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The Image in the Maelstrom of Photography

In studies, essays and commentaries covering photography-based images, a consensus appears to be forming that in the last two decades, the status of the photograph in museums has undergone a radical change.[1] As we become increasingly accustomed to a visualisation based on mechanical images in our everyday routines of socialising and communication, as well as in the natural and social sciences,[2] photography as a particularly artistic medium has emerged as a surface for dealing with traditional questions of pictoriality, such as referenciality, authenticity, the passing-on of traditions and medial reflection.

Photography-inspired artistic inquiry, however, may not only be directed towards issues to do with the two-dimensional, projected image plane. Differing artistic practices may also have the historicism and anthropology of photographic customs as their subject matter, or the way photographs are received and utilised. In the picture archives collected and organised by artists, and used by them as a resource, and in the group experiments documented during creative "research", the impact exerted on our way of living and behaving by the technical image-making procedures, the *apparatus*,[3] also crops up as a theme.[4] In *performative* modes of photography, which seek an active connection with those participating in the image-making process and with the future beholders, motivation also comes from a desire to record communal experiences, and from a political commitment and sense of responsibility towards visibility. Of the many diverse uses of photography, it is through the genre of the tableau—that is, the artistic practice of revisiting the tableau using the medium of photography—that we can discern most strongly the shifts in photo-theoretical and aesthetic opinions and in legal and institutional processes, which all play a role in the changing status of photographs in museums. Nevertheless, in view of the oft-mentioned complexity of the photographic process, and due to local differences in the socio-cultural circumstances that influence photography, we are bound also to present creative programmes which differ from this.

Photographic tableaux which conform to different types of painting (landscape, portrait, group-portrait, interior, genre-piece) and build on them by using subjects from the modern environment have become more noticeable throughout the last two decades, even by virtue of their size and the costly technologies employed to prepare them. These colour super-enlargements, with a wealth of detail and a sheer magnitude that had never been seen in an exhibition hall before the 1980s, draw attention to themselves not just in museums and in pri-

[1] Since the presentation of the photographic tableaux of Jeff Wall: *The Destroyed Room* (1978, cinematographic photo, lightbox, 159 x 234 cm, National Gallery of Canada) and a *Picture for Women* (1979, cinematographic photo, lightbox, 142,5 x 204,5 cm, the collection of the artist).

[2] Consider, for example, the *visual chatting* that takes place via the rapid capturing and sharing of images, the use of imaging procedures in medicine and space research, or our exposure to social phenomena through digitised picture archives.

[3] Vilém Flusser describes photography as an apparatus, a toy that simulates thinking. Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000).

[4] For example, in the works of Marcell Esterházy, Ágnes Eperjesi, Lajos Csontó or Gergely László.

vate collections, but also at the prestigious events of art dealers and art auctions, which are an integral part of the practice of collecting.

> *"I think the process of deconstructing photography as a rhetoric has reached a point of exhaustion. This line of inquiry did not succeed in providing an alternative to our acceptance of a physical basis for the photographic image. We haven't progressed beyond where we were when the medium was new, and we won't. Photography is what its first practitioners said it was—pictures created by the controlled actions of nature, of light reflected from surfaces. Nevertheless, we have only been able to suggest what that means for the actual practice of photography, maybe because the process of deconstruction encouraged them to feel that we understood what photography was. Now I feel there's a retreat from that, not in the sense of a defeat or a reaction, but in the sense of increased respect for photography as a medium, a process, even an institution."*[5]

This change of scale, resulting in what is by now an academic form of image, where both the way photography is exploited by artists and the method of installation followed by museums enjoy a mutual enrichment, has also inspired the practitioners of the "image scientists"[6] to give their response, or rather, their contemplation. The precursors of the photographic tableau as a type of art, bursting onto the scene at the end of the 1970s (such as the light boxes of Jeff Wall, and the oversized colour photographs of Stephen Shore, a member of the generation of American landscape photographers who broke away from its heroic traditions), provoked virulent criticism from art historians who were intent on uncovering the social and cultural constructions of photographic images and practices out of ideological-critical ambition. This ideological-critical passion, directed towards the modernist canon of museums and towards figurativeness of monumental proportions, and also influenced by the wave of conceptual art, appears to have died down: maintaining its potential for intellectual excitement, it has become more nuanced. Increasingly well-known examples of the photographic tableau genre, which has now attained a point of maturity, are regarded not so much as representatives of a *spectacle*, in a situationist sense, but as an honoured place for a changing audience and the altered opinions of people who look at photographs, as a kind of *pensive image*,[7] or even as a surface for *resistance*.

