



New World / Life is astronomical

Wolfgang Tillmans in conversation  
with Beatrix Ruf

BR You call this book and the new series *Neue Welt* [New World]. The title brings to mind the 1928 photography book *Die Welt ist schön* [The World is Beautiful] by Albert Renger-Patzsch, in which he used 100 photographs to depict the state of the world in motifs like those of plants, people, landscapes, architecture, machinery, and industrial products. It also reminds me of the 2002 publication *Sichtbare Welt* [Visible World] by Peter Fischli & David Weiss, in which they revisited every sight seen hundreds of times already, every longed-for mythologized location, and made touristy, postcard images from them again.

What was your project? How can one grasp the world today?

WT Recently, a friend referred to my studio as a laboratory for the contemporary. What is the current situation? From the start, I was concerned with trying to answer this question as a whole. In the process, I was constantly aware of only being able to do this based on selected motifs and significant fragments taken from the world. For example, carefully studying a single edition of a daily newspaper tells you an amazing amount about the world. It poses the question of how information is actually processed. Information density nowadays is incredibly high. For that reason, only fragments can actually be processed. We might possess more absolute knowledge than ever before, but everything is fragmented—the same way hard drives save “fragmented” files. There is no longer a view of the totality, of the whole.

Until now, I had always found this whole in facets of the private and the public, and I usually remained close to my own living environment at the same time. Foreign and exotic exceptions to the rule have always existed. Of course, my work was primarily an involvement with people and things in some way close to me, or with art-immanent questions concerning the picture, the material, and the installation. Basically, to study a wrinkle in a piece of cloth or a dent in an unbroken surface is already enough to locate a picture of the whole. It's all a matter of the gaze, of an open, anxiety-free gaze.

BR So you have dealt extensively with questions of medium, abstraction, and representation.

WT For the last ten years I've been dealing rather introspectively with abstract, medium-reflexive images like those in

Neue Welt / Leben ist astronomisch

Wolfgang Tillmans im Gespräch  
mit Beatrix Ruf

BR Du nennst dieses Buch und die neue Werkgruppe *Neue Welt*. Der Titel ruft den 1928 erschienenen Bildband *Die Welt ist schön* von Albert Renger-Patzsch in Erinnerung, in dem er mit 100 Fotografien den Zustand der Welt in Motiven wie Pflanzen, Menschen, Landschaft, Architektur, Maschinen und Industrieprodukten darstellte. Auch die 2002 veröffentlichte Arbeit *Sichtbare Welt* von Peter Fischli & David Weiss kommt mir in den Sinn, in der die beiden jede schon hundertfach gesehene Sehenswürdigkeit und jeden mythologisierten Sehensort noch einmal aufgesucht und das touristische Postkartenbild davon noch mal gemacht haben.

Was war dein Projekt? Wie kann man heute die Welt erfassen?

WT Ein Freund bezeichnete letztes mein Atelier als Forschungsstätte für das Zeitgenössische. Was ist der Stand der Dinge? Von Anfang an ging es mir um den Versuch, diese Frage als Ganzes zu beantworten. Mir war dabei stets bewusst, dass ich dies immer nur anhand von ausgewählten Motiven und signifikanten Ausschnitten aus der Welt machen kann. Zum Beispiel kann einem das genaue Studium einer Tageszeitung eines einzigen Tages unglaublich viel über die Welt sagen. Das wirft die Frage auf, wie Information eigentlich verarbeitet wird. Die Informationsdichte ist ja heutzutage sehr hoch. Deshalb können eigentlich nur noch Fragmente verarbeitet werden. Wir wissen vielleicht absolut mehr als jemals zuvor, aber alles ist fragmentiert – so wie auch Festplatten Daten „fragmentiert“ abspeichern. Man hat kaum noch einen Blick für die Totalität, für ein Ganzes.

Dieses Ganze hatte ich bislang stets in Facetten des Privaten und Öffentlichen gefunden und war dabei meistens nah an meiner eigenen Lebenswelt geblieben. Ausnahmen des Fremden und Exotischen hat es immer gegeben, aber meine Arbeit war vor allem eine Beschäftigung mit Menschen und Dingen, die mir in irgendeiner Weise nahestanden, oder aber mit kunstimmanenten Fragen des Bildes, des Materials, der Installation. Im Grunde reicht ja bereits das Studium einer Falte im Stoff oder eines Knicks in einer unversehrten Oberfläche, um ein Bild des Ganzen zu finden. Es ist alles eine Frage des Blickes, des offenen, angstfreien Blickes.

BR Du hast dich dann viel mit Fragen des Mediums, der Abstraktion und Repräsentation beschäftigt.

Nouveau Monde / La vie est astronomique

Wolfgang Tillmans en entretien  
avec Beatrix Ruf

BR Ce livre et la nouvelle série d'œuvres, tu les appelles *Neue Welt* [Nouveau monde]. Ce titre rappelle le livre de photographies publié en 1928 par Albert Renger-Patzsch, *Die Welt ist schön* [Le monde est beau], dans lequel l'état du monde était représenté à travers 100 photographies classées par motifs – plantes, hommes, paysage, architecture, machines et produits industriels. Il me fait aussi songer à l'ouvrage de Peter Fischli et David Weiss publié en 2002, *Sichtbare Welt* [Monde visible] dans lequel les deux artistes ont revisité toutes les attractions touristiques et tous les lieux mythiques fantasmés déjà vus cent fois pour en refaire la carte postale.

Quel a été ton propre projet? Comment peut-on faire un état des lieux du monde actuel?

WT Récemment, un de mes amis a décrit mon atelier comme un centre d'études de la contemporanéité. Quel est l'état des choses? Dès le début, mon propos a été de tenter de répondre à cette question dans sa totalité. J'ai toujours été conscient que je n'y parviendrais qu'à l'appui de motifs choisis et de fragments significatifs du monde. L'étude détaillée d'un journal à une date particulière nous apprend par exemple un nombre de choses incroyable sur le monde, ce qui appelle la question de savoir comment l'information est traitée. La densité de l'information est aujourd'hui très élevée. Du coup, seuls des fragments peuvent être traités. Dans l'absolu, nous savons peut-être plus de choses que jamais auparavant, mais tout cela est fragmenté – comme en informatique, les disques durs sauvegardent les données de manière « fragmentée ».

Nous n'avons pratiquement plus de vue d'ensemble, de regard pour le tout. Jusqu'ici, j'avais toujours trouvé ce tout dans certaines facettes du privé et du public, et j'étais donc resté proche de mon propre monde, de mon propre vécu. Il y a toujours eu des exceptions étrangères et exotiques, mais mon travail portait avant tout sur des hommes et des objets qui d'une manière ou d'une autre étaient proches de moi, ou encore sur des questions immanentes à l'art – l'image, le matériau, l'installation. Au fond, l'étude d'un pli de tissu ou d'une irrégularité dans une surface intacte suffit pour trouver une image du tout. Tout est question de regard, d'un regard ouvert, sans peur.

BR Après, tu t'es beaucoup intéressé aux questions touchant au médium, à l'abstraction et à la représentation.



*Blushes, paper drop, and Lighter.* During that time, I also continued to photograph with the camera. But only now, after years of studio practice, has a really new, artistic interest in the outside world developed. The abstract works, too, were a reaction to things in the world, but they confronted paper and abstract compositions for the most part. This is why, at the end of the last decade, I arrived at the question of how the world actually appears when seen at a distance from my usual beaten path. In this sense, I was gripped by a restlessness and curiosity. I asked myself why I shouldn’t travel to places where I was nothing but a traveler. I wanted to know: How does the world appear twenty years after I’ve begun to form a picture of it? Can there be a “new” view of it? And “new” also in the sense of greatly expanded technical possibilities. The tremendous political and economic shifts of recent years, and technical advancements, have considerably altered the world’s appearance.

BR You could have also said: The world is so greatly altered that this even shows itself in my immediate vicinity. We definitely see “old friends,” too, among the portraits in *Neue Welt*.

WT That’s why I photographed simultaneously in London, New York, and Berlin, also “old friends” whose world has likewise moved on, but also found as uncomplicated and, actually, as utterly wondrous as things like cell phones and flat-screen monitors.

BR You repeatedly talk about the micro- and macrocosm connection that you reinvent in particular in the digital resolution of a high-resolution pictorial world. After these abstract worlds in the introspective space of the studio, did the new digital technology first inspire you to travel to take photographs?

WT There was no direct connection. The wish to expand the field of vision was there first. I bought this digital camera before taking the first trip. That was in 2009, on the occasion of the total solar eclipse in Shanghai. I had always deprived myself of the China trend. But the total solar eclipse was different. That was my China moment. On my way back, I traveled through different Asian countries. During this trip, I took both analog and digital photographs. By the way, the photographs in this book are also, in part, analog prints.

Digital photography is not better than analog photography. It’s just different. What mattered to me was looking at the “new world” through a contemporary

WT Ich habe mich ca. zehn Jahre eher introspektiv mit abstrakten, medium-reflexiven Bildern wie *Blushes, paper drop* oder *Lighter* beschäftigt. In der Zeit habe ich zwar auch mit der Kamera weiter fotografiert, aber erst jetzt, nach Jahren der Studiopraxis, ergab sich ein wirkliches neues, künstlerisches Interesse an der Außenwelt. Die abstrakten Arbeiten waren zwar auch eine Reaktion auf die Dinge in der Welt, aber sie setzen sich doch vor allem mit Papier und abstrakten Kompositionen auseinander. Deshalb kam ich Ende des letzten Jahrzehnts zu der Frage, wie eigentlich die Welt jenseits meiner gewohnten Pfade aussieht. Insofern hat mich eine gewisse Unruhe und Neugier gepackt. Warum, fragte ich mich, sollte ich nicht an Orte fahren, an denen ich nichts als ein Reisender bin. Ich wollte wissen: Wie sieht die Welt aus, 20 Jahre nachdem ich angefangen habe, mir von ihr ein Bild zu machen? Kann es einen „neuen“ Blick auf sie geben? Neu auch im Sinne erweiterter technischer Möglichkeiten. Sowohl die großen politischen und ökonomischen Verschiebungen der letzten Jahre als auch die technischen Neuentwicklungen haben das Aussehen der Welt doch ziemlich verändert.

BR Du hättest auch sagen können: Die Welt verändert sich so massiv, das zeigt sich auch in meinem direkten Umfeld? Wir sehen ja auch durchaus „alte Freunde“ in den Porträts, die in der *Neuen Welt* auftauchen.

WT Deshalb habe ich simultan auch in London, New York und Berlin fotografiert, auch „alte Freunde“, deren Welt ebenfalls weitergegangen ist, aber auch als simpel empfundene, aber eigentlich höchst wundersame Dinge wie Handys oder Flachbildschirme.

BR Du sprichst immer wieder von der Verbindung zwischen Mikro- und Makrokosmos, die du insbesondere in der digitalen Auflösung einer hochauflösenden Bildwelt wiederfindest. Nach diesen abstrakten Welten im introspektiven Raum des Studios hat dich erst die neue digitale Technologie dazu gebracht, auf Reisen zu gehen, um Fotos zu machen?

WT Es gab keine direkte Verbindung. Der Wunsch, das Blickfeld zu erweitern, war zuerst da. Ich habe mir diese neue Digitalkamera gekauft, bevor ich die erste Reise angetreten habe. Das war 2009 zur totalen Sonnenfinsternis in Schanghai. Ich hatte mich immer dieser China-Mode entzogen. Aber die totale Sonnenfinsternis war dann mein China-Moment. Auf der Rückreise bin ich durch verschiedene Länder Asiens gereist. Auf dieser Reise habe ich parallel analog

WT Pendant à peu près dix ans, j’ai travaillé de manière plutôt introspective sur des images abstraites interrogeant le médium, comme dans les séries *Blushes, paper drop* ou *Lighter*. À l’époque, il est vrai que je continuais à photographier avec un appareil, mais c’est seulement aujourd’hui, après des années de travail en studio, qu’est né un intérêt artistique vraiment nouveau pour le monde extérieur. Les œuvres abstraites étaient elles aussi une réaction aux choses du monde extérieur, mais elles portaient essentiellement sur le papier et la composition abstraite. À la fin de la dernière décennie, j’en suis donc venu à me demander à quoi ressemblait le monde hors de mes sentiers battus. On peut donc dire que j’ai été pris par une sorte d’inquiétude et de curiosité. Pourquoi, me suis-je demandé, ne pas aller dans des endroits où je ne suis qu’un simple voyageur ? Je voulais savoir à quoi ressemblait le monde vingt ans après que j’ai commencé à m’en faire une image. Peut-il y avoir un « nouveau » regard sur ce monde ? « Nouveau » aussi au sens des possibilités élargies offertes par la technique. Les grandes évolutions politiques et économiques des dernières années et les progrès techniques récents ont quand même fortement changé l’aspect du monde.

BR Tu aurais aussi pu dire: le monde change tellement que cela se voit même dans mon environnement immédiat ? Dans les portraits de *Neue Welt* apparaissent aussi de « vieux amis ».

WT C’est pourquoi j’ai photographié à la fois à Londres, à New York et à Berlin, dont les « vieux amis », pour qui le monde a également continué d’évoluer, mais aussi des objets apparemment banals, mais en fait absolument merveilleux comme les portables ou les écrans plats.

BR Tu parles encore et encore du lien microcosme/macrocosme que tu retrouves en particulier dans la résolution numérique d’un monde visuel en haute définition. Après les univers abstraits explorés dans l’espace introspectif du studio, est-ce la nouvelle technologie numérique qui t’a incité à partir en voyage pour faire des photos ?

WT Il n’y a pas eu de lien direct. Il y a d’abord eu le désir d’élargir mon champ de vision. Je me suis acheté cet appareil numérique avant d’avoir entrepris mon premier voyage. C’était en 2009, pour l’éclipse solaire totale de Shanghai. Je m’étais toujours tenu à l’écart de cet engouement pour la Chine. Mais l’éclipse totale m’a attiré en Chine. Au retour, j’ai voyagé à travers plusieurs pays d’Asie. Pendant ce voyage, j’ai travaillé en

medium that corresponds with the simplicity of a good reflex camera. The camera I chose for this cost 2,000 and not 15,000 euros. It’s important to me that my medium delivers high-quality results without it settling into a world of “special effects.” I always find technologies interesting when they arrive at the point of general use, because this is also when they have the potential to reach people with a generally accepted vocabulary.

BR The attention to detail in digital pictures no longer corresponds to our everyday seeing experience, unless one consciously changes to extreme focusing. In your new photographs, one continually encounters this extreme perceptual density, for example, in the picture of the waterfall (*Iguazu*, 2010), where even the smallest spray of water surprises with its staggering resolution, or when microstructures become large-format images.

WT This question deeply preoccupies me, now more than ever since I switched to the digital camera. It enables pictures to be taken with an almost endless information density, which only reveals all its details when enlarged to two meters. Even then, one doesn’t see pixels! I had to learn from scratch how to take pictures. Thirty-five millimeter film is actually enough for me, since it corresponds to what my eye actually sees. Large-format images are, of course, impressive, but they don’t usually move me because of their inhuman sharpness. Now I find myself in the situation of using a camera capable of achieving large-format sharpness. But now, too, the increased sharpness strikes me as being consistent, because everything in the world is “high definition” in the meantime. The increased sharpness corresponds to what feels like a new perception, and since I otherwise use the new camera like I did the other—without a tripod, et cetera—the former view remains the same. I find it extremely challenging to generate photographs in an already overdepicted world using precisely these new technologies. Just the same, I often had my doubts and thought: What sort of randomness and complete worthlessness is this?

BR The digitalized world archive is still physically and mentally impossible to grasp, as well as a disturbing model of an archive. Has digital photography changed your approach to taking pictures?

WT I needed a year to ignore all feedback on the small display on the back

und digital fotografiert. Die Fotos in diesem Buch sind übrigens auch teilweise analog. Digitale Fotografie ist ja nicht besser als analoge. Sie ist anders. Es ging mir eben darum, die „neue Welt“ mit einem zeitgenössischen Medium anzuschauen, das der Einfachheit einer sehr guten Spiegelreflexkamera entspricht. Die Kamera, die ich dafür gewählt hatte, kostete daher 2.000 und nicht 15.000 Euro. Es ist mir wichtig, dass mein Medium zwar hochwertige Resultate liefert, aber nicht in einer Welt der „Special Effects“ angesiedelt ist. Technologien finde ich immer dann interessant, wenn sie im allgemeinen Gebrauch angekommen sind, weil sie dann auch das Potenzial haben, die Menschen mit einem allgemeingültigen Vokabular zu erreichen.

BR Die Detailgenauigkeit digitaler Bilder entspricht schon nicht mehr unserer alltäglichen Seherfahrung, außer man wechselt bewusst zum extremen Fokussieren. In deinen neuen Fotos trifft man immer wieder auf diese extreme Wahrnehmungsdichte, zum Beispiel in dem Bild von dem Wasserfall (*Iguazu*, 2010), wo selbst das kleinste Gischtelement noch mit einer gigantischen Auflösung überrascht oder auch Mikrostrukturen, die zum Großbild werden.

WT Diese Frage beschäftigt mich sehr, erst recht seit ich auf die Digitalkamera umgestiegen bin. Sie ermöglicht Bilder mit einer fast unendlichen Informationsdichte, die erst bei zwei Metern Vergrößerung alle ihre Details zeigt, und dann kann man immer noch keine Pixel sehen. Ich musste komplett neu lernen, Bilder zu machen. Eigentlich reicht mir Kleinbildfilm, weil das dem entspricht, was mein Auge tatsächlich sieht. Großformatbilder beeindrucken zwar, aber aufgrund ihrer menschlichen Schärfe berühren sie mich normalerweise nicht. Jetzt finde ich mich in der Situation wieder, eine Kamera zu benutzen, die in ihrer Schärfe ans Großformat heranreicht. Diese höhere Schärfe erscheint mir aber jetzt als schlüssig, weil mittlerweile alles in der Welt „High Definition“ ist. Die höhere Schärfe entspricht einer neuen gefühlten Wahrnehmung, und weil ich die neue Kamera ansonsten wie immer verwende, also ohne Stativ usw., bleibt der bisherige Blick erhalten. Ich sehe es als eine extreme Herausforderung, gerade mit dieser neuen Technologie aus einer bereits überabgebildeten Welt Fotografien zu generieren. Ich habe auch immer wieder gezweifelt und gedacht: Was ist das für eine Beliebigkeit und totale Wertlosigkeit?

BR Das digitale Weltarchiv ist doch immer noch ein physisch und gedanklich

argentique aussi bien qu’en numérique. Un certain nombre de photos du livre ont d’ailleurs été prises en argentique. En fait, la photographie numérique n’est pas meilleure que la photographie argentique. Elle est différente. Ce qui m’importait, c’était justement de regarder le « nouveau monde » avec un médium actuel qui ait la simplicité d’un bon reflex. L’appareil que j’ai choisi a donc coûté 2 000 euros, pas 15 000. Il est important pour moi qu’un médium fournisse des résultats de grande qualité, mais il ne doit pas se situer dans un monde d’« effets spéciaux ». À mon sens, les nouvelles technologies deviennent intéressantes une fois entrées dans l’usage courant, parce qu’elles ont alors aussi le pouvoir d’atteindre les gens par un langage universellement valide.

BR Aujourd’hui, la précision de l’image numérique ne correspond déjà plus à notre expérience visuelle quotidienne, sauf quand on est dans le domaine de l’agrandissement extrême. Dans tes nouvelles photos, on trouve régulièrement cette densité de la perception, comme dans la photographie des chutes d’eau (*Iguazu*, 2010), où la plus infime partie de l’écume surprend encore par son incroyable précision, ou dans des microstructures transposées en grands formats.

WT Cet aspect me préoccupe beaucoup, a fortiori depuis que je suis passé au numérique. La photographie numérique permet de réaliser des images contenant une quantité d’information presque illimitée dont tous les détails ne se révèlent que dans l’agrandissement à des formats de deux mètres, et l’on ne voit toujours pas les pixels. J’ai dû repartir à zéro pour faire des images. En fait, le 35 mm argentique me suffit parce qu’il correspond à ce que mon œil voit réellement. Les images en grand format sont bien sûr très impressionnantes, mais leur précision inhumaine fait que, généralement, elles ne me touchent pas. Aujourd’hui, je me retrouve dans la situation d’utiliser un appareil qui se rapproche du grand format. Cela dit, cette plus haute précision me semble aujourd’hui cohérente parce qu’entre-temps, presque tout dans le monde est devenu *high definition*. La précision accrue correspond à une nouvelle perception sentie, et comme la manière dont j’utilise l’appareil reste la même pour tout le reste – c’est-à-dire sans pied, etc. –, le regard d’avant est préservé. Je trouve que c’est un défi extrême d’utiliser ces nouvelles technologies pour générer des photographies d’un monde déjà surreprésenté. Régulièrement, j’ai aussi douté et je me suis dit: qu’est-ce que c’est que toute cette gratuité et cette absence totale de valeurs ?

of the camera, detailing what’s being photographed at the moment. For me, photography is a dialogue between the photographed and the one photographing—a projection, a hope, and a presumption, regardless of what emerges from it. With analog photography, this first becomes visible a few days later. In the viewfinder, you can see what you photograph, but the translation process constituting the magic and psychology of photography is not just optomechanical. Photographs are also spiritually charged objects. In the past, this idea had a space of its own. Today, however, you already see the image in the display a half second after taking the shot. For me, a customary approach encountered a great disturbance in this way. I had to learn to ignore this. Taping over the display is not the solution, because it also gives me access to important controls. Evaluating the deeper quality of the picture is done later on the computer. That’s one of the reasons why, on principle, I never retouch or alter anything afterwards. I believe in the magic of the picture’s creation process at the moment the photograph is taken. One should be able to trust my pictures. Despite the vast photo-editing possibilities, as a matter of principle, I never remove, enhance, or smooth out any details. On those rare occasions when I did change something, the intervention was clearly recognizable, and it was usually meant tongue-in-cheek.

BR Then you would say: You still make your decisions for the picture in the same manner?

WT Exactly. It happens afterwards, weeks or months later. I don’t take advantage of the possibilities of immediate processing. I always feel images somehow need time to mature. Of course, that’s not true, since they don’t really do that. But the more distance you have from the moment the image is photographed, the more you can separate yourself from your wishes and hopes.

BR Like in your earlier work, similar to Renger-Patzsch, large thematic groups move through *Neue Welt* as well: people, social constellations, natural formations, plants, points of transit like airports, shopping malls, animals, means of transportation, technology, and science. How do you view these thematic groups, and what do you see happening when pictures are juxtaposed?

WT I’m not concerned with completeness or a conceptual principle. Popular locations and landmarks can be followed the next day by a totally unfamiliar or banal

nicht fassbares und auch beunruhigendes Modell von Archiv. Hat sich dein Vorgehen durch das digitale Fotografieren verändert?

WT Es hat ein Jahr gedauert, bis ich die Rückkoppelung mit dem, was ich gerade fotografierte, auf dem kleinen Bildschirm hinten auf der Kamera ignorieren konnte. Für mich ist Fotografie ein Dialog zwischen dem Fotografierten und dem Fotografierenden, eine Projektion, eine Hoffnung und eine Vermutung, was dabei herauskommen mag. Bei der analogen Fotografie wird das erst ein paar Tage später sichtbar. Du siehst zwar im Sucher, was du fotografierst, aber der Übersetzungsprozess, der das Magische und Psychologische an der Fotografie ausmacht, ist eben nicht nur optomechanisch. Fotos sind auch geistig aufgeladene Dinge. Dies hatte früher seinen ganz eigenen Raum. Jetzt siehst du eine halbe Sekunde nach der Aufnahme das Bild auf dem Display. Für mich wurde dadurch ein gewohntes Vorgehen mit einer massiven Störung konfrontiert. Also musste ich lernen, das zu ignorieren. Das Display zu verkleben ist ja auch keine Lösung, denn es hat auch wichtige Kontrollfunktionen. Die Beurteilung des Bildes in seiner tieferen Qualität erfolgt dann später auf dem Computer.

Das ist auch einer der Gründe, warum ich grundsätzlich nichts nachträglich bearbeite oder retuschiere. Ich glaube an die Magie des Bildentstehungsprozesses im Zeitpunkt des Fotografierens. Man soll meinen Bildern vertrauen können. Trotz der immensen Möglichkeiten der Bildbearbeitung nehme ich grundsätzlich nichts nachträglich weg, verschönere nichts und ebne nichts ein. In den ganz wenigen Fällen, in denen ich mal etwas verändert habe, ist der Eingriff offensichtlich erkennbar und hat zumeist eine humorvolle Note.

BR Du würdest also sagen: Die Entscheidung fürs Bild triffst du immer noch auf dieselbe Art und Weise?

WT Genau. Die findet hinterher, Wochen oder Monate später statt. Die Möglichkeiten der sofortigen Verarbeitung nutze ich nicht. Ich habe immer das Gefühl, dass Bilder irgendwie reifen müssen. Obwohl das natürlich nicht stimmt, denn sie tun es nicht wirklich. Aber je weiter du von dem Aufnahmezeitpunkt entfernt bist, desto stärker kannst du dich von deinen Wünschen und Hoffnungen trennen.

BR Wie in deinen bisherigen Arbeiten ziehen sich ähnlich wie bei Renger-Patzsch auch durch die *Neue Welt* große Themenkomplexe: Menschen, soziale Konstellationen, Naturformationen,

BR L’archive numérique mondiale reste un modèle d’archive insaisissable, physiquement et intellectuellement, mais aussi inquiétant. Ta démarche a-t-elle été changée par la photographie numérique ?

