

# The Theatre of Photography an interdisciplinary duologue

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Article abstract

Taking as a starting point the opposition of our title: this text, in the form of a duologue, is also a meeting between photography and theatre, a vantage point from which certain conceptual frameworks can be challenged and even collapsed. In the domain of theatre, one hears often of artifice, authenticity, likeness and liveness. Theatre, from the conceptualisation of naturalism in the nineteenth century to the challenges posed by performance art in the twentieth century, struggles with media (despite the eclecticism of its own technological apparatus), sometimes seeking distance from them. Photography studies, meanwhile, has often emphasised the possibility or impossibility of veracity, the truthfulness or deceptiveness of photographs, with performance seemingly offering one escape route... This duologue seeks only to cast light on certain crossings inside the theatre of photography, envisaging future dialogues between media and across disciplines.

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The Theatre of Photography  
an interdisciplinary duologue

Joel Anderson, Wiebke Leister

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## Résumé

Nous prenons comme point de départ l'opposition du titre : ce texte, sous forme de dialogue/duologue, est également une rencontre entre la photographie et le théâtre, un point de vue privilégié permettant l'interrogation et même l'effondrement de certaines grilles conceptuelles. Dans le domaine du théâtre, on parle souvent d'artifice, authenticité, vraisemblance, et « liveness ». Le théâtre, à partir de la conceptualisation du naturalisme à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle et jusqu'aux défis de la performance au vingtième, semble lutter contre les médias (malgré l'éclecticisme de son propre dispositif représentationnel technologique), cherchant parfois à se situer en dehors d'eux. D'autre part, les études photographiques soulignent souvent la possibilité ou l'impossibilité de la véracité photographique, les sincérités ou tromperies des photographies, d'où la « performance » semble parfois proposer une issue... Ce dialogue se contente d'éclairer certains croisements au Théâtre de la Photographie, afin d'envisager de futurs dialogues entre les médias et les disciplines.

## Abstract

Taking as a starting point the opposition of our title: this text, in the form of a duologue, is also a meeting between photography and theatre, a vantage point from which certain conceptual frameworks can be challenged and even collapsed. In the domain of theatre, one hears often of artifice, authenticity, likeness and liveness. Theatre, from the conceptualisation of naturalism in the nineteenth century to the challenges posed by performance art in the twentieth century, struggles with media (despite the eclecticism of its own technological apparatus), sometimes seeking distance from them. Photography studies, meanwhile, has often emphasised the possibility or impossibility of veracity, the truthfulness or deceptiveness of photographs, with performance seemingly offering one escape route... This duologue seeks only to cast light on certain crossings inside the theatre of photography, envisaging future dialogues between media and across disciplines.

**Mot-clés** : théâtre, théâtralité, intermedialité, traduction, spécificité du médium, médiation, liveness, performance, performativité, photographie de théâtre, dispositif

**Keywords**: theatre, theater, photography, theatricality, intermediality,

## The Theatre of Photography

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translation, medium specificity, mediation, liveness, performance, performativity, theatre photography, apparatus

# Contents

Intermedial translation . . . . .	5
Medium, Media . . . . .	8
Remediation . . . . .	13
Liveness . . . . .	17
Performativity . . . . .	20
Apparatus . . . . .	24
Bibliography . . . . .	25

# The Theatre of Photography

Joel Anderson

Wiebke Leister

## **Intermedial translation**

(WL) The question of what is “essential” or “specific” to a given medium has been addressed in many ways. In contrast to some of these, we are keen to characterise possibilities relating to how theatre and photography can be brought together not only by means of documentation or reproduction, but where theatre and photography become methodologies for one another’s making and understanding, where an action is staged for the camera, where photography is part of a scene or is crucial to how it is constructed.

Our duologue on the Theatre of Photography focuses on those intersections between photography and theatre, taking their multiple encounters as an opportunity to rethink the often overused or misconceived concepts of “performance” in order to consider an exchange of ideas between photography and theatre by asking what we can learn from their close association.

Barbara Cassin stresses in her *Dictionary of Untranslatables* that the term “to translate” refers to a passing from one language to another (from Latin: “traducere”) as a way of leading-across that describes a passage or a transmission (2014, 1139). We are interested in this sense of “bringing one to the other” as means of *visual translation*, potentially arriving at a hybrid construction that is considered less of a “thirdness” between the fields, and rather an attempt to think about the dialectical encounters between theatre and photography. Just as theatre can be still and photographs can convey a sense of movement. Our approach therefore includes how both may function as contexts or methodologies for each other, and moves beyond con-

ventional distinctions between “staged photography” (as constructions to be photographed) and “theatre photography” (as documents of a performance).