Michael Fried's work *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*[8] is not just an apologetic description of the emphatic presence of museum-photography, that is, photographic objects that elaborate on the pictorial tradition of art and are destined from the start for display in a museum, but also a symptom of it. In his richly illustrated and typographically splendid magnum opus, Fried revives the interpretative framework he introduced at the end of the 1960s, in his study of eighteenth century French academic painting and the art criticism of Diderot,[9] which can be expressed in terms of the pair of concepts known as *absorption* and *theatricality*. The focus here is on an understanding of the pictorial, and therefore also artistic, autonomy of the compositional solutions employed by painting as they ripened across the centuries. An image comes alive at the point where eye contact is made between the painted figure looking out of the picture and the real person looking at the picture, and indeed it is only in this way, through the inclusion of the beholder, that a *theatrical* work accomplishes its purpose; whereas the portrayal of figures who are

[5] Interview with Jeff Wall by Jan Tumlir, originally published in *Artforum* (March 2001); http://www.americansuburbx.com/2011/01/theory-interview-with-jeff-wall-hole.html

[6] I am not referring here to Bildwissenschaft (the science of images), which is increasingly gaining ground as a discipline in its own right, but to the scholars of art history, aesthetics, media theory and anthropology, scientific fields which cross borders and affect each other, and which treat visual culture, pictorial tradition and image-making as an object or a source.

[7] Jacques Rancière's term, in *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009).

[8] Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).

[9] Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality. Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

busy in their own *absorption*, daydreaming or sleeping, shutting out the rest of the world, works by "excluding" the beholder, and fortifying the independence and ontological status of the picture. Fried claims to have discovered (as a vindication of a long-held theory) the currency of this bipolar model, which can be used as a "key", in the staging of contemporary photo-based tableaux. One undisputable assertion he makes is his thought-provoking description of the impossible-to-ignore revolution which brought about the shift in the way photography is presented in museums: blowing up colour photographs to giant proportions and hanging them on the wall, in other words, a dramatic change in scale and location that altered the circumstances in which photographs are viewed and the viewing habits themselves.[10] No longer are photographs restricted to small-size blow-ups in museum frames and glass cases, or images seen when browsing through magazines and books (and these days web pages)—photographs can now be observed in the proud place traditionally held by paintings. The necessity of being physically present in order truly to experience a picture, previously reserved for paintings, started to become, in the 1980s, a question of some significance for photographed works too. However, in his prose—which is threaded around creative intent, or rather its crisis, in other words the "see-saw" game of artistic intentions and the lack of them—Fried does not stray across the border of aesthetic remoteness. Pictorial representation remains, for him, an interface for aesthetic and philosophical meditations. In spite of his detailed descriptions of the works, he is unstirred by the references of the content in the subject of the pictures, and by the socio-cultural and political ramifications of the characters and venues. Nevertheless, the interpretation and utilisation of photographs, whether from a medial and technical point of view or from an anthropological one, cannot be isolated from the phenomena they depict.

As well as playing a part in the text by Fried which keeps alive the issue of the modernist autonomy of art creation, the œuvre of Jeff Wall is also of model value in the study by Julian Stallabrass[11] which relates to our subject. Stallabrass, though, views Wall's cinematographic still images from a greater distance, from the aspect of the broader layers of photograph-users and of a more colourful spectrum of photographic practices. He does not give in to artistic intent, and expresses his critical observations with a knowledge of the technical processes. Unlike Fried, he points out the problematic areas which are still there in spite of the maturity of the works, or perhaps because of them, but which are in any case related to Wall's particular creative process.

As far as Wall's pictures are concerned, one sensitive question concerns the camouflaging of the distinctness of photographic media. His particular creative process is consistent with the traditions of drawing: a number of pictures are taken of the staged everyday scenes, and after careful selection they are placed together during additional working processes carried out in the studio, with the seams digitally covered over. The artist's control over and attention to every detail of the image creates the surface which is made up of different photographed components, so that features in motion are also seen as sharply shot. In accordance with the artist's plan, the image thus created using photographic means gives visibility, in crystalline rigidity, to that special quality which has become so obvious with the spread of the moving image: the sense of arresting time and suspending the moment. As in a painting or drawing, every single detail in the composition of the picture is the result of a decision by the artist. But these photographic images executed on a grand scale and in brilliant quality, brought about technically by compositing, conceal their montage character.