WT Il m’a fallu un an pour pouvoir ignorer le retour de ce que j’étais en train de photographier sur l’écran de contrôle de l’appareil. Pour moi, la photographie est un dialogue entre le sujet photographié et celui qui photographie, une projection, un espoir et une conjecture sur ce qui peut en résulter. Dans la photographie argentine, ce résultat n’apparaît qu’après quelques jours. Ce que tu vois, tu le vois dans le viseur, mais le processus de transposition qui fait l’aspect magique et psychologique de la photographie n’est pas seulement de nature optomécanique – les photographies contiennent aussi une charge spirituelle. Avant, cet aspect avait son espace propre. Aujourd’hui, l’image apparaît à l’écran une demi-seconde après la prise de vue. Du coup, ma démarche habituelle a été confrontée à une perturbation massive. Il m’a donc fallu apprendre à l’ignorer. Coller un cache sur l’écran n’est pas une solution parce que l’écran affiche aussi des fonctions de contrôle importantes. L’évaluation de l’image quant à ses qualités plus profondes a lieu plus tard, devant l’ordinateur.

C’est aussi une des raisons pour lesquelles en principe, je ne retravaille ou ne retouche jamais rien après-coup. Je crois en la magie du processus de création de l’image au moment où l’on photographie. Je veux qu’on puisse faire confiance à mes images. Malgré les immenses possibilités offertes par le traitement de l’image, je n’ôte par principe rien après-coup, je n’embellis rien, je n’égalise rien. Dans les cas très rares où il m’est arrivé de changer quelque chose, l’intervention est clairement reconnaissable et comporte généralement une note humoristique.

BR Donc, concernant la manière dont tu choisis telle ou telle photo, tu dirais que rien n’a changé ?

WT Tout à fait. Le choix a lieu après-coup, après des semaines ou des mois. Je n’exploite pas les possibilités du traitement immédiat. J’ai toujours l’impression que d’une manière ou d’une autre, les images doivent avoir un temps de maturation. Bien sûr, ce n’est pas vrai concrètement. Mais plus on s’éloigne du moment de la prise de vue, plus on peut se défaire de ses souhaits et de ses espoirs.

BR Comme dans ton travail antérieur et un peu comme chez Renger-Patzsch, de grands complexes thématiques parcourent aussi *Neue Welt*: hommes, situations sociales, formations naturelles, plantes,

place, perhaps some small town I hung around in because a friend of my parents lived there and I could stay a couple days. There is less of a system to my traveling. It has more to do with searching for possible flight routes: What lies over there? What could be connected to that? That’s how I landed in unheard-of spots like Darwin in North Australia. And I’m not scared off by unusually popular locations like Iguazu Falls either, since I trust that many places are unusually popular simply because they are, in fact, special. For example, the Sydney Opera House is such a famous landmark that it shouldn’t be necessary to see it in life. But it looked totally different from the well-known photographs of it, and felt totally different from the way I had imagined it.

BR While searching out these well-known places again, you have neither a guiding concept nor any ethnological or investigative intentions. Also, you say that you don’t stay very long in each of these locations.

WT That’s right. A short period of full immersion is enough for me. More isn’t possible than simply being physically present, moving around as much as possible, gathering impressions, making contacts, and opening a few doors. It comes down to physically taking a good look at various things on location and confronting them as best you can. This was no touristy round-trip that forces the so-called foreign into familiar interpretive patterns, but rather the attempt to have a genuinely new experience.

The short stay can attain a special lucidity in the process. We’re all like this: The first day of a trip feels like three days, the second day like two days, and the third like one. After that, the time passes like it does every day.

In the case of such a short stay, the surface of a place stands out most. The surfaces and even superficiality itself have always interested me, because we basically have to read the truth of things from the world’s surface. There is a well-known quote by Bertolt Brecht about the exterior of a factory never depicting the work conditions inside it. Of course the photograph of a factory reflects only to a limited extent what happens inside, but its exterior is a reality, too, the way it stands there. And the double-page spread with both photographs of the foreign workers’ dismal quarters in Dubai is to be understood this way (*workers’ accommodation*, 2009).

BR What also suggests itself here is the critical discourse on the exotic and the reception of the exotic. How do you deal

Pflanzen, Orte des Transits wie Flughäfen, Shopping-Malls, Tiere, Transportmittel, Technologie und Wissenschaft. Wie siehst du diese Themenkomplexe, und was geschieht für dich in der Gegenüberstellung der Bilder?

WT Es geht mir nicht um eine Vollständigkeit oder um ein konzeptuelles Prinzip. Nach bekannten Orten und Wahrzeichen folgt am nächsten Tag vielleicht ein völlig ungewöhnlicher oder banaler Ort, irgendeine Provinzstadt, in die es mich verschlägt, weil da ein Freund der Eltern wohnt und ich dort zwei Tage sein kann. Ich bin weniger mit Systematik gereist, sondern eher mit der Suche nach Flugrouutenmöglichkeiten: Was liegt denn da? Was könnte sich daran anschließen? So bin ich dann auch an Unorten wie Darwin in Nordaustralien gelandet. Auch vor besonders populären Orten, wie den Iguazu-Wasserfällen, bin ich nicht zurückgeschreckt, denn ich vertraue darauf, dass viele Dinge besonders populär sind, weil sie eben besonders sind. Zum Beispiel ist das Sydney Opera House ein dermaßen bekanntes Wahrzeichen, dass es eigentlich unnötig sein müsste, es noch in natura zu sehen. Aber es sah völlig anders aus als auf den weltweit bekannten Bildern und fühlte sich völlig anders an, als ich es mir vorgestellt hatte.

BR Du gehst also weder konzeptuell in Hinblick auf das Wiederaufsuchen bekannter Orte vor noch ethnologisch oder investigativ. Du sagtest, dass du dich nicht lange an den jeweiligen Orten aufgehalten hast.

WT Stimmt. Mir genügt ein kurzzeitiges Volleintauchen. Mehr ist nicht möglich, als sich physisch an diesem Ort aufzuhalten, sich dort möglichst viel zu bewegen, Eindrücke zu erhalten, Kontakte zu machen, Türen zu öffnen, sich Situationen so weit wie möglich auszusetzen. Das war ja keine touristische Rundreise, die das sogenannte Fremde in vertraute Deutungsmuster einpasst, sondern der Versuch, eine wirklich neue Erfahrung zu machen.

Das Kurzzeitige kann dabei eine besondere Luzidität haben. Es geht uns allen ja so: Der erste Tag auf einer Reise fühlt sich an wie drei Tage, der zweite Tag wie zwei Tage und der dritte Tag wie ein Tag. Danach verfließt die Zeit wieder wie im Alltag. Bei einem solchen Kurzaufenthalt zeigt sich vor allem die Oberfläche des Ortes. Die Oberfläche, auch die Oberflächlichkeit, hat mich schon immer interessiert, weil wir die Wahrheit der Dinge im Grunde anhand der Oberfläche der Welt ablesen müssen. Es gibt dieses bekannte Zitat von Bertolt Brecht, nach dem das Äußere

espaces de transit comme les aéroports, centres commerciaux, animaux, moyens de transport, technologie, science. Comment considères-tu ces thématiques et que se passe-t-il pour toi dans la confrontation des images ?

WT Je ne recherche pas l’exhaustivité ni un principe conceptuel. Après les lieux célèbres et les emblèmes, demain, je vais peut-être photographier dans un endroit totalement inhabituel ou banal, une ville de province où je me retrouve parce qu’un ami de mes parents y habite et que j’ai deux jours à y passer. Je n’ai pas vraiment voyagé dans une perspective systématique, plutôt en fonction des routes aériennes possibles : que trouve-t-on là-bas ? qu’est-ce qui pourrait suivre ? Du coup, je me suis parfois retrouvé dans des endroits aussi improbables que Darwin, au nord de l’Australie. Je n’ai pas non plus reculé devant des sites particulièrement populaires comme les chutes d’Iguazu, car je me fie volontiers au fait que bien de choses sont populaires justement parce qu’elles sont spéciales. L’opéra de Sydney, par exemple, est un emblème tellement connu qu’il devrait en fait être inutile de le voir de ses propres yeux. Mais il a un tout autre aspect que ce que montrent les images diffusées dans le monde entier, et l’impression qui s’en dégage a été complètement différente de tout ce que j’avais imaginé.

BR Donc, ta démarche, quand tu te rends à nouveau sur des sites célèbres, n’est ni conceptuelle, ni ethnologique, ni investigative. Tu as dit que tu n’étais pas resté longtemps au même endroit.

WT C’est vrai. Une courte immersion totale me suffit. On ne peut faire plus que séjourner physiquement à un endroit, y bouger autant que possible et chercher à en tirer des impressions, établir des contacts, pousser des portes, c’est-à-dire simplement s’exposer le plus possible à des situations. Car ce n’était pas un circuit touristique destiné à faire entrer l’« étranger » dans des schémas d’interprétation familiairs, mais la tentative de faire une expérience réellement nouvelle.

À cet égard, la brièveté peut produire une lucidité particulière. C’est la même chose pour tout le monde : le premier jour d’un voyage est vécu comme trois jours, le deuxième comme deux jours, et le troisième comme un jour. Après, le temps s’écoule à nouveau comme dans notre vie quotidienne. Lors d’un court séjour de ce genre, ce qui apparaît, c’est surtout la surface du lieu. La surface – et aussi la superficialité – m’a toujours intéressé parce qu’au fond,



with this difficult question? What does it mean today to travel and to grasp the world?

WT The more interesting question is: “What is normal?” Who decides what is aestheticizing, what is research, what is familiar, what is exotic? Pictures are always the transcription of an experiencing of the world. Ideally, they pose the question of there possibly being another way to experience the world. It’s not the world contained in the picture; the picture is a translation. A representational picture does no more and no less than form reality before our eyes. Even if this is fundamentally a platitude, it should always be kept in mind. Of course, I’m aware of the problem addressed here. It was even a key point for me, as a privileged individual traveling to places less connected to the West and suffering economically. Just the same, these places exist and people live here without seeing their existence purely as hardship. What mattered to me was not losing sight of the respective social presence—without being, of course, able to penetrate it too deeply in such a short amount of time, but while, most of all, devoting myself to the question of what constitutes life on earth today, how one assesses and captures it, and perhaps, too, how a sense of the whole could be revealed. In connection with this, three or four years ago I came across the sentence “Life is astronomical.” I see the earth and, most importantly, all living things as merely the formation of a particular astronomical condition, which specifically exists on this planet. The human assumption that we all heed, that life on earth is in and of itself separate: “We live on the earth,” “We populate the earth,” and “Save the planet!” just isn’t so, because *we* are the planet; all of us are the formation of these conditions and, for that reason, only the expression of an astrogeological concoction. The same is inherent in the juxtaposition of people, plants, constructions, and technologies: Everything is matter continually renewing itself and transforming from one aggregate state into another. I even find that somewhat comforting. Naturally, we should make each other’s life as pleasant as possible, and that’s why I believe philosophy, politics, and the rest make sense. All this isn’t just entropy and chaos—that we desire a sense of order and, for example, seek love, right?

BR That sounds like a higher wisdom that ignores social conditions and relationships.

WT The thought that “Life is astronomical” is not meant deterministically,

einer Fabrik niemals die Arbeitszustände in der Fabrik darstellen kann. Natürlich sagt ein Foto einer Fabrik nur bedingt etwas darüber aus, was im Inneren vorgeht, aber auch das Äußere ist eben eine Realität, so wie sie dasteht. So ist auch die Doppelseite mit den beiden Fotos von den tristen Quartieren der Fremdarbeiter in Dubai zu verstehen (*workers’ accommodation*, 2009).

BR Es drängt sich auch der kritische Diskurs über das Exotische und die Rezeption des Exotischen auf. Wie bist du mit dieser schwierigen Frage umgegangen? Was heißt es, heute zu reisen und die Welt zu erfassen?

WT Die interessantere Frage ist: „Was ist normal?“ Wer entscheidet darüber, was Ästhetisierung und was Forschung ist, was vertraut und was exotisch? Bilder sind immer die Umsetzung einer Welterfahrung und stellen im Idealfall die Frage nach einer anderen möglichen Welterfahrung. Es ist nicht die Welt, die in dem Bild enthalten ist, das Bild ist eine Übersetzung. Ein gegenständliches Bild formt die Wirklichkeit vor unseren Augen, nicht mehr und nicht weniger. Auch wenn das im Grunde ein Allgemeinplatz ist, sollte man es sich immer wieder klarmachen. Natürlich bin ich mir über die Problematik bewusst, es war sogar ein zentraler Punkt, als privilegierter Mensch an weniger westlich verbundene und wirtschaftlich ärmere Orte zu fahren. Aber auch dort leben natürlich Menschen ihr Leben, ohne dieses immer nur als pure Härte zu empfinden.

Mir ging es darum, das jeweilige Soziale zwar im Auge zu behalten, ohne in der kurzen Zeit natürlich tiefer eindringen zu können, aber mich vor allem der Frage zu widmen, was das Leben auf der Erde heutzutage ausmacht, wie man es einschätzen, festhalten und wie sich vielleicht ein Sinn für das Ganze ergeben kann. Im Zusammenhang damit ist mir vor drei, vier Jahren der Satz „Leben ist astronomisch“ in den Sinn gekommen. Ich sehe die Erde und alles Leben vor allem als Ausformung eines bestimmten astronomischen Zustandes, der speziell auf diesem Planeten gegeben ist. Die menschliche Annahme, der wir eigentlich alle folgen, dass das Leben von der Erde an sich getrennt ist: „Wir leben auf der Erde“, „Wir bevölkern die Erde“ und „Save the Planet“ stimmt so eben nicht, denn *wir* sind der Planet, wir alle sind die Ausformung dieser Gegebenheiten und damit eigentlich nur Ausdruck eines astrogeologischen Gebräus. Das steckt auch in der Gegenüberstellung von Menschen, Pflanzen, Bauwerken oder Technologie drin: Alles ist Materie, die sich dauernd erneuert und verwandelt, von einem Aggregatzustand in den nächsten. Ich finde,

la vérité des choses doit être lue à partir de la surface du monde. Il y a cette célèbre citation de Bertolt Brecht qui dit que l’aspect extérieur d’une usine ne peut jamais rien dire sur les conditions de travail dans cette usine. Bien sûr, la photo d’une usine n’illustre que très relativement ce qui se passe à l’intérieur, mais l’extérieur aussi est une réalité brute. C’est aussi comme ça qu’il faut comprendre la double page montrant les sinistres logements de travailleurs immigrés à Dubai (*workers’ accommodation*, 2009).

BR L’on songe forcément au discours critique sur l’exotisme et la perception de l’exotisme. Comment as-tu abordé cette question difficile? Que signifie aujourd’hui voyager et recenser le monde?

WT La vraie question est plutôt: « Qu’est-ce qui est normal? » Qui décide où commence l’esthétisation et où commence l’étude, ce qui est familier et ce qui est exotique? Les images sont toujours la transposition d’une expérience du monde, et idéalement, elles posent la question d’une autre expérience possible du monde. Ce qui est contenu dans l’image n’est pas le monde, l’image est une traduction. Un tableau figuratif formule la réalité devant nos yeux, ni plus ni moins. Même si c’est un lieu commun, il est bon de le rappeler de temps en temps.

Je suis bien sûr conscient de cette problématique, cela a même été un aspect central de pouvoir me rendre en privilégié dans des endroits moins reliés à l’Occident et économiquement plus pauvres. Mais ces endroits existent, des gens y vivent leur vie sans forcément la percevoir comme une pure dureté. Pour moi, il était certes important de garder à l’esprit les différents aspects sociaux – sans pouvoir bien sûr y entrer plus profondément dans un laps de temps aussi court –, mais surtout de me consacrer à ce qui fait la spécificité de la vie sur Terre aujourd’hui: comment peut-on l’évaluer, la fixer, et comment peut-il éventuellement en découler un sens pour le tout? C’est dans ce contexte qu’il y a trois ou quatre ans m’est venue la phrase: « La vie est astronomique. » Je vois la Terre et toute vie en premier lieu comme la formulation d’un état astronomique particulier donné précisément sur notre planète. Le postulat de l’Homme, qu’au fond nous suivons tous, selon lequel la vie est un fait séparé de la Terre en tant que telle – « Nous vivons sur Terre », « nous peuplons la Terre », et « save the planet » – n’est pas vraiment juste, car nous *sommes* la planète, nous sommes tous une manifestation de ces conditions et donc en définitive seulement l’expression d’une décoction astro-géologique. C’est aussi inhérent à la mise en

implying that everything follows its “higher” path and no one can change the course of things and so forth. It’s rather the question of: What can one know at all; what can and cannot be changed? In what position does one find oneself as an observer? In my experience, occurrence advances in its simultaneity and always remains ungraspable in its wholeness. Nevertheless, I was driven by the question of whether it might be possible to achieve the awareness and experience relevant to wholeness via a short-term visibility of things. In order to engage in such an “experiencing of the world,” one has to physically move oneself to the most diverse places on earth. My relationship to reality is always, above all, more ethical than technical, or purely aesthetic. I see and photograph the world in the same way that I otherwise react towards it. Essentially, this is about humanitarianism. I’m aware that one can easily succumb to ethnological temptations and glorify the exotic as such. But these photographs are also reactions to my own experiences, which are not always pleasant and familiar. In that respect, “Life is astronomical” deserves emphasis in larger brackets.

BR What does photographing strangers mean for you at all? That’s not exactly a problem-free activity. And you don’t always ask for their permission beforehand.

WT In my opinion, observing people and sometimes photographing them without their knowledge is acceptable when done with the kind of empathetic gaze just mentioned. Of course, each person has to decide this for himself. It could also be considered questionable, how people use posed profile pictures on Facebook in order to be appealing. I think the unobserved photographing of people in their everyday life can also contribute, in general, to a more empathetic understanding of the world. This should never be about capturing photographic “spoils.” I realize I’m walking a thin line here, but I always try to remain aware of this. The moment I sense a lack of consent or catch people at a bad moment, I immediately delete the picture. That’s good about the camera display. But this photography in a state of flux, which dives into life with the camera, risks embarrassment, and has no safety zone whatsoever, continually brings forth something truthful, something genuine. I’m sure of that. It’s also the joy of experiencing the unpredictability and derangedness of life, the preposterous situations that arise, how bodies act among themselves,

das hat auch etwas Beruhigendes. Natürlich sollten wir unser Leben gegenseitig so angenehm wie möglich machen, und deshalb, glaube ich, macht Philosophie und Politik und alles Sinn. Das ist nicht alles nur Entropie und Chaos. Dass wir eine Ordnung wollen und beispielsweise Liebe suchen, oder?

BR Das klingt wie eine höhere Weisheit, die soziale Zustände und Zusammenhänge ignoriert.

WT Der Gedanke „Leben ist astronomisch“ ist ja nicht deterministisch gemeint, dass alles seinen „höheren“ Gang geht und man sowieso nichts ändern kann und so weiter. Die Frage ist doch vielmehr, was kann man überhaupt wissen, was kann man verändern und was nicht? In welcher Beobachterposition befindet man sich? Meine Erfahrung ist es, dass das Geschehen in seiner Simultaneität voranschreitet und in seiner Ganzheit immer uneinholbar ist. Dennoch trieb mich die Frage an, ob eine das Ganze betreffende Erkenntnis und Erfahrung auch über eine kurzfristige Sichtbarkeit der Dinge möglich ist. Und um eine solche „Welterfahrung“ zu machen, muss man sich eben physisch an die verschiedensten Orte der Erde hinbewegen. Meine Beziehung zur Wirklichkeit ist immer in erster Linie eher ethisch als technisch oder rein ästhetisch. So wie ich die Welt sehe und fotografiere, so verhalte ich mich ihr gegenüber auch ansonsten. Es geht im Grunde um Menschenfreundlichkeit. Mir ist klar, dass man dabei schnell der ethnologischen Versuchung erliegen kann, das Exotische als solches zu verklären. Die Bilder sind aber auch Reaktionen auf die eigenen Erfahrungen, die ja auch nicht immer angenehm und vertraut sind. „Leben ist astronomisch“ dient insofern einer größeren Klammer.

BR Was bedeutet es für dich überhaupt, fremde Menschen zu fotografieren? Das ist ja auch nicht ganz unproblematisch. Du wirst sie ja vorher nicht immer gefragt haben.

WT Ich denke, die Leute zu beobachten, sie zu fotografieren, teilweise ohne dass sie davon wissen, ist dann in Ordnung, wenn es mit dem eben beschriebenen empathischen Blick geschieht. Das muss natürlich jeder für sich selbst entscheiden. Man könnte es auch als höchst fragwürdig empfinden, wie sich Leute für ihre Facebook-Profilbilder verstellen, um zu gefallen. Ich denke, dass auch das unbeobachtete Fotografieren von Menschen in ihrem Lebensalltag im Allgemeinen zu einem empathischeren Weltverständnis beitragen kann. Es darf eben niemals

regard d’hommes, de plantes, d’édifices ou de technologies: tout est matière qui se renouvelle et se transforme continuellement, d’un état au suivant. Je trouve qu’il y a aussi quelque chose de rassurant en cela. Bien sûr, nous devrions nous faciliter la vie les uns aux autres dans toute la mesure du possible, et c’est pourquoi je crois que la philosophie et la politique ont un sens. Tout n’est pas qu’entropie et chaos. Le fait que nous voulons un ordre et que nous recherchons par exemple l’amour, n’est-ce pas?

BR Cela sonne comme une sagesse supérieure qui ignore les conditions et les rapports sociaux.

WT Cette idée, « la vie est astronomique », n’a pas pour moi un sens déterministe selon lequel toutes choses suivraient leur cours « supérieur » et que de toutes façons, on ne peut rien changer etc. La question est plutôt, très généralement: que pouvons-nous savoir, que pouvons-nous changer ou non? Quelle est notre position d’observateur? Mon expérience est que les choses avancent dans leur simultanéité et qu’il est impossible de les rattraper en leur totalité. J’ai néanmoins été motivé par la question de savoir si une connaissance et expérience touchant la totalité était aussi possible par le truchement d’une approche brève. Et pour faire ce genre d’« expérience du monde », il faut bien se rendre physiquement dans les différents endroits de la terre. Mon rapport à la réalité est toujours plus d’ordre éthique que technique ou purement esthétique. La manière dont je regarde et photographie le monde est aussi celle dont je me comporte à son égard. Au fond, tout est question d’humanité. J’ai conscience qu’on peut très vite succomber à la tentation ethnologique de transfigurer l’exotique en tant que tel. Mais les images sont aussi une réaction à mes propres expériences qui, elles non plus, ne sont pas toujours agréables et familières. Dans cette mesure, « la vie est astronomique » sert en fait à ouvrir une parenthèse assez vaste.

BR Très généralement, que signifie pour toi photographier des inconnus? Cela ne va pas non plus sans poser des problèmes. Je suppose que tu ne leur as pas toujours demandé leur avis.

WT Je pense qu’observer les gens, les photographier sans qu’ils en soient conscients, même un peu, est acceptable quand on le fait avec le regard empathique que je viens de décrire. Chacun doit bien sûr se positionner individuellement sur ce point. On peut aussi trouver fortement suspecte la manière dont les gens manipulent la photo de leur profil sur Facebook

and how they dress, establish nearness, or keep their distance. All this is infinitely fascinating. I find such contact with everyday life around the world endlessly inspiring.

BR In the series and here, too, in the book, pictures of stellar constellations and night skies frequently appear. You have as strong an interest in astronomy, the universe, scientific research focused on perceiving the universe, and viewing the world we live in as scientifically ascertained and ecologically endangered, as you do in basic questions concerning human existence in light of knowledge and non-knowledge.

WT The question of knowledge and non-knowledge, of everything non-scientific applied to the scientific and the reverse, naturally leads to an ironic way of dealing with knowledge and/or non-knowledge. This is the topic of my work *truth study center*. It opposes those people who accept nothing outside of their own truths and religions; it opposes an ideological understanding of knowledge and truth.

Astronomy is my childhood obsession. I even believe it was my visual initiation into seeing: hours spent trying to distinguish between the finest of details, moving along the boundaries of the visible. Did I just see something or was that only a flicker in my eye? Since then, the question of perceptibility, of the ability to distinguish between nothing and something, has been a central interest of mine. When do developments become visible? What were they prior to being recognizable? This is as interesting politically as it is scientifically. In the series of night sky shots, I could specifically capture this borderline topic in pictures with the new camera. For these pictures, I adjusted the camera’s sensor to such a high speed that it could record hundreds of stars in only one or two seconds. But at the same time, this extreme adjustment makes it hard to tell if what one sees is a star or nothing at all. When sensors see nothing, they create noise, and in these pictures the noise’s pixels seamlessly merge with the real stars. At the European Southern Observatory, one could see that astronomers push their research to precisely this limit. What they see by night are not sparkling stars, but rather weak and pale-hued monitor images in which the noise is barely distinguishable from the stars. Not until several exposures are layered together does it stand out what is artifact and what is truly reality.

That today, twenty-five years later, I rediscovered a deep interest in astronomy also has to do with astronomy currently

darum gehen, fotografische „Beute“ zu machen. Das ist ein schmaler Grat, ich weiß, ich versuche mir immer darüber bewusst zu sein. Sobald ich ein Nichteinverständnis spüre oder Leute in schlechten Momenten getroffen sind, lösche ich das Bild sofort. Das ist das Gute an dem Kamera-Display. Aber diese Fotografie im Fluss, voll und ganz ohne Sicherheitszone, mit der Kamera ins Leben eintauchen, Peinlichkeit wagen, fördert dauerhaft etwas Wahres/Echtes hervor, da bin ich mir sicher.

Es ist auch eine Freude an der Unvorhersehbarkeit und Debilität des Lebens, daran, was für absurde Situationen sich ergeben können, wie Körper sich zueinander verhalten, kleiden, Nähe oder Distanz halten, überhaupt die Beobachtung sozialer Interaktion. Das ist ja alles unendlich faszinierend. Diesen Umgang mit dem Alltag überall auf der Welt finde ich endlos inspirierend.

BR In der Serie und auch hier im Buch gibt es auch immer wieder Bilder von Sternenkstellungen und Nachthimmeln. Du hast generell ein großes Interesse an Astronomie und an wissenschaftlichen Forschungen, die an unsere Vorstellungen vom Universum, an die Welt als wissenschaftlich Erfasste und ökologisch Gefährdete ebenso rühren wie an Fragen der menschlichen Existenz angesichts von Wissen und Nichtwissen.

