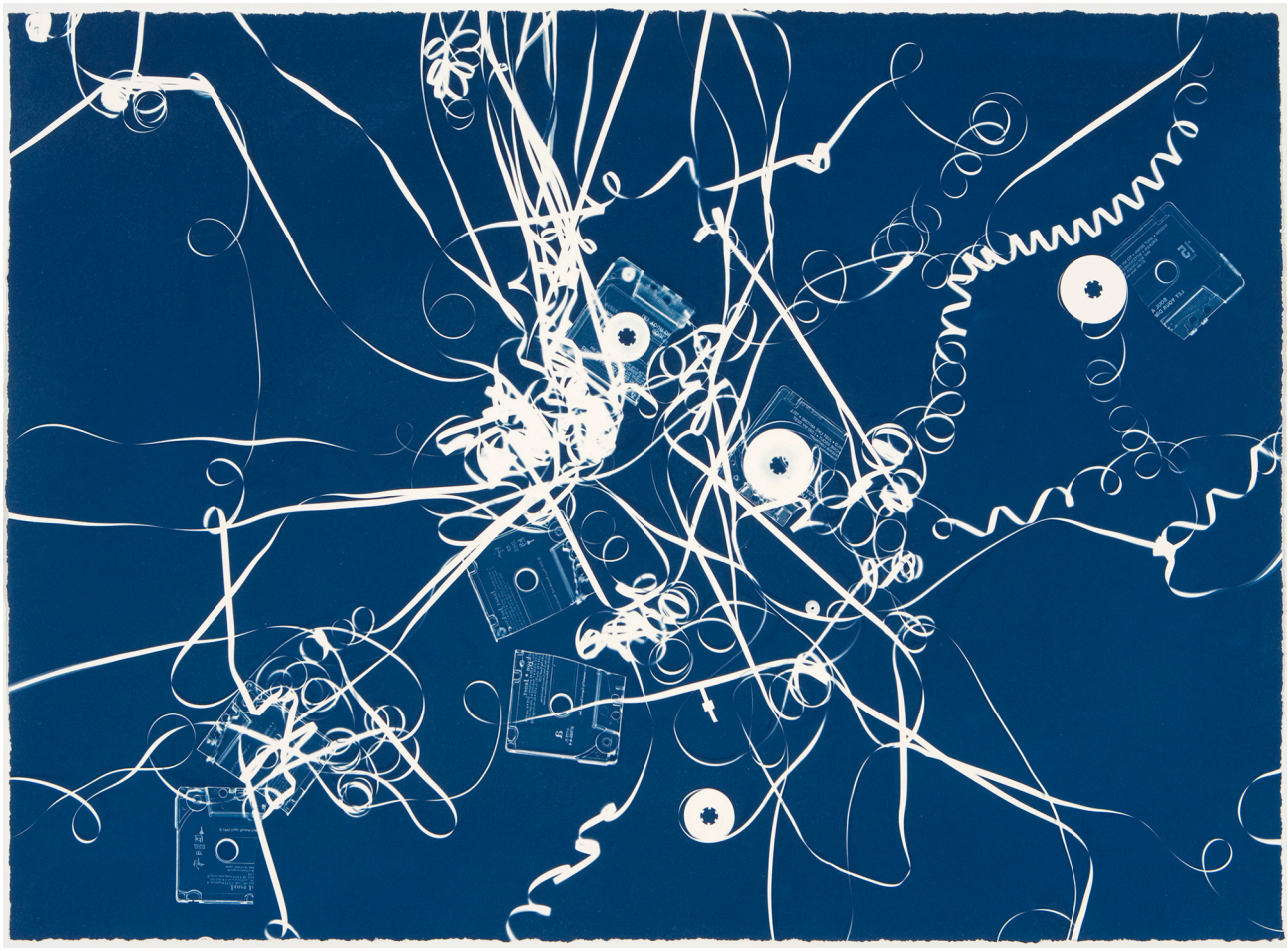

Christian Marclay, *Untitled*, 2008, cyanotype, 51.4x72.9cm

MÉTAPHOTOGRAPHIE · RÉFLEXIVITÉ · INTERMÉDIALITÉ

PARTIE 3 – TEXTES THÉORIQUES

Cours de Nassim Daghighian

MÉTAPHOTOGRAPHIE • RÉFLEXIVITÉ • INTERMÉDIALITÉ

PARTIE 3 – TEXTES THÉORIQUES

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

W.J.T. MITCHELL

ICONOLOGIE

IMAGE, TEXTE, IDÉOLOGIE

LES PRAIRIES ORDINAIRES

Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la science de l'image

Préface de W.J.T. Mitchell à l'édition française

En publiant *Iconologie*, il y a plus de vingt ans, je ne m'imaginais pas que le livre deviendrait le premier volume d'une trilogie[1]. Au milieu des années 1980, des notions telles que la *visual culture* et la *New Art History* n'étaient que des rumeurs. L'étude indépendante du rapport entre « texte et image » n'était pas envisageable, encore moins une Association Internationale pour l'Étude des Rapports entre Texte et Image (AIERTI)[2]. À cette époque, le concept même d'« iconologie » apparaissait comme une sous-discipline obsolète de l'histoire de l'art, associée aux pères fondateurs du début du XX^e^ siècle, Aloïs Riegl, Aby Warburg et Erwin Panofsky.

Aujourd'hui, bien sûr, le champ est tout différent. Il existe des départements académiques de *visual studies* et de *visual culture*, ainsi que des revues consacrées à ces sujets. La *New Art History* – tout du moins celle inspirée par la sémiotique – a fait son temps. L'étude interdisciplinaire des médias verbaux et visuels en est venue à former une composante centrale des humanités, et de nouvelles formes d'iconologies critiques, de *Bildwissenshaften* et de « sciences

1. *Iconology. Image, Text, Ideology*, The University of Chicago Press (UCP), Chicago, 1986 ; *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, UCP, Chicago, 1994 ; *What Do Picture Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, UCP, Chicago, 2005.

2. NdT : Fondée en 1987, l'AIERTI – ou *International Association for the Study of Word and Image* (IAWIS) – est basée à la fois en Allemagne, en France et aux États-Unis. L'association « a pour vocation de promouvoir l'étude des rapports entre texte et image dans un cadre culturel, et plus particulièrement dans les arts » (http://www.iawis.org).

de l'image » ont émergé dans les sciences humaines, les sciences sociales, voire dans les sciences naturelles.

Iconologie a joué un rôle dans ces développements. Mais il me serait cependant difficile de définir son influence avec exactitude. Aussi, je ne peux que me pencher à nouveau sur les idées émises par ce livre en les mettant en relation avec leurs développements dans mes travaux ultérieurs. Lors des vingt dernières années, en m'intéressant à des problèmes de culture visuelle, de compétence visuelle, de science de l'image et d'iconologie, quatre concepts fondamentaux se sont continuellement imposés à moi. Certains d'entre eux étaient déjà en latence dans *Iconologie*, mais trouvèrent uniquement leur formulation dans des écrits ultérieurs. J'espère que ce bref essai fournira au lecteur un panorama cohérent des thèmes et des problèmes qui émergèrent d'*Iconologie*, et qui forment aujourd'hui ce que je conçois comme « les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la science de l'image ». Il s'agit du *pictorial turn*, de la distinction *image/picture*, des notions de *metapicture* et de *biopicture*.

Le *Pictorial Turn*

Cette notion (tout d'abord développée dans *Picture Theory*) est parfois comparée à la notion plus tardive de Gottfried Boehm – *iconic turn* – et à l'émergence des *visual studies* et de la *visual culture* en tant que disciplines académiques. Elle est souvent (mal) interprétée comme une étiquette liée à l'apparition des médias prétendument « visuels », la télévision, la vidéo et le cinéma. Mais cette interprétation pose plusieurs problèmes.

Tout d'abord, l'idée même d'un média purement visuel est radicalement incohérente, et la première leçon de toute réflexion portant sur le domaine de la culture visuelle devrait être de la dissiper. Les médias réunissent toujours différents éléments sensoriels et sémiotiques, et

les prétendus « médias visuels » forment des ensembles *mixtes* ou hybrides, combinant sonore et visuel, texte et image. La vision n'est pas non plus purement optique ; ses opérations nécessitent par exemple une coordination d'impressions optiques et tactiles.

Deuxièmement, l'idée du *pictorial turn* ne se confine pas à la modernité ou à la culture visuelle contemporaine. Il s'agit d'un trope ou d'une figure de la pensée qui ré-apparaît à de nombreuses reprises dans l'histoire de la culture, habituellement lorsque entre en scène une quelconque technologie de reproduction ou un nouvel ensemble d'images associé à des mouvements sociaux, politiques ou esthétiques. Ainsi, l'invention de la perspective, l'apparition de la peinture de chevalet et l'invention de la photographie ont toutes les trois été saluées en termes de *pictorial turns*, et étaient perçues comme merveilleuses ou menaçantes, souvent les deux à la fois.

Nous pourrions également repérer une version du *pictorial turn* dans le monde antique, au moment où les Israélites « se détournent » des lois rapportées par Moïse du Mont Sinaï et érigent un veau d'or comme idole. Le tournant idolâtre est la version la plus anxiogène du *pictorial turn*, et elle s'enracine souvent dans la peur qu'une masse humaine soit dévoyée par une fausse image, qu'il s'agisse d'un concept idéologique ou de la figure d'un leader charismatique.

Quatrièmement, tel que le suggère cet exemple, c'est non sans une certaine anxiété que les *pictorial turns* sont souvent rapportés à la « nouvelle domination » de l'image, une menace à l'encontre du verbe, depuis le mot de Dieu jusqu'aux compétences linguistiques. Les *pictorial turns* font d'ordinaire appel à une version de la distinction entre mots et images, le mot se voyant associé à la loi, à l'intelligence et à la règle des élites, l'image à la superstition populaire, à la stupidité et à l'inconvenance. Aussi, le *pictorial turn* va habituellement *des* mots *vers* les images et n'est pas propre à notre époque. Toutefois, cela ne revient pas à dire des *pictorial turns* qu'ils sont tous les mêmes : chacun implique une image spécifique qui émerge d'une situation historique particulière.

Cinquièmement, et finalement, il y a une spécificité du *pictorial turn* propre à notre époque. Il est associé au développement du savoir disciplinaire, voire de la philosophie elle-même, succédant à ce que Richard Rorty avait qualifié de « tournant linguistique » (*linguistic turn*). Rorty soutenait que l'intérêt de la philosophie occidentale, tout d'abord tourné vers les choses ou les objets, s'était porté sur les idées ou les concepts, puis (au XX^e^ siècle) sur le langage. À mon sens, l'image – les images visuelles comme les métaphores verbales – en est venue à former un sujet urgent et propre à notre époque, non seulement dans le champ politique et dans la culture de masse – où il est familier –, mais dans les réflexions les plus générales ayant trait à la psychologie humaine et au comportement social, ou encore aux structures mêmes du savoir. Tel que décrit par Fredric Jameson, le tournant qui déplace la *philosophie* vers quelque chose que l'on nomme *théorie* dans les sciences humaines se fonde, selon moi, non seulement dans le fait d'admettre que la philosophie repose sur le langage, mais également sur tout un éventail de pratiques représentationnelles, dont les images. Pour cette raison, les théories de l'image et de la culture visuelle se sont penchées sur un ensemble de problèmes bien plus généraux durant les dernières décennies, passant des problématiques spécifiques de l'histoire de l'art à un domaine étendu incluant la psychologie et les neurosciences, l'épistémologie, l'éthique et l'esthétique, les théories des médias et la politique, vers ce que l'on ne peut s'empêcher de décrire comme une nouvelle « métaphysique de l'image ». Ce développement, de même que le tournant linguistique de Rorty, engendre une relecture générale de la philosophie, relecture qui peut être reliée à des démarches telles la critique du logocentrisme par Derrida – en faveur d'un modèle d'écriture *graphique* et *spatial* – ou la thèse de Gilles Deleuze selon laquelle la philosophie a toujours été obsédée par le problème de l'image et qu'elle a de ce fait toujours consisté en une forme d'iconologie. Au XX^e^ siècle, la philosophie n'a pas uniquement opéré un tournant linguistique : comme l'affirmait Wittgenstein, « une *image* nous tient captive » (*ein* Bild *hielt*

uns gefangen), et la philosophie a répondu de diverses manières pour s'en libérer : la sémiotique, le structuralisme, la déconstruction, la théorie des systèmes, la théorie des actes de langage, la philosophie du langage ordinaire, et aujourd'hui la science de l'image ou l'iconologie critique.

Image / picture

Si le *pictorial turn* est une relation mot ➞ image, la relation *image/picture* est un retour à l'objectité (*objecthood*). Quelle différence y a-t-il entre *picture* et *image* ? Partons du vernaculaire, d'une distinction anglaise intraduisible en français : « Vous pouvez accrocher une *picture*, mais vous ne pouvez pas accrocher une *image*. » La *picture* est un objet matériel, une chose que vous pouvez brûler ou abîmer. L'*image* est ce qui apparaît dans une *picture* et qui survit à sa destruction – dans la mémoire, dans le récit, dans des copies et des traces au sein d'autres médias. Le Veau d'or peut être détruit et fondu, mais il survit comme *image* dans les histoires et dans d'innombrables descriptions. Dès lors, la *picture* est l'*image* telle qu'elle apparaît sur un support matériel ou à un endroit donné ; *picture* mentale y compris, dont l'*image* apparaît – ainsi que l'a relevé Hans Belting – dans un corps, une mémoire ou une imagination. L'image n'apparaît jamais sans média, mais elle est aussi ce qui transcende les médias, ce qui peut être transféré d'un média à un autre. Le Veau d'or apparaît tout d'abord sous la forme d'une sculpture, puis réapparaît comme un objet décrit dans un récit verbal et comme une image peinte. Il correspond à ce qui peut être copié, d'une peinture vers un autre média (photographie, diapositive ou fichier numérique).

L'image relève par conséquent d'une entité hautement abstraite et plutôt minimale pouvant être évoquée par un simple mot. Il suffit de nommer une image pour l'avoir à l'esprit – c'est-à-dire pour l'amener

à la conscience, dans un corps doué de perception ou de mémoire. La notion panofskienne de « motif » est ici pertinente, au sens du détail d'une représentation picturale suscitant la connaissance, et plus particulièrement la *reconnaissance*, la prise de conscience que « ceci est cela », la perception de l'objet nommable, identifiable, qui apparaît comme une présence virtuelle, la « présence absente » paradoxale mais fondamentale à toute entité représentationnelle.

Le concept d'*image* ne nécessite en rien une posture platonicienne supposant un ensemble d'archétypes transcendantaux renfermant formes et idées en attente d'une incarnation dans les objets matériels et dans les ombres de la perception sensorielle. Aristote fournit un point de départ tout aussi solide selon lequel les images relèveraient de classes de *pictures*, soit des identifiants génériques associant un certain nombre d'entités spécifiques par air de famille. Tel que l'affirmerait Nelson Goodman, il existe de nombreuses représentations matérielles de Winston Churchill, des *pictures* qui contiennent l'*image* de Churchill. Nous pourrions les qualifier de « Churchill-*pictures* » – une expression qui suppose une appartenance à une classe ou à une série, auquel cas nous dirions que ce sont les images qui nous autorisent à identifier le genre d'une *picture*, de façon spécifique (la Churchill-*picture*) ou générale (le portrait). Il existe également des caricatures, des *pictures* de Winston Churchill (par exemple) sous la forme d'un bulldog. Dans ce cas, deux images apparaissent simultanément et fusionnent en une seule figure, soit un exemple classique de métaphore visuelle. Mais toute dépiction se fonde sur une métaphore, un « voir comme ». Voir un paysage dans une tache d'encre revient à résoudre une équation ou à opérer un transfert entre deux perceptions visuelles, de même que la proposition « aucun homme n'est une île » implique une comparaison ou une analogie entre le corps humain et une figure géographique.

L'image peut dès lors être pensée comme une entité immatérielle, une apparence fantomatique, fantasmagorique mise au jour sur un support matériel. Mais il ne nous est pas pour autant néces-

saire de postuler un quelconque ensemble métaphysique d'entités immatérielles. La projection d'une ombre est celle d'une image, de la même manière qu'une empreinte animale laissée dans le sol, ou le reflet d'un arbre dans l'eau, ou l'impression d'un fossile dans la roche. L'image correspond ainsi à la perception d'une relation de ressemblance, de similarité ou d'analogie – ce que Charles Sanders Peirce définissait comme le signe iconique, un signe dont les qualités sensibles intrinsèques nous renvoient à un objet autre. Les formes abstraites et ornementales constituent donc une sorte de « degré zéro » de l'image et sont identifiables au moyen de descriptions très schématiques telles que les arabesques ou les figures géométriques.

La relation entre l'*image* et la *picture* peut être illustrée par la double signification du terme « clone », qui renvoie à la fois au spécimen individuel d'un organisme vivant, réplique de son organisme parent ou donneur, et à toute la série des spécimens dont il relève. L'*image* de la brebis Dolly, le plus célèbre des clones, peut être dupliquée sous la forme d'une *image* graphique dans des photographies, dont chacune sera une *picture*. Mais l'*image* dupliquée dans toutes ces *pictures*, et qui les relie en une série, est en tout point analogue à l'*image* biologique qui unit tous les ancêtres et tous les descendants du clone singulier dans une série collective qui peut également être reconnue comme « le clone ». Quand nous disons d'un enfant qu'il est le « portrait craché » de ses parents, ou d'un jumeau qu'il est l'image de son frère, nous employons une logique similaire d'air de famille qui conçoit l'image comme une relation plutôt que comme une entité ou une substance.

Metapictures

Parfois se présente une *picture* dans laquelle apparaît l'*image* d'une autre *picture*, sorte d'« emboîtement » d'une *image* au sein d'une autre, comme lorsque Velasquez se peint peignant dans les *Ménines*

ou lorsque Saul Steinberg dessine un homme dessinant dans *New World*. Dans *L'Adoration du Veau d'or* de Poussin figurent un paysage désertique, des Israélites dansant autour de la statue, le grand prêtre Aaron gesticulant en sa direction, et Moïse, descendant du Mont Sinaï, en colère face au comportement de ces idolâtres, sur le point de briser les Tables de la Loi. Ce tableau forme une *metapicture* dans laquelle une *image* relevant d'un média (la peinture) encadre une *image* d'un autre média (la sculpture). Il est aussi la *metapicture* d'un *pictorial turn*, depuis les mots vers les images, depuis la loi *écrite* des Dix Commandements (et plus précisément la loi qui proscrit la production d'idoles) vers l'autorité d'une statue.

Les *metapictures* sont courantes. Elles apparaissent à chaque fois qu'une *image* exhibe une autre *image*, à chaque fois qu'une *picture* présente une scène descriptive ou fait apparaître une *image* – comme lorsqu'un écran accessoire est mis en évidence dans un spectacle télévisuel. Mais ce redoublement ne se limite pas forcément à un seul média, et l'enchâssement d'un média dans un autre peut tout aussi bien avoir lieu – comme lorsque le Veau d'or apparaît dans une peinture à l'huile ou qu'une ombre est projetée dans un dessin.

Il existe par ailleurs une acception selon laquelle toute *picture* peut devenir une *metapicture*, à chaque fois qu'elle est employée comme un moyen pour refléter la nature des *pictures*. Le plus simple des dessins au trait, lorsqu'il est utilisé comme exemple dans un discours sur les images, devient une *metapicture*. La modeste image du lapin-canard, peut-être la plus célèbre des *metapictures* de la philosophie moderne, apparaît dans les *Investigations philosophiques* de Wittgenstein pour exemplifier le « voir comme » et la dualité inhérente de la dépiction. L'Allégorie de la Caverne de Platon est une *metapicture* philosophique très élaborée qui fournit un modèle de la nature de la connaissance sous la forme d'un assemblage complexe d'ombres, d'artefacts, d'illuminations et de corps perçus.

Dans *Iconologie*, j'ai qualifié ces métaphores verbales et discursives d'« hypericônes » – autrement dit, de « *pictures* théoriques ».

Celles-ci émergent bien souvent dans les textes philosophiques comme des analogies illustratives (par exemple, la comparaison de l'esprit avec une tablette de cire ou avec une *camera obscura*), analogies qui accordent aux images un rôle central dans les modèles de l'esprit, de la perception et de la mémoire. La *metapicture* pourrait donc tout aussi bien être considérée comme une forme d'hypericône visuelle, qu'elle soit imaginée ou réalisée matériellement.

Comme le suggère l'Allégorie de la Caverne, une *metapicture* peut fonctionner comme une métaphore ou une analogie fondatrice pour un discours tout entier. La métaphore du « corps politique » implique par exemple de voir ou d'imaginer la collectivité sociale comme un corps unique et gigantesque, à l'image du personnage qui orne le frontispice du *Léviathan* de Hobbes ; et la figure courante de la « tête de l'État » participe discrètement de l'analogie. Cette métaphore fait pour ainsi dire volte-face dans le discours biomédical moderne où le corps est perçu non pas comme une machine ou un organisme, mais comme une totalité sociale ou un « état cellulaire » criblé de parasites, d'intrus et d'organismes exogènes, comme une division du travail entre les fonctions exécutive, judiciaire et législative, en parallèle d'un système immunitaire protégeant le corps contre des étrangers et d'un système nerveux communiquant avec ses « membres ». La métaphore du « membre » s'applique-t-elle du corps social vers le corps organique, ou vice versa ? Quels types de corps sont imagés dans la figure de la corporation ? Ces métaphores réversibles et fondatrices correspondent à ce que George Lakoff et Mark Johnson appellent « les métaphores au travers desquelles nous vivons » (*metaphors we live by*). Elles ne forment pas uniquement des ornements discursifs mais des analogies structurantes qui marquent des épistémès entières.

Biopictures

Aujourd'hui, une nouvelle version du *pictorial turn* voit le jour. Le processus biologique du clonage, devenu à la fois une puissante métaphore et une réalité biologique ayant des conséquences éthiques et politiques profondes, en est la meilleure illustration. Bien entendu, le clonage est un processus tout ce qu'il y a de plus naturel pour les plantes et les êtres unicellulaires, c'est-à-dire le processus de reproduction asexuée de cellules génétiquement identiques. En grec, la signification première du terme « clone » était « bouture ou jeune pousse » et le terme renvoyait au procédé botanique d'entage et de transplantation. Avec la découverte des micro-organismes et de la reproduction cellulaire, la notion de clonage s'étendit au règne animal. Mais ces dernières années, une révolution s'est produite en biologie avec le décodage (partiel) du génome humain et le clonage du premier mammifère. Aussi, la possibilité du clonage reproductif humain se meut aujourd'hui en horizon technique, une possibilité qui a eu pour effet de raviver bien des tabous traditionnels quant à la production d'images sous sa forme la plus puissante et la plus dérangeante, la création de la vie artificielle. L'idée de la duplication des formes de vie et de la création d'organismes vivants « à notre image » a rendu littérale la potentialité que préfiguraient mythes et légendes, du Golem au cyborg de science-fiction, en passant par *Frankenstein*, et même le récit biblique de la Création, où Adam est modelé dans l'argile « à l'image et à la ressemblance de Dieu » avant de recevoir le souffle de vie.

Iconologie recèle bien sûr de nombreuses autres pistes approfondies ces vingt dernières années. L'idée de traiter la relation texte-image comme un problème rhétorique à part entière, requérant non seulement une analyse sémiotique et formelle, mais également une contextualisation historique et idéologique, a été extrêmement productive dans un certain nombre de domaines. Les appréhensions

(iconophobie, iconoclasme, idolâtrie, fétichisme, prohibition des idoles dans le judaïsme, le christianisme et l'islam) qui environnent l'image en sont venues à former une préoccupation centrale de son étude, dans une époque caractérisée par le « retour du religieux » – difficilement perceptible au cours des années 1980.

La « critique de l'idéologie » critiquée sous l'angle d'une « rhétorique de l'iconoclasme » aura, je l'espère, refroidi les ambitions d'un criticisme démystificateur faisant invariablement appel à sa propre infaillibilité idéologique. J'ai préféré m'allier aux objectifs plus modestes de la « divination séculaire » avec Edward Saïd et de la déconstruction avec Jacques Derrida, les deux théoriciens critiques qui ont été pour moi les contemporains les plus stimulants durant cette période que je considère encore comme l'Âge d'Or de la Théorie.

Words Without Pictures

aperture

Abstracting Photography

WALEAD BESHTY

> Far from it being the object that antedates the viewpoint, it would seem that it is the viewpoint that creates the object. —Ferdinand de Saussure

> It is indeed the characteristic of the sadist that he humiliates his object and then—or thereby—satisfies it. —Walter Benjamin

> Let's begin with two images . . . —Rosalind Krauss

The issue of what constitutes "Photography" as an ontological category has again gained currency, a rather surprising reinvestment in medium specificity, especially when considered in the context of contemporary art, where professional divisions between aesthetic practices are more or less a thing of the past. Despite being vaguely nostalgic, and at worst retrograde, the urgent impulse to revive categorical boundaries signals a deeper critical dilemma facing devotees of the medium, for the drive to reconstitute a stable and practicable definition of photography is inextricable from the very real sense that the prominence of photographic discourse in contemporary art has receded. By now the charged debates of the late seventies and eighties—between the Museum of Modern Art's staid photography department and "postmodernist" critics—that once lent photography, and the intellectual terrain it describes, a sense of urgency, have all but petered out. Between the loss of photography's

status as a contentious intellectual battleground, and its denaturalization via a series of technological developments, an impenetrable fuzziness has descended over what "Photography"—as an aesthetic and theoretical discourse—actually is, and furthermore, what might be at stake in reopening the discussion of its identity.

In the wake of what are now decades-old polemics, inert fragments of previous formulations and aesthetic conventions litter photography's theoretical landscape, amounting to a critical crisis for those who wish to constitute it as an epistemologically coherent tradition in anything but negative terms. Thus "Photography" has become a Benjaminian *facies hippocratica*, a transformation of discursivity into dissolution, the medium representing a disorderly field that the historian/critic can do little more than survey, and hope to reconstitute. As George Baker wrote in his essay "Photography's Expanded Field," "Critical consensus would have it that the problem today is not that just about anything image-based can now be called photographic, but rather that photography itself has been foreclosed, cashiered, abandoned—outmoded technologically and displaced aesthetically." [1] In other words, the Barthesian theorization of the "this has been" *contained in* the photographic image, has become the "this has been" *of* "Photography" itself. This lack of certainty with regard to what constitutes photography as an object of inquiry is, in all its abstractness, a mirror of the problem of theorizing the photograph: a clash between the apparent concreteness of the photographic referent and its slippery contextual play. Yet the term "Photography," and all it implies, persists beyond its supposed theoretical and practical disintegration, [2] and with it a forlorn pastiche of critical theorizations and aesthetic conventions repeatedly confront a metaphor for their own failure in the "death mask" of the photographic image. [3]

This contemporary conundrum is perhaps nowhere better displayed than in Baker's aforementioned text, which, as a literary object, both narrates and performs the dilemma. Reflecting on the dispersal of the photographic "field" prompts Baker to assert that "the terms involved only now become more complex, the need to map their effects more necessary, because these effects are both less obvious and self-evident." [4] Baker proposes to "read" the contemporary condition of photography through an earlier text, that of Rosalind Krauss's "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," at times going so far as to transplant his terms and formulations into direct quotes from her text, inhabiting her text as much as her text prefigures his own. [5] Baker sets out to re-picture the scene of dispersal, to ritually connect terms *again*, yet with the nagging sense that the result of this effort is destined to be tenuous and self-defeating. The text, in its self-narrated attempt to add clarity and order to its "theoretical object" (a term he appropriates from Krauss), transforms into a traumatic re-enactment of "Photography's" fragmentation (a condition emphasized by his use of textual pastiche), that culminates in another moment of defacement and dispersal (in its final paragraph Baker recounts a scene where the diagram at the center of his text is scribbled over by one of the artists it is meant to contain). [6] Thus, the final pages of "Photography in the Expanded Field" serve as something of an epitaph for the short-lived theoretical model Baker endeavours to (re)construct, and perhaps, the very ability of the critic/historian to play an active role in contemporary art's historicization.

Seeing this as a state of crisis for the medium (and thus for the historian/critic who defines it), Baker performs, as so many recent commentators on the medium do, as allegorist. Reading his own moment through a temporally displaced other, the status of the photograph is reread through the urgency of critique in 1979 (not

insignificantly, Baker's urtext was written by his mentor Krauss). Through this operation, his own position as a critic within the contemporary academy is tied metaphorically and metonymically to photography's ebb and flow as an ontological category, its crisis of theoretical clarity serving as a forlorn metaphor for the predicament of the historian/critic. Here, the photographic object, in microcosm, comes not only to represent the loss of a unity between signifier and signified, its manifestations dispersed within an equally fragmented field that, for the historian/critic, requires it to be resituated and re-pictured, but also to function as a metaphor for contemporary critique's confrontation with its own ambiguous role. For Baker, it is a picture, a visage of the past, that bridges the divide or rupture between discursive moments, and in this, as in many cases, it is the picture alone that signifies the wound or trauma it is meant to remedy. For pictures transform the nameless into the named, the unwieldy into the static, and in his quest to address the contemporary condition of photography, it is a picture that serves as Baker's point of departure.

So I am going to start where Baker started: with a picture—a frame, or more exactly, a square, that serves as an emblem of a past moment in art history and photography's most contentious and heady days, and that, like the organizational impulse of all pictures, attempts to bridge a gap or cauterize a wound. Baker's text, like that of the text from which he adapted his title, represents a current historical dispersal in the quaternary field of Algirdas Julius Greimas's semiotic square (referred to in Krauss's text as a Piaget or Klein group), a strategy for expanding binary oppositions into larger fields of interrelations. In 1979, Rosalind Krauss deployed this same picture when confronted with what she perceived as a crisis for the categorical language of the critic, a challenge to its ability to manage its domain. Her text, "Sculpture in the

Expanded Field," sought to rescue a category that was "in danger of collapsing" from the sheer heterogeneity of objects it had been called upon to describe, [7] arguing that in the discussion of post-war American art, "categories like sculpture and painting have been kneaded and stretched and twisted in an extraordinary demonstration of elasticity, a display of the way a cultural term can be extended to include just about anything." [8] To prevent the dam from bursting, Krauss outfitted the field with a corral, framing a sequence of coordinates whose discrete interrelations were compressed into dotted lines.

For Krauss, this was a far-reaching methodological crisis, but redeployed by Baker (who acknowledges that the situation for photographic discourse is radically different), it takes on a personal dimension, reflecting his own intellectual development couched in the oedipal relations of teacher and student, where his own connection to a critical lineage, and to history, is staged as a literal interpenetration of models and methodologies. As Baker writes, "Now I have been drawing Klein groups and semiotic squares ever since I first met Rosalind Krauss, and the reader by this point will not be surprised to learn of how fondly I remember sitting in her office conjugating the semiotic neutralization of things like the terms of gender and sexuality, some twelve years ago." [9] He then places his voice into that of the past, and through his voice, the past speaks of the present. The switch from Krauss's impersonal and authoritative assertion of a condition, to Baker's superimposition of historical moments, autobiography, and introspective reflexivity, further emphasizes the sheer distance that separates their respective positions in time and methodology, a melancholic rupture that cuts laterally through the entire text, and ironically, through the institution of critique itself. We thus have, in Baker's reanimation of Krauss' schema, an image of critical melancholia, and as Walter Benjamin

surmises in *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, "the only pleasure the melancholic permits himself, and it is a powerful one, is allegory." [10] The critic/historian, as allegorist, displaces history with pictures, synchronic schemas that in their attempt to "recover" and solidify only mask a "pertrified, primordial landscape." [11] For the picture, proposed as the imago of history, is fundamentally opposed to historical time, opting for synchronicity over diachronicity, transforming historical time into spatial metaphor, and resisting the linear causal chains of development and instead operating along the axes of formal morphology; it is, in short, the tool of the historian who has turned away from history. Baker abandons the notion of historical time, while simultaneously performing the collapse of the organizational schema he displaces it with; in the wake of his argument we are left with only the rupture, the gap. When this ontological rupture is named by Baker, it is called photography.

Krauss's map was nothing if not timely, indicating both the grip that structuralist analysis had within a certain mode of theoretically fluent American art criticism, and the attraction of artists of the time to structuralist theory's usefulness in fracturing totalizing unities. It was, in other words, deeply embedded in its cultural moment; one need only think of Robert Smithson's "nonsites," Martha Rosler's *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974-75), (or, more explicitly, her *Semiotics of the Kitchen* [1975]), or the writings of Robert Morris, Dan Graham, Mel Bochner, or Allan Sekula, to see the wide effects of structuralist formulations on the American artistic landscape. Semiotic considerations seemed equally well entrenched, making Krauss's use of Greimas's semiotic square and its modular geometric form all the more resonant with the aesthetic conventions of the time (Hanne Darboven, Lawrence Weiner, Joseph Kosuth, Robert Morris, Sol Lewitt, et al.).

It was a moment when the art historian, far from looking backward on an arrangement of artists' practices, directly participated in an active debate with them. [12] Perhaps no group of artists took this understanding of signification to heart more than "the 'Pictures' Generation," whose work, generally speaking, exploited the fracture between sign and referent that structuralist and deconstructive procedures laid bare. According to the reception of the work at the time, their work argued that the image was like that of the Kraussian understanding of modernist sculpture, a homeless, free-floating signifier whose meaning derived solely from a context to which it had once been inextricably tied, but now found itself separate from. In their hands, when an image spoke, it spoke of this distance.

It seems no coincidence that, in response to the dual rise of institutional critique and appropriation art, the conceptual dimensions of allegory would become a potent catalyst for some of the most vocal and ambitious critics of the time (whose formulations are particularly indebted to the writing of Peter Bürger, and his application of Benjamin's theorization of an "allegorical vision" in the *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* to the works of the early twentieth century avant-garde). This interest produced two major texts published just two years apart: Craig Owens's "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism (Parts 1 & 2)" (1980), and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh's "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art" (1982). [13] In its most basic sense, allegory is when one text is read through another. In the allegorical formulation of institutional critique (derived in equal parts from both texts), the artwork re-examines the condition of exhibition, usually along the axes of its physical, economic, or architectonic properties, proposing that selected aspects, activated by artistic "intervention," be

read in tandem with the institution that contains them. In contrast, the critical action of appropriation, following the pathway of Pop art back to its roots in the readymade, was targeted at the instrumental use of images and the repressive categorizations they tacitly asserted.

Both Buchloh's and Owens's texts provide ample disclaimers regarding the potential political agency of their chosen subjects. Buchloh maintains that at least some of the artists within his text run the risk of merely replicating alienation (here writing specifically of Sherrie Levine and Dara Birnbaum), producing works whose "ultimate triumph is to repeat and anticipate in a single gesture the abstraction and alienation from the historical context to which the work is subjected in the process of commodification and acculturation." [14] Owens acknowledges an even more bleak state of affairs when first observing that Robert Rauschenberg (within Owens's text, offered as a paternal figure to "the 'Pictures' Generation" [15]) "enacts a deconstruction of the museum, then his own deconstructive discourse [that]—like Daniel Buren's—can take place only within the museum itself. It must therefore provisionally accept the terms and conditions it sets out to expose." [16] Owens then concludes, "We thus encounter once again the unavoidable necessity of participating in the very activity that is being denounced precisely in order to denounce it. All of the work discussed in this essay is marked by a similar complicity, which is the result of its fundamentally deconstructive impulse." [17] This point is reiterated by Buchloh some twenty years later in the preface of his anthology *The Neo-Avant-Garde and the Culture Industry* (2000), in which he surmises that the panoply of artistic challenges to the culture industry, which "range from mimetic affirmation (e.g. Andy Warhol) to an ostentatious asceticism (e.g. Michael Asher) that—in its condemnation to a radical purity of means—more often than not in

the last decade had to *risk losing the very ground of the real upon which critical opposition could be inscribed*." [18] Conscribed by the arguments laid out for them, the practices positioned to overturn institutionalized structures (be they in the form of cultural or economic authority), and constituted within the critical reading of allegory, offer only further evidence of the invulnerability of the institutions they identify, if only by their inability to exist without them. It is no coincidence that a similar implication of "critical failure" (Owens's term) is at play in the work of these critics. In their deconstruction of the institutionalized rhetoric of validation, they rely on the authority granted to them through processes of accreditation, peer review, etc., in order to present their critique of those very procedures by which legitimacy (and thus power) is naturalized. Despite the nearly three decades that separate us from these ideas (more still if we credit Bürger, who clearly outlined this methodological problem), this paradox of aesthetic critique persists. As it was succinctly put by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2006), "Artistic critique is currently paralysed by what, depending on one's viewpoint, may be regarded as its success or its failure." [19]

Yet, the proposition of materialist, artistic or aesthetic critique carries with it a seductive promise not only that the world of appearances can be punctured, shedding light into its darkened recesses, but also that there is something to be found lurking behind the curtain, a repressed "truth" that lies dormant within all things that, once revealed, has liberatory potential. In writing on the photographic image, this attempt repeatedly confronts an unrepresentable rupture in signification, where laying things bare often leaves nothing but an abyss. Here, again, it is the "the real upon which critical opposition could be inscribed" which is sacrificed through the operation of the image. Writing on the work

of Troy Brauntuch in his seminal 1977 essay "Pictures," Douglas Crimp observed that "the result is *only to make pictures more picture-like*, to fix forever in an elegant object our distance from the history that produced these images. *That distance is all these pictures signify.*" [20] This appraisal was not uncommon among his contemporaries. In "Photography *en abyme,*" Owens went further, indicating that this quality of doubling, and its reflexive understanding, was "a property of the photograph itself," an instance of photography speaking *from the abyss*. [21] Using Smithson as an example, Owens writes, "In a photograph, Smithson casts a shadow over the presumed transparency of photographs; he raises serious doubts about their capacity to convey anything but a sense of loss, of absence." [22] This absence is theorized as death for Barthes, for "however 'lifelike' we strive to make it (and this frenzy to be lifelike can only be our mythic denial of the apprehension of death), Photography is a kind of primitive theatre, a kind of *Tableau Vivant*, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead." [23] This argument echoes Sigfried Kracauer, who, in his 1927 essay "Photography," wrote: "That the world devours [photographs] is a sign of the *fear of death*. What photographs by their sheer accumulation attempt to banish is the recollection of death, which is part and parcel of every memory image. In the illustrated magazines the world has become a photographable present, and the photographed present has been entirely eternalized. Seemingly ripped from the clutch of death, in reality it has succumbed to it." [24] Kracauer saw photography as demolishing memory (the real), the core of a liberated consciousness (the very mnemonic real that Barthes saw as the redemptive *punctum*, a wound that opened up in the surface of the banal *studium*, or the social history that the photograph was a part of), the historical real that critique itself proposed to preserve.

Since its inception, the photographic image has been strongly associated with displacement and destruction, a triumph of images over material. Writing in 1859, Oliver Wendell Holmes claimed that with the advent of photography (for him distilled in the verisimilitude of the stereograph), "*form is henceforth divorced from matter.* In fact matter as a visible object is of no great use any longer, except as the mould on which form is shaped. Give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view, and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please." [25] This destruction is totalizing; in Vilém Flusser's multivalent study of photography, this conundrum of the photographic image is inescapable:

> Nothing can resist the force of this current of technical images—there is no artistic, scientific or political activity which is not aimed at it, there is no everyday activity which does not aspire to be photographed, filmed, videotaped… In this way, however, every action simultaneously loses its historical character and turns into a magical ritual and an endlessly repeatable movement. The universe of technical images, emerging all around us, represents the fulfilment of the ages, in which action and agony go endlessly round in circles. Only from this apocalyptic perspective, it seems, does the problem of photography assume the importance it deserves. [26]

This is the apocalyptic becoming of the technological image in the form of the photograph, an inescapable conflation of the concrete with the likeness, an abstract gleaming distopia where the real is a priori an image, and vice versa. It is the photographic act that comes to stand for this transformation of object into image, and it is the photograph as image, that renders this

abstract transformation tautologically, and traumatically complete.

As signifying surfaces, images are abstractions. The logic of the abstraction is the reduction of four dimensions to a two-dimensional surface. As Baker cites in his aforementioned text, Roland Barthes argued "The goal of all structuralist activity, whether reflexive or poetic, is to reconstruct an 'object' in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning (the 'functions') of this object. Structure is therefore actually a simulacrum of the object, but a directed, interested simulacrum, since the imitated object makes something appear which remained invisible . . . " [27] To put it another way, structuralism is primarily concerned with images—the chain of imagistic abstractions that we encounter in the world, or more specifically, the source ("real") from which the chosen chains of abstractions has developed and must be thus reconstituted backwards from (because, of course, this "real" is obscured by the abstractions it generated, suppressed under their weight). Thus, for the structuralist, another image is necessitated to make the invisible visible again, with the hope that this is the urimage, the direct evidence of the symbolic order that we are enslaved within. To this end, when structuralism confronts an object, it adds another layer of abstraction, and another picture is placed on the conceptual heap (albeit the structuralist image which is revelatory). Built on this foundation, the discourses around ideology critique and critiques of representation, identity, etc., insofar as they are concerned with images, do not seek to simply reconstruct the object or origin point of the abstraction (source text, or "real") in the physical or temporal circumstance of the creation of the image (people, places, things, times), because this reality is inconsequential, a matter of minutae, but look to reveal the sociopolitical origin of the abstraction, unveiling its ideological formulation.

In essence, this is a shift from what an image or picture is "of" to the identity of the transformative process of imaging itself, an image of imaging, which distils some form of power that instrumentalizes the image and the symbolic order it is invariably an expression of, giving it a name, be it that of a capitalist, colonialist, racist, heterosexist, sexist, etc., episteme (each of these being an ideological tool that seeks to maintain the relations between dominant and subordinate forces). The structuralist critique becomes a competition of images, a matter of competing faiths. When confronted with a world of appearances, the irony is that the only tool left to combat the tyranny of images is yet more.

But this is somewhat beside the point, for to confuse a photograph (or any object, theoretical or otherwise) for an image is to subject the concrete world (the real relations between things) to another in a sequence of abstractions. Louis Althusser outlined this misstep in the common Marxian architectonic metaphors of "infrastructure" and "superstructure," for him a debilitating methodological problem because the terms are purely metaphorical, not the actual operations at work, and in "picturing" class conflict, the actual machinery of dominance and subordination they attempt to address is obscured. When photographs are treated as mere images, a parallel confusion occurs, for photographs are, after all, present in four space-time dimensions, not simply two (as images are), and are constructed of worldly material having definite size and shape. In other words, it is quite a leap to reduce a photograph to an immaterial imago/likeness. The term "image" is not an ontological umbrella under which a photograph can be classified, but a conceptual tool that functions in a particular way and ceases to function if applied in a circumstance in which it is asked to do something other than what it was designed for. To confuse this is to turn a relational idea into an ontological one.

Perhaps this confusion of photographic theory for the analysis of images is why the discourse on photography shifted from a focus on its instrumentality to a concern that photography no longer truly exists. Of course, this shift occurs only after photography as a concept had been fully *imagined* (imaged). Subsumed in a digital or ideological dispersal at the whim of a multitude of discursive intrumentalizations, its supposed dissolution has become so utterly complete that whatever photography once was, it no longer is (if it "is" at all), becoming a "void" or the site of "death." It is comforting to propose that something is "behind" images in a metaphysical sense, even if this something is an absence (death, as Barthes and Kracauer, among others, have proposed).

The result, in practical terms, is that "art" photography has become dominated by anachronism, as though the solution to this paradox might be in reenacting the pictorial rhetoric of the late 1800s (consider the aesthetic parallels between the work of Timothy O'Sullivan, Carleton Watkins, Eugène Atget, Charles Marville, or the physiognomic typologies of Francis Galton and Alphonse Bertillion with contemporary photographic tropes). In sharp contrast to the most prominent tactics of nonphotographic aesthetic programs of the late eighties and nineties—approaches that showed renewed interest in bricolage, social networking, and rough-hewn or vernacular aesthetics—photography of the era seemed to codify around a diametrically opposed array of concerns. The photography of that moment favored the staid genre forms of the pre-modern Beaux Arts, exemplified in an almost obsessive adherence to Renaissance pictorial formulae. Making use of art's own reflexive theatrical death mask (the institution), architectural tropes—ubiquitous in both contemporary photography's presentational affect and its subject of choice—performed a tautological affirmation of the cold geometries of the white cube within

monolithic proscenia, as if reassuring spectators of their ontological place in the museum's hallowed halls. The depopulated city scenes and emptied, serial structures of seventies art photography grew into Plexiglas monoliths, an odd hybrid of architecture's industrialized materiality and painting's scale. Photography not only adapted itself to the wall of the museum, but in adopting aluminium backframes and reflective Plexiglas encasements, became materially continuous with the architecture that surrounded it, both casting an image of its site of reception back at its surrounds through its slippery surfaces, and obsessively depicting Cartesian arrangements in pictorial tableaux. In short, photography *became* the wall of the institution *en abyme*. Its photographic alternative embraced the notion of the archive, a reiteration of organizational power, or as Buchloh put it with regard to Conceptual art, an "aesthetics of administration." It was as if, in the wake of the troubling recognition of photography's malleability in the hands of instrumental use and its critical reappraisal by artists and critics in the sixties and seventies, the contemporary production of photographs required turning back to a time before avant-gardist debates or postmodernist dismantling—back to something akin to the Pictorialism of salon painting and the hearth of the Natural History Museum. Such works become metaphors for the instrumentalization of the photograph; a negative parody of this foreclosure, in short, they are little more than an image of the photograph's base social condition in the art world, that evasive quality that Krauss termed "exhibitionality,"—a concept that again points to the nineteenth-century, and the term exhibition itself. [28]

Until the Great Exhibition of 1851 popularized the term "exhibition," it had only specialized legal meaning, referring to a giving of evidence before a sovereign power: meaning literally to "hold out." But with the Great Exhibition and in the World's Fairs that

followed, the implications of the term blossomed, and in no small part because of the peculiar architecture that contained it. Despite its epic glass and iron construction, Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace, which housed the Great Exhibition, was not of the world of buildings and monuments. Instead it functioned as a massive frame, a container for vistas, a structure whose modular construction allowed endless substitution, a proposal that was alien to the public affirmation of cultural stability that architecture had come to represent. At every turn, its interchangeable serial components shone with a "fairy like brilliance," [29] as if dropped from the heavens; its grand halls described as a chimerical container for "a perspective so extended" that it appeared to be "a section of atmosphere cut from the sky." [30] Architecture and vision became a singularity rendered in iron, as though Alberti's diagram of Renaissance perspective had been made concrete, a massive structure whose chief function was invisibility.

If the Crystal Palace was the first building that fully capitalized on the theatrical spectacle of exhibition, the readymade was the first art object to be solely constituted by theatrical distance. Here the ritual act of viewing became the artwork's material, and the object itself a hollow shell, a decoy. Thierry de Duve put it succinctly when he wrote that, in the wake of the readymade the only truth to which the art object could attest was the power of its own name, rendering palpable the "pact that would unite the spectators of the future around some object . . . that added nothing to the constructed environment and did not improve on it but, quite the contrary, pulled away from it, bearing no other function than that of pure signifier." [31] It seems no coincidence that, just as Duchamp brought the foundational theatricality of art objects to the fore, the "zero point" of painterly materialism would surface thousands of miles away as

a theatrical backdrop. In 1913, Kazimir Malevich was asked to contribute costumes and set designs for the Cubo-Futurist play *Victory over the Sun*. Aside from his almost unwearable costumes, Malevich produced a series of concept drawings for the sets, which, in stark black and white, appear like preparatory sketches for the Suprematist canvases he would begin producing two years later. When asked about his tautologically titled *Black Square* (1915), and its placement at forty-five degrees in the top corner of the room of the 1915 exhibition *0.10*, Malevich referred back to these early set designs as its origin. The monochrome was thus situated as both the material negation of the painterly image (an object that operated by pictorial resemblance), and the symbolic negation of the very thing that made vision possible.

While *Black Square* (1915) is often credited with being the first monochrome, this is not actually the case (not that being first matters). Some thirty years earlier this totem of total materialist refusal was realized by the poet Paul Bilhaud, in an exhibition staged in the apartment of writer Jules Lévy in October of 1882. Such modernist notables as Edouard Manet, Pierre Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro, and Richard Wagner were given a peek at what would be framed as their legacy. For the exhibition, Bilhaud contributed a small black painting titled *Combat de nègres dans une cave pendant la nuit* (*Negroes Fighting in a Cellar at Night*), a joke that was stolen not once but twice, first by Alphonse Allais who produced a book titled *Album Primo-Avrilesque* (1897), which expanded the series to a range of color swatches (and contained no mention of Bilhaud, despite their acquaintance), and later by Malevich, who in the same year as *Black Square* produced the painting *Red Square,* which included a particularly Bilhaudian parenthetical addendum in its title (*Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions*). The impossibility of direct

depiction was here matched by the invisibility of the site of labor and the marginalized, both relegated to infrastructural obscurity. Daily life's representability was as scathingly parodied as it was by Duchamp with his innovation of the readymade, the quotidian again displayed in absentia, as the object of representation that has been doubly negated (first supplanted by the image, and then displaced as a negated picture). Such mistrust of images has become a staple of modern life (and that is not to say that images aren't an ancient bugbear, golden calves and the like operating as the exemplar of societies on their downward spiral), although photography, not painting, has been the primary recipient of this ritual derision for the past half-century. Stoic deconstructive critique and hedonistic celebrations of nihilism often result in identical outcomes; only the captions change. One is prompted to wonder how many times we can restage this anxious war between materiality and the image in the hopes that the outcome might change.