[10] Fried makes reference to the enormous colour photographs by Jean-Marc Bustamante, exhibited under the title of *Tableau* from the late 1970s, and to the observation of Jean-François Chevrier. The term *tableau* is making its way into the terminology of critical writing which deals with photography and photographic images.

[11] Julian Stallabrass, "Museum Photography and Museum Prose", *New Left Review* no. 65 (2010), 93–125. http://newleftreview.org/II/65/julian-stallabrass-museum-photography-and-museum-prose.

By turning montage into nothing but a technique, and hiding the *medial hybrid* ethos of the picture, the latent strength within the craft of montage—its subversive power to overturn aesthetic conventions—is lost. In photomontages made in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, and again in the 1960s, the fracture lines revealing the varied origins of the pictures, and the conspicuously evident joints, were both a creative gesture turning its back on the aestheticising use of photography and a manifestation of rebellion against the political and cultural status quo. With the concealment of the montage technique in Wall's pictures, the photographic image is being accorded a place in the tradition of painting, and a role in the *art of memory* of Baudelaire, through the seamless and digitally polished portrayal of the frozen stills from the "movies" of our daily lives. This is no trifling matter! The creation of unique photographic objects, based on a logic of thought that is embedded in pictorial tradition, which require an overwhelming expenditure of time and energy and provide an exceptional experience in a museum environment, in sum, which resist the accepted practices of reproduction, is a creative activity which upholds the question of the autonomy of visual art as an institution and a vocation, and sets an example of how it is possible to achieve *différance* among interdisciplinary transitions and intermedial routines.

Taking this consensus—that analytical photoconceptualism has changed spectacularly, together with the status of photographs in museums, as photographic tableaux have gained ground in them in the wake of critiques deconstructing photography—and unravelling it into its legal and art historical aspects, the thesis loses some of its radicalness, just as the trend for collecting and holding auctions for vintage prints, requiring material and cultural investment, and the museums' embrace of photographs which were not made with an artistic objective—in which the process of attributing works to named photographers, and the mature language used by art experts to describe painting aesthetically, were equally instrumental—were what fuelled the processes of deconstruction in the 1970s. The legal convention by which the creative use of photos is inextricably linked to their creator was not laid down, but only reinvigorated, by the artistic use of photography carrying on the traditions of the tableau, and reviving the problematics of pictorial depiction, as this legal practice goes back to the very beginnings of photography, and also pervades the accepted practice of museums. What is new is mainly to do with the modes of artistic application to which the photograph and photography are put. Artistic opportunities have also multiplied with the enrichment of photo-based media and image-communication channels, and with the advent of the digital world.

At the same time it is also strange to gaze upon the status of photographs or photo-based works from the perspective of conventional art history. For example, the aesthetically and politically radical photos of the classical avant-garde, the body of photographs that emphasised the medial objectivity and reticent, descriptive nature of photography in modernism, and the photo series of the 1960s that were at least in part motivated by a criticism of institutions, are all present in museum collections, and are equally sources and transformers of the descriptions that organise art history into pictorial sequences. It is apparent, however, that with photographic tableaux, the pictorial tradition and the contemporary visual culture which defines the subject (media images, and the use of settings belonging to our urban environment and our contemporary culture as pictorial resources) are being covered up, and from the 1980s onwards there is an increasing tendency for artistic photography to become a surface for the perpetuation of conventions. This leaves fewer opportunities for aesthetic and political radicalism, or at least it looks that way for the time being. The question is, though, has the scope for political resistance in pictures now come to an end, or does it live on, incorporated and infiltrated into the newer forms of visuality, representing more than meets the eye? Could it be that, through photographic tableaux, the changes that are held to be so radical are in fact more in evidence when seen from the perspective of aesthetics and photo-theory, which are more open to an analysis of the medium? But even if these questions and systems of criteria can be separated for the length of a thought, we are compelled to accept that, due to the functional diversity of photography and its increasingly paradoxical "nature", we cannot expect them to give us a linear decipherment, only a colourful juxtaposition of units of thought and experience which are, in places, allusive or cohesive, mutually reinforcing or destructive, but always in motion.