WT Die Frage von Wissen und Nichtwissen, das ganz Unwissenschaftliche angewandt auf das Wissenschaftliche und umgekehrt, führt natürlich auch zu einem ironischen Umgang mit Wissen/Nichtwissen. Man kann vieles wissen, aber eben nicht alles. Dies ist das Thema meiner Arbeit *truth study center*. Es richtet sich gegen Leute, die nichts außer ihrer eigenen Wahrheit oder ihrer Religion gelten lassen, gegen dieses ideologische Verständnis von Wissen und Wahrheit. Astronomie ist meine Kindheitsobsession, ich glaube, sie war sogar meine visuelle Initiation zum Sehen: stundenlang zu versuchen, feinste Details zu unterscheiden, mich an der Grenze des Sichtbaren zu bewegen. Ist da noch was, oder ist das nur ein Flimmern im Auge? Diese Frage der Wahrnehmbarkeit, der Trennschärfe zwischen nichts und etwas, ist seitdem ein zentrales Interesse von mir. Wann werden Entwicklungen sichtbar? Was waren sie, bevor sie erkennbar wurden? Das ist politisch wie wissenschaftlich gleich interessant. Dieses Grenzthema konnte ich mit der neuen Kamera in der Reihe von Sternenhimmelaufnahmen noch mal ganz konkret in Bildern fassen. Für diese Bilder habe ich den Sensor der Kamera so hochempfindlich

en vue de plaire. Je pense qu’en général, photographier des gens pendant leur vie quotidienne sans qu’ils le sachent peut contribuer à une compréhension plus empathique du monde, à condition de ne jamais chercher à faire du « butin » photographique. La marge est étroite, je sais, je tâche d’en être conscient à tout moment. Dès que je sens un refus, ou si les gens sont touchés à un mauvais moment, j’efface immédiatement l’image. C’est ce qu’il y a de bien avec l’écran de contrôle. Mais cette photographie au gré du moment, s’immerger entièrement dans la vie avec l’appareil, sans zone de sécurité, oser l’embarras, fait émerger durablement quelque chose de vrai, ça j’en suis sûr. C’est aussi la jouissance de l’aspect imprévisible et débile de la vie, la jouissance des situations absurdes qui peuvent apparaître, la manière dont les corps se comportent les uns par rapport aux autres, s’habillent, entretiennent une proximité ou une distance. Tout cela est formidablement passionnant. Ce rapport au quotidien partout dans le monde est pour moi infiniment inspirant.

BR Dans la série comme dans le livre, on trouve régulièrement des photos de constellations et de ciels nocturnes. Tu t’intéresses beaucoup à l’astronomie, au cosmos et aux recherches scientifiques qui touchent à notre conception de l’Univers, du monde tel qu’il est abordé par la science et menacé écologiquement, aussi bien qu’aux problèmes de l’existence humaine au regard de ce qu’on sait et de ce qu’on ignore.

WT La question du savoir et de l’ignorance, le fait totalement non scientifique appliqué au fait scientifique et vice versa, cela conduit évidemment à une approche ironique du savoir et de l’ignorance. On peut savoir bien des choses, mais pas tout. C’est le thème de mon œuvre *truth study center*, qui s’oppose aux gens qui n’admettent rien d’autre que leur propre vérité ou celle de leur religion, à cette compréhension idéologique de la connaissance et de la vérité.

L’astronomie est mon obsession d’enfance, je crois même qu’elle a été mon initiation visuelle : passer des heures à tenter de distinguer les moindres détails, me situer aux confins du discernable. Est-ce que je vois encore quelque chose là, ou n’est-ce qu’un papillotement dans l’œil ? Depuis lors, cette question de la perceptibilité, de la distinction aiguë entre rien et quelque chose, revêt pour moi un intérêt central. À quel moment les évolutions deviennent-elles visibles ? Qu’étaient-elles avant de devenir décelables ? C’est là un sujet tout aussi intéressant du point de vue politique que du point de vue scientifique. Avec mon nouvel appareil, j’ai pu aborder très

being at a point where it’s paradigmatically changing the world again – as it last did in the times of Copernicus and Galileo. In this respect, I’m fascinated by exoplanet research. That now one can say, with relative certainty, that millions of earth-like planets exist in the universe, has actually changed the fundamental parameters for assessing human life. Until recently, only the guesswork of astronomers told us there were probably other planets with earth-like atmospheres, but this couldn’t be proven. Today, one has proof—with almost absolute certainty—that among the countless planets in the universe, the specific conditions for an earth-like surface character are repeated elsewhere.

This year, when I was able to visit the European Southern Observatory in Chile, an astronomer confirmed this for me. He said that, twenty-five years ago, when as a young physicist, he chose to become an astronomer, it was still a seemingly inert field of research, and it was unforeseeable that one would handle such fundamental questions today. Naturally, this challenges religions and their leaders, who see human beings as the center of divine concerns. Something is fundamentally changing today. Without delving any further into this topic, let me briefly mention that I deliberately left religion out of *Neue Welt*. There are more relevant things.

BR This seems to be just the beginning. In CERN, in Geneva, discussions in the area of the microcosm are opening up similar fundamental boundaries of our knowledge of the world.

WT Yes, on a neighbouring mountain beside the one that is home to the largest ESO telescope to date, consisting of four mirrors, each one eight meters across, the E-ELT is going to be built and completed by 2022, with the telling name “Extremely Large Telescope.” It will have the incredible reflector diameter of 40 meters. For a period of 40 years, the five-meter reflecting telescope at Mount Palomar was considered astonishingly big. During the last fifteen years came the eight-meter reflectors, and today, thanks to further advancements, even 40 meters are possible. My guide at ESO spoke of being on the brink of a Galilean moment.

BR This thought is directly realized in your new pictures: The conditions for creating the earth’s surface and its extremes basically correspond with the conditions for creating images. The presence and absence of composition is definitely similar. The world is incessantly recorded microscopically as well as macroscopically, for example, on the pages of *Google Earth*.

eingestellt, dass er in nur ein, zwei Sekunden Hunderte von Sternen erfassen, aber zugleich durch diese Überreizung nicht mehr genau sagen kann, ob da tatsächlich ein Stern ist oder nichts. Wenn Sensoren nichts sehen, kreieren sie Rauschen, und in diesen Bildern gehen die Bildpunkte des Rauschens nahtlos in tatsächliche Sterne über. Auf der Europäischen Südsternwarte konnte man sehen, dass die Astronomen an genau dieser Grenze ihre Forschung betreiben. Was die nachts sehen, sind keine funkelnden Sterne, sondern laue, fahle Bildschirmbilder, auf denen Rauschen kaum von Sternen zu unterscheiden ist. Erst durch das Überlagern mehrerer Aufnahmen lässt sich erkennen, was Artefakt ist und was echte Realität. Dass ich mich 25 Jahre später wieder sehr stark für Astronomie interessiere, hat auch damit zu tun, dass sie heute an einem Punkt angelangt ist, an dem sie die Welt noch mal paradigmatisch verändert, so wie dies zuletzt unter Kopernikus und Galileo der Fall gewesen ist. Insofern interessiert mich die Forschung nach Exoplaneten.

Da man jetzt mit ziemlicher Sicherheit sagen kann, dass es Millionen von erdähnlichen Planeten im Universum gibt, haben sich eigentlich alle Grundparameter für die Beurteilung des menschlichen Lebens verändert. Bis vor kurzem gab es nur die Vermutung von Astronomen, dass es wahrscheinlich auch andere Planeten mit erdähnlicher Atmosphäre gibt, man konnte es aber nicht beweisen. Jetzt hat man Beweise dafür, dass es so viele andere Planeten im All gibt, dass sich die spezifischen Bedingungen zu einer erdähnlichen Oberflächenbeschaffenheit mit an Sicherheit grenzender Wahrscheinlichkeit woanders wiederholen. Als ich dieses Jahr auf der Europäischen Südsternwarte in Chile zu Besuch sein konnte, wurde mir das von einem Astronom bestätigt. Er meinte, als er vor 25 Jahren als junger Physiker den Weg zur Astronomie eingeschlagen hatte, war sie ein schläfriges Forschungsfeld, und es war nicht abzusehen, dass man es da heute mit so fundamentalen Fragen zu tun haben würde.

Das stellt natürlich Religionen und deren Führer in Frage, die den Menschen als Zentrum des göttlichen Interesses ansehen. Da wird gerade fundamental etwas verändert. Ohne das Thema jetzt weiter aufzumachen, will ich kurz sagen, dass ich Religion bewusst aus der *Neuen Welt* rausgelassen habe. Es gibt tatsächlich relevantere Dinge.

BR Es scheint gerade erst der Anfang zu sein. Im CERN in Genf werden im Bereich des Mikrokosmos ähnlich fundamentale Grenzen der Erkenntnis über die Welt aufgestoßen.

concrètement le thème des limites de la perception dans des images comme celles de la série des ciels étoilés. Pour ces images, j’ai augmenté la sensibilité du capteur au point qu’il pouvait capter des centaines d’étoiles en une ou deux secondes, mais du fait de cette hypersensibilité, personne ne peut dire si ce qu’il voit est une étoile ou non. Quand les capteurs ne voient rien, ils génèrent du bruit, et dans ces images, on passe insensiblement des points de bruit aux étoiles. À l’Observatoire européen austral, on peut voir que les recherches se situent très exactement dans cette frange limite. Ce que les astronomes voient la nuit, ce n’est pas le scintillement des étoiles, mais des images d’écrans blafardes et diaphanes dans lesquelles on ne peut guère distinguer le bruit et les étoiles. Seule la superposition de plusieurs clichés permet d’identifier ce qui est accidentel et ce qui est vraiment la réalité.

Le fait que je m’intéresse à nouveau très fortement à l’astronomie vingt-cinq ans plus tard est aussi lié au fait qu’elle est aujourd’hui arrivée à un point où elle est à nouveau en train de changer le monde du point de vue du paradigme, comme cela a été le cas la dernière fois avec Copernic et Galilée. C’est ce qui m’intéresse dans les recherches sur les exoplanètes. Comme on peut dire aujourd’hui avec une quasi-certitude qu’il existe dans l’Univers des millions de planètes semblables à la Terre, tous les paramètres fondamentaux de l’appréciation de la vie humaine ont changé. Récemment, on n’avait encore que les conjectures des astronomes selon lesquelles il existe d’autres planètes enveloppées d’une atmosphère semblable à celle de la Terre, mais on ne pouvait pas le prouver. Aujourd’hui, on a des preuves du fait qu’il existe dans l’Univers un si grand nombre d’autres planètes que la probabilité d’avoir des conditions superficielles analogues à celles de la Terre confine à la certitude.

Cette année, quand j’ai pu visiter l’Observatoire européen austral au Chili, un astronome me l’a confirmé. Jeune physicien, quand il s’est lancé dans l’astronomie il y a vingt-cinq ans, cette science était un champ de recherches ensommeillé, et l’on ne pouvait encore prévoir que l’on serait confronté aujourd’hui à des questions aussi fondamentales.

Cela remet évidemment en cause les religions et leurs chefs, qui placent l’homme au centre de l’intérêt divin. Sur ce point, quelque chose est en train de changer fondamentalement. Sans vouloir développer ce sujet, je dirai seulement que dans *Neue Welt*, j’ai délibérément laissé de côté la religion. Il y a des choses plus importantes.

BR Il semble que ce ne soit que le début. Au CERN à Genève, des limites tout aussi fondamentales concernant le microcosme



Technology is everywhere nowadays. What exactly does it mean to produce pictures in this overdepicted and over-represented world, and to make physical and mental journeys? Couldn’t you also make these pictures and journeys on the Internet?

WT Not really. I still believe it’s possible to show something new and say or find something inexpressible in pictures. There I have faith in the picture. In fact, I think a value is created when I “put myself in situations” and subject myself to unpredictable reactions. Taking a step on the Internet always means following the respective “command.” Maybe you never know what follows on the next page, but you basically see only whatever you have asked about. Everything is predefined on the Internet. On the other hand, in the real world the possibility of a surprise is always immanent.

BR The Swedish poet and artist Karl Holmqvist said that, provided the collectivization of a given world is advanced, the individual will become collectively meaningful again. Precisely because the overlapping, the collective authorship, like on the Internet, is so omnipotent regarding the simultaneity of all the “voices,” the individual voice becomes relevant again in order to establish a connection to the collective as a dialogue factor. Today, the Internet is no longer the technical “other” or counterpart we imagined it to be ten years ago. Now it’s a fully integrated aspect of reality—and for that reason has a completely different connection to the individual…

WT …and perhaps even demands this. In any case, at the end of the 1990s, I sensed less of a need to photograph my contemporaries. I felt the parameters had changed. In the early 1990s, that was still the exception and it wanted to be visualized. Ten years later, however, to photograph a young European-American person meant something else, and we were only then on the road to the over-photographed state, which was nowhere near as far along as it is today. As a kind of counter-reaction, I slowed down my picture production and directed my attention more towards nonre-presentational, abstract photography. Now it strikes me as necessary to become active in such excessive background noise. And so I asked myself: Would it be possible not to filter out individual pictures, but rather to place them inside it, as individual pictures that “ring out” from the general noise?

BR During your travels, you had to “resist” using your new digital camera’s photo-editing possibilities. So which pictures surprised you most?

WT Ja, auf einem Nachbarberg zum bis jetzt noch größten ESO-Teleskop, das aus vier Spiegeln mit je acht Metern Durchmesser besteht, wird bis 2022 das E-ELT gebaut, mit dem bezeichnenden Namen „Extremely Large Telescope.“ Es wird den unglaublichen Spiegeldurchmesser von 40 Metern haben. 40 Jahre lang war das Fünf-Meter-Spiegelteleskop von Mount Palomar einzigartig groß, dann kamen in den letzten fünfzehn Jahren die Acht-Meter-Spiegel, und dank dem Fortschritt sind heute diese 40 Meter möglich. Mein Betreuer bei ESO sprach davon, dass ein galileischer Moment bevorstehe.

BR In deinen neuen Bildern findet eine direkte Realisierung dieses Gedankens statt: Die Bedingungen der Entstehung der Erdoberfläche und ihrer Auswüchse entsprechen im Grunde den Bedingungen der Entstehung der Bilder. Die An- und Abwesenheit von Komposition ist durchaus vergleichbar. Mikro- wie auch makroskopisch wird die Welt permanent aufgezeichnet, zum Beispiel bei *Google Earth*. Technologie ist überall. Was bedeutet es, in dieser überaufgezeichneten und auch überrepräsentierten Welt Bilder zu produzieren, physische und mentale Reisen zu machen? Könntest du diese Bilder und Reisen auch im Internet machen?

WT Nicht wirklich. Ich glaube nach wie vor, dass man etwas Neues zeigen oder etwas Unaussprechbares in einem Bild sagen oder finden kann. Ich habe da Vertrauen ins Bild. Ich denke, es entsteht insofern ein Mehrwert, als dass ich mich „in Situationen bringe“ und nicht planbaren Reaktionen aussetze. Wenn man im Internet einen Schritt macht, folgt man stets dem jeweiligen „Befehl.“ Man weiß zwar nicht, was auf der nächsten Seite folgt, aber man sieht im Grunde immer nur das, wonach man gefragt hat. Im Internet ist alles schon vorgegeben. In der realen Welt ist dagegen die Möglichkeit einer Überraschung stets unmittelbar gegeben.

BR Der schwedische Dichter und Künstler Karl Holmqvist meint, dass in einer Welt, in der die Kollektivierung so weit fortgeschritten ist, eigentlich das Individuelle wieder kollektiv bedeutungsvoll wird. Gerade weil die Überlagerung, die kollektive Autorenschaft wie im Internet in der Gleichzeitigkeit aller „Stimmen“ so omnipräsent ist, sei die individuelle Stimme wieder relevant, um als Dialogisches einen Bezug zum Kollektiven herzustellen. Das Internet ist heute ja nicht mehr das technische „Andere“ oder „Gegenüber“, wie wir es noch vor zehn Jahren wahrgenommen haben, es ist

sont aujourd’hui battues en brèche par notre connaissance du monde.

WT Oui, sur une montagne voisine de ce qui va rester pour quelque temps le plus grand télescope ESO du monde quatre miroirs de huit mètres de diamètre – va être construit d’ici 2022 l’E-ELT, avec son nom très significatif: « Extremely Large Telescope ». Son miroir aura un diamètre incroyable de 40 mètres. Pendant 40 ans, le télescope du mont Palomar, avec son miroir de cinq mètres de diamètre, a été le seul de cette taille. Puis, ces quinze dernières années, sont arrivés les miroirs de huit mètres, et les progrès actuels permettent d’avoir ces 40 mètres. Mon guide à l’ESO a parlé d’un moment galiléen imminent.

BR Ton nouveau travail est une concrétisation directe de cette idée : les conditions de l’apparition des surfaces et des excroissances terrestres correspondent en fait aux conditions de la genèse des images. La présence/absence de composition est tout à fait comparable. Aujourd’hui, le monde est continuellement recensé, sur les plans microscopique aussi bien que macroscopique, par exemple par *Google Earth*. La technologie est partout. Dans ce monde sur-recensé et sur-représenté, que signifie pour toi produire des images, entreprendre des voyages physiques et mentaux ? Pourrais-tu réaliser ces images et ces voyages sur Internet ?

WT Pas vraiment. Je continue de croire qu’on peut montrer quelque chose de nouveau ou dire ou découvrir quelque chose d’inexprimable dans une image. Sur ce point, j’ai confiance en l’image. Je pense qu’il y a une valeur ajoutée dans le fait que je me « mets en situation » et que je m’expose à des réactions non planifiables. Quand on fait un pas sur Internet, on suit toujours la « commande » proposée. Bien sûr, on ne sait pas ce qui va apparaître sur la page suivante, mais en définitive, on ne voit jamais que ce qu’on a demandé. Sur Internet, tout est toujours fixé d’avance. Dans le monde réel en revanche, la possibilité d’une surprise est sans cesse donnée immédiatement.

BR Le poète et artiste suédois Karl Holmqvist pense que dans un monde dans lequel le collectif a atteint un tel degré de développement, le facteur individuel redevient en fait collectivement significatif. C’est précisément parce que la superposition, l’atorat collectif – comme sur Internet –, sont tellement omniprésents dans la simultanéité de toutes les « voix » que la voix individuelle redevient significative pour établir un rapport de dialogue avec le collectif. Techniquement, Internet n’est plus aujourd’hui un « autre » monde ou un vis-à-vis, comme il était encore

WT Actually, everything continued to function the way it always does: When something interests me, or when I’ve thought about it long enough, I always find the right moment to photograph it, without having to force it in order to make the pictures. In the process, I find especially interesting the observations that set me in motion without having to search for them. For example, over the last ten years, I have followed how car headlights have increasingly become highly technical and transformed to complex light sculptures, and have a more aggressive look about them now. They’ve been “overbred” far beyond the necessary technical requirements. I found the “right moment” in an underground garage in Hobart in Tasmania. The ambient lighting and absence of security guards let me give my full attention to the headlights. In this small detail, I saw a picture for a fundamental state of mind, for the technological fantasies of the entire world. It’s interesting how, on this restless search for individuality and distinction, one falls for such cyber-light objects. I see an immediate connection between this aggressive design and the increasingly tougher competition rhetoric in the world. While twenty years ago, most car headlights were round or rectangular, with a friendly look, today, nearly all of them are shark-eye headlights. There really is something detectable on the surface here. Cars have always interested me, these strange capsules always present in the street scene. Mankind’s fundamental wish for individual and independent mobility is understandable, but the consequences of this are also so monstrous…

BR You could have also photographed these headlights in an underground garage in Berlin.

WT Yes, but somehow it needed…

BR …Tasmania.

WT There are many pictures in the series I could have made in London, a city I know better than any other, but nevertheless an endless, unfathomably deep, and intricate place that functions like a mirror reflecting the whole world, of course reinforced by the Commonwealth that practically was the whole world once. In reality, it’s not at all clear which place produced which pictures. Oddly enough, I rarely hear: “Where was that taken?” I often heard this with my earlier pictures, when the W-questions: Who? Where? Why? What? functioned as reflexive actions meant to give viewers access to the images.

ein voll integrierter Realitätsaspekt – und damit hat es ganz andere Bezüge zum Individuum …

WT …und fordert diese vielleicht auch. Ende der 1990er-Jahre jedenfalls habe ich eine geringere Notwendigkeit verspürt, meine Zeitgenossen zu fotografieren. Ich hatte das Gefühl, dass sich die Parameter verändert hatten. Anfang der 1990er war das noch die Ausnahme, die nach einer Bebilderung verlangte. Zehn Jahre später bedeutete das Fotografieren eines jungen europäisch-amerikanischen Menschen etwas ganz anderes, und wir waren erst auf dem Weg zum überfotografierten Zustand, das war lange noch nicht so weit fortgeschritten wie heute. Als eine Art Gegenreaktion habe ich die Bilderproduktion verlangsamt und den Fokus mehr auf die verhaltenslose, abstrakte Fotografie gerichtet. Jetzt scheint es mir notwendig, in diesem extremen Grundrauschen aktiv zu werden. Ich habe mich gefragt: Ist es möglich, Einzelbilder nicht herauszufiltern, sondern eben Einzelbilder da hineinzustellen, Bilder, die aus dem allgemeinen Rauschen „herausklingen“?

BR Du musstest auf den Reisen ja immer auch der Bildüberprüfungsmöglichkeit deiner neuen Digitalkamera „widerstehen“. Welche Bilder haben dich dann am meisten überrascht?

WT Eigentlich, dass es weiterhin so funktioniert, wie es immer funktioniert hat: Dass ich für das, was mich interessiert oder worüber ich lange genug nachdenke, den richtigen Moment finde, ohne ihn zu forcieren, um daraus Bilder zu machen.

Ich finde dabei vor allem Beobachtungen interessant, die mich in Bewegung versetzen, ohne dass ich sie gesucht habe. Zum Beispiel habe ich über die letzten zehn Jahre verfolgt, wie Autoscheinwerfer immer hochtechnisierter, zu komplexen Lichtskulpturen und auch aggressiver in ihrem Ausdruck geworden sind. Sie sind weit über das nötige technische Maß hinaus „überzüchtet“. In einer Tiefgarage in Hobart in Tasmanien habe ich dann den richtigen Moment gefunden. Die Lichtstimmung und Absenz von Wächtern erlaubten es, dass ich mich voll den Scheinwerfern widmen konnte. In diesem kleinen Detail habe ich ein Bild für eine grundsätzliche Befindlichkeit, für die Technologiefantasien der ganzen Welt gesehen. Es ist doch interessant, wie man sich auf dieser rastlosen Suche nach Individualität und Unterscheidung solche Cyberlichtobjekte andrehen lässt. Zwischen diesem aggressiven Design und einer immer härteren Wettbewerbsrhetorik in der Welt sehe ich durchaus

perçu il y a dix ans, mais un aspect pleinement intégré de la réalité – et de ce fait, il entretient aujourd’hui des rapports très différents à l’individu …

WT …et les favorise peut-être. Cela dit, à la fin des années 1990, j’ai moins fortement éprouvé le besoin de photographier mes contemporains. Mon sentiment était que les paramètres avaient changé. Au début des années 1990, c’était encore l’exception qui invitait à une mise en images. Dix ans plus tard, photographier un jeune Américano-Européen signifiait tout autre chose, et nous n’étions encore qu’en route vers « le » sur-photographié, tout cela était encore très loin d’être aussi développé qu’aujourd’hui. C’est par une sorte de réaction contraire que j’ai ralenti ma production d’images et orienté sensiblement mon attention vers la photographie non-figurative et abstraite. Aujourd’hui, il me semble nécessaire de redevenir actif dans ce bourdonnement extrême. La question que je me suis posée est celle-ci : est-il possible non pas d’en distiller des images particulières, mais précisément d’y instiller des images particulières qui « résonnent » hors du bourdonnement général ?

BR Pendant tes voyages, il t’a toujours fallu « résister » à la possibilité de visionner les photos sur ton nouvel appareil numérique. Plus tard, quelles sont celles qui t’ont le plus surpris ?

WT En fait, ce qui m’a le plus surpris, c’est que tout continue de fonctionner comme cela a toujours fonctionné : le fait que je trouve le bon moment pour faire ce qui m’intéresse et à quoi je réfléchis depuis suffisamment longtemps, sans me forcer la main pour en faire des images. Dans ce processus, les observations qui m’intéressent le plus sont celles qui me font bouger sans que je les aie recherchées. Ces dix dernières années par exemple, j’ai suivi la manière dont les phares de voitures sont devenus des sculptures lumineuses de plus en plus complexes du point de vue technique, mais aussi plus agressives dans leur expression. Ils tournent largement en « surrégime », bien au-delà de toute mesure techniquement nécessaire. C’est dans un parking souterrain à Hobart, en Tasmanie, que j’ai trouvé le bon moment. L’ambiance lumineuse et l’absence de gardiens m’ont permis de me consacrer entièrement aux phares. Dans ce petit détail, j’ai vu l’image d’un état d’esprit fondamental, des fantasmes technologiques du monde entier. Je trouve intéressant de voir que malgré la quête permanente d’individualité et de différenciation, on se fait fourguer ce genre de cyberobjets. Pour moi, il y a un rapport direct entre ce design agressif et la rhétorique toujours

BR Let’s go back to the photographs of the car headlights and the association with shark eyes it triggers in the viewer. The relationship of technology and nature, or the association made to this relationship, frequently appears in your work, for example, in the photographs of new technologies for food processing and packaging, but also with the copy and printing machines and high-tech settings. You often show transportation vehicles and technical facilities ...

WT It’s amazing how high technology visually overpowers and spreads around the world. In the past, a smaller number of people participated in the use of high technology. Technical advancements were best recognized in connection with icons of sought-after achievements like space travel, the moon landing, and the Concorde. Today, billions of people communicate with the same cell phones. Even in poor countries, like Ethiopia, no one uses a cell phone from ten years ago.

