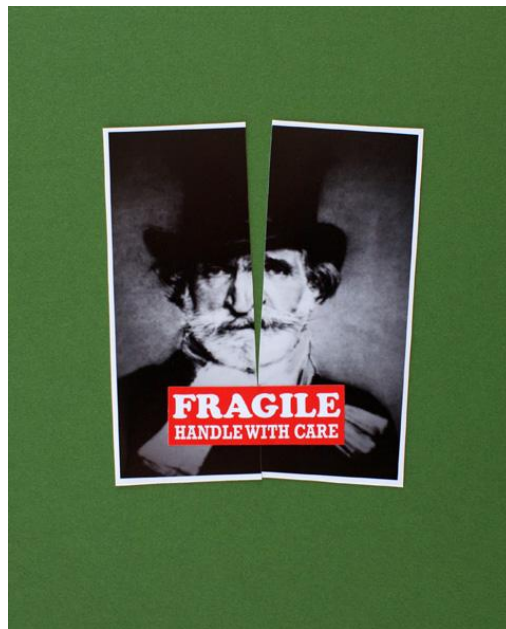


DOSSIER GAIALIGHT

2007-2011



GK/AGENCE 'X'

2011

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[Two limited-edition, 8 1/2” x 11” prints by Gaialight]

Cover image – Gaialight, *Fragile: Handle with Care* (2011). Mixed media. 28 cm. x 22 cm. © Gaialight, 2011.

DOCUMENTS (2007-2011)



Gaialight, *Light America: Detroit, Michigan, November 2008*. © Gaialight, 2011.

THE PASSION OF JEANNE D'ART

Jules Michelet's *Histoire de France* opens with Jeanne d'Arc and closes with the Revolution of 1848 after the Restoration (after Napoleon, before Napoleon III). The history of post-contemporary Art is no less a mythic undertaking, a historiographic disaster.

In Gaialight's work we see this disaster (the catastrophe, the cataclysm, the Fall). We also see a strenuous intelligence at work (at war) that is only apparently obsessive-compulsive. If we could "see" Jeanne d'Art (Gaialight), rendered iconic, we would see an innocent in armor, from the waist up, and in couture attire from the waist down (Gucci, Prada, Chanel), the faux-ironic ad campaign to follow, golden hair streaming across gleaming armor.

The anger, the passion, the campaign is a principled battle against Milan Kundera's dreaded "imagology" (the endless semiosis denounced in his great novel *Immortality*), the post-modern curse or plague of fantasies present in present-day global culture (problematized endlessly by Slavoj Žižek); Hollywood, media, and advertising in particular. This surfeit of empty signs, where Life is driven into the wilderness and sacrificed, is the age-old dialectical struggle between Mammon and scapegoat. This "war" finds redemption only in the turning of things into other things (the turning of things loose, or free, from ideological and socio-economical chains). To silence the Beast ...

It is possible, then, that these works deconstructing and reconstructing the demented, endless reification of imagery (of media as collective psychosis) resurrects an elementary materialism of signs (an elective atomism) while refusing the actual content of the same. Michel Houellebecq's *The Elementary Particles* (2000) comes to mind, as does all manner of "pre-Socratic" mischief perpetrated in post-modern theory and criticism; all an attempt to re-load the Real while trashing the Symbolic. Such works only appear innocent, whereas they open on to the vast void of the Imaginary (interiority as Moral Law). Michelet's or George Bernard Shaw's Jeanne d'Arc, Houellebecq's or Kundera's visions of "the catastrophe", or Gaialight's faux neo-pop assault on already dulled senses signals but one thing – that one thing the Platonic One (Truth) murdered, buried, and sold within the Many.

What remains, after all (as after image), is the anti-ideological *esprit* (spirit) of the surgical strikes – the erasure and defanging of the monstrous, toxic anti-sublime beast of post-contemporary media and its rites of passage to nothingness and back (as Art).

There are two types of insanity (compulsion and obsession) on display in the Light Treatments: 1/ The manic bombardment of pointless information (imagery); and 2/ The embrace of the same as substitution for authentic experience. Both are neutralized in the work, and the work (treatments) open on to a vast silence that suggests the antidote (antithesis). This silence is the void of the subject (subjectivity itself), and its silence is the very thing parasitized and traumatized by media – this assault first disclosed in its utmost mendacious (cruel) manner by the Surrealists. It is this "lost" silence, however, that the work ultimately references; and the work (as project) is, therefore, a violent critique of media violence. Vacuousness is, in fact, doubled, signifying a very different saturation – or, the work as totality signifies Nothing (pure phenomenon, in/for Itself, as Redemption).

GK (September 2007)



Gaialight, *Light Treatment* (2007). Mixed media on orthopedic aids. © Gaialight, 2011.

LETTER TO GAIA



I see what you know ...

Since Kant, “representation” has been duly troubled. On the one hand, there is the idea that we can know nothing of the Thing Itself (Thing in Itself), and place there, instead, our own consciousness upon simply opening our eyes (beginning to “see”). On the other hand there is the Thing Itself, and the knowledge (quiddity) it embodies by simply being (existing). The Thing in Itself is not so much the actual, physical thing but the phenomenality of the thing, and this has been lately troubled in its own right/rite in what has come to be known as post-phenomenology. The emphasis on the “phenomenality” of things then begs the question, What is phenomenality itself? ...

In the work of Art these two types of knowledge meet – that is to say, “abstract”, *a priori* knowledge and the dark knowledge of actually existing things (the presence/gift of the so-called “given”) intermingle. Then, there is also the paradox of the blind spot, often interpreted to mean that what looks back at us from within things (a locution dear to Walter Benjamin regarding the auratic quality of things) is merely our own “intelligence” (concepts) hiding out in things. It is possible, nonetheless, that this blind spot is what is

common to both things and our selves – or, that what is called the blind spot is “intelligence itself” (phenomenality itself).

Image (above) – Gaialight, *Light America: Washington, DC, January 20, 2009*. © Gaialight, 2011.

What will be seen in your work is: 1/ your intelligence; 2/ the intelligence of the one looking into your work; and 3/ the intelligence of the object itself. All three forms of intelligence will exist in different degrees, different proportions, depending on the one looking, and thinking through what they see. The blind spot in this scenario also implies the possibility of misreadings and distortions. This would, of course, fall under the responsibility of the person doing the looking, versus the artist or the thing itself.

Blind spots are, therefore, implicit in all things. In Art the blind spot can be the source of revelation or of misapprehension. What is most evident in such a scenario (of mixed proportions of understanding and comprehension) is that the object (the work of Art) is not merely to be re-subjectivized but to be addressed as autonomous thing (a newly “given” thing). Purely subjective readings of Art is a shibboleth (and an end run on truth).

Lastly, what is present in Art is what the German Romantics sought – aesthetic knowledge. Inclined to ignore abstract truth (metaphysics), and reacting to Kant by positing an alternative route to truth, the High Romantics (the Jena school) knew without knowing. This knowing without knowing is what permeates their written works to this day. This form of knowing is also the oldest form of knowledge on Earth. It is self-knowledge, and it is the same type of knowledge that is characterized by the word *revelation*. Nominally “archaic”, Revelation is, after all, timeless. Such too is “phenomenality itself”.

II.

Three-fold seeing (knowing) is perhaps pushed to its present-day limits (what can be said today through re-representation) in the photographic work of Thomas Struth, and foremost in the work at the Prado (2007); wild images (very large C-prints) of mostly art tourists looking at Velázquez’ paintings, the paintings looking back at the same, the photographer looking at this spectacle, the resulting images then placed on the gallery walls (elsewhere, and at the Prado), or images derived in-between (at least), with the re-representation of the re-representation coming to an apotheosis in the gravest image of all, or, Struth mining the full implications of what it means to stand in front

of *Las Meninas*, a painting said to represent representation itself, while the camera (Struth) records the scene and the technological spirit of photography (see Flusser's *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*) clashes with, closes in on, the resources of painting, all resulting in the imminent arrival of a form of immanence, the presence of seeing in/for itself, and the threat of absolute "ontological embarrassment", meltdown and parousia – the event well-marked along the way, the structure of thought mirrored and exposed three times, but the predicament of catastrophe palpable.

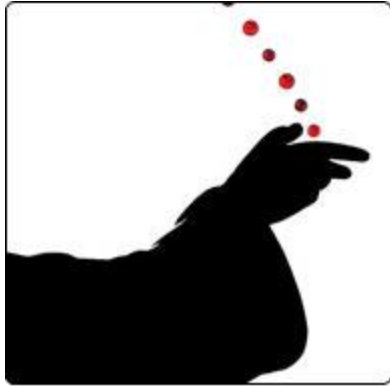
What I see, then, in all such Art is a peculiar form of anamnesis, Platonic remembering, but a form that requires the maelstrom of images we inhabit to be forced to speak of their own origin, against all ideological matrices, and through a logic of signs that is also a type of madness.

To re-mark, re-circulate, re-calibrate, and re-situate the moments of this minefield (this horror) – the insane fragments of the media-saturated "work" we inhabit – after all brings home something that is lost in that very process. If it is the surface that tantalizes and seduces, titillates and anaesthetizes intellect, it is intellect that is, as form, at its most primordial (plastic) condition in Art, as it is in bodies, in abject objects, in the utter mastery of a universe atomized into submission. Atomism and nominalism go hand in hand toward nothingness (nihilism). One secret exposed in works that embody anamnesis is that intellect is also emotionally charged "being"; that this charge is what sets everything on its path to either annihilation or redemption.

And thus, and perhaps always, as long as we trouble representation itself, we are back with Plato, and with noumenal and phenomenal forms of what is but one thing – it is to this end that one even bothers to ask questions in the form of making Art. And it seems that such a semi-divine language of forms (of *aesthetic visio*) leads to the intersection of two roads, two worlds, and two wills. This nexus, place of "crossing", is at once the primordial and futural site of Art, its "crucifixion", and its only reason to exist.

GK (August 2007)

“ART AS SUCH”: THIS IS NOT POP ...



“The messiah comes for our desires. He separates them from images in order to fulfill them. Or rather, in order to show they have already been fulfilled. Whatever we have imagined, we already had. There remain the (unfulfillable) images of what is already fulfilled. With fulfilled desires, he constructs hell; with unfulfillable images, limbo. And with imagined desire, with the pure word, the beatitude of paradise.”¹ –Giorgio Agamben

This is not Pop ... This was not included in the 2007 Gagosian London show or catalogue *Pop Art is [...]*. That said, it is important to qualify the statement. It is not because Gagosian did not recognize or even know about the work of Gaialight, it is instead that the spurious and specious assimilation of artists as diverse as Richard Prince, Damien Hirst, and Gerhard Richter by Gagosian makes no real sense.² Obviously, the definition of Pop today is

without critical merit; or, more likely, it is an exercise in attempting to circumvent criticality itself. Such is the post-critical posture of contemporary art.

Image (above) – Gaialight, *Darklight Christmas* (2010). © Gaialight, 2011.