Accordingly, we are interested in acts of translation between different media, translating from event into image, remediating from the position of photography into theatre, and back into former or different media states, as practices of re-writing their intermedial and interdisciplinary aspects. In addition to the key concepts of the performative, the theatrical and the photographic, other terms – like the framed and the staged, the pro-photographic and the non-diegetic, the event and the institution – continued to come into play, alongside ideas relating to gesture, stage, apparatus, situation, documentation, construction, re/enactment and re/presentation. Hoping to eventually arrive at a dictionary of photo-theatric terms in context, we were keen to extend our dialogue to others<sup>1</sup>, to discuss the relational gap between theatre and photography from different perspectives<sup>2</sup>.

(JA) Our task here is to stage a dialogue. Of course, this might resemble a dialogue between theatre and photography, but – although we as scholars might represent theatre studies and photography studies – we are not seeking necessarily to assume these institutional or disciplinary roles, to occupy entrenched positions, reinforcing the stability or knowability of each field. Rather, we aim to use the dialogical form to explore some of the notions that each of our disciplines brings to bear on the subject of authenticity and artificiality and to use this form to posit how an encounter between photography and theatre challenges some of the notions at play in both disciplines, thereby offering a nuanced form of interdisciplinarity.

In considering intermediality with or within theatre, certain questions arise as to whether theatre is a medium, and to what extent, and as to whether theatre mediates and is mediated. Indeed, we cannot speak with confidence of theatre *and* media, since theatre is surely a medium, an instance of me-

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<sup>1</sup>Indeed, this approach can be evidenced in our recent edition of the journal *Photography and Culture*: starting from several network meetings with interested collaborators, we published five essays by other pairs of theatre-photography-authors engaging in the proposed experiment of co-writing in various forms, not only a methodology for different approaches to writing but also for thinking about the relationship of photography and theatre (Anderson and Leister 2018).

<sup>2</sup>Allsopp and Williams (2006) compare their approach, among others, to an open-ended “Lexicon of contemporary performance” with “Fragments of The Intersubjective Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Theatre” (1994).

dia. Such an idea seems credible; certainly, if we follow McLuhan's broad notion of media as "extensions", we are likely to consider theatre as a means of communication, a communicative technology, a vector, distributing and circulating. As such, theatre would need to be defined in terms of its particularities in comparison with other forms of media, perhaps with newer ones, like photography.

Involved in the task of examining the relationships between media is resisting the urge to posit one as enjoying critical authority or dominance over the others, and to avoid imagining any medium to be knowable or pure; any theory of intermedia, examining the relationships between media and the ways in which they occupy one another's locations and logics, must also quickly find that the media were *always already* interacting and were never entirely autonomous.

(WL) Are we therefore assuming that today's emphasis on interdisciplinarity and the post-medium condition have overturned modernism's conception of medium-specificity? Jan Baetens describes how the paradigm of opposing the spatial construct of the picture with the temporal entity of the text has led to a "literary turn" in the photographic discourse. This had the effect of turning photography's recent understanding of itself as an interdisciplinary discourse back into what is effectively a mono-disciplinary, text-led approach – which not only reintroduces an essential difference between time-led and space-led practices, but also risks the very basis of interdisciplinarity.

How then do we approach photography and theatre as one continuum that allows them to contain each other? Baetens suggests introducing a "meta-interdisciplinary" viewpoint that avoids power relations between disciplines, simply because "disciplinary approaches engaged in interdisciplinary discussions are often not interdisciplinary themselves" (2007, 65). This aims to form new relationships as "an attempt to speak nevertheless" (2007, 69–70), relationships that remain plural rather than attempting a total synthesis, and that are able to address specific inter-art phenomena while simultaneously allowing some space for contradictions to co-exist.



## Medium, Media

(JA) In an interview taking place very near to the end of his life, Roland Barthes suggested that his monograph *Camera Lucida* was participating in a “theoretical boom” (1980, 1235), with photography, at the time more than a century old, seemingly receiving sudden critical attention. Notable within this “boom” is a recourse to theatre as a means for understanding photography, in Barthes work, of course, but also in that of the contemporaries he mentions.

Theatre does sometimes seem at odds with certain habitual understandings of a medium, through its hybrid constitution as much as by way of the limitations of its procedures. Certainly, theatre can seem distant from the notion of “the media” (referring to new technologies and/or the “mass media”). In stage performances, from classical to contemporary plays through to durational performance art, for example, information is not necessarily efficiently delivered, at least not to the assembled audience, who will have to wait (for the twist of the denouement, or indeed for *Godot*) or who, through the dramatic irony of witnessing messages transmitted either to the wrong recipient, too widely, or lost in the very process of transmission, merely witness a certain circulation of information. In some stage work, theatre becomes machine, or else seeks to exit the machine; theatre images take shape before audiences used to a glut circulating on screens. In such works, the uncertainty and inefficiency of theatre’s modality contrasts with mechanisms of high-speed reporting and near-instant communications; the slow-paced action, or frozen *tableau vivant*, and the slow emergence of meaning onstage counter and confound televisual repetition and flow.