I observed something similar in connection with sportswear, although sportswear doesn’t immediately depict a sense of technology, but rather tries awakening the suggestion of technological advancement directly on the body. Wherever I went, people wore the same styles and materials—like a global uniform. This gave the impression that certain things are virally present. Of course, this corresponds with the intentions of corporations. But there’s more to this simultaneous spreading of particular styles and technologies.

It’s fascinating to observe how the world’s surface is changing: For example, the color of light is drifting away from light-bulb yellow and towards the pallid, cold glow of the energy-saving lamp. At first, I wondered how someone could accept this lighting of a much lesser quality. Now it has become apparent that energy-saving lamps are just an intermediate phase, and that in the future all light will come from LED sources, which offer a broader spectrum of colors. In China, entire houses are decked with LEDs already. The cities there look totally unlike anything I’ve ever seen before. And the flatness fetish related to monitor screens is a similar global phenomenon. In Ushuaia, the world’s southernmost city, I photographed a shanty town, where the heat insulation was made entirely of Styrofoam packaging from technical appliances (*Ushuaia Favela*, 2010).

BR Surfaces, disguises, and architectural cladding constantly turn up in these pictures as well: designs evolving from folds, but also architectural facings like the Arabic architectural elements used as

einen unmittelbaren Zusammenhang. Vor 20 Jahren waren Scheinwerfer zumeist rund oder viereckig, mit einer freundlichen Ausstrahlung, heute gibt es fast nur noch Haifischaugen. Hier ist an der Oberfläche tatsächlich etwas abzulesen. Autos haben mich immer schon interessiert, diese im Straßenbild allgegenwärtigen seltsamen Kapseln. Der fundamentale Wunsch des Menschen nach individueller und unabhängiger Mobilität ist verständlich, aber in seiner Tragweite auch so was von monströs ...

BR Diese Scheinwerfer hättest du auch in einer Tiefgarage in Berlin fotografieren können.

WT Ja, aber irgendwie brauchte es ...

BR ...Tasmanien.

WT Es gibt viele Bilder in der Serie, die ich in London hätte machen können, einer Stadt, die ich so gut wie keine andere kenne, die aber trotzdem unendlich und uneinholbar tief verschachtelt ist und als Spiegel der gesamten Welt funktioniert, verstärkt natürlich durch das Commonwealth, das mal fast die ganze Welt war. Eigentlich ist es überhaupt nicht eindeutig, welcher Ort welche Bilder hervorgebracht hat. Die Frage „Wo ist das?“ wird interessanterweise gar nicht so oft gestellt, wie ich das früher bei meinen Bildern erlebt habe, als diese W-Fragen: „Wer? – Wo? – Wie? – Was?“ als reflexartige Zugangsfunktionen des Betrachters ins Spiel kamen.

BR Lass uns zurückgehen zu den Fotografien von den Autoscheinwerfern und der beim Betrachter ausgelösten Assoziation zu Haifischaugen. Das Verhältnis Technologie und Natur oder die entsprechenden Assoziationen tauchen häufig in deinem Werk auf, zum Beispiel auch in den Fotografien von neuen Technologien der Nahrungsmittelverarbeitung und Verpackung, aber auch bei den Fotokopierern, Druckmaschinen und Hightech-Umgebungen. Häufig zeigst du Transportvehikel und technische Anlagen ...

WT Es ist erstaunlich, wie sich Hochtechnologie visuell niederschlägt und um die ganze Welt verteilt ist. Früher hatte ein weit geringerer Teil der Menschen Teilhabe an Hightech. Technischer Fortschritt wurde eher über Sehnsuchtsikonen wie Raumfahrt, Mondlandung oder die Concorde wahrgenommen. Heute telefonieren Milliarden von Menschen mit denselben Handys. Selbst in armen Ländern wie Äthiopien werden keine Handys von vor zehn Jahren benutzt. Etwas Ähnliches habe ich in Bezug auf Sportswear beobachtet, obwohl

plus dure de la compétition mondiale. Ici, la surface permet effectivement de lire quelque chose.

Les voitures m’ont toujours intéressé, ces étranges capsules omniprésentes dans le paysage urbain. L’aspiration fondamentale de l’homme à une mobilité individuelle et autonome est bien compréhensible, mais aussi tellement monstrueuse dans ses implications ...

BR Ces phares, tu aurais aussi bien pu les photographier dans un parking souterrain de Berlin.

WT Oui, mais pour une raison ou pour une autre, il fallait ...

BR ... la Tasmanie.

WT Dans cette série, il y a bien des photos que j’aurais pu faire à Londres, une ville que je connais mieux qu’aucune autre, et qui néanmoins est insaisissable, d’une complexité infinie, et qui fonctionne comme un miroir du monde entier, notamment de par le Commonwealth, qui était autrefois presque le monde entier. En fait, on ne peut pas vraiment dire quel lieu a produit telle ou telle image. Fait intéressant, on me pose aujourd’hui moins souvent la question « c’est où ? » qu’autrefois avec mes photos, quand les questions « qui ? – où ? – comment ? – quoi ? » servaient de clés d’accès réflexes au spectateur.

BR Revenons aux photographies des phares de voitures et à l’association avec des yeux de requin déclenchée chez le spectateur. Le rapport entre technologie et nature, ou la référence à ce rapport, est souvent présent dans ton travail, notamment dans les photographies des nouvelles technologies de production et d’emballage alimentaires, mais aussi de photocopieurs, de presses d’imprimerie et d’environnements high-tech. Tu montres souvent des véhicules de transport et des dispositifs techniques...

WT C’est étonnant de voir comment la haute technologie exerce une influence visuelle et comment elle se diffuse dans le monde entier. Autrefois, seule une partie des gens bénéficiaient du high-tech. Les progrès techniques étaient plutôt perçus au travers d’icônes fantasmées comme la conquête spatiale, les alunissages ou le Concorde. Aujourd’hui, des milliards de gens téléphonent avec les mêmes portables. Même dans des pays pauvres comme l’Éthiopie, on n’utilise pas les portables d’il y a dix ans.

J’ai observé un phénomène similaire dans le sportswear, qui n’est pourtant pas strictement représentatif de la technologie, mais qui entend plutôt susciter l’image du progrès

decorations in one of your photographs (*cladding*, 2009), taken in a new structure built of concrete; the radiant surfaces of the new hotel and merchandise temple, but also the forms and encasements of the world’s surface in urban structures, shown from a bird’s-eye view; or the Masai’s hair sculpted into an artistic shape with mud (*Young Masai*, 2012).

WT Cladding is not just a construction type, enormously popular and almost considered normal. It also grants expression to a specific attitude. Other similarly questionable attitudes are, in the Anglo-Saxon realm, exposed brickwork and the factory-building aesthetic in Berlin, both interesting at first, but later became the cliché of stifled forms. I always travel around the world with half an eye open only to architecture. What interests me is when something is pure facade and when something is “genuine,” meaning when something is either false or honest. In my opinion, architecture often handles the expectations of its users very carelessly. In this respect, I consider deception, when it presents itself as such, much less problematic. But when everything is just curtain-walled slabs, my first reaction is that I don’t feel taken seriously as a user. In the Anglo-Saxon realm, everything is completed with cladding or curtain walling. The Centre Pompidou-like approach is more to my taste, everything left open, or else everything permanently plastered. Of course, the “cladders” could say that they are being honest in their illusion, that it never lasts longer than five years anyway, and being fake is used in the same way to neatly plaster or cover with bricks.

This tension between constructions promising eternity and endurance and the pragmatism and practical constraints of money, the vagabonding use of it, is something I find mind-boggling. A strong motivation for traveling and taking trips to cities evolves from observing this in all its forms around the world. Built space always confronts viewers with the results of a multitude of creative decisions made by the most disparate people and their different approaches. A kind of visual polyphony reigns. Most people don’t notice this at all, because it qualifies as the norm. But I constantly see and read the world in this way. Other interesting “constructions” are blossoms. On the one hand, they envelop and adorn the real issue: the fertility pistil. On the other, blossoms are wondrously decorative deception devices for bees. But they never poison bees. This is less clear in many malls in the world of consumers. I am not, per se, against consumerism. I’m concerned with intensifying that point where the harmless

Sportswear nicht im unmittelbaren Sinne Technologie darstellt, vielmehr den Anschein technologischen Fortschritts am Körper erwecken will. Überall, wo ich war, trug man dieselben Stile und Stoffe – wie eine globale Uniform. Man bekommt den Eindruck, dass gewisse Dinge viral präsent sind. Das entspricht natürlich der Absicht der Konzerne. In dieser Gleichzeitigkeit der Ausbreitung bestimmter Stile und Technologien steckt aber noch mehr. Es ist faszinierend zu sehen, wie sich die Oberfläche der Welt verändert, zum Beispiel die Lichtfarbe, weg vom glühbirnen-gelb hin zum fahlen kalten Licht der Energiesparlampe. Ich hatte mich zunächst gewundert, wie man ein so viel schlechteres Licht in Kauf nehmen kann. Jetzt wird deutlich, dass die Energiesparlampe nur eine kurze Zwischenphase ist und in Zukunft jegliches Licht von LEDs kommen wird, die farblich ein weit größeres Spektrum bieten. In China sind bereits ganze Häuser in LEDs verkleidet. Die Städte dort sehen ganz anders aus, als ich es je gekannt hatte. Auch der Flachheitsfetisch in Bezug auf die Bildschirme ist ein ähnliches globales Phänomen. In Ushuaia, der südlichsten Stadt der Welt, habe ich eine informelle Siedlung fotografiert, in der die Wärmedämmung aus Styroporverpackungen von Technikgeräten bestand (*Ushuaia Favela*, 2010).

BR Oberflächen, Verkleidungen, Verschaltungen kommen in den Bildern ebenfalls immer wieder vor: Faltenwürfe, aber auch Architekturverkleidungen, wie zum Beispiel die arabischen Architekturelemente, die in einem deiner Bilder in ein neues Betongebäude als Dekoration gesetzt sind (*cladding*, 2009), die glänzenden Oberflächen der neuen Hotel- und Warentempel, aber auch die Strukturen und Umhüllungen der Weltoberfläche in Stadtstrukturen, die man aus der Vogelperspektive sieht oder die mit Lehm in eine künstliche Form gebrachten Haare eines Massai (*Young Masai*, 2012).

WT Verschalung ist eben nicht nur eine Bauart, die enorm weit verbreitet ist und fast als normal empfunden wird, darin kommt auch eine Haltung zum Ausdruck. Andere ähnlich bedenkliche Haltungen sind das *exposed brickwork* im angelsächsischen Raum oder die Fabrikhallenästhetik in Berlin, beides anfänglich interessante, aber jetzt zum Klischee erstarrte Formen. Ich laufe ständig mit einem halben Auge nur für die Architektur durch die Welt. Mich interessiert, wann etwas reine Fassade und wann etwas „echt“, das heißt, wann etwas unehrlich oder ehrlich ist. Architektur geht, wie ich finde, häufig sehr fahrlässig mit den Erwartungen der Benutzer um. Insofern halte ich Unehrlisches, das sich als solches

technologique à l’appui du corps. Partout où j’ai séjourné, on porte les mêmes styles et les mêmes tissus – comme un uniforme global. On a l’impression que certaines choses sont là de façon virale. Cela correspond évidemment aux intentions des grands groupes industriels. Mais cette simultanéité de la diffusion de certains styles et de certaines technologies recèle encore davantage.

Il est ainsi fascinant de voir comment la surface du monde change, par exemple avec la couleur de la lumière : nous quittons le jaune de l’ampoule à filament pour la lumière blafarde et froide de l’ampoule à basse consommation. J’avais d’abord été étonné que les gens acceptent une lumière tellement moins bonne qualitativement. Aujourd’hui, il semble évident que l’ampoule à basse consommation n’est qu’une courte phase transitoire et qu’à l’avenir, tous les éclairages vont être à base de LED, qui offrent un spectre chromatique beaucoup plus étendu. En Chine, des immeubles entiers sont déjà équipés de LED. Les villes là-bas ont un tout autre aspect que tout ce que j’ai jamais connu. Un autre phénomène global similaire est le fétiche du « plat » dans le domaine des écrans. À Ushuaia, la ville la plus méridionale du monde, j’ai photographié des bidonvilles dans lesquelles l’isolation thermique était faite en plaques de polystyrène expansé venant d’emballages d’appareils électroménagers (*Ushuaia Favela*, 2010).

BR Dans ton travail apparaissent aussi régulièrement des surfaces, des masques, des coffrages : des draperies, mais aussi des revêtements utilisés en architecture, par exemple les éléments de l’architecture arabe qui servent de décoration pour un nouvel immeuble en béton dans une de tes photographies (*cladding*, 2009), les surfaces rutilantes des nouveaux temples de l’hôtellerie et du commerce, mais aussi les structures et les revêtements de la surface du monde avec les structures urbaines photographiées en vue aérienne, ou encore la mise en forme artificielle des cheveux d’un Massaï avec de la glaise (*Young Masai*, 2012).

WT Le coffrage n’est pas seulement un mode de construction immensément répandu et presque perçu comme un fait normal, il exprime aussi une attitude. D’autres attitudes tout aussi suspectes sont l’*exposed brickwork* dans le monde anglo-saxon ou l’esthétique « halle d’usine » à Berlin. Ces deux formes intéressantes à l’origine se sont aujourd’hui figées jusqu’au cliché. Je me promène sans cesse dans le monde avec un œil sur l’architecture. Cela m’intéresse de voir quand quelque chose est pure façade et quand c’est « authentique »,



enjoyment of packaging, advertising, and types of decoration shifts to exploitation and simulating false data. It always revolves around the same question: What is genuine?

BR Alongside cosmological, technological, and organizational constellations you frequently express an interest in social constellations, groups of people entangled in everyday situations. Here, I’m thinking about the marketplace scene in Ethiopia (*Market I*, 2012). What I find especially interesting about this picture is that it makes an immense picture archive available as the basis of our perception: We encounter such a huge number of images. Unlike nineteenth-century ethnologists, we no longer bring home with us from our travels pictures that appear foreign in nature. A great deal of this comes across in the marketplace picture. On the one hand, this is your own “authentic” picture. But it also shows everything we know about composed imagery. One witnesses the interplay of everything possible: expressions of so-called “authentic” life or the not composed, art history, and a visual range spanning from our collective projections to the collapse of this acquired way of seeing. Like you mentioned earlier, the same scene, with people wearing different clothes and with other goods, could have taken place in a park in London, right? What role does the migration and globalization of pictures and merchandise play for you in this context?

WT Markets and merchandise define people and cultures. People come together where trading takes place. Markets are economically vital for their participants, but also places of communication and places to ward off boredom with. People are never alone at markets, and they can hope to personally benefit from some part of the general activity.

BR How and why do the photographs become specific?

WT That’s another important aspect. This has nothing to do with making a stereotypical image of the world, but rather with making something in the general realm of things visible. I don’t think of this as a “balancing act.” It’s actually inherent in all things. For example, a hotel room is, first of all, nothing out of the ordinary and simply a standard. At the same time, however, it’s this specific hotel room that prompted a reaction in me (*Jurys Inn*, 2010). So it’s not just the idea “Ah yes, there are millions of hotel rooms like this one,” but also the specific combination of red carpeting, offensive lamp stand, and this particular abstract painting on the wall.

zeigt, für nicht so problematisch. Wenn aber alles nur vorgehangene Platten sind, fühle ich mich als Benutzer erstmal nicht ernst genommen. Im angelsächsischen Raum ist alles verschalt oder verhangen. Mir liegt eher das Centre-Pompidou-mäßige, alles offen zu lassen oder aber das dauerhaft Verputzte. Die „Verschaler“ können natürlich sagen, dass sie ehrlich in ihrer Illusion sind und, da sowieso nichts länger als fünf Jahre hält oder in derselben Weise genutzt wird, es *fake* wäre, ordentlich zu verputzen oder zu mauern.

Dieses Spannungsverhältnis zwischen einem ewigkeits- und dauerhaftigkeits-versprechenden Bauen und dem Pragmatismus und Sachzwang des Geldes, der vagabundierenden Nutzung, finde ich irre. Eine starke Motivation für das Reisen und die Fahrten durch Städte rührte daher, sich das in den verschiedensten Spielarten überall auf der Welt anzusehen. Im bebauten Raum ist man ja stets mit den Resultaten einer Vielzahl von gestalterischen Entscheidungen unterschiedlichster Menschen und ihrer verschiedenen Ansätze konfrontiert. Es herrscht eine Art visueller Polyphonie. Das wird ja von den meisten Leuten gar nicht wahrgenommen, weil es eben der Normalfall ist. Ich aber sehe und lese die Welt ständig so. Andere interessante „Konstruktionen“ sind Blüten. Sie verhüllen und verzieren das, worum es eigentlich geht: den Fruchtstempel. Blüten sind ein wunderbares Zier- und Blendwerk für Bienen, aber sie vergiften die Bienen nicht. Manche Konsumwelt-Mall ist da nicht so eindeutig. Ich bin ja nicht konsumfeindlich per se. Mir geht es darum, den Blick dafür zu schärfen, wo der harmlose Genuss von Verpackung, Werbung und Zierrat umschlägt in eine Ausnutzung, eine Vortäuschung falscher Tatsachen. Immer wieder dreht es sich um die Frage: Was ist echt?

BR Neben kosmologischen, technologischen oder organischen Konstellationen interessieren dich immer wieder soziale Konstellationen, Gruppen von Menschen, die in Alltagshandlungen verstrickt sind. Ich denke da an die Marktszene in Äthiopien (*Market I*, 2012). Ich finde dieses Bild besonders interessant, da wir inzwischen als Grundlage für unsere Wahrnehmung über ein immenses Bilder-Archiv verfügen: Wir kennen so enorm viele Bilder. Anders als noch die Ethnologen des 19. Jahrhunderts bringen wir von Reisen keine fremdartigen Bilder mehr mit. An diesem Marktbild zeigt sich davon sehr viel. Einerseits ist es ja dein „authentisches“ Bild, es zeigt aber auch alles, was wir von komponierten Bildern gelernt haben. Man kann im Grunde alles daran

en d’autres termes, quand quelque chose est honnête ou malhonnête. À mon sens, l’architecture traite souvent les attentes de l’utilisateur par-dessous la jambe. C’est pourquoi la malhonnêteté qui s’affirme comme telle ne me semble pas tellement problématique. Mais quand tout n’est que plaques de revêtement, ce que je ressens, c’est qu’on ne me respecte absolument pas en tant qu’utilisateur. Dans le monde anglo-saxon, tout est bardé de revêtements et de murs rideaux. Je préfère le genre Centre Pompidou, où tout est ouvert, ou encore un bon vieux crépi durable. Bien sûr, les « revêteurs » peuvent dire qu’ils sont honnêtes dans leur illusion et que comme rien ne tient plus de cinq ans et n’est utilisé de la même manière, ce serait *fake* de faire un crépi ou de monter un mur dans les règles de l’art.

Cette tension entre un mode de construction qui promet l’éternité ou la durabilité d’une part, et d’autre part le pragmatisme et les contraintes de l’argent, de l’utilitarisme errant, je trouve ça fou. Une forte motivation pour mes voyages et mes promenades urbaines a été d’en voir les différentes déclinaisons dans le monde entier. Dans l’espace construit, on est toujours confronté aux résultantes de toute une série de décisions formelles prises par toutes sortes de gens avec leurs différentes approches. Il règne une sorte de polyphonie visuelle. La plupart des gens ne s’en rendent pas compte parce que c’est la normalité. Mais moi, c’est le regard que je porte continuellement sur le monde et la lecture que j’en ai. D’autres « constructions » intéressantes sont les fleurs. D’un côté, elles servent de voile et de parure au sujet crucial: le pistil. Les fleurs sont un prodigieux ouvrage ornemental et trompe-l’œil pour abeilles, mais elles n’empoisonnent pas les abeilles. Certains centres commerciaux mondiaux ne sont pas aussi clairs à cet égard. Je ne suis pas fondamentalement hostile à la consommation. Ce qui m’importe, c’est d’aiguiser le regard là où le plaisir bénin de l’emballage, de la publicité et de l’enjolivre tourne au traquenard, au simulacre et au mensonge. On en revient toujours à la même question : qu’est-ce qui est authentique?

BR À côté des constellations cosmologiques, technologiques ou organiques, tu t’intéresses régulièrement aux constellations sociales, à des groupes de gens impliqués dans des actes quotidiens. Je songe à la scène de marché en Éthiopie (*Market I*, 2012). Ce que je trouve particulièrement intéressant dans ce livre, c’est qu’il crée une immense banque d’images qui serait la base de notre perception. Nous sommes confrontés à tant d’images... Contrairement aux ethnologues du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, nous ne revenons plus de nos

BR The Internet, perhaps the last twenty years of images and image transfer, has played a major role in establishing access to a different dimension of the subjective and the individual in order to enable other assertions again. In media theories, this is discussed in terms of new maneuvering space for the subjective. I can imagine that there must be more advanced theories of the subjective, theories we haven’t actually read yet and therefore can’t discuss.

WT It is probably becoming increasingly difficult as an individual to make an individually valid depiction of the “world” because people are overrun, like never before, by an incredible number of preconceived opinions and pictures of an unknown magnitude, and these are constantly colliding and ending up beside and on top of one another within a sustained noise. What interested me was not only to passively submit to all this, but to consciously let things bump against each other and stand side by side, even when—or precisely because—their references are so obvious.

In this book, for example, there is a double-page spread showing what appears to be one sheep, until its shadow reveals it to be two sheep. Beside this image is the picture of a beach cottage in Papua New Guinea, which is the epitome of the island paradise cliché, but, in reality, shows a family residence. Then there is also the photograph of a DeBeers jewelry store with a limousine driving by, taken on Fifth Avenue in New York City. Here, the contrasts are really too obvious. What excites me, however, is enduring this because it’s somehow the full range: How far does it go? What can one endure? I can resist the judging-and-condemning impulse these contrasts provoke in me. Now I can leave everything the way it is.

BR This is really about an altered reality and, therefore, having different experiences with this simultaneity.

WT The simultaneity and availability of all things constitute our reality today. That hint of the didactic is gone: There are the poor and there the rich, and so forth ...

BR ...and the genuine and the perhaps no longer genuine. What does it mean when you refer to all three of these pictures without immediately activating the clichés of your existing or, to some extent, learned and educated criteria? The first time I saw these works, I had the impression they were about an emptying process—not of pictures, but rather an emptying of the clichés and

durchspielen: Begriffe des sogenannten „authentischen“ Lebens, also das Nichtkomponierte, die Kunstgeschichte, unsere kollektiven Projektionen bis hin zu einem Kollaps dieser erlernten Sichtweisen. Wie du schon sagtest, die Szene könnte auch in anderer Kleidung und mit anderen Gütern in einem Park in London stattgefunden haben, oder? Welche Rolle spielt für dich Migration und Globalisierung von Bildern und Waren in diesem Zusammenhang?

WT Märkte und Waren definieren Menschen und Kulturen. Wo gehandelt wird, da kommen Leute zusammen. Märkte sind für ihre Teilnehmer wirtschaftlich lebensnotwendig, aber sie sind auch Orte der Kommunikation und Orte gegen Langeweile. Auf Märkten ist man nie allein und kann außerdem darauf hoffen, dass etwas von der allgemeinen Aktivität für einen selber abfällt.

BR Wie und warum werden die Fotografien spezifisch?

WT Das ist ein weiterer wichtiger Aspekt. Es geht nicht darum, ein stereotypes Weltbild zu erzeugen, sondern etwas Allgemeines sichtbar zu machen, das trotzdem hochspezifisch ist. Ich glaube, das ist kein „Spagat“, es ist eigentlich inhärent in allen Dingen vorhanden. Ein Hotelzimmer zum Beispiel ist ja erst mal nichts Außergewöhnliches, ein Standard eben. Zugleich ist es aber genau dieses spezifische Hotelzimmer, das in mir eine Reaktion hervorgerufen hat (*Jurys Inn*, 2010). Es ist dabei nicht nur die Idee „ah ja, solche Hotelzimmer gibt es millionenfach“, sondern auch genau die spezielle Kombination aus dem roten Teppichboden, dem fiesen Lampenhalter und diesem kitschigen abstrakten Bild an der Wand.

BR Das Internet, vielleicht die letzten zwanzig Jahre von Bildern und Transport von Bildern, hat eine große Rolle dabei gespielt, Zugang zu einer anderen Dimension des Subjektiven oder Individuellen zu finden, um wieder andere Behauptungen machen zu können. In Medientheorien wird das etwa diskutiert als neue Handlungsspielräume für das Subjektive. Ich könnte mir vorstellen, dass es noch weitergehende Theorien des Subjektiven geben müsste, die wir noch nicht wirklich lesen und deshalb diskutieren können.

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WT Es wird wahrscheinlich zunehmend schwieriger, sich als Individuum ein individuell gültiges Abbild von „der Welt“ zu machen, weil man in bislang nicht gekanntem Ausmaß von einer ungläublichen Vielfalt vorgestanzter Meinungen und Bildern umlagert ist, die in einem

voyages avec des images inconnues. Dans la photo du marché en question, cet aspect est très présent. D’un côté, c’est ta photo « authentique », d’un autre côté, on y trouve tout ce que nous avons appris des images composées. Au fond, tous les aspects sont là : les notions de la vie « authentique », c’est-à-dire l’aspect non composé, l’histoire de l’art, nos projections collectives jusqu’à l’effondrement des regards appris. Comme tu le disais, cette scène pourrait aussi bien s’être déroulée dans d’autres habits et avec d’autres produits dans un parc de Londres, n’est-ce pas ? Quel rôle jouent pour toi la migration et la globalisation des images et des produits dans ce contexte ?

WT Les marchés et les produits définissent les hommes et les cultures. Là où l’on marchande, les gens se rassemblent. Pour leurs acteurs, les marchés sont une nécessité économique vitale, mais les marchés sont aussi des lieux de communication et des espaces contre l’ennui. Sur un marché, on n’est jamais seul ; de plus, l’individu peut espérer récupérer une part de l’activité générale.

