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# An Atlas of Clichés. Peter Fischli and David Weiss' *Visible World*
# Un atlas de clichés. *Visible World* de Peter Fischli et David Weiss

Danièle Méaux

See table of contents

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Article abstract

To produce the *Visible World* series, Peter Fischli and David Weiss took, during their travels around the world, a vast number of photographs resembling those taken by tourists on holiday. These pictures function as "clichés" in both senses of the French term. Via their banality and their quantity, the photographs reflect a form of universal assent to the beauty of the world, all while serving as a reminder of the fragility of the planet.

# An Atlas of Clichés. Peter Fischli and David Weiss' *Visible World*

## *Un atlas de clichés. Visible World de Peter Fischli et David Weiss*

**Danièle MÉAUX**

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## Abstract

To produce the *Visible World* series, Peter Fischli and David Weiss took, during their travels around the world, a vast number of photographs resembling those taken by tourists on holiday. These pictures function as "clichés" in both senses of the French term. Via their banality and their quantity, the photographs reflect a form of universal assent to the beauty of the world, all while serving as a reminder of the fragility of the planet.

**Keywords:** Photography; Contemporary art; Books; Installations; Clichés

## Résumé

Pour leur série *Visible World*, Peter Fischli et David Weiss réalisent, au fil de leurs déplacements aux quatre coins du monde, un grand nombre de photographies qui ressemblent à celles que produisent les touristes. Ces images se présentent comme des « clichés » dans les deux sens du terme. De par leur banalité et leur nombre, elles renvoient à une forme d'assentiment partagé devant la beauté du monde. Elles rappellent dans le même temps la précarité de la planète.

**Mots-clés :** Photographie; Art contemporain; Livre; Installation; Cliché

At the end of the 1980's, Swiss artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss began a decades-spanning collaboration on a vast collection of photographs taken during their travels. While the vast majority of the pictures have a note of familiarity due to their mirroring of photographs taken by tourists as souvenirs of their trips around the world, the very number of images is such that upon presentation of the archive, in book forms or installations, a spectator could not possibly examine each particular image, imposing the very agreed manner in which the world is seen.

The immense atlas of clichés, entitled *Visible World,* (1979-2012) has been reimagined and displayed in various installations, exhibitions, and print format (Baqué, 1998: 270). The continual growth of the archive and its various iterations bring into question established hierarchies between the activities of the masses and those reserved for the elite. As Fischli and Weiss sought neither accomplishment or uniqueness in this undertaking, the photographs gathered from their travels are, simply put, trite. And yet, despite the triteness of the representations, they evoke emotion in the spectator confronted with the archive's universality, forced to take in the photographed beauties of the world. In projecting this form of shared admiration for the riches of the planet, be they natural or man-made, *Visible World* also fuels a concern for the threats these very riches face in this Anthropocene age.

Firstly, I shall review the notion of "cliché" as it is the primary instrument of analysis I employ on *Visible World*. I will then analyze Peter Fischli's and David Weiss' long collaboration to identify the different levels which coexist in the appreciation of their work. To do so, the intrinsic variability of their work will be considered. Finally, I will show how this atlas of clichés leads to reflection on the precariousness of the globalized world in which we live.

# "Clichés"

In etymological terms, the words "stereotype," "cliché," or "copy" refer to concrete objects or processes used in printing or the arts for the purposes of reproduction or duplication. "Pouncing," or tracing paper with tiny holes, allows a preparatory drawing to be transferred onto a surface to be painted. In former times, the method was notably used to make frescos. "Cliché" and "stereotype" designated prints on metallic plates produced from a typographic composition with movable type; during the growth of the press in the 19th century, this allowed for rapid, large print runs at a lower cost. The terms "cliché" and "stereotype" both belong, therefore, to what Walter Benjamin would refer to as the era of mechanical reproduction (2011 [1939]). By extension, in 1860, the word "cliché" came to mean a photographic negative from which positive images could be drawn. Later it referred to the positive image on a transparent support used for projection, but the process fell into disuse; to avoid confusion, this type of image is currently referred to as a "slide." Nowadays, in French, we usually speak of a "cliché" to designate a photograph, and the term seems to belong to the vocabulary of photography rather than that of printing, not excluding it as such from the semantics of reproduction and mass diffusion.
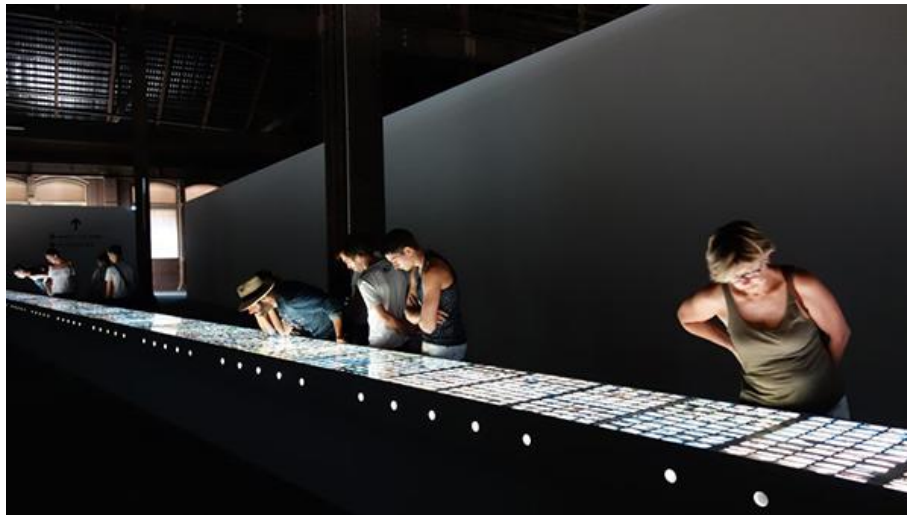
Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Visible World* (1986-2001)