Much discussion around theatre in relation to media is organised around the encounter between the two. This discussion plots theatre’s shifts (for better or for worse) in contact with technologies (always already “new” ones). Frequently, scholars are concerned with how theatre and performance adapt themselves (by way of appropriation or resistance) when met with media, as in some postdramatic theatre, or immersive performances embracing the fact that the theatre is now one of the only places where mobile telephones cannot be used (of course, some works have incorporated the smartphone into the apparatus, too).

(WL) Conceptions of the “photographic” refer to plurality, demonstrating that there is no such thing as one “photography” but rather many “photographies”, which are inherently interdisciplinary and intermedial, made up of many elements that expand its concepts and that are part of its own different ways of coming-into-being and contributing to all sorts of photographic cultures – including social, historical and political circumstances, cultural production, aesthetic discourse or philosophy, in installation and in other forms of dissemination or circulation; be it in different contexts and for different receptions, as a discursive system and as an event, as image and object, process and interpretation, theory and practice, medium or technology, instrument or record, artistic expression or commodity (Tagg 1988, 143). Similar to theatre, photography is never a singular medium. It refers to a range of practices and institutional spaces that give the context in which the meaning and status of a particular photograph or performance can be interpreted. We are therefore keen to tease out a “theatric” mode and to emphasize its intermedial and interdisciplinary aspects<sup>3</sup>.

In the mid 19th-century, in the early days of photography and electricity, the neurologist Duchenne de Boulogne – together with the younger brother of the famed Parisian photographer Nadar – managed to photograph fleeting facial anatomy, even though contemporary exposure times would have been far too slow to capture any form of immediacy. But Duchenne overcame these obstacles of time and involuntary body movement by using a low voltage current to activate the facial muscles and hold them in place for the duration of camera exposure. This allowed him to isolate and visualize the facial muscles, and name them after their functions (the muscle of joy, the muscle of pain), obtaining an iconographic scale of emotional expressions.

Alongside the main Medical Section, he also included an “aesthetic section” in his 1862 book *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression*, in which he not only corrected the expressions of classical sculptures, but also engaged in illustrating emotive characters from famous plays from an “aesthetic” point of view. For instance, he illustrated Shakespeare’s “Lady Macbeth” and her muscular expressions induced with electricity to act out the varying intensities of the “expression of cruelty”. Describing his process: “The facial expres-

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<sup>3</sup>Barthes develops the term “filmic” in his essay “The Third Meaning”, wherein the stilled image of a film conveys an obtuse meaning that cannot be described, “where language and metalanguage end.” (1977, 64–65)

sion of this young girl was made more terrible and more disfigured than even in *Plate 82* by the maximal contraction of this little muscle, and we need to consider it as principle and true agent of the aggressive and wicked passions, of hatred, of jealousy, of cruel instincts.”(Duchenne de Boulogne 1990, 122).



Figure 1: Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne & Adrien Tournachon, 1854-56, printed 1862, albumen silver prints from glass negatives, 28.4 × 20.3 cm.

Plate 81: “Lady Macbeth, moderate expression of cruelty”: “Lady Macbeth: Had he not resembled // My father as he slept, I had done’t. [Macbeth, act II, scene II]. Moderate expression of cruelty. Feeble electrical contraction of the m. procerus (P, Fig. 1)”

Plate 82: “Lady Macbeth, strong expression of cruelty”: “Lady Macbeth: Come, you spirits // That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, // And fill me, from crown to the toe, top-full // Of direst cruelty. [Macbeth, act I, scene V] Strong expression of cruelty. Electrical contraction of m. procerus.”

Plate 83: “Lady Macbeth, ferocious cruelty”: “Lady Macbeth - about to assassinate King Duncan. Expression of ferocious cruelty. Maximal electrical contraction of m. procerus.” Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, The Buddy Taub Foundation Gift, Dennis A. Roach and Jill Roach, Directors; Harris Brisbane Dick and William E. Dodge Funds; and W. Bruce and Delaney H. Lundberg Gift, 2013.

<https://www.metmuseum.org> (Public Domain)

In the tradition of pathognomy, Duchenne’s *Mechanism* assumed the face as a legible mask and the photograph of facial expressions as equally legible codes for inner states. Featuring the electrical probes clearly visible in the

faces of his sitter, Duchenne's photography did not just record the body of his model, but actively transformed it in the process of staging the relation between emotion and expression. Engaging different levels of performance and re-enactment, the resulting photographs bring together different stage and studio conventions through the use of light, gesture, pose, and imaging by electrical and photographic means. Circulating in various distribution contexts, they also attempt to blur the boundaries between "aesthetic object" and "scientific record": as medical research, as atlas of emotive states to be used by artists, as illustration of theatrical characters and as gallery artefacts. As photographic portraits, they stress the varying degrees of collaborative exchange between sitter and photographer in a performative setting.