But the historical definition of Pop is also vague and indeterminate. It goes without saying, regarding Pop Art, that most art-historically challenged consumers of Art would think first of Andy Warhol, while Pop extends as far back as the post-war British art scene of the early 1950s (the Independent Group) and has a dubious connection to Futurism, the early 1900s avant-garde movement that glorified the technological hubris of the early modern (but only “early modern” in the short-sighted, art-historical sense, as modernity by any other standard is pushed back several centuries, if not to the Renaissance than to the French Revolution). Modern art history as a discourse has often seemed, strangely, half blind – yet, today, contemporary art history may be totally blind (intentionally and blissfully so).

The problem nonetheless, in the present case, is, simply, What is collage? – and the problem persists insofar as the so-called invention of collage is invariably attributed to Futurism, c.1909-1913, and its agit-prop provocations (see Marjorie Perloff’s *The Futurist Moment*, 1986). This troubled history of collage, which at times conflates montage, assemblage, and collage, and which in the post-modern sense implicates, further, the pathetic artistic agency of pastiche and gross insincerity (or, at best, irony), is a very slippery slope. Suffice to say, once again, Gaialight’s work is not Pop (or not-Pop). It is easy to say why.

The Pop sensibility is totally, or at least primarily, non-critical – it is celebratory. It is hard to find anything Warhol did that is against the proliferation of the popular as precious spectacle (*spectaculum*), that is against the essentially

¹ Giorgio Agamben, “Desiring”, pp. 53-54, in Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), p. 54. Vast mysteries are contained in this highly condensed statement, part of a highly charged, extremely short (two-page) essay. Agamben’s summary is, in essence, an intensely iconoclastic enunciation of what “messianic time” portends; that is, the deliverance of “what remains” is the deliverance of what always already was fulfilled, and the fact that the paradisiacal is imageless is slightly misleading. Instead, what is elliptically stated is that “paradise” is the “time” when the image strictly corresponds with the thing and there is no division (therefore, there is no image per se, and no unfulfilled desire as a result). This was the supposed (mythical) condition of “Eden”, and such is also the supposed condition or outcome of “redemptive” time, the time of the messiah, the time that arrives to end time (or experience mediated by imagery and desire). Agamben’s recent work on redemptive time comes by way of Walter Benjamin, both Benjamin’s appropriations of Lurianic, East European Jewish mysticism and his interest in Saint Paul (a figure he shows to be buried in Benjamin’s famous “Theses on the Philosophy of History”). See Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005). First published *Il tempo che resta* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000). Agamben is the editor of the Italian edition of Benjamin’s complete works.

² Agamben points out elsewhere in *Profanations* (in the essay “Special Being”, as below) that “specious first meant ‘beautiful’ and only later came to mean ‘untrue, apparent.’” (p. 58). His main gesture here is to show that the schism (rupture) between things and ideas is the tragic dimension of modernity exemplified, and that all transcendent signifieds must, therefore, remain empty – or, that all signs must remain broken signs. Gerhard Richter is included in the Gagosian show solely based on his appropriations of photography and media (newspaper imagery, etc.), while his early work certainly underscores the “empire of broken signs” given to post-modern nihilism. That said, his work has also become an extraordinary critique of the same.

anti-modern vacuousness of celebrity- and image-driven culture.³ (His car crashes are perhaps an exception.) If the 1960s delivered Pop, as antidote to high modern art, it did so with the full collusion of then-emergent visual media, of which we live with the full implications of today. The avalanche of Pop coincided with the explosion of postwar media. The anti-modern and the minimalist and conceptualist insurrections of this time were aimed at both modernist hegemony and a public with a voracious appetite to indulge voyeuristic art practices and everyday bric-a-brac (advertising, high-commodity culture, and momentary sensation). The hedonism of the 1960s spawned Pop Art. It was an anti-establishment, anti-elitist art that became the establishment by appropriation.

There is, then, the additional problem of what not-Pop actually is. Not-Pop is intentionally predicated on Pop, while it is strenuously NOT Pop. This is not merely a semantic game, while it *is* a “structuralist” (art-grammatical) game. One only need pass through the surface of not-Pop to find that the actual intent is to destroy Pop from within. Richard Prince might be said to think this, or to pretend such, while he has settled instead for an uneasy accord with Pop and neo-Pop for reasons that we can only assume have to do with marketability and sustained irony. In his case, Pop is a fence-sitting exercise. Holzer and Kruger have sold themselves to the same devil, insofar as their works are essentially (literally) “vulgar”, or generally ludicrous (meaning they are aimed at the lowest common denominator – that is, the art public and its endless appetite for information and spectacle, whether sardonic, whimsical, pseudo-erudite, or otherwise). The common purpose is *détournement*, Debord’s and the Situationist’s idea that one might use the imagery of spectacle to critique the same. What matters, however, is whether that turning of spectacle upon itself connotes anything other than the cancelation or mere negation of the contagion.⁴

Thus, the work of Gaialight is placed in the difficult in-between that represents what Pop acclaimed and what Pop failed to deliver – that is, a future free from all forms of economic-political constraint, and a future free of all forms of modernist cant and moralism. Yet, one almost misses that cant and moralism as a result of the utter artistic poverty (apparent rote nihilism) of Pop. If Pop, based on re-formulated Futurism plus Dada and Surrealism, was meant to validate a brave new world of image-driven cultural agitation, a world of endless and marvellous innovation and mechanization, unparalleled freedom to race very fast cars over very slick roads (Marinetti), that is,

³ “The Latin term *species*, which means ‘appearance,’ ‘aspect,’ or ‘vision,’ derives from a root signifying ‘to look, to see.’ This root is also found in *speculum* (mirror), *spectrum* (image, ghost), *perspicuus* (transparent, clearly seen), *specimen* (example, sign), and *spectaculum* (spectacle). In philosophical terminology, *species* was used to translate the Greek *eidos* (as *genus* was used to translate *genos*); hence the sense the term takes on in natural science (animal or plant species) and in the language of commerce, where the term signifies ‘commodities’ (particularly in the sense of drugs and spices) and, later, money (*espèces*).” See Giorgio Agamben, “Special Being”, pp. 55-60, in *Profanations*, pp. 56-57. Importantly, the “making precious of spectacle” is a doubling of desire and consistent with the rarified nature of commodity production. Warhol raised the stakes for Art, doubling what Walter Benjamin called its “exhibition value”, and, in so doing, Warhol and Pop placed so-called contemporary art in line for endless appropriation by the very mechanisms of production and circulation out of which it (Pop) arrived. The term *contemporary* is used art-historically, or art-critically, to distinguish what came after modernism (typically a transition that encompasses the 1950s and early 1960s) from modernism proper; Lost in the transition, so-to-speak, are artists such as Yves Klein and Tony Smith. This gap has been problematized by Hal Foster especially in the context of the diachronic nature of MoMA’s curatorial program.

⁴ It is not Pop per se (as paradigm or anti-paradigm) that is given to endless accommodation of the capitalist market economy and its unbridled demand for always new forms of spectacle, but the presence of Pop as corollary or handmaiden to the same; either Pop in retrospect, and, therefore, most forms of neo-Pop, or Pop Art proper as a period phenomenon co-terminous with the postwar expansion of Western consumerist fantasies. Hal Foster has indicated, in terms of Pop architecture, that often the “spectacular” nature of the presentation (the unbuildable architectural project) concealed a secret agenda in the form of fomenting or picturing class warfare, or that which would bring the entire (un)edifying complex, the project itself, into eventual ruin. This is consistent with Guy Debord’s brief flirtation with the fantastic agenda of Pop architecture, that is, Constant’s New Babylon, before he saw that such projects were nothing other than a manifestation of an ill-conceived colonization of the margins of that which he and the Situationist International sought to totally demolish. See Hal Foster, “Image Building”, *Artforum*, vol. 43, no. 2 (October 2004): pp. 270-73; 310-11. The unqualified assimilation of neo-Dada and neo-Surrealism (the 1960s versions) to Pop and neo-Pop should not go unquestioned, as Dada was a highly critical and mordant (deadly) affair, as Surrealism was an apocalyptic venture situated at the intersection of art (visual art and literature) and psychoanalysis; Both Dada and Surrealism were perched at the “edge of the abyss”, meaning Dada emerged out of utter revulsion with World War I and Surrealism was born in the inter-war years as pure aesthetic rebellion. Zurich Dada, in particular, was an absurdist moment in the agit-prop tendency of the European avant-garde, and its agenda (at the Cabaret Voltaire), under careful analysis, proves to have been highly moral (not moralistic). Lastly, it is necessary to say that Marcel Duchamp cannot be blamed nor credited for everything that came afterward, that is, after Dada, in the form of anti-art, as his own position within the art world is not so much that of satyr-saint, but ultra-critical logician and unorthodox semiotician or shaman, a figure, if not genius, of vast significance and a figure grossly misunderstood to this day.

to celebrate technological, eidetic, and virtual triumphalism, or, in a word, to indulge every self-indulgent, candy-colored fantasy, it clearly failed. What the collaged works of Gaialight deliver, instead of a reprisal of all of that, is a vast, unrelenting critique of that very failure and the fact that we live with that failure as the “given” of our current cultural condition.

It is necessary to say why, and it is necessary to instruct those who might fall for the insanely dynamic and optically charged surface of the work (its preliminary “beauty”) as to the depths into which one must fall, willingly, to access the singular critique at the heart of this work. One must bracket the apparent Pop sensibility, and one must ask oneself why this imagery is so utterly unrelenting (devastating), until the obvious question appears through this preliminary questioning – or, What is the prevailing sentiment, and is this not a vision of horror, after all?

Once this sentiment is recognized and engaged, once one falls not for the surface but for the depths, the moral depths, there is no other conclusion to be reached but that *here* is a type of hellishness pictured in a savagely repetitive, highly allusive, and largely elusive collage technique that also, importantly, relies as much on its base (its support) as on the imagery itself. It is, after all, a type of painting (as collage was said to have killed off painting, or at least rendered it obsolete). As a result, neither can such be reduced to the frisson of contemporary assemblage art (post-conceptual installation art), as this is, clearly, modernist collage, not post-modernist assemblage or pastiche. And, if modernist montage was cinematic or photographic (Rodchenko, Malevich, Eisenstein, Man Ray et al.), we have no choice but to admit that here collage does miraculously what montage and assemblage also do. Gaialight’s collage launches a singular subject (object) of/for art, rigorously, and it integrates through repetition fragments that appear as sparks that rise from a fire that burns from somewhere and some place we have no chance of locating, that is, until we arrive there *through reflection* (a negative-dialectical, apophatic form of “seeing” and “not-seeing”). It is this very eliding of collage, montage, and assemblage that makes Gaialight’s work impossible to classify. It is all of these things, and it is none of these things, at once.

Therefore, one must return to the source (one must make the journey), to the principled place of production, the mind’s eye (the artist’s soul), and see that the intent is strenuously moral and strenuously the opposite of Pop per se (or opposite of not-Pop). One can only weigh such things in golden scales, and golden scales no longer exist in the art world proper because art is currently made of mostly thin air, or smoke and mirrors. They (such scales) remain only in the imaginary of the perceiver and in the furtive conscience of “Art as such” (as “given”).

GK (April 2008)

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007). The premise of this collection of exceptional essays is to return actually existing things to “use” (actual use), from ultra-rarified and ultra-reified states that produce horizonless anomie and endless disenfranchisement – the latter, arguably, the very intention of advanced capitalism.

Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003). See “Andy Warhol’s One-Dimensional Art: 1956-1966”, pp. 461-529. Germano Celant et al., *The Avant-garde Movements 1900-1919: Art of the Twentieth Century* (Milan: Skira, 2006). See “The End of the Artistic Object”, pp. 387-412.

Jean-Louis Comolli, Gérard Leblanc, Jean Narboni, *Les années pop: Cinéma et politique, 1956-1970: Et une filmographie commentée* (Paris: Bibliothèque Publique d’Information, Centre Pompidou, 2001). Published on the occasion of the exhibition “Cinéma et politique”, May 23-June 18, 2001.

Hal Foster, “Image Building”, *Artforum*, vol. 43, no. 2 (October 2004), pp. 270-73; 310-11. The special issue is entitled “This is Today: Pop after Pop”. Foster shows the links between Pop Art and Pop architecture, the latter of which was exemplified by Peter and Alison Smithson, Archigram, Archizoom, and Superstudio. The issue reprints Lawrence Alloway’s 1962 essay “Pop Since 1949” (pp. 57-58; 61; 274; 276), in which Alloway states, “Pop Art begins in London about 1949 with work by Francis Bacon ...”, referring to Bacon’s appropriations of cinematic and photographic images in his paintings of the period.

Mark Francis, Stefan Ratibor, eds., *Pop Art is [...]* (London: Gagosian Gallery, 2007). Exhibition catalogue, September 27-November 10, 2007. The full title of the exhibition (and the catalogue) is “Pop Art is: Popular, Transient, Expendable, Low Cost, Mass Produced, Young, Witty, Sexy, Gimmicky, Glamorous, Big Business”. This title is taken from a letter written by Richard Hamilton to Peter and Alison Smithson dated “16th January, 1957” and

reproduced in the catalogue. Importantly, Hamilton qualifies several of the terms in his “table of characteristics” for Pop, including “Popular (designed for a mass audience)”, “Transient (Short term solution)”, “Expendable (easily forgotten)”, and “Young (aimed at Youth)”, and the odd capitalization is his. Additionally, Hamilton writes, “I find I am not yet sure about the ‘sincerity’ of Pop Art – it is not a characteristic of all but it is of some, at least a pseudo sincerity is.”

Barbara Haskell, ed., *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance, 1958-1964* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, in association with W.W. Norton, 1984). Exhibition catalogue, September 20-December 2, 1984.

Edward Leftingwell, Karen Marta, eds., *Modern Dreams: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988). Exhibition catalogue, ICA/Clocktower Gallery (Long Island City, New York, New York), October 22, 1987-June 12, 1988.

David McCarthy, *Pop Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; London: Tate Gallery, 2000).

Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Regarding collage, see “The Invention of Collage”, pp. 44-79. First published in 1986, the 2003 edition includes a new preface citing resurgent “Futurist” agendas in late-modern art and architecture. See especially, “The Word Set Free: Text and Image in the Russian Futurist Book”, pp. 116-60, regarding Malevich, Mayakovsky, Kruchenykh, Khlebnikov, Larionov, and Goncharova. Perloff performs the usual dance around the issues of the “politicization of art” (Communism) and the “aestheticization of politics” (Fascism), citing, as well, Robert Tucker regarding Marx’s “conception of ultimate communism”, that is, “Human self-realization means much more to Marx than the return of man to himself out of his alienated labor.... The ending of economic alienation will mean the end of the state, the family, law, morality, etc., as subordinate spheres of alienation.... What will remain is the life of art and science in a special and vastly enlarged sense of these two terms. Marx’s conception of ultimate communism is fundamentally aesthetic in character.... The alienated world will give way to the aesthetic world.” Robert C. Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 157-58; cited in Perloff, p. 34.

WRITING TOWARD DARKNESS



Gaialight, *Triptych: Ice in Central Park*, 2009. © Gaialight, 2011.

The image. It reverts to the primordial chord, to “the beginning” and “the end”. For no other reason, photography courses/cuts to the place where “I” faces “I” – the proto-essential and proto-aesthetic place of taking-place (and the place where the problem of God arises). It is the conundrum barring none – the exact moment of Art, as if Art were pure image, after Baudelaire, the absolute fusion of knowing and seeing, not intellection per se, not didactic rubbish as reactionary dictum dictates. The precise moment of Art is embodied in photography as knowledge – not a privileging of seeing (of the eye), but of the “I”.

And such is why God is photography. That very position in knowledge that is seeing is the penultimate and “pointless” redundancy of image, the *mise-en-abyme* that compels all visionary experience to utterly fall/collapse into that divine caesura that is God.

We wander in endless corridors of abstruse rhetoric. This is the truth of Baudelaire, Duchamp, Barthes, Robbe-Grillet, Marker, Derrida, and ... What matters is matter. What is, is. The reductive force of the divine art of image is mirror placed before mirror – *as world* – or, the “godlike” anti-nature of photography is the prismatic fold of images reflecting images, this dynamic field (photography) a mimetic cataclysm, but also fictive substitute for everything that passes through the lens of being.



Gaialight, *Triptych: Guggenheim Museum*, 2009. © Gaialight, 2011.

Historicity dies step by historical step – as does art historicity die step by art-historical step. Both the photograph and the painting betray this truth. To be made/born in the image of God is to see God. God sees God, and photography sees itself. It is a form of writing in the dark, a pure reduction to visibility and intellection without the discursive, recursive multiplicities of thought dislocated from that primordial place of writing into darkness. The Word is not linguistic, but “first being” (first cause) – solitary and singular, singularity as gestural *waiting in sublimity*. The photograph indexes this condition and, therefore, is a signature of that condition – plenum, pleroma, promise (*la promesse*).

Writing in the dark is writing with light – it is purely formal, and it is the exact art of seeing form, of forming vision (visuality). Everything else follows on this. There is no time in photography (no diachrony) – it is “first seeing”,

“first light”, dawning visual knowledge (Logos). Word fused with formal disclosure (formal agency) – and knowledge wrapped in shadow – is the path of the photographic revelation.

The white light of Reason is another form and realm of visibility – it is actual inversion of writing in darkness. This brighter light is the world as it is – *all at once* – and it has a name. That name is Art Photography, archive and avalanche.

The archive, the cinematic (the time-image), is the avalanche. Diachrony inhabits the dark mirror of this serial abyss – recursive, cascading, falling into visibility, the God that is photography dies over and over, is delimited in time and space (everything cannot happen all at once in such a world). Diachrony haunts and hollows out the photograph. The serial image (the series and the cinematic avalanche) betrays (both turns upon and also signals) the return of the recondit “first light” of writing in darkness. Hence the triptych – in painting and photography – or, the categorical reduction by expansion (by tripling), the trinitarian marking of “just enough”.

In the time of “God as photography” we are in a time of closing, not opening – a paradoxical focusing of the formal resources of a pseudo-apparatus. After all, it is not the artifact or the *dispositif* that renders that “first writing” with light palpable – the reduction proves this. The resources of visibility are wholly formal, and the apparatus is red herring (and always has been). The support, the frame, the canvas, the lens, all provide the “metric” of visibility as intellection, the formal *gravitas* of this first world of seeing weighs upon all apparatuses in inverse proportion to the dead weight of the apparatus. The archive is also said to be a tomb ... Visibility as intellection is also the resurrection of a very old, austere truth.

GK (February 2009)



Gaialight, *Triptych: Picnic in Central Park, 2009*. © Gaialight, 2011.

SCARLETT WORDS: *LIGHT AMERICA*

From Sufi poetry to Walt Whitman (from Georges Bataille and Walter Benjamin to Roland Barthes), behind every image (word) are other images (other words). Behind every art work – painting, photograph, collage – is the immaterial impress, the nonsingularity that produces the singular object of art.

The maelstrom of contemporary art is awash in nonsingular, intentionally abject, anti-ideological and anti-intellectual verbiage. The “flashing sign” of contemporary art is symptomatic of the hyperbolic wasteland of the post-cultural state – a condition now melting before our very eyes, and (without the necessary immaterial impress, without resting in the immaterial) this world now passing away will not be missed.



Image – Gaialight, *Light America: Autumn, Detroit Michigan, 2008*. © Gaialight, 2011.

A long awaited post-nihilist shift toward the authenticity of images long abandoned is underway – that is, we are witnessing a return to the necessary depth that provides art with its otherworldly bona fides, its presence “here and now”, but its paradoxical belatedness. The catatonic visuality of abjection is (finally) passing away, its collapse and subsequent debris field, as torsional field, gives way onto a wholly different landscape, a this-worldly fusion of art and not-art – or, what is now (re)appearing is the strange, secret, eroticized universe of words and images on fire that underlies and underwrites everything “real”.

From collage to photography is not a leap, nor is it a calculation. What is in collage is a secret language – an intense, often hallucinatory anti-world, critically surveying the wreckage of worlds, while provisionally reassembling that wreckage as visual hieroglyph (for example, Rodchenko, Teige, Man Ray, Warhol, Richard Prince). Whether cinematic or pop-cultural, iconic or crassly commercial and/or comic, it hardly matters at all which form such maneuvers take – as they are almost always autopsies.

In moving from the intensity of collage to collaged photography (as in the *Light America* series underway as of late 2008), the work of Gaialight moves closer to what was always embedded in the graphic exuberance of the *Light Treatments*, while moving away from what was always misunderstood about these very works. Not an appropriation artist, but using such against the grain anyway, misappropriated in turn by well-intentioned but art-historically challenged contemporary media, those works are the precursor of *Light America*. What now arrives (with Scarlett) is what was always there (yet secreted within the work). What Scarlett (and her “travels”) portend is the eroticized heart and mind (world as cosmogonic eros) about to be (re)born. This exacting, ahistorical rite of passage is in every sense a return, while at the same time it is in the nature of the belatedness of art to present it as “futural”.

GK (February 2009)

THE DARKLIGHT ELABORATION

Twenty Theses on the Unbearable Relativity of Digital Colors Inspired by Josef Albers' Studies and Theories on the Relativity of Color (*Interaction of Color*).

* * * * *

1. The relativity of color is conceptually unbearable for those who still believe in the truth of photography, of the precise instant, of the exact shade of blue of a portrayed sky, in chromatic authenticity along every stage of the creative process (and in the post-productive one as well).
2. Digital relativity of color is frightening because it can only be controlled technically (for example, through monitor calibration): it does not directly depend on human sensitivity, perception, or skill to preview and eventually dominate chromatic effects.
3. It is almost all (sadly) about pixels.
4. Digital color is uncertain, unstable, and unpredictable.
5. Perception (authenticity) can easily be faked.
6. The enforced secondary role of human (personal and emotional) efforts is part of the problem.
7. The “machine” leads the evaluation and decides the effect (the human contribution to this is mostly illusory).
8. It is all a matter of time: The digital era has drastically changed the way we approach, consider, and use color.
9. The problem, then, is a classic chiasmus: Is the problem the digital relativity of color or the relativity of digital color?
10. It is all a matter of relativity (regardless).
11. Relativity invokes time, and all reflections are, as such, relative to this very digital time in history.
12. Nobody is to blame for this.
13. It eventually all depends on the way we relate to this issue: often it is not even considered an “issue”.
14. This is, conceptually, all very simple, and (as a result) all very frustrating as well.
15. Digital relativity of color nowadays can be very drastic (and alarming).
16. A critique of digital color can be, *avant la lettre*, derived as an “emanation” from Josef Albers' magnificent theory of the relativity of color.
17. The *Darklight* studies are based on Albers' enlightening critique.
18. Light reaction to this “problem” (that is, personal critical reflections, chromatic frustration, and months of Albers' studies) is the origin of the *Darklight Elaboration*.
19. By digitally erasing digital color we can push the entire operation toward a point in photography that is exceptionally not relative.
20. In studying Albers' theory of relativity in color we can also extract a more austere and grave form of “affect” by

the elimination of color (its absence).