Since the arrival of the digital world, the *autopsy* (personal experience through the senses), as one of the central ideas guiding the writing of art history,[12] seems not only to be present as part of the critical toolset in support of the right of the *objet d'art* to exist in the twenty-first century, but also present, having crossed disciplinary boundaries, in dissertations and arguments that muse on the accessibility of intellectual property.[13] Via the concept of the autopsy, however, a work of art which has physical reality in itself can take on a key role in the discourse on digitisation-related cultural developments, on the access to cultural assets, most specifically, on intellectual property rights, which are increasingly difficult to enforce in the digital world. In the case of works of literature, digitisation has not presented us with any medial obstacles as far as their content is concerned (apart from the difficult task of giving up personal habits), but in the case of works of art, there is an inevitable loss of content and information. A work of art is not exclusively a creation of the mind, but also a method of observing and depicting the world in which the materials and technology, in their physical existence, are also part of the work. The material being manipulated and the technology being applied are not simply the point of departure or a convertible communications device. The creative thought-process and realisation that develop through manipulation, the *artistic techné* (to evoke a traditional concept used in the interpretation of art which goes back to antiquity) which is manifested on the object and conveys the creative process out towards the spectator as well, cannot be passed on through photographic copying and digitisation without an ensuing loss of information—regardless of whether or not we are in the age of mass reproductions. The connections between IP rights and the qualities that are bonded to physical realities also pose problems in the case of photographic tableaux which exist as limited-edition pictorial objects. Moreover, when we are dealing with a photograph, which is already intimately linked to the idea of reproduction, the question of limits being imposed on reproduction is especially intriguing!

> *"Photographers are detail workers when they are not artists or leisure-time amateurs, and thus it is not unreasonable for the legal theorist Bernard Edelman to label photographers the "proletarians of creation."*[14]

As shown by the collectors' preference for vintage prints and by the appearance on the scene of the *connoisseur* with specialist expertise in photography, that is, by the incorporation of photographs into the art trade, the aesthetic sensitivity that develops through personal visual experience and the status of IP rights are also decisive criteria when it comes to the judgement of photographs. Intellectual property rights, though, do not only come into play as a law applied to individual photographs. As indicated by the legal theorist Bernard Edelman and the art historian John Tagg, cultural and artistic practices which use photography can also be approached by looking at the historical debates

[12] The autopsy is also a term used in medicine: a post-mortem examination that forms the basis of pathological knowledge, but this is just incidental here. Or is it?

[13] Gáspár Miklós Tamás, "Szolidaritás és kritika", *Élet és Irodalom* LVII, no. 5 (February 1, 2013): 10–12.

[14] Allan Sekula, "Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital", in *Art and Photography,* ed. David Campany (London and New York: Phaidon, 2003), 217.

conducted in civil trials.[15] The artistic status of specific photographs in a majority of cases in the nineteenth century was decided not through artistic and aesthetic discourse, but by a judicial ruling. This implies that the courthouse, equipped with legislation and acting on behalf of the ideology of the civil legal system, has played a decisive role in the development of the artistic (or institutional) status of photographs since the very start. What is more, we can view this issue from the inverse perspective: the representatives of the legal system who permeated the social structure set up to defend private property, and who were sensitive to the issue of ownership, were provoked into thought by the invention of the photographic process, and by the proliferation of practices that were burgeoning under the weight of knotty questions, only one of which was the dilemma of whether photography is "art or science". The question of "Whose picture is it?" in terms of ownership, for example, has also impacted on the development of intellectual property rights, as well as the theoretical question of "What is a photograph?". Does the photograph belong to the person operating the camera, or to the person being photographed / owner of the property being photographed? Because, what IS a photograph? A reproduction of the physical reality in front of the lens? A direct imprint of the phenomenal world that can be experienced with the senses? Evidence of the existence of these phenomena? Or an "engineered" surface which produces a likeness? Who has the right to circulate the photograph? Does the blow-up, which can be reproduced and distributed in variable sizes, constitute the picture? Or the negative, which is usually kept by the operator? In the time of analogue photography, when leaving the photo lab, we tended to vote for the blow-up, gazing excitedly at the prints while the roll of negative film was virtually forgotten, and often treated with utter neglect. These are discomfiting questions, to which—in the nineteenth century—an evaluation of the input contributed by the photographer has provided a solution. If the photograph revealed a kind of added creative effort, and seemed to offer more than a mere reiteration of the phenomenon depicted, the court would rule in favour of according it the status of art, originated by the creator. From this point on, the photographer owned the photograph, and had a say in its availability and dissemination. Checks and limitations on distribution are inseparable from the legal consequences of the status of authorship and artistic rank, and from the enforcement of the right of those doing creative work to earn a living. The uncertain ontological status of the photograph, however, also resulted in a broad playing field in this regard. In order to be able to distribute a photograph as widely as possible, arguments were made that it was not artistic, while attempts to restrict its distribution rested on claims of artistry, and the argument could go backwards and forwards, for example in the case of erotic photographs in the pornographic industry.