But what of Malevich's zero point of painting, and its proposed transcendence? As post-revolutionary Russia progressed into Stalinism, Malevich returned to his pre-Suprematist foundations, producing canvases that aped his antecedents—first Cubo-Futurism, and then, at its most extreme, Impressionism. Stranger still, Malevich backdated these works, so that his Suprematist works remained the forgone conclusion of these styles, turning his own progression into a parabola, doubling back on itself. Since he held to the conviction that he had come closest to the endpoint of painting—the height of purism in form—in his late thirties, there was nowhere to go but backward. [32]

* * But perhaps this is a promising turn for photography as an artistic practice. As photographs are increasingly produced with an internalized awareness of the circumstances of their display, specifically within the

rhetoric of architecture and its pastiche of art historical tropes that reiterate the circumstance of the museum, they become accountable to the social and political realities that their treatment as freefloating images held at bay. It is the particularities of the object that govern the specific implications of works of art, a comprehension that is suspended when the question becomes that of imaging. With the image, the question is always of distance, the distance we are placed at in relation to what is represented, the absence of the origin of its likeness, while the material of the image, how it comes to present itself, its "exhibitionality," is commensurately excused. For the task at hand is to reinsert and repoliticize the photographic discourse if we are to recover it, and in so doing, it is necessary to abandon the foreclosed models of dominance and subordination offered by the allegorist, which deadend in the melancholia of symmetrical totalizing metaphors for political opposition. The fatal flaw of this schematic is that the location of, to use Buchloh's phrasing again, the "real upon which critical opposition could be inscribed" is situated at the level of depiction, a turn from the politics of representation to the absurdity that politics *is* representation. In short, the proposition of a photograph as image, operating solely at the level of depiction, is part and parcel of the obfuscation of the political, or, in Althusserian terms, "the real conditions of existence".

* * This error is underscored by the image being synonymous with ideology, with abstraction, which functions as representation. In the Althussarian formulation "it is not the real conditions of existence, their real world, that 'men' represent to themselves in ideology, but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there. It is this relation which is at the centre of every ideological, i.e. imaginary, representation of the real world." [33] This on its own

is commensurate with the structuralist formulations of the image's relation to the "real" thus far outlined, but in Althusser's rejection of metaphor in his theorization of the political sphere lies the insight that this imaginary not only has a material existence, but beyond this, that it *is* its material existence. In other words, "ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice or practices. This existence is material." [34] The importance of the Althusserian construction is that it moves past the struggle of ideologies, of just versus unjust ideologies (and in parallel, ethical versus unethical depictions, or true and untrue images), but locates the site of struggle in the micro-circumstance of individual actions, to use Althusser's more precise language, in the "material actions, inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatuses from which derive the ideas of that subject." [35] This also posits that opposition, like the ideology it works against, is not located at the level of competing depictions, but at the level of actions, habits, i.e. daily life, where the meaning of depiction is given form.

Within this formulation, a photograph can be understood as an object, but more importantly, the production of images can be understood as containing a democratic possibility, representing a daily ritual of compromise enacted with various levels of awareness, but present nonetheless as a lingering force. No longer a spectral entity, we find we are both inside and outside of the picture, one of its parts and one of its producers; a stratified hierarchy is not needed in our relationship to aesthetics. Through considering the material specificity of photographs, it is possible to bring the images that alienate down to earth, give them bodily form. The truth of the matter is that all images require a material existence, and we must resist the urge to transform the material world into an image

world. This is not an either/or choice, but a realization that images are indistinguishable from their material supports; one cannot exist without the other. The embedded compromises and negotiations present in any production and their subsequent lack of instrumental solidity, need not be seen as dirty secrets. This would not be an absolutist proclamation of the loss of the "real" that images represent for vulgar materialists, but rather an assertion that the production of meaning is a communal one, located in the public sphere, in commonplace contexts. In this realization, a middle ground of negotiation appears. All production—even that of monolithic power—is comprised of myriad transit points and competing forces that deceptively assume the appearance of solidity, but are in fact, porous.

The endless circulation of purisms in a culture of copies, in which political life is framed as a struggle of images, always seem to lead to the same place—back into the blank, which leaves the sites of production, specifically that of communal production, camouflaged in plain view, like Paul Bilhaud's preemptive joke on monochrome painting's radicality. In the debris of such battles (and their ritualized reenactment), one is prompted to ask where the ground of the real that these struggles are supposedly in the service of actually lies. In the wake of these double negations, individual producers are relegated to one more modular element, the social field appearing as a static constellation of interchangeable parts. The citizen subject is realized as a relational component, a unit of measure, an abstraction. Where labor's vulgar bodily exertions are required, it exists out of view, in off-hours, backrooms, cellars, and distant factories, or under mute layers of paint, negotiated in private communications and invisible transports, sanitized by aggregation, and illegible in seductive surfaces. The question most urgent for photography is no longer

what inherent meaning it may contain (whether it be the interminable presence of the aesthetic formalists, or the essentialized condition of contingency and ideological instrumentalization of the social critics) but how specific photographs construct and organize social space in a concrete and immediate way.

The world we see from transitional spaces—the world outside the window, the world from the perspective of escalators, people movers, monorails, and shopping centers—has become an intellectual bogeyman, a storage container for all our alienations. These infrastructural, interstitial zones stand as compromised, indeterminate way stations between chimerical destinations. Seemingly monolithic expressions of power, such as images, are similar accumulations of compromise and negotiation, that in truth have material solidity, and with which interaction is a two-way street. In their margins there are gaps where any visitor may assert her or his own agenda. The answer seems less to reorganize a seemingly chaotic field in abstract terms, or to reenact nihilistic self-effacement by depicting a methodological rupture ad infinitum, than to allow a discourse's "crisis" to open up what were seemingly foreclosed possibilities. The repeated confrontation with the absence at the core of the photographic image is simply evidence that the language games enacted around the photograph have ceased being useful. It is the questions that are wrong, the supposed absence they deliver merely an invitation to formulate different methodological approaches. These momentary openings—the pockets between, their ruins, their transitory spaces, their ignored seams and forgotten vistas—promise a site from which the either/or of utopian and apocalyptic thinking or the political/formalist opposition can be dismantled, and production can be understood as a common process, enacted in every moment of daily life, even at the level of viewership.

* * Editor's Note: Although clarifications were made throughout the text at the editor's prompting, the two paragraphs marked by two asterisks were added by the author after the original essay and discussion forum appeared on-line.

Notes

1. George Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field," *October*, vol. 114, Fall 2005, p. 122.
2. This condition is further complicated by a commonplace confusion of the discrete tangibility of the object of inquiry for the amorphous constellation of discourses that surround it (i.e. the rhetorical transformation of the photograph into an analogy for "Photography").
3. For example: the recurring theme that what is missing from a photograph constitutes what it is truly about—an approach most notoriously deployed by Walter Benjamin, in his "Short (Small) History of Photography," when he wrote that the work of Atget derived its meaning from its appearing like a "recently evacuated scene of a crime."
4. Baker, p. 138.
5. For example, on page 127, Baker writes/quotes, "'That is,' to really paraphrase Krauss, 'the [*not-narrative*] is, according to the logic of a certain kind of expansion, just another way of expressing the term [*stasis*], and the [*not-stasis*] is, simply, [*narrative*].'" Baker's insertions are represented within the text as brackets, or "breaches" in the continuity of Krauss's voice through which Baker's formulations bubble up.
6. "At any rate, when I first sketched my graph for the artist with which I began, Nancy Davenport, she quickly grabbed my pen and paper and began to swirl lines in every direction, circling around my oppositions and squares, with a look that seemed to say, 'What about these possibilities?' *My graph was a mess*. But the photographer's lines, though revolving around the field, had no center, and they extended in every direction." Ibid., p. 140. Emphasis added.
7. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October*, vol. 8, Spring 1979, p. 30.
8. Ibid., p. 33.
9. Baker, p. 128.
10. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 185.
11. Ibid., p 166.
12. Not to put too fine a point on it, but the radicality of Krauss's text was that the diagram it was centered on was constructed analogously to the work she described.
13. Neither Owens nor Buchloh mentions the other's work despite various similarities in reference and argumentation, and the assumed awareness the two authors had of each other's work. This is especially noteworthy since both were students of Krauss at CUNY, and were directly involved with the journal *October* from early on.
14. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," *Artforum*, September 1982, p. 56.
15. *Pictures* is the title of an exhibition curated by Douglas Crimp that opened at Artists Space, New York, in September 1977, including works by Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith. An essay of the same title published by Crimp in *October*, vol. 8 (Spring 1979, pp. 75–88) was an

expansion of Crimp's essay that accompanied the exhibition.
16. Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism (Part 2)," *October*, vol. 13, Summer 1980, p. 71.
17. Ibid. p. 79.
18. Buchloh, *The Neo-Avant-Garde and the Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (New York and Cambridge: October Books, 2001), p. xxi. Emphasis added.
19. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism,* trans. Gregory Elliot (New York and London: Verso, 2006), p. 466.
20. Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (Spring 1979), p. 85. Emphasis added.
21. Owens, "Photography *en abyme*," *October* 5 (Summer, 1978), p. 78.
22. Ibid., p. 88.
23. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (Hill and Wang: New York, 1981), pp. 31–32.
24. Sigfried Kracauer, "Photography," *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays,* ed./ trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 59.
25. Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and Stereograph," *Classic Essays on Photography,* ed. Alan Trachtenberg, (New Haven: Leete's Island, 1980), p. 80.
26. Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), p. 20.
27. Cited in Baker, p. 124.
28. Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1985), pp. 131–50.
29. Patrick Beaver, *The Crystal Palace, 1851–1936: A Portrait of Victorian Enterprise* (London: Hugh Evelyn, 1970), p. 34.
30. Ibid. p. 239.
31. Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from*
32. The preceding three paragraphs were first addressed in my essays: "Absolu Avec Vache (and the Spectre of the Gun)," *Material Presence*, Project Space 176, London, September 2008; "On American Ingenuity (and the problem of the readymade)," *Afterall*, Spring 2008, No.17. pp 21–34; "Air Made Solid," *Dot Dot Dot*, issue 15, Spring 2008; and "A White Cow in a Snow Storm" *Bunch Alliance and Dissolve*, Cincinnati Museum of Contemporary Art, Public Holiday Projects eds., pp. 208–219.
33. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)", in *Mapping Ideology*, Slvoj Zizek ed. (New York: Verso books, 1998) p. 124.
34. Ibid. p. 126.
35. Ibid. p. 127.

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DISCUSSION FORUM
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Subject: At Home In Exile, In The World:
Photography's Native Ambiguity
Date: 17 October 2008 17:02:30
From: GIL BLANK

There is a great deal to admire in Walead's work and writing, not least of which is his demonstration that the opposition of abstraction and representation is quickly revealed by photography's native function to be a false dichotomy. More energizing still—and I am speaking now personally—is his conviction that post-structuralist criticism can be a generative force, despite its historical position to the contrary as inimical to the proposition that photography retains a potential to model individual experience within culture. This alone sets him apart from many of his contemporaries who exploit cameraless abstraction to nihilistic or cynical effect.

It certainly requires feats of remarkable dexterity to square those antagonistic poles, and to contemplate just how a photographic practice is ever to come to terms with a formulation that posits the a priori illegitimacy of representation in general. Notice then, in replay, how he pulls it off: after categorically dismissing all photographic pictures as equivalent abstractions (never mind for the moment that this is a Structuralist reading), he then qualifies his own practice as something else, as somehow beyond such abstractions, as "concrete." Regrettably, this attempt at a day-is-night, up-is-down lexical inversion, whereby photographs are condemned *en masse* as irredeemably abstract, while his photograms and indexical sculptures achieve a kind of super-representational exceptionalism, is cognitive dissonance at best and doublespeak at worst.

Beautiful as it first appears, logic tortured to such an extreme nullifies itself immediately. To wit: if all pictures are effectively abstract, then the distinction itself is meaningless, and it must further be allowed that all pictures are effectively representational (a point Walead himself is advocating as the argument behind his "concrete"/abstract photograms). Yet if all pictures are indeed effective representations—a proposition that runs afoul of both the last forty years of critical dialogue and the central axis of Walead's program—then it follows that there can be no point to his own critique or his images in the first place.

More importantly, such blanket dismissals discount the capacity of photography's viewership to understand these complications implicitly and to benefit from them as a result, an underestimation that would seem to disavow the type of forum in which we're engaged at the moment. Clearly no argument can be sustained that denies the event of its proposal, so I take Walead's participation here to indicate that it is precisely those ambiguities intrinsic to the pictorial model—quite rightly including even those which historically have suggested their own abstraction—that are not the frustration, but indeed the source, of photography's meaning.

The ablest of photography's makers and analysts, regardless of historical period or agenda, have always had an instinctual understanding of this multivalence: namely, that the ambiguities inherent to so uncanny a representation are photography's ongoing replenishment. Tensions such as those between abstraction and representation exist along a continually sliding scale, one that creates within each such image a hermetic admixture, the alien power of which is precisely its singular value. Again, the uniqueness of that conflicted representation is itself the photograph's meaning, *superlative even to the photograph's content*, by virtue of its ability to model (rather than merely document, or even index) the contradiction we know experience to be. So-called

"concrete photography," in its attempt to literalize content at the cost of ignoring the picture's most basic capability for paradox, prioritizes metaphor over model, denying exactly the kind of potentiality that it proclaims in (but relegates to) theory.

It bears mentioning that the final eclipse of revolutionary abstraction was not accomplished by Stalin's terror, but in the admission that its idealization regressed to an autonomous form that could never be justified—indeed, in Alexander Rodchenko's own later words, *must* never be justified [1]. The crux of the argument at hand then is that when grafted onto the inherently representational character of photographic practice, the passion of a consummated *faktura* comes to grief with the awareness that it can be manifest in only the most remotely metaphoric terms. Photograms surrender the world in favor of the darkroom. Similarly, the design and display of glass boxes intended to be shattered during shipment to their own museum exhibition, however conscientiously orchestrated as a reflexive system, is an enunciation of social conditions rendered symbolically at most. The irony of that divorce—as Walead rightly cites Buchloh for first proposing—is to confirm precisely, by the terms of its surrender, the totality of the "dehumanizing spectacle" it purports to critique. Remember that Malevich's summer landscapes and Rodchenko's circus performers were only the last in a long series of retreats from that woe begotten Front, now long since deserted. [2]

So let us be clear: the principle danger here remains the conservative attempt at a restoration, albeit one misleadingly dressed in the mythological doxa of an avant-garde long since foreclosed. Malevich, condemned like Rodchenko to a spiritual house arrest as much the making of his own suffocating logic as the rapidly declining conditions of a totalitarian dictatorship, is not an example to envy.

If ultimately there is anything to be learned from simulacra, it is that we can never in fact separate ourselves from the world or the real.[3]

More to the point, I do not think any ethically conscious individual can genuinely desire to do so. Abstraction, whether aesthetic, mnemonic, or epistemological, is never so complete that it obviates even the least attempt at a transparent reckoning of history, nor so corrupt that its shortcoming does not in itself offer some model for understanding the human contingency of that same history. Cast perpetually adrift, we bear the responsibility of engaging the absurd aspect of our exile as such, lest the allure of rhetoric alone form the first walls of our confinement.

Notes

(1) "Art—is serving the people, but the people are being led goodness knows where. I want to lead the people to art, not use art to lead them somewhere else . . . Art must be separate from politics." Alexander Rodchenko. *Alexander Rodchenko: Revolution in Photography*, Moscow House of Photography, 2008.

(2) The Left Front of the Arts (Levyi Front Iskusstv or LEF) was an early avant-garde group founded in 1923 by Rodchenko along with Vladimir Mayakovsky. One principle tenet of LEF was to define the revolutionary potential of so-called "concretist" artistic practices as equivalent to concrete social actions. Despite its avowed mission to "re-examine the ideology and practices of so-called leftist art, and to abandon individualism to increase art's value for developing communism," LEF's advocacy of formalist abstraction was the exact cause of its condemnation by rival factions of the Soviet vanguard, principle among which, it can be noted with some irony, was the original October group.

(3) "[T]here is still one link that binds an image to its referent within the apparently empty barrage of photographic imagery and the universal production of sign exchange value: the trauma from which the compulsion to repress originated." It is precisely at that tipping point that the acculturated image as such paradoxically "yields its own secret," as being "a perpetual pendulum between

the death of reality in the photograph and the reality of death in the mnemonic image." Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Gerhard Richter's Atlas: The Anomic Archive," *Photography and Painting in the Work of Gerhard Richter: Four Essays on Atlas* (Barcelona, Llibres de Recerca, 1999).

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Subject: Response to Abstracting Photography
Date: 17 October 2008 19:18:08
From: MILES COOLIDGE

Hi Walead!

Just read your essay. I must admit I come away from it feeling very conflicted about my own relationship to the loose body of knowledge—"photo theory"—that comprises your subject. In one moment I imagine I have a vital relationship with the critical positions you discuss. A moment later they seem relatively inconsequential, as the sweep of events in the world ultimately has the last word. I'm simultaneously aware that the mistake of making a fetish of theory is just as egregious as the self-defeating insistence of its irrelevance. So I'll try to strike a balance between these tendencies.

In Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*, Mia Farrow's character attempts to engage her doctor in a medical dialogue concerning her pregnancy, an effort dismissed by him with the condescending admonition "You've been reading books!" Artists who announce a professional interest in art history or critical theory are similarly inviting disdain from these quarters. Thus it is no surprise that the default position for the artist on this question is as follows: we make, you interpret. But keep in mind that Polanski's portrayal of the doctor is a scathing caricature. I applaud your willingness to ignore the prevailing injunction to separate the labor of producing from the work of commentary.

So far, these observations may be nothing more

than a simple gloss on your nuanced account of the problems facing the literate, informed producer of photographs. I identify with your assertion that photography "persists past its supposed theoretical and practical disintegration." Painting continually copes as well with its own spectral persistence. However, I think we can both agree on an important distinction between these two cases. The machinations of avant-garde aesthetics reduced paintings to the status of objects, allowing them to be identified directly (by way of the readymade) with products manufactured for the consumer economy. To put it crudely, the postmodern criticism of MoMA's objectification of the photograph proceeded along similar lines. However, photographs' dual status as objects and as images offered a paradoxical possibility of resistance to this program, which you appropriately identify with Crimp's coinage of "the Pictures Generation" of photographic artists. The representational burden conventionally associated with photographs allowed the medium a tenuous existential foothold in the midst of a thoroughgoing effort to purge art production of taints of identification with the interests of capital. But the question of how photography acquired its representational role is important. Photography over its history has been constituted equally as much (or more) by its association with its vernacular manifestations as with the hegemonic institutions that shape its discourse. Its popularity within the spheres of private use and industrial production (broadly speaking) has inoculated photography against the hyperbolic purism responsible for painting's death sentence.

As to the question of complicity and the difficulty of finding a vantage point unassociated with the market and the institutions charged with its maintenance, I am reminded that the critical environment you take as your subject is itself a construct of certain historical exigencies that have concrete relationships to time and place. The debates concerning the status of the art object in the seventies and early eighties are symptomatic

of the soul-searching of the American new left in the wake of its successes and failures of the late sixties. In foreclosing the promise of direct revolutionary action, progressive impulses were channeled into allegory, gradualist modalities of "changing the system from within," or going underground (to appear later in the form of alienated cranks or as legitimately dangerous "non-state actors" apparently without constituency). That these tendencies would find expression in art production and criticism of the period should be expected.

In such a historical context, the skirmish over MoMA's role in the formation of photographic discourse actually assumes a greater importance than it may first appear. Serge Guilbaut's groundbreaking cold-war scholarship tracing New York's post-WWII institutionalization of the European avant-garde has only been validated by subsequent research. While the CIA's active patronage of the non-communist left was well known amongst intellectuals in post-war Europe, it nevertheless had a paralyzing effect. For various reasons, the political actors responsible for this state of affairs were much more successful at obscuring their role in the institutionalization of the avant-garde in the U.S., which created an artificial atmosphere of innocence that abetted the continuation of its project (as abstract-expressionism and the neo-avant-garde, for instance). The late-seventies/early eighties deconstruction of MoMA's role in the formation of modernist photographic discourse was an early effort in a process that ultimately revealed a state of affairs that had already been assumed to be the case in most foreign intellectual circles.

The situation of extreme concentration of capital, political power and culture in postwar New York that undergirds the phenomena you discuss renders your subject at once parochial and urgent. The despairing tautologies of art critically aware of conditions from which it cannot conceive of escaping that characterized much work of the early eighties in New York have become naturalized and familiar. This condition is not surprising, as it

is emblematic of a generalized state of paralysis with respect to the possibility of meaningful social change. In this interval, yes, the freshness of the debate over photography's discursive status has faded. And yes, the subsequent destabilization of its material character encouraged by the rise of digital photographic technologies has also contributed to a sense of photography's decline in cultural relevance. But we should expect that, as a technology among technologies, photography is susceptible to the forces that dictate continual revolution of the means of production. Thus it is only from a willfully narrow perspective that photography's death can be imagined from a technological standpoint. On commercial and vernacular levels, it has never been more alive. Perhaps the concern is that Flusser's gloomy speculation that photographers can only circulate redundant images under current conditions is becoming increasingly true, and that "going digital" only reinforces this tendency.

So what of photography's status as specialized artistic discourse? Is photography's relevance more at risk, compared with that of other media? I would argue that photography's advantages as a communicative tool are more associated with its automaticity than with its material bases. Photographs continue to be fundamentally unstable products of encounters between contingency and will. I keep looking for opportunities to leverage the semantic surplus the medium continues to offer as its primary strength. Photography's special appeal is that it is always in a state of discursive crisis. The "momentary openings—the pockets between, their ruins, their transitory spaces, their ignored seams and forgotten vistas" of your final sentence are not identifications of marginal territories we are relegated to explore in the shadow of the totalizing culture industry, but rather constitute a persistent promise fundamental to the medium from its inception.

Talk soon,
Miles

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Subject: _If you still need to keep your lens attached, don't go focusing it, and certainly don't go around pointing it at something "interesting."
Date: 19 October 2008 19:19:03
From: KARL HAENDEL

Photography can be a real pain in the ass. I mean, it's complicated; it's so technical. You've got to check the exposure, the lighting, the framing, and that's before taking care of the biggest nuisance, the focusing. (I'm talking about real photography here, not iPhone stuff.) Digital might seem to solve some of this, but really it just masks these operations, as the work still needs to get done. And if you really care, you are using a view camera, and then you have even more to worry about: shift, tilt, swing, plane of focus, and, oh shit, bellows extension! And then, of course, there is this ongoing issue of "representation." Who or what is pictured, and just how are they pictured? Could that brief bit of sexual titillation I feel when I see some leg in a glossy magazine say something about how I relate to chicks, or even think about my mom? Could those war-ravaged shirtless Africans on the cover of my (home-delivered) *New York Times* reflect somehow on the way I live my life and how I have arrived here? But even worse, do I want a photography that explains this to me, thus depriving me of such meager furtive pleasures? These are just a few of my many complaints, most of which of course are not art-related, but if I can find a way to alleviate even a couple of them, I'm down.

Although I make drawings, I think its fair to say that not only am I a fan of photography and slightly versed in its historical trajectory and its current practitioners (I will only hang photographs in my house, never paintings or drawings, really, I can't stand them) but also that images, specifically flat, non-moving images—usually called photographs—are fundamental to my work. Put simply, I love photography. Beshty's

argument, while not entirely over my head, deals with a theoretical language that I left behind when I finished the Whitney Program, so I can't tackle it head on (sorry Walead), but there are three recent trends in photography that his essay got me thinking about. They are of special interest to me because I can see in them some parallel moves that I've made in my own work, and to be honest, I might have ripped a few of them off along the way. These three camps I'm going to call, for want of better terms, the pictorialists, the autobiographical appropriationists, and the abstractionists.

The pictorialists probably have the longest history to pave their way forward, because its not their history at all, but the history of romantic and realist painting, really Renaissance vision itself, that they build on. We are talking about so many photographers of the past, but more recently, the 1970s Americans with large format cameras, cars, and color film (Stephen Shore, Joel Sternfeld); the Germans who followed them (Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth) and who, although a past generation by now, still hold much of the limelight; and then some of the genre's newest adherents, photographers with whom I am familiar and would like to touch on, such as Florian Maier-Aichen and Amir Zaki. These photographers, who learned their craft in a Photoshop age, seem to embrace the digital in not so much a subversive manner, although it could seem that way, but as just one more tool to make the pictures they love. It is this love that I want to speak to, because I can't figure out why they would otherwise use such an antiquated pictorial mode unless they are in love with the epic grandeur and corporeal seduction of the form. Yes, it's pictorial—fully—and the pleasure we receive from these works, since most of us don't know any better, is probably guilt free. I for one like being blown away, and if these pseudo-Germans use the same tricks as much older Germans (Caspar David Friedrich, for example), it's fine by me. In fact, I've been known to make a really big, pretty picture myself.

Maier-Aichen's vistas of the California coast, and his tweaking of them with a computer, seem to me akin to the old car enthusiast tinkering with his vintage engine in the garage; it speaks to his commitment, conviction, and passion. It comes through in the pictures, and I can respect and even admire that.

The autobiographical appropriationists (Anne Collier, Roe Ethridge, Elad Lassry, and to some extent Collier Schorr) offer us a pleasing mix between wonky '70s conceptual practices (Vito Acconci, Dennis Oppenheim) and '80s appropriation (Richard Prince, Barbara Kruger). It seems that they recognize the cold, empty feeling we get from the Pictures Generation, yet have taken to heart its lessons. Similarly, they understand an important lesson of the Conceptualists: the reportage function of the photograph can be used to one's advantage by simply setting something up in front of the lens to record or attest to the fact that "I did this." They twist it up a bit though, by instead proclaiming, "I love this," be it an old postcard or an album cover. Like the pictorialists, their practice is also one of the enthusiast, but this time in the guise of the collector, or to use a more trendy term, the archivist. The things, or views, or types of image often come from shared culture, if not always from the mainstream variety. Because they are re-photographing and representing (sometimes this takes the form of a straight appropriation, other times the image just apes a trope, say a certain kind of "intimate" portrait), the "I love this" moment usually comes with the caveat "even though I should know better," which makes their debt to Prince, Cindy Sherman, and the like clear. But in their attempt to humanize and bring warmth to appropriation, their work is overly coded, private, and something of an in-joke that for the most part I am not in on. I've always been wary of work that needs a guest list to access because I feel bad for the people on line outside. Even though in my work I have an inclination towards personal appropriation, I've always made an attempt to keep

my references open and recognizable enough so that you need not have taken a seminar in the French New Wave to know what I'm talking about. People have called me a populist, as if it's a nasty word, and I guess I am. I don't think that's such a bad thing.

Lastly we come to the abstractionists, or materialists, or as I would like to call them, the Disinterested Photographers. Again, they too have their lineage, starting with the non-objective and photogram work of the 1920s (Man Ray, László Moholy-Nagy), some offshoots of the New York School in the 1950s (Aaron Siskind, Harry Callahan), and then in the 1980s (Adam Fuss, and most importantly, James Welling). Its best current practitioners include Beshty, Eileen Quinlan and Liz Deschenes, and a few others, such as Anthony Pearson and Shane Huffman, whose staying power I'm not so sure about. Their work is literal, dumb, non-pictorial, and often non-referential; in short it is straightforward and maybe even honest, at least with Beshty and Quinlan. (I can't help but fall for Quinlan's ongoing series called *Smoke & Mirrors*.) And what I see evident in this new breed of abstract work is more than just a reappraisal of the relationship between the image and the real, for as Beshty rightly points out, as did Craig Owens, this type of deconstructive art often leaves us with a feeling of vacancy. Simply, it leaves us nothing to sink our teeth into, nothing to come away with but a question that we came there with to start. Not a positive feeling, or as my therapist would say, "not a good place to be." Oddly, though, out of a different kind of "nothing" these abstractionists seem to be on the path to "something."

This new abstract work is attempting, in its subtle way, what amounts to an assault on the practically monolithic association between the image and its material form, what Beshty calls "a triumph of images over the material," so that maybe photography can finally get somewhere without images. What we are talking about is a materialist photography that uses as its tools the very thing

that makes the image/object relationship possible—light-sensitive surfaces, paper, chemicals, dyes, etc.—and it is to this often repressed aspect of photography (it is often taken care of in "dark rooms") that these photographers give much of their attention. An embrace of the materialist cause also means that all the hard, metal gear associated with photography (and I am talking to you, middle-aged man-character, the shutterbug), such as lenses, proper lighting setups, meters, and all that stuff, can be jettisoned. (Sorry B&H, my Jew brothers, but you have profited enough.) This also means that the actions involving such gear must be reexamined and perhaps left behind (and I am fully aware that the sexual pleasure of toying with one's lens will be missed). I am talking about focusing, adjusting the aperture or shutter, and all the endless puttering around that enables the image to be "faithfully" recorded. It is the lens, that which so closely approximates the physiognomy of the human eye, which has made photography indistinguishable from images for many people. But get rid of the lens, and all that is "in front" of it, and you get rid of the image.

So basically, if you still need to keep your lens attached, don't go focusing it, and certainly don't go around pointing it at something "interesting." Without the lens, you just have light-sensitive surfaces, the actual material of photographs, without images. I like to call this new group of photographers "disinterested" because they seem more eager to be not just camera-less (Rayographs were camera-less, yet with those silhouettes the "thingness" of the things still remained), but almost to be unselective, in not giving us "some thing" to look at. That which historically and culturally has been the subject of the camera's gaze is off to the side, not so much resisted as disregarded, played out. It's almost as if they are a bit rudderless, random, letting chance and accident take over—but not all the way—for theirs is not an art of resignation. It's anti-compositional and anti-hierarchical, perhaps even democratic, letting that which is

uninteresting or inconsequential a chance to finally have its picture taken. It's more fair, a redistribution of camera time, if you will. I like that.

An interesting question that I am not capable of exploring in this short response (nor do I have the interest or critical tools at hand to do so) is why at certain periods of overheated artistic propagation (the historical avant-garde [Moholy-Nagy], the New York School [Siskind], the 1980s [Welling], and the very recent past, a period which has yet to be named but which I am pretty sure has just ended) there has been a renewed interest in materialist photography. That is not to say that this type of work dominated their eras, but they seem to appear during periods of abundance (abundant money, abundant artistic product), which makes me think there might be an unconscious kind of Marxism at work in these pictures of nothing. Actually, I have to believe it's not unconscious, and it's definitely there.

Postscript:
Now that our global economy has collapsed, the progress of Disinterested Photography might have to be put on hiatus until prosperous times return and vulgar materialism warrants a finger pointing. Sure, Disinterested Photography, in its stubborn insistence on the material and material only, seems to be, at least in part, a political project. But the thing with images, no matter how wrong by their very nature they always are, they happen to be very good at being wrong in a political manner. What I'm thinking is that maybe some new WPA project is in order. I've always liked those dust-bowl, starving redneck, fruit-picking, breadline-standing pictures. Of course, now the poor are fat and the Midwest is not so much dusty as rusty, but I still think it's a great idea. Top notch idea in fact. First these Disinterested Photographers need to get their cameras out of pawn or the closet. Then I say we put Quinlan and Beshty and the rest of them in a car and send them out into America and see what they come back with.

For I fear it might already be time for something new. Again.

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Subject: Taking Pictures on Shaky Ground
Date: 20 October 2008 16:05:03
From: ZOE CROSHER

In a most fascinating set of historical and quotational twists and turns, from Barthes to Malevich, Beshty lays out a meandering path that culminates and resonates most profoundly, for me, in the last paragraph—a hope for photographic practice that is to be found in embracing an in-between space, what German urban planner and theorist Thomas Sieverts has termed "zwischeinstadt," meaning between the urban and the country. Although I will engage with this notion more later on, it is important to first mine Beshty's thoughtful reckoning with various art histories, laying bare a surprising assumption of a grand, theorized master narrative at work in the heart of historical image production. It seems a reflection that leaves us at a loss, singing to institutional choirs and fighting discursive windmills, finding ourselves staring down the nihilistic failure of the "this has been" of photography itself.

Beshty is clearly questioning the weight of a heavy-handed history of image making that has informed and molded him and his practice, as it has most of ours who have gone through the professionalizing process of the medium in our various art school careers. However, throughout his essay one reads a progressive building up of the assumed monumentality of theorized discourse as the dictation of practice as opposed to the supporter of an image-making practice. This assumption that there ever was (or is) a dictating authority seems an engaging point to start talking about the chicken and the egg scenario in this schism between theory and practice, a schism that weighs down many contemporary artists I know.

Perhaps the hardest thing to acknowledge is

that such monumentality and authority as has dictated art/image historical presumptions is no longer valid, and that whatever agency there is in the production of photographs must now be claimed at a time more uncertain, theoretically or otherwise, than at any point in our art historical past. Taking pictures on shaky ground is far more difficult than answering the call of scientific, political or theoretical "truths." I am not saying that elements of these motivations don't feed into why we do what we do, but there no longer seems to be such singularity of purpose. Such disappointed relationships and nostalgic nods to a more utopian past have already been explored by the likes of Sam Durant in his early work and described at length in Beshty's article. Finding ourselves embedded in this critical moment in photography with the total dissolution of an assumed "real," we see parallels with what painting went through with the image in the late '70s and early '80s and the demise of high Modernism. Of course, from a contemporary perspective, this past seems grounded and linear, and is edited as needed in attempts to interpret historical trends among a set of mitigating circumstances. But the question is, after breaking apart what doesn't quite apply anymore, what other options are available? What is the exit before the last exit?

One "seductive promise" offered by Beshty is that of materialist critique. At certain moments I question if this recent turn to abstraction is simply a retreat into materiality. A whole world of work that is self-conscious of its mediumness has burst onto (or been rediscovered by) the scene, with a push towards the concreteness of the material as a possible alternative to the almost existential crisis of representation, institutional critique and postmodernism. Embracing notions of making "pictures more picture-like" is one avenue that image-making has recently tended, from Beshty's large scale photograms and whacked out, x-rayed negatives, to Elad Lassry's use of frames that reference perfectly slick commercial images, to James Welling's long-standing dance

with photographic-ness and Eileen Quinlan's smoke and mirrors.

However, what I find more compelling than this self-reflexivity is the direction Beshty takes in his final paragraph. Here he lays out the potential to be found in in-between spaces, describing "infrastructural, interstitial zones" that "stand as compromised, indeterminate way stations between chimerical destinations," and argues for uncoded and unprocessed space as a momentary place of hope—a potential autonomous zone where authorship and origin are set aside. But how does one actualize this?

Along with Deleuze & Guattari, the potential of these interstitial spaces was mined in the late '90s by Sieverts, whose term "zwischeinstadt," which is literally translated as "between the place as a living space and the non-places of movement." Although Sieverts's premise has an architectural and planning basis, a possible application of the theory resonates profoundly for art making and writing, and is for me pointedly appropriate to the problematics of photography and its relation to my interests in (the fiction of and violation of) documentary, mapping, and the resulting imaginary.

A critical question presents itself: how does this theoretical or aesthetics space refer or have relation to real space, especially in regards to photography? A recent project that explores the possibility of playing with these ideas (and not just photographically) is *Suddenly: Where We Live Now*, spearheaded by inspired curator Stephanie Snyder and mischievous bon vivant and author Matthew Stadler. Culminating in a traveling exhibition, public programs and publication, the entirety of the project attempts to find "new ways" and "new descriptions that give the landscape where we live an independent identity in the imagination of its occupants," proposing a new engagement to displace traditional binary notions of "the city" and "the countryside." (See www.suddenly.org and web.reed.edu/gallery/) Just as Beshty concludes with momentary openings as

possible trajectories away from traditional dialectics of either/or thinking, whether in utopian/apocalyptic thinking or in the political/formalist opposition, *Suddenly* attempts to unravel the authoritative presumptions of mapping and land use, literally and metaphorically. In a real-time affair called the *Backroom* that I attended during a weekend-long symposium devoted to this very question of spaces between, Thomas Sieverts and Aaron Betsky were in conversation about transitional space as we were all eating gourmet Thai food, arguing about how images and the imaginary function, and dripping wet at dusk in the rain under a temporary structure/autonomous zone in an almost abandoned parking lot a half an hour outside of town. Perhaps it is in situations such as this active experiment, when theory is stripped of its monumentality and included in the active and lived construction of meaning, that it can take a more appropriate place as reflector of the artistic condition as opposed to determinant of the artistic act.

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Subject: Response
Date: 21 October 2008 01:46:19
From: ANTHONY PEARSON

Firstly, let me start by saying that I am not a theoretician, but a devoted practitioner. Therefore, I feel I cannot confidently respond to Mr. Beshty's essay or to Mr. Blank's response, due to this fact. With this being said, I do believe I have an inkling of the ideas and sentiments expressed here, yet cannot say I am compelled by them. Nevertheless, I may be mistaken of the arguments due to their meandering, oblique and encoded nature.

But enough disclaimers. The questions that arise for me in this discussion are as follow: what is it that compels many individuals involved with photography to insist on a categorization and compartmentalization of methods of practice?

Why would one attempt to impose a set of absolutist rules and regulations on the supposed meaning of photographic practices? This is seemingly such an archaic and outmoded form of reasoning when it comes to any method of visual art, yet those in photography seem to insist on these dialectics and pigeonholes.

I often feel that artists using photography and theoreticians concerned with photography insist on examining the medium in a way that views it as a dead subject. If they are not using the language of John Szarkowski, they are using the language of academic postmodernism. They do not allow for a contemporaneous, fluid, open-ended, or Po-PoMo read of the subject. In fact, it often seems that they desire the complete death of the medium itself, so they can poke at it and examine it without any risk of it jumping up and biting them in the ass. Unfortunately or not, the medium remains undead and is open-ended, sticky, and confusing with no easy answers.

A multitude of levels of photographic engagement are open to any artist, free of any undying commitment, romantic notion of positioning, or investment in the antiquated idea of movements. Frankly, it is shocking to see this kind of forced positioning even entertained in the contemporary arena. I was recently asked if I was a materialist and, frankly, I have little idea as to what this might mean. My work is continually compared to Mr. Beshty's, which I will take as a high compliment. But I gather we have little in common theoretically, politically, or artistically with the exception of the fact that we are both known for photographic abstraction.

Naturally, this kind of compartmentalization is endgame, as illustrated in Mr. Haendel's assessment of photographic genres. I could address each forced categorization, for example his complete conflation of pictorialist and Modernist photographic histories, but I think it would be most useful to attempt to tackle this confusion in regards to what he refers to as the abstractionists or materialists.

Mr. Haendel seems to assume, as many people do these days, that photographic practitioners with an involvement in abstraction are mostly uncommitted to lens-based practices and detest image and subject. He cites Ms. Quinlan as an example of this, yet she has perhaps the most reoccurring and omnipresent subject of any photographer working today. Her commitment to her subject has been unceasing and she photographs it relentlessly. Her images are highly specific and her methods are directed at a complete engagement with the objects in front of her lens. The camera is her tool in the traditional sense and her work reads as completely photographic.

The suggestion that so-called "abstractionists" are unselective, disinterested, and desire to make work without images is frankly absurd. I, for one, have a defined subject, use a camera (and a lens for that matter) in every work I produce, and am completely engaged with photography in the highly traditional sense. I simply produce non-representational images, which has nothing in-and-of-itself to do with a resistance to traditional photographic methodology.

And finally, I must say I take exception with the fact that Mr. Haendel has brought into question my "staying power." I find this to be completely out of line as my virility is not in question here. This is about photography, not male potency, and I assure you, as my wife would gladly testify, this is not an issue for me whatsoever.

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Subject: Response to Walead Beshty's "Abstracting Photography"
Date: 28 October 2008 11:56:43
From: JASON SMITH
Title: "Everyday Abstraction"

Walead Beshty's "Abstract Photography" proposes, in its closing pages, a new theoretical framework for thinking about the photographic that would no longer be bound by—or forced to choose between—the

classical divisions organizing the discourse on photography. On the one hand, there is no longer any need to stage the kind of theoretical "salvaging" of the disappearing photographic object, understood as threatened in its ontological specificity by the contemporary dominance of digital technology in the production of "images" (whatever their support). On the other hand, it is no longer enough to speak of the social function of the image either, if we are compelled to assume the discourse on power and its "monolithic" character that accompanies these discourses. The first type of discourse seems, according to Beshty, to lose its object all the more the moment it attempts to produce an "expanded" concept of the photographic; the second, in turn, seems to tautologically ensure its own failure by insisting on a notion of power that always already reappropriates any form of critique or "resistance" mounted against it. The theoretical reconstruction of the object is, then, not so much the production of an enlarged conceptual framework for thinking about the nature of the photographic in an aesthetic and cultural space dominated by digital encoding and cinematic models, but an allegory of the failure to do just this, a failure paradoxically brought about by the very airtight "success" of the theoretical operation. The social reading of the photograph is also haunted by a kind of congenital failure, a melancholic "complicity" that can only ever repeat, at a more reflexive or hyperaware level, the very errors it claims to be denouncing. So, two models of failure: a theoretical operation that is so successful it suppresses the very thing it seems to produce, and a social inscription of the photograph that can only ever reproduce the relations of power it claims to expose or critique.

If this quick formalization of at least one strand of Beshty's argument is correct, then it gives rise, for me, to two fundamental questions. These questions are largely questions asking for clarification, for distinctions that are more pointed or elaborated at greater length.

1. In the final paragraph of Beshty's essay,

we are told that instead of "[reorganizing] a seemingly chaotic field"—photography in its current digital and cinematic implosion—we should instead allow the "crisis" of the discourse of photography to "open up what were seemingly foreclosed possibilities." The question, for me, is simple. What is the difference between this desire to "open up" the photographic field, seeing the crisis of the definition of the photographic as an opportunity rather than as an anxious historical moment, and the project of generating, through a set of "logical" operations, an expansion of the field of the photographic? It is certainly possible that the results of George Baker's theoretical reconstruction of the photographic might occlude an entire range of possibilities available today. But is this an effect of the theoretical operation itself, that is, of the very methodology used—the semiotic square and its "logical" operations—or is it a shortcoming of the specific deployment of this technique? It is a tricky issue, because the effect produced by the use of structuralist methods is double: it opens up a field that was formerly identified with a specific medium, but it also closes that field by claiming to generate, and "logically ratify" (Baker's words), the entire field of possible permutations available to contemporary photographic practices. This effect of closure is important. Without it, the discourse would no longer be theoretical; it would be an empirical hunch, with very imprecise terminology, pragmatic to be sure, but never certain of exactly what it is talking about when its says "photography." The risk to be taken here is to demonstrate how one arrives at the terminology one uses. So what we have, it seems, is a "deconstruction" (not so much a theoretical operation as an historical fact, the "crisis" of the photographic object) of the medium-specific concept of photography and, at the same time, a regulated expansion of the field of the photographic through a series of logical operations. The danger that Walead Beshty's discourse courts, then, is the empiricist one of being so open to the possible transformations an

object can undergo that it can no longer say, with certainty, what it means by the term "photography." But perhaps the real question is whether this is really a danger, or a risk that must be taken in order to avoid "foreclosing" a set of possibilities that the theoretical reconstruction of the object, no matter how expansive it may be, necessarily performs.

2. The second question (or set of questions) concerns the image of the social and the political as it is presented in these final pages. It is a matter of defetishizing power, of seeing it not as a saturation of social space, but as a patchwork of competing or "overdetermined" forces that are never organized into a monolithic force (whose image is that of the state or the institution), but instead shot through with seams, fractures, local instabilities, "marginal zones" and "transitional spaces" that are inhabitable in their own way, providing points of autonomy that are not immediately inscribed in the dynamics of power and resistance that haunt the allegorical critique of institutions. This language is meant to break with the built-in failures of the avant-garde project—Malevich's point zero of the black monochrome, to use Beshty's example—and of the critical procedures of Pictures-era allegory. To the "either/or" of the absolute decision required by the avant-gardist commitment, we are instead told of "compromises and negotiations," of the indeterminate play between positions and destinations. There is even, at one point, a mention of the "daily ritual of compromise." The first question that comes to mind, however, is whether this space of the everyday ritual is a space of opaque ritual that remains too elusive for the networks of power and its institutions, or whether it is, to the contrary, the very space of "ideology" itself as it was reformulated by Louis Althusser in the late 1960s? As Beshty knows well, this theory of ideology tried to locate the material existence of ideology (ideology has nothing to do with "ideas" in Althusser's theory) precisely in "ritual," what Althusser at one point refers

to in his text as "the practical rituals of the most elementary everyday life." In my reading of his essay, Beshty places a great deal of weight on this notion of "everyday life," and there is an implicit reference in these final paragraphs not only to Henri Lefebvre but more importantly to Michel de Certeau's work from the 1960s. It would be necessary, given the ambiguity of the terms "ritual" and the "daily" or "everyday," to offer a more developed theoretical framework for this term so that it is not immediately identified with ideological ritual. The second question that is raised by this image of the social is the opposing of the language of decision—the utopian and the apocalyptic—to the language of compromise and negotiation. This division recalls, despite everything, the language of Nicolas Bourriaud's theorization of relational aesthetics in the 1990s, in which the violent position of the avant-garde and its task of "destroying" the institution of art and bourgeois culture more generally is abandoned in favor of microtopias and their participatory consensus and "openness" to revision and reformulation. No one has analyzed the weakness of these models—the way they uncritically reproduce the dynamics of contemporary "immaterial" capitalism and its organizational logics—better than Beshty himself does in his "Neo-avantgarde and the Service Industry: Notes on the Brave New World of Relational Aesthetics." (*Texte zur Kunst*, no. 59, September 2005) In what sense, then, do these marginal zones and transitional spaces, these interstices of compromise, collaboration and negotiation, offer the points of autonomy referred to above, rather than the secretly melancholic complicity that is barely concealed by the casual Friday of accommodation to contemporary neo-liberalism and its rhetoric of difference, hybridity, and marginality?

Photography and Abstraction

GEORGE BAKER

> Here again the road leads over capitalism's dead body; but here again this road is a good one.
> —Bertolt Brecht

Twenty years ago, Rosalind Krauss attempted to rethink the entrenched relations between photography and abstraction with a small exhibition devoted to the work of James Welling and Holly Wright. Gone were the classical nudes and the gleaming pears and the cacti, and in their place appeared body parts and close-framed images of hands; gone were the light studies and architectural meditations, and in their place a series of images of gelatin, or tinfoil, or aged diaries; gone were the Modernist concerns with pure form and the conditions of visual transparency, and in their place the opaque photographic conditions of the uncanny, the compulsion to repeat, and the "empty sign." [1] Provoked by Walead Beshty's recent essay for this series, I want to speculate on the need to rethink the relations between photography and abstraction once more and yet again, today.

In doing so, I will not comment much on Beshty's reading of my prior essay, "Photography's Expanded Field," except to observe that it is extremely disorienting and yet refreshing to witness an artist turning the tables on a critic, doing to a work of mine what I most often do to a work by a given artist: interpreting, historicizing, and critiquing it. Melancholy, allegory, failure: I will not comment on these. Instead, let me simply narrate some

motivations, as I perceived them, behind my writing of that earlier text. One thing was clear to me: it was not "theory" or "structuralism" that could expand the photographic object or medium. My essay was a heuristic exercise, an attempt to invent language and transform our historical and descriptive discourse, for that expansion of photography had already occurred—indeed, a generation before the writing of my text. Theory could potentially clarify our relation to an expansion and a transformation that had already happened (but then again, such transformation has also hardly concluded). If I may then play with Beshty's terms, it was not theory that had "abstracted" photography, but rather photography that had become—in some new and potentially radical way—abstract. Using vastly different terminology, this is the event that I called photography's "expansion" and that I wanted to trace in my earlier essay. I do not mean that photography had become abstract in the formalist sense of the term—empty, blank, nonrepresentational. Rather, I understand abstraction as a social as much as a formal process (a process where form overtakes the social, where form transforms sociality itself). It is that violent decontextualization, voiding, and recoding of objects endemic to the principles of capitalist modernity.

We may push further. As an artifact of capitalist modernity, photography has not only been abstracted in recent decades, transformed "beyond recognition"—what more surface descriptions might identify as its recoding at the hands of digital techniques, for example—but it has itself always been a force of abstraction. This cuts counter-intuitively against the conventional understanding of photography's essence as indexical, as a potential assertion of physical presence, or as inherently (for critics like Clement Greenberg, and, more recently, Jeff Wall) depictive. The old modernist (and more recent postmodernist) debates on photography and abstraction thrived on

this aesthetic disjunction, a debate that leads back to the schism between photography and painting, ultimately. Again, I am using these terms in a radically different way. No schism exists between photography and abstraction (unless it can be crafted *within* artistic practice, perhaps the most difficult of tasks, on which I'll say more in a moment). For photography has been one of the capitalist forms through which processes of abstraction became visible, and could also concretely be achieved. (Abstraction is concrete as well, terrifyingly concrete perhaps, from this perspective.) For divergent reasons, Beshty seems to agree with me on this point. "Since its inception," Beshty writes, "the photographic image has been strongly associated with displacement and destruction, a triumph of images over material." He cites Oliver Wendell Holmes writing on photography in 1859, as will I: "*Form is henceforth divorced from matter*. In fact matter as a visible object is of no great use any longer, except as the mould on which form is shaped. Give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view, and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please." [2] Holmes, like most of the avant-garde that would follow him in the twentieth century, evidently suffered from what I would call capitalist euphoria, but his hallucinations have their anchor in the reality of photography's enactment of the shared processes of modernity and modernization. So if I have gone on the record with an attempt to trace photography's "expansion" in recent decades, what we actually need to contemplate and register in the contemporary situation of photography is a force of abstraction that has now itself been submitted to a process of further abstraction. Photography begins to sound like money in this account, and this is no coincidence. We need today to contemplate the further abstraction of a prior abstraction—a second-degree, or exponentially accelerated, dynamic.