NOTES ON THE *DARKLIGHT ELABORATION*

The *Darklight* series was started by digitally eliminating colors from digital color images, as a means of exploring the infinite possibilities of balancing levels of dark (black) and light (white) up to the *Darklight* “point” (the moment of truth/arrest) within the same image; meaning that specific combinations of dark (black) and light (white) are able to produce a visual and emotive threshold given to the image in a rather raw state, and at which point the absence of color is superseded by something that precedes it nonetheless (purely formal effects), yet effects that are always different from another produced by a different *Darklight* “point” (moment of truth/arrest).

Darklight aims to work on the emotional potential of chromatically de-structured images. In erasing digital color (a determination using the apparatus of digital media against itself) one arrives at the destruction of affect, arguably the main component of the fake emotional nature of digital photography.

This is, of course, a conceptually provocative challenge that aims to refocus the formal, basic, and essential nature of an image, one that can easily be found (rediscovered) and seen (digitally) by rigorously eliminating (digital) color.

First stage: Focus on the essence of the photographic image through absolute de-saturation (elimination of all color). What remains is the basic structure of the image, absolute chromatic values of black and white, with no intermediate shades or middle tones (that is, grey or grey scale, which is strangely close to a form of “color” anyway). The *Darklight* process is similar to sculpture in this sense; it is all about eliminating non-essential elements from the starting image up through the essential *Darklight* “point” (the essence). We might call this “freeing the image” from bondage.

Second stage: Once the *Darklight* moment is found, in some cases the newborn image will lead to a newer image; that is, simply through observation (the eye traversing the image) an abstract image emerges, or, figuration completely falls away. Abstraction in this case is derived from an absolutely “real” starting point, a photographic image. It is not abstraction in/for itself that is put into play. The level of abstraction in the final image is also a measure of the permissible loss of color and detail while retaining the “essence” of the *Darklight* moment. The new abstract image is the result of the serial repetition/extension of the first (matrix) image in the assembled series. Seen in sequence, the images within the series have a cinematic quality that indulges yet another of photography’s secrets, insofar as photography moves easily toward cinema by montage and repetition (seriality). *Darklight* examples: *Skyline Composition*; *Guggenheim Composition*.

This is all a fascinating process of reversing photo-digital means, while also, paradoxically, pushing the same forward (in a new direction). Resulting from the Albers’ studies, the *Darklight* series introduces a new visionary and anticipatory process capable of prefiguring the final effects developed by the series. The more you train the eye (and what is beyond the eye, of course), the more the abstraction will be rewarding and visually successful. This level of the image provides a new register for the affects of photography bypassing the easy affective regime of color (garish or otherwise).

The serial repetition of the image (rigorously assembling it through a technique of repeated specular juxtapositions) produces the new abstract image. Not only formally abstract, but also conceptually abstract (as it comes from a preexisting photographic image), a new visual world arrives out of a previous, simpler one.

It is magic, unpredictable in details but still controllable; and it all depends on the starting image. As controllable magic, *Darklight* accesses a level of the image that is pre-discursive and pre-affective. The austerities involved are the main means to no end other than the image itself.

Gaialight (July 2010)

THE DARKLIGHT ELABORATION: ZEITGEIST OR EPISTEME?



Gaialight's *Darklight Elaboration* (2010) opens and closes (slams shut) several doors all at once. Foremost amongst those doors it closes is the gauzy, glossy one given to digital photography and its affective regime; that is, its dependence on a type of color that no longer relates to the image itself, but, instead, floats free of the image and introduces a spectral sense of color that overrides the image and introduces a specious range of false or spectral emotion.

While this series engages a range of questions regarding contemporary photography and its excesses (its dependence on factors that exceed the historical determinations of photography), it is the historical determinations of photography that remain most interesting within the implicit critique of the intelligible nature of the image. And while this historical agency has often been bracketed in the contemporary photograph (and its often outsized modality), what anyone given to placing such things in an historical register sees is the evolution of the image toward a form of irreality that no longer engages the real but, instead, along with many forms of postmodernity, distances itself from the real in near endless forms of simulation and deferment.

Image (above) – Gaialight, *Darklight: Moon, Bethany, Connecticut, March 2010*. © Gaialight, 2011.

Goethe's *Theory of Colours* (*Zur Farbenlehre*, 1810) comes to mind immediately in this regard, especially since this theory of colors was derived from staring into a well and the subsequent realization that color emerges from the interplay of black and white (darkness and light). That his model was decidedly anti-Newtonian (a demonstration that there is no absolute or universal origin for color), and that all color is derived from relative or earth-bound conditions, is telling. Gaialight's interpretation and critique of color through *Darklight*, though based on Josef Albers' *Interaction of Color*, does not so much argue for the relativity of color proper, but, instead, forces the image backward, ironically toward its origin and its future, at once, in high-contrast, black-and-white coordinates that justify the series' quiet claim to photographic knowledge as a type of universal knowledge. Albers' serial abstraction is almost present here, but what is more important is the serial questioning of the abstract agency of color, despite its relative nature (production by association). Therefore, in erasing color altogether, the *Darklight* series introduces vectors antecedent to color, while its absence suggests its presence. Such is a new relative position for color; and, hardly a representational game or house of mirrors, this presence of the absence of color is an absolute statement of the significance of color (*by obliterating it*).

Half way through Jean-Luc Godard's *Éloge de l'amour*, the august and extreme filmmaker shifts from black-and-white film stock to digital color. This occurs following an elegiac and extraordinary sequence of scenes leading to the denouement at the Brittany coast, where suddenly the sea (via montage) comes in through a window and the shift to digital color induces a delirium of a visual order, the sea washing over the room in which a woman sits at a desk and a lamp merges with the sea and seagulls, waves of color superseding all singular objects or discernable forms. Godard suddenly drops his guard, and the affective regime of color washes away the last resistance to the impending inundation the world is always at the cusp of. The deluge comes in the form of a capitulation to pure affectivity and its erasure of individual memory.

The historical trajectory of photography is but one-hundred-and-fifty-or-so-years long, while it resides within the near-ageless history of the production of images. Yet, what we see in the *Darklight Elaboration* is a return by way of Albers to a seminal moment in this short history, albeit a relatively recent turn toward the production of images that no longer take themselves quite so seriously. This moment occurred in the early 1960s, arguably with Warhol, who (despite all arguments to the contrary) was not the progenitor of this shift but its most savvy co-conspirator. In making images that fully engaged with emergent pop culture, Warhol merely conceded well in advance of the post-modern caesura underway (to appropriate Antonio Negri's term for the period we are now passing through) that everything was to be subsumed by market forces. That affect (and its production in related fields, including cinema and architecture) was at first seen as a liberatory excess within visibility, or an end run on discursive and objective orders, is well known. This "moment", in turn, has now played out, and the possible antidote has arrived in a return to more rigorous and intelligible orders that signal a re-engagement with paradigmatic concerns (those concerns

never abandoned by artists of the caliber of Godard or other late-Romantics, inclusive of those hiding in the long shadows of modernity's endless demise).

While all of this seems to indicate that modernism is not dead, it is also instructive to note that the post-modern caesura has not been fully traversed either. To pass out of the last phases of nihilism will require a severe turn into the hallowed corridors of visual truth and its analogue (or origin), intelligibility. The pretenses of the late-modern machine that has permitted affect to substitute for truth, and the pretenses of artists who have embraced that somewhat cheap sensibility in exchange for intelligibility notwithstanding, what appears now is the inexorable shadow of the *Zeitgeist* (demoted to episteme by Michel Foucault such that it might be subject to a perverse disciplinary action in its own right, a critique of institutions, inclusive of art and its worlds). The doors we hear being slammed shut in the *Darklight Elaboration* are the doors that have been opened since the end of the last end of modernity – not the doors of perception, but the doors of deception. One senses that the very nature of the image is at stake, again, and that digital color is but one example of perhaps hundreds of examples, wherein the question of balance is the foremost question worth troubling over.

In the *Darklight Elaboration* we see that very idea of balance teetering on the edge of the abyss in the precise elaboration of what is enough (or what is just enough) for the image to speak (able to slip over, and/or able to return to form new worlds). In erasing color, Gaialight has also erased all the dubious questions in one very telling form of visual intelligence. Photography's role in the production of deception, and its concurrent "interpretive" ("critical") role, is legendary. Perhaps for this reason we should note the origin of Gaialight's venture into the Albers' studies that have inaugurated the inquest that the *Darklight* series represents; that is, reading Susan Sontag on an airplane while en route to Art Basel Miami ... Everything unfolds from that moment (including the not-accidental, mid-air meeting that led to Albers) ...

Suffice to say that the *Zeitgeist* moves in austere ways, while the episteme is given to the florid and garish (arguably Godard's point). While the latter has its moments, we have been through all of that and it is time for something altogether *otherwise*. It is time, therefore, to discipline and punish the late-modern (late-capitalist) episteme, but without recourse to the sado-masochistic measures of Foucault's methodology.



Gaialight, *Triptych: Light after Dark, Rome, 2010*. © Gaialight, 2011.

A few words, then, about the *Darklight Elaboration*, in the specific.

To push the image back to the austere coordinates of black-and-white, semi-abstract photography is to push figuration back to its inherent frontier at the edge of things. It is things, after all, that matter, insofar as things connote ideas, and vice versa, and it is ideas that move within all forms of figuration, versus affect. The attempt to circumvent this truth has been the pride and prejudice of post-modernity and all attempts to demolish the paradigmatic. The paradigmatic is the realm of ideation (and for this reason it was brought into question, submitted to the most ruthless measures of critique, or simply abandoned). It has lived "on the moors" ever since ...

The *Darklight Elaboration* proceeds on two principal fronts at once: the first being its obliteration of color (affect); the second being its decisive selection of a "moment" when the excoriating measures of this process of de-saturation are "arrested". The choice is an artistic decision that also involves the intelligible. We see in that moment of arrest (the decisive moment of "closure") the most salient expression of the truth embedded in the image. One could push the process further toward de-familiarization, a classic modernist maneuver, but that would, in turn, overturn the

purpose of the elimination or sublimation of color. To say that color remains while all color has been removed from the originating digital color image is to say that the resulting image is an outcome of the critique of color.