The variety of applications photography can be used for, and the way photographs would enter circulation by reproduction, also raised, and continue to raise, some moral and ethical questions. When it comes to ownership of the photograph and the legal regulation of its authorship, in addition to the operator or author (in today's terms, occasionally the perpetrator) we should also consider the model (or victim) of the photograph, its audience and its consumers—although in the nineteenth century and at the start of the twentieth century, the latter were mostly referred when claiming a defence of common decency. The law fundamentally defended the author, and the view of ownership that was enforced through this, that is to say, the priority accorded to privatisation and to the defence of private property, can be seen in the studying and documentation of marginalised social groups, and in the procurement of photographs showing alienated and disenfranchised people, which for audiences in later eras would cause an intensification of the ethical questions this called up. In addition to media images, the private archives that are emerging one after the other and becoming public also mercilessly confront us with the mentality, which is not independent of the legal apparatus, in which the position of power and supervision meets the position of the photographer, and a person who is being stripped of their rights can quickly become the victim of the image-making practice. However, legal support for deobjectification and dispossession through photography, that is, the exclusion of the subject and spectator of a picture from the multi-role "game" of photography in favour of the legally definable author and distributor, reached a turning point when digitisation arrived. As part of the phenomenon accompanying the privately conducted distribution of images and the dialogical morphosis of our culture, by which the student has as much of a right to speak as the teacher, and the spectator has as much of a right to play a role as the creator, there is also, in the process of photography, an increasing tendency for the characters in a picture to be thought of as active participants. Our altered perceptions also work retrospectively: the humiliated person looking into the camera is not simply the victim of their torturer's process of documentation. A person who can manage to maintain their self-esteem to the end, even in the most humiliating of circumstances, has the capacity, via the means of the camera, to address an audience of hundreds or thousands of unknown spectators, and to move them to take a stand against the injustice they see. In the digital world, the awakened connection between the person portrayed in the picture and the person potentially looking at the picture has raised both the subject and the spectator of the picture to an equal footing with the operator (as in the works of Endre Koronczi and Tibor Gyenis). The interpretation of the photograph is in the process of being turned into action, and this activation can be understood from the essay Susan Sontag wrote on the infamous Abu Ghraib prison photos, which shocked even seasoned war reporters: the horrific thing is not what can be seen in the pictures, but the fact that it was all carried out in order for the pictures to be taken.[16] Ariella Azoulay does not regard the photograph as a certainty existing within itself in unchanging confinement (not as a fossil), but as a kind of something that may provide certainty. According to her theoretical thesis, we are citizens with equal rights in a photographic society which transcends nations and states, and the extent to which we exercise these rights depends on our level of consciousness and independence.[17] Control and direction are no longer the prerogative of the camera operator, because the figure standing in front of the lens, or tolerating the glare of the camera, is also—in their knowledge of the dissemination of the picture and the anticipated reactions of the eventual spectators—a shaper of the picture, with the power to exert an influence on the emotions and actions it causes. The certainty is not the photograph itself, but the fact that the picture will, sooner or later, be seen, and will thereby begin to operate in consequence of the viewer's reactions.

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[15] John Tagg, "A Legal Reality: The Photograph as Property in Law", in *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 [1988]), 103–116.