15 light tables and 3000 small format photographs

Photograph taken at the Fondation Luma in Arles (2017)

© Peter Fischli & David Weiss, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

As in English, the French term is also used in a figurative sense to characterize an overused formula, frequently repeated identically. Vital Gadbois defines the term "cliché" as an "often-used" phrase, "often borrowed by one speaker from another, and thus giving the impression of grand banality," whereas the term "commonplace [...] concerns [...] meaning and not [verbal] expression[1]" (1974: 30 [my translation]). Likewise, for Ruth Amossy and Elisheva Rosen, the "cliché" is by nature "discursive, in contrast to the commonplace which cannot be defined at a verbal level[2]" (1983: 71 [my translation]). However, the terms "cliché" and "commonplace" are also decried today: the ordinary citizen's receptivity to dominant representations and pre-conceived ideas is stigmatized. These terms denote norms and great quantity, while in today's mainstream culture, value is deemed to reside instead in subjectivity and originality.

Nevertheless, the "commonplace" was not always viewed so pejoratively (Amossy, 1991). In ancient times, *topoï* designated certain categories of arguments likely to be successful in debate or logic owing to their broad scope and general recognition. Their rhetorical interest laid not in their noetic quality but in their function. Integrated into the *inventio*, topoï constituted a reserve of familiar discursive phrases apt to create adhesion. This acceptance lasted a long time; but gradually, in the 18th century, a change of perspective came about and from the next century, "the trivial [was] no longer the crossroads of a community, but the point of separation between the individual and the common path: it designate[d] the zone of division and distinction of the individual and the social dimension[3]" (Amossy and Herschberg, 1997: 18 [my translation]). Anthologies of "received ideas" (Flaubert, 1913) thus sprung up, betraying the elite's scorn for common opinion. The 20th century saw the continuation of this highlighting of individuality and difference, and especially so in the field of the arts, where, according to *doxa*, nothing supplants innovation. Originality in this field becomes dogma and is, by the way, strongly stereotyped.

Photography is an exercise which hinges on the mechanic reproduction of the visible and which can prove to be relatively easy. Throughout the history of the medium these characteristics have frequently been cited to justify its exclusion from the field of the arts. For Pierre Bourdieu, photography is "middle-brow art" (Bourdieu, 1965) that anyone can take up depending on their class motivations, their desire for integration or distinction in relation to the community. The vast accessibility of photography as a quasi-universal practice posits the everyday viewer in the position of the capturer of the image, reintegrating the universality of the exercise into the experience of the image rendered. As a mass pursuit, it is thus determined by norms and customs and forever linked to its socially attributed functions. The "clichés" — in the true photographic sense of the term — thus appear as *de facto* "clichés" in the figurative sense. It is this double exercise of the "cliché" that Peter Fischli and David Weiss question within *Visible World*.
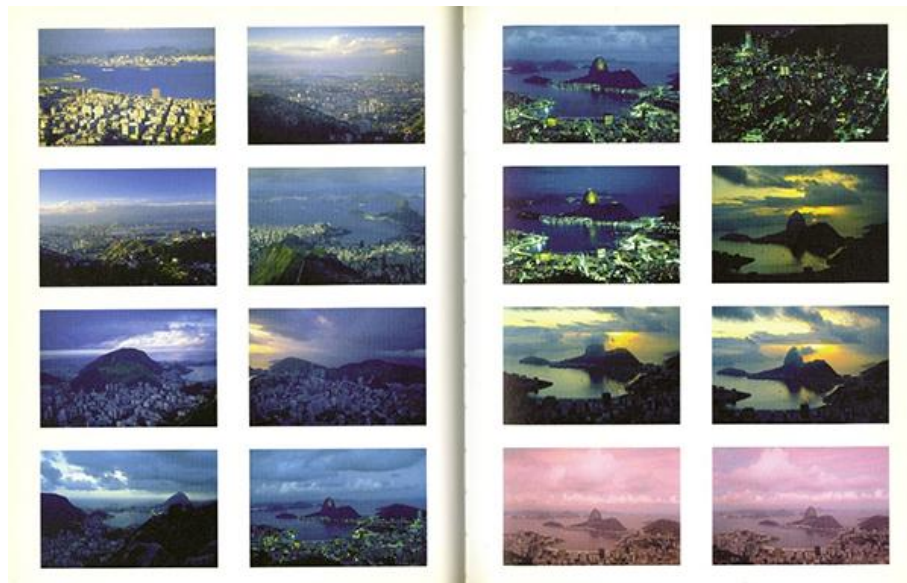
## *Visible World*