In the winter of 1854-5, at the same time as working with Duchenne, the brothers Nadar collaborated on a series of expression studies and body postures based on the *commedia dell'arte* character, Pierrot. With long exposure times requiring immobility, Pierrot's simulated movements are confined to the shallow photographic space, his silent performance doubling the process of still photography. It remains unclear whether Duchenne in some way or other inspired Pierrot's photographs, if the Pierrot-series influenced Duchenne's experiments, or if the two were simply products of the same physiognomic age. If anything, their close relation goes to show that performance was not incidental to Duchenne's experiments.

(JA) In an influential article, Rosalind Krauss (1978) describes the spectral figure of the mime Charles Deburau, as Pierrot photographed by Nadar<sup>4</sup>, claiming that this image is a meeting of the mechanical imprint of photography and the gesture of a theatre mime. While this influential notion of the imprint or trace has been challenged, perhaps most extensively by Joel Snyder (for example, in 1980, 504-5), and certainly in terms of attempts to thereby distinguish photography from other forms of picture-making, we should focus here on Krauss's distinction between the kinds of writing made possible by the figure of the miming body and by photography; Krauss is attentive to the notion of writing present in the word "photo-graphy", and she seems to suggest that the collision of temporalities of the trace prepares the ground for a citational space. Krauss observes in Nadar's photograph a meeting of representational modes, the gestures traced by a mime and the

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<sup>4</sup>A more in-depth and nuanced consideration of this corpus can be found in Rykner (2015).



Figure 2: Nadar & Adrien Tournachon: Jean-Charles Deburau as “Pierrot Running”, 1854-55, Albumen silver print from glass negative, 26.5 x 20.8cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gilman Collection, Purchase, The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation Gift, through Joyce and Robert Menschel, 2005. <https://www.metmuseum.org> (Public Domain)

traces recorded by a camera, and she suggests that this encounter is only able to occur by way of a photograph. She writes: “the ultimate surface onto which the multiple traces are not simply registered, but fixed, is that of the photograph itself.” (Krauss 1978, 45). Patricia Falguières (2000) also refers to the mime appearing in early photographic experimentation in describing the passage of subjects across the stage created by the chronophotographer, Étienne-Jules Marey, in his research station in the late 1800s, noting the meeting of photosensitive materials sequentially capturing the “purely gestural and silent sequence of the mime”, calling this a figure a “white ghost” (Marey 1894, 102).

### Remediation

(JA) The theatre photographs of Josef Koudelka are at once the earliest examples of his photographic output and the least well known. Scholars and critics, in the numerous accounts of Koudelka’s life and work, give only limited attention to these theatre images, making much of the photographer’s resolute abandonment of theatre when he was forced to leave Czechoslovakia after taking widely circulated images of the Prague Spring.

Koudelka, as part of different companies, photographed theatre productions throughout most of the 1960s, notably including the work of director Otomar Krejča. The nature of his role and of the activity of photographing theatre begs questions around the status of theatre photography, which is often conducted and conceived elsewhere as an activity of recording, situating theatre photography within the Benjaminian notion of the reproduction of a work of art. But where theatre is the object of the photographic lens, more nuance might sometimes be necessary. At least linguistically, it is difficult to conceive of the notion of “theatre photography”, as such a practice adopts the slipperiness of the term “theatre”, referring, among other things, to an activity as well as to the place where this activity takes place. “Photographs of theatre” also poses a problem potentially as representation of a representation – we cannot be sure (if that is what is being demanded) what or whom we are looking at, with, for example, the earliest “theatre photographs” be-

ing portraits of actors, often in role, rather than attempts to capture a stage performance<sup>5</sup>.



Figure 3: Josef Koudelka: Czechoslovakia. Prague. 1966. Theatre Divadlo Za Branou (Beyond the Gate). *The Three Sisters*, play written by Chekhov and directed by Otomar Krejča. Magnum Photos.

Theatre photography, at least at the beginning in the mid-twentieth century, is usually considered in terms of what Bolter and Grusin have influentially called immediacy, or transparent immediacy, whereby “the user is no longer aware of confronting a medium” (2000, 24). But perhaps - and Koudelka’s images seem instructive in this regard - theatre photographs also sit uncomfortably within this conception of the medium, and indeed might be located across Bolter and Grusin’s triad of immediacy, hypermediacy, and remediation<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup>See my *Theatre & Photography* (Anderson 2015, 39–47), which gives an account of nineteenth-century actor portraiture and of scholarly responses to this practice.