"No-one now can be unselfconscious of photographs taken before. There is an encyclopedia of representation that is in our heads almost from the day we were born. I think that my work is especially dealing with that—respecting the knowledge that every single person has about his/her visual existence and what that means, and what photography means to him/her. Every one of us carries this huge knowledge around so what I really try to do in my work is photograph people in between these two poles: their pure innocent self and their inescapable knowledge and vision of themselves and society. How people feel that it is appropriate to show and hold their body. How we find comfort and discomfort in posture."[18]

[16] Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others", *The New York Times Magazine,* May 23, 2004. http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/23/magazine/regarding-the-torture-of-others.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm.

[17] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* New York: Zone Books, 2008).

[18] "Interview with Neville Wakefield (1995) ", in Jan Verwoert, Peter Halley, and Midori Matsui, *Wolfgang Tillmans* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 122.

What lies at the core of Tillmans's creative problematics is actually avoided by exponents of tableau-photography, who explore the representational possibilities of the photographic image. The legal strengthening of the photographer's position as author has its roots in the input they add and which is unquestionably creative. Creative work, however, may not only manifest itself in the superficial aestheticisation and individualisation of the photograph—indeed, it is predominantly not in this that it manifests itself—but in the integration of the deconstruction of the 1970s and 1980s and the fruits of medium-analytical theory.

It is a cliché to say that our trust in the photograph as an authentic document crumbled with the advent of digital photography. A telling everyday example of this is the official routine of issuing passports. For decades it was enough to attach a standardised, studio-made ID mugshot to our passport application, but today we have to go to the issuing office in person, and they take the photograph there and then—the resultant image may be much less of a likeness than one taken by a professional photographer, but authenticity is not bestowed by the degree of similarity, rather by the act of having the photograph taken at the same time and same place as we submit the application and give our signature. This weakening of the photograph's ability to serve as conclusive proof marks a significant break from the functions it served throughout the twentieth century, but an examination of the medium from a socio-cultural historical perspective reveals that its use as a document of proof was not automatically evident; it only became so through its use by scientific researchers and state administrators around the early 1900s. The history of photographs being used as evidence, as clues and as an index can be traced throughout the twentieth century, not just from a practical point of view, but also from a photo-theoretical one, for the interpretative framework of semiotics introduced by Peirce at the start of the century was still being reloaded by Rosalind Krauss at the end of the 1970s.[19] With the onset of the age of digital technology, the semiotic matrix of the icon-index-symbol, while still making an appearance in the role of instigating debate, has proven tangibly narrow in its ability to encompass the altered photographic habits and creative problematics of today, and does not enable us to progress far in approaching them. The photograph can be utilised in a way which goes far beyond the recording of events and the seizure of phenomena that allow themselves to be captured optically. Photographs which conform to the genre of the tableau, and which are conceived and executed as tableaux, also assume the possibilities and functions of pictorial representation: they are not simply imprints, but can also be *representations* of spheres of reality that cannot be perceived in their direct visibility, but which are arrived at instead through visual experience.

Even in the creative practices of those who make tableau-photography, there is a very broad spectrum. From constructing spectacles and making models of natural phenomena to be placed in front of the camera (Sonja Braas, James Casebere, Thomas Demand, Dezső Szabó), through digital reworkings and montages of multiple image components (Jeff Wall, Andreas Gursky), to searching for and preparing locations (Tamás Dezső, Candida Höfer, Thomas Struth, Gábor Ősz) and staging scenarios with pre-arranged characters (Rineke Dijkstra, Gábor Gerhes, Tibor Gyenis, Riccarda Roggan, Thomas Struth), there are many varieties of the creative process, each mature in its own way, and each influencing the way the picture is understood. The profusion of graphic art applications of photography stems from its interdisciplinary resourcefulness, its potential for linking together several different media. In artistic photography, the emphasis is not on the moment of exposure. The multifaceted and laborious working stages that precede the act of taking the picture itself also profit from the lessons learned from and stratagems employed by other

[19] Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America", *October* 3 (Spring 1977), 68–81; 4 (Autumn 1977), 58–67.

