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ART IN THE AGE OF VISUAL CULTURE
AND THE IMAGE

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Peter J. Schneemann

Critical Constellations. When Art Questions the Image

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At Documenta 11, on the second floor of the Fridericianum, the visitors were invited to enter a room that was completely dark. There was nothing on the wall but three backlit text panels made up of glowing white letters that were so glaring it was painful to read them. The precise paragraphs dealt with issues concerning the image, seeing and understanding. They addressed the problem that images crucial in shaping our memory and our understanding of history increasingly come into the possession of controlling instances. The texts thus replaced the image, or indeed became the image. I am talking of the work *Lament of the Images* by Alfredo Jaar, to which I will come back later in my text (fig. 1).

The last Annual Conference organized by the German Assembly of Art Historians, which took place in Bonn, once again stressed the issue of 'Bildwissenschaft'. It has become standard procedure in our discipline to define art history's competence as one that deals with images. There is hardly any art historical research project being presented today without mentioning this keyword. In Bonn, however, people also put forward critical questions. One important aspect addressed the resistance experienced when encountering images that do not have the traditional status of an object of art¹. A new type of

¹ Cp. *Iconic Turn. Die neue Macht der Bilder. Das neue Buch zur Vorlesungsreihe*, ed. Ch. Maar, H. Burda, Köln 2004; G. Boehm, *Was ist ein Bild?*, 3rd ed., München 2001; H. Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie*, München 2001; K. Sachs-Hombach, *Wege zur Bildwissenschaft*, Köln 2004; T. Holert, *Imagining*, Köln 2000.

research has evolved that collects images from the most diverse sources with the help of the World Wide Web. On the last day of the conference Lydia Haustein's project *global icons*, which constitutes a huge 'cultural image atlas'², was presented. With reference to Aby Warburg the idea consists in collecting and indexing images that include not only art works such as paintings, but also advertisement designs, propaganda images and images from the news. The result is a kind of giant database project based on the assumptions that there are images that etch themselves on the collective memory, that there is the possibility to group images, to follow their journey through high and low art, to trace their transformation, their quotations and their strategies. Accordingly, the motif of the twin towers and the portrait of Osama Bin Laden were among the favoured examples chosen to prove the incredible amount of pictures and their importance to analyse them. While in the discussion Otto Carl Werckmeister and others questioned the status of these images, insisting on the distinction between a work of art and a popular image, a press photograph, the media use of images and so on, I see the problem somewhere else. While quoting Warburg as a reference, the methodological reflection of this new image collection is limited to being nothing else but a classical *Motivgeschichte*, or history of the motif, focusing on the subjects of the images. While widening the field of competence on the level of material to include all visual material, art historical competence is thus at the same time restricting itself to the visual aspect in dealing with art. I think that this is a high price to pay as it could lead to a new conservative definition of art. Details could easily be discussed, how for example people working on this huge project tried, in the context of the project 'global icons' to interpret a documentary photograph of a performance by Santiago Sierra in direct comparison with a Coca Cola advertisement – following the trace of a person that carried a tattoo.

Instead, I would like to put forward the thesis that artistic reflection on the status of the image today goes far beyond this new art historical fascination of the image as the most powerful means of communication. I would like to discuss selected aspects of a phenomenon which I call the artistic questioning of the image as a means of artistic expression. In doing so, I do not refer to conceptual art in general, although one could easily show how artistic expression of 20th century art is of course by no means limited to the visual. Instead, I selected examples that have, I claim, a direct link to modern image-culture, a link to the availability of images, the increasing importance

² L. Haustein, *Global Icons*, Göttingen 2005.

of images as most doubtful pieces of evidence to legitimize a war, and so on. These challenging problems should be discussed in terms of how we deal with these works of art. In Bonn there was a clear tendency to dismiss art works that do not 'work visually' as not belonging to art. Visual quality is considered the normative criterion for excluding works of art that deliberately question the status of the image. That we expand our field of research to include media images and scientific visualizations should not be misunderstood and abused as a way of limiting our attention to the visual language. Maybe the analysis of works that question the *use* of the image will lead us to an adjustment of our self-conception as art historians dealing with images.