Fischli and Weiss began collaborating in 1979 and continued to do so until the latter's death in 2012. All their joint work, marked by the production of the emblematic short film *Der Lauf der Dinge* (1987), demonstrates a fascination for the most banal of objects often featured in totally burlesque or incongruous situations (Millar, 2007). In the films *Der Geringste Widerstand* (1980) and *Der Rechte Weg* (1983), Fischli and Weiss appear disguised as a bear and a rat conversing on art and life before the camera. The posing of playfully assembled items in 1984 in *A Quiet Afternoon* — sausages, worn out tools or empty bottles, arranged in an unstable equilibrium — seems to stem from a form of infantile creativity or a "bricolage," as defined by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955): the materials used are cheap, often second-hand, the arrangements rudimentary (Parvu, 2021: 30). For *A Quiet Afternoon*, the artists again produced simulacrums of ready-mades, copies in plastic of simple everyday objects. They undermined, in this case, the expectations of the public since these were fakes and not real ordinary objects being introduced into the museum environment. In *Sonne, Mond und Stern* in 2008, the two artists gathered an exceptional quantity of advertisements from the press which was displayed without any additional commentary. As evidenced by even just this brief survey of their realizations, the Swiss duo's decidedly derisive work is inspired by concrete reality and banality (Baqué, 2004: 26).

In 1987 Peter Fischli and David Weiss began to constitute the immense archive called *Visible World*, a collaboration which only came to an end in 2000. A veritable work in progress, the archive brought together the impressive quantity of photographs taken by the two artists during their journeys around the globe. The collected images resemble postcards or photographs taken by tourists to immortalize their trips, and thus by reproducing "déjà vu" figurative formulas they constitute "clichés," in both senses of the term. Few human beings, but lots of sunsets, wonderful flowers, snow covered peaks, exotic landscapes, pastoral scenes, famous monuments... Certain motifs are man-made creations, part of a cultural heritage, while others are more natural elements: in any event, in *Visible World*, mountain glaciers border Inca temples and plant and flower beds appear in close proximity to port towns. In this copious collection of gradually accumulated images, a special place is allocated to airports as places heavily-frequented by travellers. The recurrence of airport terminals and tarmacs contributes to the atmosphere of tourist activity. Views of world-famous sites are also featured: the Eiffel Tower, the Pyramids of Giza, the Sugar Loaf in Rio de Janeiro.

These images appear terribly familiar: they show subjects beloved by ordinary tourists, taken in a flat manner with no particular technicity, no formal composition, along the conventional lines of amateur photographers. Confronted with the images of *Visible World*, the viewer may be reminded of "the absurd paintings" Arthur Rimbaud (1977 [1873]: 228) liked so much. The images of Peter

Fischli and David Weiss certainly appear absurd; they are devoid of any desire for distinction and reflect a naïve adherence to the notion of a "lovely picture."



Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Visible World* (2000)

From Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Visible World*, Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 260 p.

© Peter Fischli & David Weiss, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

What is most disconcerting for the spectator is that the photographs seem nevertheless to be relatively pleasant, displaying soft rainbow type colours, the friendly tones of dawn, the harmonious proportions of a site. The charms of reality seem to be expressed without any filter, the operators having simply captured what was laid out before them. Respecting the most conventional methods of figuration eclipses the very form of the photograph by the viewer who goes straight to the heart of the subject and is touched by its "grace." Notwithstanding their banality, the sites on show manifest a certain seduction capable of unsettling the spectator (Waters, 2006: 31). When looking at the photographs, the viewer is surprised by feelings of simple child-like pleasure in contemplating these magnificent fragments of the "visible world." The choice of the title is not insignificant: put together, the photographs compose a sort of atlas of the planet and of the pleasure found in its attractions.