artistic media and creative practices. When tableaux are being made, the whole rigmarole of planning, gathering resources, constructing sets and models, casting the characters, conducting rehearsals, arranging the scene, and playing it all over (and over) again recall the production processes at play when a film is being made. The methods known and acquired from film production technology are also used in editing the pictures and in finalising their material format, in other words in the post-production stage, after the pictures have been taken. And just like in a movie, in a photographic tableau too, it can be said that nothing in the picture is what it seems and nobody is who they seem. The ostentatious or insinuated mode of creating a scenario which may only become clear after lengthy observation is also a reflection of the constructed nature of photography as a medium, and of the social and cultural constructedness of photography. Beyond the imprints recording optical phenomena, there are *representations* which provoke a narrative or are assimilated into one. And since the people visible in the pictures are often actors, whose roles and functions rely on the instructions of the creator (as is the case with Jeff Wall's pictures), the ethical questions concerning the people visible in the pictures are dissipated as the creator's vision is staged. Still, although this method of creation requires film-like teamwork, these images, like the films of directors, are exclusively linked to the visual artist in their role as director. The costly process of finishing the pictures materially, with their monumental size, which also acts as a kind of artistic branding, has repercussions which are not restricted to questions of intellectual property rights. By setting a limit on the number of copies, and by installing them in museum spaces, thus ensuring a personal visual experience, a limit can also be set on the opportunities for reproduction, given that easily distributed printed copies do not achieve and can never achieve the concrete impact of the photographic object, which is discerned by the senses as the meaning of the work unfolds through direct experience. The political issue emerging from the author's perspective and from the unique and individualised process comes from the fact that it is offering *resistance* against the techniques of *standardisation* which are increasing the mechanisation of our working time and way of living, and against the accelerated mindless consumption of images in the functions of continuously improved image-making and communication technologies. In the creative practice which puts photography into image-making service as documentary proof of our physical reality, and at the same time, as a tool for representation, pictures are created which do not attempt to decide on or respond to the paradoxes that have existed in the photographic image since its invention, but rather attempt to ratify them and make them visible. It is through enlarging photographic images, and through their enlarged interfaces, that the nature of their undecidable complexity is made obvious to the pensive spectator standing in front of the picture. Exclusivity is given neither to the pictures' mechanical documentary value, nor to their representational value; instead they are interlinked qualities, each of which assumes the other. In being exploded to tableau dimensions, the photographs not only reveal their own ambivalence (their mechanical nature versus the one created through the interventions of the artist), but through this also open up the way for self-knowledge and self-reflection to develop during the visual experience, facilitating the formation of personal opinions. The instrument for receiving these pictures, and at the same time the very thing that is at stake, is the reacquisition of the time spent in *pensiveness*, in pensive reception. The moment is arrested and suspended—like in Jeff Wall's pictures—and we can live through a receptive experience of time, in which, through the encoding of the separate phases of pictorial representation, we become aware of the risk that our way of seeing things and our lives could be manipulated and colonised by our techniques for making mechanical images. A picture that opens a crack between visual representations, bearing with it the possibility of intervening in cultural and historical processes, however, need not only be a photographic representation which operates within the geometric paradigm of monocular vision. (Photographic) image objects which force multifocal exposure from more than one angle can be instruments for liberating us from a fixed and unmoving perspective, and for resistance against the dominant image-making practice embodied in the photograph itself (Marcell Esterházy, Luca Gőbölyös, Zoltán Szegedy-Maszák).

“For my part, as an artist, I don’t want to abandon the field of representation to people who stand for a political availability of background figures. … There’s perhaps a particular personal or societal necrophilia at play. … I felt a need to make these museum photos, because many works of art, which were created out of particular historical circumstances, have now become mere fetishes, like athletes or celebrities, whereby the original inspiration for these works is fully obliterated. What I wanted to achieve with this series which will be limited to maybe thirty photographs, is to make a statement about the original process of representing people leading to my act of making a new picture, which is in a certain way a very similar mechanism: the viewer of the works seen in the photo is an instance which finds itself in a space to which I, too, belong when I stand in front of the photo. The photos illuminate the connection and should lead the viewers away from regarding the works as mere fetish-objects and initiate their own understanding or intervention in historical relationships.”[20]