THE ABSENT IMAGE

I would like to come back to the installation *Lament of the Images* (2002) by Alfredo Jaar. I experienced this piece shown at Documenta 11 as one of the strongest positions to address the issues outlined above. The three texts that Jaar used in the first room of the installation were written in cooperation with a poet (fig. 2). They appear to be straightforward pieces of information with some elements of description. All three centre on the status of seeing, the status of images and the relation between society and images.

The first text is about Nelson Mandela's liberation from imprisonment in February 1990 and described the moment he was leaving the high security prison on Robben Island. The text actually describes a photograph taken the very moment he stepped outside the prison gate. In a wider context it is the story of how exposure to the sun while working in a limestone quarry caused Mandela to have a kind of blindness that led to the disability to cry. The image itself is absent. Instead a dialectic discussion around notions of black and white, seeing and not seeing is opened up. The second text panel refers to a news line which had appeared in 2001. It hinted at the economic interest in images, personified by the figure of Bill Gates. How do we react to the fact that, with the argument of preservation, one of the biggest archives is controlled by economic interests? Seventeen million images that are crucial to our notion of history were bought by Bill Gates' company 'Corbis' and are in the process of being buried in an archive³. The links to the first text are complex and work on different levels. There is a first link in the fact that the im-

³ Cp. <http://pro.corbis.com/splash.aspx>.

ages of Mandela's time as a prisoner are part of the archive that was bought by Bill Gates' company. A second level then plays on the dialectic between image and light, namely the storage of these images in the dark as a means to preserve them, with, however, the rather ironic consequence that access is no longer guaranteed, since 'Corbis' has not digitized more than two percent of the images as yet. 'Corbis' by now owns the rights of altogether 65 million images, among them reproductions of many works of art. The third text informs us about the U.S. Air strikes in Afghanistan in autumn 2001, which took place during the night. For this operation the U.S. Defence Department purchased all available air views of that country from a private company that runs a satellite called 'Ikonos', with the clear intention to control all available satellite images from Afghanistan 'Whiteout' was the name of this strategy. The media as a witness and critical observer of the operation thus lost the possibility to see. In this first room, the image is deliberately replaced by the text – following the logic of a critical reflection on the status of images in our society. The text is the source of light and introduces us to three moments of contemporary history that are significant for the absence of images.

Leaving this room we have to pass through complete darkness before entering the second room of the installation, where we are confronted by a strong, cold light (fig. 3). Instantly we try to protect our eyes by covering them with our hands, at the same time we take few steps back. The light emanates from one of the walls that hides a simple light construction consisting of powerful lamps behind a translucent surface. The light is not projected from an outside source. This wall frames a light window that had no composition, just its classical format, offering an escape out of the encompassing darkness, yet we do not see anything while gazing into the light. The installation reconstructs the experience of stepping out of the dark into an aggressive light destroying all images. At the same time it is as if we were confronted with an abstract image, stressed by the fact that the light field was framed, even we consider it as an absent or negative image. Looking at it one automatically tries to find the 'right' distance, which comes close to the position known from looking at the glowing installations of the huge paintings of Abstract Expressionism. However, before further developing the idea of this light image being a negative image, one has to note that the installation works on a further level still. In the first room the beholder was invisible in the total darkness. The second room renders the beholder visible. Not being alone in the installation an interesting interplay among the visitors began. The moment one turned around one noticed the other people being exposed to the

light as if on a stage. When you looked towards the light and other people were in front of you saw them as a black silhouette.