It should be noted that these are not, as is the practice of many artists today, pre-existing images simply selected out of piles of postcards in antique or flea markets or even appropriately downloaded images from websites. The photographs are all instead taken by the artists themselves. Rather than attempt to ironically counterfeit tourist practices, to pastiche the folly of the madding crowds, on the contrary, Fischli and Weiss chose to replicate the transitivity of photographs taken by amateurs, to assume their naivety and to exert a penchant towards capturing the pleasing views which presented themselves. To achieve this effect, they had perhaps to overcome a resistance to photographing what had already been captured, or to photographing what is beautiful in reality with the knowledge that the image cannot improve upon or increase the beauty of the subject. The artists had to make efforts to achieve a primal humility, to snap unstudied photographs before the

attractions of the "visible world," an exercise no doubt requiring them to set aside of a certain self-respect to join a commonly shared inclination.

## The Trials of "Bathmology"

Faced with all these accumulated images, the viewer finds themself torn between the rejection of "vulgarity," kitsch, and "uncultivated" participation in a rediscovered delight. In viewing the gigantic archive, the spectator may experience within themself a co-existence of contradictory sentiments, and the surprise of feeling such ambivalence. Roland Barthes' notion of "bathmology" proves especially pertinent when grasping the diverging appreciations surfacing at the same time in the spectator's spirit: "Every discourse is caught up in the interplay of degrees. We might call this interplay *bathmology*. A neologism is not superfluous if it gives us the notion of a new science: that of the degrees of language. [...] [I]t will straddle, as between one step and another, all *expression*." (1977 [1975]: 66-67)

The first step of the spectator is undoubtedly a critical consideration of this accumulation of photographs, devalued at the same time both by their quantity and their banality. Many works these days problematize the never-ending flow of images which constantly submerge us (Gunthert, 2015): *24 Hours of Photographs* (2011), an installation designed by Erik Kessels stigmatizes, for example, the overwhelming flux of images circulating on the Web. To produce this work, the Dutch photographer, designer and curator printed all the photographs posted online during a period of twenty-four hours on the photograph sharing website Flickr. Similarly, during the 2013 edition of the Arles Rencontres internationales de la photographie, the paper prints poured in a compact torrent onto the floor of the Archbishop's Palace. The installation was paradoxical since it materialized an outpouring which in fact was only made possible by de-materializing images destined for mass circulation (Buignet, 2017). It almost goes against the grain to display such a number through a concrete, physical accumulation of photographs, since the images uploaded to the website are not typically intended for print (Rouillé, 2020: 30).

The exponential quantity of images circulating in contemporary society is also questioned by American artist Penelope Umbrico, who systematically collects photographs of trivial subjects (sunsets, television screens or second-hand desks available online) from social media networks, in particular Flickr. Collecting photographs in such a way allows Umbrico to sort them into thematic grids[4], to construct monumental mosaic murals, stigmatizing a "social fact" as highlighted by Émile Durkheim (1895). The mass of images, intangible and elusive online, takes on a concrete and objective consistence once arranged on the wall (Nardin, 2020).

Erik Kessels and Penelope Umbrico do reassemble found images, rather than feature snapshots taken by themselves, in contrast to the images included in *Visible World*; that Fischli and Weiss produced their own images does not, however, inhibit their conforming to popular tastes, structured by the practices of mass tourism. Generally focused on a standard motif which legitimizes the photograph by its intrinsic qualities, the snapshots possess relatively pronounced tonalities that, one might say, "serve the subject." In the conceptual movement, other artists have taken up a form of "voluntary regression" by duplicating the practices of amateur photography, producing photographs which are clumsy, grey, blurred or badly framed. The practitioners of "poor photography" (Baldner and Vigouroux, 2005) work in the same way. They cultivate "flops" for their plastic or semantic effects. There is none of this with Peter Fischli and David Weiss who take quite standard touristic photographs, though ones which are "accomplished" in that most of the time the images are sharp and relatively harmoniously arranged (Godfrey, 2006: 279). However, what the two Swiss artists' photographs share with tourist photographs is their easy and attractive nature: easy because they are unsophisticated, but also attractive because they are easy...