The experience of understanding a picture through pensive contemplation, which may lead to the emancipation of the spectator, is, in the ideas of Laura Mulvey[21] and Jacques Rancière,[22] one possible method of finding our way around in our photo-based visual culture. Through the slow-motion frames of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* and Roberto Rossellini’s *Journey to Italy*, Laura Mulvey breaks down the types of spectator into the *pensive* and the *possessive*. Without question, a pensive spectator who traverses the topography of film stills and photographic images, and explores the spatial depth of the pictures, will go further in living through the experience conveyed by the films than a possessive spectator who seizes upon the scenes in the story and who, in relation to the characters, raves about the icons of cult stardom. Re-encoding film representation into its basic photographic units uncovers the tension of moving and still images, which is difficult to observe, if at all, when a film is being projected. This photographically frozen and static condition, which is revealed in a gaping hole between the representations of rigidity and animation, arrestation and movement, gives extra meaning to the material world which appears in motion in film imagery. Rancière, on the whole, chooses pictures as the subject for his thesis, but in his vein of thinking too, pensiveness becomes a *punctum*, not for the spectator, but for the picture itself, the epithet of a photographic image which blends diverse modes of representation. The source of his terminology, like that of Mulvey’s interpretation of photography, is to be found in Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*. Whereas Michael Fried continues to regard Barthes’s *punctum* as playing the essential part in the spectator’s understanding of photographs, which can also be interpreted, through the detail that finds its way into the picture in addition to the creator’s will, as the crisis of artistic intent, Mulvey and Rancière, moving away from the heightened position of the creator, place the emphasis on the experience of Barthes’s *studium*, which is passed on to the spectator and the picture, and which unfolds through pensive contemplation. Azoulay embarks from a completely different corpus of images, informed by pictures from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, both those published in the media, and private ones taken by the military and civilian populations, but in her understanding of in-

[20] “Thomas Struth interview with Benjamin Buchloh”, in *Art and Photography,* ed. David Campany (London and New York: Phaidon, 2003), 252.

[21] Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second. Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).

[22] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator.*

terpreting photographs, she also sees a path forward in spectators changing their attitude and way of looking from one of just glancing to one of observing.[23]

In unpicking the representational modes of photos and photographic works, and in the realisations that are generated during pensive contemplation, there can be no economising, neither from the creators nor from the spectators, on the kind of medial reflection and critical approach which are virtually self-evident in the field of painting. The use of artistic photography at monumental proportions which rival those of advertising hoardings can authenticate itself with this very medial reflection, and thereby liberate itself from accusations that the scale of these pictures is banal and dependent purely on financial and technological resources. It could be that the rhetoric wishing to deconstruct photography and photographs has run out of breath, as suggested by Jeff Wall, but it has not disappeared without a trace; instead it is incorporated into various image-making processes, into the creative execution that can be sensed during the visual experience and re-encoded through personal contemplation, as can be seen, for example, from the artistic use of photography that combines the documentary and depictive types of representation, and which shows the constructedness of mechanical images. At the same time, it is not only the medium of photography that can be used in an analytical approach to our world; medial analysis of the mechanical image itself remains relevant, that is, the use of photography by analytical artists continues to open channels towards questions which are very much alive in social and cultural sciences. Because of the *artistic techné*, because of the practices anchored in transferring concepts into physical reality via diverse materials, in their production we are made aware of the peculiarities of the technical conditions of the image-making apparatus, which are absent from our field of vision in our everyday, market-oriented use of photography.

In the works Ágnes Eperjesi, which stretch the boundaries of the photographic image, it is precisely these stages, which are very much part and parcel of the photographic process, but which are mostly known only to the "nameless" laboratory assistants, and the mechanically performed working stages (such as the latency period of film-based photography, developing and converting between negative and positive) which are made visible, and turned into pictures. In the daily ebb and flow we do use them, of course, but we are even less aware of the new functions that have appeared with digital photography, and the far-reaching changes they have engendered in our relationship with pictures.

This implies that, as a result of the withdrawal from everyday use of film-based photography, photographic objects that also have the memory of material are being lost, or at least not being produced any more. Our hastily snapped and posted images, on the other hand, are accumulating and floating around in the eternity of cyberspace. The ability to take, share and edit pictures quickly with digital technology opens up innumerable opportunities, as does the hybridisation of different technical processes. To get back to our subject, the production of colour, tableau-sized blow-ups is only possible using digital technology. Nevertheless, in artistic practices, manual working processes and personal decisions provide scope for placing the various medial characteristics in the foreground, for putting them on display, and last but not least, for avoiding standardisation. Whereas centuries ago, artisan activities had to struggle to be included in the free arts, to be ranked as an intellectual activity, and to be emancipated from the patronage of social institutions, could it be that today, the *artistic techné*, bound to the rules of the material, is nothing but a pledge of the social usefulness of the graphic arts, which are now forced into self-justification and constantly called to account?

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[23] Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography.*