Moreover, within the nature of the series is a cinematic quality that arrives by way of the seriality of the operation (another modernist maneuver par excellence). Three of anything is the minimal series (hence the earlier triptychs of Gaialight en route to the *Darklight* series). This “cinematic” force in the series is already given within the history of photography; for, it was not long after the invention of photography that moving images were invented. Again we see that contained within this exercise is an improbable critique of the history of photography and its well-known complicity with ideology and rote discursive orders, progressive or repressive. Perhaps the foremost artist of the proto-cinematic nature of the still image is (and remains) Chris Marker. His exquisite appropriation of montage by way of Dziga Vertov is renowned. If there is a single (literal) moving image in Marker’s *La jetée*, the manner in which Marker assembles images is entirely shot through with the moving agency of the photograph. An obvious double entendre, moving agency invokes what is at the very center of the *Darklight Elaboration*. These images move in wholly austere ways – and, therefore, they move us. Their formal agency, while predicated on the erasure of false aura (post-modern affect) engages half-remembered forms of visual knowledge – and knowledge moves all things

Albers’ *Interaction of Color*, first published in 1975, strangely returns us to the triumphs of modernism. Albers is known as much for his influence on American artists as his origins in the premier schools of European avant-garde art and industrial design. *Homage to the Square* remains his most renowned work, one begun in 1949 and revisited continuously. It is also a series, and, as it invokes the entire spectrum of interests in seriality, it registers something that has long been buried in the pursuit of the singular object of art. If the series excavates a range of formal operations given to any possible singular object (and the 1960s so-called multiple seems to be of this operative, conceptual order), the single image within any series speaks a slightly different truth. If art is derived from things, and intelligibility moves all things, the singular object or image remains of (singular) interest. Within the *Darklight* series, then, are the so-called moments (of arrest) that produce the singular image. What we see in the series of highly reductive black-and-white images (yet, not as reductive as they might be) is a substitute order for color as affect (or what, in the foregoing analysis of affect, passes as end run on the object of art). The series begins to undo the singular object and sets in motion a very different affective regime. It is possible that this introduction of time to the singular image (by seriality and de facto montage) is also the re-introduction of what has been masked by color as affect.

The sound of doors opening and closing, then ... Yet, it is the origin of the *Darklight* series that remains most interesting. The sense that a new order of sense is present through the evisceration of color, plus the patent critique of digital photography are not inventions of a parallel discursive order applied to the work of art under examination. Neither is a reverse teleology of art at work in revisiting the black-and-white image or the series as time machine (Marker’s *métier*). Instead, paradoxically, the most pleasing and pressing outcome of Gaialight’s *Darklight Elaboration* would seem to be the return of the singular object (minus its artificially imposed affective register, interpretive or purely visual). These singular images (inspired by immersion in Albers’ critique of color and troubled by the finite and relative nature of color) strangely open on to the infinite. Subject matter hardly matters at all in such instances, though it is retained in most cases as a means of *not* plunging into the abyss of pure abstraction. For abstraction to remain relative is an inordinate trick or gift of the highest artistic kind. One might venture that this was precisely Albers’ point. In the few instances where the image dives off the cliff into the abyss of purely abstract agency we see the relative retained in the form of pattern (a new form of repetition and seriality given to the singular image in/for itself). This latter move further enhances what is always at play in the series – movement between images or movement within images as the first, principal trace of intelligibility, arguably, the origin of all affective regimes, and/or the origin of the world (worlds).

GK (July 2010)

CAM GIRLS

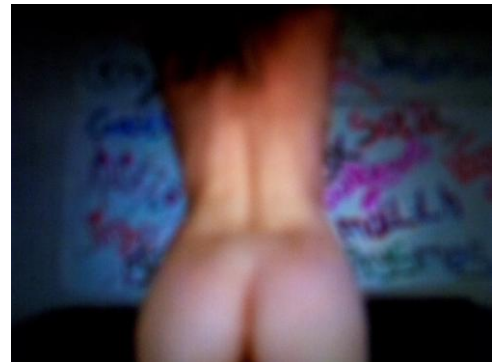


Sex and eroticism are natural and good. Sex and eroticism *plus voyeurism* (on the Web or otherwise) is the beginning of exploitation. Gaialight's *Cam Girls* (2011) documents both. The presence of a Web camera in these situations not only represents the voyeur's gaze but also induces the activities documented. By photographing them "midstream", however, we have a disturbing document or portrait of a sociological conundrum. Documentary photography, despite its purported objectivity, has lately begun to reveal its own implicit bias. This bias, as in the works of Thomas Struth and Thomas Ruff, has been turned to new purposes insofar as photography has returned to its historical origin as "portraiture" – a phenomenon that also suggests not the death of painting, as expected in the 19th century, but its doubling in "photography as painting". As

portraiture, *Cam Girls* does not so much erase the disturbing origin of these images as suggest an alternative reading. Whether or not this possible alternative reading also neutralizes the path toward exploitation remains, out of necessity, in the eye of the beholder.

The nature of the disturbing origin of these images (no different than phone sex, some may say) begs several questions all at once. How old are these girls? Who is paying to view these "live" intrusions into the bedrooms of the willing subjects? What incentives other than money induces the subjects to perform for the online voyeur?

It is the Internet that permits the activities "documented" in this series of photographs that is ultimately called into question; its pervasiveness and its purpose. If by photographing the phenomenon Gaialight is also removing or bracketing the questionable socio-economic origin of the activity depicted, what is finally depicted? In a sense we have a process of erasure, albeit, one that leaves as trace all of the issues supposedly erased. In viewing the photographs of the casual, yet most likely *staged* promiscuity of young girls, and in permitting oneself to pretend that the innocence of the acts portrayed is restored, the calculated "disinterested" viewer of Art is also performing the game of erasing the true phenomenal source of the images. After all, then, the image resides in the conscience of the viewer, and the photographer vanishes as well.



GK (April 2011)

Images – Gaialight, *Cam Girls* (2011). Internet stills. © Gaialight, 2011.

BROOKLYN BUZZ



The *Brooklyn Buzz* series presents an extended visual exploration of Brooklyn, New York, and its inhabitants viewed through the frame of a bus window. The initial project was conceived, developed, and realized in the summer of 2010 (May-September) as a symbolic, photographic portrait of America in this specific time in history, a time of transition and constant, if not relentless, transformation profoundly related to the post-2007 global economic downturn and its effects on society, politics, and culture. Yet, beneath all of these more abstract terms is the very real and very precise terms of day-to-day life in the late-modern metropolis and its effects on singular human beings.

Each image is caught in passing, a chance arrangement of figures that appear for a moment in front of the camera before the bus moves on. *Brooklyn Buzz* is an original and intimate portrait that aims to capture the soul and powerful energy of Brooklyn, globally considered one of the hot spots of our days, although still largely unexplored and unknown. Shocking in many regards, *Brooklyn Buzz* is not the image of New York in 2010 that most Americans harbor, nor is it the image that New York projects to the world from the PR offices of the mayor or the glamorous Midtown headquarters of major corporate media.

The choice of abandoning overall control of the image, and placing ourselves at the mercy of circumstances, was inspired by Robert Frank's masterpiece *The Americans* (1955-1956) – widely considered a mirror reflecting 1950s America through European eyes – and by our personal desire to engage an emotionally challenging and visually striking exploration of the human and social landscape of Brooklyn, our adopted city since 2007. Frank's work, considered disturbing at the time of its publication, has since become a touchstone for the integrity of photo-journalistic reportage, with a major retrospective exhibition of all of the images in the book held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2009-2010.

Riding local buses with the intention of capturing the essence of “the real thing” was a very rewarding although tough experience: local buses are crowded with children and elders, with a humanity rarely to be seen on the Manhattan-centric subway cars. It feels like riding a mobile living room where you can experience a special intimacy and sense of sharing; where people talk, fight, laugh, sleep, eat, cry, scream, and listen, all the while observing one another through a filter of bodies. The windows also work as filters, but with the *outside* world: sometimes as enlarging lenses, amplifying and revealing unpredictable details, while capturing life as it is in that precise moment, in the streets, at the bus stop, through the windows of a local deli – frames framing other frames. Other times they work more as protective barriers, yet facilitating a deeply penetrating view into people's lives, momentary glimpses of otherwise unknown, hidden, forbidden, or difficult-to-access places, faces or circumstances. Stealing emotions with the camera, capturing an expression on a face, a body in motion, or a simple gesture is the very essence of photography's timeless and universal function to observe, record, and – without apology – comment.



Brooklyn Buzz is an ongoing experiment in documenting the current state of socio-economic affairs in America, against all counter claims by selective editing to mask the stresses the Republic is undergoing as it shifts from one condition to another; from boom to bust to – perhaps – another boom. The project visually *recreates* this

complex emotional experience through building an archive of the dispossessed, this “turning tide”, rather than merely describing it. It is the emotional charge of the images that is its means of commenting.

The extended intention of the project is to take it “on the road”, to travel the length and breadth of America by bus and document the general desuetude passing over the outmoded and the disenfranchised places and peoples of early 21st-century America. The artists (Giallight and Alessandro Cosmelli) propose to make this crosscountry journey through 2011-2012 in the run up to the presidential elections, producing a further series of images for the larger archival project while also searching for the always-present signs of renaissance amidst squalor.

Giallight and Alessandro Cosmelli (May 2011)



All images – Giallight and Alessandro Cosmelli, *Brooklyn Buzz* (2010). © Giallight and Alessandro Cosmelli, 2011.

BROOKLYN BUZZ: THE SEMI-DIVINE METROPOLIS

Gaialight and Alessandro Cosmelli



its relation to human subjectivity.

The window as “frame” is a condition given to art that is found in painting and in photography, from Medieval to the modern times. Two of the most famous examples of this visual construct in painting are Robert Campin’s *St. Barbara in Her Tower* (1438) and Caspar David Friedrich’s *Woman at the Window* (1822). Indeed, Friedrich’s appropriation of this pictorial device (especially, *View from the Artist’s Studio, Window on the Right*, c.1805-1806) was the impetus for an exhibition of paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art entitled “Rooms with a View: The Open Window in the 19th Century”, April 5-July 4, 2011. The exhibition focused on paintings inspired by Friedrich’s justly influential reworking of this thematic, a conceptual figure that came to represent the Romantic vision of the world at large and

Image – Gaialight and Alessandro Cosmelli, *Brooklyn Buzz* (2010). © Gaialight and Alessandro Cosmelli, 2011.

Brooklyn Buzz (2010), while referencing Robert Frank’s *The Americans*, a series of photographs taken in the 1950s as Frank traveled across America, accesses this same dimension in representation by using the window of a bus to frame and configure the outside world (Brooklyn, New York) from the relatively safe interior of the New York City bus. Frank, of Swiss origin, has rightly been termed a “documentary” photographer in the sense that his work captures the conditions of modern life in austere and unstaged images. Yet, to say his work is “documentary” also implies that it is objective, which is, after all, an impossible task assigned to the apparatus of photography itself (Vilém Flusser’s point¹), as all claims to “realism” for literature and painting are also suspect given that we remain in the realm of speculative mimesis in all arts that create worlds. The photographers of *Brooklyn Buzz*, while nominally bracketing their own role in the production of these images, nonetheless appear in the photographic agency of the images by way of their presence as subjects observing and recording what lies beyond the pane of glass, an evocation of the subjective state of Romantic painting insofar as the usually solitary figure of the paintings by Friedrich and others stands in for the viewing subject, or he/she who looks at the painting, albeit, non-objectively. Reflected, then, in these images of Brooklyn is the consciousness and *conscience* of their authors, the photographers, with the attendant result a subtle commentary on the relationship between seeing and being seen, and seeing and not being seen.