For my question three aspects of this installation are especially interesting: the absence of the media image, the representational image that is referred to as an issue of the entire installation, and its replacement by an abstract light field. The installation *Lament of the Images*, like a whole number of Jaar's works since the mid-1990s, dispenses with pictures altogether. On the one hand, this alludes to the inevitable blind spots (and hence limitations) of all photographic documents. But the empty screen also serves as a visual allegory of the fate implied by Jaar's texts: a future in which the capacity to bear witness to one's reality in the form of an image – and, by extension, to imagine a possible alternative to that reality – will have been permanently withdrawn. Before I come back to this installation I would like to hint at another project by Jaar, which demonstrates the development towards this absence of the image.

Alfredo Jaar, who trained as an architect, first gained his reputation as a photographer. In 1994 he travelled to Rwanda during the ongoing genocide. He was deeply moved by what he saw and experienced in the refugee camps. The international community's lack of interest in one of the cruellest genocides of the 20th century shocked him. When he returned home, he initially wanted to convey the pain and humiliation he had seen through the 3000 photographs taken during his visit to Rwanda. But he felt that the pictures had lost their meaning. So, his works about Rwanda came to consist of just a few pictures combined with texts. Of his various installations I would like to make a few comments only about *Real Pictures* (fig. 4) as exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago in January 1995. Jaar had selected sixty images out of the thousands of photographs he had taken in Rwanda. He then 'buried' each of these images in a black linen box. On the lid of each box he had silk-screened in white a written description of the image inside. These boxes were stacked and arranged into 'monuments' of various shapes and sizes. Jaar used the term 'graveyard' for this installation. Apart from being a reference to the image hidden away in the box the text is also the motivation to create in one's mind's eye a personal image – an image of the unimaginable. This installation gives a different value and connotation to the absence of the representational image. While *Lament of Images* is aiming at criticising the lack of images resulting from a highly problematic image culture, namely one of control and manipulation, *Real Pictures* comments on the limits faced when trying to depict or document reality. The documentary im-

age is deliberately replaced by an abstract experience so that the beholder is forced to 'imagine'⁴.

THE ABSTRACT IMAGE AND THE RE-CREATION OF THE AURA

For me it is not only interesting and indeed highly significant that the discussed examples of artistic reflection on the status of the image are working with the absence of a representational image, in this case the documentary photograph. It is equally interesting that both installations result in an aesthetic experience that focuses on a highly abstract image. One does not necessarily need to compare the light field of *Lament of the Images* to an installation of James Turrell to recognize that Jaar in fact creates extremely powerful icons that bring about an auratic experience. This might be so even when Jaar is talking, as happened in the case of the installation shown during Documenta 11, of a negative experience, of the pain of experiencing the lacking, the erased, the stolen, the forbidden image. Nevertheless, he led the beholder to a moment of silence and even contemplation.

Describing the evidence of his artistic means in this way a rather surprising analogy seems to emerge. I was strongly reminded of the discourse of abstract art and its discourse of the absolute, final or pure painting, and especially the developments in America during the forties and fifties that placed reflection on the artistic image in the context of negating the illustrative function of an image⁵. As an example I would like to refer to the well known cartoon *How to Look at Abstract Art* that Ad Reinhardt published in 1948 in P.M. journal. But many more instances in the discourse by Abstract Expressionist painters can be interpreted as signs of a desire to redefine the image as an abstract icon by negating any representational function, for example

⁴ Cp. G.J. Anderson, 'Wir haben unsere Sehfähigkeit verloren': Ein Gespräch mit Alfredo Jaar, in «Neue Bildende Kunst» 4 (Aug.-Sept. 1997), pp. 44-47; V. Athanassopoulos, *Alfredo Jaar: Une autre version de l'invisible*, in «Art Press» (June 2003), pp. 30-33; A. Jaar, *Es ist schwierig*, in *Documenta 11 Plattform 2: Experimente mit der Wahrheit*, Ostfildern-Ruit 2002, pp. 329-352; M. Sundell, *Alfredo Jaar – Reviews: New York*, in «ArtForum» (Jan. 2003); R. Vine, *Images of inclusion – installation art by Alfredo Jaar*, in «Art in America» (July 1993); *Nauman, Kruger, Jaar*, Zürich 2001; *Alfredo Jaar: Let there be light: The Rwanda Project 1994-1998*, Barcelona 1998; A. Haase, *Keine Zukunft ohne Vergangenheit, oder: Kunst als Mittel der Erkenntnis*, in «Kunstforum» 161 (August-Oktober 2002), pp. 52 ff.