BR Qu’est-ce qui fait qu’une photographie devient spécifique ?

WT C’est l’autre aspect important. La question n’est pas de produire une image stéréotypée du monde, mais de rendre visible un fait général qui soit malgré tout hautement spécifique. À mon sens, il n’y a pas là de « grand écart » ; en fait, cela existe en toute chose. Dans un premier temps par exemple, une chambre d’hôtel n’a rien d’inhabituel, c’est un standard. En même temps, c’est justement cette chambre d’hôtel particulière qui a suscité en moi une réaction (*Jurys Inn*, 2010). Il ne s’agit pas seulement de l’idée « ah oui, ce genre de chambre d’hôtel, il en existe des millions », mais aussi de la combinaison très particulière entre la moquette rouge, l’infâme abat-jour et cette peinture abstraite kitsch accrochée au mur.

BR Ces vingt dernières années environ, l’internet a joué un rôle important pour conquérir une autre dimension du subjectif ou de l’individuel et pouvoir avancer de nouvelles affirmations. Dans les théories des médias, cet aspect est débattu dans le cadre des nouveaux espaces d’action ouverts au subjectif. J’imagine assez bien qu’il existera encore des théories du subjectif plus développées que nous ne pouvons encore vraiment lire et donc discuter.

WT Il va probablement être de plus en plus difficile de se faire une image « du monde » individuellement valide parce que nous sommes assaillis comme jamais auparavant par une incroyable diversité



stereotypes we are familiar with and readily approach.

WT Essentially, artworks are only endowed with a soul and uniqueness when a specific set of criteria exists in the artist. I found it to be an enormous challenge, verging on frightening, to unlearn how to photograph, to ignore the criteria I felt secure with, and to expand my focus to the extreme: to the whole world, to the entire pixel and/or information density, and to the complete range of subject matter, while pulling out the rug of my own social environment from under my feet in the process. Added to that comes the hugely increased number of pictures, around three times as many as I normally used when I photographed with film ...

BR That means you must have had many more pictures to choose from ...

WT Exactly. Where image consumption is concerned, I believe there’s a limit. Books with thousands of pages don’t interest me. “A lot” has never really interested me. Even though I’ve always been very productive, I only fully utilize thirty to forty camera pictures a year as art works. As a viewer, you can’t really process more than that.

BR With your abstract works, the studio works, from the *Freischwimmer* series to the *Silver* works, there is a development linked to a material-induced composition. You didn’t want the *Freischwimmer* series brought in connection with the “travel” pictures, but with the latest *Silver* works you did ...

WT ... because the *Freischwimmer* series connects intention and wish to the uncontrollable with far more intensity. Ultimately, it deals with traces and compositions I actively bring into the picture manually. With the *Silver* works, my hands are involved only insofar as I expose some of the sheets to colored, homogeneous light. The imaging process is subjected to the inherent logic of the material purely mechanically. The undeveloped photo paper—sometimes exposed, sometimes unexposed—passes through a photo-developing machine, which I intuitively, or depending on my intention, leave dirty or clean to varying degrees. Because of the remnants of chemicals in the empty machine, filled with only water, the photo paper continues to develop, but only partially. On the other hand, dirt and silver particles from the traces of chemicals settle on the paper’s surface, and this often produces interesting scratches. The result is basically no less a piece of reality than the photograph of

ständigen Rauschen aufeinanderprallen, nebeneinander und übereinander liegen. Dabei hat mich interessiert, das nicht einfach nur passiv hinzunehmen, sondern die Dinge bewusst mal einfach so aufeinanderstoßen und nebeneinanderstehen zu lassen, auch wenn oder gerade weil ihr Bezug so offensichtlich ist. In diesem Buch gibt es zum Beispiel eine Doppelseite, auf der etwas zunächst wie ein Schaf aussieht, sich dann aber über den Schatten als zwei Schafe entpuppt. Daneben gibt es das Bild einer Hütte am Strand in Papua-Neuguinea, das dem Klischee des Inselparadieses perfekt entsprechen könnte, aber in Wirklichkeit der Wohnort einer Familie ist, und dann ein Foto von einem DeBeers-Laden mit einer Limousine davor, das an der 5th Avenue in New York entstanden ist. Die Gegensätze sind hier eigentlich zu offensichtlich. Aber mich reizt es, das ertragen zu können, denn irgendwie ist das die Spannbreite: Wie weit geht es? Was kann man ertragen? Ich kann dem be- und verurteilenden Impuls widerstehen, den diese Gegensätze bei mir herausgefordert haben, ich kann es jetzt stehen lassen.

BR Es geht ja eigentlich um eine veränderte Realität, und darum, mit dieser Gleichzeitigkeit andere Erfahrungen zu machen.

WT Die Gleichzeitigkeit und Verfügbarkeit von allen Dingen macht unsere heutige Lebensrealität aus. Es fällt der didaktische Fingerzeig weg: Es gibt hier Arme und Reiche und so...

BR ... und Authentisches oder vielleicht nicht mehr Authentisches. Was heißt es, wenn du dich gleichzeitig auf diese drei Bilder beziehst, ohne die Klischees deiner vorhandenen wie auch immer gelernten und gebildeten Kriterien sofort zu aktivieren? Als ich die Arbeiten zum ersten Mal gesehen habe, hatte ich eben auch den Eindruck, dass es um eine Entleerung geht – nicht um eine Entleerung der Bilder, sondern eine Entleerung der Klischees und Stereotypen, mit denen wir gewohnt sind, uns dem anzunähern.

WT Grundsätzlich sind Kunstwerke ja nur beseelt und besonders, wenn dafür ein spezifisches Set von Kriterien im Künstler vorhanden ist. Ich habe es als extreme Herausforderung empfunden, bis hin zur Angst, das Fotografieren zu verlernen, auf die bewährten Kriterien bewusst zu verzichten und meinen Fokus extrem auszuweiten: auf die ganze Welt, auf die gesamte Pixel- oder Informations-tiefe, auf die gesamte Sujet-Bandbreite, und mir dabei gleichzeitig den Teppich

d’opinions et d’images préfabriquées qui s’entrechoquent, se juxtaposent et superposent dans un bourdonnement incessant. Ce qui m’a intéressé dans ce contexte, c’est de ne pas seulement accepter ce fait de manière simplement passive, mais de laisser délibérément les choses s’entrechoquer entre elles, de les laisser à leur place les unes à côté des autres, même si ou précisément parce que leur rapport est tellement évident. Dans mon livre, il y a par exemple une double page où l’on aperçoit quelque chose qui ressemble d’abord à un mouton avant que l’ombre portée de ce quelque chose montre qu’il s’agit en réalité de deux moutons. À côté, il y a l’image d’une hutte sur une plage de Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée, cliché type de l’île paradisiaque, mais qui est en réalité le logement d’une famille, et puis la photo d’une bijouterie DeBeers, avec une limousine devant, qui a été prise dans la Cinquième Avenue à New York. En fait, ces oppositions sont bien trop éclatantes. Mais cela m’intéresse de pouvoir le supporter, car d’une certaine manière, c’est bien là l’étendue du spectre: jusqu’où va-t-on aller ? que peut-on supporter ? Je peux résister à l’impulsion de juger et de condamner ce que ces oppositions suscitent en moi ; aujourd’hui, je peux laisser les choses à leur place.

BR En fait, il s’agit d’une réalité modifiée et aussi que la simultanéité permet de faire d’autres expériences.

WT Aujourd’hui, notre réalité vécue est définie par la simultanéité et la disponibilité de toutes choses. La didactique de l’index pointé disparaît: il y a là des pauvres et des riches et donc ...

BR ... et de même l’authentique et ce qui ne l’est peut-être plus. Qu’est-ce que cela signifie quand tu te réfères simultanément à ces trois images sans activer tout de suite les clichés de tes critères appris ou constitués d’une manière ou d’une autre ? En voyant pour la première fois ces œuvres, j’ai eu le net sentiment qu’il s’agissait aussi d’une évacuation – pas d’une évacuation des images, mais des clichés et des stéréotypes auxquels nous avons l’habitude de faire appel pour aborder tous ces aspects.

WT Fondamentalement, les œuvres d’art n’ont une âme et ne sont spéciales que quand un ensemble de critères spécifique existe en l’artiste. J’ai resenti comme un défi extrême, et ce jusqu’à l’angoisse, de désapprendre la photographie, de renoncer consciemment aux critères éprouvés et d’élargir mon approche à l’extrême: au monde entier, à toute la profondeur des pixels et de l’information, à toute la palette des sujets, tout en me privant des ressources de

a tree, but one for which I also didn’t create the depicted object.

BR A self-depiction of the process?

WT This is fundamentally something mineral, a piece of nature, genuine matter, a changing environment. Residues of every kind—dirt, remains, and scratches—are unavoidable, basic and intermediate states in nature. Even in the photo emulsion, I view color in exactly the same way—as a natural phenomenon. Placed in connection with the subject, this “natural autonomy” development of the *Silver* pictures’ material perhaps transforms thinking and perceiving in the sense of a new subjectivity. Actually, here in the book, one always confronts a representational picture as though the main concern is likewise a kind of reflecting on reality. At the same time, one could view the *Silver* works as a farewell to the organic-chemical nature of photography.

BR In books, you have recently begun to layer photographs onto the pages.

WT The first time I did that was last year, in the catalog of the exhibition in the Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw. One naturally lessens the “preciousness” of the individual picture and uses it as pure image material. But we should also have confidence in the picture as simply an excerpt in a new relationship to other pictures, as able to be something entirely new. On the one hand, this might create an image from the simultaneity of pictures I sense. But, most of all, I believe this addresses an interest in new developments, in the question: “How does one arrive at new pictures?” In some cases, I see these compositions and pages created from layering as new, individual works.

BR For example, you have three technological pictures, headlights, and technical spaces overlap on the back cover. It looks as if cutting took place, but the pictures are no longer the classical, cut-out fragments of a collage technique, but rather layered images and visual simultaneities. Then double-pages like these appear in the book: the photograph of an extremely intricate concrete mixer truck beside the page showing the interior of the driver’s cabin of a bus, where images in the reinforced rearview mirror, television images above it, and the view outside layer the composition; or the image of the young man on the telephone, with the layered photograph of a copying machine behind it, and which you juxtapose with a hotel

meines sozialen Umfeldes weggezogen. Dazu kommt eine stark erhöhte Zahl an Bildern, die ungefähr dreimal so hoch wie das ist, was ich sonst mit Film fotografiert hätte ...

BR Das heißt, du musstest auch aus viel mehr Bildern auswählen ...

WT Genau. Ich glaube, dass es im Bilderkonsum sowieso eine Grenze gibt. Bücher mit tausend Seiten interessieren mich nicht. „Viel“ hat mich eigentlich nie interessiert. Obwohl ich immer sehr produktiv war, habe ich pro Jahr eigentlich nur dreißig bis vierzig Kamerabilder wirklich als Werke herausgegeben, als Betrachter kann man auch gar nicht viel mehr verdauen.

BR Bei deinen abstrakten Arbeiten, den Studioarbeiten, gibt es eine Entwicklung von den *Freischwimmer*- hin zu den *Silver*-Arbeiten, die mit einer materialbedingten Komposition zu tun haben. Die *Freischwimmer* wolltest du nicht mit den „Reise“-Bildern zusammenbringen, die neueren *Silver*-Arbeiten aber schon ...

WT ... weil die *Freischwimmer* viel stärker Absicht und Wunsch mit Unkontrollierbarem verbinden. Letzten Endes handelt es sich hier um Spuren und Kompositionen, die ich manuell aktiv ins Bild bringe. Bei den *Silver*-Arbeiten sind dagegen meine Hände nur noch insofern im Spiel, als ich manche Blätter mit farbigem homogenem Licht belichte. Das Bildgebungsverfahren ist aber rein mechanisch der Eigenlogik des Materials unterworfen. Das unentwickelte Fotopapier, manchmal belichtet, manchmal unbelichtet, wird durch eine Entwicklungsmaschine geschickt, die ich je nach Intuition und Absicht in verschiedenen Stadien der Verschmutzung oder Reinigung belassen habe. Aufgrund der Restchemikalien, die sich in der leeren, nur mit Wasser gefüllten Maschine befinden, entwickelt sich das Fotopapier partiell noch weiter, andererseits lagern sich auf dessen Oberfläche die in den Restchemikalien enthaltenen Schmutz- und Silberpartikel ab. Auf diese Weise entstehen auch oft interessante Kratzer. Das Resultat ist im Grunde genauso ein Stück Realität wie das Foto von einem Baum, bei dem ich auch nicht den zentralen Bildgegenstand geschaffen habe.

BR Eine Selbstabbildung des Prozesses?

WT Es ist im Grunde etwas Mineralisches, ein Stück Natur, reale materielle, sich verändernde Umwelt. Ablagerungen aller Art, Schmutz, Reste, Kratzer, sind ja unvermeidliche Grund- und

mon environnement social. À cela s’ajoute un nombre de photos accru qui représente un volume à peu près trois fois plus important que ce que j’aurais photographié avec un appareil argentique.

BR C’est-à-dire qu’il t’a aussi fallu choisir entre un plus grand nombre de photographies ...

WT Tout à fait. De toute façon, je crois que la consommation d’images a ses limites. Les livres de mille pages ne m’intéressent pas. En fait, « beaucoup » ne m’a jamais intéressé. Même si j’ai toujours été très productif, je n’exploite pleinement que trente, quarante photographies en tant qu’œuvres d’art par an – en tant que spectateur, on ne peut d’ailleurs en digérer beaucoup plus.

BR Dans tes œuvres abstraites, les œuvres d’atelier, il existe aussi une évolution qui va des séries *Freischwimmer* aux *Silver*, qui concernent une composition liée au matériau. La série *Freischwimmer*, tu n’as pas voulu la rapprocher des photos « de voyage », alors que *Silver*, plus récente, oui ...

WT ... parce que dans *Freischwimmer*, l’intention et le souhait sont beaucoup plus fortement liés à l’incontrôlable. En définitive, il s’agit de traces et de compositions que je fais entrer dans l’image manuellement et de manière active. Dans les œuvres de la série *Silver* en revanche, mon intervention manuelle se borne à exposer certaines feuilles à une lumière homogène, le procédé de fabrication de l’image étant soumis de façon purement mécanique à la logique propre du matériau. Le papier photographique non développé, parfois exposé, parfois non, est envoyé dans une développeuse que j’ai laissée dans différents états de salissure ou de nettoyage au gré de l’intuition. Du fait des produits chimiques résiduels présents dans la développeuse vide seulement remplie d’eau, le papier photographique continue de se développer partiellement, cependant que des particules de saleté ou argentiques contenues dans les produits chimiques résiduels se déposent à sa surface. Souvent, il en résulte aussi des rayures intéressantes. Au fond, le résultat est tout autant un morceau de réalité que la photo d’un arbre, pour laquelle je n’ai pas non plus créé le sujet central.

BR Une autoreprésentation du processus?

WT Au fond, il y a là quelque chose de minéral, un morceau de nature, d’environnement réel, matériel, qui se modifie. Les dépôts de toutes sortes – saleté, résidus, rayures – sont en effet des

window's view of a city—but superimposed on the view is the reflection on the window's inside surface ... Can you say more about these layered images and overlaps? They not only seem to demonstrate your special perception, but also a transition of this simultaneity to a picture.

WT These layered images, the impure, the contaminated, and that which isn't compatible but which functions just the same, were present in my work from the start. This not only happens in the pictures, but has always been a central aspect of my installations. Books, too, if you turn the pages rapidly, have this simultaneity. As a result, a new formation of something that was there all along is currently in my work. Now my perception of the world has found this form.

Zwischenzustände in der Natur. Genauso sehe ich Farbe, auch in der Fotoemulsion, als ein Naturphänomen an. Setzt man das in einen Bezug zum Subjekt, transformiert diese „natürliche“, „autonome“ Entwicklung des Materials der *Silver*-Bilder vielleicht das Denken und die Wahrnehmung im Sinne einer neuen Idee von Subjektivität.

Hier im Buch stehen sie eigentlich immer einem gegenständlichen Bild gegenüber, so als handelte es sich ebenfalls um eine Art Realitätsbetrachtung. Zugleich kann man die *Silver*-Arbeiten auch als Abgesang auf die organisch-chemische Natur der Fotografie ansehen.

BR Vor kurzem hast du begonnen, in Büchern Fotografien auf den Seiten zu überlagern.

WT Das habe ich das erste Mal letztes Jahr im Katalog zur Ausstellung in der Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warschau gemacht. Man setzt so natürlich die „Kostbarkeit“ des Einzelbildes aus, benutzt es als reines Bild-Material. Man muss darauf vertrauen, dass es als bloßer Ausschnitt im Verhältnis zu anderen Bildern vielleicht etwas Neues sein kann. Einerseits entsteht so vielleicht ein Bild von dieser Gleichzeitigkeit der Bilder, die ich empfinde, aber es ist, glaube ich, vor allem auch ein Interesse an Neuentwicklungen, an der Frage: Wie kommt man zu neuen Bildern? Die aus den Überlagerungen entstehenden Kompositionen und Seiten werden von mir teilweise schon als neue Einzelwerke gesehen.

BR Zum Beispiel überlagerst du auf der Coverrückseite drei technologische Bilder, Scheinwerfer und Technikräume. Das sieht so aus, als ob da Schnitte stattgefunden hätten, obwohl diese Bilder gerade nicht mehr wie in der klassischen Collagetechnik ausgeschnittene Fragmente sind, sondern Überlagerungen und Gleichzeitigkeiten von Bildern.

Dann gibt es im Buch Doppelseiten wie diese: Dem Foto eines unendlich kompliziert verschachtelten Betonmischlastwagens steht die Innenansicht einer Fahrerkabine in einem Bus gegenüber, in der sich Bilder im Rückspiegel mit Blenden, Fernsehbildern und der Außenansicht verschachteln; oder aber der junge Mann am Telefon, dessen Bild ein Foto von einem Kopierer überlagert und das du einem Blick aus dem Hotelzimmer auf die Stadt gegenüberstellst – der Blick auf die Stadt ist aber mit der Reflexion auf der Innenseite des Fensters überlagert ...

Kannst du mehr über dieses Überlagern und Verschachteln sagen? Darin scheint sich nicht nur deine sehr spezielle

états fondamentaux et intermédiaires inévitables dans la nature. C'est exactement la manière dont je vois la couleur, même dans l'émulsion photographique : un phénomène naturel. Quand on met cela en relation avec le sujet, cette évolution « naturelle », « autonome » du matériau des œuvres de la série *Silver* transforme peut-être la pensée et la perception au sens d'une nouvelle idée de la subjectivité. Dans le livre, elles sont en fait toujours mises en regard d'une photographie figurative, comme s'il s'agissait également d'une sorte de regard porté sur la réalité. En même temps, on peut considérer les œuvres de la série *Silver* comme un chant du cygne à la nature organico-chimique de la photographie.

BR Récemment, dans des livres, tu as commencé à superposer des photographies à l'intérieur d'une même page.

WT J'ai fait ça la première fois l'année dernière pour le catalogue de l'exposition à la Zachęta National Gallery of Art à Varsovie. L'on se défait ainsi du caractère « précieux » de l'image unique, qui est utilisée comme un pur matériau visuel. Il faut avoir confiance dans le fait qu'en tant que simple fragment, dans un nouveau rapport avec d'autres images, elle peut devenir quelque chose de nouveau. Il en résulte peut-être une image de la simultanéité des images, telle que je la ressens, mais je crois que c'est aussi et surtout un intérêt pour de nouvelles évolutions, pour la question : « Comment parvient-on à des images nouvelles ? » Les compositions et les pages qui résultent de superpositions, je les considère en partie déjà comme des œuvres à part entière.

BR En quatrième de couverture par exemple, tu superposes trois images technologiques, des phares et des espaces techniques. Tout se passe comme s'il y avait eu des découpages, bien que ces images ne soient justement plus des fragments découpés comme dans la technique classique du collage, mais des superpositions et des simultanités d'images. Et dans le livre, il y a des doubles pages comme celle où la photo de la bétonnière extraordinairement complexe est placée en regard de la vue intérieure d'une cabine de conducteur de bus, dans laquelle l'image reflétée dans le rétroviseur s'imbrique avec un pare-soleil, des images télévisées et la vue extérieure, ou encore le jeune homme au téléphone dont l'image se superpose à la photo d'un photocopieur, et que tu mets en regard de la vue sur la ville d'une chambre d'hôtel – mais à la vue de la ville se superpose le reflet de la face intérieure de la fenêtre ...

Peux-tu en dire un peu plus sur cette superposition et cette imbrication. Il ne semble

Wahrnehmung zu zeigen, sondern eben auch eine Umsetzung dieser Gleichzeitigkeit ins Bild.

WT Diese Überlagerungen, das Unpure, das Kontaminierte, das, was nicht zusammenpasst, aber trotzdem funktioniert, war in meiner Arbeit von Anfang an enthalten. Das findet nicht nur in den Bildern statt, sondern ist immer schon zentraler Aspekt meiner Installationen. Auch Bücher, wenn man schnell blättert, haben diese Gleichzeitigkeit. Von daher ist das in meinem Werk jetzt eine neue Ausformung von etwas, das eigentlich schon immer da war. Meine Weltwahrnehmung hat jetzt diese Form gefunden.

pas seulement s'y montrer ta perception très particulière, mais aussi, précisément, une traduction de cette simultanéité dans l'image.

WT Ces superpositions, l'impur, le contaminé, ce qui n'est pas fait pour aller ensemble, mais qui fonctionne quand même, a été présent depuis toujours dans mon travail. Cela ne se passe pas seulement dans les photographies, mais est déjà un aspect central de toutes mes installations. Les livres aussi, quand on les feuillette rapidement, ont cette simultanéité. Dans mon travail, il s'agit donc d'une nouvelle déclinaison formelle de quelque chose qui a en fait toujours été là. Ma perception du monde a désormais trouvé cette forme.





Tom Holert

The Unforeseen.

On the Production of the New, and Other Movements in the Work of Wolfgang Tillmans

Prelude: How a visitor may be led

Warsaw, January 2012. Ascending the majestic staircase of the classicist art palace built between 1890 and 1900 for the Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych, the then Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts, and now home to the Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, Poland's National Gallery, I make my way up to Wolfgang Tillmans' exhibition *Zachęta. Ermutigung (Zachęta. Encouragement)*. En route I see large paper-drop pictures hanging in niches that must originally have been intended for paintings. These close-ups of sheets of curling, curving photographic paper with shimmering and gleaming polychrome surfaces are unframed, held in position by the foldback clips that Tillmans uses to present his works on paper. With the three-dimensionality of the images and the three-dimensionality of the physical objects, the paper-drop pictures perform a dance of gravity, materials, reflections and shadows. They show what they are, even if not completely. For the difference between the materiality of the photographic paper 'in' the pictures and the archival sheets exhibited here (207 × 138 centimetres) that have absorbed the ink-jet prints, prevents any over-hasty identification.

The brilliant white of the walls of this grand stairwell, the stage for real and imaginary art societies, forms a backdrop against which the white backgrounds of the paper-drop scenarios stand out discretely yet distinctly. Thus the opaque white of a classicist art ideal turned white cube contrasts with the white of an artistic project that is not beholden to any notion of an ideal white but that does nevertheless engage with an endless number of photographically producible white tones, with the grey tinges and marginal hues of a white that is never pure, that is always mixed, mingled, mashed.

On the landing I turn to the right to continue my tour of the exhibition. I enter the first room, an airy gallery with a glass ceiling that indirectly allows daylight into the space. The pale parquet floor is empty – as opposed to the walls, which are loosely covered with works in all sorts of formats, some crowded together, some spaced far apart. That this part of the exhibition alone contains fifty-three pictures only dawns on me later on. For the abundance of exhibits is not overwhelming – if anything it evaporates, evanesces, ephemeralises into the lightsome heights of the gallery, albeit not without forming hotspots, concentrated items and arrangements that require our concentration – combinations, groups, where gazes, gestures, lines, planes interact, where rhythms and chords arise and where the distinction between form and content is consistently rendered inoperative.

I look straight ahead and see, on the wall facing me, two large, blue-black ink-jet prints from the *Freischwimmer* series, placed symmetrically side by side, at exactly the same height. Since it is impossible to miss this diptych from the entrance to the room, it sets the tone, establishing a benchmark for this display. The movements within the image in the left-hand *Freischwimmer* (187, 2011) run vertically; the dark, fibrous threads or cloud formations plunge downwards, or maybe stand up, whereas the right-hand picture (176, 2011) appears overall lighter and undulating, with dark hair tentacles flowing horizontally.

The two *Freischwimmer* pictures are flanked on the same wall, at a respectable distance, by two smaller-format C-prints. On the far left is *Genom* (2002) and on the far right *Nonkosi* (2008): enlarged black-and-white photographs (printed on colour photo paper) of a still life with socks scattered on the wooden floor of a corridor in a domestic interior, and a half-length portrait of a woman against a black background; leaning on her arms with her head turned towards the camera, she is wearing a red T-shirt with a logo that reads 'HIV POSITIVE'.

Together with the *Freischwimmer* images these two pictures connect in their difference. The title – *Genom* – takes the pattern of socks (whose shapes resemble the scientific symbols for chromosomes used in images of genomes) and turns it into a still life of molecular-biological data – or into a message, written in a reified foreign language that is to be deciphered in some other way. Meanwhile the portrait of Nonkosi Khumalo, Chairperson of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in South Africa, reflects Tillmans' commitment to education on AIDS and the development of treatment methods. This is also seen in his photographs for a publication documenting a meeting of AIDS activists in Cape Town in 2006; the publication was produced jointly by Tillmans, TAC and HIV i-Base. He also took up the thread of activism around issues of medical and sexual politics in other parts of the Warsaw exhibition, such as in a series of display tables in the adjacent room, where he focused on issues surrounding homophobia, transgenderism and sexual politics, as a critical challenge to the reactionary sexual morals of Polish officialdom and as a gesture of solidarity with the country's sexual opposition.