There exists therefore a kind of second degree in the consideration of the archive. The intellectual vigilance of the spectator unwinds as they scan the images and surprise themself by adhering to a universal yet naïve satisfaction in the face of the "visible world." The vernacular aspect of the photographs, the absence of any exercise of virtuosity or distinction emanating from the operator, everything allows for direct access to the attractions of reality. The mediocrity of the compositions also means that the spectator feels they are on an equal footing with the operators whose know-how is far from impressive. The archive thus tends to become a space of sharing, far from any aspiration towards sophistication or culture. The very predictability of the images leads, in a certain way, towards their transparency. Each one keeps deep down within himself the traces of the child he might have remained, wondering, as Peter Fischli asks in *Findet mich das Glück*, "Can I rediscover my innocence?" (Fischli and Weiss, 2003).
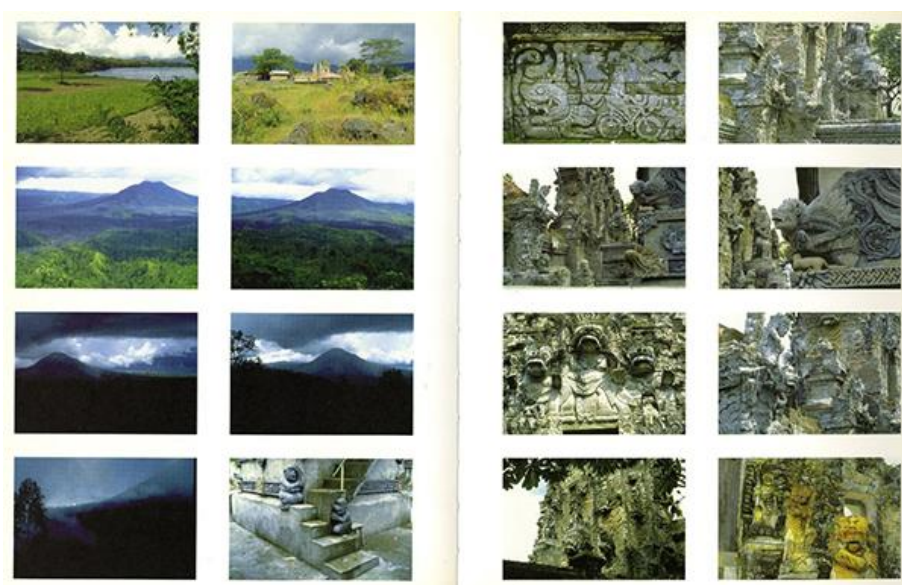


Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Visible World* (2000)

From Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Visible World*, Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 260 p.

© Peter Fischli & David Weiss, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

The spectator is also struck by the sheer number of images, creating a strange form of universality. In fact, while the very quantity of objects might seem to devalue them, this sense is attenuated once a certain threshold has been crossed. The emotion incited by a particular image may result from the accumulation of all emotions elicited by each of the individual photographs viewed until that point, and yet the large number of images transforms the nature of the viewer's overall impression of any single picture. Here the mass of images seems in congruous movement and agreement concerning the beauty of what the world has to offer, underscoring the epic and universal nature of the archive.

Finally, a third degree in the consideration of the archive arises from the awareness of this feeling of contentment: the viewer meditates on the contradictions of their own gaze and correlates them to the artist duo's approach. According to Fischli, "[d]uring our last trip, there was the clear intention of finding images that already existed as such, which had been largely diffused and were

already very popular" (in Fleck, 2006: 29), departing from their prior "unstudied" methodology. A *praxis* of the "cliché" is thusly vindicated: the spectator is not invited to appreciate a result, rather an experiment carried out over time (Osborne, 2000: 79).

*Visible World* appears therefore as a relatively conceptual work with Fischli and Weiss taking the role of amateurs (Poivert, 2003: 30). They pose as anti-heroes of the art world, in an attitude at odds with *doxa*. Roland Barthes noted with regards to the "amateur:"

> The Amateur (someone who engages in painting, music, sport, science, without the spirit of mastery or competition), the Amateur renews his pleasure (*amator*: one who loves and loves again); he is anything but a hero (of creation, of performance); he establishes himself *graciously* (for nothing) in the signifier: in the immediately definitive substance of music, of painting; his praxis, usually, involves no *rubato* (that theft of the object for the sake of the attribute); he is — he will be perhaps — the counter-bourgeois artist.
>
> 1977 [1975]: 57

Adopting a tourist's ways of doing leads the spectator to rediscover pleasure in the simplicity of *the gaze*. It also involves contravening a bourgeois conception of art, while at the same time satisfying the expectations of contemporary art and continually questioning its boundaries (Heinich, 2014: 55).

The different levels, intrinsic to this brief exercise of "bathmology," coexist and imbibe the work with all its interest and complexity. The plurality of possible approaches urges the spectator to partake in an internal dialogism, to wade through depths of coexistent meanings.