I will admit, of course, that these terms appear nowhere in the essay "Photography's Expanded Field." For a variety of reasons, I relegated them instead to a text that I consider a companion piece to that essay, the short book that I wrote about the artist Gerard Byrne. [3] So if structuralism did not "abstract" photography, now it begins to sound like capitalist forces and processes are the determinate factors—and yet some new kind of Marxist determinism is precisely the narrative my text on Byrne hoped to avoid. [4] Instead, I found myself engaged with an artist who produced photographs that—while attached to genres such as the street photograph, the landscape photograph, or the architectural photograph—tarried with the unrepresentable. The most figurative and even traditional of photographic languages now began to appear "abstract," and this in the old, aesthetic sense of the term. And yet, simultaneously, and perhaps paradoxically, I found myself contemplating the necessity, in the current moment of aesthetic work upon the photograph, of a return not to the photography and abstraction debates around modernism, but to the "Realist-Modernist" debates within Western Marxism from the beginning of the twentieth century—the positions notoriously taken up at that moment by Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukacs, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno. Brecht was especially useful for his productivist position acknowledging the fact that at his historical moment, the only realism worthy of the name would have to *incorporate* abstraction. Brecht wrote, "*Realist* means: laying bare society's causal network/showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators/writing from the standpoint of the class which has prepared the broadest solutions for the most pressing problems afflicting human society/emphasizing the dynamics of development/concrete and so as to encourage abstraction." [5] For Brecht in the early twentieth century, a realism worthy of

the name would have to involve abstraction, for this had become in fact a social form—a form through which the social had to pass.

So, it seemed to me, was the situation of photography to be narrated today, its representational, "documentary" status everywhere in doubt—and this because of new historical realities far greater than the loss of indexicality signaled by digitalization. The transformation was not just technological, but epochal. We had entered a topsy-turvy historical situation in which photography was increasingly rendered abstract even when it was most entrenched in its traditional documentary and representational formats, and potentially representational when it was most abstract.

Among contemporary artists, perhaps no one has better given voice to this shift than Hito Steyerl in her essay "Documentary Uncertainty." [6] Steyerl's account begins with her experience of watching CNN's "embedded" documentary footage of a journalist during the recent U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Transmitted via cell phone, the most concrete images of the onset of the war appeared almost entirely unintelligible, the recording equipment unequal to the task of the historical reality to be recorded, producing some new form of low-resolution abstraction. Steyerl read the images allegorically, as testifying to "a deeper characteristic of many contemporary documentary pictures: the more immediate they become, the less there is to see. The closer to reality we get, the less intelligible it becomes. Let us call this 'the uncertainty principle of modern documentarism.'" Her critique continued:

> Contemporary artistic documentarism, with its focus on a politics of representation, has not yet paid sufficient attention to this change; politics as such are moving beyond representation. Very tangible developments make clear that the principle

> of representative democracy is becoming increasingly problematic. The political representation of the people is undermined in many ways—from the non-representation of migrants to the creation of strange democratic hybrids like the European Union. If people are no longer represented politically, then maybe other forms of symbolic representation are undermined as well. If political representation becomes abstract and blurred, so might documentary representation. Is this also a way to interpret CNN's abstract documentarism? A documentarism which moves beyond representation?

Steyerl's concern, as a filmmaker, has been with "documentary" as a mode; but I feel that the situation must be described as entirely parallel for the medium of photography today, with all of its own ontological ties to documentary. We face the imperative to understand anew today what it might mean for photography to "move beyond representation." We face the imperative to understand anew the situation of photography as it is submitted to a process of transformation and ultimately abstraction, as it is now rendered an abstraction of an abstraction. I have said that this description of photography parallels another symbolic form—namely, money—as the latter is increasingly transcoded into sheer number itself, divorced, under contemporary conditions of production, from any tie to identifiable objects, products, or commodities. Money generated from money itself, money for money's sake, the abstraction of an abstraction: this is the contemporary condition that the critic Fredric Jameson has outlined in his writings on finance capital. Since I wrote about this at length in my prior text, I hope Beshty will excuse me if I lapse into paraphrase again. But this time, the paraphrase and the citation are of myself.

* * *

The questions around which this essay has been circling could be stated as follow: What would an abstraction of an abstraction look like? What would be the structure of such an entity? How can representational images or photographs in contemporary culture be said to engage with the abstract or the unrepresentable? Could this be described as a realist project? How does reification continue to invest and alter the forms of contemporary art? How can we describe postmodern forms of autonomization, if they can even be said to exist, and how do they relate to modernist autonomization and aesthetic autonomy? I want to bring some partial closure to these questions now, although history has not yet run its course and my observations should be taken as provisional.

We need to rethink the great cliché that modernist art was engaged with the negative, the autonomous, and the abstract while postmodernism has signaled a massive return of popular and representational forms, a return to realism and figuration. Though the question of realism returns with pressing urgency in the moment of the postmodern, its traditional language cannot resume, no matter the desire of even the most sophisticated of critics to theorize the lineaments of an aesthetic project of "re-figuration" in the wake of modernism's repressions. Fredric Jameson's recent writings on finance capital provide us with much direction as to why this is so. On the level of social structures, Jameson has imagined analogies between the structures of social occultation existing in the modernist era—the invisibility, say, of the labor and resources of imperialist colonies to the Western urban areas that otherwise depended on them—and the aesthetic necessity of modernist formal abstraction and its occultations. In a newly "transparent" global world

system of instant flows of communication and capital, such occultation dissipates, along with the aesthetic languages that it supported (or conversely, that arose to give such social occultation an allegorical form). The "new transparency of the postmodern world system (which resorts to new techniques of distortion by way of a suppression of history and even...of time and temporality itself) now also explains the shift from the abstract and initiatory forms of modernism to what look like more popular and representational kinds of art and writing (and music) in postmodernity, a shift often and widely considered to be a return to realism and figuration." [7] And yet this movement "forward" of the historical process should not be narrated as a simple "return." We must begin to imagine an earlier, modernist abstraction not happily canceled, but in fact redoubled—raised to a higher level in both social forms and aesthetic language. For, as Jameson asserts, "postmodernism is not really figurative in any meaningful realist sense or at least... it is now a realism of the image rather than of the object and has more to do with the transformation of the figure into a logo than with the conquest of new 'realistic' and representational languages. It is thus a realism of image or spectacle society, if you will, and a symptom of the very system it represents in the first place." [8]

In a series of recent essays, Jameson has explored the lineaments of the "system" to which the new representational images of postmodernity might be said to correspond. For Jameson, the mediations between such aesthetic forms and their social correlatives only become apparent in a moment dominated by the new totality of financial speculation, the "post-productive" moment of *finance capital*. [9] Simply put, finance capital is the form of what we have been calling an abstraction of an abstraction, the "freeing" of money—a first level of abstraction—from the products and industries to which it

was previously attached, and by which it was originally generated. According to Jameson:

> [Finance capital] suggests a new type of abstraction, in which on the one hand money is sublimated into sheer number, and on the other hand a new kind of value emerges, which seems to have little enough to do with the old-fashioned value of firms and factories or of their products and their marketability. The recent business failures like Enron seem to suggest that the value of a given stock cannot long be separated from the profitability of the firm it is supposed to "represent" or express, but I think they demonstrate the opposite, that under the conditions of finance capital stock value has a decidedly semiautonomous status with respect to its nominal company and that, in any case, postmodern 'profitability' is a new category, dependent on all kinds of conditions unrelated to the product itself, such as the downsizing of employees at the demand of banks and investment institutions and the draining of the company's assets (sometimes fatally) in order to inflate dividends. [10]

It is to such a logic that Jameson now wants to attach his understanding of the structure of postmodern culture; modernism will correspond in this new schema to a first moment of abstraction, the moment of industrial (or productive) capital, while postmodern forms arise in the increasingly speculative transition to a second level of abstraction, the freeing of productive, industrial capital into the pure speculation of finance capital. "The formal abstractions of the modernist period—which corresponded to the dialectic of value of an older monopoly stage of capitalism," Jameson explains, "are to be radically distinguished from the less palpable abstractions of the image or the logo, which operate with something

of the autonomy of the values of present-day finance capital." We need to understand this new freedom, and thus this new form of abstraction, in the very presence of putatively representational postmodern forms. As with finance capital, Jameson will find this new structure in the "recoding" of a previously abstracted form; as he puts it, the difference between modernist and postmodern abstraction is "the distinction between an object and its expression and an object whose expression has in fact virtually become another object in its own right." [11]

Since the "new economics" of the 1980s, since the Reagan and Thatcher years in the U.S. and Britain, we have become increasingly familiar with finance capital and the present centrality of its forms: the valuation of investment and the stock market over industrial production; the massive expansion of ephemeral profits reaped without an engagement with production as such; the excessive growth of land speculation and its reshaping of the contemporary urban milieu; the increasing power of monetarism and thus of organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These are only the "positive," or rather constructive, transformations involved in the machinations of finance capital. A long list of negative or destructive ones should by now be familiar as well—systematic unemployment, capital flight and disinvestment, the periodic necessity of the economic "crash"—and we will return to this in a moment. The familiarity of these forms, however, has not made us any wiser as to the structural effects of the centrality of finance capital to our own contemporary capitalist moment. To open up this understanding, Jameson's exploration of finance capital turns to the account of capitalism given in Giovanni Arrighi's text *The Long Twentieth Century*. Following Arrighi's perspective, Jameson proposes that finance capital or the "speculative moment" is the third and final stage of any

local process of capitalist development. Such development proceeds through a first, primitive stage in which, through an inevitably difficult process of accumulation, a quantity of money is brought into being for "capitalization." Then, in a second moment, that money becomes capital and is, in Jameson's words, "territorialized"—that is, invested in agriculture and manufacture, transforming a geographic area into a center of production. Eventually, however, this productive moment comes into crisis, reaching internal limits on its growth; it then enters its third, speculative stage. "Speculation," Jameson writes, "the withdrawal of profits from the home industries, the increasingly feverish search, not so much for new markets (these are also saturated) as for the new kind of profits available in financial transactions themselves and as such—these are the ways in which capitalism now reacts to and compensates for the closing of its productive moment." [12] Finance capital stands as a complete abstraction of an earlier moment of an already-abstract—though perhaps retroactively visible as an only partially abstract—capital.

If such an understanding is to be correlated with the transition from modernism to our contemporary forms of postmodernism, a series of surprising revisions becomes necessary. Modernist abstraction comes about only in a social situation of *incomplete* abstraction, while the postmodern return to figuration is the cultural expression of an epoch of total or complete abstraction (although this totality can in turn be questioned)—an expression of the new freedom to recode and, to use the Deleuzian word that Jameson chooses, *deterritorialize* all residual content (and the recent deterritorialization apparent in contemporary visual art's turn from concrete representational images to more ephemeral *projected* images should also be connected to this development). In other words, at the moment of a transcendent finance capital, capital itself

becomes "free-floating," as Jameson puts it. It can now be separated not only from a concrete object, as money is already in an earlier capitalist stage; finance capital cuts its ties to the object from which it originated altogether, and not only separates itself off from a single object and its context but proceeds to a second stage where it can be transformed into investment in other similarly abstract forms, or entirely other products and geographies. Finance capital "separates from the 'concrete context' of its productive geography. Money becomes in a second sense and to a second degree abstract (it always was abstract in the first and basic sense): as though somehow in the national moment money still had a content—it was cotton money, or wheat money, textile money, railway money and the like. Now, like the butterfly stirring within the chrysalis, it separates itself off from that concrete breeding ground and prepares to take flight." [13] Finance capital is an abstraction that is not fully "blank" in its initial denial of an object that it then abstracts (the social situation instead of modernism); it is an abstraction that is instead blankly "full," nauseatingly replete, a recoding of an earlier abstraction (the social situation of postmodernism). And this "full" abstraction, a newly total abstraction, places the unrepresentable at the core of its form—a form of now-pure mutability and infinite transformation, but one whose nervous deterritorialization of all previous contents will not allow itself to settle ever again into any one stable entity. One cannot represent that which no longer has a singular form but that exists, rather, as the immaterial process of recoding and quantitative exchange itself.

The leap of finance capital into "pure number" and abstract profits comes with its dialectical after-effects; the "flight" of this new abstraction depends on real "capital flight," the loss of productivity in formerly industrial arenas, the search for cheaper labor, the rise

of unemployment and layoffs, discarded objects all around. Indeed, we might say that in addition to the new relationship to the unrepresentable, the *cast-off* becomes the experiential mode of the regime of finance capital itself, the only way to measure and, perhaps, restrain the airborne virtualization of this newly dominant capitalist "axiomatic" (again a word of Deleuze's that Jameson puts to use). The *discard* has become both the breeding ground and the result of deterritorialization, and this in a way as newly pure and intense as the new forms of abstraction themselves (since obsolescence in some less ubiquitous form has always been a structural component of capitalism). [14] And this new era of the cast-off, the dialectical twin to an era of total abstraction, has its aesthetic parallels, as we have been witnessing in the transformed situation today of formerly industrial image-forms—putatively abandoned media such as photography and film. We can begin now to understand how and why artists increasingly dedicate their art to the recoding of these mediums, to what we might call the remnants of capital flight and aesthetic outmoding. And yet while we now may notice that the signs and signifiers of our current speculative mode of production appear everywhere in such images or projects, even when they are properly "invisible" (land speculation, disinvestment, the stock exchange, urban reconstruction and deterritorialization, capital flight, outmoded objects and failed utopian plans, etc.), this is a method that becomes realist less in what it depicts or in its inner thematics—for all such representational depictions answer to a regime of abstraction today—than in a procedural congruence with the structure and the essential working of finance capital itself. Which we could put in a simpler way: one can only represent the unrepresentable by playing its own game. A pure abstraction can only be "realized" by utilizing the methods and the forms that have secured its purity—a

further abstraction and autonomization of form. This is where the hopes of a true realism lie today. [15]

* * *

Looking back upon this paraphrase of my text of five years ago, it is clear that the situation today has shifted, and perhaps the questions we need to ask of photography have shifted as well. What I called for five years ago was the imperative to imagine some new form of abstraction, a kind of "cultural speculation" to counter and transcode the axiomatics of financial speculation in our time. It was a productivist call, in its way. Theory, and theorizations of photography, in this view, were surely not the enemy; capital and its axiomatics and forces were the primary source of such abstraction. Photography, as a manifestation of abstraction—and precisely because of its role as such—could become a tool to force capital's axiomatics in different directions.

But today I write from the vantage point of what seems like the global collapse of the speculative mode itself, its latest and unavoidable crisis (crisis being systemic to the very structure of capitalist abstraction and the emptying implicit in its junk-bond dynamics). This situation calls for photography to imagine other tactics, perhaps new strategic relationships to abstraction (and thus to itself as well). And while yet again a narrative of determinism is to be avoided, can we not say that today the crucial project to imagine would be some form of what we might call an "aesthetics of the crash"? Should we not attempt to invent new modalities of abstraction's collapse, new modes of emptying out and devastation—not of the economy, but of images? Where once the crucial task seemed to be to exacerbate abstraction itself, now is it not the exacerbation of recession and impoverishment that we are called on to enact? I don't

have answers yet to the questions that the new historical situation raises; I simply want to end this position piece by asking some questions that I hope will be productive themselves. We have some guides in this search for the right questions. I think it important to remind ourselves of the fact that we possess at least one major theorization of photography that was self-consciously posed as a response to an economic crash, Walter Benjamin's "Little History of Photography," published in 1931. In fact, it occurs to me that Benjamin is also not alone; Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* of 1980 could also be described as a photographic theory proper to a moment of deep economic recession, with the radical difference of this text from Barthes's earlier theories of photography in the 1950s and 1960s a measure of the changed economic-historical conditions that characterized the retreat of capitalist modernization in the late 1970s. Let's be literal-minded, as Brecht was wont to do: Barthes's *Camera Lucida* amounts to the theory of photography characteristic of the decade of the "oil crisis," and Benjamin's "Little History," in turn, to an intellectual response to the economic crash of 1929.

Not surprisingly, both Benjamin's and Barthes's texts offer up primitivist instead of productivist visions of photography, elegiac attempts to reconnect with the medium's "underground" and earliest history. Both are fantasies of what we might call photographic atavism. Benjamin's text, as is well known, imagines the present economic crisis as opening up a form of aesthetic time travel, the potential to return to the lost halcyon days of the photograph in the first decade of its existence, the latent power of the medium prior to its crushing and massive industrialization as an aesthetic form. He connects this potential directly to the crash of 1929: "It would not be surprising," Benjamin wrote, "if the photographic methods which today, for the first time, are harking back

to the preindustrial heyday of photography had an underground connection with the crisis of capitalist industry." [16] Benjamin's "aesthetics of the crash" welcomed photography as a form of atavism, the breaking-through of not-fully-surpassed historical experience: that is, experience not fully devastated by the operations of modern abstraction. The crash, the economic recession, the rolling back of industrialization itself: all of this would allow what had once been declared superceded to return, or better, to live again in some new form. Atavism remains Benjamin's concern in his photographic theory only for a short while; "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" abandons this position, partly due to the influence of Brecht (and partly due to the receding of the horizon of the financial crash?); atavism thus was robbed of one of its great potential theorists. We will have to wait for Barthes's "*this has been*" for photography's atavistic potential to return, under new conditions of capitalist crisis—the "*this has been*" will be again. And perhaps again. And again, it will have been. Such is the very structure of photographic atavism, the eternal return. Atavism, from *atavus*, grandfather of my grandfather, is a genetic, well-nigh biological eruption of a long-past trait. Atavism connotes reversion, even retroversion; it is the historical throwback, the return of the lost object, the reappearance of that which has been thought definitively to have disappeared. Genes hide atavisms when they are not "expressed," in a biological mode of preservation, a kind of hidden secret. Photography's preservationist powers seem hardly a step away, perhaps also its modes of obfuscation and opacity. But biological atavisms are also "monstrous," impossible hybrids: the hind leg on the back of the whale, the tail on the human fetus, an extra toe on a horse, and webbed hands and feet in a land-loving mammal.

Atavism thus appears like a mutation, but it is not;

it speaks, instead, of the inherent power of the past to produce transformation from its very inertia, the shocking return that also signals a departure. We might say that while photographic abstraction voids content, producing new hybrids by recoding and inhabiting older forms, photographic atavism returns lost contents, forcing temporal hybrids upon the present, the intransigent past haunting the overly confident future. [17] Caught today between abstraction and atavism, photography seems captured, once again, by a binary logic from within which it is torn. For the dialectics of abstraction and atavism seem to subsume or take on those more traditional dialectics of photography, theorizations of its essential logic as either that of the copy or of the index, as an assertion of pictorial abstraction or of documentary representation, as a force of vertiginous decontextualization or obdurate physical presence. A canon of photographic projects answering to the dialectics of abstraction and atavism—a canon of artists and practices to which today we have to respond more directly than in the past—might be imagined. Think of Richard Avedon's portraits suspended between the most extreme conditions of what could be called the "blank" and the "detail," the Warholian disjunction of skin and ground. Think of Ian Wallace suspending his work—we must contemplate Warhol again—between photojournalism and the monochrome. Or, more recently, think of Wolfgang Tillmans's suspension of his project between the opposed but imperious demands of snapshot and color field (and between miniaturization and enlargement). The photographic dialectics of abstraction and atavism thus have a long history and have shaped photography history in various ways at various times. However, the questions we need to ask concern the ways in which this opposition structures photographic practice today, as we seem to face the most extreme crisis of social abstraction that we have ever known.

And yet, the "aesthetics of the crash" may no longer be our specific problem, just at the moment that we become dimly aware of its longer history and dynamics. If we want to follow the poet manqué of the current crisis, or more accurately its *poète maudit*, Alan Greenspan, we have perhaps entered today not an economic crash at all, but what he called instead memorably a "credit tsunami." [18] The metaphor is no longer the (modernist) one of the crash, calling for strategies of disjunction, collision, and montage. Instead it is of the tsunami, a metaphorics of flow, overflow, and excess, of echoes and reboundings, of chain reaction, of inundation and flood—liquidity gone awry. It is not a question of the industrial object crumpled before us, but of the flood plain swept bare, the barren aftermath of a catastrophic clearing. Stated in this way, the metaphor surely seems appropriate for an era of abstraction as intense as the one through which we have been passing. Such is the imagination and the "writing of the disaster" that we must broach. Perhaps we need to imagine dams more than crashes, stoppages more than collisions. Perhaps we need drainage. Perhaps we need new forms of emptying more than of collapse.

In closing, I could mention two photographic projects that perhaps embody a new writing of the disaster. Surely both engage the present and its regimes of social abstraction through concerted modes of photographic atavism. I am thinking of Zoe Leonard's *Analogue* (1998-2007) and Sharon Lockhart's *Pine Flat Portrait Studio* (2005). [19] Imagine, if you can—since these are "words without pictures"—the first photograph, "TV Sets in Store Window," from Leonard's recent archive as it was published in book form. [20] We face a neglected shop window, filled with broken-down televisions awaiting repair, boxes within boxes captured within another box, the outmoded Rolleiflex that the artist aligns with her chosen objects, and whose reflection can be dimly

glimpsed in the shop window's ghostly sheen. We face echoes of Eugène Atget and Walker Evans, the return and repetition of time past through the citation of photographic languages, like a vast collection of the aesthetics of economic crisis resounding through the ages and touching the present. And we face an image of emptying—the obsolete camera capturing the neglected shop window, replete with television screens stripped bare, deadened, the dance of flickering media images no more. And yet this emptying is also the precondition for a new form of retention, of holding on, as the image presents us with a kind of hole that is in reality a waiting receptacle, with the voiding of the image only allowing an opening onto the past, the filling of this hole with the data of both memory and desire. We face the receptacle that is the camera opening onto the receptacle of the shop window, filled with the receptacles of the television screens, analog receivers that no longer project the information of the mass media but passively accept the aleatory life of the events of the nearby street: the cars, buildings and also the artist reflected on an entirely transformed—photographic—form of the screen.

It is a strange form of emptying at which we stare, just as repetition takes on entirely new dimensions in Lockhart's *Pine Flat Portrait Studio*. Like Benjamin contemplating the avant-garde's return at a moment of economic crisis to the primitive photographs of the 1840s, Lockhart's contemporary images of rural children reawaken forgotten vernacular photographic languages, such as the amateur archives of Mike Disfarmer from the early twentieth century. A genetic connection and return is contemplated, and the photographs emerge not so much as statements of appropriation and citation—proper to the debates carried on around photography at earlier moments of postmdernism—but as documents of historical remnants, continuities between past and present, the

survival of what seems most precarious and impossible to contemplate in the current historical moment. But repetition structures almost every aspect of Lockhart's project, as the images repeat not only Disfarmer's language and project, but also internally echo amongst themselves, with all of the children imaged by Lockhart appearing at the same scale within the image, setting up new forms of connection and new experiences of time travel (the ability to distinguish the marks of age all but cancelled out). And Lockhart's project holds an almost hidden dialog with another set of images, in this case memory images—Lockhart's own private archive of portraits of her own childhood, as well as family snapshots of her own past. It is a meditation on childhood that is also then a meditation on time past, but everywhere returning. The modality of repetition let loose by the seemingly inherent powers of photographic atavism, its vertiginous ability to propose historical survivals and retain superceded remnants of that which we imagine abstraction to have eradicated—the resounding call of the historical echo.

And so with these strategies of emptying and of repetition, photographic atavism returns us to the terms with which we began: Krauss's assertion of a new postmodern abstraction of the "empty sign" and of uncanny repetition. This is no coincidence. For now these experiences of photographic abstraction serve another set of purposes; the terms and strategies of postmodernism return, but with a crucial difference. It is with this recent historical transformation of aesthetic languages in mind that I propose the importance of contemplating the dialectics for photography of abstraction and atavism. The new historical conditions of our present moment, I have been trying to argue, require this. And if photography must always be conceived as torn between this dichotomy, articulating it differently at different historical moments, the lessons of the present teach us that photography will never embody

just one or the other of these aesthetic options. This is a new way, perhaps, of stating an old dilemma: the ontological anti-essentialism of the photograph. Photography cannot be reduced to regimes of abstraction (it is perhaps also then one of our most potent weapons of resistance to them); but neither can it fully resist them. Torn between abstraction and atavism, photography finds itself in a space between complicity and resistance, between futurism and archaism. I will admit to my interlocutor here, to Walead Beshty, that yes, these last thoughts are abstractions indeed. But the question—the Brechtian question—is: are they useful?

Notes

1. Rosalind Krauss, "Photography and Abstraction," *A Debate on Abstraction* (New York: Hunter College Art Gallery, 1989), pp. 63–70.
2. Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," *Classic Essays on Photography,* ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), p. 80. Cited in Walead Beshty, "Abstracting Photography," in the *Words Without Pictures* essay series.
3. *Gerard Byrne: Books, Magazines, and Newspapers* (New York and Berlin: Lukas & Sternberg Press, 2003). The book on Byrne was published before the expanded field essay, but they were drafted more or less simultaneously.
4. Which is precisely why they were banned from the essay "Photography's Expanded Field."
5. Bertolt Brecht, "The Popular and the Realistic," *Brecht on Theatre,* ed. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), p. 109.
6. Hito Steyerl, "Documentary Uncertainty," Documenta 12 Online Magazine (March 2, 2007), http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/article.php?IdLanguage=1&NrArticle=584.
7. Fredric Jameson, "The End of Temporality," *Critical Inquiry* 29, vol. 4 (Summer 2003), p. 701.
8. Jameson, "The End of Temporality," p. 701.
9. Jameson's thinking on the subject of finance capital could stand as a helpful corrective to the lack of a social vision in the otherwise utopian argument of Nicolas Bourriaud's book entitled *Postproduction* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002).
10. Jameson, "The End of Temporality," p. 703.
11. Ibid.
12. Jameson, "Culture and Finance Capital," *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 142.
13. Ibid.
14. For an intimation of the lineaments of this culture of the discard, see the special issue of *October* dedicated to "Obsolescence," *October* 100 (Spring 2002).
15. These paragraphs, in a slightly different form, were first published in *Gerard Byrne: Books, Magazines, and Newspapers*, pp. 73-80.
16. Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," *Walter Benjamin: Selected*

Writings, Volume 2, 1927–1934, Michael W. Jennings, ed., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 507.
17. While I have offered up my writing on artist Gerard Byrne as an example of new forms of abstraction, one project by Byrne directly confronts the dialectics of abstraction and atavism both: his series of works on the Loch Ness Monster.
18. Descriptions of our current crisis suffer from mixed metaphors, actually. While most commentators try to avoid the word "crash," many refer to the crisis as a "credit crunch." And if the metaphorics of the crash are accepted here, they shift in the larger description of our contemporary condition as a "global financial meltdown," with its evocation of global climate change, the manmade imagined as a natural disaster, and liquidity run amok.
19. I have written at length on these projects in "Lateness and Longing," *50 Moons of Saturn* (Milan: Skira, 2008).
20. Zoe Leonard, *Analogue* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).

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Subject: Letter from Paris
Date: 22 November 2008 14:11:12
From: MOYRA DAVEY

The first question that comes up when asked to think about someone else's proposal is: will it be useful? Will it merit the brief but usually intense detour into someone else's preoccupations, someone else's inquiry? I write slowly, I am not good with abstractions, and I am ambivalent about "the assignment." I crave it as much as anyone; it can be productive and generative; it connects you to people; there is a *dérive* aspect to it that I enjoy; but I also worry that it is a distraction from the deeper and oftentimes more painful questions of one's own. If I accept an invitation to respond, I must do so in good faith to the project and its writers, but only if it helps me think through and clarify ongoing and latent questions of my own. And it is only worth doing if "responsibility", "urgency" and "pleasure" can figure in equal measure.

These days I have been immersed in forms of the diary, note-taking, letters. I came to Paris

with a project that begins with a series of images from a letter Walter Benjamin wrote to Gershom Scholem on December 20, 1931: a library, a divan on which to write, lying down, a view and a clock. I discovered the letter about a year and a half ago while reading Benjamin's "Little History of Photography," published the same year, and looking to substantiate a hunch that Benjamin had been contemplating suicide around the time he wrote the essay. I did not have to look far: Susan Sontag confirms it in "Under the Sign of Saturn," her magnificent, short biographical homage to Benjamin. Nonetheless, I read most of the letters from 1931 and retained that one. I brought a copy of it with me and copied a portion of it into a document named "To Have Been Driven," the default title chosen by Microsoft Word that became the working title for "the thing I am working on now" a long, tangled, diary-hydra that will eventually get edited down to a video script (or maybe not).

Hence my impulse, after reading George's text "Photography and Abstraction," about, among other things, the relationship between photography, capital and the financial crash, to lift from my diary this entry of just over a month ago:

"October 7. Not enough sleep. Drive myself crazy with online banking. Read *NYT* first thing: news about stocks plummeting and potential worldwide crisis: recession or worse. How to go on with what I do in the face of all this? Feel insane at the moment."

The sentence "How to go on with what I do . . . ?" did not come out of the blue. While I did, in fact, in that sudden and sickening way, feel the triviality of "what I do" in the face of the "credit tsunami" going on out there, the permission to write my question came from a sentence Jane Bowles (who also figures in the "To Have Been Driven" project) wrote in a letter to her friend Libby Hollman in 1964. Here is the sentence, exactly as Jane wrote it seven years after suffering a disabling stroke at the age of forty: "Now I am so depressed about Goldwater and the whole negro civil rights scandal that I think to write about

anything else is beside the point."

I've digressed, but I want to stay on track, so I read again the double-sided page of notes that I jotted over the course of my second reading of George's essay. Near the top of the page I've written: "Walead's pictures → my diary → abstractions," and near the end, I've copied the essay's final sentence about the Brechtian question of usefulness, and later, while on the phone to a friend I added in pencil: "Subprime mortgages → alchemy, shit-to-gold pyramid scheme. Late capitalism → postModernism. Finance capital → digitization of the image etc." What to make of all this? Other than "alchemy, shit-to-gold," I rarely speak or write any of the other terms listed above. They form a category of abstract thought I mentioned earlier, the kind I'm not adept at. Plus, I have so much more to say about Benjamin's letter and its beautiful images, and especially about Bowles's letter in relation to where we are now in 2008 with Barack Obama as president-elect.

I saw Walead's pictures in the 2007 Whitney Biennial and in my diary, noted: "March 4. Walead Beshty: large, dreamy photos of trashed hallways in abandoned building. Smashed glass cubes and shipping boxes. Love the look of this stuff. These people are the new guard. Feel old and outmoded." I assumed the pictures were digitally-created, later learned the washed-out, painterly effect came from film fogging in airport x-ray machines, and finally, that these were pictures of the abandoned Iraqi embassy in the former East Berlin. Abstraction and atavism figure in these works; I would also hazard that "the real" is in them too, in their evocation of war and grief.

A diary can be like an exquisite corpse. On the page immediately following Walead's I find: "March 5. Finished long AF piece on Zoe's Winterthur retro." And not far below that: "Tacita Dean ancient painted tree at MoMA; Atget glowing staircases; Sander portraits of old men + women in black." When I packed for Paris in August I assembled a folder of documents to bring: it contains the Benjamin letter in English and in German;

the "To have been driven . . . " quote from a self-help book; and an odd and very beautiful Xerox clipping in deep, rich blacks using Times Roman. It is a footnote giving Barthes' definition of Structuralist activity ("makes something appear which remained invisible"), a fragment I keep in my periphery and read every so often to remind myself of what it means. Also discernable is about one inch of a photo that I know to be August Sander's "Three Farmers on the Way to a Dance" [ca. 1914]. I'd forgotten the origin of the clipping but am now almost certain it comes from George's *October* essay "Photography in the Expanded Field," a portrayal of futurist rather than atavistic aspects of the medium. I resist it all at first. I must have checked Word Count a hundred times while writing this, but now I am over my limit, and so it is time to conclude and to say that for myself at least, yes indeed, the abstractions have been useful.

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Subject: notes on foreclosure
Date: 8 December 2008 00:53:15
From: HITO STEYERL

Hello George,

What I really admire in "Photography and Abstraction" is its determination to confront the most urgent questions head on. How will the recession upset visuality and rearrange our perception? Will it confront us with the austerity of an updated FSA aesthetics, reenactments of Busby Berkeley's girl-ornaments or Leni-Riefenstahl-meets-Hamas, death metal terrorist videos? What could terms like re-nationalization or volatility mean beyond national pavilions at a Frieze Art Fair or gallerists jumping from high-rise buildings?

It's too early to tell, for sure. You are wise to refuse to engage in any speculation as to the crisis' consequences. But connecting aesthetic

and financial abstraction to think through these questions is a very convincing way to move forward. Reading "Photography" is like overhearing a conversation that I immediately want to join in.

Here are just two small comments or fragmentary and sketchy contributions to this discussion:

1. False Concreteness: Hyper-abstraction and false concreteness are probably twins. While the former is defined by unrepresentability, the latter could be dubbed an overrepresentation.

What does false concreteness mean? Coined by critic Siegfried Kracauer in 1927, false concreteness means the attempt to forcefully concretize abstract power structures. False concretions are premature representations as well as attempts to violently reduce complexity.

To give a possible example: the urge to represent the unrepresentable may be a factor in many contemporary terror attacks, which can be seen as forced attempts at concretion of abstract power dynamics. It's like creating the enemy by shooting at him or her, by means of retroactive logic. If somebody drops dead, they must have been evil in the first place. False concretion could indeed be described as the rationale of much of contemporary warfare as well. In times where drawing clear lines between "us" and "them" has become a paradoxical task, false concreteness takes a delusional shot at simplification.

But false concreteness is also tied to the proliferation of (media-) hyperrealisms—catastrophe as daily soap opera, YouPorn, and permanent live transmissions. All these failing concretions merely prove that today's reality is an abstraction that stubbornly resists being concretized. This means that a large number of contemporary realisms are actually failed takes at abstractions. And that any other realism will look fairly abstract today.

2. Foreclosure: "Foreclosure is the legal and

> professional proceeding in which a mortgagee, or other lienholder, usually a lender, obtains a court ordered termination of a mortgagor's equitable right of redemption. Usually a lender obtains a security interest from a borrower who mortgages or pledges an asset like a house to secure the loan. If the borrower defaults and the lender tries to repossess the property, courts of equity can grant the owner the right of redemption if the borrower repays the debt. When this equitable right exists, the lender cannot be sure that it can successfully repossess the property, thus the lender seeks to foreclose the equitable right of redemption."

A whole barrage of words like violation, repossession, equity and even redemption are deployed to circumscribe legal foreclosure. Its definition sounds like a fast forward version of Benjamin's sermon about violence and the law. What it probably means: The creditor excludes the defaulting debtor from any further relations with him or the property. Any symbolic tie to him is terminated. He or she is not only literally left out in the cold, but also kicked out of the sphere of legal relations.

Here is another definition of foreclosure:

> "Foreclosure is a primordial defense because it does not act on a signifier that is already inscribed within the chain of signifiers, but rather, it rejects the inscription itself." (Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, 1955-56)

This is Jacques Lacan's version, his translation of Freud's term *Verwerfung*. Lacan's foreclosure is not a procedure of exclusion, but absolute refusal of inclusion into the symbolic. It opens up a "pure and simple hole . . . in the Other." (Lacan, *Écrits*) " . . . When the subject calls upon the Father . . . he encounters only an echo in a void that triggers a cascade of delusional metaphors."

Do these two different meanings of foreclosure have anything in common? And does this coincidental consonance help us to think beyond the borders of (symbolic) representation? Both terms refer to an exclusion from the level of the law and the symbolic, and prevent the inscription of certain elements, but from different directions. While one is expulsed, the other one cannot be included. While one locks you out, the other refuses to take you into account.

In Lacanian diction the foreclosed is relegated to the Real; in the terminology of real estate the foreclosed might be cleared out or evicted. But while the Lacanian Real is completely banned from any form of appearance, the contemporary foreclosed is present yet unrepresented, invisible in plain sight. Just as the homeless "box people" in Tokyo's parks and back alleys populate blind spots in bypassers' vision (whose gaping size leaves you to wonder whether they still see anything at all). Or like the blind TVs you mention in Leonard's photos.

What is thus the relation between the Real and real estate? Does the Real in real estate refer to the fact that ultimately nothing can be owned at all? That our own apartment appears to us as expropriated and alienated from ourselves? Is there anything like foreclosure from vision? And would this mean that reality has been repossessed?

Good night,
Hito

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Subject: Response to George Baker: Photography and Abstraction
Date: 13 December 2008 02:41:54
From: MARK GODFREY

In George Baker's text, at least four meanings of the terms "abstract" and "abstraction" are used, each one associated with different traditions of 20th century art.

a.) Abstraction in "the formalist sense of the term—empty, blank, non-representational" would presumably describe a kind of artwork like a Robert Ryman painting or abstract photographs by Bauhaus professors and students. (These were the abstract photographs that Rosalind Krauss starts with in her essay "Photography and Abstraction" before introducing James Welling and Holly Wright.) George quickly dismisses this kind of abstraction as not particularly interesting to him given his present concerns.

b.) Abstraction as a kind of image that is *abstracted from* another kind of image. This is the understanding of abstraction that underpins Hito Steyerl's ideas (as George presents them). Steyerl is interested in the "low-resolution abstraction" that one finds in degraded or highly pixelated images made by cell-phone cameras. These "almost entirely unintelligible" images have taken on a value as seeming to be the most "concrete" or authentic images made in war zones. This idea of abstraction as the degraded image for me invokes the notion of abstraction present in some early 20th century work such as Theo van Doesburg's *Composition (The Cow)* (1917), a painting that is almost entirely unintelligible as a cow, but whose design is abstracted from a more recognizable image. Needless to say, the associations attached to degraded "abstract" images made in war zones are very different to those attached to such paintings.

c.) George's main concern is with abstraction as "as a social . . . process; . . . that violent decontextualization, voiding, and recoding of objects endemic to the principles of capitalist modernity." Abstraction here is the name George gives to the social and economic processes of early 20th century modernity. One might think that the early collages of Picasso

would be an example of art appropriate to this understanding of abstraction.

d.) The abstraction associated with finance capitalism. George theorizes a later historical moment, that of finance capitalism, as a new degree of abstraction. Finance capitalism is "the abstraction of an abstraction," since whereas in earlier stages of capitalism, money was tied to production and materials, in the period of finance economy, money floats freely from "identifiable objects, products, or commodities." "Money [is] generated from money itself." Thinking about finance capitalism in this way allows him to characterize a practice such as Gerard Byrne's, which consists of photographs whose meanings are not necessarily tied to the things they depict, as powerfully responsive to contemporary social conditions, since it has a "procedural congruence" with finance capitalism. Byrne's "new form of abstraction" plays the same game as finance capitalism and can therefore counter its workings. Byrne's practice can be called "abstract" even though his photographs show things in the world (unlike Ryman's paintings), and even though they are not "abstracted from" anything (like Van Doesburg's).

For me, it is helpful to try to separate out these four understandings of abstraction. First of all, I would question whether we do not simply need more art historical or critical terms to signify the divergent ideas that are encompassed by the term "abstract" in the way that some cultures have several words for "snow"! But I would also question some of the assumptions made about some of the notions of abstraction here.

For instance, I do not think that abstraction in "the formalist sense of the term" should necessarily be understood as "empty, blank, non-representational." Elsewhere, I have argued that formalist abstraction, for instance, the paintings of Barnett Newman and Frank Stella, can

constitute powerful representations of historical events and historical experience. But to address photography, I would suggest that today many artists are interested in the "formalist" traditions of abstract art even when they are putting these traditions to new uses. As George brings up Zoe Leonard's practice, my example will be her most recent work. *You see I am here after all* (2008) is an installation made up of 4,000 postcards of Niagara Falls installed along a very long corridor at Dia Beacon. The postcards are grouped according to the viewpoints along the falls and are arranged in large grids. When viewed from a close distance, the work's relationship to Sol LeWitt's nearby, early 1970s wall drawings becomes apparent. There are at least two important strategies of abstraction in these wall drawings: the drawings are arranged in grids, and they invite viewers to experience the difference between the close-up and longer view. (Right near the wall, you can see the individual pencil lines; further back you see shades or tones as the lines dissolve together.) Leonard makes use of exactly these strategies, but the meanings change: close-up, one has a sense of the individual postcards and what each photograph of Niagara meant to individual visitors; further away, one reflects on the history and implications of mass tourism. In other words, in Leonard's hands, strategies of formalist abstraction are used to represent our relationship to the world. Elsewhere, in the 400-part, C-print version of *Analogue*, Leonard also arranges her photographs in grids. To my mind, Krauss's argument about the grid is pertinent here: "One of the most Modernist things about 'the grid' is its capacity to serve as a paradigm or model for the antidevelopmental, the antinarrative, the antihistorical." Though one thrust of *Analogue* is to present a narrative (of shop closures, of the movement of goods across the world), Leonard uses the grid to counter this narrative force. Within the installation version of *Analogue,* there is both a sense of movement corresponding with narrative (from one grid to the next) and of stasis (as one looks across a

single grid). This tension could correspond with Leonard's conflicting desires while making the work to keep things as they are (for instance, for her neighborhood to stay as it is) and to track things as they move around the world. Whatever the case, the formal abstraction of the grid serves an important purpose.

My second concern has to do with the characterization of economic history in George's text. Perhaps I am misunderstanding it, but the impression I have is that economic history is too neatly characterized as a succession of stages, for instance from industrial capitalism to finance capitalism. For me, this is problematic because it is (dare I say it) an "abstraction" of conditions as we find them around us. Three or so years ago, at the height of the economic boom, the finance economy was certainly strident, and the effects of speculation could be felt in real terms through rising house prices, and so on. But other economies persist alongside finance capitalism, economies still completely tied to "identifiable objects, products, [and] commodities." To continue with Leonard, one way in which her project can be characterized is that it was both an attempt to attend to the victims of finance capitalism (small, independent shops that closed down as real estate prices escalated) *and* to represent economies that persist beyond the reaches of finance capitalism (the trade in second-hand clothes from New York to Uganda; the economies of the Polish flea market). I think that many of the most interesting photographic projects of recent years (and ones which emerged during the boom years, not since the current recession) have been motivated by a desire to explore the economies that continue alongside finance capitalism. One of Simon Starling's photographic projects, *CMYK/RGB* (2001), for instance, began when he was invited to make an exhibition at a small institution in France. Starling became aware that the French institution printed their catalogues in Romania to save on printing and paper costs. He traveled to the Romanian printing works and took photographs

of his journey and the works. Later in France he built a replica of the Romanian printing works within the gallery, and stacked up the photographs he had taken in the space. These "sculptures" were later disassembled and the individual sheets bound into his catalogue. The project, in other words, explored the materiality of the printed photograph, and the economics of photographic and book production, making evident the different economies of Easter and Western Europe.

While I have some reservations about the uses of the terms "abstract" and "abstraction," and about the characterization of "finance capitalism," I do think that the dialectic of abstraction and atavism posited in the second half of George's paper is fascinating and extremely productive. Certainly (sticking with Starling) it opens up a new way of thinking about some of his most recent projects. Some of these have involved looking at nearly obsolete modes of photographic production, such as platinum printing. In one project, *One Ton II* (2005), Starling visited a South African platinum mine and photographed it. He then arranged for one ton of ore to be exported from the mine from which enough platinum could be taken to print five copies of his photograph. "Atavism" is crucial here since Starling is looking back to the histories of photographic production (rather than to historical kinds of images, as with Leonard's relationship to Atget, or Lockhart's to Disfarmer). Starling is making new use of these processes not though some fetishistic fascination with precious and obscure printing techniques, but to think in concrete terms about our present day relationship to natural resources, labor, energy, transportation, ecology, and so on, in other words, to address materials and real economies rather than "abstract" financial economies. So in some ways, the work counters the "abstraction" of finance capitalism. Yet in a more recent work, *Inventar—Nr. 8573 (Man Ray), 4m-400nm)* (2006), another kind of abstraction, in the "formalist" sense of the term, re-emerges. In the Museum Abteiberg in Mönchengladbach, a "proto-postmodern museum by

Hans Hollein" whose architecture is "reminiscent of an opencast mine," Starling was drawn to Man Ray's *Geological Fold* (1927), which shows rock strata. Starling photographed it closer and closer up, firstly on the racks of the museum's storage space, then right up against its surface, and then using a microscope. The sequence of images is presented as a slide show and eventually the microscope photographs reveal the individual particles of the silver salts within the Man Ray print. The particles recall biomorphic abstract sculptures, the photographs showing them are as concrete images of the material world as Man Ray's. The work as a whole could be seen to exchange the image and illusion of Postmodernist architecture with a reminder of its physical underpinnings.

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Subject: A response to George Bakers "Photography and Abstraction"
Date: 16 December 2008 12:57:23
From: JOHANNA BURTON

I will happily sign on to George Baker's characterizations of abstraction as it has operated (and now operates) with regard to photography; these are (if I read Baker correctly) signposts, not meant as entirely stable or iron-clad, but postulates, *abstractions* if you will, that nonetheless hint at the shape of things as they articulate themselves and are articulated (and re-articulated) over time. Such an operation allows us to throw a net, to *make sense*, if only in order to unsettle it again. My signing on as such does not mean we couldn't debate Baker's terms; I would like to discuss with the author, for instance, the ways in which abstraction is not only a "voiding and recoding of objects" but *also* a wholly necessary tool for human comprehension (as it allows for the illusion of graspability), and the ways in which abstraction flirts with notions of "essence." But to sign on lets me get to his essay's big questions, the ones that I want to

think about most.

Indeed, here's what I find so valuable in "Photography and Abstraction": it's an experiment in trying to imagine what changes when everything does (but when everything also seems to stay the same). If, five years ago, Baker's question to himself was "What would an abstraction of an abstraction look like?," then he was writing from within a context that yielded—in its perfect metaphor of money *as* abstraction—a force both omnipotent and absent. Looking back at that situation from the one we now find ourselves in, where that very omnipotence and absence would seem to have forcefully inverted (though, in fact, there is evidence that they are really only gathering a new kind of speed), Baker shores up a wrinkle in what would seem to be the endlessly smooth fabric of abstraction ad infinitum. Call it atavism if you like. (I quite enjoy the perversity of thinking of the implications of embedded DNA that is carried along over generations, but I would like also to challenge the genealogical model, which begs its own set of problems—teleological, patriarchal, etc....) Perhaps I'd call it something else: deep tissue memory or, even more overdetermined, battle scars.

But no matter, whether atavistic outgrowth or site of reparation, Baker's postulation argues that against all odds, something exceeds the parameters of "second degree abstraction," jams the machine that would seem to find a use-value for everything. Whether these breakthroughs are, as Baker suggests, instances of "true realism" is a question, but they are certainly contradictory, in the sense that they offer up material and historical *arguments* (which is to say that they are contentious) in their very being. In hauling the past into the present, they insist on a layered futurity, a strangely hybrid heap. Unlike second order abstraction (or to return to a related model, Roland Barthes's "secondary mythification"), which promises to undo an operation but oftentimes only redoubles its effects, Baker's atavism promises *nothing at all;* but it does believe that

things and ideas surface, spontaneously, erratically productively.

Lacan reminds us that "there is nothing missing in the Real," a phrase that comes to mind especially after reading Hito Steyerl's provocative response to Baker's essay on this *Words Without Pictures* site. That there is nothing missing in the Real we know (and Lacan knew) only because we cannot access the Real; we cannot represent it. That this is the most profound space of the "unrepresentable" does not, however, align photography so neatly with the unconscious, with the traumatic, nor does it mean we should think of the Real as wholly abstract. But there is something important about these overlaps, and about the way they dialogue with Baker's atavism, a model which, like the unconscious, seems to let previously inaccessible elements drift up and into representation—as in atavism, in unwanted horns, or tails, or feet; and as in the unconscious in slips of the tongue, in dreams, and in desire. And it is here that I will end my response to Baker's essay, which I read as both diagnostic and speculative. Having just written a short essay on Zoe Leonard's *Analogue* myself, I too have been thinking about the effect of this collection of some four hundred photographs, taken by the artist over a decade and in places as disconnected, yet deeply entwined, as Mexico City, the East Village, Warsaw, and East Jerusalem. What haunted those pictures for me was not only the persistent yet disappearing "horn" of obsolescent technologies and modes of exchange but also Leonard's inhabitation of the medium itself. For not only did her images reveal what Baker calls "historical survivals" and sound the call of a "historical echo" in the things and places she captured via a vintage Rolleiflex camera. Here and there Leonard's own reflection appears in the glass of a storefront window she shoots; but even when she does not literally appear, the artist, I would argue, pictures herself amidst the "things"—she, too (to steal from Baker some words describing atavism), represents a "shocking return that also signals a departure."

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Subject: Response to George Baker's "Photography and Abstraction"
Date: 27 January 2009 *
From: TOM MCDONOUGH

* Note: Due to technical difficulties, this response was received after the discussion forum ended.

George Baker's reflections on the current state of photography are necessarily framed by the ongoing world financial crisis, a veritable potlatch of capital on a scale unseen since 1929. [1] The 25-year-long, neo-liberal boom appears to have come to an end, and upon the ruins of this order Baker has asked us to contemplate the outlines of an "aesthetics of the crash," to imagine "new modes of emptying out" and the "devastation" of images—a dialectical potlatch within the realm of the visual, as a critical correlate of that massive destruction of wealth to which we continue to be witnesses. He proposes, in his concluding remarks, two examples of such an aesthetic in what he calls the "photographic atavism" of Zoe Leonard's *Analogue* (1998-2007) and Sharon Lockhart's *Pine Flat Portrait Studio* (2005)—in their shared project of "return[ing] lost contents, forcing temporal hybrids upon the present, the intransigent past haunting the overly confident future." Or rather, we should say that their work is suspended between the poles of abstraction (understood as both a formal and a social condition) and atavism, mobilizing the latter's "vertiginous ability to propose historical survivals and retain superceded remnants" as a form of resistance against the power of the former to empty out, annul and vacate all content from the image.