### Parallelism – Subjectivism – Objectivism

This all means that the decorative unity of wall and image, which the hanging of the *Freischwimmer* initially promises, is not only thwarted by the shift in dimensions, the infringement of symmetrical order and the (supposed) discontinuity of abstraction and figuration, and by the fact that the different types of image and their configuration on this wall require the viewer to move around in the space and to continually readjust his or her gaze, bearing in mind that in the corner of one's eye or following a slight turn of the body more pictures are constantly looming into view, mostly unframed, very small (postcard-sized), very large, hung very low down, but also very high up, portraits and still lifes, gestural abstractions, a close-up of a vagina, a picture of a modern *Boy with Thorn*, street scenes, an air-conditioning system. It also means that the pictures communicate with each other in a way that is not bound to the pattern of a closed narrative or any particular line of argument. Instead they create a form of aesthetic and thematic interaction that Tillmans sees as 'a language of personal associations and "thought-maps"',<sup>1</sup> as '... a pattern of parallelism as opposed to one linear stream of thought',<sup>2</sup> and which the critic Jan Verwoert has aptly described as a 'performative experiment with the viewer.'<sup>3</sup>

With all their variability and flexibility – underpinned by an invisible rectilinear grid yet fundamentally open in their interconnections – these installations serve Tillmans as reflections of his own way of perceiving the world, as externalizations of his thinking and feeling, and as a chance to fashion a utopian world according to his own ideas and fantasies.<sup>4</sup> However, this Romantic subjectivism of self-expression or externalization has to be seen in light of a radical objectivism (Tillmans attaches great importance to this) that specifically draws attention not only to the expressive potential arising from the ageing process, from evidence of wear and other precariousnesses in the materials of photography (paper, camera techniques, chemicals, developing equipment etc.) but also to the remarkable resistance and persistence of these same materials.

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1 'Peter Halley in Conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans', in Jan Verwoert, Peter Halley and Midori Matsui, *Wolfgang Tillmans* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 8–33 at 29.

2 Steve Slocombe, 'Wolfgang Tillmans – The All-Seeing Eye', in *Flash Art*, vol. 32, no. 209, November–December 1999, 92–95 at 95.

3 Jan Verwoert, 'Survey: Picture Possible Lives: The Work of Wolfgang Tillmans', in Verwoert et. al., *Wolfgang Tillmans*, 36–89 at 72.

4 See Slocombe, 'Wolfgang Tillmans – The All-Seeing Eye' (see note 2), 95.



Amongst the phenomena that inform this objectivism there are those instances of loss of control that can arise during the mechanical production processes of analogue photography or from coding errors, glitches, in digital images. Temporality, finity, brevity come into play here – a certain melancholy that activates rather than paralyses.

Over the years Tillmans has constantly found new ways to explore, to interpret and to stage this dialectic of intention and contingency. His repertoire and means of aesthetic production have multiplied. And this expansion has not been without consequences for the presentation of his work. Tillmans himself feels that the character of his installations has changed since 2006/07, in other words, when different versions of a solo exhibition of his work toured to three museums in the United States. It was during this exhibition tour that Tillmans started to see the benefit of placing greater weight on individual groups of works in the various rooms of larger exhibitions. In so doing he gave visitors the chance to engage in a different kind of concentration, without the pressure of constantly having to deal with the ‘full spectrum’ (Tillmans) of his oeuvre.<sup>5</sup>

The *Freischwimmer*, which Tillmans started to produce in the early 2000s, form a group or family of images that are not made using a camera lens. As the results of gestural and chemical operations in the dark room, these originals on medium-sized photo paper, which are subsequently scanned and enlarged both as ink-jet prints and as light-jet prints on photo paper, are unrepeatable one-offs. It has been said that these images, which include ensembles such as *Peaches*, *Blushes* and *Urgency*, call to mind microscopically detailed images of biological processes, hirsute epidermises, highly erogenous zones, and that their aura fills the whole space – above all when they are presented in such large formats as in Warsaw or yet larger still, as in the case of the two monumental *Ostgut Freischwimmer* (2004) that used to grace the walls of the Panorama Bar at Berghain in Berlin. The *Freischwimmer* and their kin can be read as diagrams of sexualised atmospheres in private or semi-public spaces, in boudoirs or clubs, as highly non-representational images that both suspend and supplement conventional depictions of sex.

#### Value Theory, Value Praxis

The Warsaw *Freischwimmer* diptych also invites analogies, a biomorphising and anthropomorphising gaze, where the atmosphere of the ‘museum’ context of course has its own agenda and suggests different points of interest, raises different expectations, prompts different modes of behaviour to those that would apply in a club or private apartment. The tendency to receive works in terms of their figurative rather than their defiguring qualities can be explained in terms of cognition theory and the psychology of perception; it can be attributed to the activities of the ‘brain-association tool’ that Tillmans himself holds responsible for our perceptive faculties’ urge to identify forms.<sup>6</sup> For the picture-object itself does not provide any evidence for these interpretations. In the exhibit we see a more or less random conglomeration and distribution of colour particles in and on the fibres of a chemically reactive sheet of paper that was fixed with clips and nails, unframed, to the wall of an exhibition space in Warsaw in late 2011. But, by definition, for the culturally and aesthetically predisposed visitors to a museum, it is impossible to exclusively concentrate on this empirical reality. No-one is so naïve – least of all Wolfgang Tillmans – to imagine that political-economic conditions and symbolic contexts

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5 See Julia Peyton-Jones and Hans Ulrich Obrist, ‘Interview with Wolfgang Tillmans’, in *Wolfgang Tillmans* (London: Serpentine Gallery/Koenig Books, 2010), 21–27 at 24.

6 See Pirkko Vekki, ‘Wolfgang Tillmans, sukupolvensa silmä’, in *Gloria Syyskuu*, 2006, 64–67 (quoted by Dominic Eichler, ‘Thinking Pictures’, in *Wolfgang Tillmans Abstract Pictures* [Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011], 7–12 at 9).

are not constitutive to the perception and the generation of meaning in works of art. Both the institutional backdrop of art and each individual art institution in which Tillmans' works are exhibited contribute to the institutionalisation of the artist and to the construction of specific modes of perception.

The visitor to an exhibition of the work of Wolfgang Tillmans in the year 2012, in this case the author of these lines, arrives in expectation of a particular, clearly defined type of art and image experience. A sense (however fragmentary) of the artist's past exhibitions and publications is always present in any encounter with his work. And this includes the need to see the 'abstract pictures' in the context of an oeuvre where realistic and abstract elements have never intentionally been separated from each other. On the contrary, abstraction is always co-present with figurative and representational elements. There is no contradiction between forms and matter free of meaning – that is to say, visual moments that on the face of it neither represent nor illustrate anything – and Tillmans' photographs of people, animals, objects and landscapes; in fact there is an unbroken connection, a continuum. This applies both to individual images as much as to the internal, dynamic relationalism of his oeuvre as a whole. And it also applies to each individual, concrete manifestation of multiplicity, as in the case of the installation in the first room of the exhibition in Warsaw.

Both aesthetic theory and the institution of art itself provide decisive grounds for discussing photography and visual art in such a way that images are not solely considered in terms of documentary functions or ornamental aspects nor are they reduced to the question as to whether their contents are stage-managed or authentic, but that attention is paid instead to the material nature of the pictures and objects in the space, to their sculptural qualities. Having decided early on against a career as a commercial photographer and in favour of a life in art, there was no need for Tillmans to seek to justify the interest he had already felt in his youth in a non-hierarchical, queer approach to various forms and genres in the visual arts. For the young Wolfgang Tillmans the cover artwork for a New Order LP, a portrait of Barbara Klemm (in-house photographer at the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*), or a screenprint collage of Robert Rauschenberg in Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen were all 'equally important' images.<sup>7</sup> The mobilisation and reversal of value and meaning are central strategies in his praxis. He questions the 'language of importance'<sup>8</sup> in photography and alters valencies of the visual by, for instance – in a 'transformation of value'<sup>9</sup> – producing C-prints from the supposedly impoverished or inadequate visuality of old black-and-white copies or wrongly developed images and thus raising them to the status of museum art. However much he may set store by refinement and precision, he avoids conventional forms of presentation, that is to say, 'the signifiers that give immediate value to something, such as the picture frame'.<sup>10</sup>

In November 2000 the London fashion and lifestyle magazine *i-D*, for which Tillmans himself regularly worked from 1992 to 1995, published a long feature on Tillmans by Kodwo Eshun. Looking back at the early and mid-1990s, Eshun wrote that 'to see a Tillmans image then was to experience the immediate thrill of short-circuited hierarchies, of worlds

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7 Wolfgang Tillmans, email of 12 May 2012.

8 Julie Ault, 'Das Thema lautet Ausstellen (2008) Installations as Possibility in the Practice of Wolfgang Tillmans', in *Wolfgang Tillmans. Lighter* (Stuttgart/Berlin: Hatje Cantz/SMB), Nationalgalerie Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2008, 27.

9 See Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Wolfgang Tillmans* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2007 = *The Conversation Series*, 6), 41.

10 Gil Blank, 'The Portraiture of Wolfgang Tillmans', in *Influence*, 2, autumn 2004, 110–21 at 117.



connected, of moments, desires, moods that had never been elevated and valued before.<sup>11</sup> That this form of photographic seeing – with the intention of doing away with existing cultural classifications – was bound to meet with resistance was already known to others before Tillmans. The bureaucratic discipline that separates the domains of different modes of expression and perception in order to maintain a social order, in which access to aesthetic experiences is just as rigorously controlled as mobility within the given class system, has repeatedly provoked contraventions of its rules. After all, the history of Modernism and Postmodernism in art is above all shaped by the progressive opening-up and expansion of audio-visual vocabularies and the ongoing integration into art of allegedly non-artistic forms of expression and perception.

But these tendencies towards greater openness and integration are far from random in terms of either history or geography; their importance and their impact arise from the discursive and aesthetic conditions in a particular place at a particular time. The cultural situation in London or Cologne around 1992 was very different to artistic life in Berlin or New York in 2012. Historic events such as the German reunification, the wars in former Yugoslavia and Iraq, September 11th 2001, the financial crisis and Fukushima have led to this difference, as have the paradigm shifts in aesthetic praxis and theory (documentary turn, educational turn, ethical turn etc.), the deterritorialisation of the field of contemporary art in the wake of globalisation, and the ever-deepening divide between art-market art, biennial art and alternative-dissident practices without institutional ties. And then there is the ubiquitous and no doubt irreversible digitalisation of photographic techniques, from camera technology to online distribution and presentation methods, which has fundamentally changed the basic conditions of photographic discourse and has obliged practitioners to seek out new concepts and strategies.

Tillmans' own 'value transfers' are thus not idiosyncratic whims. On the contrary, they are responses to the transformation of visual culture in both local and translocal contexts, to conservative and progressive tendencies, to technical innovations and the obsolescence of media – within but above all outside the system of the visual arts. Driven by subjective interests and passions, his work is marked out by the increasingly complex typology of his groups and series, and by the dynamic, recombinable repertoire of his presentation methods and technical procedures. And, as such, it addresses not only the status of the photographic image but also the limits of art itself.

#### Conditions: Subject – Work – Mediation

If we take the line proposed by the philosopher Jacques Rancière, then the 'aesthetic regime' of the modern era, which – following the introduction of a modern concept of art and aesthetics – abandoned the regulatory aesthetic canon of the classical age in the nineteenth century, is distinguished by the fact that under its auspices the traditional hierarchies separating the high from the popular branches of narration and visualisation were problematised and reconfigured in such a way that a new politics of aesthetics and a 'distribution of the sensible' in the name of art ensued. Rancière has recently proposed the term 'aisthesis' for the way in which very different things have been registered as 'art' for the last two hundred years or so. As he points out, this is not about the 'reception' of works of art, but about the sensory experiential backdrop against and within which they come about. 'These are completely material conditions – places of performance or exhibition, forms of circulation and reproduction – but also modes of perception and the regimes of emotion, the categories that identify them and the patterns of

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11 Kodwo Eshun, 'Under the Flightpath', in *i-D*, no. 203, November 2000, 104–16 at 107.

thought that classify and interpret them.<sup>12</sup>

In order to understand why the work of Wolfgang Tillmans – so seemingly casual, so heterogeneous and so wide-ranging – is not only extremely successful, but has, for over twenty years, been intelligible and influential both within and outside the field of art, with the result that by now his praxis seems like a universal, subtly normative style of perception and image-making, it is essential to consider the ‘conditions’ alluded to by Rancière. For these are fundamental to the specific visibility and speakability of this œuvre and to its legitimacy as art.

In view of the task implied by Rancière’s concept of ‘conditions’, it is advisable to reflect not only on the artist and the relationalities of his work but also on one’s own position and relation as critic, art analyst, mediator, interlocutor, theorist and observer of this work. For how does one establish what might be called a relationship to artistic work – and how can this relationship be formed and changed? The most obvious way, in the context of a publication being produced to accompany a major overview exhibition, is to work one’s way through the categories associated with the work. The institutional configurations and infrastructures that connect the artist, the critic, the museum, the marketplace and the format ‘survey exhibition’ determine questions as to the unity or heterogeneity of an artist’s production, for in this web of interconnections every exhibition, every publication, every text reproduces and reconstitutes the work.

That I am writing, as the author of this essay, on the work of Wolfgang Tillmans, is the outcome of a whole series of material and epistemological circumstances. By that I am referring less to the anecdotal level of acquaintanceship and a partly shared history<sup>13</sup> than to the constantly startling (although, or maybe because, it is so natural) and disturbing fact that any encounter with an artist’s ‘work’ is also experienced (and is lived out) as an encounter with another person. The economy of the art market – with its dependence on originality, authorship and uniqueness – is structurally at the mercy of the signature of the individual artist. That this very singular market is so personalised goes back to all sorts of aesthetic, art historical and sociological manifestations of artistry, creativity and the artistic genius, all of which can be traced back to the early modern era; these were then taken to full effectivity by the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie and, in our own time, culminated in the cult of the creative persona and his or her never-ending performances. The ongoing desire for a monographic view of a visual artist goes back to these precepts; at the same time it also pre-forms recipients’ attitudes and critics’ perspectives.

### The Production of the New

Wolfgang Tillmans deals with this traditional mediation of the work and subject in a carefully considered, highly strategic manner. He knows that this mediation owes its existence to the historical development of the role of the author and as such is fundamentally open to criticism and to review; and he exploits the malleability of this principle by deliberately seeking out experiment and, hence, taking a calculated risk that the relationship of ‘indeterminacy’ and ‘determinacy’ is not always that of the ‘moment’ to the ‘whole’, in the way that Theodor W. Adorno, for instance, still insists in his aesthetic theory.<sup>14</sup> The ‘unforeseen’ is one of Tillmans’ guiding principles. As long as a thing cannot be planned and cannot be subsumed in discourse,

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12 Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis. Scènes du régime esthétique de l’art* (Paris: Galilée, 2011), 10.

13 In the late 1990s, for instance Wolfgang Tillmans and I, along with Jutta Koether and Diedrich Diederichsen were all actively involved in the publication of the German music and pop-culture magazine *Spex*, based in Cologne.

14 See Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie (Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 7)*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 63f.

there is a chance of art, in other words, art may ensue ‘when the cognitive process cannot fully catch up with what you’re looking at.’<sup>15</sup> Or to put it in terms of another terminology – drawn from system theory and chaos research but long since transdisciplinary in its application – Tillmans’ artistic praxis provokes *emergence*, that is to say, changes and events that cannot fully be explained in terms of cause and effect or on the basis of the properties of the relevant components and elementary particles. However much the previously mentioned ‘conditions’ have to be taken into account, the objects and processes of this production are irreducible to their context, which ultimately also means irreducible to the artist as author-actor.

Emergence is thus the aim of the investigations that Tillmans undertakes in his exhibitions and publications – although this aim is never ‘achieved’, because by definition it resists prior definition. The gallery becomes an experimental set-up, a composition with chains of reaction so that the public behaviour of the pictures may be observed. In a correspondence with Julie Ault there is talk of an ‘ongoing ever-changing laboratory situation’,<sup>16</sup> and as he contemplated a model of the exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in 2010 Tillmans again saw it as the image of ‘a laboratory for studying the world in many of its facets and visual manifestations.’<sup>17</sup> The search, or research, that is his praxis seems to be sustained by a fundamental belief in the world and its potential for change. Every picture, every exhibition, every publication is required to create a situation whereby – in the contact between the pictorial objects and the public, from the individual viewer to the great mass of those with an interest in art – those present sense the possibility of change, of a new becoming.

Tillmans thus also makes his contribution to an answer to the question posed by the philosopher John Rajchman (in response to Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault and their deliberations on the production of the new and on the creative act in present-day, control-obsessed societies). Rajchman asked how, in and with the arts and their institutions, spaces for open searches and researches could be devised, in which learning and unlearning, resonance and interference, a new affective solidarity and real experimentation might be possible *before* the onset of all sorts of methods, all forms of governance, all kinds of discipline and *doxa*.<sup>18</sup>

This form of experimentation does not lead to benchmark research results; nothing is ever proved or illustrated, regardless of what is in the images or what they may purport to show. Ever engaging in experiment Tillmans roams through the reality of materials, forms, affects and gives us tangible access to these unportrayable, unreferential realities. Tillmans engages his emotions when he is working, also and specifically when he is photographing people, or plants, machines and cities. Individual emotions separate off from the representation of living beings and objects and form nodes of emotion in the viewer’s mind. ‘Artists are presenters of affects, the inventors and creators of affects’, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari put it in *What is Philosophy?*, ‘they draw us into the compound.’<sup>19</sup> And indeed Tillmans’ laboratories are places where emotion and affect are generated and presented, rhythmically resonating between pictures, from wall to wall, from room to room, from side to side. The dog asleep on the stones, its breathing body warmed by the sun (in the video *Cuma*, 2011),

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15 Quoted in Nathan Kernan, ‘What They Are: A Conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans’, in *Wolfgang Tillmans. View from above*, ed. Zdenik Felix, conceived by Wolfgang Tillmans (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 11.

16 Ault, ‘The Subject Is Exhibition’ (see note 8), 27.

17 Peyton-Jones and Obrist, ‘Interview with Wolfgang Tillmans’ (see note 5), 23.

18 John Rajchman, ‘A Portrait of Deleuze-Foucault for Contemporary Art’, in Simon O’Sullivan and Stephen Zepke (ed.), *Deleuze, Guattari and the Production of the New* (London: Continuum, 2008), 80–90 at 89.

19 See Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 175



Susanne's lowered gaze (in *Susanne, No Bra*, 2006), with the line of her hair encircling her head like an incomplete figure of eight, but also the disturbed, interrupted, lurking monochromatism of the *Lighter* and *Silver* works – they all open up the longer you look at them, the longer you *are* with them, to a perceiving in terms of forces and affects. They alert us to the fact that all images are fabricated.

#### In Defence of One's Own Interests

Wolfgang Tillmans does a great deal to communicate important tenets of his own aesthetic theory. Aesthetic *theory*? It would surely be more appropriate to talk of theory-praxis or praxis-theory, for the systems and methods he uses are the result of his own empirical-experimental investigations into the material potential of photography, investigations that also concern his interest in an artistic language of surprise, of spontaneous occurrences, of emergence. On another level of discourse, above all in the medium of the artist's interview, Tillmans has repeatedly pointed out how important it is to him that his distinctive, sometimes distinctly Romantic preferences and convictions, his way of perceiving the world, directly impact on his artistic decisions and on the forms his works take. And as he says, the exhibitions, the installations of individual pictures reflect the way that he sees the world he lives in; at the same time, as he explains, they are also models of a world that he would like to live in.<sup>20</sup>

However, in order to realise this demiurgic project of a subjective agency, without stumbling into the trap of an ideology of creativity, it is necessary to reflect on the 'conditions' cited by Rancière. In interviews and in his occasional texts Tillmans himself has repeatedly returned to certain aspects of the conditionality of his own praxis. Amongst these, not surprisingly, he primarily lists his own interests and concerns, in so far as it is possible to verbalise these. At a young age the child with the unusual hobby of astronomy developed a fascination for life's great questions. Tillmans talks of 'this very fundamental interest in light and what I can do and how I can shape it'; later on he also took a keen interest in social matters, in subcultural communities, interpersonal interaction, in 'the very real, the very being-in-this-worldness with others, and the desire to be intensely connected to other people.'<sup>21</sup> Certain comments in early interviews underline this humanist yet also anthropological interest that goes with merging fantasies of an idiosyncratic social utopia. All this can at least partly be attributed to Tillmans' experiences (still very important to him) of spirituality and collectivity in peace-loving church youth groups and, not long afterwards, of the queer glamour of bohemian Pop around figures such as Boy George in London in the 1980s. Despite that, in the early days of his career Tillmans had to fight against constantly being referred to as a lifestyle photographer and chronicler of youth culture. As he pointed out in 1996, 'I didn't set out to talk about youth culture, but to report on humankind.'<sup>22</sup> He had acquired this unwanted reputation above all through his work for magazines such as *i-D* and *Spex*, but also through the response to his earliest exhibitions – such as the much acclaimed stand presented by Interim Art/Maureen Paley at the *Unfair* in Cologne in 1992 (with a large print on fabric of *Lutz & Alex sitting in the trees*, 1992, from the 'Sex' issue of *i-D* that same year) or his first major solo exhibition, in 1993, at Daniel Buchholz, with an installation that combined – in a highly unusual way for a gallery presentation in those days – magazine pages, photocopies, individual prints tacked straight onto the wall and sequences of images from magazines laid out in display cases. But

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20 See Slocombe, 'Wolfgang Tillmans – The All-Seeing Eye' (see note 2), 95.

21 Quoted in Kernan, 'What They Are: A Conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans' (see note 15), 11.

22 Christian Göttner and Alexander Haase, 'Wolfgang Tillmans: Fotografie als Selbsterfahrung', in *Subway*, November 1996, 8–11 at 10.

little real attention was paid at the time to the particular degree of independence that Tillmans had attained in the magazine world. Or else people simply tended to ignore the semantic and semiotic effects of the 'art gallery' context.

The (entirely contradictory) construction of Tillmans' early image ultimately culminated in the reception of his first book, published in Cologne in 1995 by Taschen, who produce high print runs that are distributed worldwide. This book contained a gallery of by now iconic portraits of friends, chance acquaintances, strangers and scenes of youthful life in various cultural and social-sexual parallel universes. In the accompanying essay Simon Watney talked of 'a dense tapestry of sumptuous images which go some way to restore our sense of the dignity and integrity of a generation which is so frequently represented only in banal clichés and stereotypes'.<sup>23</sup> And although this remark is certainly not inappropriate, above all in that it refers to the avoidance of clichés in the depiction and presentation of the individuals in question, it nevertheless casts Tillman in the role of portrait artist for his own generation, which he never set out to be and never in fact was, in part because, in view of the highly differentiated youth subculture of the 1980s and 1990s, the concept of 'generations' was harder to justify than ever before.

Tillmans therefore always energetically resists labels of that kind, the same labels that first made his name. They are entirely at odds with his determination constantly to surprise himself and others. In that sense it is also wrong to suggest that he is exclusively interested in 'ordinary, everyday' things, since, as he himself says, he is at least as interested in 'extraordinary' things.<sup>24</sup> Annoyingly, as he says, above all the critics working for the mainstream media are hardly willing to recognise 'parallelism and polyphony', whereas the public at his exhibitions and those who buy his books are perfectly able to cope with an 'interconnected web of delight in the absurd and humility towards life'.<sup>25</sup>

Over the years he has attached increasing importance to matters such as the relationship of the general and the particular, of contingency and control, of materiality and cognition. 'Above all I am interested in textures, in surfaces and smells. I am attracted by the kinds of perceptions that form in a single moment or in a single glance . . . so that the essence of a thing presents itself to me with the greatest clarity.'<sup>26</sup> Tillmans, as he himself says, sometimes tries to puzzle out the paradox of how 'universality' can be achieved by recognising 'specificity'.<sup>27</sup>

Lane Relyea has suggested that the contradictory aspirations of modern art caught between experimental particularity and symbolic unity are acted out by Tillmans in his wide-ranging work, with a division of labour between the general and the particular. Thus, as he proposes, the abstract pictures may help to divert attention from the 'parliamentary tussle' of the people and objects in the representational photographs, with their very specific gazes and perspectives, to the phenomenon of the medium of photography in general.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, one might equally well suggest that the 'multi-vectored[ness]' of the installations that

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23 Simon Watney [introduction], in *Wolfgang Tillmans*, ed. Burkhard Riemschneider (Cologne: Taschen), 1995, n.p.

24 Florian Illies, 'Ohne Zweifel kann ich mehr nach vorne gehen', in *Monopol*, February 2007, 56–70 at 68.

25 Ibid.

26 Quoted in Heinz-Norbert Jocks, 'Von der Zerbrechlichkeit der Nacktheit und der unerschrockenen Suche nach Glück', in *Kunstforum International* 154, April/May 2001, 314–27 at 316.

27 Blank, 'The Portraiture of Wolfgang Tillmans' (see note 10), 120.

28 Lane Relyea, 'Photography's Everyday Life and the Ends of Abstraction', in *Wolfgang Tillmans*, exh. cat. Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (New Haven/London: Yale University Press 2006), 89–105 at 97.

Tillmans prefers to talk of,<sup>29</sup> need not be restricted to the camera-based pictures, but may equally well include the photographs that owe their existence solely to gestural acts and chemical processes.