For this reason, we also find (after the fact) the very same operative agency in *Brooklyn Buzz* as we find in Chris Marker’s recent exhibition “Passengers” (Peter Blum Gallery, April 2-June 4, 2011), a series of photographs taken on the Paris Metro with a hidden camera. Marker, always more or less invisible within his work, and always attempting to vanish into that work, nevertheless has produced a body of work that is intensely charged with his own sense of what is immemorial in images. This immemorial quality is the “all-but-forgotten” origin of images, or what might be called “conscience” (and “memory”). Yet, it is correct – *after all* – to call such a state “objective” (or to personally vanish into the work); for “conscience” invokes the universal, and the universal (by definition) belongs to no one person.

The late-modern metropolis is pictured as “semi-divine” in *Brooklyn Buzz* in relation to its intersubjective conditions, arguably, the same reason that Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is a survey of the late-Medieval world at the dawn of the Renaissance. Yet it is only “semi-divine”, since the conditions portrayed, as in Marker’s world, suggest an economy of broken signifiers (world as distressed affective regime) awaiting “rebirth”.

GK (May 2011)

¹ See Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. Anthony Mathews (London: Reaktion, 2000).

RECONNAISSANCE: *LIGHT WAR*, *MASS SURVEILLANCE*, AND *VIDEO GAMES*



There are few ways of “looking” in the world that are truly dispassionate or do not involve one form or another of intentionality – the foremost in the latter case being the act of reconnaissance. Surveillance up close or from afar is a matter of observing activities that also require a certain distance or secrecy to properly record the activities observed. There is, of course, a regrettable aspect to surveillance that implies a somewhat malevolent Big Brother or Big Other keeping an eye on “his” minions. From Jeremy Bentham’s *The Panopticon Letters* (1787) to Wim Wenders’ film *The End of Violence* (1997) modern surveillance has invoked an all-seeing eye that is nominally utilitarian but potentially despotic.

Gaialight, *Light War* (2010). Photographic installation. Mixed media (snow and toy soldiers). © Gaialight, 2011.

Gaialight’s three recent series *Light War* (2010), *Mass Surveillance: Web Cams* (2011), and *Video Games* (2011) all contain an implicit or explicit threat, and all three are, additionally, acts of surveillance by the artist. *Light War* is perhaps the most innocent of the three, as it is also mordantly funny and suggests both a child’s game in the snow played with toy soldiers and a benevolent God watching from afar, perhaps disapprovingly but also with a certain tenderness for the mishaps of errant humanity. *Video Games*, while no longer a child’s game, documents a dangerous game nonetheless in a form that has become increasingly prevalent and increasingly violent as the technology in support of the computerized games has grown more and more realistic and more and more capable of delivering a devastating vision of contemporary society quite typically *urban*. These games combine misanthropy, misogyny, and general malevolence to such a degree that the act of documenting them via the Internet is a synoptic condemnation of violence with no suggestion of mercy. These merciless and lethal games underwrite a morbid symptom of late-modern culture and reinforce stereotypes and patterns of behavior that are simply indefensible. The somewhat innocent game of playing with toy soldiers or dolls has become, *with time*, the entirely culpable immersion in mindless games of slaughter, larceny, and sexual enslavement. Yet the fact that American soldiers train today for high-tech warfare using such games and simulations is essentially nothing more than an amplification of the earliest techniques for turning children into warriors, terrorists, and/or murderers.¹ The entire operation from childhood to adulthood is reducible in this regard to societal brainwashing.

Image (right) – *Video Games* (2010). *Six Days in Fallujah*. Video still. © Gaialight, 2011.



Mass Surveillance is the most slippery of the three acts of reconnaissance carried out by Gaialight insofar as the security camera is an intended means for keeping order, or for restoring order after something has gone awry. The multiplication of such cameras around the world is truly astonishing, from kindergartens to city streets to the bleak and empty edges of the landscape. Some are merely for pleasure and facilitate a bizarre form of armchair traveling by way of the Internet. Yet the vast majority of these cameras are conducive to placing the world under “house arrest.” The images delivered to computer screens around the world (authorized or otherwise), often arrive blurred or pixellated, strangely mirroring and fostering at once a new emergent aesthetic in photography sponsored in part by the smartphone and suggesting that a new empire of images is dawning, and that this empire is premised on a saturation that has its analogue in human consciousness proper – overall, a blatant and overt denigration of the very purpose of the photographic image.

¹ See Harun Farocki, *Serious Games I: Watson is Down* (2010). Two-channel video installation (color, sound). 8 minutes. Part of *Serious Games I-IV*, 2009-2010.

Gaialight's many excursions into this spiraling vortex of digital media, her appropriation of it for both reportage and for a calculated reduction of its ubiquity to a series of images that uncomfortably takes up residence within art photography, is, after all, a benevolent cause chasing a malevolent symptom – a mirror placed before the virtual and viral world of contemporary media as if to reflect or return that incipient or wholly contagious “dis-ease” back into the unreal-real world of art, both honoring the significance of the image as a form of thought and re-naturalizing the activity *portrayed* in the very medium *betrayed*.

GK (September 2011)



Gaialight, *Mass Surveillance: Web Cams* (2011). *Osaka, Japan*. Web cam still. © Gaialight, 2011.

FIRST CAUSE

First Cause (τι ὃ οὐ κινούμενον κινεῖ) is one of the great paradoxes of metaphysics and theology since Aristotle. As self-causing cause (*causa sui*) it negates much that is present in the logical apparatus of Reason. Yet, as Goya said, “The sleep of reason produces monsters” (“El sueño de la razón produce monstruos”).

Photography has a strange relationship to the images that inhabit the space of reason, arguably, the origin of discursive thought. If images precede thought, the great paradox of the First Cause is that it closes down discursive operations within thought, perhaps returning to the source of thought itself.



For this reason images are compact forms of knowledge, yet of a different order than most forms of knowledge insofar as they embody as a type of knot or a singularity that conceals the apparatus of their becoming images. Yet this, too, is not the “origin of photography” or of “thinking in images”. What precedes the production of the image is the very nature of seeing (and such also induces thought as a form of seeing). If this First Cause is the self-caused cause, and if the image may be thought of as a self-caused cause, then an approach appears for considering photography as a limit; as a making of thought as “image as limit”.

As an artist who has worked as appropriation artist, first creating an intensely charged set of collaged objects saturated with the imagery of pop culture, Gaialight, in turn, has begun through photography a distillation of the processes that were embedded in the earlier work; albeit, a set of works that were associative and highly liminal, existing at the crossroads of making images and *appropriating* images. With the *Darklight* series first formulated under the spell of Josef and Anni Albers, the approach to the image as First Cause first came into view.

Goya, *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*, from *Los Caprichos* (1799).

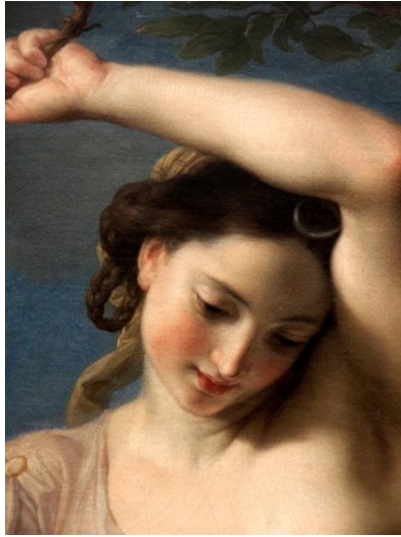
The camera is a notorious apparatus for the supposed capture of the soul of things, or at least this is the myth (and the argument for the necessity of the critique of photography). Yet, if one brackets the apparatus and enters the river of imagery that surrounds and inhabits us, one forever remains in the place of the First Cause – that is, what can only be called the “immemorial”. Chris Marker’s utter disregard for the conventions of art photography and for the conventions of presenting photographic works in gallery settings is indicative of the approach to the “origin of photography” *as memory*.

From *Darklight* forward, but especially with the 2010 series *Brooklyn Buzz* (with Alessandro Cosmelli), and with turns into new forms of appropriation (*Cam Girls* and *Met Ladies*), Gaialight has crossed the limit given to photography and entered the realm of “thinking in images”. With a similar disregard as Marker for the production of images aimed at the art world and its appetite for readily marketable works, Gaialight has begun to produce a body of work that “speaks the unspeakable name of the unnameable”; a double paradox in logical terms. For example, *Brooklyn Buzz*, in particular, resides at that limit where the term “documentary photography” has little or no meaning. In such instances, the term is on its way to vanishing. *Brooklyn Buzz* is a tour or *tour de force* of self-causing causes, here instanced as the ever-elusive image of humanity (the unnameable par excellence).

Paradoxes famously shut down logic; and logic famously is productive of mirages. *Causa sui* as liminal mirage (appearing at the limit of thought), *for the apparatus of thought*, is also the origin of thought. Just behind that origin is the “origin of photography” and memory.

GK (June 2011)

MET LADIES



“Art is based on no truth that exists before it; and one may say that it expresses nothing but itself. It creates its own equilibrium and its own meaning. It stands all by itself, like the zebra; or else it falls.” –Alain Robbe-Grillet

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is a vast labyrinth of Art. Its corridors and its galleries seem endless. There are two ways to access its collections; one is to target a specific exhibition and promptly leave; another is to wander “aimlessly” *with or without* purpose, extracting from the tableaux of rooms and collections a synoptic “cut” of what is present.

The latter manner of viewing art has a long lineage and has been foremost troubled by Alain Robbe-Grillet’s approach to figuration and its excessive emphasis on narrative content or authorized meanings. Part of the incipient post-structuralist project in Paris in the second half of the 20th century, Robbe-Grillet’s literary project has been to simply erase authorized meanings; thus Mark Tansey’s famous painting of Robbe-Grillet scrubbing the rocks of a barren landscape (*Robbe-Grillet Cleansing Every Object in*

Sight, 1981). Thus, too, Robbe-Grillet’s mesmerizing and by some estimations annoying screenplay for Alain Resnais’ circular and maddening film *The Last Year at Marienbad* (*L’année dernière à Marienbad*, 1960). Mesmerizing, annoying, circular, and maddening ... Such are the terms of endearment for an avant-garde approach to Art that leaves behind the usual means of measuring its worth.

Image (above) – *Met Ladies* (2011). *Light Appropriation of Diana and Cupid, Pompeo Girolamo Batoni, 1761. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York. © Gaialight, 2011.*

This is effectively a nihilist project; yet, an advanced nihilist project en route to somewhere or something else. As end in itself, such a project eventually depletes its own resources, as post-structuralism slowly faded in the 1990s and its chief protagonist Jacques Derrida exited the “room” with his seminal *Spectres of Marx* (*Spectres de Marx: L’état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*, 1993), alienating, in turn, both post-structuralists and Marxists in the process – engaging, after years of deferred promises, the figure who stood on the receding horizon of the materialist-determinist project of post-structuralism. In returning to Marx, Derrida also returned to the idea of the transcendental subject, a figure long deconstructed through the annals of post-structuralism. This figure returns as “ghost” and is detected as aggressive act of repression in Marx and Engel’s early work *The German Ideology* (*Die Deutsche Ideologie*, 1846).