We might fruitfully extend these reflections, and consider further the ways in which "abstraction" and its other are manifest within the photographic at this moment of global restructuring, by looking at two other recent bodies of work:

Jin Jiangbo's series *The Great Economic Retreat: The Dongguan Scene* (2007–2008) and Tacita Dean's large-scale photographs of ancient trees in southeastern England (2006–2007). Jin's *Great Economic Retreat* consists of a group of panoramic color photographs of the interiors of defunct manufacturing plants in Dongguan, an industrial city of China's Pearl River Delta. By the early 21st century, there were around 14,000 companies backed by overseas capital operating there. Dongguan became, in other words, one node within the circuits of global finance. But as popular struggle over wages has intensified in recent years, investors have chosen to relocate their factories to new, low-wage zones elsewhere in Asia, leaving behind the shells of their manufacturing infrastructure. [2] Jin has taken these as his subject matter; but in their thematics of absence, the resulting images do not simply reproduce the logic of the documentary photograph.

Take for example his image of the abandoned factory floor of a television manufacturer. We see a cavernous space, an open floor roofed with simple, exposed steel trusses, lit by sunshine streaming in through distant windows. All moveable equipment has been removed, and what remains are forlorn piles of insulation scattered about the floor, some fire extinguishers, and the overhead banners that once exhorted the employees toiling below. It is an apparently straightforward image, but one engaged in a rather complex dialogue with an extended genealogy of "abstraction." First we might note its evident reference to a recent history of digital photography, in particular Andreas Gursky's large-scale studies of the architectures of capitalism and globalization. However, whereas Gursky, in works such as *99 Cent* (1999), proffers a visual experience of almost obscene repletion and stimulation, Jin presents us with a vast expanse of emptiness, a "boring" void where there is literally nothing to see. Or perhaps we would do better to say, where capital accumulation has given way to dust breeding. For this floor, an immense, horizontal plane with heaps of waste strewn

about, uncannily echoes *Dust Breeding*, Man Ray's 1920 photograph of Duchamp's *Large Glass* covered with a year's worth of dust. *Dust Breeding*'s aesthetic of lassitude is here transformed into an index of capital's mobility and the concomitant obsolescence of human labor. Lastly, we should see in this empty room the negation of collectivity—an image of the way that capital is able to assemble and disperse bodies according to its own logic. [3] As such, it stands as a dialectical counterpart to Shao Yinong and Mu Chen's remarkable photographic series, *Assembly Hall* (2002), a typological survey of the halls used for communal gatherings during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s as seen from the post-Maoist present.

Tacita Dean's large-scale, black-and-white photographs of trees, whose forms she isolates by painstakingly applying white gouache in order to paint out all background detail, would seem in their bucolic solemnity to be at the very opposite aesthetic pole than Jin's desolate factories, but in fact a similar logic is engaged. Here, too, it is a matter of atavism, of what stubbornly remains: in *Beauty* (2006), we see a hoary, twig-laced oak of great age (half a millennium or more), framed by the flurry of white brushstrokes. The title of the work is in fact the name of the tree pictured, a venerable specimen found on the Fredville Estate in Nonington, Kent. (Dean also photographed Majesty there, widely considered the most impressive oak in Great Britain.) There seems to be an important conjunction of image and technique, both of which verge on the outmoded: both tree and analog photography appear as holdovers from an earlier age, and her choice of overwriting the image in gouache similarly recalls procedures of hand-retouching that have been superseded in an age of Photoshop. Indeed, *Beauty* resolutely positions itself on the aesthetic terrain of the digital the better to announce its atavistic intentions. The scale of the work, at 141 x 147 inches, recalls that of digital photography, while its prominent seams—the photograph is printed on

three overlapping sheets of paper—read as pointed rejoinders to the seamlessness of contemporary photographic manipulations. But Dean's aim in *Beauty* and related works extends beyond a reflection on the persistence of the analogue; both tree and photography have an allegorical function. The great age of this oak brings to mind an earlier, pre-Modern i.e., pre-capitalist, social order, and despite being located on private property Beauty functions as a kind of cipher for the commons, for a notion of a logic external to the commodity and enclosure. Dean's *Beauty* is then an image of perseverance, threatened and tenuous, no doubt, but still striking in its gravity. This, too, is a photograph that has been emptied out and devastated, to return to Baker's terms, but it is also an embodiment of the principle of hope in the midst of crisis.

Notes

1. See the useful overview in Joel Geier, "Capitalism's worst crisis since the 1930s," *International Socialist Review* 62 (November-December 2008).
2. On this dynamic of global restructuring, see Massimo De Angelis, "Next Lap in the Rat Race? From Sub-Prime Crisis to the 'Impasse' of Global Capital," first published in *UE News* (June and July 2008), and available online at *The Commoner*, www.commoner.org.uk/?p=52.
3. For an anecdotal but fascinating account of the impact of capital's flight from Dongguan on its migrant workers, see Michael Standaert, "Chinese Migrant Workers in Search of Jobs, Return Home to Farms," *The Huffington Post*, December 18, 2008, available online at www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-standaert/chinese-migrant-workers-i_b_151989.html

The Anxiety of Photography
Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO, USA, 13.05. - 17.07.2011

Photography can be thought of as a medium, a tool, an object, a practice, or, more often than not, some combination thereof. Through approximately 40 works, some of them created for the exhibition and some shown for the first time, *The Anxiety of Photography* examines the growing number of artists who embrace photography's plasticity and ability to exist, sometimes uneasily, in multiple contexts.
The fluidity of photography as a medium can produce fundamental anxieties for both artist and viewer. The pervasive use of photography within conceptual art practices of the 1960s—and a generation later by artists of the so-called pictures generation—effectively ended the debate about photography???s status as art. However, the status of the medium itself remains unresolved. Many of the works in this exhibition reflect powerfully on the changing nature of our relationship to the materiality of images, as artists produce photographic prints from hand-painted negatives, violently collide framed pictures, arrange photographs and objects in uncanny still lives, or otherwise destabilize the photographic object.
Many of the artists included in *The Anxiety of Photography*—some of whom self-identify as photographers, others for whom photography is central to their work—employ an expanded collage aesthetic and have fully digested notions of appropriation. Throughout the exhibition, both the "objecthood" and connectedness of images is felt strongly, whether expressed in front of the camera or in the presentation of the work itself. These investigations of the medium are furthered by a pervasive reinvestment in studio practice and an interweaving of personal content within the work.
The Anxiety of Photography includes work by Colby Bird, Miriam Böhm, Liz Deschenes, Roe Ethridge, Brendan Fowler, Mario Garcia Torres, Leslie Hewitt, Matt Keegan, Annette Kelm, Elad Lassry, Anthony Pearson, Sara Greenberger Rafferty, Matt Saunders, David Benjamin Sherry, Erin Shirreff, Dirk Stewen, Sara VanDerBeek, and Mark Wyse. On the occasion of the exhibition, an extensively illustrated catalogue will be produced, featuring newly commissioned contributions by Anne Ellegood, senior curator at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, and Jenelle Porter, senior curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

Source au 2012 08 03: http://www.aspenartmuseum.org/archive_anxiety_of_photography.html

The Object Lost and Found
Matthew Thompson, Associate Curator, in *The Anxiety of Photography*, exhibition catalogue

I. PHOTOGRAPHY
Photography was, from the beginning, an interdisciplinary undertaking. Early practitioners brought together aesthetics, optics, and chemistry. French inventor Nicéphore Niépce took the first photograph. But only after inventing the *pyréolophore*, the world's first internal combustion engine. This new way of making images was first called "photography" by John Frederick William Herschel, a British mathematician, chemist, and astronomer. He named seven moons of Saturn and four moons of Uranus. And he named the snapshot. Although Hershel also first used the term "negative" in connection to photography, it was William Henry Fox Talbot, inventor and researcher of optics and light, who created a reproducible photographic process using the negative/positive method. Nearly all early pioneers of photography have biographies that sound, for example, like that of the British soldier, geologist, and inventor Levett Landon Boscawen Ibbetson. This catholic activity applied not only to photography's innovators, but also to some of its earliest fans: Queen Victoria was an amateur photographer and prominent intellectuals like Victor Hugo and Oliver Wendell Holmes advocated publicly for the medium.[1]
Photography has always borrowed liberally from other disciplines. Cameras have been used by artists since the sixteenth century and became standard equipment by the eighteenth century. The camera does not separate photography from other media. Only with the development of the physical object, the print, and its condition of reproducibility does photography begin to be conceived as a medium in and of itself and not simply an optical tool.[2] But as the early history of photography suggests, this sense of cohesion is illusory. There has never been a singular act or process, just *one* type of photography. Even early descriptions of photography are fraught with duality and an uneasy elusiveness. Talbot named it "the art of fixing a shadow."[3] Holmes called it "the mirror with a memory."[4]

Photography's field is defined by separate but interrelated artistic, commercial, and vernacular uses. These are immensely varied and, because of photography's direct relationship with technology, they are constantly shifting with innovation. The ubiquity of images and imaging devices has become overly familiar as a concept, but how that pervasiveness shapes practical reality, both physically and ideologically, is only beginning to be understood. The ranges of imaging technologies that we use to see the world "includes everything from 'art' photography to iPhone snapshots, from MRI scans to the infrared eyes of CIA Predator drones, and from surveillance cameras attached to facial-recognition software to minoritarian documentary practices from Rodney King to Abu Ghraib."[5]

Because photography is thoroughly and visibly connected to technological apparatus, and because that technology is constantly changing—and presently in the midst of a period of epochal change—ontological discussions of the medium have proliferated. Recent institutionally and independently organized projects have interestingly engaged the question of what photography is. Surveying them broadly, however, there is a noticeable frustration on the part of artists, curators, and critics with these essentializing discussions. The instability of all media, and particularly of photography, leads to a reactionary discursive framing around ideas of ontology and crisis. But we understand media as being distinct based on the collision of technology and application.[6] Media are defined simultaneously by their tools and what is done with those tools. The conventions that develop around this interaction are what make a medium legible as such.

It is useful here to think of the term "medium" itself, as it implies an intervening, in-between stage: a translational space. Institutions like the academy and the museum are invested in delimiting this space, and a continuous shifting—between adherence to convention on the one hand and new relations between technology and use on the other—creates a perceived crisis. In the interest of self-justification and self-preservation, "photography becomes, in this instance, a way to name this institutional anxiety, and any perceived crisis is really that of the disciplinary structures applied to it."[7] These disciplinary structures are formed by the categorization and taxonomy that defines art history, which molds institutions from their outlook to their departmental structure to their framing of critical discussions. The crisis, then, is abstract, cartographic, revolving around the demarcation of territory. This is photography. That is not photography.[8] As photographic practice had been historically excluded from fine-art discourses—that is to say, even well after photography had staked a claim for its place within the institution, it was often treated as a separate discussion, both by institutions and photographers—its sense as a medium became strengthened by a discursive isolation.

In taking stock of photographic activity within the field of contemporary art, it seems that any framing of the present should depend on the practices of the artists themselves. And if attempts to define photography ontologically are not only futile, but also wholly insufficient for understanding actual artistic practice, then we need a more elastic way of approaching and articulating photography. Instead of delineating photography philosophically, it seems more productive to, as Charlotte Cotton puts it, "unpack and engagingly narrate photography's pluralism in ways that feel absolutely relevant to contemporary eyes."9 We must engage its multiplicity and its greater social reality, and a discussion around crisis is ill-equipped for this. But if it bleeds, it leads, and historically criticism has rehearsed death narratives for just about everything. Roland Barthes, André Bazin, Walter Benjamin, Christian Metz, and Susan Sontag all saw photography as an abstraction of death.

Anxiety is a through-line in this cycle of endgame narratives, and these examples suggest that anxiety has always been part of the relationship between criticism and photography.[10] But instead of searching for some kind of atavistic truth within photography as a medium, artists are instead breaking down this compartmentalized, taxonomic, institutionally informed way of thinking about photography. During a recent panel discussion, Walead Beshty joked about the distinctions drawn between certain photographic practices, drawing an analogy between making these divisions and saying, "I don't like art painting, but I like painting."[11] There is not necessarily a choice to be made between being an artist or being a photographer, as those distinctions are largely historical and discursive. In most cases, Beshty argued, asserting the position "photographer" tends to close off a set of conversations more than it opens them up. As he wondered aloud, "Is Martin Puryear a carpenter?"[12]

II. ANXIETY

Photography has always had strong ties, both in terms of implementation and technological innovation, to spheres that produce anxiety or reflect it back to us. To begin with, its language is violent. Shooting frames, capturing images, bombarding the world with pictures. Dodge and burn. Crop. Some of the earliest photographic taxonomies were produced to catalogue the facial features of criminals, with the intent of creating a reliable method of visual detection. Today, people fret over full-body scanners employed by airport security. The histories of war and cinema are fatally intertwined.[13] From spirit photographers to UFO enthusiasts, photography has long been a physical link to the paranormal. In Voodoo, the belief that any similar-looking object can create a powerful link to its mirror creates a special place for photographic images in spells or curses.

Photography both seduces and unsettles by surpassing the limits of human perception. Early stroboscopic experiments at MIT attempted to reveal and arrest phenomena that are seen, felt, and experienced, but remain invisible without the aid of photography.[14] Here an ostensibly rational scientific application of photography results in a "strange sense of suspension, of being caught between things."[15] It is worth noting that stroboscopic technology enabled the first photograph of a nuclear explosion, and later the technology was altered to help trigger atomic bombs themselves.[16] Photographic vision surrounds us like a fog, seeping into all of the physical spaces of our existence and showing us things we are not supposed to see, both in between and inside. Three-dimensional X-ray technology allows doctors to see broken bones in the round and make new versions of them. Belgian artist Kris Martin used this technology to create a perfect bronze replica of his skull, an impossible reminder of his own mortality made tangible and visible, as the work's title notes, while he is *Still Alive* (2005).[17]

Popular culture also registers an overflowing of anxiety with photography. A quick list of notable films from the past four decades includes Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966), where a fashion photographer begins to realize that he accidently photographed a murder—the dark side of Henri Cartier-Bresson's decisive moment. In Richard Donner's *The Omen* (1976), a photographer begins to notice unexplained marks on photographs he takes of people that foreshadow their subsequent deaths. The protagonist in Robert Zemeckis's *Back to the Future* (1985) first notices the impending reversal of his own existence when he sees himself fading out of a family snapshot. The frenetic uneasiness in Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000) stems from photographs used as a literal and deeply flawed replacement for memory as an anterograde amnesiac depends on them in the search for his wife's killer. Scientists have called the (mis)use of photographs as memory surrogates in Memento "the most accurate portrayal of the different memory systems in the popular media"[18] and "close to a perfect exploration of the neurobiology of memory."[19]

Crazy Horse, the Native American war leader of the Oglala Lakota, strictly forbade his picture being taken, fearing that the capture of his image would mean certain death. For entirely different reasons the artist Stanley Brouwn refuses to let himself or his work be photographed or reproduced. Ian Wilson similarly refuses that his speech-based works be photographed or recorded. More recently, much has been made about the prohibitions artist Tino Sehgal places on the documentation of his work in any manner. The mechanisms of desire are crucially implicated in this gesture. As critic Ben Davis notes, the prohibition

is about denying spectators a mode of relating to their own experience, and, presumably, maintaining the author's monopoly on how it is experienced. The urge and ability to photograph is so all-pervasive that Sehgal's prohibition on pictures really can only be another arbitrary restraint to intensify his visitors' desire for his work: a pair of velvet handcuffs; a chastity belt.[20]

Any discussion of anxiety within and around photography must contend with desire. Not desire depicted in photographs, nor the desirous gazes they reveal, though an understanding of those mechanisms can and should inform our interpretation of photographs. Instead of defining desire by parsing out the various types operating within photographic images, desire should be thought of as a more general question: What do you want from me? As Jean-Louis Gault explains:

To my question about your desire: "What do you want from me?", you can answer pointing at something and say: "I want that." But do you really want "that" or do you want something else beyond what you answer to me? So, here is a new question, to which you could give a more precise answer, and so on after the second answer and a new question. That impossibility to give an ultimate answer to the question about desire maintains desire as a question. That question without answer is the cause of anxiety.[21]

Photography's anxiety stems from the fact that photography becomes this question without answer. A photograph needs to be completed. It is designed to be taken in.22 It is motivated. That question without answer can be reframed as "what does the picture require in order for you to

understand it, to fulfill it . . . in order for it to do the work it was designed to do?"[23] While this condition can be ascribed broadly to representational media—Plato relates that Socrates, in his dialogue with Phaedrus, described the unfortunate quality of writing and painting to "preserve a solemn silence"—it is particularly acute within photography.[24] In his so-called "aporetic" dialogues, Plato introduces Meno's paradox (often called the learner's paradox), a logically valid string of deductions that "proves" that it is impossible to learn anything. But for Plato, rather than inducing paralysis, the learner's paradox induces aporia, a paradox of meaning, which in this case has a cleansing effect for the questioner. The uneasiness of the paradox replaces the comfort of thinking one knows something with a desire to investigate further, creating a productive condition. Anne Ellegood, in her text for this catalogue, cites paradox as perhaps the defining aspect of photography throughout its history and fertile ground for many artists working today.

So even when we think we know the answer to the question posed by the photograph, it is always only partial. One reason for this is photography's polysemy. Photographs have an innate ability to have their contexts radically shifted and still retain their legibility. This, as Kate Bush puts it, is "the promiscuity and elasticity of photography."[25] Because images can exist in multiple places, they do not sit comfortably within any of them. This uncertainty only exacerbates the problem of approaching a photograph, of answering the question "What do you want from me?", because we are not sure who "you" is.

Photography's relationship to time also makes answering this question quite difficult. In the first place, this relationship is overwhelmingly imagined in relationship to death. André Bazin compared it to embalming the dead.[26] After the death of his mother, Roland Barthes wrote *Camera Lucida*. In it, he describes viewing a photograph as "enter[ing] into *flat Death*,"[27] as photographs show us both what once was and what no longer is at the same time. He concludes that "every photograph is a catastrophe."[28] Shortly after it was published, he died in a car accident. For Susan Sontag, photographs "state the innocence, the vulnerability, of lives heading toward their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people."[29] And Christian Metz describes the encounter with photography in more violent terms, saying "the snapshot, like death, is an instantaneous abduction of the object out of the world into another world, into another kind of time."[30]

It is about time. We are always pushed by its current, and if a photograph freezes time, our relationship to every image changes accordingly. The constant tension between fixity and fluidity that is always embodied in photography produces a fundamental anxiety. It seems fitting that in 1882, with the intention of an ever-fine arresting of time, Étienne-Jules Marey invented a chronophotographic gun, with a rotating glass plate, capable of shooting twelve frames per second. This violent metaphor rings out in a device that collides the two factors that continually shift photography's rug from beneath our feet: technology and time.

It is in this act of capturing time that Stephen Shore locates the photograph's ability to enunciate, noting that "as this flow is interrupted by the photograph, a new meaning, a photographic meaning, is delineated."[31] But instead of thinking of fixed and fluid as an on-off switch, it might be more useful to think of those states as having a more dynamic relationship. The speculative fiction writer Stephen R. Donaldson conceives of order as organized or frozen chaos and likewise chaos as a fluid state of order.[32] This metaphor is apt here for two reasons. First, because this dance between chaos and order is inherently anxiety producing and feeling unsettled along this continuum is the root of a number of mental illnesses, like obsessive-compulsive disorder. And second, because this model hints at a stored energy, a potential, that exists at every point. Within this framework, photography's capacity to create meaning exists as it balances these two poles, finding a middle point between their tensions that is rich and dynamic. In Donaldson's view, "chaos is a more subtle and perhaps more essential form of order."[33]

A closer examination of photography's complex struggle between arrest and motion can be framed by looking at a film composed of still images, Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962). By stripping cinema of a seemingly essential quality, movement, but retaining the time-based structure of narrative montage, Marker overlays our experience of narrative time, this-is or this-will-be,[34] with an even sharper sense of what Roland Barthes describes as the peculiar way a photograph registers the past: as a simultaneous indication of this-has-been and this-is-no-more.[35] The film makes us sharply aware of this uneasy coexistence of time senses, producing an anxiety through the very "'photographicity' [of the] image—a triangulation of reality, past, and death."[36] The images, no longer relying on movement to convey a sense of time, begin to *produce* time through their interrelation.

Marker's *photo-roman*, as it is called in the work's opening credits, is a science fiction film about time travel. Set in postapocalyptic Paris, the story centers around a man, the narrator mentions, who is haunted by an image from his past: an obsessive memory of a death he witnessed as a child, on a boarding platform at the airport, and a woman he saw just before it took place. He is doubly a prisoner, beholden to this image and incarcerated underground, fittingly, in the galleries of the Palais de Chaillot. Scientists at the prison impress the man into time-travel research, attempting "to send emissaries into Time, to summon the Past and Future to the aid of the Present."[37] When he completes his mission, he learns that he is scheduled to be executed. He flees to the past to find the woman, meeting her at the airport. But he is followed, and he is killed. In his final moments, "he understood there was no way to escape Time, and that this moment he had been granted to watch as a child, which had never ceased to obsess him, was the moment of his own death."[38]

The collapse of time in the work—of photography and cinema, of past and future—are set at further remove when the work reveals its own making. In some shots, reflected light is clearly visible on the photograph's surface, tipping the construction-in-studio. Crucial to our understanding of this gesture is Marker's stubborn refusal to identify as an artist, on which he elaborates, "I'm a cobbler . . . I think I'll stick to cobbling, with all that's inherently honorable in artisanal undertakings."[39] He insists on the mark of the handmade, of the fabrication before the camera, of the mediating presence of lights and the camera itself. His answer to the question "Have you never considered yourself a filmmaker": Ne-ver.[40] Perhaps Marker, too, has a photophobia. When asked for pictures of himself, he sends images of his cat, Guillaume, instead.[41]

III. PULL IT DOWN OR BURN IT UP

As artist Victor Burgin writes in *Looking at Photographs*, "The daily instrumentality of photographs is clear enough: to sell, inform, record, delight. Clear, but only to the point at which photographic representations lose themselves in the world they create."[42] In thinking about everyday encounters with images in the real world they help shape, unpacking the actual experience of photography helps to understand how those conditions shape our understanding of images. Photography reaches us in a fundamentally different way than we reach its two closest artistic analogues: painting and cinema. The viewing of a painting or a film is an intentional act, where photographs "have no special space and time allotted to them . . . photographs are received rather as an environment."[43]

Photography has never been more available than it is today. Some 307,006,550 people live in the United States.44 According to a recent study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 82% of adult Americans own a mobile phone, and of those 76% use their phones, on average more than once a day, to take a photograph.[45] Mashing those numbers together provides a rough but conservative estimate of the number of mobile-phone photos taken each day in America: 191,326,482.

Approximately 54% of adults have used their mobile device to send someone a photo, which means that 135,942,500 Americans have gone as far as distributing a photo they have taken. And 15% have posted a photo online, so at least 37,761,805 have published in some form.[46] As one would expect, these trends are even more pronounced among younger adults, as 93% of 18–29 year olds use their phone to take pictures, and 81% send photos to others. Among 30–49 year olds, 83% use their phone to take pictures, a 12-point increase from 2009.[47]

Though these numbers are only measuring the habits of mobile-phone users and fail to take into account the large amount of digital images created on a daily basis in other contexts, they reveal a tremendous upswell not only in the sheer amount of participation in the act of taking photographs, but more direct participation in image culture through thoroughly available dissemination and publication. We gain a tremendous facility with photography that is conditioned by environment and participation, passive and active experience.

This facility is often internalized, preconscious, and applied automatically as we sift through sensory data. Victor Burgin uses the analogy of piecing together a puzzle photograph, and the shift that occurs at the moment of recognition:

Once we have discovered what the depicted object is however, the photograph is instantly transformed for us—no longer a confusing conglomerate of light and dark tones, of uncertain edges and ambivalent volumes, it now shows a "thing" which we invest with a full identity, a being. With most photographs we see, this decoding and investitude takes place instantaneously, unselfconsciously, "naturally"; but it does take place.[48]

We project a coherence into the photograph. A semifiction and half-truth. A mental image graft on to a visual one. An act of naming. And we get very good at it, because we do it over and over. Photographic images, in many of their iterations, are not meant to be looked at for very long. So our speed in recognition, in naming, comes from the necessity of processing images quickly and the practice of repetition. We reflexively begin to internalize photographic relationships. But, as Burgin points out, "this structure of representation—point-of-view and frame—is intimately implicated in the reproduction of ideology (the 'frame of mind' of our 'points-of-view')."[49] What ideologies do we soak up when exposed to technologies that not only greatly expand photography's plasticity and make reproduction and distribution instantaneous, but also enable deep surveillance and remote war?

The means with which we produce, distribute, and experience photographic images are undergoing the first truly radical transformation since Talbot's invention of the negative/positive process. Still written with light, the digital photograph no longer requires the intermediaries of negative and print to view the image in a material form.[50] By distancing us from a physically rich photographic object, the digital image refocuses our attention on its content. Screen space is more or less standard in size and format and narrow in tonal range, equalizing photographic images. In essence, our physical experience with images has been shifted to screen spaces that trade variation and material intrigue for flexibility and portability. When our primary experience of images is digital, we lose a sense of context in favor of a flattened, attenuated focus on content.

As manifestations of images transition to digital, and our vernacular experience shifts from analog photography and print to digital camera and screen, it seems natural that artists invested in photography are widely exploring its changing materiality. Often materiality is formally embedded within the work—in assemblages and constructions made to be photographed and placed in front of the camera. Sometimes it is reflected in the manner in which the work is printed or displayed. In recent exhibitions and critical writing (assessing ostensibly more formally oriented work, especially abstract photography), these interests are all too commonly situated as nostalgic yearnings for earlier moments in photography's history during chemical photography's supposed sunset. Nostalgia is certainly present, but along with romanticism it has been recovered throughout contemporary art in recent years after being repressed in much of the work of the 1980s and 1990s. So its operation must be placed within a broader context, as must our approach to photography's materiality. That we are in the midst of seismic change is clear, but if we are going to speak of loss, it takes time and reflection to understand just what we might lack. We are still figuring out what this transition might mean, still developing a language for how to talk about what digital technologies really change.

Digital photography still operates, by and large, as a simulation of older technology. Just as we must understand the invention of photography within the larger framework of industrialization, we should be sensitive to digital photography's place within a broader process of digitization, one that began in the late 1970s and persists today. Proclamations about digital technology ending photography as we know it, or obliterating its material presence, are beginning to feel a bit like Charles Baudelaire's fears about photography destroying artistic genius—he refers to Daguerre as the messiah of a vengeful God[51]—or Oliver Wendell Holmes's worry that the mere availability of pictures of far away places would end travel. Holmes's worry about profusion and distribution feels incredibly relevant at present, as does his retrospectively preposterous assertion. Addressing photography's relationship to the material world, Holmes writes, "Give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view, and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please."[52]

IV. MATERIALITY

Welling up across contemporary art of the last decade has been a renewed interest in objects and materiality. This notion has been explored in some depth with sculptural practices, and it is worth looking at how they situate two specific ways of relating to objects: making and collage. Some exhibitions have examined the ways in which artists have reintegrated the handmade into their practice, often through labor-intensive means. *The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas* identified how this careful positioning of craft alongside mass production creates a "quality of open-endedness wherein questions are posed and single meanings are denied . . . [a] sense of uncertainty."[53] Helen Molesworth used this condition of being partly manufactured and partly man-made as a way of reimagining Duchamp's legacy on postwar sculpture in her exhibition *Part Object Part Sculpture*. Another recent exhibition, Knight's Move, was partially framed around the questions "How can strategies of estrangement, appropriation, and abstraction exist alongside direct engagements

with materiality, figuration, and storytelling? Can the makeshift, readymade, and precarious exist in dialog with the meticulous, obsessive, and finely crafted?"[54] These exhibitions grapple with an approach to making objects that is polyvalent and multiple. Rarely, it seems, are things merely fabricated, or conversely, merely made in studio.

The notion of collage, as well, has been taken up, responding to a pieced-together quality of much recent sculpture and installation. Identifying contemporary sculpture that juxtaposes disparate objects for suggestive effect, the exhibition *Unmonumental* positioned collage within sculpture as a response to an "age of crumbling symbols and broken icons."[55,] The exhibition situates collage as a historical response to trauma and social upheaval and focuses on a certain set of more gestural collage practices: "fragmented forms, torn pictures and clashing sounds."[56] But these approaches can be placed within a more recent expanded notion of collage, pervasive within contemporary art, which involves the resituating of elements, not simply in new contexts, but in new relationships, in nuanced interactions that investigate materials, memory, and forms. In many ways, this describes the work of an artist like Carol Bove or Jason Dodge as readily as that of Mark Bradford or Gedi Sibony. Artists like Kris Martin, Trisha Donnelly, and Mark Manders, whose practices are deeply conceptual, use a refined, clean assemblage that is heavily invested in objects and their associative potential. Another element that unites the practices of these artists and differentiates their work from conceptually inflected readymades produced by, for example, Jeff Koons and Haim Steinbach, or the detached, ironizing installations of Cady Noland or Pruitt and Early, is a reinvestment of personal content.

In addition to a renewed interest in materiality, this expanded collage aesthetic and influx of the individual are reflected in recent photographic practice. All of these aspects of contemporary practice are connected in some way to the idea of appropriation. To unpack the term "appropriation" and what relevance it has for photographic practice, we should look at changing relationships with the subject and with authorship.

The realist photographers of the 1930s and 40s, most notably Walker Evans in the United States and August Sander in Germany, always played with their distance from subject matter, creating images that exhibit a clear tension between a frank, documentarian approach and a keen, earnest connection to the depicted object. This "oscillation between engagement and estrangement"[57] crops up in a variety of ways in the work of artists employing photography in the 1960s, including Bernd and Hilla Becher, Bruce Nauman, Ed Ruscha, and Stephen Shore. In addition to artists beginning to incorporate photography into their practices, the profusion of photographic education that happened during the 1960s and continued on into the 1970s encouraged photographers to think outside of the medium and become "increasingly alert to the ideas, effects, and techniques that might be borrowed from one medium and persuaded to serve another."[58] Work became increasingly hybridized, and a number of photographers displayed "evidence that [they] had hands as well as eyes."[59] Engagement and estrangement become mapped onto the photographic object itself.

This obvious mixing of practices, and the hand of the photographer they implied, was accelerating just as a growing number of artists were interested in upsetting conventional notions of photographic authorship. Even in the work of the Bechers, for example, authorship was repressed, piled under the rules of typological investigation.[60] During this time, a second seismic shift in photographic education occurred. MFA programs began to incorporate photographic practice, and a generation of photographers participated in dialogues and, perhaps more importantly, pedagogical systems from which they were historically kept out.[61] And it is at this moment that French post-structuralist theory, especially Michel Foucault's critique of power and Roland Barthes writings on authorship, began to seriously penetrate the art academy.

For a number of photo-based artists of the late 1970s and early 1980s, including Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince, and Cindy Sherman, it seems that "the only conceivable radical act was to acknowledge the impossibility of photographic originality, and to merely select and incorporate images that were already in circulation in wider culture."[62] If conceptual art used photography in part to question the necessity of the object, the pictures generation employed photography to question its own necessity, to investigate it as a system of representation. Photographic practices of the 1980s involved a redirection from one category, like advertising or cinema, into the realm of another, fine art. Transposition was favored over transformation. This fits into larger strategies of appropriation that treated found objects singularly as whole, realized entities. The slickness of the work reveals a detached, analytical relationship with the object and its referent.

Photography is an inherently analytic discipline.[63] But artists working with photography today seem less interested in making photographs *about* than photographs *that*, less interested in what a

photograph *is* than in what it can be, what it *does*. As artist Carter Mull has suggested, "the dynamic between a sense of materiality on the one hand, and an awareness of how images relate to other images (historical, commercial, or contemporary) on another, is what characterizes a strong facet of contemporary photographic practice."[64]

In more recent photographic practice, the source of images, both found and "original," is downplayed within the work. The German philosopher Gottlob Frege's distinction between a sign's sense and its reference is helpful in understanding the qualities or attitudes of a reference, the way a sign regards its object. The reference is the definite and agreeable thing toward which a sign points. The sense is *how* it points. To say that a photograph is a depiction of a clown is to name its reference. To say that a photograph is an ironic depiction of a clown is to invoke that sign's sense. Within this framework, the pictures generation seems, in retrospect, to have been heavily invested in the reference, while artists today are widely exploring the sense.

Appropriation has ceased to have a critical function or reading in and of itself. It is a given, a condition many young artists were born into (or after). The term appropriation itself connotes an aggressiveness or hijacking of imagery that simply does not conform to the complex, intermixed, sometimes conflicted ways that artists are using existing imagery today. Borrowed images coexist with photographs taken by the artist; images produced in a commercial context are reused within the artist's studio. According to Kate Bush, these practices are "post-appropriative" in the sense that they recognize "the impossibility of absolute originality while still investing in photographic authorship."[65] The term post-appropriative gives pause because of the way it privileges appropriation as a historical trajectory. But it is useful in acknowledging "photography as something that is fluid" and for thinking about the way that not just images, but entire image-making contexts can be appropriated.[66] And it seems absolutely connected to the ways in which the reuse of existing materials have fundamentally changed in both artistic practices and larger cultural practices in recent years.

If advances in digital technology have inspired anything, they have contributed to a more self-reliant and direct relationship to production—a "maker" culture—which expands beyond repurposing digital media to cobbling together open-source software and hardware, hacking consumer electronics, and creating other functional devices like clothing and home décor all from information shared freely online. Drawing from the DIY ethos of subcultures as disparate as punks, hippies, and computer programmers, maker culture reflects people's growing inclination to understand how the objects in their world work, and how they can be altered. Although enabled by digital technology and the free and open sharing that makes this kind of collective development possible, maker culture encourages a much more direct and active physical relationship with our objects and devices.

Photography was born at the intersection of the laboratory and the studio, and it has returned there again. Even while attempting to capture nature, to penetrate the outside world, photography's innovators were tied inside. The desire to accurately depict clouds in the sky, for example, made difficult by the overlong exposure times, and other attempts at a more faithful reproduction of nature spurred the development of image manipulations like negative retouching, painting on the print, and combination printing.[67] In addition to being a chemist, Louis Daguerre was a painter, specializing in producing sets for the opera and for popular theater.[68] The earliest known daguerreotype, made in 1837, depicts the inside of Daguerre's studio, a detailed view of an arrangement of ornamental sculpture in the corner. The resurgence of sculptural materiality and the return of personal content within contemporary art reflect a commitment to studio practice. It is a return to the studio as a site of making, not simply a site of production. This immediacy and sense of the artist's investment in the object's making feels far from the arch production values that dominated much art of the late 1990s and early 2000s, and in photography specifically, the very large, very detached photographs of artists like Andreas Gursky and Candida Höfer. The studio draws the artist into sustained relationships with material, be they fraught or meditative.

A touchstone for many artists working with photography today—a model not only for polymorphous production but also for focused studio work—is James Welling. One of the most striking aspects of Welling's output is the incredible diversity of his printing methods: photograms, traditional gelatin silver prints, Polaroids, and digitally processed prints.[69] That Welling's preoccupation with the photographic surface exists in all of his work, and not simply his more well-known photograms or images of tinfoil, reveals a long-term and multilayered engagement with the photograph-as-object that has been taken up by a number of younger artists. Crucial to understanding Welling's influence is his intense focus on objects, a "double stress on simplicity and aestheticism"[70] that reveals materials not "merely or primarily as they are in themselves, but as they are revealed

photographically, as they exist *within* photography or are made manifest *by* photography."[71] He cites *Lock* (1976), an elegant and deceptively simple photograph of a two-by-four leaning against the wall of his studio, as a foundational early work. His important early abstractions, like his photographs of diary pages, aluminum foil, or black velvet drapes strewn with shards of phyllo dough, are resolutely studio based. As Michael Fried notes, however, this diversity of output and attention has led some to view his art "as conducting a critique of photography rather than as mobilizing its resources."[72]

Artists working with photography are opening up and reassessing the very process and structure of making pictures. Their return to the (art) studio is accompanied by a profusion of still lives and portraits, genres most closely linked to the (photographic) studio. By running down the catalogue of photographic genres, techniques, and styles, artists "move through photography's own internal 'typologies' in a way that acknowledges the putative redundancy of the medium while simultaneously reclaiming a space for artistic maneuver."[73] Where transposition was a key artistic strategy of the 1980s, it was focused on the object. In the past decade it has been reinvigorated on the level of practice and process, an aspect of current artistic engagements with photography that is explored in Jenelle Porter's essay for this publication. Photography's fluidity can produce fundamental anxieties, but artists are intent on exploring the very possibilities for and limits of its plasticity.

Photography is full of closures. The iris, the shutter, the arrest of time, the myth of ontology. Whether conceiving of photography as a medium, a tool, an object, a practice, or some combination thereof, artists are opening it back up, playing with the photograph's three essential qualities: being flat, static, and bounded.[74] Artists are investigating just what a photographic object—and a photographic practice—can be, taking its aporia as a point of departure rather than a mark of crisis. They use the puzzlement the photograph so easily traffics to induce a more careful state of looking, a more open dive into pictures. They are fully mobilizing photography's resources.

NOTES

1 Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1964), 65.

2 Ibid., 11.

3 William Henry Fox Talbot, "The art of fixing a shadow," in *Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing: Or, the Process by which Natural Objects may be made to delineate themselves without the aid of the artist's pencil*, (London: R. and J. E. Taylor, 1839), unpaged.

4 Newhall, *The History of Photography*, 22.

5 Trevor Paglen, "Is Photography Over?" (participant statement, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, April 22, 2010), accessed February 7, 2011, http://www.sfmoma.org/pages/research_projects_photography_over/.

6 For a thorough examination of the relationship of media, crisis, and institutional structure see Walead Beshty, "Is Photography Over?" (participant statement, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, April 22, 2010), accessed February 7, 2011, http://www.sfmoma.org/pages/research_projects_photography_over/.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Charlotte Cotton, "Is Photography Over?" (participant statement, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, April 22, 2010), accessed February 7, 2011, http://www.sfmoma.org/pages/research_projects_photography_over/.

10 If it seems that this has been particularly endemic in discussions about photography, there is perhaps an interesting counter-narrative suggested by George Baker, a history of photographic thought that engaged real-world crisis as a context for possibility. As he writes: "I think, for example, of Walter Benjamin predicting the rebirth of photography in the wake of the stock market crash of 1929, of his hopes for a return to the forgotten potentials of the medium before its industrialization. I think, too, of Walker Evans announcing the 'reappearance' of photography around the same historical events. I think of Roland Barthes prioritizing similarly atavistic potentials of the medium at the moment of a later economic recession, that of the 1970s, which is also the moment immediately preceding the technological shift from the analog to the digital that we have subsequently witnessed." George Baker, "Is Photography Over?" (participant statement, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, April 22, 2010), accessed February 7, 2011, http://www.sfmoma.org/pages/research_projects_photography_over/.

11 Walead Beshty, "Is Photography Over?" (comment, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, April 22, 2010), accessed February 7, 2011, http://www.sfmoma.org/pages/research_projects_photography_over/.

12 Ibid.

13 See Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London: Verso, 1989).

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15 Peter Eleey, "Thursday," in *The Quick and the Dead* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2009), 45.

16 Trevor Paglen, "Is Photography Over?" (comment, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, April 22, 2010), accessed February 7, 2011, http://www.sfmoma.org/pages/research_projects_photography_over/.

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27 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 92.
28 Ibid., 96.
29 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1977), 70.
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33 Ibid.
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35 See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 92.
36 Orlow, "The Dialectical Image: *La Jetée* and Photography as Cinema," 179.
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64 Mull, *Words Without Pictures*, 75.
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The Photographic Paradox
Anne Ellegood, in *The Anxiety of Photography*, exhibition catalogue

The photograph is not simply a product or a channel but also an object endowed with a structural autonomy.[1] Roland Barthes

Spanning less than two hundred years, the life of photography has been extraordinarily dramatic and fast paced. Embraced and maligned, widely used but little understood, it might be argued that photography has undergone multiple lives, taking up various modes and characteristics like a movie actress embracing a string of wide-ranging roles. No other medium has infiltrated our daily lives with such proficiency and abundance. Substantial technological advancements and increased capacities within the medium have meant that today, simply put, photography is everywhere.

There is no doubt that our contemporary culture takes photography's existence for granted. It has permeated all areas of society—from the commercial to the personal, from the courthouse to the battlefield—and is small enough to fit on our handheld devices and large enough to see several blocks away when driving. In fact, we are so accustomed to being surrounded by photographs in various incarnations that we rarely stop to consider where all these photographs come from and the processes by which they came into being. While most of us can point and shoot, few of us understand (or certainly participate directly in) the various other technical aspects of the medium—from light meters and f-stops, to the chemicals used in the darkroom, to basic formatting and editing. We might describe this strange divide between ubiquity and knowledge—between use and understanding—as a paradox of the medium.

But this is just one paradox of photography. If we consider the history of the medium, paradox seems to be one of its defining features. Its immediate attraction to artists and inarguably central role in our culture did not mean that it made its way easily into the canons of museum collections, for example. Its indexical ability to capture reality has not limited it to a documentary role nor has it resulted in a stable relationship to notions of truth. The paradox that Roland Barthes pinpointed in "The Photographic Message" (which primarily examined the press photo) revolved around the coexistence of denoted and connoted messages in the photograph. For him, this structural conundrum was also an ethical one: "when one wants to be 'neutral,' 'objective,' one strives to copy reality meticulously, as though the analogical were a factor of resistance against the investment of values . . . how then can the photograph be at once 'objective' and 'invested,' natural and cultural?"[2] Barthes' final treatise on the ontology of photography, *Camera Lucida*, has yet another paradox. What he identifies as the thing that makes an individual photograph capture one's imagination—what he called the "punctum" ("sting, speck, cut, little hole")[3]—ends up being deeply personal. Far from an objectively identifiable characteristic within the photograph, the punctum (if it is present in the image at all) is different for each viewer. These various paradoxes within photography's short history speak to the medium's fluidity. It is an ever-present feature of our lives that is nonetheless remarkably hard to pin down. And this makes it an enticing subject for artists.

Several photographers who have emerged in recent years—many of them featured in *The Anxiety of Photography*—are invested in examining and upending another paradox of the medium: how its primary function as a producer of two-dimensional imagery has largely supplanted aspects of its material properties. Interested in more than the image *per se*, these artists' practices have turned our attention to the processes of photographic production, and specifically to the physical and material attributes of the photograph *as an object*. Employing a range of photographic techniques, both analog and digital, these artists in some sense deconstruct the medium. This allows them to consider photography's component parts—the numerous chain of events that must occur prior to the existence of the final image or final grouping (or series) of images. The outcome is oftentimes decidedly tactile, the works resisting the slick surface and inevitable remove of the photo-as-image. This breakdown between the opticality of the image and the haptic potentiality of photography results in slowing down our reading of the photograph, often confusing our assumptions about the fundamental nature of the medium and how photographs operate in the world.

This desire to analyze and deconstruct grows out of a predilection for a type of medium-specific investigation that considers both form and function. In other words, the ontological examinations at play here encompass not only the precise technical actions that allow for particular physical manifestations but also the role of photography in our culture. Given photography's rich and textured history, the work presented here is, not surprisingly, remarkably diverse. Even while the click

of the shutter still looms large in our cultural imagination as photography's point of origin, these artists' considerations of their medium begins far in advance of the moment when the camera's lens opens itself to light. Indeed, some of them only pick up the camera intermittently, preferring to traffic in found images or finally taking photographs only after a great deal of work has already occurred. They utilize a range of familiar genres and categories of their medium—the commercial setup, the scouted on-site fashion shoot, portraiture, still life, appropriation, collage, abstraction—and employ just about every technical process invented for the medium, from its earliest forms, such as photograms, to the latest digital tools.

The material qualities of photography are drawn out both by making use of very traditional techniques and materials of the medium and by embellishing the photograph within a layered visual language. Liz Deschenes creates abstract forms that overturn the idea of the photograph as an identifiable embodiment of a fixed reality. Rather, by using time-consuming processes like long-exposure photograms and reflective silver toner that changes over time, her works shift and transform with every viewing. Dirk Stewen uses photographs as the starting place for his multimedia compositions. His found or shot imagery and texts provide clues to a loose narrative and his formal inventiveness—painting photographic paper with dark ink and decorating the surface with confetti and colored thread—emphasizes the capacity for the photograph to be a unique object. Both Matt Saunders and Sara Greenberger Rafferty begin with found images borrowed from the histories of popular culture and then alter their surfaces by using water, paint, and other materials, their acts of mark-making moving the photographs from the realm of the public archive to a space of private contemplation.

The influence on this generation of important predecessors like Christopher Williams and James Welling is visibly evident, especially for their engagement with the various methodologies through which a photograph comes into being. Yet the distancing from legible imagery seen here takes these investigations in a slightly new direction. Williams's work remains in the realm of the image; he revels in the seduction and visual possibilities of the two-dimensional representation. And while some artists here certainly share a similar devotion to the pleasure and power of photographic imagery, they are more likely to filter or tamp down photography's capacity for spectacle by reminding us of its physicality. For them, photography enacts obfuscation as much as it reveals or provides representation.

Artists like Williams and Welling set the stage for the precise articulations of photography's technical and material possibilities found in the works included in *The Anxiety of Photography*. However, it might also be useful to consider these practices in the context of the burgeoning of large-format, visually saturated photographs during the 1990s. During this period, photographers like Andreas Gursky, Thomas Demand, Jeff Wall, and Cindy Sherman garnered much commercial and critical attention. Interestingly, however, much of the discourse surrounding this work revolved around the argument for its meaningful relationship to painting. Beyond the large scale of the work, it has been noted that this type of photography is evocative of painting because of its grand subject matter (Wall's work is often compared to history painting) and its reliance on elaborate constructions more akin to the process of demarcating and layering representation with paint on canvas than the instantaneity of the photograph (Sherman's utter transformation through costume and make-up is the defining characteristic of her practice).

For this new generation, other mediums—sculpture, collage, drawing, and painting—are sometimes woven into their working processes. Indeed, some create final pieces in mediums other than photography. Anthony Pearson's arrangements combine black-and-white prints with abstract bronze sculptures. Miriam Böhm and Brendan Fowler mount and combine their images into three-dimensional constructions. Leslie Hewitt assembles objects into temporary compositions and photographs them, sometimes leaning large framed prints against the wall to emphasize their three-dimensionality. Matt Saunders transforms his stills into moving images. Nonetheless, these recent practices are firmly entrenched in both the history of photography and the material and imagistic possibilities for the medium going forward. There is little chance we will mistake their works for paintings. Rather than assert meaning by attaching their works to identifiable characteristics of other mediums, these artists remain in the realm of the photograph and take pleasure in parsing through photography's many paradoxes.

NOTES

1 Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 15. The title of this essay is borrowed from a section heading of Barthes's essay.

2 Ibid., 20.

3 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 27.

Why Red Cabbage?
Jenelle Porter, in *The Anxiety of Photography*, exhibition catalogue

In effect, the only tokens of history continually available to our senses are the desirable things made by men. Of course, to say that man-made things are desirable is redundant, because man's native inertia is overcome only by desire, and nothing gets made unless it is desirable.[1] George Kubler

Not only does nothing get made unless it is desirable; nothing gets bought. Artists have made work about desire, since, well, the very beginning. But to focus on the recent past, when photography became Photography, we can look to artists who emerged in the 1980s such as Richard Prince, Barbara Kruger, Sarah Charlesworth, Jack Goldstein, and Cindy Sherman. These artists questioned the language of photography, but also investigated desire: what is it, who determines it, and why. The brand of desire manufactured by capitalism and spoon-fed to the postwar generation was their métier. Stuff. Cigarettes, coffee, refrigerators, televisions, clothes. We buy stuff, our stuff defines us: "I shop therefore I am," Kruger's famous artwork blasted us in graphic red, white, and black. Charlesworth isolated and juxtaposed symbolically charged objects and floated them on solid color backgrounds, like an ad image clipped from its supporting copy. Prince literally clipped ads and, exploring modes of repetition and difference, commented on advertising's modes of reinforcement: Repetition generates brand knowledge. Brand knowledge translates to desire. Desire sells stuff.

Several of the artists included in *The Anxiety of Photography* also appropriate from advertising, specifically the formal aspects of the product shot. The product shot is exactly what you think it is: a photo of an object against a background. Product shots depict products, objects for sale, which through such photography communicate to the audience their desirability. While one current discourse is centered on the photography of sculpture, as explored in a recent historical survey at The Museum of Modern Art, little has been written about art photography's relationship to the product shot. Yet, one could claim that Alfred Stieglitz's photograph of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* is one of the twentieth-century art's most famous product shots. After all, it is in factual description a photo of a commercially produced object—a urinal—shot against an appealing background (a Marsden Hartley painting), centered in the frame, and dramatically lit. If not for the scrawling signature identifying it as one of the most famous sculptures ever created, could it not be an advertisement for plumbing products?