### Assimilating Photography into the Paradox

By virtue of the portability and variability of his works, with every print, with every exhibition, with every publication Tillmans can modify and modulate anew the relations between picture and picture support, representation and presentation, motif and materiality. In the two decades that have elapsed since his entry into the art business his praxis has continuously expanded. From the outset photography was his springboard for both integrative and eccentric acts. And even though this oeuvre may create the impression that the medium of photography knows no limits, photography – as discourse, as technique, as history, as convention – has remained the constant point of reference for all of Tillmans' complex operations. It could also be said that he is immensely faithful to his chosen medium, although – or precisely because – that medium is not always recognisable as such. To quote an older essay on photography and painting by Richard Hamilton (whom Tillmans once photographed), his work is about 'assimilating photography into the domain of paradox, incorporating it into the philosophical contradictions of art. . .'.<sup>30</sup> Since Tillmans' experiments with a laser copier in the 1980s, he has produced hundreds of images that may be beholden to the etymology of photography (light drawing) but that also constantly undermine or overuse the social and epistemological functions of photography as a means to depict reality, as proof, as an aide mémoire, as documentation or as a form of aesthetic expression. The discourse on photography, with all its 'post-photographic' exaggerations, the debate on the status of the photographic image – none of these have been concluded; on the contrary, Tillmans is continuously advancing them on his own terms. His praxis forms the backdrop for experimentation and adventures in perception that are closely intertwined with the past and the present of photography and theories of photography; yet the specific logic of this oeuvre creates a realm of its own in which archive and presentation interlock in such a way that photography still plays an important part as historic and discursive formation, but the problems and paradoxes of fine art have now taken over the key functions.

The contagious impact of the epistemological problems of art has opened up new options for the medium of photography, new contexts of reception. And in this connection it is apparent, as Julie Ault has put it, that 'Tillmans enacts his right to complex mediation'.<sup>31</sup> In other words, photography provides a means for him to engage with a whole range of interactions with the viewer. In his eyes and hands photography becomes a realm of potential, where a never-ending series of constellations and juxtapositions of materialities, dimensions and motifs of the 'unforeseen' can come about. Photography thus regains a dimension of experimentation, an openness that is not constrained by aesthetic formats and technical formatting but that does arise from a precise knowledge and understanding of the history of the medium.

### Layers and Groups

Tillmans' work has consistently expanded both horizontally and vertically, that is to say, it has developed not only in terms of its breadth, variation and selection of motifs and processes but

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29 See 'Peter Halley in Conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans', in Jan Verwoert, Peter Halley and Midori Matsui, *Wolfgang Tillmans* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 8–33 at 33.

30 Richard Hamilton, 'Photography and Painting', in *Studio International*, vol. 177, no. 909, March 1969, 120–25 at 125.

31 Ault, 'The Subject Is Exhibition' (see note 8), 15.



also with regard to the acuity, actuality and decisiveness of its statements and forms. His oeuvre consists of layers and groups, to which new ones are periodically added. The layers are questions, interests, passions. The groups (or families) comprise materials, motifs, methods. The boundaries between layers and groups are neither rigid nor random. Every layer can expand and deepen, every group can accommodate new members or participants. Layers extend into groups, groups mingle with layers. What this looks like and what effect it has is demonstrated by Tillmans in every exhibition, in every single room in an exhibition, on every single wall, in every single picture.

Any attempt to follow the artist's progress through these developments involves tracing his horizontal and vertical movements, making dynamic maps of internal and external vectors and connections. It should be borne in mind that Tillmans himself also actively adds to these maps and diagrams. His exhibitions and publications are to a large extent endeavours to *discover through the act of construction* an order, a sense of orientation, a taxonomy in the multitude of individual pictures – without demonstratively drawing attention to this order, which itself cannot simply be equated with the intention that underpins the movements in the work. This order is neither methodological nor heuristic; it neither instigates nor directs production, for it arises during the course of the artistic process and is only, if at all, visible or legible with hindsight – as an offer to the viewer, or a challenge.

Thus, in order to embark on an analysis of Tillmans' oeuvre, we have to make maps from maps, diagrams from diagrams, constellations from constellations. In the moment when that happens, that is to say, when someone starts reading (in contrast to viewing the works, which is not about coming up with fixed statements and descriptions) a collaboration also gets under way between the author of the work, who in this case bears the name 'Wolfgang Tillmans' and the author who is attempting to decipher a logic or an intellectually affective structure that can contribute to our understanding and experience of that work. In the case of an artist such as Tillmans a collaboration of this kind automatically leads to comparisons, possibly even to rivalry between different systems of order. Cognitive interests may converge in the process, they may even be identical for long stretches. But any reading, however concentrated, ultimately deviates from the explanations and manuals that the author himself has provided for his works and their reception.

This difference creates a specific hermeneutic tension, of the kind that occurs in confrontations with many instances of basically discursive contemporary art. And this tension is hard to dispel, since the discursiveness and referentiality of the work does not manifest itself in contestable statements or contributions to the discussion, but rather in installations, in arrangements of pictures and pictorial objects, whose generation of meaning is, and has to remain, ambivalent and atmospheric. The experience of authenticity, spontaneity and incidentalism should not be mistaken for a lack of codification, nor affective engagement in these pictorial spaces for a presuppositionless accessibility.<sup>32</sup>

Although Wolfgang Tillmans concerns himself with the quality of each individual picture, although he conceives and produces his works as self-contained, rounded compositions in their own right and exhibits them in a manner that does justice to their singularity and autonomy (in that sense the installations serve to test the power of iconic persuasion inherent in individual works), reference is repeatedly made to the 'interdependence' of his pictures and to the fact that Tillmans' works are generally seen in the company of and surrounded by other pictures. The relationship of individual pictures to the context that they collectively create

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32 See Ilka Becker, *Fotografische Atmosphären. Rhetoriken des Unbestimmten in der zeitgenössischen Kunst* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2010), 151.

is not simply that of parts to a whole. Each side of this relationship exists despite the other. Pictures form sentences and statements without having any clearly identifiable semantic or narrative meaning, but rather as couplings of emotions, impressions and moods. However, the latter are entirely open to discussion, for the artist only provides a minimum of guidance. Besides clichés, he probably dreads nothing as much as didacticism.

#### Continuity for Discontinuity

Only on the rarest of occasions, such as in the period following the AIDS-related death of his partner Jochen Klein in 1997, have Tillmans' energy and determination flagged for any length of time. Since 1993 he has produced picture after picture, exhibition after exhibition, book after book. In this year alone, in 2012, there are six major solo exhibitions for the public to attend – in Warsaw, São Paulo, Glasgow, Zurich, Stockholm and Bogotá; in addition to this there are the books *Wolfgang Tillmans: Zachęta. Ermutigung*, *Wolfgang Tillmans: FESPA Digital/FRUIT LOGISTICA*, *Wolfgang Tillmans: Neue Welt*, and the publication accompanying the survey exhibition at Moderna Museet and Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, which contains this text.

This level of output bespeaks ability, skill, professionalism, aptitude; it seems like a singular manifestation of ableness. We search in vain for signs of failure, which is all the more astonishing considering the aesthetic importance to Tillmans of moments of hesitation, of precariousness, uncertainty, waiting, transience. A possible explanation: the artist's professionalism is the prerequisite for emergence, for mistakes, for questioning and problematising, in other words, the productive weakness that paves the way for both crises and success. Tillmans' elaborate productions rely on efficient collaboration with institutions and publishing houses and on help from his own team of assistants and from his galleries. He is personally involved in and oversees each phase of the production process. A smooth-running, carefully controlled operation provides the necessary backdrop for the experimental openness, the surprises and spontaneity, the elegance and lightness that make his work what it is.

In the programmatic afterword to his book *Manual*, published in 2007, Tillmans poses a series of questions which constitute the point of departure for his life's work, but which also seem to underpin his art and to propel his artistic activities forwards: 'When do developments become noticeable? When is a process recognizable? Which one achieves critical mass? When does something become something? What can pictures make visible?'<sup>33</sup> Each of these questions is about marginal values, fault lines, turning points and flashes of intuition. Evidently it is not only individual exhibitions and individual books that serve Tillmans as his laboratory. The ongoing production of his oeuvre as a whole is like a test series or a series of stress tests. Careful note is taken of whether anything happens or something changes, and under which circumstances. In these tests Tillmans uses tools that he himself has designed. Each individual picture fulfils a dual role – as both the means and object of observation and exploration.

#### Discovering a Picture

Wolfgang Tillmans and I are standing in one of the high-ceilinged, white-painted rooms of his studio, which occupies over six hundred square meters of one floor of an office building in Berlin-Kreuzberg that was planned and built as an apartment store in the late 1920s by Felix Hoffmann and Max Taut. It is one of his places of production. Here he and his team work on upcoming exhibitions, testing out ideas with cardboard models and trying out hangings on the walls; here, too, is the archive with the artist's proofs – the operation centre for Tillmans'

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33 Wolfgang Tillmans, *Manual* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2007), n.p.

exhibitions, which mainly consist of the artist's own prints, rather than those held in private or institutional collections; in his Berlin premises he also has a dark room with enlarging and colour processing equipment.

It is mid-June 2012. We are talking about regularities and patterns in Wolfgang's work. On the wall there is a large-format, ink-jet print of a street scene at night in Shanghai, evidently photographed in summer and bathed in the yellowish glow of the street lights, crowned by branches that – being in sharper focus than anything else in the scene and cut off by the picture edge – reach into the picture from the upper left and right.

For a long time Wolfgang did not have particularly high hopes for *Shanghai night*, a, 2009. Despite this, he has included it in his upcoming book *Neue Welt*, which is currently in preparation and will be published in time for the exhibition of the same name at Kunsthalle Zürich in September 2012. And now, enlarged to 207 × 138 cm, this print displays a previously unsuspected crystalline strength of precision – like many of the images Tillmans has taken with his extremely high-resolution, digital single-lens reflex camera, which he has only been using regularly for the last few years. While people are seen dosing on light loungers in the blurry background, in the foreground three men are playing a board game; two are down on their haunches, the third has drawn up a folding chair and is sitting with his bare, whitish back to the photographer. It is an image of absorption, of waiting, of passing time, of the passing of time. Something seems not to be right here, as though there were change in the air. Or is it an image of perfect peace? The photographer seems to have gone unnoticed as he pressed the shutter. But what influence did he nevertheless have on the composition of the picture? And why does he like it much better now, hanging on the wall? We talk about the need to enter into the social situations that one is photographing. Not to behave as though there were somewhere outside the scene and the frame. About the importance of being involved. The difficulty of overcoming one's reluctance to step out of the shadows. The sense of shame at one's own voyeurism.

I say to Wolfgang that the rear-view figure is a striking constant in his pictures of people; almost a counterpart to the frontal portraits where the subjects gaze straight at the viewer. (I am thinking here of certain pictures in the *Alex & Lutz* series and the *Bournemouth* series, both 1992, I am thinking of *Paul*, New York [1994], *Valentine* [1998], and of *Paula with typewriter* [1994], *After Warriors* [1996], *Arkadia III* [1996], and of certain images in *Soldiers – The Nineties* [1999], of *Gedser* [2004], *haircut* [2007], of *Nacken (a)* [2007] and *Nacken (b)*, [2009]). Wolfgang puts me right. In the first place, as he tells me, for years he has consciously used shots of people as substitute self-portraits and heads seen from behind as extensions of himself. And in the second place, he always tries to avoid conspicuous or too-methodical-looking regularities. Even as he points the camera, he is thinking of the predictability of a motif or a composition and, if necessary, taking steps to minimise that. One often senses in his work a determination to circumvent any form of repetition that exudes the odour of the tried and tested rather than the taste of an uncomfortable new beginning.

### Nights and Markets

For his *Neue Welt* book, his fourth artist's book published by Taschen, Tillmans has predominantly selected photographs from the last two to three years, during which time he has travelled widely, venturing to places that were entirely new to him. In Haiti at night, a year after the earthquake catastrophe, he took pictures from a moving car of tented camps along the sides of the road. Or of someone jumping out of a bus carrying a heavy sack. These pictures convey, in a very concentrated manner, something of the essence of that post-catastrophe situation, a sense of the ongoing crisis in Haiti, of the exhaustion of the people, of the need



to be constantly alert here. In contrast to such dreamlike-desolate night scenes, *Neue Welt* also contains memorable sunlit tableaux. A double spread of an epic market scene in Ethiopia looks like a perfectly arranged stage set or a realist painting from the nineteenth century, as though you could never in fact chance on such a balanced, multi-layered scene in real life. This picture of traders on dusty ground, this image with its complex web of gestures, poses, gazes, colours (above all in the garments and clothing) and the plunging diagonals around which the players are all grouped, looks like the vanishing point (forwards or backwards) of the many images of rooms and buildings of the globalised economy, the gleaming chrome-finished and granite-clad shopping malls, of speculative architecture, of shopping streets with huge billboards or of people in shops stuffed with merchandise that we see in *Neue Welt*. In this volume the photographs also reflect a heightened interest in materiality, in the sleekness and edginess of commercial architecture and in urban scenarios in the non-places of globalised society. It is a catalogue of textures – metallic paints, fake façades, glass and synthetics. Time and again, pictures of car headlights, faceted and polished like insects' eyes or primeval druzes and geodes. Dangerous-looking, futurist-archaic forms found in some underground car park in Tasmania, where Tillmans experienced something of an epiphany at the sight of recent car design in all its grotesqueness. Or this unsettling still life: a mercilessly grasping claw at a rubbish tip; a heap of jetsam that one is as keen to avoid cutting oneself on as on the sharp shells of crustaceans lying on a table that seem to point to a hastily consumed meal. A parade of disparate, heterogeneous materialities and textures, alternating with portraits of men in work outfits and leisure clothing, of Wolfgang Tillmans' partner Anders Clausen, of the aged Gustav Metzger, who – like Nonkosi Khumalo – was seen in the first room of the Warsaw exhibition. Tillmans presents glimpses of highly technologised workplaces, of an operating theatre and an observatory. He photographs the night sky above Kilimanjaro, but draws attention to the digital noise of the shot and thus foils any expectations viewers might have had of a *National Geographic* aesthetic.

And he homes in on upper arms, napes of necks and folds in clothes. These are familiar visual gestures, there are some quite astonishing continuities that initially may not seem entirely in keeping with a book title promising a new world, until it becomes clear that the movements in this body of work occur less in connection with motifs than in the sometimes imperceptible changes in photography with regard to its technical and historical possibilities and in the changes in the relationship that the artist has with his own medium.

#### Latent Pictures

In *Neue Welt* Tillmans' photographic practice becomes even more differentiated than before. It is not merely a document of his handling of digital technology, of his new-found delight in the crassness and harshness of global junkspaces that can be represented and refined in high-definition mode very differently to what was possible using analogue equipment. Significantly, above all in the first half of the book, he has interspersed the camera shots with images from the *Silver* series, possibly his most difficult, least accessible group of works. For these works are not only bereft of easily recognisable and explicable figurative elements, they also lack the gestural aspect of the *Freischwimmer* and the three-dimensional corporeality of the creased and folded *Lighter* images. Tillmans uses the stock colours from various colour photo paper manufacturers, manipulates the chemical processes in the dark room by working with used or impure developing fluids and uses the correspondingly dirtied rollers in the developing equipment, so that debris and other mechanical traces are left on the surface of the paper. As a result these images often appear strangely dry and dull, despite the fact that they are endlessly nuanced in their morphology and give a vivid account of the phenomenon (and the process)

of becoming a photographic image. Does the dark blue of many *Silver* pictures not perfectly record the struggle of the exhausted developer that is no longer capable of generating black? Do the patches, scores, rips and other irregular marks not attest to form-giving defects and deliberate operating errors?

Tillmans started to collect these maladjusted, apparently faulty, abnormal images early on in his career and first published them in 1998 in an edition for the journal *Parkett*. With these precursors of the *Silver* series he already revealed his interest in resilient materials, in the processes, in the sub-linguistic dimensions, in short, in the *noise* of photographic messages. The mechanical, chemical, physical conditions systematically suppressed in the regime of photographic representation and documentation now take centre stage, with all their modest yet intransigent *illegibility*. As Tillmans himself has said, 'Because they are so much a part of the material, for me they are also somehow a piece of nature, something mineral. The picture here develops both traditionally in the emulsion and on the surface of the image in the form of deposits of salts, silver derivatives and chalk and algae.'<sup>34</sup> These nature-like pictures often lead a life of their own, some originals (30 × 40 cm or 51 × 61 cm) change with the passage of time, because they have deliberately not been correctly fixed; they are instable, ephemeral, incalculable. They do not so much represent an event as they embody it. These are essentially latent pictorial objects, for waiting within them are countless more, other pictures.

In his feeling for the productive wilfulness of his photographic materials, Tillmans demonstrates an affinity with the early days of photography. Most notably, in his first book, *The Pencil of Nature* (1844) William Henry Fox Talbot, the inventor of 'photogenic drawing' attached great importance to the fact that photographs were 'formed or depicted by optical and chemical means alone', with no assistance from a human hand; the 'pencil of nature' could now replace the 'artist's hand'.<sup>35</sup> Talbot's calotype process, his use of paper treated with silver nitrate and potassium iodide, which produced a weak, pale image after exposure, made it possible – through the subsequent application of silver nitrate with gallic and acetic acid – to create a clearly visible (albeit still negative) image. It was only this photochemical development process that brought the hitherto 'latent' image to light. The surface of the photo paper becomes a retina of sorts, in which images of reality are caught and can be stored until they are needed; thus the paper takes on the independent reality of a chemical-physical process.<sup>36</sup>

This reality, which is also embodied in the *Silver* picture objects, is now juxtaposed by Tillmans in *Neue Welt* with digital images of a present that is profoundly shaped by digitalised design processes. Radically different pictorial concepts and pictorial realities rub shoulders. In view of the inescapability, the (economic and epistemological) power but also the potential of digitalisation of photographic images that has long since overtaken and transformed his own praxis, Tillmans will not let go of a blunt, obstinate sense of materiality and the beauty of the 'organic-chemical nature of photography'.<sup>37</sup> In his search for new pictures, which he regards as his most important duty in his artistic production,<sup>38</sup> the latest technologies are a source of inspiration and a trigger, but not a solution, at least not the only solution for the production

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34 Wolfgang Tillmans, email of 8 June 2012.

35 See William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* [1844] (New York: Da Capo, 1969), n.p.

36 See Bernd Busch, *Belichtete Welt. Eine Wahrnehmungsgeschichte der Fotografie* (Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 1989), 188ff. and Vered Maimon, 'On the Singularity of Early Photography: William Henry Fox Talbot's Botanical Images', in *Art History*, vol. 34, no. 5, November 2011, 958–77.

37 Wolfgang Tillmans, email of 8 June 2012.

38 'That's the only thing I feel responsible for: my sense of duty is that I want to make new pictures', Peyton-Jones and Obrist, 'Interview with Wolfgang Tillmans' (see note 5), 22.

of visual events that allow us to see the 'unforeseen'. The digital conquest of nature is countered by the unpredictable latency of photo paper. But this does not bring with it a retreat from the power of digital images in favour of a return to the supposedly metaphysical authenticity of a self-activating natural image. On the contrary, it seems that in the future Wolfgang Tillmans will concentrate all the more – through his engagement with the physical presence of pictures – on exploring the latency and emergence of the digital.



# Step into Liquid

MICHELLE KUO TALKS WITH WOLFGANG TILLMANS ABOUT  
THE ASCENDANCY OF INK-JET PRINTING



Pages from Wolfgang Tillmans's  
*FESPA Digital/Fruit Logistica*  
(Walther König, 2012).



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Headlight (a)*,  
2012, ink-jet print on paper,  
10" 6" x 7" 6"; digital C print,  
16 x 12"; digital C print,  
24 x 20"; digital C print in  
artist frame, 83 1/8 x 57"

We have arrived at a point where a large proportion of “painting” is actually ink-jet printing. This is an amazing fact. But it is never really talked about.



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Freischwimmer 151*, 2010, ink-jet print on paper, 12' 5" x 16' 8".  
Installation view, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

**MICHELLE KUO:** I was struck by your reaction to the David Hockney exhibition in London this past spring [“A Bigger Picture,” Royal Academy of Arts]. Beyond any sheer aesthetic pleasure, you seemed especially taken by the show’s structure, in which traditionally painted canvases were shown alongside digitally produced paintings as well as arrays of video monitors that functioned as display “canvases.”

**WOLFGANG TILLMANS:** Hockney’s exhibition is a fascinating example of the veil we put around medium. This is a subject I’ve been dealing with in my work from the beginning, so I was intrigued to see this set of issues appear in another artist’s practice—and excited by the exuberance of the show. Not only by his relentless dwelling on the subject matter of nature but also by his iPad paintings, which were actually ink-jet prints on paper mounted on Dibond. I was curious to see how these digital images were presented as material paintings in drop-shadow frames. And they resonated with the multipanel video screens showing moving images made with nine cameras. Ultimately, though—even if the work celebrates new media and technology, just as Hockney has done in the past—it almost seemed as if the iPad and video pieces were there as foils, to

underline, by contrast, the masterly position and unsurpassable value of actual oil on canvas.

Last month I was in Cologne to take a portrait of Hockney, and he talked about how amazing the quality of ink-jet printers is today, how they can produce colors beyond those of any other medium. But then he added, “The images have to be drawn. You have to draw them. It can’t come from photographs.” I found this so telling, this notion that something hand-drawn will print differently from something that is photographed, and that the printing technology itself could be used, ultimately, to uphold this hierarchy. The ink-jet printer itself obviously doesn’t care where the input, the color values, come from, whether something drawn, scanned, or photographed; the printer merely prints the color space it can technically cover.

In fact, the show demonstrated there is an unprecedented equality among different media today. But it also made clear that there is a deep psychological attachment to traditional hierarchies of medium. And I have been observing this leveling—and the attachment to hierarchy in the face of it—for many years. For example, the same medium exists in completely different museum departments. If one looks

at the traditional divisions of modern art, the same category of mechanically produced work exists across the print department, the photography department, the painting and sculpture department, plus obviously architecture and design.

**MK:** And just as the boundaries between those traditional mediums themselves have become increasingly murky, markets and institutions have seemingly reinforced those divisions all the more.

**WT:** We have arrived at a point where a large proportion of “painting” is actually ink-jet printing. This is an amazing fact. But, almost as astonishingly, it is never really talked about. A photographic ink-jet print on paper, an iPad drawing printed on ink-jet paper, and an original design printed on ink-jet paper are all technically exactly the same. Perhaps it’s time to rethink the remarkably persistent categorization of artworks. In my view, we are all making pictures.

**MK:** How is this condition of “pictures” reflected in your work, and how did you come to work with digital photography and ink-jet printing yourself?

**WT:** I always saw myself as a picture maker, using whatever means were available to make a new picture. I started working with digital printing in 1986. I used the first black-and-white laser photocopier by Canon in a copy shop to print a one-off zine. When

Wolfgang Tillmans, *Lutz & Alex sitting in the trees*, 1992, ink-jet print on paper, 63 x 47 1/4".  
Installation view, Maureen Paley/Intern Art stand at Unfair, Cologne.







Wolfgang Tillmans, *InterRail*, 1987, black-and-white laser photocopy, 11 1/4 x 16 1/4".

I started experimenting with this new machine, I realized how much more meaningful those photocopies were in texture and in presence than the drawings and paintings I was making at the time—that this mechanically produced object had a richer texture because of the rather rough dot screen and the surface lines generated by the technology of the moment. It was digital, which meant it should be perfect, but in fact it wasn't; the process always created some degree of interference and unevenness, which I liked. Then in 1992, in order to make larger pictures, instead of tiling many A3 photocopies together I found a brand-new Canon Color Bubble Jet Copier A1, which was really a photocopier unit

with an ink-jet printer inside it that printed on twenty-four-inch rolls of paper.

I realized that I could make large-scale, lightweight pictures by photocopying my smaller, hand-printed photographs from the darkroom and enlarging them to four feet by five feet. I hung each picture as a sheet of paper on the wall, unframed, so that there was nothing between the viewer and the ink-saturated matte surface. Because these early ink-jet prints were executed with unstable dyes, I realized that if I wanted to have the advantage of this fragility and more immediate spatial relationship, it was essential to find a way for people to perceive them as permanent, and so I accompanied the works with the original photograph

and a certificate, instructing the owner how to reprint the picture when the first copy faded. While this was a practical solution, it also afforded viewers the opportunity to break down certain barriers of materiality—attaining a paradoxical permanence even as attachment to the "original" print was obviated.

**MK:** And that transitioned away from the heavy vehicle or container—like the thick wood and Plexiglas frame or the light box—that was standard practice for large photographs and also associated with a certain strain of conceptual photography.

**WT:** Yes. I wanted to avoid the heavy language of large-scale photographs. The unframed ink-jet print was definitely an exception to that language, and it





Wolfgang Tillmans, *Onion*, 2010.  
ink-jet print on paper, 81 1/2 x 54 1/2".



Details of various contemporary artworks made using ink-jet printing. Photos: Wolfgang Tillmans.



was seen as a dramatic, rebellious gesture at the time, although it has since become a common practice. But for me, it was not so much an objection to the frame. It was about the love of this immaculate object as it comes out of the printer or processing machine. It was about acknowledging the objectness and the specificity of materiality. I was asking: How can I present this object, which has always been just that—an *object*, a print, for me, and not just a conduit of information? And how can I bring it to the wall?

For my small-scale C-type prints, I found a way of taping the photograph that wouldn't harm the surface and was detachable from the back, in order to foreground this attention to materiality. After some years, though, I became known for this way of installing my work; it felt important to reinvigorate the dialogue about the photograph as an object and not let it drift into the background as merely the expected way of encountering my work. So I introduced frames and showed them next to the unframed work. This juxtaposition held open the possibility of a reversal of meaning, or a questioning of expectations.

**MK:** The frame, or the border, gets pressured differently within newer media. In several photographs that

you took for this piece, which are close-ups of ink-jet works by different artists, you focused on the edges and corners.

**WT:** Because that's really where the picture begins and ends, where it meets the real world around it. It is a crucial point—where the reality or the body of the work, so to speak, manifests itself. It is also, importantly, a juncture where you can often see the paint or ink or pigment meet the material support underneath. So I've always been interested in the ways in which artists deal with the corners and edges, how they are managed and handled. Whether viewing a Velázquez or a Jeff Wall, after taking in a picture as a whole I take a look at its side. I like to observe the shadows that stretchers cast—as in a room of Rothkos on view recently at MOMA, which could be viewed afresh by blocking everything else out and only concentrating on the shadows cast by the bottom corners of the paintings.