Thus, we have before us the spectral nature of Art, as affirmed by Robbe-Grillet, and as tested and re-tested by Derrida, while the issue of the subject and subjectivity remains present (though famously through absence). With the end of post-structuralism, what returned was this very figure, half-starved for attention, we might say, and given to protestations regarding its purported “death”.

The “cut” proposed above for viewing Art in a manner given to extracting tropes or figures of speech (as evidenced by the famous Parti Pris series at the Louvre, in 1990, undertaken by such eminent figures as Peter Greenaway, Jean Starobinski, and – yes – Jacques Derrida) and/or isolating “moments” (as exemplified by the recent 2006 “excavation” of fragments of paintings of Tiepolo from the Ca’Dolfin, exhibited at the Met and analyzed and documented by art historian Svetlana Alpers, painter James Hyde, and photographer Barney Kulok) is, in effect, an analogical means for escaping art history per se – a process of selecting and editing, and a process of re-positioning the work in an *intentionally* ahistorical continuum, versus the authorized, pseudo-objective narratives of Art History proper. Intentionality, here, denotes the presence of the thinking subject, but face to face with everything else.

One finds, then, in Gaialight’s *Met Ladies* (2011) a similar means to undermine perceived and received truths in Art; not so much the radical gesture of Robbe-Grillet’s New Novel, but nonetheless *of the same spirit*. This spirit is, in fact, Spirit; it’s evocation of a time outside of the time of the artwork itself (negating its historical coordinates) engages through analogy and inference a vast otherness given to Art (with all due respect to the genius of Robbe-

Grillet and Derrida). This otherness is what transpires in the inner corridors of Art as passage to Spirit. That it takes place in the subject (in the mind's eye) is the problem. As problem, this process exceeds nonetheless the subject proper and analogically and anagogically accesses another subject altogether. In this respect the age-old suspicion regarding images becomes a central motif in works of art that circumvent the recognizable address (specific figure and delimited place) of art's taking place.

Art as intellectual and speculative capital becomes the issue. The spectral properties of *Met Ladies* induce not decentralized or deconstructive delirium but, instead, an internal (and idealist) survey of the merit of images appropriated in this case from the immense vault of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This intellectual capital, in turn, is the wealth of the paintings collected by Gaialight; that is, the Met Ladies act as classic metonyms for a wealth *within painting*, albeit hidden there by the art-historical project. In extracting this wealth, Gaialight has returned the speculative premises of the works to their primary address – the mind's eye.

Since 2007 (and surviving the economic meltdown of the intervening years), Art has proven to be the penultimate form of speculative capital (Art as penultimate surplus value). Art's use value is of little concern in this sense. Its surplus value is immense, if not infinite. This surplus or excess in the production of Art pushes the artwork toward Spirit proper. For these reasons *Met Ladies* as “curatorial vision” crosses the last frontiers of art-historical scholarship and arrives “home”. The Met Ladies and their return or averted gaze (*as subjects*) invoke all that resides outside of the nominal subject, or, as Jean-Luc Godard implied by elliptical means in his 2001 film *Eloge de l'amour*, all that overflows singular images. For Godard this *quelque chose* (something else), repetitive signpost within the gravely non-linear and non-narrative film, is Life (or History).

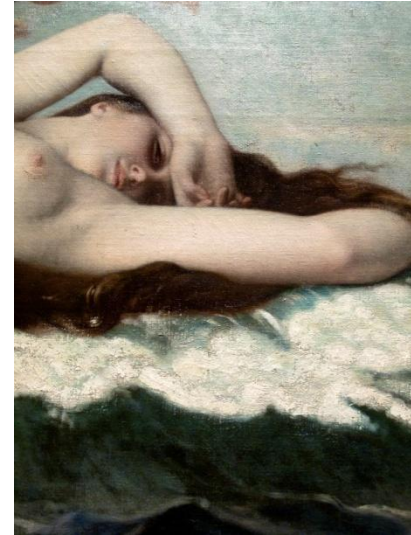


Image (right) – *Light Appropriation of The Birth of Venus* by Alexander Cabanel, 1875. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York. © Gaialight, 2011.

If it is History as Spirit proper that overflows all images, and thereby serves to overrun and cancel the figurative boundaries of the singular image (mnemonic or otherwise), then with the return of the subject a return of what is not-subject also returns. This excess permeates *Met Ladies*. The “cut” performed by Gaialight in the echoing corridors and galleries of the Met extracts from the singular work of art all that Art truly accesses and what the singular work of art represses.

GK (June 2011)

WHEN CAM GIRLS MET LADIES

How photography comments on, distorts, or documents conditions in the world is part and parcel of its discursive practice as an art. In this sense, the two photographic series by Gaialight, *Cam Girls* (2011) and *Met Ladies* (2011), have, at first glance, nothing much in common. Yet, once the surface of the image is dealt with (and its suspected narrative content demolished) the photographic image as a type of limit becomes in itself the actual subject of these works. But image of what?

As limit, images are predictable insofar as they compress and, to a certain degree, shut down and silence the origin of the image – its socio-economic origin or its reference to specific subjects or objects within the world. Franco Moretti's great insight into the novel as a means of providing an "exit" from what there is literally no exit from – that is, the world at large – is also an extraordinary admission that the world is an immense construction of interlocking visions (an internalizing artwork built atop a very real base or ground).

There are certain intellectual and ethical issues with *Cam Girls*, for example, that are unavoidable. The first order of inquiry in the reception of these images is their origin in the socio-economic conundrum that induced this digital game of eroticized hide-and-seek between young women and online (presumable male) voyeurs. In the case of *Met Ladies* the game is of another order and another time. The time of the museum is caught in this series as a strange but very much alive art-historical time that suggests even the well-known critique of museums as mausolea is at least half wrong (and, therefore, half true). *Met Ladies* is art-archaeological in this sense, but it is also playing against the conventions of the museum and its preferred means of reception – the authorized linear narrative of modern art history. In producing this synoptic, photographic survey of paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and in selecting from within select canvases a "cut" or portion of that preferred means of reception, Gaialight has – as with *Cam Girls* – indulged the artistic volition of imposing a limit and in doing so engaging an unlimited formal force field within both art and photography (in Moretti's sense a world-historical force field). This is the paradoxical nature of art and its means of producing singular moments within a larger order that reduces and refines that order. The "cut" is, therefore, analogous to a tailor taking a bolt of cloth and removing what is required to fashion a jacket or coat. In this manner the "cut" performed in the echoing corridors of the Met extracts from singular historical works of art what such works often repress through their own relationship to image as limit.

In the case of *Cam Girls* the Internet is an important aspect of the conditions supporting the images. Yet, in the images, as limits imposed by photography, this origin is effectively neutralized or bracketed. Through the erasure of the means supporting the activities portrayed a trace is retained of the innocence and light promiscuity behind the questionable socio-economic phenomenon proper.

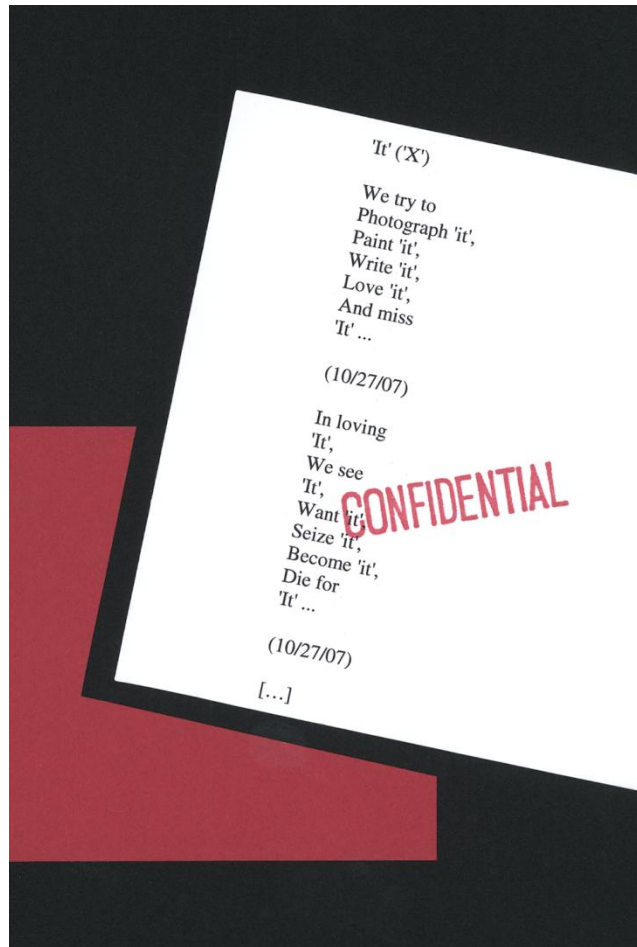
The most obvious perspective relative to the content provided by both *Cam Girls* and *Met Ladies* is the liberation of a certain old-fashioned and out-moded term. The first sense or first temptation is to gender this term and offer it as some sort of comment on the exploitation of women. But the larger and overriding term engaged by these works is the ultimate term of endearment given to universal humankind (the nod toward Humanity proper), making these images an act and survey of the state of that quaint and old-fashioned term.

In photography and painting it is axiomatic that the subject of the work often looks back at the observer, two gazes meeting. Here, however, the gaze is tripled and its three forms only meet in a fourth subject, converging on the universal subject of all Art, a somewhat forgotten subject that inhabits the internal force field of the photograph. That forgotten subject is universal subjectivity itself, and a condition or state almost always translatable to "conscience".

GK (July 2011)

N.B.: As Chris Marker once said (in the film *Le fond de l'air est rouge*), "images sometimes tremble". They do so because they enfold as virtuous limit (as apparent singular thing) the very image of a fragile, imperiled, and fluctuating universal subject.