Vital to the product shot is technique. Perfect lighting, compelling background, captivating angles, and the right lens. These are the fundamentals. But of greatest importance to the success of the image is the resolution: the level of reproduction of detail. Product shots are photographed at a resolution that is a great degree higher than what we see in real life, because for a product shot to be effective, you must believe that you could reach out and grab the object portrayed. We need to see those dewy drops on the shiny apple, individual strands of freshly washed hair, melting ice cubes in the glass of whiskey. Other modes of photography glorify the casualness of the snapshot, or the intentionally blurry painterly qualities of pictorialism. The product shot traffics in the haptic: that which we can touch with our eyes. And with the preponderance of cameras, available at higher and higher resolutions and incorporated into personal electronics with which we constantly interact, we can ostensibly reach out and touch everything. Susan Sontag called the photograph's subject "an extension of that subject; and a potent means of acquiring it, of gaining control over it."[2] Sontag was writing about photographs, the kind you held in your hand. But in this digital age how many of us even print our snapshots? We store them on computers, we scroll through them on a screen (another kind of lens). In other words, the desire we could once grasp has become once again intangible.

Why do artists take pictures of stuff (and subsequently print them)? Why this stuff? In the main, the stuff seen in the works exhibited in *The Anxiety of Photography* is characterized by a pervasive, deliberate neutrality. But neutral is never really neutral. Rather, it is nonnarrative, nonhierarchical, nonreferential. Aesthetic and/or formal considerations trump 1980s-style critique. Has the critique of representation been subsumed by an aesthetic of the critique of representation? Advertising has become another tool to be used because, like appropriation, it is overwhelmingly prevalent. Erin Shirreff describes her approach as neither reverence nor irreverence toward an image, but rather an "interest in using [photographs] to think about a more abstract idea, such as how seeing a thing as an image enhances and disrupts our relationship to it."[3] Elad Lassry appropriates both object and image. His staged arrangements reveal an inextricable formal connection to the product shot.

His work tests an (often store-bought) object's potential to be considered on purely formal terms, devoid of reference or symbolic meaning. Whether we, the ceaselessly subjective viewer, see an arrangement of lipsticks or red cabbage as without meaning is not Lassry's objective.

A handful of artists included here have a more direct association with commercial photography. Sara VanDerBeek was a commercial photographer before turning to art as a profession. Roe Ethridge's work deftly crosses genres with the photographs he makes as artworks and those commissioned for editorial assignments. For him, just as for photographers of the 1920s and 1930s like Paul Outerbridge, Edward Steichen, and Man Ray, who worked on assignment for advertising art directors, there is no difference—no inherent conflict—between art for art's sake and art for the client's sake. Considering the temperament of our one-big-conflict-of-interest world, can we argue the point? And while several of the artists included in this exhibition borrow from advertising, especially the product shot's central object/subject, a critique of advertising is not part of the endeavor. (We'll leave for another essay how such impulses to arrange objects reference still life.)

We encounter product photography in magazines, often in succession and in relation to one another as we flip the pages. Through a common characteristic of recent photography and its installation—the series approach, or the site-specific composition—the page is effectively transferred to the wall. Works are presented as a nonnarrative, nonhierarchical mash-up: a community of images. This strategy of presentation echoes advertising's main strategy, which instead of repetition in this instance we might call reproduction. After all, what distinguishes photography (the promiscuous art form) from other art forms is its ability to reproduce itself. To quote from an advertising expert's essay on making "The Successful Advertising Photograph": "It is important to point out here that originality for originality's sake is no criterion of a successful advertising photograph. The first idea, even though it has been done before, may be the best one. A fresh approach, a new angle, or a change of focus may be all that's needed to give it an aura of originality."[4] What is critical to consider when evaluating advertising's influence—and I'm compelled to add that its appropriation did not conclude in the 1980s, but rather has been used to great effect, and to entirely different conceptual and formal ends, by such artists as Christopher Williams, whose influence is apparent among younger generations—is how the artists discussed in this essay so adeptly conflate, indeed control, varying levels of desire. The thing pictured (the object) and the thing itself (the artwork) are one and the same: something to be desired, obtained, and gazed upon. So you must ask yourself: do you want the photograph, or do you want the red cabbage?

NOTES

1 George Kubler, *The Shape of Tim: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962), 1.
2 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 155.
3 Erin Shirreff, e-mail exchange with the author, December 23, 2010.
4 Roy Pinney, *Advertising Photography, A Visual Communication Book* (New York: Hastings House, Publishers, 1962), 25.

ABÎME ; MISE EN ABYME / Abyss ; Mirror text

Jean-Marie Grassin / Chloé Conant, in *Dictionnaire International des Termes Littéraires* (2005)

ETYMOLOGIE / etymology

Abîme, subst. masc. français, XII^e siècle, du latin chrétien *abyssus*, devenu *abysmus*, *abismus* ; du grec ἄβυσσος *abussos* : «sans fond», composé du privatif ἀ - et βυσσος : «fond de la mer» avec une idée d'infini.

abyme et *abisme* sont des formes archaïques ou archaïsantes conservées en héraldique.

Mise en abyme : L'expression composée *mise en abyme* apparaît sous forme verbale chez André Gide qui écrit en 1893 dans son *Journal* :

«J'aime assez qu'en une œuvre d'art on retrouve ainsi transposé, à l'échelle des personnages, le sujet même de cette œuvre par comparaison avec ce procédé du blason qui consiste, dans le premier, à mettre le second en "abyme"».

Ce qui intéresse André Gide quand il effectue cette comparaison, c'est l'image de l'écu accueillant en son centre la représentation miniaturisée de *lui-même*. L'expression est restée, malgré une remarque ultérieure de Bruce Morrissette (« Un héritage d'André Gide : la *duplication intérieure* », *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 8, n°2) selon laquelle la comparaison gidienne est inexacte : jamais, en héraldique, le blason inclus n'est l'image de l'écu qui le reçoit.

C'est Claude-Edmonde Magny dans *Histoire du roman français depuis 1918* (1950), dans le chapitre intitulé « "La mise en abyme" ou le chiffre de la transcendance » qui établit définitivement l'expression *mise en abyme* dans la critique littéraire. L'expression sera conservée malgré les équivalents proposés par Pierre La fille dans *André Gide romancier* (1954) : *métaphore spéculaire*, *miroir intérieur du récit*, *composition en abyme*, *construction en abyme*. Gérard Genette, en 1972, propose également *structure en abyme*.

ETUDE SEMANTIQUE / Definitions

A. Abîme/*Abyss*

1. (Sens premier). Gouffre, précipice, fossé insondable.

(Métaphoriquement) *abîme entre* (plus fort que *fossé entre*) : Différence importante entre des concepts, des opinions, etc. Opposition irréconciliable.

2. (Héraldique). Milieu, centre, cœur de l'écu pouvant accueillir des figures réduites. Division de l'écu située au centre. La reproduction de l'écu au centre ou à l'abîme de l'écu, d'où est tiré le terme littéraire de *mise en abyme*, est en héraldique une *pièce honorable* appelée *écu en cœur.*

3. (Métaphoriquement). *Infini*, chose d'une telle profondeur qu'elle est incompréhensible et que l'homme y perd son entendement. *L'abîme du temps*. *Abîme de l'enfer.* «Éternité, néant, passé, sombres abîmes» (Lamartine).

4. (En référence au renvoi infini des images entre deux miroirs ou par allusion aux méditations sur la primauté de l'œuf ou de la poule). Régression du présent dans le passé dans une quête infinie de l'origine. Vertige ressenti devant la profondeur de l'infini semblable à un jeu de *miroirs* face à face, devant l'*incommensurable*, l'irrationnel, l'*indicible*, en faisant fréquemment une figuration du destin «insondable» dans la littérature. « Le monde, c'est l'abîme et l'abîme / Est mon trou » (Victor Hugo, *La légende des siècles*). Vertige qui s'empare du lecteur devant la malléabilité du sens, son instabilité résultant du jeu infini des signifiants dans un texte. cf l'article JOUISSANCE.

5. (Religions monothéistes, souvent en référence au *tohu va bohu* du *Livre de la Genèse*). Matrice du monde encore incréé contenant toutes les potentialités existentielles avant toute formulation par le Verbe (le logos). Espace vague qui entoure la terre («vêtement», psaume 104), la séparant du manteau de lumière de Dieu.

(Par extension. Logique). Indétermination. Absence de principe organisateur. Absence d'ordre.

Espace liminal séparant la puissance créatrice, l'esprit divin, le noumène des phénomènes.

Conditions préalables entourant l'émergence des phénomènes indéterminés.

cf les articles ABSENCE, ÉMERGENCE, ESPRIT, LIMINALITÉ, NOUMÈNE.

6. (Post modernité) *abyss of nothingness* : Sensation passagère, mais récurrente du vide dans lequel se dissout le sens (*solving emptiness*), de l'abîme de néant creusé par les mots qui se renvoient les uns aux autres sans atteindre une identité.

B. Mise en abyme

7. (Poétique, d'après André Gide). Procédé consistant à insérer dans un texte un fragment qui le représente. *La mise en abyme est une autoreprésentation diminutive*.

Figuration de l'écrivain par lui-même en train de composer son œuvre ; certains romanciers par exemple ont ainsi présenté dans leur récit un écrivain qui écrit.

Dans le cas du théâtre dans le théâtre, le spectateur peut voir des acteurs jouant des personnages qui jouent eux-mêmes un rôle.
La mise en abyme est une *forme fractale* (dont les plus petits éléments reproduisent la structure de l'ensemble. cf l'article FRACTAL).
8. (Narratologie). Dispositif insérant un récit (*sous-texte*) dans le récit principal ou primaire reproduisant les caractéristiques du récit primaire lui-même, l'illustrant, l'expliquant, le contredisant, le prolongeant comme contrepoint. *La mise en abyme peut servir à mettre en évidence le thème central du roman, de la pièce, etc.*
Selon Mieke Bal, la *fabula principale* et la *fabula enchâssée* se paraphrasent mutuellement grâce à l'élément ou aux éléments qu'elles ont en commun. La fonction du *sous-texte* est d'être un *signe* du texte principal ou primaire. V. les articles FABULA, PARAPHRASE, SOUS-TEXTE.
9. (Théâtre). Pièce dans la pièce. *La mise en abyme la plus célèbre du répertoire dramatique est probablement dans la tragédie de Shakespeare la pièce qu'Hamlet fait jouer devant le roi reproduisant les circonstances de l'assassinat du frère du roi par le roi lui-même.*
10. (Sémiologie. Par extension aux arts). Œuvre insérée dans une œuvre qu'elle représente en miniature. Image dans une peinture représentant le tableau lui-même. Image de l'image dans l'image.
11. Représentation de l'artiste dans son tableau en train de le peindre.
Les tableaux de Van Eyck, de Memling ou de Metsys qui représentent un miroir convexe reflétant la scène en train d'être peinte sont des mises en abyme visuelles.
12. (Stylistique). Manière d'écrire, de composer qui reproduit dans sa syntaxe la structure de la phrase, l'organisation des parties, le propos général du texte. V. l'article FRACTAL.
On pourra trouver, par exemple, un effet de miroir, au moins une homologie entre une abondance de circonlocutions, d'incises, de parenthèses, de prolepses, d'analepses et la sinuosité d'une pensée tortueuse, ou d'une intrigue compliquée.
13. (Déconstruction). Moment de "*prise de conscience*" (anglais : *realization*) de *l'"infini du sens"* quand le procès de déconstruction a supprimé l'"habillage idéologique" du texte , a dénoncé ses "*préconstruits"* et ses "*présupposés*,"mis en évidence les *"apories"* de ses certitudes ("*logocentrisme*,*"* ou *"métaphysique de la présence"* dans la terminologie de Jacques Derrida), a décelé les "*traces* d'*absence*", a dépassé les limites de la *parole*, de la *langue*, du *langage* ; ceux-ci en effet ne renvoient qu'à leur propre découpage de la réalité échappant aux opérations de véridiction.
Jean-Marie Grassin

COMMENTAIRE / Analysis
La mise en abyme désigne la relation de similitude qu'entretient tout élément, tout fragment avec l'œuvre qui l'inclut, principe souvent décrit de façon imagée comme un *effet de miroir*. Cet *emboîtement* s'apparente à une *auto-citation*.
Le concept, qui s'est imposé à grande échelle depuis sa prise en charge par le Nouveau Roman, appartient à la vaste problématique de la *réflexivité* (*autoreprésentation*, *autoréférence*) et est un des outils de base de la *métafiction*, cette écriture littéraire qui intériorise un commentaire sur son écriture mais aussi sur sa lecture (ou sur sa représentation dans le cas du *métathéâtre*).
André Gide illustre son emprunt à l'héraldique par un exemple littéraire principal, la scène des comédiens dans *Hamlet* (II, 3), une scène de théâtre dans le théâtre, et par des exemples picturaux, quand apparaissent dans les tableaux des jeux de miroirs reflétant la scène déjà représentée.
Victor Hugo avait cependant en 1864 décrit cette intuition dans son *William Shakespeare* : « trente-quatre pièces sur trente-six offrent à l'observation (...) une double action qui traverse le drame et le reflète en petit ».
Selon Lucien Dällenbach à qui l'on doit la description la plus précise du procédé (*Le Récit spéculaire*, 1977), la mise en abyme se caractérise par son « objet », son « amplitude » et sa « portée ».
En ce qui concerne d'abord l'objet, deux éléments du texte peuvent être mis en abyme. La *réflexion de l'énoncé* est le retour, le rappel du « résultat d'un acte de production ». La mise en abyme est *fictionnelle* (« dimension référentielle d'histoire racontée ») ou *textuelle* (« aspect littéral d'organisation signifiante »). Au contraire, la *réflexion de l'énonciation* consiste dans « la mise en abyme du contexte ou des acteurs de la production et / ou de la réception ».
Deuxièmement, il existe trois figures essentielles de l'amplitude : la *réduplication simple*, qui consiste en un rapport de similitude élémentaire ; la *réduplication à l'infini*, dans laquelle le fragment inclus

inclut lui-même un fragment ayant cette relation de similitude ; et la *réduplication répétée* ou *spécieuse*, dans laquelle le fragment est censé inclure l'œuvre qui l'inclut.
Quant à la portée, il existe trois sortes de mises en abyme, reflétant trois formes de *discordance* entre l'ordre de l'histoire (*diégèse*) et celui du récit (*narration*) : la mise en abyme *prospective*, qui « réfléchit avant terme l'histoire à venir » ; la mise en abyme *rétrospective*, qui « réfléchit après coup l'histoire accomplie » ; la mise en abyme *rétro-prospective*, qui « réfléchit l'histoire en découvrant les événements antérieurs et postérieurs à son point d'ancrage dans le récit ».
Jean Ricardou décrivait à l'aide de plusieurs exemples la mise en abyme dans *Problèmes du Nouveau Roman* (1967) et *Le Nouveau Roman* (1973). Dans *Problèmes du Nouveau Roman* il posait les bases de ses réflexions ultérieures sur le sujet dans trois paragraphes : « La mise en abyme », « Contestations par la mise en abyme », « Révélations par la mise en abyme ». Mais dans la nouvelle édition de *Le Nouveau Roman* parue en 1990, il précise que les « rectifications minimes » qu'il tenait à apporter sont « principalement, au chapitre trois, à la suite des remarques d'un spécialiste, davantage de précautions dans le diagnostic de "mise en abyme" (...). »
En effet, entre temps, en 1977, est paru l'ouvrage de Lucien Dällenbach, qui comprenait également un panorama historique intitulé *Variations sur un concept+, une *Typologie du récit spéculaire+ et quelques «Perspectives diachroniques» consacrées au Nouveau Roman et au Nouveau Nouveau Roman.
Jean Ricardou ouvre d'un jeu de mots (*abymé* : « mis en abyme » et *abîmé*, au sens de l'anglais *spoiled*) sa propre description, qu'il intitule « le récit abymé ». C'est en effet dans le chapitre de son ouvrage sur *Le Nouveau Roman* consacré au « récit en procès » qu'il place sa description. Pour lui la mise en abyme relève de deux fonctions principales : la *révélation* et *l'antithèse*. La fonction de révélation fonctionne « d'une part de fonction générale (répétition) ; d'autre part selon des traits distincts (condensation, anticipation) ». La fonction antithétique, elle, est cette force qui « *tend à briser l'unité métonymique du récit selon une stratification de récits métaphoriques*. »
Lucien Dällenbach décrit la mise en abyme comme un « *procédé de surcharge sémantique permettant au récit de se prendre pour thème* ». Le résultat est la production d'un *métatexte*.
Mais comment peut-on caractériser une telle relation ? Selon Jean Ricardou, c'est un rapport d'*opposition* qui caractérise la relation entre l'enchâssant et l'enchâssé puisque la *mise en relief* de l'autoreprésentation produit l'affaiblissement du système de représentation : « Là où le sens domine, le texte tend à l'évanescence ; là où le texte domine, le sens tend au problématique. » (*Nouveaux problèmes du roman*, 1978). Jean Ricardou et Lucien Dällenbach perçoivent aussi le procédé en termes de contestation, surtout de la tradition mimétique de l'art. Jean Ricardou analyse la mise en abyme comme « la révolte structurelle d'un fragment du récit contre l'ensemble qui le contient » (*Problèmes du Nouveau Roman*).
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Photography *en abyme*

CRAIG OWENS

Brassaï's portrait of a group of young Parisians at the *Bal des Quatre Saisons* may at first appear, like most photographs, to be a straightforward transcription of an observed reality, as if the image had already existed in the world before it was suspended in the photograph. We might therefore be tempted to raid it for clues to the inner lives of its sitters, or for memories of a long-since vanished Parisian milieu. However, the longer we contemplate the image, the more remote that kind of information becomes. A complex web of internal reduplications deflects attention away from that which, despite the status of photographs as imprints of the real, remains external to the image: the reality it depicts. Psychological and sociological details are thus displaced by the network of internal relationships between subject, mirror, and other, which structures the image.

Two groups of two couples each are the ostensible subjects of the photograph. The first occupy what reads as the "real" space of the image and are doubled by their own mirror images, while the second, except for the fragmentary detail of a bare arm cropped below the elbow, are present *only* in reflection. Doubled and yet, paradoxically, represented but once, the latter appear to have been dispossessed of their corporeal beings. Their reflections, severed from any physical connection with an object, attach themselves to the first group, so that each of the figures seated on the banquette finds a second, virtual double in the mirror reflection of the other. Details of costume, pose, and gesture reinforce this impression: the young man flanked by two women drapes one arm over the shoulder of the woman to his left, a gesture that is reiterated by his mirror counterpart, who wears an identical hat. The blank expression of the woman to his left is repeated by her counterpart; further, both seem to use the same coiffeur. On the right, two other women demonstrate the same oblique gaze, one in apparent flirtation, the other to observe the making of the photograph. (This gaze also reiterates the angle of Brassaï's shot, thus implicating the photographer within the scene, as both witness and flirt.) The sequence of duplications is brought to closure on the right by two men who wear identical tweed caps and echo each other's distraction. (Brassaï cropped the figure on the extreme right out

Brassaï. Group in a Dance Hall. *1932*. © *Brassaï*.

of subsequent prints, thereby eliminating this, the weakest link in the reduplicative chain.)

Because of the absolute symmetry of the two groups, the couples seated on the banquette appear as if poised between parallel mirrors mounted in series, so that the distance—both physical and psychological—that separates them in reality is collapsed. Space thus drained from the image, the effects of doubling may no longer be located within the space of the world, but only within the flatness of the photograph. The double image appears to have been generated by an act of internal du*pli*cation, a literal folding back of the photograph upon itself—the mirror suggests not only reflection, but also a literal crease in the surface of the print. To double by folding, however, also implies the leaving of a deposit or trace on the surface thus manipulated, as in those familiar symmetrical imprints of blotted ink. Thus, the duplication that occurs within this image suggests the specifics of the photographic process itself.

The image includes yet another, more obvious depiction of photography. It suggests the analogical definition of the photograph as a mirror image, that

informs a great deal of the criticism of photography, especially that dating from the nineteenth century.[1] Because the mirror image doubles the subjects—which is exactly what the photograph itself does—it functions here as a reduced, internal image of the photograph. The mirror reflects not only the subjects depicted, but also the entire photograph itself. It tells us in a photograph what a photograph is—*en abyme.*

In the vocabulary of literary criticism, the phrase "*en abyme*" describes any fragment of a text that reproduces in miniature the structure of the text in its entirety. Introduced by Gide in a passage of his *Journal* from 1892, the phrase originally described the reduplicative strategy of his own work—like the "supplement" in Rousseau, it tells us in a text what a text is:

> It pleases me to find, in a work of art, the very subject of the work transposed to the scale of its characters. Nothing illuminates the work better, or establishes its proportions more clearly. Thus, in some paintings by Memling or Quentin Metsys a small, somber convex mirror reflects the interior of the room in which the depicted scene is set. Also, Velasquez' *Las Meninas* (but in a slightly different way).[2]

Not only are Gide's initial examples of this textual device drawn from painting; all of them implicate the optical properties of mirror reflection. In painting, however, mirrors rarely function as analogues for the painting itself and Gide, sensing this—"none of these examples is absolutely accurate"—substituted another analogy drawn from heraldry. The perfect emblem for the procedure was itself already an emblem:

> What would be more accurate, what would state better what I wanted in my *Notebooks,* my *Narcissus* and in *La Tentative,* is a comparison with that procedure in heraldry which consists of placing a second shield within the first—"*en abyme*".[3]

The necessity of coining a new critical term marks the radical break with the past signified by construction *en abyme.* Gide's intention was not to describe a textual device that had a historical existence, but to dissociate his own texts from all previous literary production.[4] Thus, the use of a visual device of ancient standing—that of a miniature blason suspended within another blason, whose

1. Photography, in its earliest manifestations, was frequently referred to as "Daguerre's mirror." Certainly the silvered surfaces and lateral reversals of early Daguerreotypes supported this analogy. As early as 1839, Jules Janin, introducing the invention, urged his reader to "imagine that the mirror has retained the imprint of every object it reflects, then you will have a more complete idea of the Daguerreotype." Quoted from Heinz Buddemeier, *Panorama, Diorama, Photographie,* Munich, Wilhelm Fink, 1970, p. 207. Richard Rudisill's *Mirror Image* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico, 1971) contains, as its title suggests, copious documentation for the photo-mirror analogy.
2. André Gide, *Journal 1889–1939,* "Pléiade," Paris, Gallimard, 1951, p. 41.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Gide did cite *Hamlet, Wilhelm Meister,* and *The Fall of the House of Usher* as texts employing the device, but only to immediately disqualify their candidacy.

external contour and internal divisions it replicates exactly. If, in subsequent commentaries, the heraldic metaphor has fallen into disuse, the phrase which designates it has gained currency, in spite of an unconscious reversion. Perhaps because it suggests the familiar case of mirrors mounted in series to produce an infinite suite of specular effects, the *mise en abyme* and the internal mirror have become synonymous. So that it is defined, at least in its literary manifestations, as any internal mirror reflecting the totality of the work that contains it, either by simple reduplication (a fragment of a work demonstrating a relationship of similitude with the work that includes it), by reduplication to infinity (a fragment demonstrating a relationship of similitude with the work that includes it and which itself includes a fragment demonstrating . . .), or aporistic reduplication (a fragment supposedly including the work which includes it).[5]

One reason for Gide's desire to distinguish the *mise en abyme* from classical examples of reduplication may have been the resistance to the concept which many of those texts demonstrate. Classical reduplication—in paintings as well as written texts—is rarely infinite, but almost always brought to closure, suspended. The classical attitude towards the possibility of infinite reduplication is perhaps best exemplified by Husserl in a passage from his *Ideas* which also relies upon a visual demonstration:

> A name on being mentioned reminds us of the Dresden Gallery and of our last visit there: we wander through the rooms, and stand before a picture of Teniers which represents a picture gallery. When we consider that pictures of the latter would in their turn portray pictures which on their part exhibited readable inscriptions and so forth, we can measure what interweaving of presentations, and what links of connexion between the discernible features in the series of pictures, can really be set up.[6]

The philosopher would, however, reduce this experience to a specific case of representation. For Husserl, every representation is a representation *of:* representations "present themselves as the modification of something, which apart from this modification would be there in its corporeal or represented selfhood."[7] In the case of potentially infinite reduplication, Husserl claims that we can penetrate through the series of levels until we arrive at a final one, at which the seemingly infinite play of reduplications is arrested: "the glance penetrates through the noemata of the series of levels, reaching the object of the last level, and there holding it steady, whilst no longer penetrating through and beyond it."[8] It is this "last level" that classical theories of representation attempt to locate. They ground the representa-

5. For a historical treatment of the *mise en abyme* in literary theory, see Lucien Dallenbach, *Le récit speculaire: essai sur la mise en abyme,* Paris, Seuil, 1977.
6. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas,* trans. W. R. B. Gibson, New York, Collier, 1962, p. 270.
7. *Ibid.,* p. 269.
8. *Ibid.,* p. 271.

tion in its object; multiple reduplications are simply a smoke screen which may blur the outlines of the object, but can never obliterate it entirely.

Gide, however, described a textual phenomenon that is closer to the infinite play of substitution of the Derridean *mise en abyme*, as it informs the philosophy of *differance*, supplementarity. . . . In an early text (*Speech and Phenomena*), Derrida cited Husserl's Dresden Gallery passage, commenting:

> Certainly nothing has preceded this situation. Assuredly nothing will suspend it. It is not comprehended, as Husserl would want it, by intuitions or presentations. Of the broad daylight of presence, outside the gallery, no perception is given us or assuredly promised us. The gallery is the labyrinth which includes in itself its own exits: we have never come upon it as upon a particular case of experience—that which Husserl believes he is describing.[9]

For Derrida, the *mise en abyme* describes a fundamental operation of the text—it is synonymous with textuality. It can therefore have no existence outside of texts. Since it cannot be ascribed as a property to objects, it cannot be grounded in them. The Derridean abyss—"when one can read a book within a book, an origin within the origin, a center within the center"[10] and, we might add, a photograph within a photograph—underlies the techniques of deconstructive reading, which describes, among other things, the way in which representation is staged within the text.

> An entire theory of the structural necessity of the abyss will be gradually constituted in our reading: the indefinite process of supplementarity has always already infiltrated presence, always already inscribed there the space of repetition and the splitting of the self. Representation in the abyss of presence is not an accident of presence; the desire of presence is, on the contrary, born from the abyss (the indefinite multiplication) of representation, from the representation of representation, etc.[11]

The effects of the abyss—the indefinite play of substitution, repetition, the splitting of the self—are evident in Brassaï's photograph. The mirror accomplishes both the identification with the Other and the specular dispossession which simultaneously institutes and deconstitutes the subject as such. What is more, the implicit analogy between mirror and photograph ascribes these functions to photography as well. (The splitting of the subject by its photographic doubling was also depicted by Lartigue in a photograph, contemporary with Brassaï's, of the *demi-mondaine* Renée Perle in the intimacy of her dressing room.

9. Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David B. Allison, Evanston, Northwestern, 1973, p. 104.
10. Quoted in Dallenbach, *Le récit speculaire*, p. 216.
11. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1976, p. 163.

In this image, the subject turns her back upon the camera and inclines narcissistically towards her mirror image. Beside her on the dressing table is a fashion photograph for which she once posed. That photograph within the photograph functions as a second mirror which reflects, in turn, Renée herself, her mirror image, and Lartigue's photograph of her. The caption that accompanies this photograph in *Diary of a Century*, "Renée Perle contemplating the face of the most beautiful woman in the world," underscores the subject's narcissism. Through the use of a transitive verb to describe a reflexive action, it also literally describes the structure of the photograph.)

The abyss resonates throughout Brassaï's oeuvre. In his photograph of a gala soirée at Maxim's, in which an ornate Art Nouveau mirror frames exactly the same scene as Brassaï's viewfinder and is reiterated by a second mirror in the depths of reflected space, we encounter infinite reduplication. In another image, a wedge is driven through the intimacy of a lovers' embrace by two mirrors that abut one another at right angles—the two are alienated by their reflections, consigned to two separate, self-enclosed realms. Still another image, depicting the aftermath of a quarrel, shows exactly the same location as the *Group in a Dance Hall* and reiterates the three species of doubling—by the photograph, the mirror, and the other—which structure that photograph. Here, a man is doubled by his own reflection in the mirror, while his female companion is doubled by another woman's reflection which floats nebulously in the mirror above her. A small square glass cleat that marks the intersection of mirror panels obliterates one of the reflected woman's eyes, suggesting a possible psychological reading (mutilation, male fantasy, etc.). However, it is the internal structure of the image—the network of relationships that constitutes it as double—that makes any such interpretation possible. Meaning, therefore, does not reside in details of expression or gesture that are simply registered by the photograph. Rather, it is a property of the photograph itself.

Brassaï's fascination with mirrors has been explained as a derivative from painting, from Cubism in particular; and biographical data—his friendship with Picasso, his early aspirations to a painting career, and his obvious absorption of the Parisian milieu into which he was transplanted—has been mustered in support of this claim.[12] However, no appeal to painting is sufficient to unravel the photographer's predeliction for reflective surfaces and complex mirror duplication. Not only does an appeal to Cubism reduce the mirror effects to a multiplication of perspectives and thus deny these images their specifically photographic character, it also ignores the frequent recurrence of the mirror in photographs throughout the history of the medium. Its first appearance as a self-conscious device coincides with that moment at which photography began to depict its own possibilities and conditions in its images.

The work of the Victorian photographer, Lady Clementina Hawarden,

12. See Colin J. Westerbeck, Jr., "Night Life: Brassaï and Weegee," *Artforum*, XV (December, 1976), 34-45.

Brassaï. Lovers' Quarrel. *c. 1932.* © *Brassaï.*

represents one of the earliest such attempts. (Most of Hawarden's work may be dated to the late 1850s, and the first half of the '60s.) Her obsession was the double portrait; as frequently as not, however, these images are constituted by a single subject doubled in reflection, as in a photograph that has been posthumously captioned "At the window." Here the subject seems to be suspended between two possible objects of contemplation—the view out the window and her own image in a mirror. She seems to incline towards the latter; the reticence of the image reinforces this impression. Thus, what is depicted is the process of becoming self-reflexive. The tension in the image between the different spectacles offered by the

Lady Clementina Hawarden. At the Window. *c. 1864.*

window and the mirror restates a structural tension within the medium—between photography as extrovert, a view onto the material world, and the photograph as a self-enclosed image of its own process. The inclinations of the subject depicted in this image are those of the photograph itself.

The mirror functions not only to reflect the subject; it also quite consciously pictures that metaphor which defines photography as a mirror image. The mirror reads as an image *en abyme.* The cropping of the print to echo the profile of the mirror firmly establishes this intention. This visual identification of mirror and photograph establishes a complex play between subject, mirror, and camera: not

only is the subject doubled twice (by mirror and camera), but the mirror image, itself a double, is redoubled by the photograph itself.

If we speak of this image, and of others like it, as reduplicative, it is because *reduplication* signifies "to reproduce in reflection" and thus describes that kind of mechanical reproduction by analogy we impute to both mirror and photograph. Ordinary usage, however, does not register differences of degree between *duplication* and *reduplication.* The latter might be expected to be contingent upon a previous act of duplication, and thus to result in what is actually a tri- or quadruplication of an original object or quantity (the ambiguity results from the possibility of taking either the original or its double as the object of the second doubling). However, the excess implicit in the concept of reduplication has been sublimated. *Duplicate* and *reduplicate* have been reduced to synonymy; both refer to a single signified: "to double." The reduction to doubling fails not only to account for the "pli" or fold implicit in both; it also strips the prefix in *reduplication* of its signifying function. Its relationship with its stem is now that of a mirror to its object—a doubling without any corresponding semantic increment. So that *reduplication* harbors within its semantic folds the concepts of tautology, of redundancy.

However, in those disciplines which take language as their object—philology, rhetoric, and structural linguistics—*reduplication* is a technical term that describes a specific phenomenon. In classical rhetoric, *reduplication* was a species of *repetition,* distinguished by the reiteration of a word or phrase within the same part of a sentence or clause. Its function, like all forms of rhetorical repetition, was emphatic. *Reduplication* has at times been identified with the etymologically parallel figure *anadiplosis* (*ana,* again + *diploun,* to double) in which the final word of a phrase is repeated at the beginning of the next. *Anadiplosis* thus establishes a mirror relationship between two segments of a text, the classic example being Voltaire's

> *Il aperçoit de loin le jeune Téligny,*
> *Téligny, dont l'amour a mérité sa fille.*

in which the second line stands as a mirror reversal of the first. That such a figure should have been designated as a *re*doubling suggests the classical view of language as a mirror of the real; hence the repetition of a word or phrase doubles that which is itself already double.

Classical philology describes a similar phenomenon, occurring not at the level of the sentence, but at that of the word. Linguistic, as opposed to rhetorical, reduplication (the term is again a technical one) involves the repetition of identical or quasi-identical syllables, commonly at the beginning of a word; the English *murmur* and the French *bonbon* are two examples. Such reduplications have been explained as motivated signs, originally expressing repeated or intensive action or, in some languages, plurality. In the analysis of structural linguistics, however, reduplication does not demonstrate motivation (a relationship of

analogy between a sign and its referent); on the contrary, it indicates, if not arbitrariness, at least the conventional nature of an utterance.

Roman Jakobson, discussing the frequent occurrence of reduplication in infantile language, suggests that it may well be the sign of the subject's entry into a symbolic order:

> At the transition from babbling to verbal behaviour, the reduplication may even serve as a compulsory process, signalling that the uttered sounds do not represent a babble, but a senseful semantic entity. The patently linguistic essence of such a duplication is quite explicable. In contradistinction to the "wild sounds" of babbling exercizes, the phonemes are to be recognized, distinguishable, identifiable; and in accordance with these requirements, they must be deliberately repeatable. The repetitiveness finds its most concise and succinct expression in, e.g., *papa*. The successive presentations of the same consonantal phonemes repeatedly supported by the same vowel, improve their legibility and contribute to the correctness of message reception.[13]

If repeatability is a necessary condition of those units out of which language constructs sense, then reduplication is, at its most fundamental level, the very sign of that repeatability. It signifies that an utterance is not simply a "wild sound," but that it is emitted according to a code, and thus conveys an intention to signify. Although repetition does not guarantee semiosis, it does suggest its presence and thus becomes, for Lévi-Strauss at least, the "signifier of signification":

> Even at the babbling stage the phoneme group /pa/ can be heard. But the difference between /pa/ and /papa/ does not reside simply in reduplication: /pa/ is a noise, /papa/ is a word. The reduplication indicates intent on the part of the speaker; it endows the second syllable with a function different from that which would have been performed by the first separately, or in the form of a potentially limitless series of identical sounds /papapapapa/ produced by mere babbling. Therefore the second /pa/ is not a repetition of the first, nor has it the same signification. It is a sign that, like itself, the first /pa/ too was a sign, and that as a pair they fall into the category of signifiers, not of things signified.[14]

Reduplication first occurs at the transition from babbling to linguistic performance, at the moment of the infant's entry into the symbolic order, which is contemporaneous with the mirror stage. Thus the dispossession of the subject by the mirror is also a law of language, and linguistic reduplication might also be a sign of the capture of the subject by an image.

13. Roman Jakobson, "Why Mama and Papa?" *Selected Writings, I,* The Hague, Mouton, 1962, p. 542.

14. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked,* trans. J. and D. Weightman, New York, Harper & Row, 1970, pp. 339–40.

In the concluding paragraphs of *The Raw and the Cooked,* Lévi-Strauss extended Jakobson's observation to onomatopoeic words; in this instance, reduplication functions to distinguish purely imitative sounds from signs. If the arbitrary character of most words is sufficient to indicate their status as signs, "onomatopoeic terms, on the other hand, are always ambiguous in nature because, being founded on a resemblance, they do not clearly indicate whether the speaker, in pronouncing them, is trying to reproduce a noise or to express a meaning."[15] Reduplication, then, functions to indicate that such utterances are indeed signs, and not gratuitous or merely imitative noises. Linguistic reduplication, the anthropologist concludes, may be used as an explanatory model for the structure of myths. Just as language chooses its phonemes from a practically unlimited range of natural sounds, so too myths draw upon the whole realm of natural phenomena for their subject matter. These phenomena are not the object of myths, rather, they are their instruments of signification. The multiple isomorphisms that constitute myths function like linguistic reduplication: "the distinctive character of myths . . . is precisely emphasis, resulting from the multiplication of one level by another or several others, and which, as in language, functions to signify signification."[16]

While the linguistic character of myths has been amply demonstrated by structural anthropology, it may legitimately be asked what relevance linguistic reduplication might possibly have to photographs, if the photograph is, following Roland Barthes's "common sense" definition, a message without a code, that is, nonlinguistic. However, the terms in which Lévi-Strauss discusses the phenomenon of linguistic reduplication suggest that it may indeed function as an explanatory model for photographic reduplication as well. Both Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss distinguish the sound emitted randomly or in imitation of another sound from that emitted as language, that is, according to a code. Photography, then, at least as Barthes distinguishes it from other semiotic systems, would seem to correspond to the purely imitated sound:

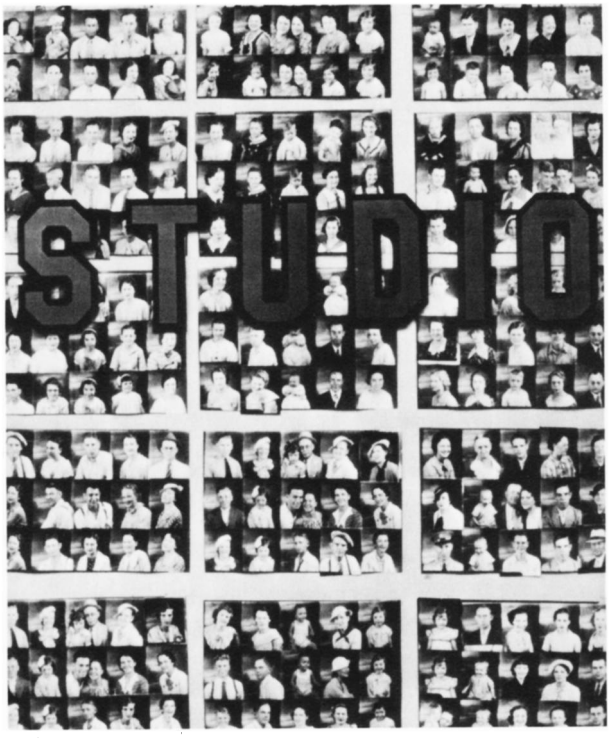
> What is the content of the photographic message? What does the photograph transmit? By definition, the scene itself, the literal reality. . . . In order to move from the reality to the photograph it is in no way necessary to divide up this reality into units and to constitute these units as signs, substantially different from the object they communicate; there is no necessity to set up a relay, that is to say a code, between the object and its image. Certainly the image is not the reality but at least its perfect *analagon* and it is exactly this analogical perfection which, to common sense, defines the photograph.[17]

15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.* I have substituted my own translation from the French original.
17. Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," *Image, Music, Text,* trans. Stephen Heath, New York, Hill and Wang, 1977, pp. 16–7.

Walker Evans. Cary Ross's Bedroom, *New York. 1932.*

What then might reduplication signify within such an image? Does it not, as in language and myth, signify the existence of an underlying intention to signify *through the image,* and thus to the possibility of a photographic language? Might it not indicate, like the reduplicated syllable in the vocable /papa/, that the photograph itself was already a sign? Might it not also contest any reading of photographs according to their subject matter or captions, the reality presented by the photograph being no longer the object of the image, but an instrument of signification? Does it not indeed suggest that we may be able to speak of a *genuine* rhetoric of the image?

The argument that the properties of the photographic image are derived not from the characteristics of the medium itself but from the structure of the real, registered mechanically on a light-sensitive surface, may describe the technical procedures of photography. But it does not account for the photograph's capacity to internally generate and organize meaning. However, it does seem to describe accurately the strategy according to which some photographs procure their authoritative status, those photographs in which a carefully calculated *mise en scène* mutely insists that the image is wholly dependent upon, since derived from, the external. Thus, the radical symmetry of Walker Evans's photograph of Carey Ross's bedroom (made in the same year as Brassaï's *Group in a Dance Hall*).



Walker Evans. Penny Picture Display, Savannah, Georgia. *1936.*

Everything about the image is symmetrical—twin beds, a pair of identically framed impressions of the same Picasso print—everything, that is, except the photograph itself. The oblique angle of Evans's shot works to exteriorize those symmetries, to present them as properties of the real rather than the image. Had these paired objects been photographed head-on, the image would have appeared artificial, staged. Seen obliquely, however, they impute to the material world the capacity to independently create its own symmetries, to mirror itself.

Still, what we recognize in this photograph, despite its claim to transparency, is an image of the photographic process. If the camera angle works to exteriorize symmetry, it also encourages the illusion of a room divided by a mirror, and thus of a single bed and a graphic each doubled in reflection. That mirror is located by a virtual fold in the surface of the photograph along which reality is reduplicated according to the properties of the image. The paired graphics, in addition to contributing to the illusion of a mirror, suggest the duplicability of the photographic print, the theoretically unlimited number of copies that may be engendered by a single negative. Photographs are but one link in a potentially endless chain of reduplication; themselves duplicates (of both their objects and, in a sense, their negatives), they are also subject to further duplication, either through the procedures of printing or as objects of still other photographs, such as

Evans's *Penny Picture Display, Savannah,* 1936. While the illusion of a mirror may be inhibited by the night table and lamp—the only supposedly single objects in the image—these, however, are also doubled by the shadows they cast on the wall. The cast shadows are an additional analogue for photography. Thus, if Evans's photograph depicts a reality outside of the photograph, that reality is nonetheless wholly conditioned by the properties of the image. This scene must have appeared as a photograph even before Evans exposed it.

An experience of the real as if it were a photograph is described by Robert Smithson in his text, "The Monuments of Passaic," in which the artist narrates the events of a day-long photographic excursion to the New Jersey suburbs. Of photographing an ordinary wood-and-steel bridge, Smithson remarks:

> Noonday sunshine cinema-ized the site, turning the bridge and the river into an over-exposed *picture.* Photographing it with my Instamatic 400 was like photographing a photograph. The sun became a monstrous light-bulb that projected a detached series of "stills" through my Instamatic into my eye. When I walked on the bridge, it was as though I was walking on an enormous photograph that was made of wood and steel, and underneath the river existed as an enormous movie film that showed nothing but a continuous blank.[18]

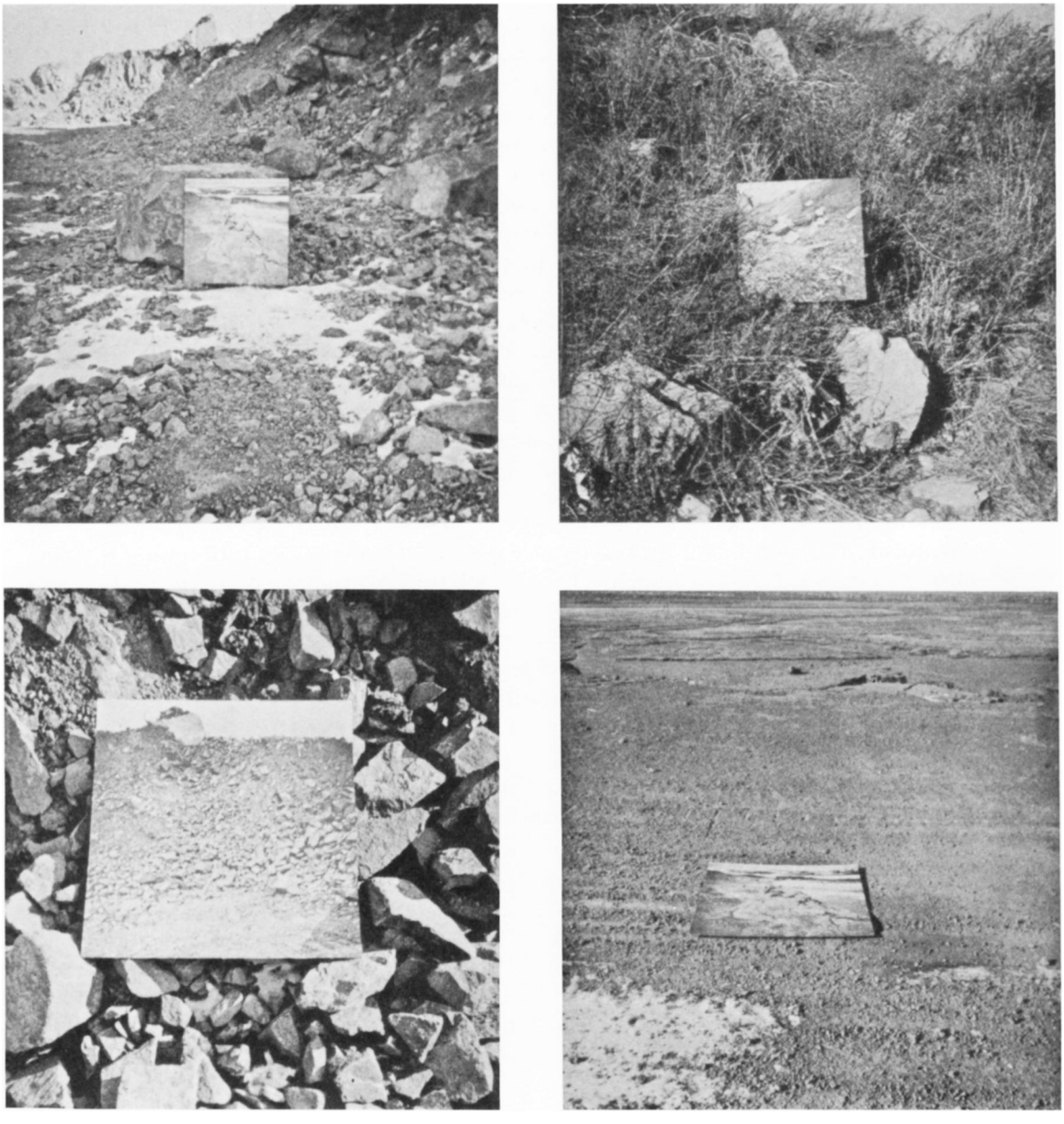
This narrative inverts the terms of a familiar argument about the photograph: that the vicariousness of the image is frequently overlooked, so that the photograph is mistaken for the reality for which it is nevertheless only a substitute. Smithson, standing that argument on its head, calls its bluff. If reality itself appears to be already constituted as image, then the hierarchy of object and representation—the first being the source of the authority and prestige of the second—is collapsed. The representation can no longer be grounded, as Husserl wanted, in presence. For Smithson, the real assumes the contingency traditionally ascribed to the copy; the landscape appeared to him, not as Nature, but as a "particular kind of heliotypy."[19] The result is an overwhelming experience of absence: the abyss.

To some extent, Smithson recapitulates that passage in Fox Talbot's *Pencil of Nature* in which the pioneer photographer recounts his realization that, in Hollis Frampton's paraphrase, "the 'image' he had sought to make is already there."[20] The invention of photography was thus simply a discovery of a physical or chemical means for fixing the discontinuous images of herself that Nature freely offered up. But Fox Talbot was looking into a camera lucida. Smithson confronts not an image, but an object *as if it were an image.* What does it mean, then, to take a photograph of a photograph?

This question is also raised in a series of photographs Smithson made in 1969, and which seem to derive, at least in part, from the experience described in

18. Robert Smithson, "The Monuments of Passaic," *Artforum,* VI (December, 1967), 49.
19. *Ibid.,* 50.
20. Hollis Frampton, "Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity," *Artforum,* XIII (October, 1974), 41.

Robert Smithson. Untitled *(first stop of* Six Stops on a Section, *Bergen Hill, New Jersey). 1969.*



"The Monuments of Passaic." Within the space of these double images, a site and its own photographic likeness are juxtaposed. This *mise en abyme* endows these photographs with an apparatus for self-interpretation; their structure, defined by the juxtaposition of two images of the same motif, gives rise to commentary on the conditions of the photograph itself. Through them, Smithson deflates the myth that photographs are a means of gaining mastery and control over objects, of rendering them more accessible to consciousness. The internal photograph reduces the landscape and distances it from us. Moreover, what is true of the internal image holds for the photograph as a whole. In a photograph, Smithson casts a shadow over the presumed transparency of photographs; he raises serious doubts about their capacity to *convey* anything but a sense of loss, of absence.

What redeems the photograph, however, is its ability to generate and organize meaning *independently of its object.* Smithson frequently published and exhibited photographs of his projects; but after an experience of his double photographs, can we seriously regard *any* Smithson photograph simply as documentation? It is impossible to experience these double images as such. We are wrong to presume that the "work" in this case consists of an action performed (the placing of the photograph in the landscape) and that the photograph is transparent to that action, which it preserves in the tense peculiar to photography, the "having-been-there."[21] However, these photographs are distinguished from documents by the relationship of the internal photograph to the photograph that contains it. Not only does this relationship exist at present only in the photograph, it has *never* existed elsewhere. So that the action Smithson performed was simply an instrument, and not the object, of signification. The photograph *is* the work.

In 1969, Smithson executed a series of "mirror displacements" in the Yucatan peninsula; nine color photographs "document" that project. Although location and materials have changed—Smithson substituted mirrors for the photograph—these images reiterate the photo displacements produced that same year in a New Jersey quarry: a motif and its reflection are juxtaposed within a photograph. Of these displacements, Smithson wrote:

> If you visit the sites (a doubtful probability) you find nothing but memory-traces, for the mirror displacements were dismantled right after they were photographed. The mirrors are somewhere in New York. The reflected light has been erased. Remembrances are but numbers on a map, vacant memories constellating the intangible terrains in deleted vicinities. It is the dimension of absence that remains to be found. The expunged color that remains to be seen. The fictive voices of the totems have exhausted their arguments. Yucatan is elsewhere.[22]

21. Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," *Image, Music, Text,* p. 44.
22. Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," *Artforum,* VIII (September, 1969), 33.