# The Variability of The Work

The reception of the work is evidently largely decided by the presentation format in which the archive is arranged. In this respect, *Visible World* possesses "variability" as an intrinsic component. The work has been presented in three very different forms, none prevailing over the others, and all gravitating towards a mutual compatibility. The first iteration of the work in 1997 at documenta X involved a video device with three screens diffusing an uninterrupted stream of still images[5]. Each of the side-by-side screen monitors displays views in a random and unsynchronized manner. Photographs follow slowly one after another, fading in and out, and the gentle rhythm of transitions confers on the work a mellow and mesmerising aspect favouring the aesthetic reinvestment of the cliché. *Visible World* was also published in book form, a great rectangular tome released in 2000. The third form in which *Visible World* has appeared, the installation, has manifested varyingly to suit different exhibition spaces. For example, at the 2017 edition of Arles Rencontres de la photographie, the installation included fifteen illuminated tables in a line covered with a grid of 3000 slides, whereas a set of only *thirteen* illuminated tables were featured in the exhibition *Voilà, le monde dans la tête* at the Paris Museum of Modern Art in 2000.

Whatever their arrangement, the photographs are not laid out according to the chronology of the film roll as they would be, for example, on a contact sheet. They are more combined in "thematic" or "topographic" blocks depending on the subjects and the places involved: after a mosaic of pictures in an airport follows a combination of views featuring the bay of Rio de Janeiro or the Alps, and so on. Within these micro-collections, endowed with a certain coherence, sometimes shots taken on different days or in different places may seem to belong to the same picture-taking session, as their physical proximity in the installation underscores similar photographic elements relating to slight variations in framing or light densities. The number of assembled images

precludes, in fact, any attempts at selection or ranking, the sheer quantity imposing the impression of a universal approval of the charms of reality. The three different presentation arrangements appear as culminations of the same experiments; in other words, the images used belong to the same common bank, patiently constituted over time, each just as likely to be included in the next combination as a particular occurrence. These new assemblies thus serve as updates of the same work, an archive representing a primary matrix, living matter liable to constant rearrangement. The successive layouts proposed solicit nevertheless very different reactions on the part of the spectator, and their forms cannot be considered as secondary or insignificant, for their spatial particularities and the diversity of media supports certainly possess a significant semantic echo. *Visible World* seems therefore to spring neither from an "allographic regime" where all updates stemming from an abstract model are equivalent, nor from an "autographic regime" where each concrete presentation is a full constitution of the work (Goodman, 1968: 113). The work refers more to an "intermediary regime" which can be defined by the variability which is its chief component.

The different arrangements proposed relate to each other and are mutually complementary based on close "intra-textual[6]" links organized in a constellation of different occurrences which make up a work within which it is, so to speak, possible to move about (Méaux, 2020). A visitor to one or other of the exhibitions may be inclined to purchase the book. Reversely, a reader of the work has perhaps sought out the installations or information on the artists' methods for determining the spatial arrangements of the photographs. Today the Internet facilitates the presentation of the different forms the work may assume, if only partially, then at least simultaneously.

The book version contains some 3000 photographs set out in eight-image analogue grids on doubled-sided pages. While each image only shows a fragment of the visible world reproduced through the lens of the tourist, the accumulation of views manifests an artwork in the form of a gigantic whole. By amassing so many images of the planet, *Visible World* seems to derive the designation of "atlas" after the titan who carried the world on his shoulders. In the infinite inventory of the lures of the visible world, there exist no limits. *Visible World* recalls the work of the conceptual artist Douglas Huebler who set himself the task of photographing all the individuals on the planet, using the art form purely as a tool for census taking: "The world is full of more or less interesting objects; I have no wish to add to this. I prefer simply to record the existence of things in terms of time and/or place," he wrote (1969: 20). The immense compilation proposed by Fischli and Weiss appears as the necessarily incomplete result of such an undertaking, stupefying the viewer and making them dream since, as an infinite gathering whose completion or finalization cannot be conceived, *Visible World* exceeds human capacity. The cover of the print version of *Visible World* features a close-up photograph of a semi-submerged hippopotamus, only the top half of its body visible; in the same way, *Visible World* represents only a minute portion of reality despite the number of images that compose the whole.
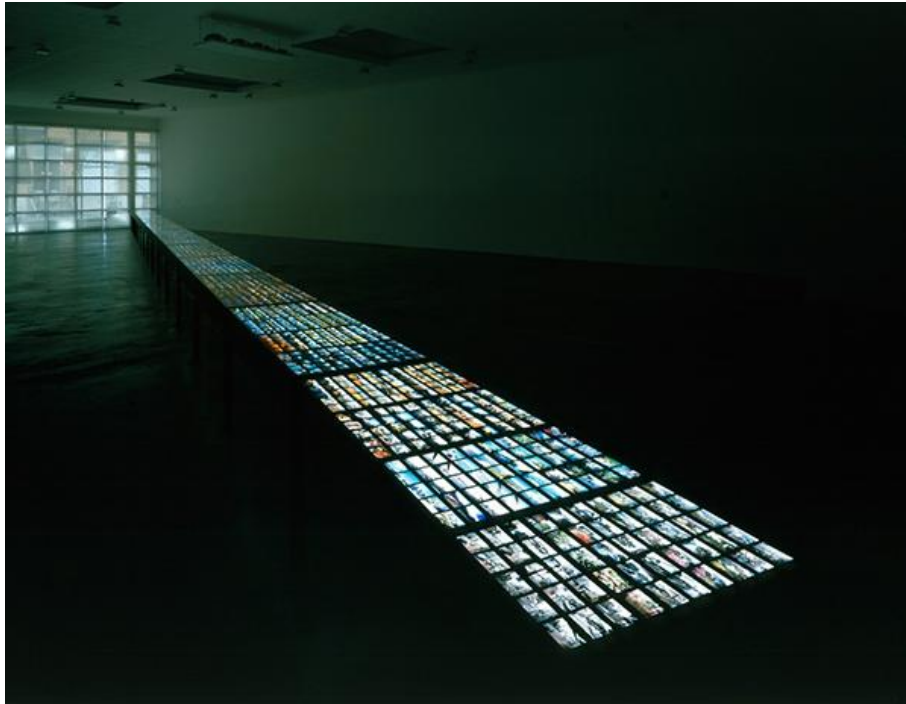
Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Visible World* (1986-2001)