<sup>6</sup>Unlike “transparent” media that give us the impression of a direct viewing experience as if seeing through a window (rather than looking at a representation), hypermedial media redirect attention to their respective mediality. The viewer looks “at” not “through” the medium and enjoys this medial awareness as a means of moving past the limits of representation. “No medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, any more than it works in isolation from

Koudelka, by his own account, was averse to any notion of recording or re-producing theatre; he claims that, in photographing theatre, the one thing he never sought to do was to record or document, stating that he was more interested in another “possibility”: “to take the performance as an initial reality and try to make something different out of it” (2003, 125). He identifies the problem: “When [you] photograph the theatre,” he says, “you deal with something that’s already done” (2007). His approach to achieving this aim of treating theatre as a raw material relied on retaining his mobility as photographer, photographing at times from the vantage point of a spectator, but also from the stage, close to the actors and on selecting his own perspectives from within the frame of the stage. Koudelka’s practical method appears even more unusual when we consider how he produced images in the darkroom: using cinema stock, Koudelka would cut down his negatives, eliminating large sections, and he would make enlargements from perhaps very small pieces of film. The process of making “something different”, as he explains it, is thus a destructive act: the photographer sacrifices the captured image as a whole, emphasising a narrow area and thus pushing the photosensitive materials to the point of failure, obliterating much detail in the final prints, creating areas of pure highlight or shadow, creating disembodied parts no longer part of the actor’s body, causing the emulsion to surrender its grain, often coating sections of an image with a fog-like overlay (Krejča 2006, 42). As such, the photographs might be considered in terms of Bolter and Grusin’s hypermediacy, as Koudelka’s method foregrounds the medium of photography, thus situating his work within a certain photographic trend of the era. But this also imbues the images with spectrality; they are “hauntological”, in Derrida’s terms, particularly in the sense that Mark Fisher (2014) describes, whereby the signal/noise relationship is upended, unseating notions of presence.

The images seem to bring elements into circulation that can be accounted for only in terms of Koudelka’s avowed project of using theatre to make photographs. The director Krejča (Koudelka 1993, 7) suggests that seeing Koudelka’s images gave a strange sense of “reversal,” whereby he – the creator of the stage work – started to doubt whether the images had been taken of his production or whether they somehow (almost supernaturally) preceded

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other social and economic forces. What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media.” (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 15)



it, prompted it. As the images remediate, they unstage as well as restage theatre.

(WL) The popular myths that underpin the many understandings of what photography is today include all shades of “authenticity”, from “straight photography” to describing it as a “pencil of nature” or as a “message without a code” that delivers “unmediated” imprints on the basis of being “transparent” and “objective”, thus conveying “natural” signifiers that “truthfully” record what is in front of them - as if there wasn’t any distance between sign and referent. What follows is an embrace of artifice as a way of thinking photographs as constructed, cultural images with floating signifiers that operate on many levels of re/presentation. And since images continue to produce their very own conceptions of “truth”, we should never forget that there are indeed many indexical images that do not constitute likeness, while photography stages many acts of mediation: from world to image, and from image to interpretations.



Figure 4: John Hilliard: “Camera Recording Its Own Condition (7 Apertures, 10 Speeds, 2 Mirrors)”, 1971. Original study, silver gelatin photo on museum board, 61x56 cm. Permission granted by the artist 01 03 19.

The different aspects of remediation can be observed in the conceptual work “Camera Recording its Own Condition” by John Hilliard in which the hand-

held apparatus serves not only as a recording device but also as the central motif. This expanded self-portrait of an artist scrutinizing the limitations of his medium excels at turning the process of mediating photography's medi-ality into a performative image. The work consists of seventy photographs that were taken by photographing the camera in a mirror with a range of combinations of aperture and shutter speed. This results in a serial grid of photographs in which only a diagonal line of prints appears "correct", while the opposite corners show prints of gradually changing settings, fading into monochrome abstraction of either white over-exposure or black under-exposure of the film. A purposefully self-reflexive gesture of reduction that highlights the relation of negative density and print, performed by the inherent logic of the analogue camera in the form of a continuous spectrum of possibilities. This visual system of spatializing the body of the image is generated by systematically performing the camera's mechanism as a way of structuring the image plane, thereby producing an optical illusion.

### Liveness

(WL) In the photograph "Boy at Circus", the boy is captured by Weegee's camera while being captivated by a performance in the circus ring himself<sup>7</sup>. He follows the spectacle from a distance, bridged by a pair of opera glasses that bring him closer to the centre of attention. The binoculars blocking out his eyes, leaning forward in suspense, his left hand supported by his knee, he is not just a passive spectator but an engaged participant in the scene that we, in turn, cannot see. Laughing openly, he does not know that he is an observed observer.

Sitting next to a father figure, the boy's forehead covers the man's lower face, while the boy's upper face is covered by the opera glasses so that their two faces almost read as one. Both figures wear seeing devices, making it impossible for the viewer to see their eyes. Accordingly, the encounter with the photograph ultimately becomes about watching, enhanced by the triangle of sightlines operating within and beyond the picture, each intertwining and extending their gazes beyond the other's point of view. The boy's laughter is aided by a mechanical eye, just as the expressions of Duchenne's model

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<sup>7</sup>Weegee (Arthur Fellig): "Boy at Circus", 18 April 1943. International Centre of Photography / Getty images: online

were triggered by an electrical device: the former, to observe the performance close up, the latter to create the photographic performance.