Sébastien FEVRY, *La mise en abyme filmique. Essai de typologie*, Liège, CEFAL, 2000, p.29 et p.32

c. Une définition opérationnelle de la mise en abyme filmique

Après ce tour d'horizon, nous sommes en mesure de proposer quatre critères qui, selon nous, déterminent l'émergence d'une mise en abyme filmique.

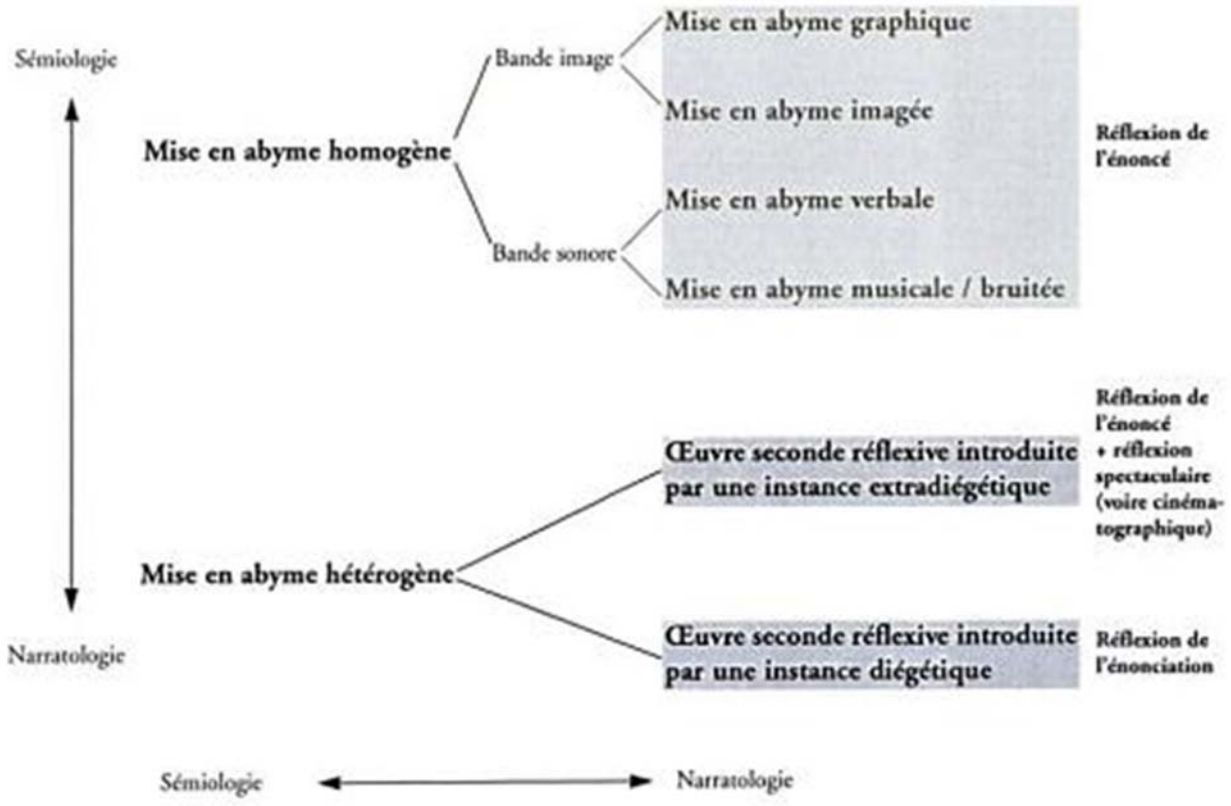
1) La mise en abyme se différencie des autres phénomènes réflexifs par son caractère *homofilmique*. Elle réfléchit le film même.

2) Comme le souligne André Gide, la mise en abyme réfléchit le sujet même de l'œuvre. La réflexion qu'elle exerce porte donc sur l'ensemble du film. La mise en abyme se différencie ainsi des métaphores dont le pouvoir réflexif s'exerce de manière beaucoup plus ponctuelle.

3) La mise en abyme ne se présente pas nécessairement sous la forme d'un récit enchâssé. Nous pensons, avec Jean Ricardou, que celle-ci peut se couler dans différentes configurations et tirer ainsi parti du médium (en l'occurrence le cinéma) dans lequel elle se déploie.

4) La mise en abyme réfléchit avant tout l'énoncé du film. Les autres mises en abyme élémentaires (mises en abyme énonciative et textuelle) que dégage Dällenbach nous semblent secondaires puisqu'elles ne peuvent entrer dans la composition d'un grand type de mise en abyme (réduplications simple, à l'infini, aporistique) qu'en se greffant sur une mise en abyme de l'énoncé.

Typologie



Mise en abyme et réflexivité dans le cinéma contemporain :

Pour une distinction de termes trop souvent confondus

Jean-Marc Limoges
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> « *À réfléchir sur la réflexivité, on prend d'emblée conscience de l'étendue du champ de réflexion*. »
> J. Gerstenkorn, « À travers le miroir », in *Vertigo. Le cinéma au miroir*, p. 10.

Quand nous avons appris la tenue du colloque *De l'autre côté du miroir*, nous avons pensé qu'il n'y avait pas meilleur endroit pour présenter l'état de nos recherches sur la mise en abyme et la réflexivité – bref, sur les *jeux de miroirs* – à l'œuvre dans le cinéma contemporain. En fait, nous voulions nous essayer à une distinction de ces deux concepts trop souvent confondus. Par exemple, dans *L'énonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film*, Christian Metz notait que « *réflexivité et mise en abyme sont considérées, sinon comme synonymes, du moins comme largement coextensives* »[1]. Puis, dans le *Dictionnaire des genres et des notions littéraires*, Lucien Dällenbach écrivait, à l'entrée « *Mise en abyme* » : « [L]*e terme de "mise en abyme" est volontiers utilisé aujourd'hui pour désigner indifféremment toute modalité autoréflexive d'un texte* […] »[2]. Enfin, tout récemment, dans son *Vocabulaire du cinéma*, Marie-Thérèse Journot admettait sans détour, à l'entrée « *Film dans le film* » : « *Les pratiques consistant à insérer un film à l'intérieur d'un autre film sont infinies, et leurs appellations sont souvent assez floues, même si des classifications ont été proposées. On parle de réflexivité* [ou] *de mise en abyme, sans toujours distinguer les procédés* […] »[3].

Cette tâche demandait d'ailleurs à être accomplie. Dans ses « *notes introductives* » au premier numéro de la revue *Vertigo* – lesquelles étaient incidemment titrées « *À travers le*

miroir » – Jacques Gerstenkorn écrivait explicitement : « *Le champ de la réflexivité paraît de prime abord si foisonnant que l'on doute de pouvoir baliser le paysage* »[4]. C'est à ce travail de « *balisage* » que nous avons cru bon de concentrer nos efforts. Nous voudrions, à l'aide des typologies proposées, d'une part par Jacques Gerstenkorn, d'autre part par Lucien Dällenbach, faire état de ce qui rapproche et différencie la « *mise en abyme* » et la « *réflexivité* », notamment dans le cinéma contemporain.

* * *

Grâce à sa typologie – d'une rare acuité et d'une singulière concision –, Jacques Gerstenkorn nous permet d'avancer plus sûrement dans les méandres que nous promet une telle exploration. À la question « *Qu'est-ce donc que la réflexivité?* »[5], il répondait d'entrée de jeu qu'elle était « *un phénomène protéiforme dont le plus petit dénominateur commun consist*[ait] *en un retour du cinéma sur lui-même* »[6]. Puis, il s'intéressait à établir une différence entre, d'une part, la « **réflexivité cinématographique** » qui tantôt « *affich*[e] *le dispositif* »[7], tantôt le « *ren*[d] *sensible* »[8] et, d'autre part, la « **réflexivité filmique** », qui consiste ou bien en des « *jeux de* miroir *qu'un film est susceptible d'entretenir* […] *avec* les autres films »[9] ou bien en des « *jeux de* miroir *qu'un film est susceptible d'entretenir* […] *avec* lui-même »[10] ; il parlera alors, dans le premier cas, de « **réflexivité hétérofilmique** » et, dans le second, de « **réflexivité homofilmique** ». Ce qui nous donne le tableau suivant (dont les exemples sont de l'auteur), grâce auquel il serait d'ores et déjà possible de mieux situer la mise en abyme par rapport à ce phénomène plus vaste qu'est la réflexivité :

TABLEAU I

RÉFLEXIVITÉ « *phénomène protéiforme dont le plus petit dénominateur commun consiste en un retour du cinéma sur lui-même* »			
RÉFLEXIVITÉ CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUE		**RÉFLEXIVITÉ FILMIQUE**	
« *Rendre sensible* » le dispositif	« *Afficher* » le dispositif	Réflexivité hétérofilmique	Réflexivité homofilmique
°Regard ou adresse à la caméra °Violent travelling °Musique appuyée °Retour en arrière °Montage court	°Film sur les conditions de production °Film sur la genèse d'une œuvre °Film sur un tournage °Film sur un acteur °Film sur la relation film-spectateur	°Remake °Citation °Hommage °Pastiche	°**Mise en abyme**

Cette typologie, par son étonnante rigueur et sa remarquable simplicité, nous offre des bases solides nous permettant de rendre compte des divers procédés réflexifs, mais des bases auxquelles nous devons apporter quelques réaménagements. D'abord, nous croyons important d'insister sur la bipartition « *rendre sensible* » / « *afficher* », mais nous croyons plus important d'insister sur une autre bipartition – « *énonciation* du *film* » / « *énonciation* dans *le film* » –, bipartition suivant laquelle on pourrait séparer les films qui mettent de l'avant « *un* » dispositif énonciatif de ceux qui mettent de l'avant « *le* » dispositif énonciatif même. Nous proposons de nommer « **autoréflexivité** » les cas plus précis d'énonciation « *du* » film et « **réflexivité** » les cas plus communs d'énonciation « *dans* » le film; les premiers ne mettraient de l'avant que le dispositif de *production* tandis que les seconds mettraient de l'avant, à la fois, un dispositif de production et de réception. Christian Metz – qui émettait des réserves quant à l'emploi un peu « *redondant* » du préfixe « *auto* » dans la thèse de Kiyoshi Takeda l'*Archéologie du discours sur l'autoréflexivité au cinéma* (qu'il avait dirigée)[11] – notait par ailleurs que le dispositif « *montré* » pouvait tout aussi bien être *le* dispositif lui-même, si la caméra se filme par le « *relais d'une glace* » comme dans *Tango, no me dejes nunca* (C. Saura, 1998, fig. 1), qu'*un* dispositif, si la caméra « *qui nous est montrée n'est* […] *pas* […] *celle qui a tourné le film qui nous la montre* »

comme dans *Le Mépris* (J.-L. Godard, 1963, fig. 2)[12]. Et s'il en est ainsi du dispositif « *montré* », il pourra en être de même pour le dispositif « *rendu sensible* ». Mais offrons pour l'instant le tableau tel que nous l'avons revu et corrigé (en le complétant de nos exemples) :

TABLEAU II

RÉFLEXIVITÉ			
RÉFLEXIVITÉ CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUE		RÉFLEXIVITÉ FILMIQUE	
AUTORÉFLEXIVITÉ Affiche ou rend sensible « le » dispositif même	**RÉFLEXIVITÉ** Affiche ou rend sensible « un » dispositif	**RÉFLEXIVITÉ HÉTÉROFILMIQUE**	**RÉFLEXIVITÉ HOMOFILMIQUE**
°Montrer ou rendre sensible la caméra même °Montrer ou rendre sensible le micro même °Montrer ou rendre sensible l'envers du décor même °Adresse ou regard à la caméra même °Apparition d'un acteur en lui-même °Film sur le tournage du film même	°Montrer ou rendre sensible une caméra °Montrer ou rendre sensible un micro °Montrer un envers de décor °Adresse ou regard à une caméra diégétique °Apparition d'un personnage jouant un acteur °Film sur le tournage d'un film	° Clin d'œil ° Citation ° Allusion ° Parodie ° Pastiche ° Remake ° Hommage	°Mise en abyme

Fig. 1 **Fig. 2**

Au terme de ce premier survol, on remarque que la réflexivité peut revêtir (au moins) **trois sens**. D'abord, un **sens large**, qui serait celui chapeautant la typologie et qui nommerait aussi bien les regards à la caméra, les envers de décors révélés et les apparitions d'acteurs que les renvois, les citations et les allusions de toutes sortes, de même que les mises en abyme proprement dites. Ensuite, un **sens étroit**, qui serait celui nommant uniquement les cas de

réflexivités cinématographiques (regards à la caméra, envers de décors, apparitions d'acteurs), cas que nous avons pour notre part opposés à l'*autoréflexivité* (regards à la caméra *même*, envers du décor *même*, apparitions d'acteurs *mêmes*). Enfin, un **sens particulier** – intrinsèque à la définition de la mise en abyme – que l'on retrouve à la fois dans la définition qu'en donne Gerstenkorn – « *jeux de* miroir *qu'un film entretient avec lui-même* »[13] – et, bien sûr, dans celle sur laquelle Lucien Dällenbach (que nous allons maintenant retrouver) échafaudera sa typologie dans l'incontournable *Récit spéculaire* : « *tout* miroir *interne réfléchissant l'ensemble du récit* »[14].

Dès lors, la mise en abyme sera toujours réflexive au « *sens large* » – elle ne sera toujours qu'un phénomène réflexif parmi d'autres, qu'une des nombreuses façons grâce auxquelles le film peut effectuer ce « *retour sur lui-même* » – et toujours réflexive au « *sens particulier* » – la réflexivité est, comme nous le verrons maintenant plus en détail, un élément intrinsèque de sa définition; une œuvre dans l'œuvre *réfléchira* toujours un aspect de l'œuvre même – mais elle ne sera pas toujours réflexive au « *sens étroit* ». En effet, il se peut qu'une mise en abyme ne montre ou ne rende sensible aucun dispositif énonciatif[15]. En revanche, une mise en abyme pourra être réflexive au « *sens étroit* », quand elle montrera ou rendra sensible un dispositif énonciatif, voire plus précisément *auto*réflexive, quand elle montrera ou rendra sensible *le dispositif énonciatif même*. Enfin, une configuration homofilmique – une mise en abyme – pourra aussi toujours se doubler d'une configuration hétérofilmique (quand le film mis « *en abyme* », par exemple, renverra à un autre film existant). On entrevoit alors les superpositions – et les confusions – de sens possibles.

* * *

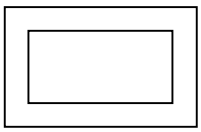
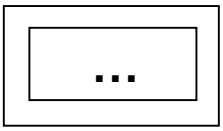
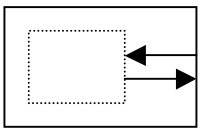
L'expression « *mise en abyme* » – popularisée par Lucien Dällenbach – a été empruntée à André Gide qui lui-même l'empruntait à l'art héraldique. Gide parlait ainsi, dans son *Journal*,

des « *petit*[s] miroir[s] » que l'on retrouvait dans certains tableaux, certaines pièces ou certains romans et qui réfléchissaient « *à l'échelle des personnages, le sujet même de* [l']*œuvre* »[16]. Il comparait alors ce procédé avec le « *procédé du blason qui consiste, dans le premier, à en mettre un second* "*en abyme*" » [17], c'est-à-dire « *en son centre* »[18]; l'« *abyme* », rappelait-il, c'est « *le cœur de l'écu* »[19]. C'est à la lumière de telles informations que Dällenbach pose alors une première définition : « *est mise en abyme toute enclave entretenant une relation de similitude avec l'œuvre qui la contient* »[20].

Parcourant les ouvrages ayant porté sur la question, Dällenbach, remarquant que plusieurs « *auteurs confondaient sous un terme unique des réalités distinctes* »[21], soutient que la mise en abyme pourra les incarner toutes les trois « *sans jamais cesser de rester une* »[22]. Il proposera ainsi de parler de trois « *types* » : la mise en abyme sera « ***simple*** » quand le « *fragment* [emboîté] *entretien*[dra] *avec l'œuvre qui l'inclut un rapport de similitude* »[23], « ***infinie*** »[24] quand le « *fragment* [emboîté] *entretien*[dra] *avec l'œuvre qui l'inclut un rapport de similitude et* […] *enchâsse*[ra] *lui-même un fragment qui…, et ainsi de suite* »[25] et « *aporistique* » (ou plutôt « ***aporétique*** »)[26] quand le « *fragment* [emboîté sera] *censé inclure l'œuvre qui l'inclut* »[27].

Au terme de ce survol, Dällenbach reformulera sa définition (définition que nous reformulons à notre tour pour des besoins de clarté tout en respectant sa pensée) : « *est mise en abyme tout miroir interne* [ou toute œuvre emboîtée] *réfléchissant* [un aspect] *du récit* [ou de l'œuvre emboîtante] *par réduplication simple,* [infinie] *ou* [aporétique] »[28]. C'est la typologie suivante (dont les icônes sont de nous)[29] qu'il nous faut maintenant exemplifier à l'aide des configurations que nous a offertes le cinéma contemporain tout en insistant sur les différents sens que le terme « *réflexivité* » y revêtira[30].

TABLEAU III

SIMPLE	INFINIE	APORÉTIQUE
		

Au cinéma, les exemples de mise en abyme simple ne manquent pas. Christian Metz, dans *L'énonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film*, parlait quant à lui de film (ou plus généralement d'œuvre) « *localisé* », d'« *emboîtement délimité* », de « *relation bien balisée* », « *d'enclave franche* » ou même de « *degré "simple"* » entretenant (ou non) une « *complicité thématique avec le film d'accueil* »[31]. Il offrait un exemple très clair de ce type de mise en abyme, qui recoupait d'ailleurs la définition qu'en avait donnée Dällenbach, c'est-à-dire d'œuvre emboîtée « *résumant* » l'histoire du film lui-même :

> Dans *Un jour à New York* [*On The Town* (S. Donen & G. Kelly, 1949)], une brève comédie musicale de théâtre (mais filmée, forcément), enclavée au milieu du vrai film, jouée par les mêmes acteurs mais sur fond de décors rougeoyants et abstraits, vient *résumer* et *symboliser* la « grande » histoire de façon schématique mais somme toute complète. Le film second est un *concentré métaphorique* de l'autre[32].

Nous pourrions évoquer *Fright Night* (T. Holland, 1985), film au début duquel le jeune Charley Brewster (William Ragsdale) aperçoit, par la fenêtre de sa chambre, deux hommes qui transportent un cercueil (fig. 3) tandis que sa copine Amy (Amanda Bearse), assise devant le téléviseur, regarde une émission qui présente des hommes transportant un cercueil (fig. 4). On notera que ce film, dont l'émission nous montre aussi l'exorciseur Peter Vincent (Roddy McDowall) à l'oeuvre (fig. 5), se termine par une scène semblable pratiquée par Vincent devenu « *réellement* » exorciseur (fig. 6). Les séquences du début et de la fin – mises « *en abyme* » dans le film – réfléchissent un pan de l'histoire et peuvent être dites réflexives au sens large et

particulier. Cependant, comme elles ne montrent ni ne rendent sensible un dispositif énonciatif, elles ne sauraient être dites réflexives au sens étroit.

Fig. 3

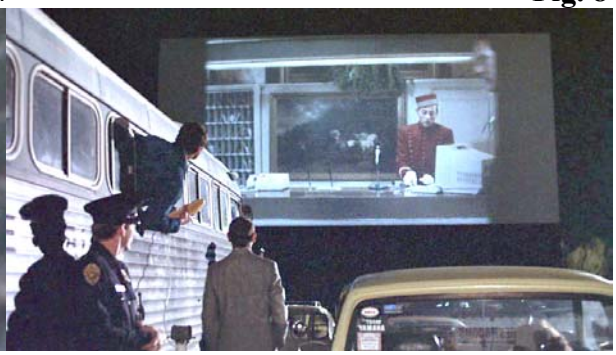
Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Il en ira autrement de la mise en abyme offerte par le film *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* (T. Burton, 1985) qui pourra, quant à elle, être dite réflexive au sens étroit. En effet, nous aurons vu, dans le film emboîtant, le film emboîté *se réaliser*. Pee-wee (Paul Reubens), qui a vendu les droits de son récit à une importante maison de production (la Warner Bros.), regarde avec fierté (fig. 7) le film qui fut inspiré de sa propre vie (fig. 8). La configuration est donc réflexive dans les trois sens.

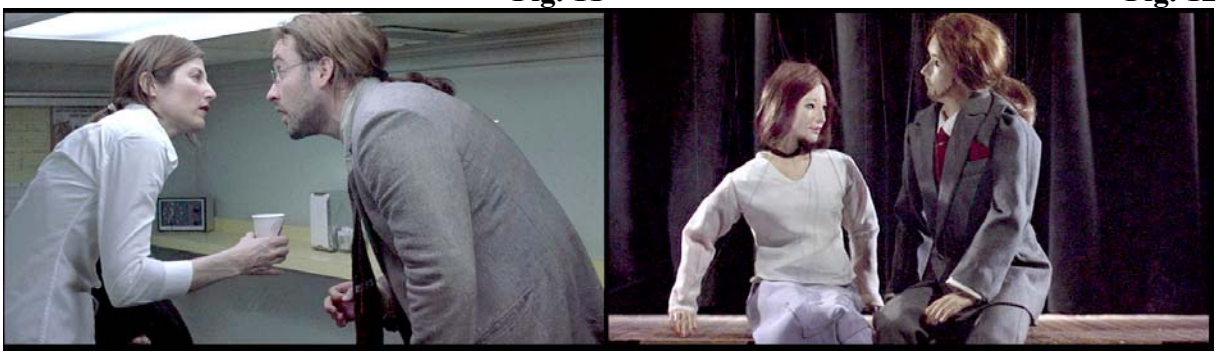
Fig. 7 **Fig. 8**

Being John Malkovich (S. Jonze, 1999) s'ouvrait sur une pièce de marionnettes dans laquelle un pantin de bois effectuait une danse (fig. 9) reprise par John Malkovich (lui-même) plus tard dans le film (fig. 10). Dans ce même film, il nous était donné d'assister au flirt (fig. 11) de Craig (John Cusack) et Maxine (Catherine Keener), lequel allait être repris dans une autre pièce de marionnettes (fig. 12). Les deux configurations sont réflexives aux sens large et particulier, mais nullement réflexives au sens étroit ; aucun dispositif cinématographique ne nous est montré ou rendu sensible[33].

Fig. 9 **Fig. 10**


Fig. 11 **Fig. 12**



En plus d'être parfois réflexive au sens étroit, les configurations homofilmiques – les mises en abyme – pourront aussi être hétérofilmiques. Citons la séquence de *This Gun for Hire* (Fr. Tuttle, 1942, fig. 14) que regarde Cliff Stern (Woody Allen) au cours de *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (W. Allen, 1989), laquelle réfléchit la scène où Judah Rosenthal (Martin Landau) demande à son frère (Jerry Orbach) de tuer sa maîtresse (fig. 13)[34]. Comme cette séquence nous présente des « *jeux de miroir qu'un film* [entretient] *avec les* autres films [et] *avec* lui-même »[35], nous dirons qu'elle est, en plus d'être réflexive aux sens large et particulier, à la fois homofilmique et hétérofilmique.

Fig. 13 **Fig. 14**

Semblable cas de figure dans cette séquence de *Twelve Monkeys* (T. Gilliam, 1995) où, assistant un peu malgré lui à *Vertigo* (A. Hitchcock, 1958, fig. 16), James Cole (Bruce Willis), spectateur ébahi peinant à faire des liens entre ce qui arrive à l'écran et ce qui lui arrive dans la

vie, avoue stupéfié à Kathryn Railly (Madeleine Stowe) : « *It's just like what's happening to us!* » (fig. 15). La mise en abyme relève ici de la réflexivité homofilmique (le film emboîtant réfléchit un pan de l'histoire du film emboîté) et de la réflexivité hétérofilmique (le film emboîtant cite – réfléchit – un autre film) tout en relevant également, bien sûr, de la réflexivité au sens large et particulier, de même que de la réflexivité au sens étroit (puisqu'elle nous montre non tellement le dispositif de la production mais de la réception; une salle de cinéma, des spectateurs et un écran).

Fig. 15 **Fig. 16**

Nous ne nous attarderons maintenant qu'à trois mises en abyme infinies afin de montrer comment celles-ci peuvent aussi être réflexives dans les trois sens. Nous entreverrons même un quatrième sens, lequel devra cependant immédiatement être mis de côté.

Dans *Edtv* (R. Howard, 1999), alors qu'Eddy Pekurny (Matthew McConaughey) passe à l'émission de Jay Leno (lui-même), il nous est donné de voir, dans le téléviseur trônant derrière eux, l'image de l'émission elle-même, dans une réduplication infinie (fig. 17). Dans *Spaceballs* (M. Brooks, 1987), au moment où Dark Helmet (Rick Moranis) et le Colonel Sandurz (George Wyner) décident de visionner le film *Spaceballs*, nos protagonistes arrivent inévitablement au moment du film où ils regardent le film *Spaceballs* et où ils se voient regardant le film, regardant le film… (fig. 18). Mais *Halloween 4 : The Return of Michael Myers* (D. H. Little, 1988) nous

offre aussi une mise en abyme toute semblable lorsque l'image du meurtrier masqué (George P. Wilbur) vient se perdre dans le miroir devant lequel il passe avant d'abattre sa victime (fig. 19).

Fig. 17 **Fig. 18** **Fig. 19**

On remarquera d'abord que, si la configuration que nous offre *Edtv* est réflexive (au sens étroit), en ce qu'elle rend sensible un dispositif énonciatif, la configuration que nous offre *Spaceballs* est plus précisément *autoréflexive*, en ce qu'elle rend sensible le dispositif énonciatif même. Cependant, si les deux premières configurations sont aussi réflexives aux sens large et particulier, la troisième le sera, dirions-nous, dans un sens… « *propre* ». Bien qu'elle constitue elle aussi une mise en abyme infinie (elle est donc, en cela, réflexive au sens particulier), il nous semble un peu forcé de la dire réflexive aux sens large et étroit. En effet, il faut se garder, croyons-nous, de prendre le terme « *réflexivité* » – voire le terme « *miroir* » – au sens propre. En d'autres termes, ce n'est pas parce qu'il y a, dans l'œuvre, un (véritable) miroir *réfléchissant* ce qui se passe dans l'œuvre, qu'il nous faut absolument parler de réflexivité (à moins, bien sûr, et c'est peut-être là une des raisons pour lesquelles on parle de « *réflexivité* », que ce miroir ne réfléchisse – au sens propre – ce qui se trouve hors de la diégèse, c'est-à-dire, justement, le dispositif énonciatif même, comme dans l'exemple de *Tango* dont nous sommes parti, fig.1). On ne peut donc parler de réflexivité chaque fois qu'un miroir apparaît dans une œuvre, à moins, donc, que ce miroir ne réfléchisse le dispositif énonciatif même (autoréflexivité) ou ne nous offre une mise en abyme infinie.

Ne nous reste plus qu'à dire un mot de la mise en abyme aporétique, laquelle est sûrement la plus connue sous le terme « *mise en abyme* » et laquelle est aussi à la base des glissements et confusions dont nous voulons faire état. La popularité de cette configuration tient sûrement au fameux article de Metz : « *La construction* "*en abyme*" *dans* Huit et demi*, de Fellini* »[36]. Son propos, qui recoupe d'ailleurs ce que dira Dällenbach sur la mise en abyme aporétique, se résumait en ceci que *8½* « *parl*[e]*, dans un film, de* ce film même *en train de se faire* »[37], que *8½* « *c'est le film de* 8½ *en train de se faire* », que « le "film dans le film", c'est ici le film même »[38]. Il reprendra d'ailleurs le même propos, vingt-cinq ans plus tard, dans *L'énonciation impersonnelle* : « le film dans le film, c'est le film même, *et la construction en abyme connaît son triomphe paradoxal quand il n'y a plus de film inclus, quand les deux films,* déclarés *distincts, sont physiquement confondus de façon totale* »[39]. Ce sera là la définition et l'exemple (toujours le même) qui reviendront sous la plume des théoriciens. Or, le film de Fellini est loin d'être, comme le laissait entendre Marc Cerisuelo, « *le seul film qui correspond en toute rigueur à l'appellation* »[40].

En fait, le cinéma regorge de ce type de configuration. Il y a en effet plusieurs films qui prennent pour sujet, non pas la production *d'une œuvre*, mais la production *de l'œuvre même*, de films où il sera question d'un film *à faire* et qui sera le *film fait*, de films racontant la *genèse d'un film* qui est la *genèse même du film*. Pensons, outre à *8½* de Fellini, à *Trans-Europ-Express* (A. Robbe-Grillet, 1966) – film auquel Sébastien Févry a consacré son ouvrage –, à *Silent Movie* (M. Brooks, 1976), à *The Player* (R. Altman, 1992) ou à *Adaptation* (S. Jonze, 2003). Dès lors, on comprend pourquoi, parce que le film s'ingénie à nous montrer le processus de sa (propre) production, cette mise en abyme a pu être dite réflexive, voire *auto*réflexive.

Silent Movie raconte l'histoire d'un cinéaste, Mel Funn, joué par Mel Brooks lui-même, cherchant à réaliser, tout au long de ce film muet, un film… muet. De plus, le film mettrait en

vedette diverses stars (Burt Reynolds, James Caan, Paul Newman, Liza Minelli, Anne Bankcroft) qui jouent toutes incidemment dans le film; Mel les supplie tour à tour – mais en vain! – de jouer dans son film. Aussi comprenons-nous que le film *à faire* est le film *fait*. L'indice le plus flagrant se trouve dans cette séquence où Mel approche un producteur (Sid Caesar) en lui promettant de le sortir de la faillite grâce à sa nouvelle idée de film. Pressé de révéler de quel genre il s'agit, Mel lui lance, euphorique : « *C'est un FILM MUET!* » (fig. 20 et 21). Sur quoi son producteur, désenchanté, lui rétorque : « *Vous perdez les pédales! Un film muet? À notre époque?* » (fig. 22). L'indice est de taille. Mais il s'en ajoute un autre qui ne laisse plus de doute. Le producteur, s'allumant non pas un, mais deux cigares (fig. 23), renchérit : « *Vous ne savez pas que le burlesque, C'EST FINI?* » (fig. 24). Sur quoi il tombe à la renverse et roule à toute vitesse sur le plancher (fig. 25). La séquence est elle-même éminemment burlesque. Il n'y a plus de doute, le film que *veut faire* Mel est bel et bien le *film que nous regardons*.

Fig. 20

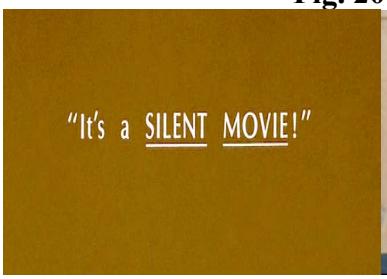


Fig. 21

Fig. 22

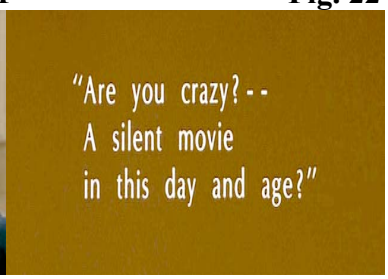


Fig. 23

Fig. 24

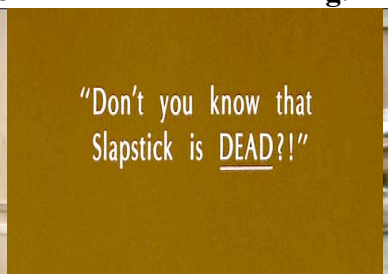


Fig. 25

The Player raconte l'histoire d'un producteur de Hollywood, Griffin Mill (Tim Robbins), qui reçoit des menaces de mort sur des cartes postales de la part d'un scénariste anonyme et qui, croyant l'avoir repéré, le tue (malencontreusement) lors d'une bagarre au cours de laquelle il réussit à échapper à la police. Or, à la fin du film, il reçoit le coup fil d'un scénariste qui lui dit :

> *Hi, Griff. Remember me? I'm the asshole who was in the postcard business.* […] *I've been busy writing a script.* […] *It's a Hollywood story, a real thriller. It's about a shit-bag producer* […] *who murders a writer he thinks is harassing him. The problem is, he kills the wrong writer. Now he's got to deal with black mail and the cops. But, here's the switch. The son of a bitch gets away with it.* […] *A Hollywood ending. He marries the dead writer's girl and they live happily ever after.*

Le producteur lui demande alors nerveusement quel sera le titre du film. Le scénariste anonyme lui répond : « *The Player* » (fig. 27), titre qui renvoie bien évidemment au titre du film même (fig. 26). Dès lors, de deux choses l'une, ou bien Mill va entreprendre la réalisation de ce film qui aura tous les traits du film que nous venons de regarder, ou bien c'est le film que nous venons de regarder qui aurait été réalisé par Mill (après avoir reçu le coup de téléphone). D'une façon comme d'une autre, la configuration est aporétique et réflexive – autoréflexive même – au sens étroit : c'est bien l'énonciation, la production, du film même qui nous est (fictivement du moins) montrée.

Fig. 26

Fig. 27

Adaptation raconte l'histoire de Charlie Kaufman (Nicolas Cage) qui doit faire l'adaptation cinématographique d'un roman de Susan Orlean (Meryl Streep), *The Orchid Thief* –

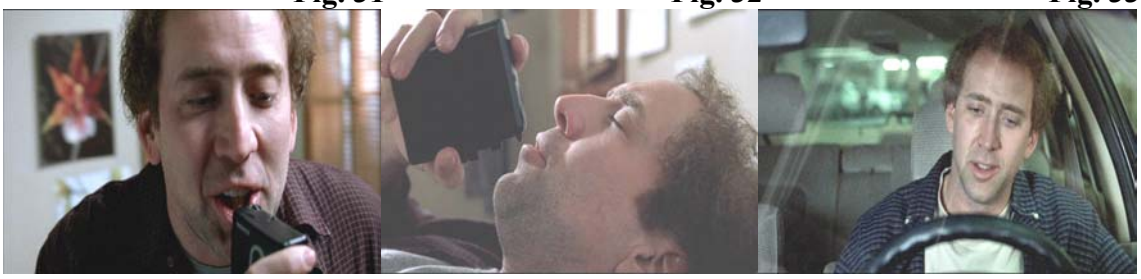
Charlie Kaufman est aussi le réel scénariste du film qui a d'ailleurs lui-même tenté d'adapter le roman de la vraie Susan Orlean. Or, cette histoire d'adaptation est aussi l'histoire même du film. Le scénario que Kaufman écrit sous nos yeux est bel et bien le scénario du film que nous voyons. Plusieurs indices nous permettent d'étoffer cette affirmation. À la quarantième minute, Kaufman empoigne son magnétophone et dicte les séquences par lesquelles le film s'est ouvert : « *Start right before life begins on the planet* » (fig. 28). Puis : « *And we see Susan Orlean in her office at* The New Yorker *writing about flowers, and bang! The movie begins* » (fig. 30). Et, à la cinquante-septième minute, après une autre révélation – « *The only thing I'm actually qualified to wrote about is myself and my own self* » (fig. 31) –, il nous offre le chaînon manquant : « *We open on Charlie Kaufman. Fat, old, bald, repulsive, sitting in a Hollywood restaurant across from Valerie Thomas, a lovely, statuesque film executive. Kaufman, trying to get a writing assignment wanting to impress her, sweats profusely* » (fig. 29).

Fig. 28 **Fig. 29** **Fig. 30**

Il poursuit, couché sur son lit (fig. 32) : « *Fat, bald Kaufman paces furiously in his bedroom. He speaks into his hand-held tape recorder, and he says :* "*Charlie Kaufman, fat, bald, repulsive, old, sits at a Hollywood restaurant with Valerie Thomas*" » (fig. 31). Enfin, à la toute fin du film, Kaufman expose – alors qu'il vient de dîner avec son amie Amelia et qu'il rentre à la maison dans sa voiture (fig. 33) – en *voice-over* : « *I have to go right home. I know how to finish the script now. It ends with Kaufman driving home after his lunch with Amelia thinking he knows*

how to finish the script ». Le film qu'il *veut faire*, est bel et bien le film *fait*. Et la mise en abyme aporétique, parce qu'elle met en scène son propre engendrement, sa propre production, *sa propre énonciation*, se confond trait pour trait avec la réflexivité au sens étroit et plus précisément avec l'autoréflexivité.

Fig. 31 **Fig. 32** **Fig. 33**



* * *

Grâce aux typologies de Gerstenkorn et Dällenbach et à l'aide des exemples puisés dans le cinéma contemporain, nous avons mis au jour les raisons pour lesquelles on a confondu « *mise en abyme* » et « *réflexivité* » et établi les définitions et distinctions qui s'imposaient. La mise en abyme sera toujours réflexive, mais dans un sens que nous avons nommé « *particulier* »; il y a aura toujours une œuvre emboîtée dans une œuvre emboîtante qui *réfléchira* un aspect – un pan de l'histoire – de celle-ci. Mais puisque, au cinéma, l'œuvre dans l'œuvre pourra être un film, et tout ce qui en a entouré la production, on pourra dire que la mise en abyme est « *réflexive* » dans un sens que nous avons nommé « *étroit* » ; on *montre* ou on *rend sensible* le dispositif énonciatif. Au reste, comme la mise en abyme ne sera toujours qu'une des nombreuses façons, à côté par exemple des adresses à la caméra et des citations de toutes sortes, grâce auxquelles le cinéma pourra effectuer un « *retour sur lui-même* », nous l'avons aussi dit « *réflexive* » dans un sens « *large* » ; la mise en abyme ne sera, en ce sens, qu'un procédé réflexif parmi d'autres. Elle pourra être, en somme, réflexive de trois façons.

Mais nous avons entrevu, en cours de route, d'autres raisons ayant mené à cette confusion. On a vu, d'abord, que quand le film mis « *en abyme* » dans le film était un film existant, la configuration était *à la fois* homofilmique et hétérofilmique; cependant, toute citation n'offre pas une mise en abyme. On a vu, ensuite, qu'un miroir savamment placé pouvait, d'une part, nous offrir une configuration *autoréflexive* (en cela qu'il pouvait nous montrer le dispositif énonciatif même) et, d'autre part, nous offrir une configuration *infinie* (quand l'image se reflétait dans un autre miroir reflétant l'image et ainsi de suite); mais tout miroir apparaissant dans un film ne fera pas forcément de celui-ci un film « *réflexif* ». On a vu, enfin, qu'un film pouvait prendre pour sujet tantôt la réalisation d'un film (il était alors réflexif dans un sens large et étroit), tantôt la réalisation *du film même* (il était alors semblablement réflexif dans un sens large et étroit, mais il nous offrait plus précisément, à la fois, une configuration *autoréflexive* et une *mise en abyme aporétique*).

Ce sont là, croyons-nous, les diverses raisons pour lesquelles « *mise en abyme* » et « *réflexivité* » ont, très souvent, été confondues. Le moyen le plus sûr que nous avons trouvé pour opérer les distinctions qui s'imposaient a été, simplement, de recenser les différents sens que pouvait revêtir le terme « *réflexivité* » (large, étroit, particulier et… propre). Mais à poursuivre la réflexion sur la réflexivité, on s'apercevrait vite qu'au bout du champ, bien d'autres sens miroitent.

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FILMOGRAPHIE[41]

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Trans-Europ-Express (A. Robbe-Grillet, 1966, © Trans American Films)
Silent Movie (M. Brooks, 1976, © 20th Fox)
Fright Night (T. Holland, 1985, © Columbia Tristar/Sony)
Pee-wee's Big Adventure (T. Burton, 1985, © Warner)
Spaceballs (M. Brooks, 1987, © 20th Fox)
Halloween 4 : The Return of Michael Myers (D. H. Little, 1988, © Anchor Bay)
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The Player (R. Altman, 1992, © New Line Home Video/Warner)
Twelve Monkeys (T. Gilliam, 1995, © Universal/Sony)
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Edtv (R. Howard, 1999, © Universal/Sony)
Being John Malkovich (S. Jonze, 1999, © Universal/Sony)
Adaptation (S. Jonze, 2002, © Columbia Tristar/Sony)

CRÉDITS PHOTOGRAPHIQUES

Fig. 1 *Tango, no me dejes nunca* (C. Saura, 1998, © Columbia Tristar/Sony)
Fig. 2 *Le Mépris* (J.-L. Godard, 1963, © Criterion)
Fig. 3-6 *Fright Night* (T. Holland, 1985, © Columbia Tristar/Sony)
Fig. 7-8 *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* (T. Burton, 1985, © Warner)
Fig. 9-13 *Being John Malkovich* (S. Jonze, 1999, © Universal/Sony)
Fig. 13 *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (W. Allen, 1989, © MGM/Sony)

Fig. 14 *This Gun for Hire* (Fr. Tuttle, 1942, © Universal)
Fig. 15 *Twelve Monkeys* (T. Gilliam, 1995, © Universal/Sony)
Fig. 16 *Vertigo* (A. Hitchcock, 1958, © Universal/Sony)
Fig. 17 *Edtv* (R. Howard, 1999, © Universal/Sony)
Fig. 18 *Spaceballs* (M. Brooks, 1987, © 20th Fox)
Fig. 19 *Halloween 4 : The Return of Michael Myers* (D. H. Little, 1988, © Anchor Bay)
Fig. 20-25 *Silent Movie* (M. Brooks, 1976, © 20th Fox)
Fig. 26-27 *The Player* (R. Altman, 1992, © New Line Home Video/Warner)
Fig. 28-33 *Adaptation* (S. Jonze, 2002, © Columbia Tristar/Sony)

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[1] Christian METZ, *L'énonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film*, Paris, éd. Méridiens Klincksieck, 1991, p. 94.
[2] Lucien DÄLLENBACH, « Mise en abyme », *Dictionnaire des genres et des notions littéraires*, Paris, Encyclopedia Universalis et Albin Michel, 1997, p. 11.
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[4] Jacques GERSTENKORN, « *À travers le miroir* (*notes introductives*) », *Vertigo*, n° 1, *Le cinéma au miroir*, Paris, 1987, p. 7.
[5] *Idem*, p. 7.
[6] *Idem*, p. 7.
[7] *Idem*, p. 7.
[8] *Idem*, p. 8.
[9] *Idem*, p. 9 (nous soul.).
[10] *Idem*, p. 9 (nous soul.).
[11] Christian METZ, *Idem*, p. 20 (n. 27). M. Takeda nous a, du reste, lui-même éclairé quant à l'utilisation de ces deux termes. Dans une lettre datée du 10 décembre 2005, il nous disait : « *D'abord, en ce qui concerne la terminologie, je ne pense pas qu'il y eût - du moins à l'époque où je rédigeais ma thèse - une distinction explicite entre les deux termes, avec ou sans le préfixe "auto-". Je me souviens qu'au séminaire de Metz, on disait soit "réflexivité", soit "auto-réflexivité", pour désigner communément cet effet de remise en cause du dispositif cinématographique.* […] *Disons donc que, du moins, à l'aube de la problématique de la réflexivité au cinéma, la présence ou l'absence du préfixe n'était pas forcément pertinente, et qu'avec les développements ultérieurs de recherches, on a opté pour le terme sans le préfixe. Par contre, en ce qui concerne la distinction entre deux niveaux de la réflexivité, à savoir la réflexivité qui joue au niveau de l'énoncé et celle qui joue au niveau de l'énonciation, il est évident que leur distinction est capitale pour saisir la véritable portée de cette notion.* »
[12] Christian METZ, *Idem*, p. 86. Du reste, il faut mentionner comment il semblait lui-même faire une différence entre cet ensemble « *d'objets et de processus dont le propre est de ne pas être vus ni entendus, dans les conditions ordinaires, par le spectateur* » et cet autre ensemble qui, une fois filmés et montrés au spectateur, se retrouve « *sur le même plan quel n'importe que objet filmé* [ainsi guetté] *par la force d'attraction de la diégèse* » (p. 87).
[13] Jacques GERSTENKORN, *Idem*, p. 9 (nous soul.).
[14] Lucien DÄLLENBACH, *Le récit spéculaire : essai sur la mise en abyme*, Paris, éd. du Seuil, coll. « Poétique », 1977, pp. 52 et 61 (nous soul.).
[15] Il nous faut ici préciser que qui dit « *mise en abyme* » ne dit pas nécessairement « *film dans le film* ». La mise en abyme est en effet beaucoup plus large que le simple film dans le film. D'une part, ce qui peut être mis « *en abyme* » dans le film et qui réfléchit, ce faisant, le récit, peut être autre chose qu'un film (pièce de théâtre, émission de télévision, tableau, photo, chanson, etc.). D'autre part, on peut avoir un film dans le film, sans qu'il n'y ait nécessairement de mise en abyme (le film dans le film peut ne pas réfléchir le récit).
[16] Cité par Lucien DÄLLENBACH, *Idem*, p. 15 (nous soul.).
[17] Cité par Lucien DÄLLENBACH, *Idem*, p. 15.
[18] Cité par Lucien DÄLLENBACH, *Idem*, p. 17.
[19] Cité par Lucien DÄLLENBACH, *Idem*, p. 17.
[20] Lucien DÄLLENBACH, *Idem*, p. 18.

[21] *Idem*, p. 59.
[22] *Idem*, p. 52.
[23] *Idem*, p. 51. Il y aura « *similitude* » entre l'œuvre emboîtante et l'œuvre emboîtée ou réflexion d'« *une même œuvre* » (p. 142).
[24] Il dira aussi « *répétée* » (p. 52), « *répétitive* » (p. 144), « *interminable* » (p. 145), voire même « *circulaire* » (p. 53).
[25] *Idem*, p. 51. Il y aura « *mimétisme* » entre l'œuvre emboîtante et l'œuvre emboîtée ou réflexion de « *la même œuvre* » (p. 142).
[26] Il dira aussi « *spécieuse* » (pp. 52 et 61) ou « *paradoxale* » (pp. 38 et 142).
[27] *Idem*, p. 51. Il y aura « *identité* » entre l'œuvre emboîtante et l'œuvre emboîtée ou réflexion de « *l'œuvre même* » (p. 142).
[28] *Idem*, p. 52. Dans son article « *Mise en abyme* », inséré dans le *Dictionnaire des genres et des notions littéraires* » (1997), il dira aussi que « *le degré de ressemblance entre agent réflecteur et ensemble réfléchi* » pourra, selon qu'il relèvera « *de la similitude, du mimétisme strict ou de l'identité postulée* », nous offrir une réflexion « *simple* », « *à l'infini* » ou « *aporistique* » (p. 12).
[29] Les pointillés de l'œuvre emboîtée dans la mise en abyme aporétique s'expliquent ainsi : il n'y pas, dans ce cas, et comme le disait Dällenbach, d'œuvre dans l'œuvre, mais seulement l'« *embryon* » ou le « *projet* » ou l'« *ébauche* » d'une œuvre. Voir, à cet effet, notre note 39.
[30] Nous ne dirons rien ici des « *mises en abyme élémentaires* » (ou des « *espèces* ») qu'avait aussi répertoriées Dällenbach, c'est-à-dire de l'« *aspect* » de l'œuvre emboîtante réfléchi (l'énoncé, l'énonciation ou le code), qui, étant donné les problèmes sur lesquels elles ouvrent, alourdiraient notre marche.
[31] Christian METZ, *Idem*, pp. 95-97
[32] Christian METZ, *Idem*, p. 96 (nous soul.).
[33] Cependant, l'apparition de John Malkovich en lui-même ferait de la séquence une configuration autoréflexive. Metz ne disait-il pas, dans *L'énonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film* que l'acteur était la « *pièce la plus visible du dispositif* » (p. 90)? Ainsi, un acteur jouant, pour ainsi dire, « *son propre rôle* », ferait basculer le film du côté de l'autoréflexivité (alors qu'un acteur jouant un acteur ferait du film un film plus simplement réflexif, au sens étroit).
[34] Merci à Sébastien Babeux d'avoir retracé la source de ce film.
[35] Jacques GERSTENKORN, p. 9 (nous soul.).
[36] Publié dans ses *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, tome I, Paris, éd. Klincksieck, coll. « D'esthétique », ©1968, 2003, p. 223. L'article s'inspirait notamment des articles d'Alain Virmaux, de Raymond Bellour et de Christian Jacotey publiés dans *Études cinématographiques* (1963) et de l'article de Pierre Kast publié dans les *Cahiers du cinéma* (1963). Il en a pour sa part vraisemblablement inspiré plus d'un. Après lui, Robert Stam dira, dans *Reflexivity in Film and Literature : from Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard* (1985), que « *Fellini released his* 8½, [b]*orrowing the* mise-en-abŷme [sic] *strategy* » (p. 102). Plus récemment, Marc Cerisuelo dira, dans *Hollywood à l'écran. Essai de poétique historique des films : l'exemple des métafilms américains*, que *8½* est « *le seul film qui correspond en toute rigueur à l'appellation* [de] *film en abyme* » (p. 90).
[37] Christian METZ, *Idem*, p. 225 (l'auteur soul.).
[38] Christian METZ, *Idem*, p. 226 (l'auteur soul.).
[39] Christian METZ, *L'énonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film*, p. 105 (l'auteur soul.). Dans *Le récit spéculaire : essai sur la mise en abyme*, Dällenbach reprendra d'ailleurs cette définition, au sujet de la mise en abyme aporétique, en disant que « *le refus de présenter des* extraits *du film* "*en abyme*" *dans le film premier* » (p. 147, l'auteur soul.) est justement ce qui fait de ce film dont il est question dans le film est le « *film même* ». Dans ses *Essais sur la signification au cinéma* (tome I), Metz écrira pour sa part que « *ce film que va tourner Guido* [le personnage du cinéaste incarné par Marcello Mastroianni], nous ne le voyons jamais » tout en précisant que « *par là se trouve abolie toute distance entre le film dont rêve Guido et celui qu'a réalisé Fellini* » (p. 225, l'auteur soul.).
[40] Marc CERISUELO, *Hollywood à l'écran. Essai de poétique historique des films : l'exemple des métafilms américains*, Paris, éd. des Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, coll. « L'œil vivant », 2001, p. 90.
[41] Merci à François Dunlop pour l'établissement de cette filmographie et des crédits photographiques.