⁵ P.J. Schneemann, *Von der Apologie zur Theoriebildung*, Berlin 2003.

when they reject to translate the visual evidence into verbal messages; or when there is long and detailed discussion of the role and function of titles to guide the beholder. The ideal image should gain the status of an independent reality with its own direct emotional power, a thought that is corroborated by Mark Rothko's just recently discovered manuscript *The Artist's Reality*⁶.

The following two aspects are central when looking at the redefinition of the abstract image as it occurs in this historical discourse: the dialectic relation towards the verbal and the formalistic discourse as model of explanation.

The highly complex refusal of a literary, narrative or anecdotic subtext of their images was replaced by a new use of the language as a poetic link to the status of myths on the one hand and an articulated theory production on the other hand. One of the masters of these artistic texts was Ad Reinhardt who modelled them on the tradition of the avant-garde manifesto. And it was in his texts that Ad Reinhardt developed the dialectics of negation. Partly published in a striking typography he defended the abstract icon against everything that would lead away from its absolute ontology. Ad Reinhardt reshaped the discourse of the 'absolute', the 'pure', the 'last image'. I refer to texts such as they appeared in the journals *Art News* (1957) and *It Is* (1958)⁷:

1. ART IS ART. EVERYTHING ELSE IS EVERYTHING ELSE.
2. ART-AS-ART. ART FROM ART. ART ON ART. ART OF ART. ART FOR ART. ART BEYOND ART. ARTLESS ARTIFICE...
7. ICON AS IMAGE AS IDEA AS SYMBOL AS IDEAL AS FORM AS ICON.
8. ICON AS DEVICE, DIAGRAM, EMBLEM, FRAME, GAME, SIGN, SPECTACLE ETC.⁸

Criticism and historiography of Abstract Expressionism found the most problematic as well as the most powerful argument in explaining the finding of the abstract monochrome painting centered on the laws of the medium and its artistic reflection in a self-referential process. The causality of modernity led to the formal solution of the purity of the flat canvas.

The Museum of Modern Art took, as many other museums did, direc-

⁶ M. Rothko, *Die Wirklichkeit des Künstlers*, München 2005.

⁷ A. Reinhardt, *Twelve rules for a new academy*, in «*Art News*» (56/3), pp. 37-38; *25 Lines of Words on Art Statement*, in «*It Is*» (Spring 1958); *Art-as-Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. B. Rose, New York 1975.

⁸ A. Reinhardt, *25 Lines of Words on Art Statement*, *loc. cit.*

tor Alfred H. Barr's discourse as a basis for a display where the painting glows in a churchlike atmosphere and is contemplated by the beholder in silence. The writings by the Abstract Expressionists are indeed only directives and their presence reduced to the display of titles. Mitchell hinted at the fact that hermeneutics constructed out of this disposition is a dangerous contradiction between the verbal and the visual⁹. A constellation that was taken up ironically by works like Jonathan Borofsky's *Chattering Man*, a life-sized sculpture accompanied by a recording of jaw-flapping patter together with a huge abstract composition, the title of which consists of some long series of numbers.