The boy's prosthetic gaze draws a parallel between the hidden elements in the image and its production: the absent circus scene seen by the boy with hidden eyes, and the unnoticed photographer who depicts him with his face equally hidden behind the camera, giving the image several layers of liveness: the absent action in the ring, the depicted reaction of the boy, the constitutive position of the photographer and, by extension, the image's event and how it communicates with me in the present. This ensemble combines different time-zones and viewpoints that add up to more than a single here-and-now.

Part of the image's photographic event are therefore not only the image-immanent elements that relate to the actually depicted scene and how it is interpreted, but also the different participants and off-frame agencies that contribute to the changing situation of production and reception. The different pro-photographic layers involved in the construction of a photograph of this kind are described by Vilém Flusser in his essay "The Gesture of Photographing", where he portrays the three inter-subjective elements involved – the photographer, the photographed and the observer of the act of photographing – who all move around, influencing and affecting one another, thus creating the social circumstances that result in the photograph. Flusser explains that "In fact, there is a double dialectic in play: first between goal and situation and then among the various perspectives on the situation. The gesture of the photographer shows the tension between these intervening dialectics." (Flusser 2011, 79).

The description of the photographer and how he approaches his subject is also reminiscent of me of the obsessive behaviour exhibited by the main protagonist in Italo Calvino's short story "The Adventure of the Photographer", which maps the breakdown of a romantic relationship by photographic experimentation and objectification (1993).

(JA) Hayley Newman's *Connotations* series draws on the longstanding relationship between photography and performance art, and plays with their close affiliation. Commentary by the artist on each of the photographs in the series states what is taking place in the photograph (for example, the artist on the London underground wearing glasses equipped with a pump to produce the effect of tears). Often the conceit of the image corresponds to familiar notions of what kinds of acts are undertaken as performances, with

extreme physical acts including endurance, or acts of intimacy done in public. The photographs invite the viewer to see them as documents of performances, of something ephemeral that has happened and that has been captured by the camera. The closeness of the link between performance art and photography led David Briers (1986), to suggest that not having photographs of a work of performance art had become akin to not having photographs of one's wedding. Indeed, the prevalence, since at least the 1950s, of photographs of performances, arguably "documentary" in their style as much as in their intent or use, points to the idea that photographs might be constitutive of performance art: performance art could even be thus defined as that which might be documented in photographs.

Newman's work in *Connotations* emerges perhaps in response to such a context, and is one of a number of challenges made by performance artists and by scholars of performance studies, in particular during the 1990s to the desirability or indeed the possibility of the documentation of performances, then conceived as something ephemeral and fleeting, and involving a limited number of participants in a particular place at a particular time. A key argument of performance studies is made by Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked* (1993), which suggests that documents of performances do not document performances, further suggesting that performance resists participation in mediatization. Philip Auslander's *Liveness* (1999), on the other hand, seems to undermine such claims that performance operates outside of media technology, pointing out that the notion of "the live" can only be operative within recording (for example, theatre would not be construed as having the particularity of being live by those having not encountered recordings).

Newman's images posit, or pose, recorded performances, leading to accounts of the works as documenting imaginary performances, or situating Newman's work within the conceptual art genre. They posit the photographic viewer as the spectator of performance and, like the celebrated Yves Klein image "Le saut dans le vide," but in a slightly different manner, they enable this by means of doing away with the (idea of) the original spectator: for Klein's image, because the performance only "takes place" through a compositing of photographs, and for Newman's series through drawing attention to an original performance in a way that undermines the photograph's apparent veracity and the veritable existence of any such event. The images straddle the barrier between the performative photograph and the performance document.

## Performativity

(WL) The popular myths that continue to underpin many understandings of the relationship between theatre and performance could be summarised by statements indicating that “acting” is just fake (artificial), while “performance” is real (authentic), and that for this reason performance is never “theatre” (rehearsed) but “live art” (actual). In this way, the earlier quoted distinction between “staged photography” as construction and “theatre photography” as documentation seems to operate in similar terms.

In photography, we often speak of “performativity” if the scene exists only to be photographed – as in Jeff Wall’s *tableau* images, in which the set is built for the camera, purpose built in order to be seen from the photographer’s point of view, while the models are directed with a clear consciousness towards the borders of the image that they are about to become. Equally, Duchenne’s “Lady Macbeth” and Nadar’s “Pierrot” are built around performative and demonstrative aspects of the studio setting. In this context, all three elements – the studio, the theatre and the gallery – are inherently performative, because everything is constructed in order to perform for the camera<sup>8</sup>.