Art | Theory | Criticism | Politics

OCTOBER

Photography's Expanded Field

OCTOBER 114, Fall 2005, pp. 120–40.

Nancy Davenport. Stills from Weekend Campus. *2004. Courtesy the artist and Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery.*

Photography's Expanded Field

GEORGE BAKER

I begin not with a negative, nor with a print, but with a screen. On the screen can be seen a landscape, a campus it seems, identified by cheerful signage and imposing brutalist buildings. This is a screen in motion, as the view begins to rotate, parading before us the series of changing buildings but also the denizens of this place: various youth, students both bohemian and conformist, potential professors, security and police. Along with the bodies, the camera scans automobiles not so much in motion as sentenced to their destruction, as we see car wreck after car wreck, an obvious homage both to one of the great moments in the history of photography, Andy Warhol's use of catastrophe photographs in his series "Death in America," and to one of the great moments in the history of cinema, Jean-Luc Godard's infamous eight-minute tracking shot of wrecked automobiles in the film *Weekend* (1967). And yet if the cars here do not move, neither do the people; both wrecked object and frozen subject simply pass by in an endless scroll—a rotating frieze—punctuated repetitively by one accident after another, a revolution that reaches its end only to loop and repeat itself again. Indeed, the strangely static moving-image work in question, Nancy Davenport's *Weekend Campus* (2004), was made by a photographer; it consists entirely of a scanned series of photographic still images and was positioned as the introductory piece in a recent exhibition otherwise given over to digital photographic prints.[1]

Everywhere one looks today in the world of contemporary art, the photographic object seems to be an object in crisis, or at least in severe transformation. Surely it has been a long time now since reformulating the history and theory of photography has seemed a vital intellectual necessity, an art-historical project born rather of the new importance of the photograph in the art practice of the 1970s and '80s. As theorized then, postmodernism could almost be described as a photographic event, as a series of artistic practices were reorganized around the parameters of photography taken as what Rosalind Krauss has recently called a "theoretical object": the submission of artistic objects to photography's logic of the copy, its recalcitrance to normative conceptions of authorship and style, its

1. Nancy Davenport, *Campus*, Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York, March 5 to April 3, 2004.

OCTOBER 114, Fall 2005, pp. 120–40.

embeddedness within mass-cultural formations, its stubborn referentiality and consequent puncturing of aesthetic autonomy.[2] With hindsight, however, we might now say that the extraordinary efflorescence of both photographic theory and practice at the moment of the initiation of postmodernism was something like the last gasp of the medium, the crepuscular glow before nightfall. For the photographic object theorized then has fully succumbed in the last ten years to its digital recoding, and the world of contemporary art seems rather to have moved on, quite literally, to a turn that we would now have to call cinematic rather than photographic.

We exist in a quite different moment than that described by Krauss twenty-five years ago in her essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field": the elastic and "infinitely malleable" medium categories decried by the critic then seem not to be our plight.[3] Critical consensus would have it that the problem today is not that just about anything image-based can now be considered photographic, but rather that photography itself has been foreclosed, cashiered, abandoned—outmoded technologically and displaced aesthetically. The artist stars of the present photographic firmament are precisely those figures, such as Jeff Wall, who reconcile photography with an older medium like history painting, in a strange reversal of photography's former revenge on traditional artistic mediums; or those, such as Andreas Gursky, who have most fully embraced the new scale and technology of photography's digital recoding (this is hardly an opposition of possibilities: Wall has also embraced the digital, and Gursky is also a pictorialist). And even the most traditional of a younger generation of contemporary photographers cannot now resist the impulse to deal the concerns of other mediums into their practice, less utilizing photography to recode other

2. Rosalind Krauss, "Reinventing the Medium," *Critical Inquiry* 25 (Winter 1999). An expanded version of the essay is reprinted in *James Coleman*, ed. George Baker (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).
3. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (1979), in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), p. 277.

Jeff Wall. The Storyteller. *1986. Courtesy the artist.*

practices than allowing the photograph to be recoded in turn, as when Philip-Lorca diCorcia lights his street photography with the stage lights of theater or cinema, or Thomas Demand now accompanies his constructed photographic simulacra with equally simulated projections placing his constructions into motion, or Rineke Dijkstra feels compelled to place video recordings of her portrait subjects alongside their photographic inscriptions. Even among those artists then who continue in some form the practice of photography, today the medium seems a lamentable expedient, an insufficient bridge to other, more compelling forms.

And yet I am pulled back from the finality of this judgment, from this closure of the photographic, by the strange vacillation in the Davenport work with which I began. How to describe its hesitation between motion and stasis, its stubborn petrifaction in the face of progression, its concatenation into movement of that which stands still—its dual dedication seemingly to both cinema and photography? It is this hiccup of indecision, whether fusion or disruption, that I want to explore here. For it seems that while the medium of photography has been thoroughly transformed today, and while the object forms of traditional photography are no longer in evidence in much advanced artistic practice, something like a photographic effect still remains—*survives*, perhaps, in a new, altered form. And if we could resist the object-bound forms of critical judgment and description, as well as the announcement of a medium's sheer technological demise, we might be able to imagine critically how the photographic object has been "reconstructed" in contemporary artistic practice—an act of critical imagination made necessary by the forms of contemporary art, and one that will answer to neither technological exegesis nor traditional formalist criteria.

Philip-Lorca diCorcia. New York. *1997. © Philip-Lorca diCorcia. Courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York.*

To "reconstruct" one's object: this is a structuralist vocation, as long ago described by Roland Barthes, and it was precisely the critical gesture made twenty-five years ago in Krauss's demonstration "Sculpture in the Expanded Field."[4] At a moment today when the photographic turn no longer seems so dominant in theories of postmodernism, this other explanatory device from that era—the notion of postmodernism as opening onto a culturally and aesthetically "expanded field" of practice—only gains in usefulness.[5] And yet it is striking to me that the explanatory schema of postmodernism's expanded field was never, to my knowledge, put into place to explore the transformation that photographic practice underwent twenty-five years ago, during the early years of aesthetic postmodernism, this event that was otherwise sensed by critic after critic as a photographic one. Surely, writers like Abigail Solomon-Godeau absorbed Krauss's critical lesson and described postmodern photography as opening onto an "expanded" rather than reduced field of practice; and yet the precise mapping of this expansion was never essayed, nor concretely imagined.[6] If today the object of photography seems to be ever so definitively slipping away, we need to enter into and explore what it might mean to declare photography to have an expanded field of operation; we need to trace what this field has meant for the last two decades of photographic practice, in order to situate ourselves with any accuracy in relationship to the putative dispersal—whether melancholic or joyful—that the medium today is supposedly undergoing.

Perhaps photography's notorious epistemological slipperiness—think of the famous difficulty faced by Roland Barthes throughout the entirety of his book *Camera Lucida* (1980) to define in any general way the object of his analysis—inherently resists the structural order and analysis of what Krauss called the expanded field. Perhaps, indeed, photography's expanded field, unlike sculpture's, might even have to be imagined as a group of expanded *fields*, multiple sets of oppositions and conjugations, rather than any singular operation. And yet it is striking how consistently photography has been approached by its critics through the rhetoric of oppositional thinking, whether we look to the photograph as torn between ontology and social usage, or between art and technology, or between what Barthes called denotation and connotation, or what he also later called *punctum* and *studium*, between "discourse and document" (to use an invention of Benjamin Buchloh's), between

4. "The goal of all structuralist activity, whether reflexive or poetic, is to reconstruct an 'object' in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning (the 'functions') of this object. Structure is therefore actually a *simulacrum* of the object, but a directed, *interested* simulacrum, since the imitated object makes something appear which remained invisible, or, if one prefers, unintelligible in the natural object" (Roland Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity," in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard [Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972], pp. 214–15).

5. Krauss's schema has been revisited recently by Anthony Vidler in an essay on contemporary architecture; see "Architecture's Expanded Field," *Artforum* 42, no. 8 (April 2004), pp. 142–47. It has also been returned to only to be critiqued by Anne Wagner in a recent essay on 1970s sculpture; see "Splitting and Doubling: Architecture and the Body of Sculpture," *Grey Room* 14 (Winter 2004), pp. 26–45.

6. "Photography after art photography appears as an expanded rather than a diminished field," Solomon-Godeau wrote in "Photography After Art Photography," in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), p. 85.

"Labor and Capital" (to use one of Allan Sekula's), between index and icon, sequence and series, archive and art photograph. One could go on.

This tearing of photography between oppositional extremes is precisely what we need to begin to map an expanded field for its practice, and indeed any one of the above oppositions might potentially serve as this field's basis. However, in the very first art-historical essay I ever published, I introduced my own opposition into the mix, an exceedingly general as well as counterintuitive one, but an opposition intended nevertheless to encompass many of the terms just mentioned, between which photographic history and practice have been suspended since the medium's invention. In an essay otherwise devoted to an analysis of the photography of August Sander, I asked when would it become necessary to conceive of the photograph as torn between narrative, or what I also called "narrativity," and stasis.[7] The question was counterintuitive, for the frozen fullness of the photographic image, its devotion to petrifaction or stasis, has seemed for so many to characterize the medium as a whole. And yet, by the moment of the early twentieth century, it had become impossible not to consider all the ways in which the social usage of photography—its submission to linguistic captioning, its archival compilations, its referential grip on real conditions of history and everyday life, its aesthetic organization into sequence and series—thrust the photographic signifier

7. George Baker, "Photography Between Narrativity and Stasis: August Sander, Degeneration, and the Decay of the Portrait," *October* 76 (Spring 1996), pp. 73–113.

August Sander. Left: Young Farmers. *ca. 1914. Right:* Streetworkers. *1928–29. © Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur–August Sander Archiv, Cologne; ARS, New York, 2005.*

into motion, engaging it with the communicative functions of narrative diegesis, the unfolding of an unavoidable discursivity. The opposition was counterintuitive then, but also logical, holding at odds such effects of movement and petrifaction, as well as perhaps the temporal and spatial dimensions themselves, in one contradictory field.

"Photography between narrativity and stasis," I called this condition, isolating its emplacement within the aesthetics of Neue Sachlichkeit at the moment of high modernism, an aesthetic, in Sander's case, torn between the narrative dimensions of his archival compilation of portraits, and its typological repetitiveness, its inability to avoid freezing its own diegesis through the systematic and serial deployment of identical poses, formats, and types. While Sander's engagement with a kind of narratological, even literary "noise" in his photography might be dismissed as one sign of Neue Sachlichkeit's anti-modernism, his project complicates such a judgment by rupturing its every claim to narrative cohesion, and by simultaneously rupturing its supposedly photographic dedication to immobility or stasis. In the twentieth century, this had been an unnoticed but increasingly unavoidable condition for photography. While Barthes had always wanted to separate a narrative art such as cinema from the different temporality of the photograph, he was always also unsure that a specific "genius" of photography in fact existed, and in his own most thrilling criticism, would be unable to keep the cinematic and photographic apart at all. For when he would look to find the "genius" of cinema in a series of films by Eisenstein, he would of course focus all of his attention on the photographic film still, in which he would locate the paradoxical essence of the "filmic" (in the essay "The Third Meaning"); and in *Camera Lucida*, the "genius" of photography would ultimately turn out to be its creation, in what Barthes began to call the photographic "punctum," of a movement onward and away from the image that he also called the image's "blind field," a property he had otherwise earlier reserved in his book for the medium of film.

Now, it is this rending of photographic language between the movements of narrative and the stoppage of stasis that might become visible today as a structuring condition for modernist photography as a whole. Applicable both to artists of the avant-garde and the *retour à l'ordre* (return to order), this is a condition that we sense structuring the Soviet model of the photo-file (Rodchenko) as much as the Farm Security Administration legacy of the photo novel (Walker Evans). It haunts every attempt by the modernist artist to create a medium of visual communication as well as the various sequencing and captioning schemes that were devised for so doing. It simultaneously haunts every counter-attempt by other modernist schools of photography to invent modes of silencing the photograph's referentiality, of inducing the photographic image to a more pure and purely visual stasis, a condition and a limit that no modernist photograph in the history of the medium, however, was ever truly able to achieve. In this way, the modernist usage of photography—what we could call its *rhetoric*—seems to result in a general condition of double negation, like what we find more specifically in the case of Sander. The

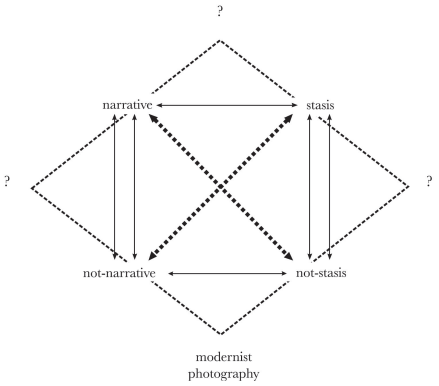
modernist photograph seems suspended in the category of the neither/nor: it is either that object that attempts to produce narrative communication only to be disrupted by the medium's forces of stasis, or it entails the creation of a static image concatenated by the photograph's inherent war between its own denotative and connotative forces. We are dealing, in other words, with the question of *meaning* and its construction in photographic terms—a question to which photographic theories that merely stress shifts in the photograph's technology, or even emphasize a kind of formalist or phenomenological account of the image, have proven blind—and for which the lessons of structuralism might still prove quite useful.

Indeed, another, less confusing way of generalizing the structural condition of modernist photography is to depict it as suspended between the conditions of being neither narrative nor fully static; the modernist photograph is that image that is paradoxically then both a function of *not-narrative* and *not-stasis* at the same time. My terms here begin to echo the logical conjugation explored by Krauss in her "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." As was the case with her structuring opposition for (modernist) sculpture of "not-landscape" and "not-architecture"—modernist sculpture, for Krauss, having become simply that thing in the landscape that is not landscape, or that thing in the architecture that is not architecture—the depiction of modernist photography as being suspended between not-narrative and not-stasis has a compelling interest. For, like the terms "landscape" and "architecture," these two terms open onto what we could also call the "built" (or constructed) and the "non-built," with narrative signaling something like the cultural dimension of the photograph, and stasis its unthinking "nature" (Barthes's terms of "connotation" and "denotation" are not far away). This opposition of nature and culture has long been one around which theories of the advent of postmodernism themselves turned, and in the history of photography it would seem that it was the gradual relaxing of the rending suspension of photography between the conditions of not-narrative and not-stasis that would signal the emergence of postmodernism in photographic terms: the reevaluation in the 1970s of narrative functions, of documentary in all its forms, and of many types of discursive framings and supplements for photographic works.

In "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," Krauss utilized the mathematician's Klein group or the structuralist's Piaget group to open up the logical opposition she had constructed. I will paraphrase her terms and her usage of this structure here. For if modernist photography was somehow caught between two negations, between the conditions of being neither truly narrative nor static in its meaning effects—if the modernist photograph had become a sum of exclusions—then this opposition of negative terms easily generates a similar opposition but expressed positively. "That is," to really paraphrase Krauss, "the [*not-narrative*] is, according to the logic of a certain kind of expansion, just another way of expressing the term [*stasis*], and the [*not-stasis*] is, simply, [*narrative*]."[8] The expansion to which Krauss referred, the Klein group, would then transform a set of binaries "into a quaternary

8. Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," p. 283.

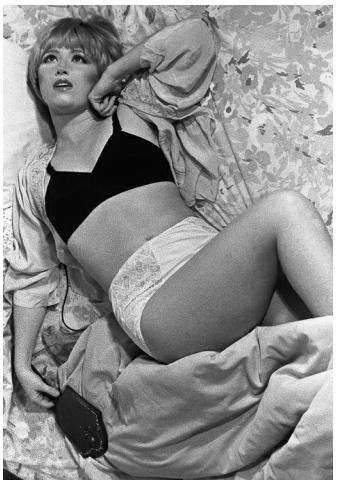
field which both mirrors the original opposition and at the same time opens it up."[9] For modernist photography, that expanded field would look like this:



Now, I have been drawing Klein groups and semiotic squares ever since I first met Rosalind Krauss, and the reader by this point will not be surprised to learn of how fondly I remember sitting in her office conjugating the semiotic neutralization of things like the terms of gender and sexuality, some twelve years ago. When I first drew this particular graph, however, about three years ago, I was at first unclear as to what new forms might correspond to the expanded field of which modernist photography, with its medium-specific truths, was now not the master term, but only one displaced part. The graph became immediately compelling, however, when I began to think of the major uses to which the photograph had been put in the most important artistic practices to emerge since the mid to late 1970s, after the closure of modernism and the legitimization of avant-garde uses of photography by movements such as Conceptual art.

I was struck, first, by how the so-called "Pictures" generation of artists (Douglas Crimp's term) most often foregrounded the use of the photograph as a self-conscious fragment of a larger field, the most compelling example of this being, of course, Cindy Sherman's untitled "film stills." Such works were photographic images that, crucially, would not call themselves photographs, and that would hold open the static image to a cultural field of codes and other forces of what I am calling *not-stasis*. At the very same moment, however, post-Conceptual uses of projected images would see an artist like James Coleman producing, in the 1970s, works based directly on narrative cinema, works that would, as in *La Tache Aveugle* (1978–90), freeze the cinematic forms of movement into still images to be projected over long delays; or that would eventually freeze films more generally into the durational projection of continuous still images (*Untitled: Philippe VACHER* [1990]); or, in Coleman's most characteristic working mode, would seize upon slide projections with poetic voice-overs continually disrupted in their narrative diegesis

9. Ibid.

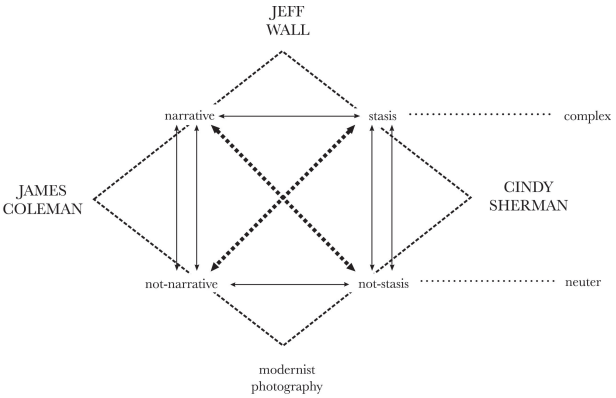


by the frozen photographic forces of what I have been calling *not-narrative* (as in the projected image "trilogy" of *Background*, *Lapsus Exposure*, and *INITIALS*, works created in the early 1990s but linked to projects that Coleman completed in the early to mid-1970s).[10] Two expansions of my quaternary field had thus been spoken for, the schemas of *narrative* and *not-narrative* as well as *stasis* and *not-stasis*, and the uncanny connection—but also the opposition—that had always puzzled me between the projects of Sherman and Coleman logically explained. More puzzling, perhaps, was what the structuralist would call the "complex" axis of my graph, the inverted expression of the suspension of modernist photography as a sum of

10. While Coleman would only be widely recognized for his "projected images" (the artist's term) in the 1990s, his first uses of the slide projection with voiceover date to the early to mid-1970s, e.g., *Slide Piece* (1972) and *Clara and Dario* (1975).

Top left: Cindy Sherman. Untitled Film Still #6. *1977. Top right: Sherman.* Untitled Film Still #21. *1978. Courtesy the artist and Metro Pictures Gallery, New York.*
Above: James Coleman. Clara and Dario. *1975. © James Coleman. Courtesy the artist.*

exclusions, neither narrative nor stasis in its neuter state. What would it mean to invert this exclusion, to locate a project not as the photographic suspension between the not-narrative and the not-stasis, but as some new combination of both terms, involving both narrative *and* stasis at the same time? But of course Sherman and Coleman in the late 1970s have a rather compelling and logical counterpart in the claiming of new uses for "photography," even if the medium-specific term now evidently needs to be reconsidered; if Sherman claims the "film still" and Coleman the "projected image," Jeff Wall's appropriation then of the advertising format of the light box for his image tableaux arrives as yet another major form invented at precisely that same moment that now seems to complete our expanded field.



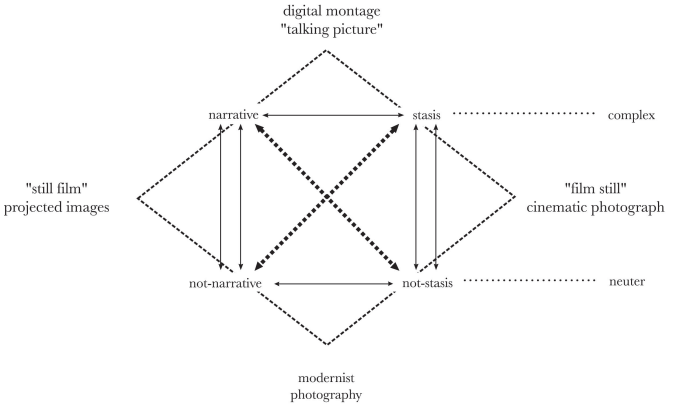
Critics have often wondered about the operation of the condition of pastiche in Wall's images; they have wondered too about his reclamation of history painting, disparaging his aesthetic as the false resuscitation of the "talking picture."[11] These questions too we can now answer, as Wall's aesthetic gambit was to occupy the complex axis of photography's expanded field, positioning his own practice as the logical and diametric inversion of modernist practice, as opposed to the oblique continuation of at least partial forms of modernist disruption or negation in the opposed projects of Coleman and Sherman (the *not-narrative* in the one, the *not-stasis* in the other). Two artists here, then, move obliquely away from and yet thus manage to continue the critical hopes of modernism; the other simply inverts its terms, allowing the ideological exclusions of modernism to shine forth without disruption.[12]

11. See Rosalind Krauss, "'. . . And Then Turn Away,'" in *James Coleman*, pp. 177–78, 183: "The role of pastiche within postmodernism has long been an issue of particular theoretical concern. . . . Ever since my first experience with Wall's *Picture for Women* (1979), a restaging of Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, I have been interested in accounting *structurally* for this condition in his work." The expanded field explored in the present essay would seem to provide this structural explanation.

12. To the extent that this claim holds, my account of Wall's project would stand diametrically opposed to recent claims by Michael Fried attaching Wall precisely to the modernist tradition, namely to the author's complex genealogy of "absorption" and anti-theatricality as elaborated in modernist painting. See, for example, Michael Fried, "Barthes's *Punctum*," *Critical Inquiry* 31 (Spring 2005), pp. 539–74.

Wall. Picture for Women. *1979. Courtesy the artist.*

It is clear to me now that in the art of the last ten years, rather than speaking tendentiously, as critics are wont to do, about the "influence" of Cindy Sherman on a younger generation of photographers, or of Coleman's or Wall's "impact" on contemporary art, we should instead be tracing the life and potential transformation of a former medium's expanded field. We are dealing less with "authors" and their influence than with a structural field of new formal and cultural possibilities, all of them ratified logically by the expansion of the medium of photography.



For the positions occupied by the great triumvirate of postmodernist "photographers" in the late 1970s have themselves spawned the more general birth of new forms we have witnessed in recent years. By the moment of the early to mid-1990s, a whole generation of artists using photography began to mine the possibilities of *stasis* and *not-stasis*, embracing the impulse to what could be called "counter-presence" that such an action upon the photograph provides, always pushing the still image into a field of both multiple social layers and incomplete image fragments. And so it will be apparent now that the intense investment in what might be called the "film still" or what I will call the "cinematic photograph" in contemporary art lies not in the closure of photography *tout court*, but in an expansion of its terms into a more fully cultural arena.[13] Thus we witness the mad multiplication of connotational codes within a single still image (the project in the 1990s, most conspicuously, of Sharon Lockhart's photographs, whose series, for example from *Shaun* to *Goshogaoka*, are often made in relation to a simultaneous film project); or the opening of the still image onto manipulations from other cultural domains (such as Danish artist Joachim Koester's use of the blue filters popularized by the director François Truffaut in the former's series *Day for Night, Christiania* or the sci-fi menace of Norwegian artist Knut Åsdam's nighttime documents of urban housing projects). The latter work by Åsdam has been presented as both an open-ended series of photographic prints, but also, significantly, reconfigured into slide projections where the sequencing and narrative possibilities discovered would lead to the artist's subsequent dedication to producing semi-narrative films.

Thus, singular artists will now occupy opposing and quite different positions within this expanded field; Lockhart, for one, is known for her production not only

13. It is true that Wall invokes the "cinematic" quite often in discussing his images. And while all the axes of photography's expanded field open potentially onto cinema through the folding of narrative concerns into the photographic construct, Wall's cinematic images and their progeny need to be rigorously distinguished from that category of work that I am here calling "cinematic photographs." While such images hardly engage with the actual cinematographic motion of the "still film" or "projected image," they also refuse the singularity and unified nature of the tableaux of photographers like Wall or Gregory Crewdson. Their engagement with cinema leads to an embrace of the fragment, of absence, discontinuity, and the particular phenomenology of what can be called "counter-presence." (By "counter-presence," I do not mean for the reader to hear anything like an echo of Michael Fried's terms of "absorption" or the "anti-theatrical"; rather, the opposite would be more true.) That said, it must also be admitted that Wall's aesthetic production is hardly monolithic, and like almost all of the artists under consideration here, many of his works—especially those conceived in series, such as his *Young Workers* photographs (1978–83)—would belong to axes of photography's expanded field other than the primary one asserted here.

Sharon Lockhart. Shaun. *1993. © Sharon Lockhart 1993. Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York.*

Lockhart. Teatro Amazonas. *1999. © Sharon Lockhart 1999. Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York.*

Joachim Koester. Day for Night, Christiania. *1996. Courtesy the artist.*

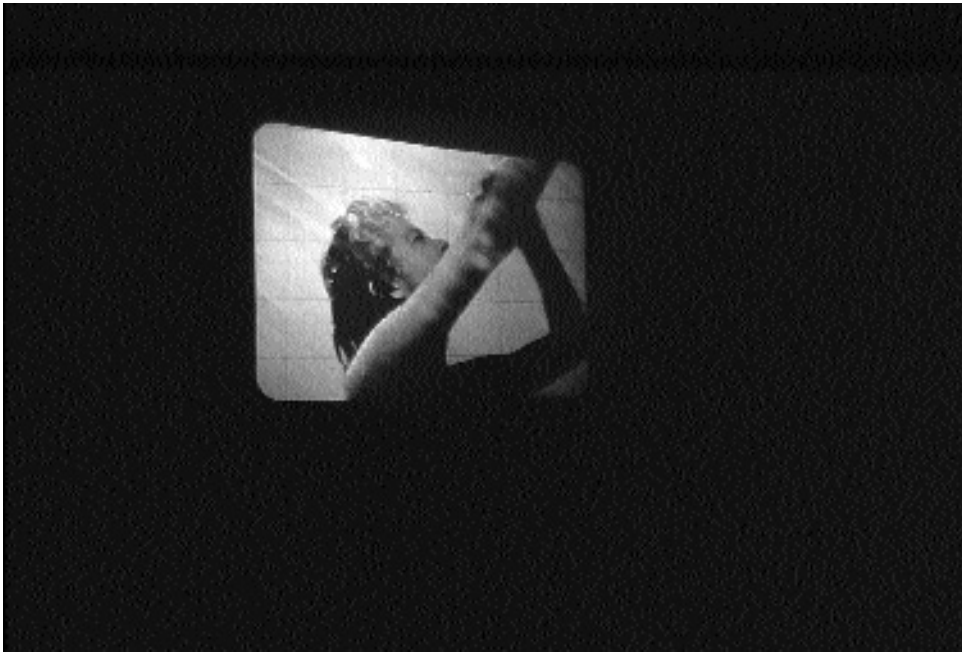
Koester. Set-up. *1992. Courtesy the artist.*

of cinematic photographs but also for a series of nearly static films, like *Teatro Amazonas*, that we can call instead of the film still the "still film."[14] Both the still film and many forms of the projected image began to give expression, at the same moment in the mid-1990s, to the possibilities opened up by the specific combination of *narrative* and *not-narrative*. For during the last decade, the projected slide sequence has attracted a whole new group of adherents, an example again being an artist whom I have just associated with another aspect of my field, namely Joachim Koester's use of found slides abandoned at the developers' to create fleeting narratives (e.g., *Set-up* [1992]). New forms will be invented in each position within the field. Tacita Dean's frozen films might occupy this position of *narrative* and *not-narrative* along with Lockhart's, just as Dean will devote as much of her practice to still photography as the photographer Lockhart does to film. And Douglas Gordon's "slowed" films—which in their most extreme versions reduce the narrative cinematic product to the foundation of the still frame by extending films to playtimes of twenty-four hours or even a time span of years—will occupy the position of the "still film" just as much as Lockhart's *Teatro Amazonas*. For even though one project may depend upon *video* and the other on *film*, both are actually linked conceptually to a field mapped out by the expansion of *photography*, to which, however, neither of them will of course correspond.

The "talking picture" or complex axis of our field—the fusion of *narrative* and *stasis*—has encompassed the wildest variety of solutions in recent years, from the painterly manipulations of digital montage (from Wall to Davenport and others), to the large-scale Hollywood tableaux of the school of Gregory Crewdson (i.e., Anna Gaskell, Justine Kurland, et al.), to the invention of what I would call the "narrative caption" in the photographic projects of artists as diverse as Andrea Robbins + Max Becher and the Irish artist Gerard Byrne, whose images

14. This is a term coined, I believe, by Douglas Crimp to account for similar work in the 1970s (his example is a film by Robert Longo). See "Pictures," in *Art After Modernism*, p. 183. The reversibility of film still and still film is already fully recognized by Crimp in this 1979 essay (written, then, in the same year as Krauss's publication of "Sculpture in the Expanded Field").

Above and facing page: Tacita Dean. Fernsehturm. *2000. Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.*



Douglas Gordon. 24 Hour Psycho. *1993.*
Courtesy the artist.

are often accompanied by the most incontinent of supplements.[15] In addition to digital recoding and linguistic supplements, new forms will be invented here as well, even if pastiche will most often be their domain: one thinks of the *Five Revolutionary Seconds* or *Soliloquy* series of Sam Taylor-Wood, panoramic still photographs made by a special camera that rotates over time and through space, often restaging historical paintings, and which are most often accompanied, upon exhibition, by wall-mounted speakers spouting literal soundtracks.[16] Here, it would seem, is a picture where the condition of "talking" has been taken as far as it can go, and where the complex axis, the fusion of both/and, perhaps cries out for a renewed dedication to disruption once more (the negation of the "not").

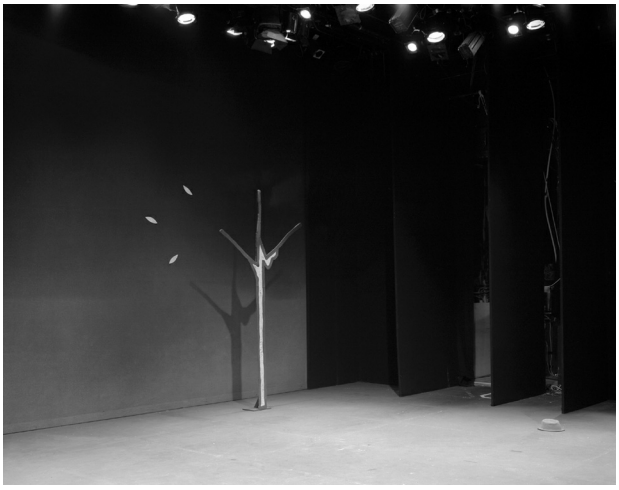
Thus, to paraphrase Krauss one last time, "[*Photography*] is no longer the privileged middle term between two things that it isn't. [*Photography*] is rather only one term on the periphery of a field in which there are other, differently structured possibilities."[17] That this is a cultural as opposed to merely aesthetic field is something that certain recent attempts to recuperate object-bound notions of medium-specificity seem in potential danger of forgetting. For such was one of the great lessons of Krauss's expanded field: not that modernist medium-specificity would simply dissipate into the pluralist state of anything goes, but rather that such mediums would quite precisely *expand*, marking out a strategic movement whereby both art and world, or art and the larger cultural field, would stand in new, formerly unimaginable relations to one another. In this connection, I think of artists such as Pierre Huyghe, whose photographs and projections are essentially positioned as waystations between his expanded forms and the cultural realms that these forms reference; in Huyghe, the postmodern play with representational codes seeks a form that would allow such codes to exceed their place within an image, within a frame, and return to re-code the reality or cultural realms that they can no longer

15. On Byrne's work, still unfortunately under-known in the American context, I point the reader to my essay, "The Storyteller: Notes on the Work of Gerard Byrne," in *Gerard Byrne: Books, Magazines, and Newspapers* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg Press, 2003). Byrne's work has progressed to the making of a series of films using "found scenarios" based on historical advertising and outmoded journalistic texts and photographs.

16. Characteristically, Taylor-Wood has accompanied such photographic expansions with simultaneous projects involving "static" videos and film. On the split between photography and projection in Taylor-Wood's project, see my review of her 2001 exhibition at the Centre National de Photographie in Paris, "Sam Taylor-Wood," *Artforum* 40, no. 4 (December 2001), p. 115.

17. Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," p. 284.

Sam Taylor-Wood. Five Revolutionary Seconds IV. *1996 © The artist. Courtesy Jay Jopling/White Cube (London).*



Gerard Byrne. Left: Waiting for Godot. *2002. Below:* In the News. *2002. Courtesy the artist.*

Murphy (Estragon) and McGovern (Vladimir) stand center stage looking at the Tree:
Estragon: Everything oozes.
Vladimir: Look at the tree.
Estragon: It's never the same pus from one second to the next.
Vladimir: The tree, look at the tree.
(Estragon looks at the tree.)
Estragon: Was it not there yesterday?
Vladimir: Yes, of course it was there. Do you not remember? We nearly hanged ourselves from it. But you wouldn't. Do you not remember?
Estragon: You dreamt it.
(Waiting for Godot *by Samuel Beckett [Faber & Faber, 1956])*

"Driver killed in B.Q.E. truck tragedy"—New York Post, *7/23/2000. View from the southeast corner, Meeker and McGuinness.*

adequately represent. This cultural expansion amounts to one reason why I have felt it necessary to recuperate the model of the expanded field, and to map its photographic dimension in this essay. I am not so much worried about the return of ideas of the medium in recent essays by Krauss or Hal Foster—in Krauss's work, this concern never really disappeared—for the idea of the medium that these critics are trying to explore seems fully in line with the expansions mapped in their own earlier work (in fact, seen in retrospect, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" amounts to a profound meditation on what a medium in the era of postmodernism might be). But their breaking of a postmodernist and interdisciplinary taboo has let loose a series of much more conservative appeals to medium-specificity, a return to traditional artistic objects and practices and discourses, that we must resist.

The problem is not to "return" to a medium that has been decentered, if not expanded. The problem, as Foster remarked upon Krauss's essay now quite a long time ago, is to resist the latent urge to "recentering" implicit in the expanded field model of the postmodern in the first place: in the "Expanded Field," Foster wrote, "the work is freed of the term 'sculpture' . . . but only to be bound by other terms, 'landscape,' 'architecture,' etc. Though no longer defined in one code, practice remains within a *field*. Decentered, it is recentered: the field is (precisely) 'expanded' rather than 'deconstructed.' The model for this field is a structuralist one, as is the activity of the Krauss essay. . . . 'The Expanded Field' thus posits a logic of cultural oppositions questioned by poststructuralism—and also, it would seem, by postmodernism."[18] This problem is ours now too. If the photographic object seems in crisis today, it might now mean that we are entering a period not when the medium has come to an end, nor where the expanded field has simply collapsed under its own dispersal, but rather that the terms involved only now become more complex, the need to map their effects more necessary, because these effects are both less obvious and self-evident.

For as I hinted earlier, other expanded fields for photography may be possible to envision than even the one mapped quickly here, an example of which I would point to in the more fully *spatial* (as opposed to *temporal*) expansion of the photograph we perhaps face in practices stemming from Louise Lawler and James Welling to younger artists such as Rachel Harrison, Tom Burr, Zoe Leonard, and Gabriel Orozco (think, for example, of the latter's *Extension of a Reflection* [1992] or his work *Yielding Stone* [1992]). Given these potential expansions, we need now to resist the lure of the traditional object and medium in contemporary art, just as much as we need to work against the blindness and amnesia folded into our present, so-called "post-medium condition." As Fredric Jameson suggested at an earlier fork in the development of postmodernity, what we need in the contemporary moment are maps: we should not retreat from the expanded field of contemporary photographic practice, rather we should map its possibilities, but also deconstruct its potential closure and further open its multiple logics. At any rate, when I first sketched my graph

18. Hal Foster, "Re: Post," in *Art After Modernism*, p. 195.

Gabriel Orozco. Top: Extension of a Reflection. *1992. Bottom:* Yielding Stone. *1992. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.*

for the artist with which I began, Nancy Davenport, she quickly grabbed my pen and paper and began to swirl lines in every direction, circling around my oppositions and squares, with a look that seemed to say, "Well, what about these possibilities?" My graph was a mess. But the photographer's lines, though revolving around the field, had no center, and they extended in every direction.

Blast-off Photography: Nancy Davenport and Expanded Photography

Ingrid Hölzl

This article engages the question of expanded photography through a study of Nancy Davenport's 2008 piece *Blast-off Animation*, part of her multichannel DVD installation *WORKERS (Leaving the Factory)*. The piece comprises digital photomontages, 'collages made up of hundreds of still images – then animated in very basic ways'. In this, post-production has become the principal site of photographic image production. Recorded and calculated images are merged into augmented documents that no longer display an (impossible) past, but a possible present. Digitally animated into moving stills, and displayed in the form of continuous loops, these images meet less a desire for movement than a desire for (spatial and temporal) endlessness. In including within the frame the endlessness beyond the frame, expanded photography overcomes the spatial and temporal confinement of the still – but in so doing confines photography within its supposed deficiency. By following the conceptual and strategic threads – and pitfalls – of expanded photography, the present essay seeks to clear the way for a new, fluctuating temporality of images – a photographic now.

Keywords: *Nancy Davenport (1965–present), contemporary photography, digital video, post-production, photomontage, Ken Burns effect, animation, loop, augmented document, moving still, expanded photography, photographic now*

Today's 'expanded field of photography' calls for an expanded concept of photography that takes into account the disruptions in the 'image economy': the structural modifications of the modes of production and dissemination of photographic images.[1] With digital image processing, post-production has become the principal site of photographic image production, where recorded and calculated images are merged into what I will call augmented documents. The augmented document emphasises not only the hybrid temporality of contemporary society but also the hybrid temporality of its representation, displaying a possible present where different space–times coexist. Contrary to the paradoxical conjunction of past and present in the (hallucinatory) experience of a past moment's being present, the digitally augmented photograph surpasses the spatiotemporal confinement of photography; it is no longer tied to the past and its uncanny survival, but displays a seamless conjunction between present and present – a 'photographic now', so to speak.[2] Thus, augmented documents do not signal the end of photography in a digital 'anything goes', but rather modify the parameters of what can be conceived as a 'true image' of the world.

In some cases, augmented documents are digitally animated into what I term 'moving stills': synthetic image-states that display movement and stasis at the same time. In a recent article disentangling the transmedial categories stillness, movement,

Thanks to Natalie Campbell at Nicole Klagsbrun for providing information and image material and for establishing contact with Nancy Davenport. Thanks to Nancy Davenport for her extra effort in providing additional stills and information. Thanks to both for the permission to use these images for this article. Thanks to Rémi Marie for the lengthy discussions on this paper and on the broader thesis of the 'photographic now' that informed it. His ideas and comments have considerably shaped the final version of this paper. Thanks also to Tammer El-Sheikh for proof reading the article and for his valuable suggestions as to the structure and tone of this paper.

1 – I am referring here to George Baker's definition of the expanded field of contemporary photography spanning between narration and non-narration, stasis and non-stasis. See George Baker, 'Photography's Expanded Field', *October*, 114 (Fall 2005), 120–40. I use the term 'image economy' following Marie José Mondzain's definition of the term 'economy' both in the sense of a pragmatic use of resources and money for one's own benefit (politics) as well as for the relation between God, image and man (theology). Cf. Marie-José Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy. The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imagery*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2005. In an article entitled 'Nouvelles Technologies de l'image et démocratie', she extends her concept of 'economy' to digital images. Her thesis of a revival of Platonism fostered by the ubiquity of computer-generated imagery, in spite of its overestimation of the emancipatory potential of digital image processing and circulation, stands out against the majority of 1990s dystopian accounts of the veracity of digital imagery. See Marie-José Mondzain, 'Nouvelles Technologies de l'image et democratie', *Horizons Philosophiques* special issue 'L'amodernite de la photographie?', 11:1 (Autumn 2000), 9–26.

2 – This temporal paradox, the genuine *punctum* of the photograph, is the trigger for Barthes's second temporal paradox between the hallucinatory 'he will die' and the lucid 'he has died', resulting in an 'anterior future tense'. In looking at a (historical) photograph, the observer experiences a future that has already happened. For the sake of the argument, I have concentrated here on the first paradox between past and present.

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print and projection with regard to photography and film, I have discussed with the Ken Burns effect a particular kind of the moving still. Re-filming still images with a moving camera, the slow pans and zooms of the Ken Burns effect generate what I have called 'take-images' that display an oxymoronic temporality; they move across a screen not as filmic but as photographic images.[3]

3 – Ingrid Hölzl, 'Moving Stills – Images that are No Longer Immobile', *Photographies* 3:1 (Spring 2010), 104–6.

An artist who emphatically embraces this effect used in documentary film-making, advertising and consumer photographic software is Nancy Davenport. Taking Davenport's recent video installation *WORKERS (Leaving the Factory)* as a starting point, my article will discusses the potential and limitations of what could be called, making reference to 'expanded cinema', expanded photography.

WORKERS (Leaving the Factory) is an ongoing project that Nancy Davenport began in 2005. The multi-channel DVD installation was first shown by curator Hou Hanru at the Istanbul Biennale 2007, at the Textile Traders' Market, a modernist building turned into an art venue named 'World Factory', alluding to the fact that former developing countries such as Turkey or China are no longer importing goods but are producing them for the world market. A different version was commissioned by the Liverpool Biennale, whose 2008 edition *MADE UP* focused on artistic utopias and dystopias, narrative fiction and fantasy: on how art generates alternative realities. In the Liverpool Biennial guide, Nancy Davenport is presented as an artist who constructs:

> reality-bending images that fall somewhere between photography and moving image, stillness and high-speed, fiction and document. [...] Within an utterly contemporary framework, Davenport develops and pieces together these apparently diverse plots and evokes a scenario where all events, both human and robotic, become related and cyclical.[4]

4 – Liverpool Biennial International Festival of Contemporary Art, 'Nancy Davenport', *The Guide,* 2008, 48.

I became interested in the work of Nancy Davenport after coming across her contribution in the 2008 anthology *Still Moving*. There, the artist comments on her earlier video animation *Weekend Campus* (2005): 'a digital montage constructed from hundreds of photographs [she had] taken at junkyards and at universities across the country. The montage was then looped and animated so that it moves across the screen like a tracking shot', paying homage to the famous tracking shot of waiting cars and dead bodies in Godard's 1967 film *Weekend*. The resulting image is a 'moving view of a statuary scene' with the only 'transitory cinematic effect' being the recurring flash of police lights. Davenport insists that *Weekend Campus* was 'not intended to deceive as film, nor to sit quietly as photography'. Rather, it was meant to foreground the fact that, with photography being experienced today on screen and in motion, 'the opposing forces of fixity and mobility are significant aspects of *all* digitized stills'.[5]

5 – Nancy Davenport, 'Weekend Campus', in *Still Moving. Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Beckmann, and Jean Ma, Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2008, 192–3.

The driving force of this work is, however, a desire for endlessness; the 'fantasy of an endless Weekend traffic jam' that goes beyond the possibilities of a VCR or DVD player. Both can repeat recorded sequences but cannot extend them in space or time. The digital montage, on the contrary, creates the illusion of a seamless photorealistic space, its animation providing the illusion of a temporal continuity and its looping the illusion of temporal infinity.

WORKERS (Leaving the Factory) is a much more complex work than *Weekend Campus*, both technically (it also includes photographic stop-action and full animation) and diegetically (it combines documentary and fantastic visual narratives with an eclectic sound collage). But Davenport's critical aims remain the same: to foreground the opposing forces of fixity and mobility in the digitised photograph. In so doing, she reiterates her desire for endlessness, the desire to overcome the photographic cut, both temporally and spatially, in including the photographic 'off' within a digitally constructed and animated photographic space.

But what if this inclusion of the off were not an expansion but rather a reduction of the photograph? What if the static frame, in pointing to space and time beyond it, were essential in building up a desire to see? What if we lose this desire when the photograph is expanded into an endless loop of an endless moving panorama? Does photography blast off? Or is it blasted?

Blast-off Animation

The piece of the multichannel DVD installation *WORKERS* I shall focus on here is *Blast-off Animation*, which was presented in 2008 at the Nicole Klagsbrun gallery, in conjunction with the piece *China/Norway Animation*, as a medium-scale video projection with open sound. While *Blast-off* is presented in the form of an open projection, *China/Norway* unfolds across eight flat-screen monitors (figure 1). Both videos are displayed as a continuous digital video loop.

Contrary to the quasi-documentary tone of *China/Norway* (and, in fact, all the other pieces of the installation), *Blast-off* deliberately combines two distinct modes of narration: documentary and fantasy. Davenport mentions *Workers Leaving the Lumière factory* by the Lumière Brothers from 1894, and *Le Voyage dans la lune* by Georges Méliès from 1902 as her primary references:

> The Méliès/Lumière bros dichotomy, as bound to an earlier moment of capitalist development, resonates for me very significantly in relation to our present moment. By referencing these two iconic films within a transformed and utterly contemporary framework, I'm seeking to evoke the deep ambivalence I feel about many aspects of globalizing culture and economics and raise questions about the historical representation of labour.[6]

6 – Nancy Davenport, description of *WORKERS* installation for the Istanbul Biennale 2007, courtesy of Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery.

Blast-off Animation starts with a portrait of a worker inside what appears to be a factory; the 'camera' zooms out and moves to the right, along a line of workers leading outside the factory. The scene itself seems to be frozen; the workers stand still, only some machines move and electric light is flickering. The second shot from outside reveals that the line of workers is leading towards a launching base where a rocket is about to take off. The rocket is fired, takes off, and crosses different artificial 'space-scapes' composed of clouds, stars, comets, and satellites (figures 2 and 3). Inside the ship, the worker-astronauts are looking at the disappearing earth. Later, one of them slowly orbits in zero gravity. Back into the cartoon mode, we see the rocket orbiting around the earth and disappearing out of the frame in the form of a shooting star (figure 4). Returning into the frame, it heads straight and fast towards the earth until it disappears – literally being sucked up by the earth's gravity. After a short fade out, we are again in the factory. The spaceship is landing in the background.

The sound track conveys another line of narration, loosely connected to the images. It starts with 'factory sounds' and a boss explaining to his workers the privatisation of the company. It then merges into a mix of Chinese voices, the beginnings of the International Anthem, and NASA chatter. It ends with a historical mix of a French broadcast discussing socialism and a French song.

Figure 1. Installation view. Nancy Davenport, *WORKERS (Leaving the Factory)*. Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, 2008. Multi-channel video installation. Courtesy of Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery. *China/Norway Animation*: eight monitors; *Blast-Off Animation*: projection, open sound.

Figure 2. Nancy Davenport, still from *WORKERS (Leaving the Factory)*. (*Blast-off Animation*) 2008. Multi-channel video installation. Dimensions variable, DVD continuous loop. Edition of 6. Courtesy of Nancy Davenport.

Figure 3. Nancy Davenport, still from *WORKERS (Leaving the Factory)*. (*Blast-off Animation*) 2008. Multi-channel video installation. Dimensions variable, DVD continuous loop. Edition of 6. Courtesy of Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery.