If we confront Jaar's installation and the discourse surrounding the abstract images of the fifties, it is the *process* leading to the contemplation of the abstract light which becomes especially interesting. Jaar excludes the possibility to inverse the proposed order. First he forces the beholder to read the text, to become informed on contemporary issues. If we follow his intention the moment of reading undermines any possibility of entering the aesthetic experience as an innocent, formal exercise. In a way Jaar's strategy is sceptical – of the abstract as well as the representational image. This double scepticism that links the questioning of our image-culture to the artistic exploration and reflection of the inherent laws of artistic media is to be found in various contemporary works.

I would like to refer to the work by Swiss Artist René Pulfer entitled *Expose (Unexposed Film)* dating from 1991, for which he used a thirty-three centimetre long piece of unexposed film (fig. 5). In Pulfer's video work this strip is shown to the beholder in three different ways, first at normal speed, then slow motion and finally inversed. Naturally, as the film is blind we cannot see anything. The only thing that is visible are traces, traces of history in terms of marks and scratches. What we see is the quality of the medium. As soon as we read the story linked to this film strip the material acquires an unexpected dramatic turn. The artist claims that the visual information found on his videotape is based on a film-strip that he had found in 1986 on the site of the Gestapo headquarters in Berlin. The reflection on the medium is turned into the political and moral questions how we deal with images of history. The artist comments on the disappearance of images that «both settle and unsettle my memory». Then again, at the same time, we can witness how our imag-

⁹ W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Ut Pictura Theoria': *Abstract Painting and the Repression of Language*, in «Critical Inquiry» 15/2 (1989), pp. 348-371.

ination is dealing with the information that relates the aesthetic view of an image to issues of society¹⁰.

Further examples of this strategy can be found in the work by Jochen Gerz, who in the seventies created works using photographs which he covered with black paint. In most of these cases the destruction or disappearance of representation leads to an icon that is aiming at a stronger impact than the documentary image. In this sense painters such as Heribert Ottersbach or Gerhard Richter use the means of 'quotation' and transfer of media from reproduction to painting and backwards to re-create the auratic icon. Richter is highly successful in combining this process with strong references to the theoretical discourse of the abstract image¹¹. In this context one may also mention Mark Tansey, who creates real history paintings out of the ideologies of modernism¹². Focusing on the critical constellation, the questioning of the image by contemporary art, I conclude with a third strategy.

¹⁰ M. Rohrbach, René Pulfer – Expose (Unexposed Film), in Brennpunkt Schweiz. Positionen in der Videokunst seit 1970 [Exh .cat. Bern 2005], ed. R. Mader, W. Brückle, N. Schweizer, Bern 2005, pp. 61-62; Partitions. Une exposition réalisée en vidéo [catalogue to the exhibition 1990/1991]: Vidéo Indépendante Suisse, 1991. Interesting is a comparison with Nam June Paik's Zen for TV and Zen for Film. Zen for TV (1963) was originally produced for a TV Set. For this work the artist manipulated the TV scan-line so that the only thing one could see was a permanent line of pure white light. It is the deconstruction of the media picture which facilitates the «creation of an image of a new kind: a Zen image, i.e., an image for a Zen type of gaze». One year after Zen for TV Paik developed Zen for Film. This work consists of a long clear celluloid strip which shows, when run through the projector, particles of dirt and dust caught in the projector's gate as well as the scratches of the film's transparent surface. In a text published in the catalogue Electronic Art III in 1971 John Cage compares Paik's work Zen for Film with his own composition 4'33" («four minutes, thirty-three seconds»), a famous work of art that consists only of the noise of the pianist walking to the piano and not hitting any keys for the whole length of the play, and stresses its differences. As his play was identical to the noises of the environment of the performance, Cage claims in the aforementioned article, the projection of the shadows of the accumulated dust on the celluloid strip of Paik's movie was the environment itself and therefore less free. Cp. H. Belting, Beyond Iconoclasm. Nam June Paik. The Zen Gaze and the Escape from Representation, in Iconoclasm. Beyond the Image Wars in Science. Religion and Art [Catalogue to the exhibition in Karlsruhe 2002], ed. B. Latour, P. Weibel, Cambridge (Mass.), London 2002, pp. 390-411; J. Cage (signed University of Cincinnati), Cinema Now, in Electronic Art III, New York 1971 (1968).