In comparison, clown image “Untitled # 425” by Cindy Sherman is performative not only because it is staged to be photographed, but also because it incorporates other levels of performativity involving the visual reference to the clown performer itself: the hyperreal colours, the larger-than-life scale of the image, the staging and framing of the figures, all gazing directly into the camera as part of a digitally composed multiple portrait acted out by the artist herself<sup>9</sup>. With an acute postmodern awareness, Sherman is not only “clowning” the codes of the Clown, she is playing with our viewing conventions and our archetypal images. She de-familiarises and subverts the idea of the harmless joker up to the point where the image actually seems to turn against the viewer. It invades our space, returning our gaze, while the laughter gets stuck in our throats, since we cannot laugh back at the depicted

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<sup>8</sup>Iversen extends the definition of the “performative” from recording something preexisting or pointing at something in the past, to using it as an element for analysis of what will come or how we see the world after a specific encounter: “Photography is thus conceived, not as a melancholic ‘that-has-been’, but more as a future oriented and interrogative” what-will-be?” (Iversen 2007, 105.)

<sup>9</sup>Cindy Sherman: “Untitled # 425”, 2004, colour photograph, 182,9 x 236,2 cm. Copyright Cindy Sherman. Courtesy of the artist, Sprüth Magers and Metro Pictures. online

clowns to release ourselves from them (in a Freudian way) or to correct them (in a Bergsonian way). Simultaneously, they seem untouchably safe in their world, making us feel excluded and exposed in our own.

Framed by the three mocking rictus masks that fill the frame from both sides, Sherman's digitally composed image "Untitled # 425" also represents a much smaller fourth figure hiding in the distance. Looking to the camera, she inhabits the shy posture of a pigtailed schoolgirl, presenting her body in profile (support leg, free leg). Triggering the nightmarish image of being isolated and laughed-at, urging the viewer to identify with her, the image merges the positions of the mocked outsider in front of the image with the ridiculed outsider inside the image. Thinking back to Weegee's "Boy at Circus" it seems as if the stage was here been turned ninety degrees, now mirroring a laughing audience while at the same time throwing its viewer into an embarrassed and infantilizing position in the middle of the ring. Peter Handke's play "Offending the Audience" also springs to mind, using speech acts and direct address to provoke some kind of Brechtian alienation effect. Sherman's display of theatrical methods is therefore far more complex than most "staged photography" because it acts out different performative levels to disrupt any unity of form and content. At the same time, the image includes its own act of viewing, giving it the event-like quality of a live encounter that is not only part of its construction in the studio, but also part of its agency in the gallery space.

(JA) The Chinese artist Ai Weiwei has for some years seemed keen to embrace both photographic recording of performance and photographic performance. We can trace his relationship with photography to his time spent in New York in the 1990s, and to his later participation in a grouping of avant-garde artists operating in a district of Beijing nicknamed "The Beijing East Village." The artists' work was extensively photographed, primarily by two photographers, Rong Rong and Xing Danwen, whose work seems committed to the idea of recording one-off events often taking place before a small audience and in necessarily private settings.

Ai Weiwei has, since his Beijing East Village experience, embraced work where he is both photographer and photographic subject. Here we consider his 1995 triptych "Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn", consisting of a set of black-and-white photographs. In the first image in the sequence, Ai is holding an urn, tilted to one side at shoulder level. In the next, his hands remain up,



Figure 5: Ai Weiwei: “Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn”, 2015, LEGO bricks (from the original 1995 photographic triptych by the artist), 230x192x3cm. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

and he has dropped the urn, which is captured by the camera in mid-air. He retains his position in the third image, in which the urn has hit the ground and shattered, with the pieces scattered around his feet. Each of the three photographs is framed identically, and in each Ai is looking directly into the camera lens.

The triptych recalls the sequential approach of chronophotography, a scientific means of capturing the phases of a movement, but also an aesthetic technique of narrativization. Here, the title’s word “dropping”, depending perhaps on whether it is taken as a participle or a gerund, might emphasise either the capturing of an event, a singular moment, an unrepeatable action (affecting an irreplaceable and irreparable object), or the “dropping” as performance done for the camera. Critical responses to this triptych have focused on the way it documents the deliberate destruction of an artwork and a timeless relic, the discussion thereby centring on iconoclasm, on conceptions of value in art or the status of ancient relics tasked with representing national heritage and history. The fact that this is a sequential image seems to reinforce the possibility that it constitutes objective photographic evidence and leaves little doubt that the urn is being “dropped” on purpose.

As well as being sold and exhibited as an artwork in its own right (in forms including the lego version reproduced here), “Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn” has also formed part of a gallery installation entitled “Coloured Vases”, in which the triptych is hung behind a collection of vessels which Ai has dripped in two contrasting colours of paint (recalling his painted Neolithic vases, a series bearing a painted Coca Cola logo; his act of painting vases and urns has

itself been photographed). Coating antique vases in paint has been labelled a kind of vandalism, but the artist has been keen to instead identify a process of modification through which the ancient objects are re-contextualized and recirculated, rather than destroyed. The co-presence of the sequential photographic backdrop and the similar painted vessels in “Coloured Vases” seems to stage the constituent works’ play on temporality. The stakes of this, and of the confusion the works stage between a documented past act and a current performance, were perhaps revealed and complicated in one notorious response to the exhibited work.