Installation view of *Peter Fischli & David Weiss* at Matthew Marks Gallery, New York (2002)

© Peter Fischli & David Weiss, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

The arrangement of photographs on illuminated tables recalls a device used in newspaper editing rooms, where the array of images is immense in relation to the size of each photograph, making it impossible to examine each one in turn. The visitor browses from one photograph to another, from plate to plate, bending over tables to examine the tiny photographs individually in detail, in a manner typically unusual in an exhibition. Large dimension prints are usually hung on picture rails in galleries and museums; placed on a vertical plane they require the visitor to stand upright to view them. Here, in contrast, the installation transforms the viewers into entomologists leaning over their plates of displayed butterflies. This proximity favours a perception of the backlit images which is both intimate and magical; however, the intimate proximity required also produces the necessity for incessant movement, as viewers must move constantly to study the next image, and thus continually modifying their distance from the photographs. This movement renders the viewers both active and hesitant in relation to the position to be adopted in front of the assembled clichés, both literally and figuratively.

It is evident that the different iterations of *Visible World* do not engage the spectator, either physically or intellectually in the same way: books and exhibitions, by their very natures, constitute vastly different experiences. Nevertheless, both presentations of the archive provide an enigma, a quest for meaning (Rancière, 2010: 10) executed through trial and error and repeated questioning. The viewer must survey and compare the different ways in which the images may be perceived, without deciding or prioritizing. Any fixed ideas about the approach to the body of work seem untenable and the spectator is aware of this flutter of interpretation, using it as a subject for reflection.

# A Shared World

The synoptic but obviously patchy depiction rendered by the sum of all the images presupposes a certain mobility. The expansion of air travel has rendered long-distance journeys within reach of the masses, even if it is mostly the better-off who benefit — a category in which the two Swiss artists belong. For travellers, "non-places" (Augé, 1992) such as airports appear as an obligatory passage. Within the series of pictures, several images show enormous aircraft pointing their tapered muzzles, access ramps rearing up in vigorous levitation. Airport transit zones place their users beyond any real localization, projecting them instead into a state of roaming above the planet even before the plane has even left the ground. During flights, passengers may look down on the world from on high in a way impossible from ground level, making out from afar, below the aircraft, the miniature outlines of land, seas, and oceans. Time zone differences in long-distance voyages convey to travellers the inescapable reality of planetary physics. Often airline passengers can also follow their itinerary on a screen. The practice of tourism reflected in *Visible World* appears thus as an experience of crossing distances and borders, nurturing a holistic perception of the planet (Lussault, 2022: 138).



Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Visible World* (2000)

From Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Visible World*, Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 260 p.

© Peter Fischli & David Weiss, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

We have often said that images of the earth taken from satellites have contributed to an increase in awareness of the world as an ecumene. By reducing the planet to a fragile bubble lost in interstellar space, these images have contributed to what Michel Lussault identifies as "an irreversible irruption of a new social space on a global scale[7]" (2013: 16 [my translation]). Such images give free rein to contemplate the earth from an impossible distance, or even from a position of extraordinary exteriority. This spatial decentralization can only be accompanied by a

form of relativism which also impinges on time: we know that life on earth appeared at a given moment; it will one day disappear.