¹¹ J. Gelschorn, *Nachbilder. Zu Gerhard Richters visuellem Repertoire / Appropriations: Gerhard Richter's Visual Repertoire, in Ohne Farbe / Without Colour [Catalogue to the exhibition in Burgdorf (Switzerland) 2005]*, R. Spieler (ed.), Ostfildern-Ruit 2005, pp. 24-38.

¹² J. Freeman, *Mark Tansey [catalogue to the exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum 1993]*, San Francisco 1993.

THE COLLECTED IMAGE AS REJECTION OF THE AURA

Let me come back to my point of departure, i.e. the obsession to gather images on the one hand and the artistic gesture to create works that counteract the impression of unlimited access to global image production by producing powerful icons on the other hand. At this stage I would like to mention artistic strategies that use these image collections to avoid the aura of the painted image¹³. Hans-Peter Feldmann entered the art world in the late 1960s when he began to construct and exhibit editions of small booklets containing pictures he had found, such as postcards, magazine clippings and posters (fig. 6). These images constituted part of Feldmann's massive 'picture archive', an assortment of images categorized according to the artist's own system. If part of the archive was incomplete because an image was missing, Feldmann would capture this image with his own camera. Using image reproduction, photography and other devices as a means of illuminating the mysteries of daily life, he has consistently given importance to under-recognized art forms such as the photo album, never underestimating the power of the most 'common' aesthetic strategies¹⁴. This image collection works again with a kind of indexing. The crucial question to raise here is what kind of values we attribute to the archive. If the archive is nothing but a database, the answers are limited to the criteria we developed beforehand.

Looking at the work of young Austrian artist Christoph Weber this problem leads my paper back to the project 'global icons' (figg. 7, 8). His heavy book bound in a simple, unsophisticated way is made up of 2450 pages of thin paper and looks like a venerable edition of the Bible. However, its pages are not printed with text, but show images of the most various provenances. Only the first page displays an inscription, providing information about the content of this artist book: the Internet address <http://images.google.com/> indicates the source of the printed images. With the help of the search engine 'google', Christoph Weber scoured the net for images corresponding to the terms 'longing', 'richness', 'affluence', 'opulence', 'luck', 'hap-

¹³ The catalogue *Sichtbare Welt* from Peter Fischli and David Weiss for example is the result of the nearly 15 years lasting search for the ideal picture. It is an archive of many thousands of photographs depicting landscapes, flowers, animals, city views and urban details from all over the world. Peter Fischli, Davis Weiss, *Sichtbare Welt*, Köln 2000.

¹⁴ H.-P. Feldmann, *272 Pages [catalogue to the exhibition 2001 in Barcelona]*, H. Tatay (ed.), Barcelona 2001.

pinness' and 'bliss', then documenting the results and the time taken by the search. This table of contents, however, is followed by pages showing nothing but the search results, without any more precise labels or classification according to individual concepts. Although the formats of the individual images differ, Weber has unified them in the black and white print layout, giving them a documentary character. In terms of subject matter, the book contains an entire universe of images: brand-name sneakers, views of living rooms, romantic kitsch photographs, art reproductions, everyday snapshots, details of tattoos using Asian characters, etc.¹⁵.

Weber opens up a panoramic view of all the clichés that our society associates with the contexts, reinterpreting them accordingly. He is interested in the evocative power of the individual images he stages as pseudo-historical icons on white paper. The significance they acquire through this labelling with keywords is projected back in an exaggerated fashion. The viewer associates each image with a narrative: the playing cards with the proverbial 'right knack' the roulette table with a stroke of luck, the dog in the field with luck at betting, the altar with heavenly bliss, the palace hall with opulence, riches, and power, the sneaker with affluence and the beaming soldiers with the happiness experienced after winning a battle.