OUTTAKES (2007)



15 QUESTIONS ABOUT EDITIONED ART PHOTOGRAPHY

- 1/ Where do the “vintage” pre- and post-war modern editions come from (e.g., Josef Sudek, Man Ray, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Richard Avedon, Helmut Newton, et al.)? Estates, private collections, the artists (when they are, in fact, still alive)?
- 2/ Who are the “collectors”/buyers of the same (that is, pre- and post-war modern photography)? And, are they different than the “collectors”/buyers of contemporary photography (that is, so-called postwar and contemporary)?
- 3/ How do they (the “collectors”/buyers) find the editions they collect (that is to say, how do they “look” for what they already or *might* collect)? And, how do they “evaluate” the same?
- 4/ What documentation accompanies “vintage” editions (for example, provenance, edition numbers, etc.)? And, how is it different, if at all, from contemporary editioned photography?
- 5/ What technical issues have changed with “vintage” editions and contemporary editions (for example, print quality, verso notations, stamps, editioning details, etc.)?
- 6/ Is gelatin silver a thing of the past (for the most part), insofar as collectors are concerned, or is it still valid today (as a signature quality/gesture to that same “past”? And, is the outsized Chromogenic print (for example, the “Struffskys”) a passing fancy or a sustainable format and genre within editioned photography?
- 7/ What is the perception of the C-print, in general, in the editions market? And, what is the perception of the Cibachrome print as the immediate predecessor of the C-print? Are there “collectors” who disparage one or the other or both (or neither)?
- 8/ Is “archival ink-jet print” a bona fide advance or unique variation on editioned prints, or is it a contemporary manifestation (of questionable merit) in digital processing/printing?
- 9/ Is the “absence of a negative” perceived as a problem, or has digital photography become an acceptable medium alongside or in advance (as improvement) of “analog” photography?
- 10/ In the secondary market (that is, auction houses, art fairs, and such) is the editioned photograph fully documented (that is, is the number of prints in an edition properly authenticated and documented)?
- 11/ In the secondary market is the current high price for postwar contemporary photography (as in the November 20, 2007 Phillips de Pury & Company auction in London) a sign of: A/ pre-war, modern photography is less available and/or therefore more costly; B/ postwar, contemporary photography is a better value overall (investment toward re-sale at a later date)?
- 12/ Are “collectors” a larger force now in the promotion, sale, and re-sale of editioned photography than institutions (galleries, museums, etc.), as in the past, and, if so, is it the speculative nature of the secondary market (art as investment) or the love of the work, or both, that accounts for (drives) this?
- 13/ Does presentation (for example, folio) enhance the sale of editioned photography (as set) or detract (as set and as folio)? And, do so-called multiples that include or are exclusively photography have a future, especially regarding emerging artists?
- 14/ Do emerging artists of various media (that is, contemporary “visual artists”), using editioned photography to market their work (sculptural, installation, performance, video, and otherwise), have a critical role to play in the editions market; that is to say, is such acknowledged and collected in any notable/significant way beyond the established artists who represent safe investments?
- 15/ Is the “Great Archive” (that is, the late-modern museum) *critically* active/engaged in the commission, production, and collection of contemporary art photography, or is it, to a greater extent, instead, the galleries that play this role?

GK (November 2007)

A FEW AWKWARD QUESTIONS FOR FRANCESCA WOODMAN

Dear Francesca Woodman,

A few awkward questions which your “you” (*votre vous*) shall never answer ...

Tonight I visited Marian Goodman Gallery for the opening of “Francesca Woodman” (November 28, 2007-January 5, 2008). I wonder what you would think of this “posthumous” retrospective after all these years, and what you would make of the purposes of the same, and the intentions of “your estate” in bringing a horde of “vintage gelatin silver prints” to market, plus the additional, perhaps truly strange, gesture of scanning and re-printing your BFA work from Rhode Island School of Design as delightfully outsized C-prints. But these questions can wait, for several reasons, until I set the main theme of this “letter to a dead artist” – that is to say, What was your relationship to Truth?

All persons have purposes ... There are *no* pointless people, though we might at times think so. Each person has a relationship to Truth – good, bad, indifferent, and, in rare cases, One to One. It is this “One to One” that interests “me” in asking “you” these prototypical, unanswerable questions. Or, it is what provokes this critique of *that* exhibition, insofar as I actually need to ask these questions for all the reasons that I allude to in the foregoing, preliminary inquisition (or “inquest”).

Thus, I see in your work everything that has been since appropriated by contemporary art theory, foremost post-feminism; and I see, as well, utter, absolute confusion. I do not see my confusion, but yours. I see this confusion as not our confusion, but the primordial confusion of Self and Other (pardon the trendy phraseology); or, I see what I suppose you staged in all of your work as auto-portrait, that is, “you” as “You” and your camera as proverbial and hyper-real Other, and I do not use this capitalized term *Other* lightly or in any other sense than that with which it always rings true – as *Not-I* (as Levinas might have said).

Perhaps, here, we have the ultimate conundrum at play and the wild and fauve “nature” that you expose in your primordially precise images of the subject lost in the diagrammatical world of things, places, and situations, plus history as ruin, or theatrical *mise-en-scène* as ridiculous antithesis to our logocentric madhouse (after Artaud). But I digress ...

So, my awkward questions include, if you are “there” (still paying attention!), What, if anything, is this body of work today, given that it is plagued by the very plague that plagued those times in which it was *not* part and parcel of what was considered “of the moment”? And, if this introduces a rhetorical chiasmus, so be it, even if it performs, as well, what seems to be buried in your work, with “you” – for example (but not exclusively), the immense Question Itself (or Question Mark raised to the “nth” degree, and, therefore, approaching Zero, in passing). As Tolstoy would say, “Drops dripped.” And, it is this “in passing” that makes, today, your work, as cumulative, excoriating something, something truly more valuable than (let us say) the detritus currently on exhibit at Gagosian by Richard Prince and others (meaning he, “RP”, personally, continues to empty his studio of every last shred of anything to “cash out”, whereas your venerable estate has merely searched high and low for your remaining seminal work (the “vintage gelatin silver prints”), while making a concession to the hyper-market of this time by generating “Francesca Woodman 2.0”, in the form of C-prints of slightly damaged and slightly ravaged works from c.1978, the aforementioned BFA “studies”, which resonate within the MG exhibition as homage to 1920s avant-garde photography, but also with the very exact and same crisis (hunt and interrogation), timeless and otherwise, the circling of and bewilderment in what constitutes subjectivity, or that exact nightmare that remains unresolved today, even after the post-phenomenological “turn” into atheology (a “formal theology” without God) and its post-post-modern iteration as “affective nothingness”, etc., “till the cows come home”.

We are faced (“you” and “I”), therefore, with the ineluctable problem of *not* discussing this in any real way (though, if I do the math, today you would be within range “for me”, and I could easily fall for “you”). That said, this problem is not so much a problem as a rhetorical device to actually unearth what is there anyway and is undeniable. The awkward moment you do not find yourself in, truly, is “my” awkward moment “for you”. And it is this awkward moment that I suggest is exactly why you might pitch into a rage at what you would see if you drifted through MG on 57th Street at this time. You would find a vast array of your work assembled with curatorial precision, but without any precise documentation or editing – at once both a gesture toward your own

indifference to the same, but a *fait accompli* in the sense that it is a hopeless undertaking to establish the limits of these prints today (as you gave so many away in your own day). I am not amazed that this is what passes for “authenticity” today, as I am not surprised that Richard Prince continues to dump his entire studio and all of its outtakes hastily into Gagosian whenever possible (the Upper East Side “Gagosian”), including at the exact moment that he has an exhibition at the Guggenheim, to mixed reviews, mind you (and which I did not bother to see, other than to duck in one late afternoon and scan FLW’s spiral, as it rose to infinity and returned to Earth with nothing much to say at all). But I must say, in closing, that I adored his *Naked Nurses* series, as I somehow suspect “you” would have as well. What I do not care much for is the exploitation of: A/ dead artists; and B/ the gullible art public. Both are avoidable; both are regrettable. What I do admire is your simply gorgeous work and its ineffable “breathlessness” – or, its “Dickinsinian” odes to “disappearing” (melting away). For Richard I’d have another set of questions, or perhaps the same questions re-addressed to his own pursuit of “Truth”.

GK (November 2007)

OCTOBER REVOLUTION

I. "X" (Il y a ...)

There is a
Resounding "X"
At the center
Of the World,
The Moral Law,
The Starry Sky –
Or, all we'd
Love to embrace
If we might
Leave the knot
And tied tongue
Of what is
Merely Being ...

(10/26/07)

II. "It" ("X")

We try to
Photograph "it",
Paint "it",
Write "it",
Love "it",
And miss
"It" ...

In loving
"It",
We see
"It",
Want "it",
Seize "it",
Become "it",
Die for
"It" ...

III. OCTOBER REVOLUTION

36x (36 eXposures)

Saturday, October 27, 2007
Rain, heavy at times, 70 ...
Today: Rain heavy at times,
High 66 to 70 ...
(*New York Post*, pp. 1, 22)

LIBRA – You may not have much
time to spare for fun and games this
weekend but that's good because
there are important issues that need
to be resolved. As so often happens
you have allowed things to drift but



your money situation demands that
you act quickly and decisively to plug
the hole in your finances.
(“Daily Horoscope”, *New York Post*, p. 33)

IV. TECHNICAL ISSUES

Fujichrome 64T (II)
RTP11 (135), Tungsten

Conservatory Water,
Boat Pond, and back ...
1:30 to 4 p.m., 10/27/07

Kodak Retina IB
Schneider-Kreuznach
5392550 Retina-Xenar
F: 2.8/50 mm.

V. THE VOYAGE

Lenin in Zurich,
closed train
through Germany
to “Russia” ...

VI. STRATEGIC RESOURCES

\$2.00 for the price of the film
(past its sell-by date),
whatever for the processing ...
Prints, texts, and salutation –
priceless ...

The price of the closed train
'cross Germany ... The notebooks,
the tea, the vodka ...
The pen and ink, the paper,
The Time That Remains ...

VII. APRÈS NOUS ...

Lenin, rumored to have
pillaged the Russian treasury,
having exported the proceeds ...
Did he have “revolutionary creditors”?
Lenin, rumored to have dropped into
the Cabaret Voltaire ...
Did he dismiss the mayhem as
mere bourgeois bad taste?
Lenin, rumored to have been
favored by the Mahatmas (Great Souls),
Roerich being his emissary ...
The famous “tenth letter” of
the Mahatma Letters, a diatribe
against all theistic urges –

was it written in red or
blue crayon?

(10/27/07)

VIII. THE “MERCILESS”

I arrived in “Russia”,
and Chopin was a potato
vodka ... These people
could be at Gstaad, but
could they “ski”, or
would they merely make
merry, while Moscow burns?
The wind sways the awnings,
the British tourists want
to know where the nearest
subway is, the Sun
illuminates the columns
from the “left” (*à la*
Vermeer), and the “Merciless”
arrives (on dove’s wings) ...

(10/28/07)

IX. HALLOWEEN

We were in a wine bar
in LIC, when the
“Merciless” arrived ...
It swooped through
the window, sliced off
our heads, circled round,
sliced and diced
the October pumpkins,
then served us
pumpkin pie on
paper plates with
plastic forks ...

X. NECESSITY

I collected the slides,
36 exposures, spread them
on the light table,
examined them with lupe,
chose 24 of the 36,
examined them again,
chose 12 of the 24,
walked out the door,
and at the corner of
Fifth and 22nd tossed
the unnecessary 24 into
the trash can ...



XI. BOLIVAR PLAZA

We used to meet at
Bolivar Plaza (CPS),
9 to 9:30 a.m., until she
ran away to Rome,
boxes of crutches and
walkers shipped gratis
by Alitalia ...

I wondered if I'd
recognize her in winter garb,
when the equestrian statues
are plastered with snow ...

I waited till 9:20 a.m.,
but she never arrived ...

XII. MORAL BEAUTY

Moral Beauty,
the True, and
the "Merciless" –
archaic, gorgeous,
the Real (or, all
we'd gladly accept
in lieu of that
which we have) ...

(10/31/07)

XIII. NOVEMBER

[...]

(11/01/07)

GK (November 2007)



[...]