**MK:** Modern ink-jet technology also produces something you've referred to as "smooth color," the experience of pure, solid color.

**WT:** The experience of pure color has been heightened to a new level: That is where I think there has been a

**In its most extreme state, a contemporary ink-jet painting on stretchers inside a museum is technically the same as an advertising banner stretched on the museum's facade. For some that may be hard to stomach.**

seismic change in technology, what Hockney referred to as colors that have not been possible before, colors with a deep richness—not a lurid richness. The quality of ink and ink-jet printing has become even more amazing in recent years, and manufacturers are now using pigmented ink, which lasts much longer than traditional C-type color photographs.

We have come to a point where the ink-jet printer actually has a bigger color space than C-type photography. But I have also noticed that there remains a faith in the optical C-print because it is connected to a unique negative and not to a set of codes. There is a tendency to want to hold on to the analog for some sort of authenticity.

**MK:** And yet images generated by a set of codes are dominant, across vastly different types of imagery—from the commercial pictures at the digital print fair you visited in Barcelona, for example, to a late Polke on vinyl.

**WT:** In its most extreme state, a contemporary ink-jet painting on stretchers inside a museum is technically the same as an advertising banner stretched on the aluminum framework on the museum's facade. For some that may be a little hard to stomach.

**MK:** One could cynically surmise that's why various artists have tried to bring the symbol for the artist's hand or the gesture into their art, by adding an "original" painterly touch with washes of paint or color on top of the ink-jet-printed image, just as late Warhols were individualized in that way.

**WT:** Yes, that seems a bit anachronistic. Interestingly, I think that for a younger generation of artists, expressive gestures are more naturally performed on digital recording surfaces, like trackpads, stylus tablets, or iPads. And these pictures' first state of being is immaterial. They are just as immaterial as a digital photograph on a computer screen or a FreeHand illustration. They are all categorically the same, but there still seems to be a hierarchization of this material, which is a near-ethical dilemma that I find fascinating.

In order to transfer such imagery into an exhibition space, it has to be mediated back onto a physical substrate, unless it will be shown on monitors. Probably one sad day, exhibition spaces may be covered floor to ceiling in digital screens as thin as wall-

paper. But today the challenge is this: Everyone who makes digital images uses the same machines made by a handful of manufacturers that produce state-of-the-art ink-jet printers. From Gerhard Richter in Cologne to a photographer in Tokyo to a fine art printmaker in Los Angeles, they all use the same set of machines.

**MK:** On the one hand, that introduces a bottleneck, because so many of those parameters are completely predetermined—but they then have endless permutations. You can introduce a boundless series of layers of different visual registers—scans, vector graphics, photographed imagery—into what is outputted.

**WT:** And now you can print onto anything—canvas, wood, glass, metal, Mylar, you name it. The choices going into making a specific pictorial object are all important here: What is a good way for this image to exist in the real world? Of course there is also the question of how one can assure that monetary value is attributed to the image. It's hard to ignore the fact that we still value the notion of an image on canvas more highly than if it were on wood, and therefore a sculpture, or on paper, and therefore a photograph.

**MK:** Nevertheless, the principle at the moment is always the same: ink pigment sprayed onto something. Which raises questions of reproducibility, of editioning, of uniqueness. None of this is new, of course—from early hand-wringing about photography to the industrially produced objects of Minimalism. Yet what seems new is the pervasiveness of one type of *media* across so many supposedly different *mediums*.

You also point to something interesting, which is that despite the sophistication of our programs or printers or technical apparatuses, it is still extremely difficult to achieve the same results. That even though we think that things are infinitely reproducible, in fact reproduction itself is still always slightly contingent on—

**WT:** On the touch and the craft and the knowledge of the operator of the printer. The reproducibility of art has to some extent always been an ideal, because the moment the data meets the physical world, you are dealing with the idiosyncratic consistency of the pigment powder that has been mixed into the ink liquid in Japan by a specific company.

For instance, the static charge that creates a slight blip in the flow of data or ink, the inconsistencies in paper or other base materials, and printing profiles and program updates mix with variables like humidity and temperature in the print workshop—anybody who has experience in fine printing knows how frustratingly difficult it is to achieve a perfect result. Just as my work addresses its relation to medium, it also directly addresses our relationship to perfection and accident.

**MK:** It recalls Warhol's paintings: the randomization of texture and the introduction of noise into those screenprinted surfaces—versus now, when nothing falls through the grid of the screen.

**WT:** Because today's best ink-jet prints have become a closed surface, with no screen or dot visible to the naked eye. The surface is 300 dpi or more, with HD information density. But random noise still happens in digital photography, in which a photo sensor translates what it sees or doesn't see into zeros and ones. In extreme low light, cameras generate random information. I used this effect in photographs of the night sky, where at great enlargement a star is no longer distinguishable from a pixel that just displays a random charge.

**MK:** Do you see the users—whether you or an ad agency or a graphic designer—as subject to the technology, waiting for the next advance, looking forward to the opportunity to play around with whatever new tools are designed? Or is it also the other way around: The producers are looking at what their users desire in terms of each next-generation development?

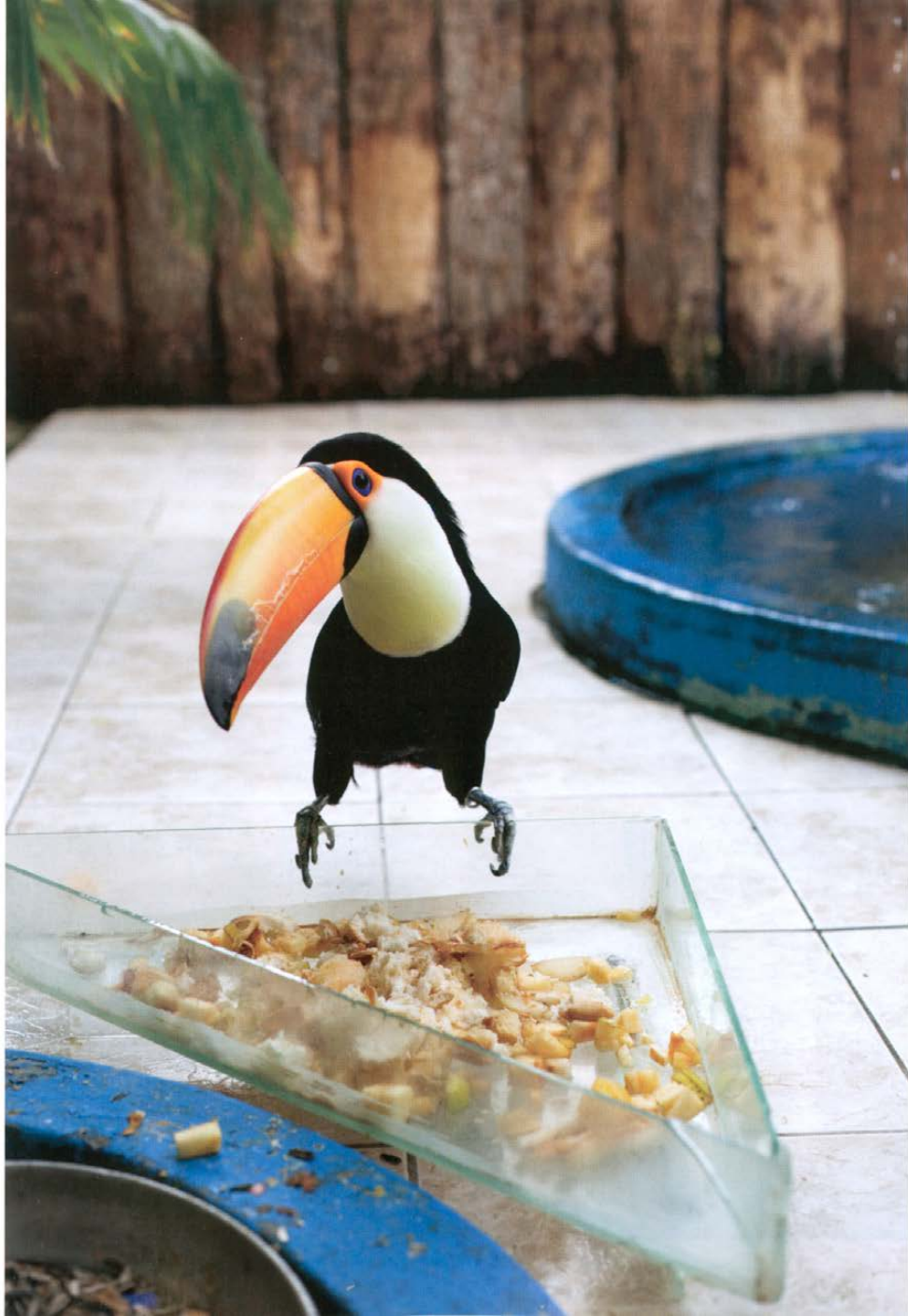
**WT:** I don't think that the artists are the ones who are actively pushing the development, and I don't think the developers are looking to artists, necessarily. But there is no denying the incredible democracy of this medium and in these extremely powerful tools. The technology is on the desktops of millions of people using all kinds of applications, making everything from home video to political signs. One has to see this as an opportunity. What does it mean, then, for the art object?

**MK:** Now the ink-jet print is a kind of material picture that parallels the register—in resolution, in color—of the picture on the screen. But this portends a homogenization of vision even as it suggests new possibilities for imaging.

**WT:** It's mind-boggling. Digital has created an advance in quality at the same time as it has created an incredible degradation of standards and of expectations. Just think of how we only watch films in fuzzy YouTube quality.

Buying a digital camera three years ago was, for me, a total revolution. I needed to learn my language for the second time. I suddenly had to deal with high definition, that every picture now sees more than my eye can see. This was about a whole new way of seeing, of working. In the past I had always said that 35-mm film was exactly right for my photography because I want my photographs to look like what my eye sees. And photographs recorded on large-format film always left me cold; they are impressive, but they have nothing to do with my experience of the world.

Now I have suddenly found myself with a small SLR [single-lens reflex] camera that has the sharpness

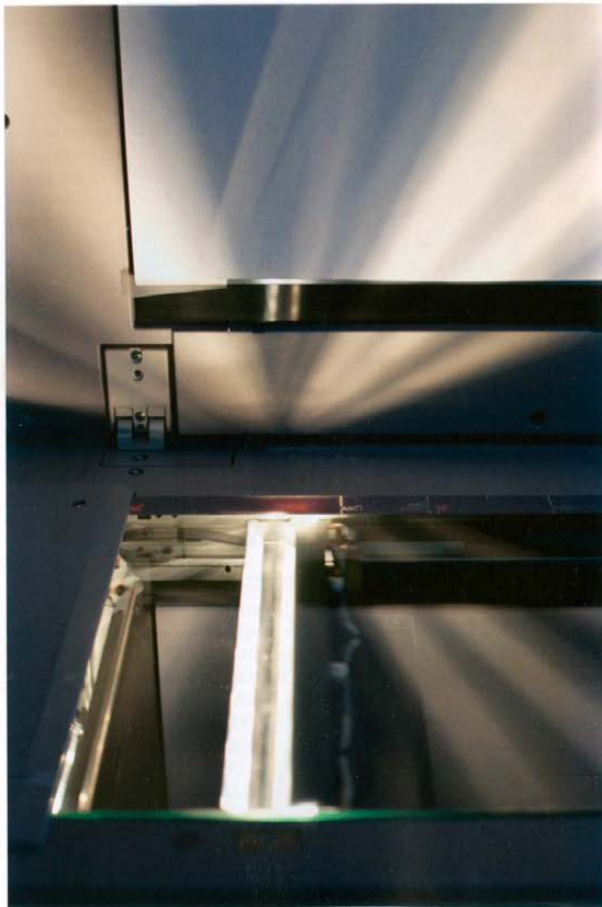


Wolfgang Tillmans.  
Tukan, 2010, ink-  
jet print on paper,  
81 1/4 x 54 1/2";  
digital C-print,  
16 x 12"; C-print,  
24 x 20"; digital  
C-print in artist  
frame, 83 1/4 x 57".



Paradoxically, today, when almost all of our images involve mechanical reproduction, we are hardly aware of the social functions that the new technology might fulfill.

Wolfgang Tillmans, *Kopierer (e)*, 2010, ink-jet print on paper, 81 1/4 x 54 1/2"; digital C-print, 16 x 12"; digital C-print, 24 x 20"; digital C-print in artist frame, 83 1/4 x 57".



Wolfgang Tillmans, *in flight astro (ii)*, 2010, ink-jet print on paper, 81 1/4 x 54 1/2"; ink-jet print on paper, 19 x 13"; digital C-print in artist frame, 83 1/4 x 57".

of large-format film. So I have really had to learn to adapt to a different process—because there is no point in artificially adding grain to these pictures. That would be so wrong. And about four years ago there was a new generation of digital cameras with sensors exactly the size of 35-mm film, and so optically the lenses perform exactly the same as those in my 35 SLR. Before, I could always recognize digital photographs. Now they don't have the same quality of flatness that they once did. Because of the portability of these supersharp cameras, I can carry on in the way that I move around the world and keep the same angles and perspectives as my previous work.

The transition was tough. I didn't want my medium to look nostalgic, but could I still make pictures of the same emotional charge and intensity? This is all coming together, in a way, as I prepare for my exhibition "*Neue Welt*" [New World] at Kunsthalle Zürich in September. As I've worked on this show, a whole new layer has entered my work, which can only be seen in person in front of the actual prints. The depth of detail is so great that a picture can never be memorized in its entirety. It's as if in

each one there is a sense of the infinite complexity of matter—a kind of trompe l'oeil effect that is neither clinical nor cold but surreal.

**MK:** This seems like part of a shift to a different visual order, one in which a surfeit, an exponentially greater magnitude, of information is simultaneously readily available—both within the camera's viewfinder and in print—and totally beyond our perceptual capacity.

**WT:** I had experienced this act of learning a new visual language once before, when starting to work with cameraless, nonfigurative pictures in the darkroom. These shifts, some chosen, some forced on us by technological development, shouldn't be seen as a threat. They are profoundly exciting.

**MK:** If *Pictures* was famously coined by Douglas Crimp as a way of talking about the class of images being made in the 1970s that did not seem self-

reflexively preoccupied with their own medium specificity but instead addressed new types of representation—film, photography, television, advertising—Crimp articulated the ways in which such “pictures” were still committed to modernism, to its radical aspirations and to its investigations into signification and representation, along the lines of Surrealism and Pop. To his mind, these artists in the '70s had merely turned from modernism's internal, formalist questions of medium to questions of the psychology of the image and its relation to (consumer) desire.

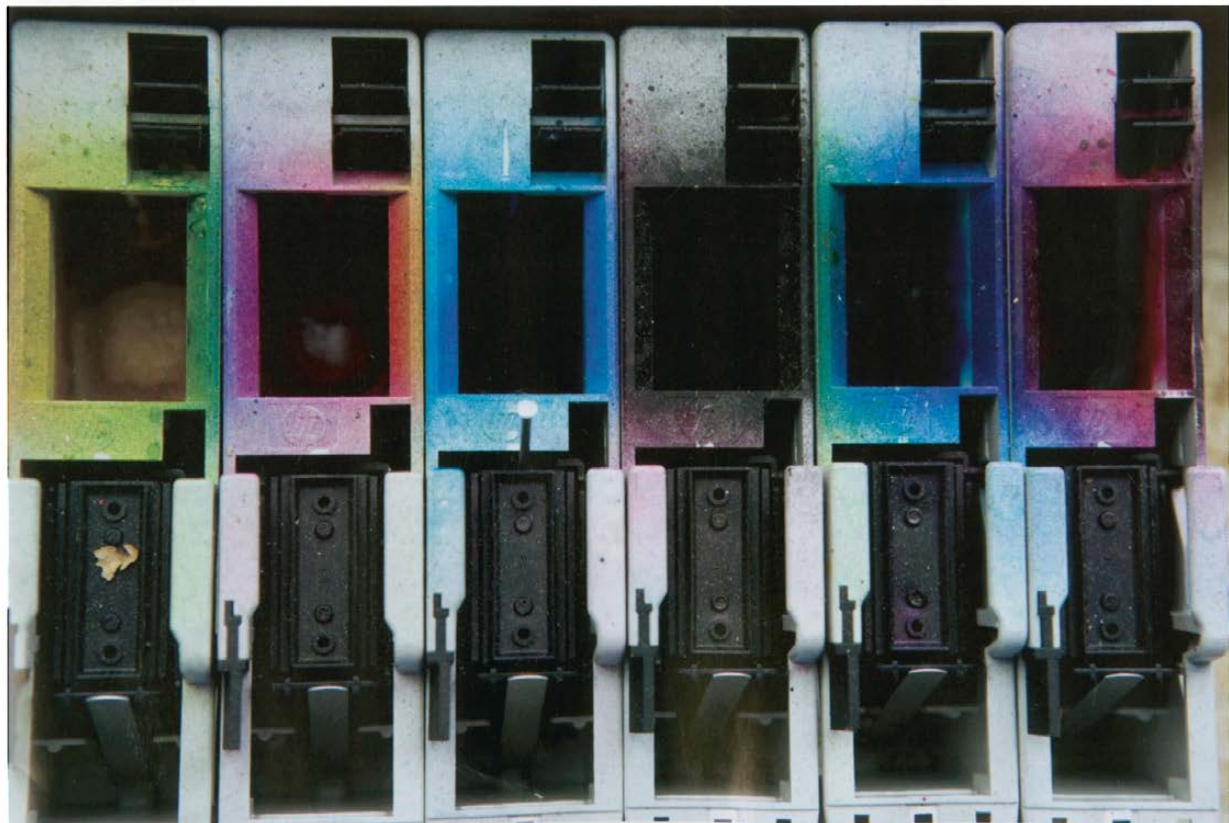
It seems that, on the one hand, the “pictures” you speak of deal very much with this territory—the realm of desire, psychology, consumption (those lurid images at the digital-printing trade fair!). But on the other hand, the universe of pictures you are talking

about also appears to break with modernist radicality, with older critiques of representation. The landscape has changed, even if we are leaving many of its possibilities unexplored.

**WT:** Well, the Pop silk screen was at the center of this tension between the radical and the commercial in the postwar period. And decades before that, Walter Benjamin spoke of mechanical reproduction as, in a way, freeing the artwork from its cult status, its role in ritual, and allowing it to enter the realm of the political. But paradoxically, today, when almost all of our images involve mechanical reproduction, we are hardly aware of the social functions that the new technology might fulfill; instead we persist in tethering it to the realm of cult and ritual, which is the fetishization of images stretched on canvas. □

WOLFGANG TILLMANS IS AN ARTIST BASED IN BERLIN AND LONDON.

Wolfgang Tillmans, *Waste Ink*, 2008, ink-jet print on paper, 54 1/4 x 81 1/4"; digital C-print, 12 x 16"; digital C-print, 20 x 24"; digital C-print in artist frame, 57 x 83 1/4".





## Tillmans's Touch

### Artist Deftly Controls His Seemingly Unruly Works

By *Blake Gopnik*

Washington Post Staff Writer

**W**olfgang Tillmans, one of today's most influential contemporary artists, takes snapshot-style pictures of his slackest techno-party pals, but he also shoots impressive images of piles of gold bullion.

He takes almost-abstract photographs of blank sheets of photo paper as they curl back onto themselves on his studio floor. He also presents pared-down abstract sculptures made from sheets of photographic paper, colored and folded. He enlarges pictures found in newspapers until they fill a wall, and reduces his own most famous photographs until they're postcard size. And then he assembles all these absurdly varied kinds of pictures and objects -- some framed as precious works of art and others stuck up with pins or Scotch tape -- into an installation that crawls up and down and all across the gallery walls.

At the Hirshhorn Museum, where a touring show that is Tillmans's first U.S. retrospective opened Thursday, the result is stunning. And it's compelling just because it's so perplexing.

Tillmans's individual pictures are often notable. But what's most impressive is the way they come together into a larger, more substantial whole. It's hard to put your finger on what makes Tillmans's totality so strong. But equally hard, I think, to resist its pull.

Being hard to pin down is part of what gives Tillmans's art so much traction. Most works of art present us with self-contained little worlds that seem sufficient to themselves. The 400 or so images Tillmans gives us at the Hirshhorn seem to open out to a wider world, capturing some of that sense that the lives we live are more open-ended than art is.

That's something that artists have always struggled to capture. And every time they succeed, they also fail. Every time that art seems to evoke life "just as it is" (such a tempting goal, because art can come so frustrat-

ingly close to life), it also sets itself up as merely the latest flashy artistic move.

Tillmans has worked harder than most to make his art feel as if it's plucked straight from reality, maybe because he's more concerned than most with how quickly such effects become just more artistic fluff.

Tillmans's first stab at making art that seemed authentic to the feel of life came early on, with his straight-ahead images of the folk he partied with and loved. He didn't want his art to be about art; he wanted it to be about people. So he used a technique that mimicked a point-and-shoot effect, where who's in the shot seems to matter more than how it's taken. But Tillmans is too good for his own good. Whether he wants to or not, he creates piles of striking pictures that viewers can't resist.

"Adam, Red Eye," near the beginning of this show, finds an echo of its subject's flash-induced red pupils in the bright red lockers behind him. That makes its "casual" moment seem as decisive as anything by Henri Cartier-Bresson, whose famous photos tried to catch the instants in the passing flux when accidents cohere into arresting images.

Ditto for Tillmans's shot of his late partner, Jochen Klein, taking a bath in 1997: The apparent accidents of its composition, with a houseplant dead center and its subject and his bathtub barely in the shot, become a perfect, and perfectly compelling, image of what accidents look like. "Empire (Punk)," a hugely enlarged photo of a lousy snapshot sent by fax, captures all the random artifacts of its transmission. This ought to make it about as casual as anything can be -- but instead it seems like an artistic distillation of casualness itself.

Or maybe Tillmans was simply the victim of his own success, like all those dedicated realists before him. An approach that seemed either not concerned at all with beauty, or even opposed to it, came to be one of the dominant aesthetics of our time. It was copied in fashion shoots and advertising throughout the 1990s.

Ever since the Tillmans mode became a fashionable photographic style, his career has seemed to be about finding constantly new ways to achieve his earlier effects -- to somehow be a guy just doing stuff, rather than an artiste striving to engender Art. The seemingly chaotic sprawl of his im-





ages across the gallery wall, and the apparent accidents of how he frames and hangs them, all speak to that ambition. They all signal that Tillmans doesn't have a settled goal in what he does; he just goes with the flow. In an installation called the "Truth Study Center," Tillmans fills a gallery with 23 knocked-together wooden tables. He then covers their tops with masses of news clippings and assorted photographs, some by him and others found, some clearly meant to look good and others resolutely not. The accumulated imagery seems to come straight from Tillmans's stream of consciousness, as he contemplates all the objects and issues that have impinged on him. (One unusually spare table in the Hirshhorn version of this installation hosts nothing more than the pages of an article published barely three weeks ago by Naomi Wolf, titled "Fascist America, in 10 Easy Steps.")

Another striking piece at the Hirshhorn, with a somewhat similar dynamic, is called the "Concorde Grid." It consists of 56 photos of that historic supersonic jet, barely glimpsed as it takes off and lands above the scrappy landscapes that surround your average airport. The unruly feel of its images seems to capture the "lifelike" encounter between an insignificant onlooker and an iconic object as they meet by accident within the haphazard flow of time.

But every time Tillmans seems to be doing one thing -- becoming, that is, an artist with a trademark strategy for making art -- he veers off in another direction.

He seems like somebody who avoids allegory and classic symbolizing, right? And then he makes a piece called "Memorial for the Victims of Organized Religions," which consists of 48 sheets of photo paper, in elegiac shades of black and midnight blue, arranged in a grid on a wall. They're like photographs of what it is to shut your eyes, or to focus on a starless night, in mourning for the evil deeds religion has inspired. So a work that seems at first glance to be art at its most formal and abstract -- like the Ellsworth Kelly color patches at the National Gallery, but without the color -- turns out to have the closest ties to issues the artist cares deeply about.

Maybe Tillmans's steadfast contrariness, his determined indeterminacy -- like the sheer, meaning-defeating quantity of information he provides

are all part of his attempt to make an artwork that evokes life. That is, taken as a single work, the Hirshhorn's Tillmans exhibition provides a living, mutating, dynamic portrait of the man who made it, in the act of making it. Its shifts, twists, refusals and perplexities provide a faithful record of the shifts and twists and refusals and perplexities that any life is built around, but that most any art will have a tendency to iron out, just because of almost any art's inherent order.

That includes the art of Wolfgang Tillmans.

Even disorder can become an ordering principle; it takes effort and ambition to achieve randomness. Look at the wooden tables in Tillmans's "Truth Study Center": Their inconsequential look is achieved through very careful carpentry. The lifelike energy in Tillmans's agglomerations of images is achieved through very deliberate labor; the dimensions and components of each museum installation are recorded with a tape measure before a show comes down, so it can be re-created in any part of it that is bought.

The Hirshhorn installation is much closer to a carefully considered magazine layout meant to capture a chaotic, energetic feel -- Tillmans was famous early on for his design of magazine spreads of his own art -- than to an actual tipped-out box of old photos.

The true surprise of the Hirshhorn exhibition isn't its disorder; it's how fine it looks. That's not how I felt the first time I saw a similar Tillmans installation. I was sure that it was about a compelling exploration of ugliness and the truly haphazard. But now Tillmans has taught me better.

He's taught me that, all along, his work has simply had the trademark look of the latest captivating art -- or of what captivating art has come to look like, since he came on the scene.

**Wolfgang Tillmans is at the Hirshhorn Museum, on the south side of the Mall at 7th Street SW, through Aug. 12. Call 202-633-1000 or visit <http://www.hirshhorn.si.edu>.**