Images taken from space reveal the planet — whose cargo includes all of humanity — as a small, vulnerable vessel (Grevsmühl, 2014), something which Fischli and Weiss' *Visible World* also conveys as tourist photographs deterritorialize the gaze of the spectator in such a way that earth takes on a global dimension. For Michel Lussault, "the tourist is perhaps [...] the ideal type of global inhabitant, who considers the World as his or her potential living space[8]" (2013: 145 [my translation]). Without doubt the Web, upon which circulate images of the most faraway places, contributes today to the same form of awareness (Manovich, 2015 [2001]: 443), but without the ubiquitously embodied experience of books, installations, or other collections like *Visible World*. In addition, the Internet was no doubt less present at the time when Peter Fischli and David Weiss began their photographic activities.

Through a reconsideration of the "cliché," of neutral and standard photography as practised by tourists, *Visible World* leads us to meditate, far removed from any hierarchy between *low* and *high* culture, on the effects this viewpoint of the world has on the visual appearances of the objects it generates. The work also leads to a reflection on the way touristic activity participates in the construction of contemporary sensibilities. It is not surprising that this type of artistic proposition, that questioning of the role of image in the construction of ways of seeing, is developing at the same time as the Visual Studies gain credence, advocating for a realisation of the agentivity of visual representations in our social life (Bredekamp, 2015 [2010]).

Touristic clichés appear therefore as media for the recognition of a common belonging to the planet. By means of their banality, these clichés pave the way for a transitivity with a world inhabited by all, the very same universal link drawn upon in the work of Peter Fischli and David Weiss. More sophisticated images could not achieve the same effect as the duo's simulated amateur photography, since artistically and compositionally distinguished photographs are mortgaged, so to speak, by the evident distinction of their author. The artists' use of the tourist cliché instead exploits the common, the shared, as in *topoï* of ancient rhetoric, neatly placing *Visible World* far from a restricted and elitist conception of art (Jouannais, 2003: 275).

The work was exhibited concurrently in three different installations at documenta X (1997), at the Tate Gallery (2007) and at the Fondation Luma in Arles (2017). A version published as an artist's book in 2000 was likewise clearly destined to the type of reception reserved for works which are recognized as belonging to "art." In this context, according to philosopher Jacques Rancière's approach, appreciation for *Visible World* stems from common interest. According to him, art meets politics in the sense that it supposes the segmentation of a sphere of experience, of objects set out as being common to all (2004: 37). Art delineates a specific space of sharing of the senses. It is thus paradoxical that the separation of places where art is active can contribute to establishing their politicity (41).

<div align="center">**\*\*\***</div>

If we pursue this analysis, it is through the articity of the work of Peter Fischli and David Weiss that the world displayed in tourist photographs appears also to belong to the collective. By installing a reflexive attitude with regards to the relation humans are building today with the planet, *Visible World* provides the experience of belonging to a community in the face of the world. The work leads us to consider the world as a "common good" (Cornu, 2017), firstly, because it is the sum of clichés stemming from a shared practice which becomes re-valued, and secondly because this archive is exhibited in spaces dedicated to art exhibition. These two conditions together render the world on display a common and political object.

What's more, nostalgia plays a role in the displayed object on three levels. Firstly images, by nature, fix a state of being the instant it tips into the past. Thus the snow-topped mountains and glaciers photographed by Fischli and Weiss no longer resemble the same landforms today; likewise some animal species featured in the images may now even be in danger of extinction. In addition, the practice of photography combined with tourism captures a sight to be retained as a souvenir and authenticates the previous passage of travellers to the site. Finally, the chromatic tones of these pictures feel inevitably outdated due to the discontinuation of the technique, and the backlighting effect resembles slides, a display method which is increasingly rare (Lacoste, 2017: 14). All these elements contribute to the notion of obsolescence surrounding the collection of physical images in such a way that, while their material manifestations may solidify attachment to the world, it is their precariousness which pervades.

## Notes

[1] « un syntagme […] repris souvent d'un locuteur à l'autre et qui donne de ce fait l'impression d'une grande banalité »; « le lieu commun […] porte […] sur le sens et non sur l'expression »

[2] « de nature discursive par opposition au lieu commun qui ne se laisse pas définir au niveau verbal »

[3] « le trivial n'est plus le carrefour d'une communauté mais le point de séparation de l'individu et de la route commune: il désigne cet espace de division, de distinction de l'individu et du social »

[4] See for example Penelope Umbrico, *Sunset Portraits from 9,623,557 Flickr Sunsets on 8/22/11*, 2011.

[5] There was also a projection of images over a period of 8 hours on the art channel Arte-TV.

[6] "Intra-textuality" designates the way in which an author inserts previous texts written by himself in new publications. By extension this term could be applied to plastic art or visual works.

[7] « l'irruption irréversible d'un nouvel espace social d'échelle planétaire »

[8] « le touriste est peut-être […] le type idéal de l'habitant mondial, qui considère le Monde comme son habitat potentiel »

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