On 16 February 2014, a visitor to Ai’s retrospective installation at the Perez Art Museum, smashed one of the “Coloured Vases”. Footage shows a man, identified in the press as Maximo Caminero, picking a green-and-peach vase from the plinth. A woman, presumably a security guard, is heard saying, “Don’t touch!” just before Caminero drops the vase on the floor, breaking it. He then stands for a moment, hands in pockets, looking up at Ai’s triptych hanging on the wall.

Accounts in the press suggest that Caminero, who is himself an artist, was unaware of the provenance of the destroyed item (the Museum initially declared its value as \$1M), assuming it was a contemporary piece of decoration, rather than an antique (Miller 2014). Elsewhere, Caminero claimed that his action was a performative protest against the hierarchical nature and commercialism of galleries and the art world, particularly with regard to the relative treatment of local and international artists. He later wrote to Ai, describing his act of “solidarity” with the artist, also suggesting that his action might be instructive, and could deter Ai and others from damaging historically significant items (Madigan 2014), a reference to the triptych. Considering the damaged item less in terms of its symbolic value, and more as a piece of private property, Ai, in a BBC interview, condemned Caminero’s act in terms of his having deliberately broken something that did not belong to him, also pointing out that his own destructive artistic acts took place “a long time ago” (Jones 2016).

Offering another angle regarding his act, Caminero described “Coloured Vases” as intentionally a “provocation” (Miller 2014), suggesting that his act might be understood as a performance that was coherent with, and indeed prompted by, the triptych backdrop. This is a compelling point, if not necessarily an advisable legal argument, since it suggests that his interaction



with the piece was consistent with the work on display, and that he was therefore guilty of responding to a step-by-step set of instructions, corresponding as such to an ambiguity in the notion of “documentation” itself, which is etymologically related to the idea of instruction, teaching, proof and warning, and thus seems to point to something of the future as much as something of the past. Photographs and video footage of the incident - which must have appeared as evidence in the apparently successful case brought against the perpetrator, show Caminero standing alongside the installation, joining it by adopting the pose of Ai on the wall behind him, then copying his action, constituting a following step, and another fragment of what we might venture to understand as an interactive, durational multimedia performance.

### **Apparatus**

(WL) So far, we have questioned the idea of a medium in relation to both theatre and photography in favour of discussing their intermedial interactions as part of what may potentially be considered the same discourse, only looked at from different points of view. We have proposed definitions of liveness and performativity, suggesting that both theatre and photography are institutional contexts that are instructive and contextual for their respective productions. To conclude, we would like to introduce the framework of the apparatus as a productive way of thinking the dialogical fields of theatre and photography as things that frame and stage, a construction that recalls equally the historical playhouse and the early Camera Obscura, which were room-sized apparatuses.

By and large, tools, machines and apparatuses appear to have been invented to “free” human beings from enslaving labour. Giorgio Agamben distinguishes between living beings and apparatuses in which human beings are captured. But even though apparatuses seem to dictate and contaminate human life, we cannot simply destroy them. We need to use them in a correct way, such that humans are not separated or estranged from themselves. Agamben suggests that this could happen through “profanation”, which he describes as a “counter-apparatus that restores to common use what sacrifice had separated and divided.” (2009, 19) So, what does this mean if we are forever subjected to the media apparatuses of photography and theatre?

In her essay on *the post-medium condition of art*, Rosalind Krauss expands the specific definition of a given medium (i.e. film) through the “compound” idea of an apparatus, saying that the medium is “neither the celluloid strip of the images, nor the camera that filmed them, nor the projector that brings them to life in motion, nor the beam of light that relays them to the screen, nor that screen itself, but all of these taken together, including the audience’s position caught between the source of the light behind it and the image projected before its eyes.” This produces a united viewing experience out of a series of interrelated elements, revealing how viewers are intentionally implied and physically invested into the work: “The parts of the apparatus would be like things that cannot touch on each other without themselves being touched; and this interdependence would figure forth the mutual emergence of a viewer and a field of vision as a trajectory through which the sense of sight touches on what touches back” (Krauss 2000, 25), potentially opening up an affective or even inter-corporeal relationship with the work.

As opposed to Barthes and Agamben, Vilém Flusser does not perceive the experimental gesture of photography as a process of objectification, because “one cannot take up a position without manipulating the situation” (2011, 83). On the contrary, Flusser insists that the photographer is an active subject whose reflective faculties are “a strategy and not a surrender of self” to the rules of the apparatus. He sees photographing as a search for the self (Flusser 2011, 85) and as a playing against the apparatus, which he describes as the only freedom left to us in a post-industrial world because, as he explains, “self-reflection through a division of labour becomes more collective and dialogical” (Flusser 2011, 88). And in this spirit, we propose to further embed each other’s apparatuses and terminologies as a way of testing new ground by performing the photographic conditions of theatre, and the theatric conditions of photography.

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