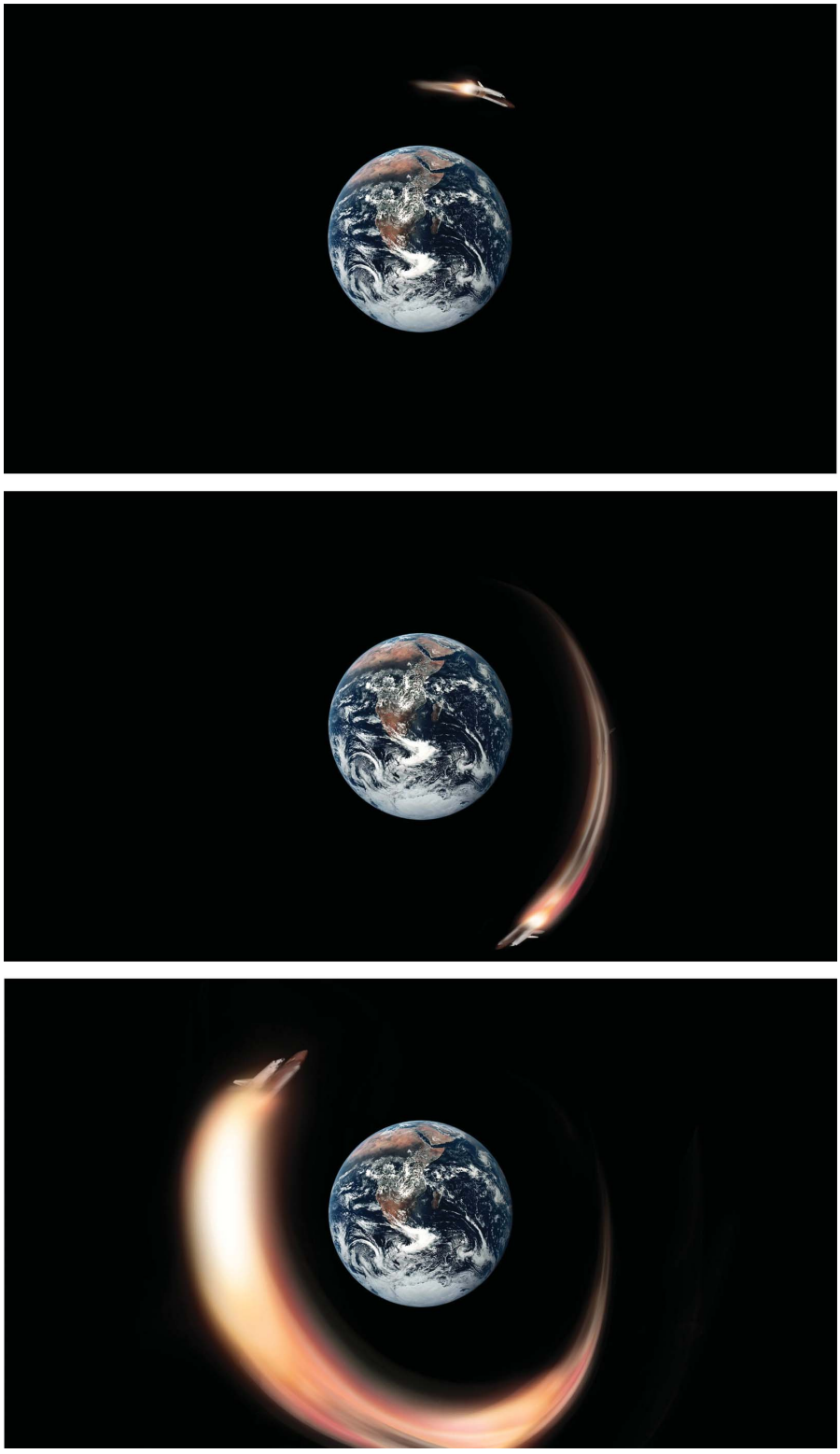

Figure 4. Nancy Davenport, stills from *WORKERS (Leaving the Factory)*. (*Blast-off Animation*) 2008. Multi-channel video installation. Dimensions variable, DVD continuous loop. Edition of 6. Courtesy of Nancy Davenport.

'Something Must be Built Up', Something 'Artificial', 'Posed'

In his 'Little History of Photography' Walter Benjamin writes, quoting Berthold Brecht:

> A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG [Allgemeine Elektricitaets Gesellschaft] reveals next to nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations – the factory, say – means that they are no longer explicit. So in fact 'something must be built up', something 'artificial', 'posed'.[7]

7 – Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty and Thomas Y. Levin, Cambridge, MA: Belknap 2008, 293. The footnote to this quote says: 'The Krupp works at Essen was the original plant in the Krupp steel, armaments, and shipbuilding empire, founded in 1811 by Friedrich Krupp. The AEG is the Allgemeine Elektricitaets Gesellschaft, or General Electric Company, founded in Berlin in 1833 by the industrialist Emil Rathenau; it was largely responsible for building the electrical infrastructure of modern Germany'. Ibid., 298.

In *Blast-off Animation*, Davenport builds up something very artificial indeed:

> Like in all my animations, the images are Photoshop documents with many layers, collages made up of hundreds of still images – then animated in very basic ways (I hope/want them to register as stills but have a certain tension with movement).[8]

8 – Nancy Davenport, email conversation, 28 January 2010.

Technically, the piece is a digital video to be played with a DVD player and projected onto the gallery wall with a digital video projector (I watched the preview copy on my own notebook screen). As far as the 'story' is concerned, the piece begins with a 'video portrait' of a worker inside a factory hall. A zooming out reveals him to be part of a line of workers that the moving image slowly tracks through the factory space. The workers, clad in blue overalls, are not working but standing in line as if they were posing. They are frozen into various poses: with hanging or folded arms, with their hands in their pockets, and so forth. They seem to be listening to the words we can hear on the sound track: 'because *now, in the future*, just doing the job is not gonna be good enough in the future ... you're gonna do it well, if you're gonna succeed' – an excerpt from the Ken Loach film *The Navigators* (2001), staging the drama of the privatisation of British Rail. (The British idiom 'now in the future' emphasises the hybrid temporality of both contemporary society and its representation – there is no future, only a multitude of possible nows.) Suddenly, one of the workers performs two brisk movements, turning a back shot into two successive profile shots. With the second movement, the piston rods of a machine tool in the foreground start moving up and down. The tracking-shot continues across a small room where workers in red overalls are seated directly facing the viewer, the electric light is flickering. Farther right, we see a mixed group of workers, European and Asian, one of whom is directly facing the camera. They wear different clothes and helmets: blue, red and orange. Most of them are looking in the same direction, towards the gates where two workers can be seen standing in bright sunlight. The camera pans over the factory hall, and one worker standing on the right comes into view. A cross dissolve reveals the outside of the factory. After a rapid zoom out, the camera again follows the line of workers and zooms out until a space shuttle appears. A huge timer in the foreground of the launching landscape changes its numbers in synchronicity with the NASA countdown on the soundtrack. In a stuttering movement, the rocket is fired and takes off through the clouds and into outer space (figures 5–7).

A Meta-factory

As the artist explains, the factory is 'composed from bits I shot of factories in Norway and China – The worker's figures ... come from all over the place, China, Norway, New York'.[9] It is not a specific factory we see, but a generic factory or rather: a meta-factory (figures 8 and 9). In her work description for the Istanbul Biennale 2007, Davenport claims her painstaking digital photo-collage and montage to evocate 'the deep ambivalence [she] feel[s] about many aspects of globalisation culture and economics and raise questions about the historical representation of labour'. This resonates with Benjamin's aforementioned call from 1931 for 'constructive images' in view of Brecht's observation that with reality having become functional, photography has reached its critical boundaries.[10] It cannot represent the human relations within an ever-more complex capitalist economy with the means of an image that depicts only one (exterior) aspect of an object: spatially and temporally. For Benjamin, it is only with (Russian) film that the constructive potential of photography – the depiction of contemporary reality in its functionality – has been fully realised.

9 – Ibid.

10 – Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', 293.

Already in 1923, in his essay 'A New Instrument of Vision', László Moholy-Nagy presents film as 'the logical culmination of photography', with the individual photographs becoming 'details of an assembly'. For Moholy-Nagy, '[...] a photographic series [i.e. a film, IH] inspired by a definite purpose can become at once the

Figure 5. Nancy Davenport, still from *WORKERS (Leaving the Factory)*. (*Blast-off Animation*) 2008. Multi-channel video installation. Dimensions variable, DVD continuous loop. Edition of 6. Courtesy of Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery.

Figure 6. Nancy Davenport, still from *WORKERS (Leaving the Factory)*. (*Blast-off Animation*) 2008. Multi-channel video installation. Dimensions variable, DVD continuous loop. Edition of 6. Courtesy of Nancy Davenport.

Figure 7. Nancy Davenport, still from *WORKERS (Leaving the Factory)*. (*Blast-off Animation*) 2008. Multi-channel video installation. Dimensions variable, DVD continuous loop. Edition of 6. Courtesy of Nancy Davenport.

Figure 8. Nancy Davenport, still from *WORKERS (Leaving the Factory).* (*Blast-off Animation*) 2008. Multi-channel video installation. Dimensions variable, DVD continuous loop. Edition of 6. Courtesy of Nancy Davenport.

Figure 9. Nancy Davenport, still from *WORKERS (Leaving the Factory).* (*Blast-off Animation*) 2008. Multi-channel video installation. Dimensions variable, DVD continuous loop. Edition of 6. Courtesy of Nancy Davenport.

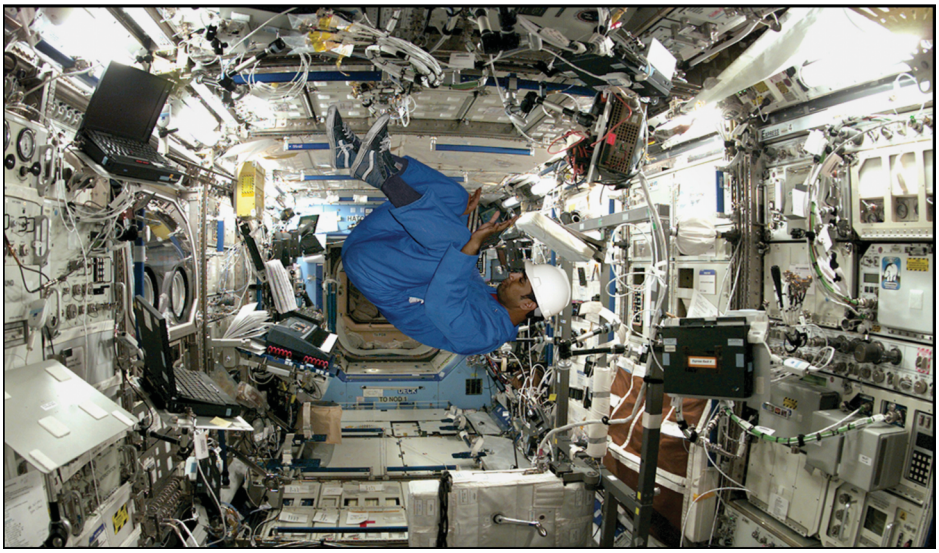

Figure 10. Nancy Davenport, still from *WORKERS (Leaving the Factory).* (*Blast-off Animation*) 2008. Multi-channel video installation. Dimensions variable, DVD continuous loop. Edition of 6. Courtesy of Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery.

most potent weapon and the tenderest lyric'.[11] Whether the still or the moving image is the appropriate form of representation has been discussed from the very beginnings of the age of the moving image. Since then, the documentary capacities of film (and later video) have been fully exploited, emptied of its emancipatory potential (television) and eventually dismissed. With her photo-animations (i.e. moving views that reference the still images they are made from), Davenport, in a retroactive move, does not animate the photographic image, but rather reanimates the moving image in the search to reinvest it with representational potential and political signification. But the times are different: contemporary artists no longer pretend at a true representation but content themselves, for the most part, with an ambiguous evocation. The claim is no longer to represent a functional world, but rather to confront, back-to-back, the functionalities of the world and of its representations.

In this sense, her reference to primitive film can be interpreted not as a way of reframing an already existing dichotomy (Lumière vs Méliès, documentary vs fiction), but rather as a way of reconnecting with a time where the functions of the moving image were not yet dealt out.[12] The narrative of *Blast-off Animation* demonstrates, by its nonchalant conjunction of documentary and fiction, that information and entertainment, political discourse and poetry, are both the flipsides of the very same fiction. In the second part of the video, an enigmatic collage juxtaposes images and sounds, present and past. When, inside the shuttle, one of the workers frozen into an embryonic pose is orbiting, out of gravity, a voice proclaims the natural equality of men (figure 10). The speech by French socialist Léon Blum (1930) entitled 'De quoi est né le socialisme' is slowly drowned out with a song: a musical score by Gabriel Fauré of a poem by Verlaine (1880) called 'Le ciel est par-dessus les toits'. The vague historical referentiality of these recordings (we recognise the kind of voice, the kind of song) generates in the audience a strong intellectual nostalgia and critical *rêverie*.

Leaving the (Photoshop) Factory

The first two factory shots (which are in fact composed of a multiplicity of shots) are a direct reference to one of the first films ever projected: *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* by the Lumière Brothers from 1894. The whole project title and subject references this iconic representation of workers. While in Davenport's piece the workers are shown as if they were leaving the factory, in the Lumière film they are filmed while actually leaving the factory.[13] They hurry out of the factory gates after a day's work. Dressed in their leisure clothes, they are not walking in an orderly manner but are pushing each other, most of them walking, some of them riding bicycles. One woman is pulling another woman's skirt in front of the camera. This incident instantly blurs the boundaries between documentary and fiction film, boundaries that were set up later with the institutionalization of cinema.[14] The act of pulling the woman's skirt would probably not have occurred if there had not been the camera: the documentary is not a record of things happening, but of things *made to* happen.[15]

Besides its documentary value, the main subject of *Workers Leaving the Factory* (and of the numerous other Lumière actualities) was, of course: movement. Not that of the camera, but that of the workers. The camera, in those early films, remained perfectly motionless, and framed its subject frontally until it ran out of film.[16] The immobility of the camera only accentuates the disorderly movement of the workers. The attraction of early cinema for the '(in)credulous spectator' was the coming to life of still images: of life-size playing cards, posters, and puppets – and of photographic portraits, which until now, had been still images.[17]

With Davenport, things are the other way round: the workers do *not* move but the images themselves scroll across the screen, in the form of mobile friezes or, rather, mobile freezes. The worker's figures – even though they are taken from different

11 – László Moholy-Nagy, 'A New Instrument of Vision', in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells, London: Routledge 2002, 95.

12 – Noël Burch, 'A Primitive Mode of Representation?' in *Life to Those Shadows*, ed., Berkely, Los Angeles and London: California University Press, 186–201.

13 – There is actually three versions of the film: one without horses (the most popular one), one with one horse, and one with two horses pulling a coach. (Thanks to Friedrich Tietjen for bringing my attention to this point.) This would indicate more than one shooting and thus call into question the one-shot paradigm. But at the same time it would reinforce the documentary claim of the film; that life continues beyond its representation.

14 – The Lumière brothers, known for their actuality films, also contributed to the genre of slapstick comedy. Their first public screening at the Grand Café in Paris in 1985 consisted of ten short films, among them both *Workers Leaving the Factory* and *The Sprinkler Sprinkled*.

15 – In his documentary *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* (D 1995), Harun Farocki, repeating this incident again and again, arrives at a different interpretation of this slippage between documentary and staged action. For Farocki, documentary film disrupts the action–reaction scheme that is the basis of human interaction. The woman does not react, because the camera records.

16 – Burch, 'A Primitive Mode of Representation?', 186–201.

17 – Tom Gunning, 'An Aesthetic of Astonishment. Early Film and the In (Credulous) Spectator', *Art and Text*, 34 (Spring 1989), 31–45. That photography was immobile before the advent of film is of course not quite true: photographic lantern slide-shows made use of movement effects since the 1880s. And around 1900 were invented what Kim Timby has called 'images changeantes', changing images, byproducts of the search for auto-stereoscopic images that were visible without the aid of a stereoscopic device. The simple principle of the linear grid also allowed for the recording and display of successive movement phases; for example, a woman with open and closed eyes. See Kim Timby, 'Images en relief et images changeantes. La photographie à réseau ligné', *Études photographiques*, 9 (Mai 2001), 124–43.

photographs – are fixed into one position, one posture, one expression. The assumption that the workers are actually leaving the factory is suggested by this lining up and is reinforced by the movement of the virtual camera. The workers do not leave the factory . . . but the camera does!

Video without Video

But there is more – the workers are not even photographed while 'taking a stride' (Benjamin), as in snapshot photography: they are photographed separately and then reassembled into a line that leads out of the (equally reassembled) factory space towards the launching area. Contrary to chrono-photography that freezes time into abstract cuts depicting 'impossible poses' of bodies about to complete a movement but never completing it, Davenport's objects are already frozen into immobility through posing before the image is taken. The resulting images are situated beyond photographic temporality as we know it, in an '(im)possible present'. The worker's figures 'complete' a movement (leaving the factory) that the photographed workers have never begun.

The same holds true for the whole video made up of post-produced movement: Besides using the Ken Burns effect turning the statuary factory scene into a sequence of moving views, Davenport also uses photographic stop action when she reassembles separate NASA snapshots (or video stills) into the stuttering moving image of the take-off. But more likely, she disassembles video footage to make it look more photographic (just like Chris Marker dissimulates the use of film footage in his photo-novel *La Jetée* [1962]).[18] Except for the take-off, then, all movement in Davenport's piece, including the 'moving camera shots' of the factory sequence, is not recorded but post-produced. What we get is a video without video: it is more the soundtrack than the rudimentary digital animation of still photographs that conveys the piece's cinematic dimension.

18 – Marker also dissimulates the precise moment where a rapid succession of serial photographs turns, for a brief moment, into film. The climax of this 'becoming filmic' is reached with the woman opening her eyes, but is actually preceded by the woman opening her mouth.

The Oxymoronic Image

In insisting on the static element in her animation, Davenport questions the habitual association of movement and temporality, the implication that 'moving images' unfold temporally and thus create a linear narration. Her 'animation effects' foreground the photographic stasis of the moving image as such: cinema as 'trucage', in the sense evoked by André Bazin.[19]

19 – André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinema*, Paris: Editions du Cerf 1990.

To be sure that the cinematic pans and zooms across/within the hybrid 'factoryscape' do not sublate the original stasis of the photographic images, Davenport adds local 'kinetic effects'. In this way, the Ken Burns effect registers as just another 'special effect' performed onto still images. Likewise, in the take-off and outer space sequence, she deliberately deskills her animation into jerky, cartoon-like motion to counter the illusion of temporal continuity; pointing at the stop, not at the motion part of her stop motion animation. The spaceship does not drop off the rocket during the whole trip. Arriving in outer space, the rocket continues to fire a motionless fire. Inside the spaceship the disappearing earth is watched by three motionless workers (except for a jerky head movement). When one of the workers slowly orbits around himself, his body remains completely still.

Thus, Davenport creates a tension between immobile objects and mobile images (Ken Burns effect), mobile objects and mobile images (kinetic effects), immobile images and moving objects (stop motion) that challenges traditional viewing conventions. It is as if the 'attraction' of the digital age was not the coming to life of mortified objects (the 'living photograph') but the reverse movement: the appearance of stillness within a moving image. It is as if animation in contemporary photography was not a negation but rather an extension of photographic stasis into filmic movement and an extension of filmic movement into photographic stasis. The resulting images are moving stills: synthetic 'image states' that display

movement and stasis at the same time. Combined with digital montage, these moving stills extend photographic space into a quasi endless 'synopsis' and filmic time into a 'synchronic' or timeless time.

Expanded Photography?

In all her video works, Davenport uses digital montage, collage, animation and loop as a means to question the spatial and temporal confinement of photography: the cut. Expanded photography, then, is less bound to a desire for movement (as suggested by realist film history, which presents film as the logical progression of photography) than to a desire for endlessness, a desire for the never-ending view. But its fulfilment might leave us frustrated, because it is precisely the cut that is pointing to the endlessness[20] of reality beyond its photographic abstraction, because it is precisely the cut that constitutes the endlessness beyond the frame (photographic off) as the imaginary counterpart of the object confined within the frame. The force of the photograph resides in its tension between autonomy (an image world) and dependence (an image of the world).[21] The photograph is a partial object constantly pointing to its absent other. With expanded photography, the off is only temporally absent from the screen. The photograph thus loses its obscenity, understood in the etymological sense as its pointing to what is 'off scene'.

The cut, rather than suspending the narrative time flow with a fixed meaning, expands the framed narrative into the spatial and temporal endlessness beyond the frame. If one wants to include the endlessness of space within the photograph or (which amounts to the same thing) to expand the limited photographic space into endlessness, one runs the risk, in either instance, of a logical contradiction: the end of endlessness. The same holds true for the temporal aspect, if the before and after are to be included in the photographic moment. Expanded photography is trapped in a logical contradiction that results not from the limitations of the photographic image itself, but from a limited understanding of photography – as deficient.

The Photographic Now

The oxymoronic views of Davenport's photoshopped meta-factory and space fantasy can also be interpreted differently, not as a desire for endlessness but for a different present. There is a structural parallel between industry and photography that becomes evident in the narrative structure of *Blast-off*. Both economies (that of goods and that of images) are in their state of post-production. In this sense, the worker's travel into outer space can be seen as a part of the chain of production. The spaceship is just a structural extension of the factory; the workers still wear their overalls. They blast off into outer space only to land at the very same factory. This travel is, in a way, also the travel of photography – a permanent round trip from photography as document to photography as fiction back to photography as document, a permanent oscillation between the photograph and its off, between its stasis and its motion.

Thus, we might re-frame the photographic now; not only as the display of a possible present, but as the possible present of photography that uses all possibilities of digital post-production or augmentation to create intelligible images that can no longer be tied to the dualism of documentary versus fiction, still versus moving, printed versus projected, recorded versus calculated. The photographic now reflects the new fluctuating temporality of digital image processing and display. The photographic now no longer ties the image to a past that never was or to a future that will never be, but launches photography into the open space of the present.

20 – Following Kracauer, the affinity to endlessness is one of photography's four affinities – the three others being unstaged reality, fortuitousness, and interminacy. See Siegfried Kracauer, 'Photography', in *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality*, with an introduction by Miriam Bratu Hansen, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1997, 3–23.

21 – Here, I am arguing against Stanley Cavell's opposition between painting (an image world) and photography (an image of the world). See Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1979. For me, the photograph is both taken (from the world) and made (as an image), it is always a self-contained representation and a partial object referring to its off.

The Photographic Now: David Claerbout's *Vietnam**

Ingrid Hölzl

In a recent article investigating a video animation by Nancy Davenport I have put forward the term "the photographic now."[1] The term designates both the current state (the now) of photography and photography's altered relation to time through digital postproduction: montage, collage and animation. I posit that, with the advent of digital postproduction, photographic images are no longer tied to a specific past but show a possible present. As digital images, they are beyond the habitual dualism of still and moving, printed and projected, recorded versus calculated.

The photographic now also reflects the new fluctuating temporality of photographic images through digital screening. The present article seeks to further explore this aspect, taking the example of the video installation *Vietnam, 1967, near Duc Pho* (2001) by Belgian artist David Claerbout. In this work, a famous press photograph from the Vietnam war is merged with an animated photo-sequence taken by the artist at the historical site, converted into a digital video and projected onto the gallery wall. With this, a radically present temporality of the photographic image emerges: a photographic now.

* I am indebted to Rémi Marie for his numerous ideas and comments on the photographic now and on Claerbout's work which helped considerably shape this article, and to the journal's anonymous reviewers and editorial committee for their constructive criticism and suggestions which helped improving it.

1. Ingrid Hölzl, "Blast-off Photography—A Critical Study of the Work of Nancy Davenport," in *Photography and Movement*, special issue *History of Photography*, vol. 35, n° 1, February 2011, p. 32-43.

Figs. 1 and 2: Video stills from: David Claerbout, *Vietnam 1967, near Duc Pho (Reconstruction after Hiromichi Mine)*, 2001 single-channel video projection, color, silent, 3 mins. looped. Courtesy the artist and galleries Hauser & Wirth and Yvon Lambert.

VIETNAM, 1967, NEAR DUC PHO

Vietnam is a single-channel video installation, silent, and in colour; no information about its dimensions is provided on the gallery preview DVD. When exhibited, the video is projected so as to cover the wall from floor to ceiling. It shows a lush landscape, above which a military plane is displayed in a state of final disintegration. There are subtle changes in light as if clouds were passing over the hills seen in the foreground, whereas the background remains perfectly still resulting in the double oxymoron of the moving still: a still image that is moving and a moving image that is still.[2] The three-minute loop appears as a continuous take, the light effect simulating the common real-time experience of clouds passing; an experience whose non-narrativity yields the impression of an extended present where "[…] what occurred previously is essentially similar to what is occuring now."[3] A comparison between the two video stills here reproduced serves to highlight the quasi-static nature of the video; though sampled from different moments in the piece, the two stills look strikingly similar (see Figs. 1 and 2).

2. Ingrid Hölzl, "Moving Stills—Images that are No Longer Immobile," in *Photographies*, vol. 3, n° 1, April 2010, p. 99-108.

3. David Claerbout and Lynn Cooke, "Conversation," in Kurt Vanbelleghem (ed.), *David Claerbout*, Bruxelles, A Prior, 2002, p. 52.

The full title of the installation, *Vietnam, 1967, near Duc Pho (reconstruction after Hiromichi Mine)*, provides the viewer with a considerable amount of historical information: where, when and by whom the image, which the present work is meant to reconstruct, was taken. Exploring the reference given in the title, we uncover Hiromichi Mine's identity as a Japanese press photographer who worked for United Press International during the Vietnam war. Mine took the photograph in 1967, one year before he died, when the armoured personnel carrier he was in hit a land mine in central Vietnam. The photograph is included in a book entitled *Requiem*,[4] which celebrates the work of the 135 photographers who died or went missing in Indochina, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in the period spanning 1950-1975. The caption of the double-spread runs as follows:

> Ha Phan [*sic*], Vietnam, 1967. A U.S. twin-engine transport Caribou crashes after being hit by American artillery near Duc Pho on August 3, 1967. U.S. Artillery accidentally shot down the ammunition-laden plane, which crossed a firing zone while trying to land at the U.S. Special Forces camp. All three crewmen died in the crash.[5]

Claerbout has established his reputation as an artist whose video installations, located at the crossroads between film and photography, question the specificities of the filmic and the photographic image. The issue in *Vietnam*, notes David Green, is "not the conflation of photography and film but a conjuncture

4. Horst Faas and Tim Page (eds.), *Requiem—By the Photographers who Died in Vietnam and Indochina*, New York, Random House, 1997.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

of the two media in which neither ever loses its specificity."[6] But, as Claerbout himself puts it, "What should be done with the solid looking' aspects of both film and photography in a computer-based environment? And, what becomes of the image as it is processed by one and the same electronic signal from its encoding to its output as a video- or data-projection?"[7]

Rather than updating the critique of medium specificity prevalent in the critical writing on Claerbout with another layer of complexity, we need to address the questions raised by this loss of medium specificity. During the first seconds, the projection seems to be a still photograph. It is only after some time that slight changes of light allow the viewer to scrutinise the image in order to grasp its status: if it is moving, it is a video, if not, it is a photograph. But the work resists—it does not yield an easy answer, and the medium uncertainty remains.

Noël Carroll has stressed that "if you know that what you are watching is a film, even a film of what appears to be a photograph, it is always justifiable to expect that the image might move."[8] The point here is that we do not know whether what we are watching is a film that appears to be a photograph or a photograph that appears to be a film. We do not know whether we should wait for movement to reveal the image to be a moving image or, rather, wait for stillness to reveal the image to be a still image. The changes of light that become perceptible after some time generate the sensation of time passing, thus, of viewing a moving image. But these changes are rather minimal, forcing the emergent moving image back into the state of almost-stillness.

The stake of the video, one might say, is the "nothing to see" in the sense that, despite the filmic expectation of the viewer in front of a projected image, nothing moves: not a leaf, not a cloud, not a sound. When finally the viewer resigns herself to the prospect that this tension between movement and stillness might remain unresolved, she may resort to simple enjoyment of the landscape's silence, its interplay with the light, and the ambivalent sensation of time passing. Continuous observation of a peaceful landscape where time passes but nothing much happens generates a contemplative mood. In front of this postmodern *vanitas*, the viewer is invoked to meditate on time.

6. David Green, "The Visibility of Time," in Susanne Gaensheimer, Friedrich Meschede, Frank Lubbers, and Katrina Brown (eds.), *David Claerbout. With two essays by David Green*, Cologne, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2004, p. 21.

7. Claerbout and Cooke, 2002, p. 42.

8. Noël Carroll, "Towards an Ontology of the Moving Image," in Cynthia A. Freeland and Thomas E. Wartenburg (eds.), *Philosophy and Film*, New York, Routledge, 1995, p. 73.

AFTER CLAERBOUT

As stated above, the photographic now pertains to the new temporality of the photographic image arising from the processes of digital postproduction and screening. Postproduction is at play in *Vietnam* in the form of both digital animation and collage. Fragments of the Mine photograph are seamlessly merged with newly photographed imagery of the historical site in order to achieve a powerful composition. Comparing the "Requiem" version of the Mine photograph with a still of Claerbout's piece, one notices several subtle differences, all of which aim to increase the dramatic impact of the picture.

While the hills in the foreground have changed, those in the background remain exactly the same (by enlarging the still, the raster grid of the newsprint photograph becomes visible). In the foreground, the American artillery camp is replaced by a lush landscape. The military antenna on the left is replaced by a telegraph pole and electric wires. On the right edge of the image, a building with a metal roof resembles that in the historical photograph, with the exception of some details. The body of the plane is moved up and to the right, closer to the cut-off tail. The debris is concentrated into a light zone of the sky above and to the right of the plana; in the Mine photograph the sky is of a uniform grey.

In his conversation with Lynn Cooke, Claerbout explains that "in order to make *Vietnam, 1967, near Duc Pho* (2001), I went to the place where Hiromichi Mine had been, but as I was not able to place myself in the same position I had to recompose the photograph somewhat."[9] In a recent email conversation I had with the artist in May 2010, he elaborated upon this point:

> I did indeed travel to the same spot but I couldn't locate the exact spot. Things just didn't look quite the same. After a few days I learned that this landscape had been dramatically changed by bombings (the hills) and by a layer of several meters to cover the old air strip when the Americans left so as to make it no longer usable as a landing strip. The landscape was recorded with a consumer still camera, recording one image every 2.5 to 3 seconds. As such, a change of light can be noticed via the sequence of several hundreds of stills taken one after the other. Then, through simple "crossfading," the stills were animated. […] Also, the sky was newly photographed. It is non-moving; so, a still.[10]

The video is thus composed of several layers. The background is a video image fabricated by crossfading a photo series taken by Claerbout somewhere

9. Claerbout and Cooke, 2002, p 62.

10. This email conversation took place between Friday May 14 and Monday May 17, 2010.

around the historical site. A re-photographed sky, at the center of which there is a lighter-coloured zone, is then superimposed over this background. The third layer consists of the hills in the background and the parts of the exploded airplane taken from a newspaper print of the Mine image. The body of the plane is repositioned right below the lighter area of the re-photographed sky, as if this zone emanated from it in the form of a white cloud.

In order to bring together the different elements of this moving image collage into a single coherent view, the changes of light of the photo-animation are digitally extended to the aircraft so that, when viewing the projection, the whole image seems to be invested with subtle changes of light. When viewing the video in fast forward, the different layers of the collage become palpable, as well as the partial animation: the light effects focus on the hills in the foreground and on the plane, but do not affect the hills seen in the background and the rest of the sky.[11]

AFTER MINE

Claerbout's complex digital recomposition questions the very possibility of what it pretends to be: the reconstruction of a photographic document. The composite, yet authentic, image also questions the possibility of photographic documentation as such. It questions the assumption of a direct causal relation between event and image, an assumption that is based on an indexical understanding of photography as the self-imprint of reality on a photosensitive surface. It questions the capacity of the camera to accurately capture an event and the capacity of the image to faithfully transmit this event through time and space. Photographic authenticity, or originality, is commonly understood as a relation of faithfulness: between object and negative, negative and print, original print and reprint.

Philosophically, this common belief has been formulated by Kendall Walton in terms of "transparency" or as the "counterfactual dependence" of the effect (the photographic image) on the cause (the photographed object).[12] This notion rephrases Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic notion of the physically

11. The "fast forward" display is another instance of the new fluidity of photographic time generated by digital technology as a kind of response to the new malleability of filmic time generated by analogue video technology. See Mary-Ann Doane, "Real Time: Instantaneity and the Photographic Imaginary," in David Green (ed.), *Stillness and Time: Photography and the Moving Image*, Brighton, Photoworks/Photoforum, 2006, p. 23-38.

12. Kendall L. Walton, "Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism," in Scott Walden (ed.), *Photography and Philosophy: Essays on the Pencil of Nature*, Malden, Blackwell, 2008, p. 14-49.

forced "point-to-point resemblance"[13] between object and image. Patrick Maynard, again, has proposed the notion of "seeing-in" or "factive pictorial experience"[14] which relates to Barthes's notion of the "that-has-been"[15] (*ça a été*) of the photographed object.

"If everything works as it should," writes Maynard, that is, "if the aim of the photographic apparatus to produce an accurate image of the world is respected, the resulting image allows to deduct the factivity of the object that it shows."[16] In the case of the digital photograph, the first instance of the "chain of information," the negative, is missing. As a result, one may think that the direct relation of object and image is even more direct than was the case in analogue photography; however, Maynard argues that this is not so. With digital recording, the "chain of information" between object and image is contrived. Most digital cameras interpolate, adding information that is merely assumed as "having been there" in front of the camera lens. Maynard has a point here, but it can be argued that the chain of information (starting with the photographed scene) is equally contrived in analogue recording. Optical and chemical parameters, photographers' and printers' decisions, etc., influence which information is transmitted and passed on to the photographic image and which information is omitted. Thus, the loss-free "chain of information" from object to image to viewer that Maynard posits as a general rule is a purely theoretical concept.

The common understanding of photography as a transparent medium allowing for "seeing in" means that event and image are mutually authenticated in a circular argument: there has been an event because it has been faithfully captured by a camera which is meant to faithfully capture an event. Mine's photograph is famous for having captured a singular event: the explosion of the Caribou plane near Duc Pho on August 3, 1967. But how can we know for certain that the image is a single view of this singular event? Could it not be a collage, such as Frank Hurley's collages of WWI? If we accept the assumption that a capture of a singular event has indeed occurred, the different versions of the image raise another question: what constitutes the event here? The contact of

13. Charles Sanders Peirce, "What is a Sign?", in The Peirce Edition Project (eds.), *The Essential Peirce, Vol. 2: Selected Philosophical Writings (1893-1913)*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1998, p. 4-26.

14. Patrick Maynard, "Factive Pictorial Experience: What's Special about Photographs?" *Nous* (forthcoming 2012).

15. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1981, p. 63-119.

16. Maynard, 2012.

the missile with the plane? The explosion of the plane? Its final crash? The event itself, one could say, has already happened; it is only its aftereffects that we see, the destroyed plane and the debris, suspended in separate points in space, before continuing along their separate paths down to earth.

The answer is that the "decisive moment" is not the representation of an event, but rather the conception of an event and its representative moment. (The famous photograph of the Hindenburg explosion, for example, shows the very moment of the explosion of the airship.) The camera does not capture an event, but creates a photographic event. It depicts a moment that has never existed as such. The photograph does not reveal the optical unconscious, but rather the photographic unreality: it shows what does not exist prior to the photographic event, i.e. the photograph. The causality argument commonly invoked with photographs holds that the recording exists because of the recorded. Instead, the opposite seems to be the case: the recorded exists because of the recording.

RECONSTRUCTION, RECOMPOSITION, REACTUALISATION

The version of Hiromichi Mine's photograph published in the Requiem book differs significantly from three others that I was able to locate online: one on the World Press Photo website, and two on the website of the C-7A-Caribou association. The World Press Photo, whose frame is almost rectangular, centres on the American artillery camp; the plane appears towards the left. In the Requiem version, larger in frame, the plane is in the centre of the image, with the horizon line dividing the image into two equal parts: the foreground with the camp and the sky with the plane. In the first Caribou version, apparently reproducing the Requiem version, the plane is still at the centre of the image, but the horizon line is considerably higher, showing more of the American camp. Also, the contour line seems to be retouched, giving it a strangely concave shape. In the second Caribou version, the horizon line is lower again, showing more of the sky and less of the camp. Most importantly, the frame is shifted to the right. The plane appears far left. Far right, large pieces of debris in the sky come into view. What appears to be the edge of a shed in the other three versions is revealed to be the remnants of a church with a clock tower.

Vietnam is closest to the Requiem version of the Mine photograph, which means that the artist most probably used this version as the model for his reconstruction. But the considerable differences in terms of light, framing, and internal composition raise the question of what Claerbout reconstructed exactly. The event of the Caribou crash, its photographic documentation, his own experience

of the photograph, or his search for the exact viewpoint from which Mine shot his famous photograph? Why should one want to reconstruct a perfect shot? It seems, rather, that Claerbout used Mine's photograph to reconstruct the deceptive landscape he was confronted with, a landscape that hides its violent past under peacefull hills. The landscape was actually reconstructed by the American soldiers when they left, the airstrip covered so as to make it no longer usable for the Vietnamese. Can *Vietnam* thus be a reconstruction of the past by means of the present or is it, on the contrary, a reconstruction of the present by means of the past?

The caption "After Hiromichi Mine" places Claerbout's video animation in relation to Mine's press photograph and thus comments on the relationship between original and remake. But taken literally, "after Mine" indicates a relation of time. Thirty years after Mine, Claerbout, the Requiem print in his hand and the idea of its reconstruction in his mind, travelled to the historical site. But, as he was not able to take Mine's position, he "had to recompose the photograph somewhat."[17] As I have shown, the artist indeed recomposed the Mine image—now consisting of at least three different layers—quite substantially. Referring to his working method in general, we can assume that even if the landscape had not changed and Mine's point of view still existed, Claerbout would have recomposed the image.

In his conversation with Lynn Cooke, the artist speaks of "creating a strong composition, [a] schematic framework that [...] determines the way that one remembers [a piece]."[18] To increase its impact, Claerbout uses "theatrical elements, like 'real' duration, and life-size projection."[19] He associates his practice of recomposition with that of history painting, in opposition to newsreel footage where "the camera chases after events: the composition is focused and locked into whatever is considered news."[20] More interested in a strong composition than a strong message, Claerbout converted the still image of the past, depicting an impossible event (an event that has taken place only as a photograph), into a moving image of the present depicting a possible landscape. At the same time, the artist attached great importance to the resemblance of image details, such as the shed on the right edge of the frame, which replaces a similar item in the

17. Claerbout, 2002, p. 62.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

earlier photograph, or the telegraph pole on the left side, which, in turn, replaces an antenna.

Claerbout's pilgrimage to the very location of the crash reminds us of Tacita Dean's audio piece, *Trying to Find the Spiral Jetty* (1997), which documents her search for Smithson's famous earthwork. Dean followed the precise instructions that Smithson left to locate the Spiral Jetty, but failed to find it. In both cases, the delay between the initial act (of making an earthwork, of making an image) and the act of its intended re-enactment is approximately 30 years. Claerbout very probably procured a set of instructions similar to those Dean had in order to find the location of the American camp (and we can assume Claerbout knew about Dean's work when he embarked on this project a few years later).

Let us briefly imagine the artist travelling to Duc Pho with his GPS device. Google maps will yield no more information than the name and a highway passing through. Let us imagine him asking people and placing the photograph between himself and the landscape, resorting to a kind of Brunelleschi experiment in order to exactly match image to landscape. [21] As has been stated in the case of Dean's work, "it appears that the enactment of the instructions is more important than the attainment of the goal."[22] But the instructions given by Mine are limited to the photograph. Contrary to Dean, who was ultimately unable to find the location of the Spiral Jetty at all, Claerbout did find the location of the American base, but he was unable to reconstruct the exact position from where Mine had taken his famous photograph—for the simple reason that this position no longer existed as the landscape had been changed by the Americans.

While Dean's piece is the audio document of her failed search, Claerbout's piece is the video document of his failed find, his failed attempt to find the "reality then" in the "reality now," his failed attempt to reactualize the past. Or, rather, it is the visual recording of the necessary failure to reactualize the past, a failure that is most likely part of the work itself. For it is precisely the difference between the "landscape then" and the "landscape now" that allows for the sensation that time has passed and that the past is irretrievably past—even if the still image of the "landscape then" is digitally animated and merged with the moving image of

21. The Brunelleschi experiment demonstrated the match between natural and artificial perspective. The viewer had to take the same point of view from where the image had been painted. Through the image being reflected in a mirror, the viewer could see a continuum of reality and representation.

22. Juan Cruz, "Disrupting the Scene: Fiona Banner, Pierre Bismuth, Fiona Crisp, Tacita Dean," *Contemporary Visual Arts*, n° 21, 1999, p. 76.

the "landscape now," which seems to convert the time past and the time that has passed into the passing of time now.

As Walter Benjamin posits, the past is incommensurable with the present and remains irrefutably past. It cannot be reactualized in the present, as being present. It can be seized only as an image "that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again."[23] "For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent." [24]

What is at stake in *Vietnam* is this impossibility of seizing the past in an image that lasts. At the same time, what is at stake in *Vietnam* is this impossibility *and* its reversal; if one cannot reactualize the past, one *can*, however, reactualize the present. In *The World Viewed*, Stanley Cavell argues that the "presentness" of the world past is due to the succession of world projections.[25] With digital video projection, these world projections are no longer film frames, but video frames. They are no longer spatial units of a discontinuous film strip, but temporal units of a continuous video signal.[26] With this, the paradoxical temporality of film as "the projection of the world past that is present to us while we are not present to it"[27] is being recast as the present temporality of the digital image that is present to us as we are present to it. With digital video projection, what is reactualized with each new frame is not the world past, but the present (continuous) image.

SCREENING STILLNESS

With digital screening, the still image is nothing more (or less) than a liminal state of the moving image. In its default mode, the digital video signal is

23. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History (1940)," in Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (eds.), *Selected Writings, Vol. 4, Thesis V*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 390-391.

24. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project (1927-1940)*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 462.

25. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 40.

26. Contrary to the frame in photography and film, the video frame is a completely linear scan of a picture; it is thus a "processual image" (Spielmann). Both analogue and digital video are electronic signals, but since digital video derives from numerical code, it offers more possibilities in terms of signal processing. See Yvonne Spielmann's notion of "transformation imagery" in her seminal study *Video: The Reflexive Medium*, Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, 2008.

27. Cavell, 1979, p. 40.

continually changing while building up its 50 half-frames.[28] With every new frame—that is, every 25th of a second—the image changes. In the case of the still image converted to digital video, the image does not change. It is, however, continually updated according to the video frame rate and the refresh rate of the video projector: 25 and 60 times per second respectively.[29] While the refresh rate indicates how often the projector draws the data (be it the same or different), the frame rate indicates how often the video source is producing an entirely new image (be it the same or different). Thus, the still image represents a special case of the moving image. It is a moving image that does not move. As such, it represents an anomaly, if not a risk for the screen that has been made to display moving images.[30]

With digital screening, stillness is no longer a medium-immanent quality, but rather an optional display mode of the digital video signal, whose default mode is movement. Put differently: stillness and movement are no longer properties of a given medium, but two modes, changing and repetitive, of an electronic signal. In this sense, *Vietnam* is ironically historical, since press photography has contributed to the conversion of the photographic image from sign to signal

28. So far, analogue and digital video technology operated with interlaced half-frames or fields: two fields correspond to one complete scan of a picture; the European PAL standard is 50 interlaced fields (50i), the American NTSC standard is 60i. Claerbout's video installation uses the European PAL standard (50i): 50 fields or 25 frames per second.

29. As the video frame rate increases, so does the refresh rate of computer monitors, which indicates the number of times in a second that the display hardware draws the data. The standard refresh rates for analogue TV and computer monitors used to be approximately 60 Hz (which indicates the frequency of the wavelength), although this standard is continually increasing, as the higher the rate, the less strain for the eye. With digital LCD displays used for most portable screens, activated LCD pixels do not flash on/off between frames, so there is no refresh-induced flicker, no matter how low the refresh rate is.

30. This is reflected by the now technically obsolescent screensaver programs which were supposed to prevent so-called burn-ins in CRT monitors if the image remained too long unchanged. As Nancy Davenport has pointed out, by the time screensavers were becoming ubiquitous, their technical necessity had already been superseded. See Nancy Davenport, "Artist Questionnaire," *October*, vol. 100, Spring 2002, p. 58-61. With LCD monitors, screensavers are even inimical to the screen; they do not save it but reduce its lifetime since the fluorescent backlight remains lit. Yet, even today, screensavers are a default mode of virtually any personal computer display. The function of the screensaver, it seems, has never been to fix a technical shortcoming, but rather to distinguish active screen time from "idle time," and to mark this "idle time" through an (in)aesthetic difference: the wavering colour lines.

through electronic image processing, transmission, and display—time consuming then, instantaneous today.

With digital animation, the immobility of the photograph is only temporary; "the image can be reanimated at any moment."[31] It is what I have called elsewhere a potentially moving image.[32] In *Vietnam*, Claerbout animates a still image sequence by "simply crossfading,"[33] into a moving image, and the still-still image of the plane by means of a digital effect into a moving-still image. Druta Veaceslav speaks of Claerbout's method (and more specifically of the *Shadow Piece*) in terms of hybridisation.[34] Technically, hybridisation is produced by an effect of incrustation whereby an image is superposed onto another. Following Veaceslav, this term aptly describes what one sees, namely "l'incrustation d'un matériel fluide, la vidéo, dans un matériel solide, la photographie. Cette impression est seulement à l'écran. Dans l'ordinateur, au moment de leur rencontre, la photographie et la vidéo sont déjà tous les deux transformées en code, flux, courant."[35] Whereas the mind still holds onto a bygone difference of media—still versus moving—the digital signal that produces the sensation of stillness and movement is already the same.

Whereas a filmic freeze frame has always been perceptively undistinguishable from a projected photograph, their respective adherence to different technologies and temporalities of projection (film projector versus slide projector, still versus moving) has made them media theoretically distinct: the freeze frame is filmic, and the projected photograph is photographic. With digital screening, this possibility no longer exists. The digital video signal that is projected or displayed on the screen carries both still and moving image content. On the screen, the photographic image no longer appears as a projected photograph, but as the evocation of a photograph.

David Green defends the idea that Claerbout's video projection does not demonstrate the "eroding of boundaries between media," and that "what one sees in this work is not the conflation of photography and film but a conjuncture of the two media in which neither loses its specificity," the screen providing "a

31. Rudi Laermans, "The Process of Becoming an Image," in Vanbelleghem, 2002, p. 19.

32. "Photography and Movement," introduction to Hölzl, 2011, p. 4.

33. Email conversation, May 2010.

34. Druta Veaceslav, "Des transformations de la photographie dans *Shadow Piece* et autres vidéos de David Claerbout," *e-AdNM*, 26 January 2008. This text can be found at www.arpla.fr/canal20/eadnm/?p=46 (last accessed December 5, 2010).

35. *Ibid*.

point of intersection for the photographic and the filmic image."[36] But what intersects on the screen is not the photographic and the filmic image; it is only their respective evocation in the form of the digital image. What the screen shows is an image that is already one step beyond medium specificity. Green interprets *Vietnam* as presenting, with the still photograph and the moving image, two conflicting modes of representation. But *Vietnam* is already indifferent to this conflict. As a digital moving image collage, it pertains to the photographic now which is characterized by the new modes of production and display induced by digitalization, postproduction and screening, and by the new fluctuating temporalities of the image that they foster.

In this sense, *Vietnam* is neither a photograph nor a film, it is the *image of an image*, an afterimage, so to speak. What *Vietnam* shows is not a photograph by Hiromichi Mine, not even a part of it, but a possible image of that photograph. Put differently, what one sees is the Hiromichi Mine photograph as a digital still-life, providing the art historical term with a new meaning and a new temporality.[37]

In layering "the trapped present over the trapped past of the photograph,"[38] *Vietnam* seems to constitute a perfect image-trap, the contemporary version of the *Vexierbild*. By projecting the image of the present onto the image of the past, it seems to overcome the historical distance of the latter and to directly affect the viewer in stimulating a contrived recollection. But, in effect, the contrary is the case: the image of the past is projected onto the present to make the latter intelligible. Vietnam is not a reconstruction of the past by means of the present but a reconstruction of the present by means of the past. In *Vietnam*, Claerbout

36. Green, 2004, p. 21.

37. What is usually overlooked is the oxymoron of the term; fruits and flowers (life) are represented as if they were inanimate (still) and, thus, beyond the reach of time. For these perishable objects to appear in the same state during the days and months of painting the picture, they need to be continually replaced. Claerbout's interactive computer work, *Present* (2000) deals precisely with this real-time decay, eclipsed by the painterly fixation. A computer program, once installed on a computer, delivers the real-time image of the decay of a flower on its desktop. The decay, of course, is pre-recorded and occurs exactly in the same manner on any computer to which the program has been downloaded. But the impression of assisting a real-time event persists; the temporality of the decay cannot be altered; the duration of the recording and the replay correspond exactly to the duration of the event. Sara Tucker, "Introduction to *Present*," Dia Art Foundation, 9 November 2000. See www.awp.diaart.org/claerbout/intro.html (last accessed December 5, 2010).

38. Damien Sutton, "The New Uses of Photography," in *The Crystal Image of Time. Photography, Cinema, Memory*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p. 224.

projects the image of the past onto his own experience of the present; only then can this experience become image.

The photograph, writes Barthes, points to a past event as though it was about to occur in the present and makes us "shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, *over a catastrophe that has already occured*."[39] Through the processes of digital postproduction and screening, this psychotic affect induced by photographic technology and the structure of visual recognition and memory is blocked. With the photographic now, a new, radically present temporality of the photographic image emerges. We are no longer experiencing the conflicting temporality of the past present, but the continuous temporality of the digital present. What is reactualized is not the image of the past but the present image, a continuously refreshed digital video signal: presence 25 times per second, life 25 times per second.

39. Barthes, 1981, p. 96. This peculiar experience of the past as future is triggered by Barthes's acute chagrin after his mother's death. When going through her things, he finds a picture of his mother as a child, the famous winter garden photograph which stands at the core of the second part of *Camera Lucida*. In his *Journal de deuil*, written while preparing the book, Barthes mentions: "13 juin 1978 […] Ce matin, à grande peine, reprenant les photos, bouleversé par une où mam. petite fille, douce, discrète à côté de Philippe Binger (Jardin d'hiver de Chennevières, 1898). Je pleure. Pas même envie de me suicider." In an earlier entry he notes: "10 mai 1978. Depuis plusieurs nuits, images—cauchemars où je vois mam. Malade, frappée. Terreur. Je souffre de la peur de ce qui a eu lieu. Cf. Winnicott: peur d'un effondrement qui a eu lieu." Roland Barthes, *Journal de deuil 26 octobre 1977-15 septembre 1979*, Nathalie Léger (ed.), Éditions du Seuil, coll. « Fiction & C^{ie} », 2009, p. 133, 155.