It is in precisely this lack of system that Weber's documentation presents a cross-section of all clichés of events and views of happiness, satisfaction and longing. His artist book can thus be understood as a collection of 'collective images' that have also preoccupied the minds of numerous other artists. While Gerhard Richter in *Atlas* documents the sources of his work, in *Spiritual America* Richard Prince, like Weber, shows a collection of images that stand for certain ideologies, promises, or power structures. While on the one hand Weber places himself in the tradition of archival practices, he also distances himself from the kind of systematization sought by the art historian

¹⁵ The online project *One Word Movie* by the Swiss artist Beat Broghe and programmer Philippe Zimmermann is closely related to Weber's book *Sehnsucht, Reichtum, Glück*. Based on a search term provided by an online user, a specially programmed search engine arranges and structures the countless pictures on the World Wide Web into a flickering film by first producing a 'hit list' and then animating the images of this list into a movie: «A word turns into images, images turn into a movie». By playing with the found images and their association with the search term *One Word Movie* reveals patterns of term-image relations and provides thus an insight into «the 'collective psychology' of online cultures' and raises at the same time questions such as about the relationship between image and text. www.onewordmovie.ch.

Aby Warburg in his *Mnemosyne Atlas* for symbols of, say, pathos. But Weber shares with Warburg the interest in a visual cosmos in which recurring images transport certain contents. Weber uses one of the first tools that make it possible to access images all across the World Wide Web using search terms. With the software 'PageRank', Google uses a system to judge web pages through cross-references and numbers of hits. If this brings us to the notion of the web's democratic nature, links to projects such as Komar and Melamid's *The Peoples Choice* can be recognised. As a 'bible of contemporary promises of salvation', Weber's work collects fragments of the visual world popular with the majority¹⁶.

¹⁶ J. Gelshorn, P.J. Schneemann, *Glücks-Treffer. Eine Enzyklopädie zeitgenössischer Heilsversprechen / Lucky Hits. An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Promises of Salvation, in Nine Points of the Law. Bild Macht Besitz, Verhältnisse [Exb. Cat. Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin, 2004]*, Berlin 2004.

IMAGES



[Fig. 1] Alfredo Jaar, *Lament of the Images*, Installation Documenta 11, 2002, detail

Cape Town, South Africa, February 11, 1990.

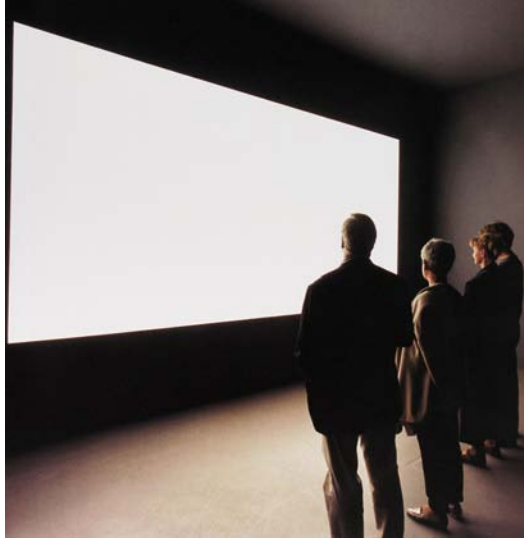
Nelson Mandela is released from prison, after 28 years of brutal treatment by the apartheid regime. The images of his release, broadcast live around the world, show a man squinting into the light as if blinded.

More than half of Mandela's sentence was spent on Robben Island, a windswept rock surrounded by the treacherous seas of the Cape of Good Hope. Only seven miles off Cape Town, the island had been used as a maximum security prison for "non-white" men since 1959. Mandela's fellow inmates there included Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, and Govan Mbeki, the father of current South African President Thabo Mbeki. Mandela later said that Robben Island was "intended to cripple us so that we should never again have the strength and courage to pursue our ideals."

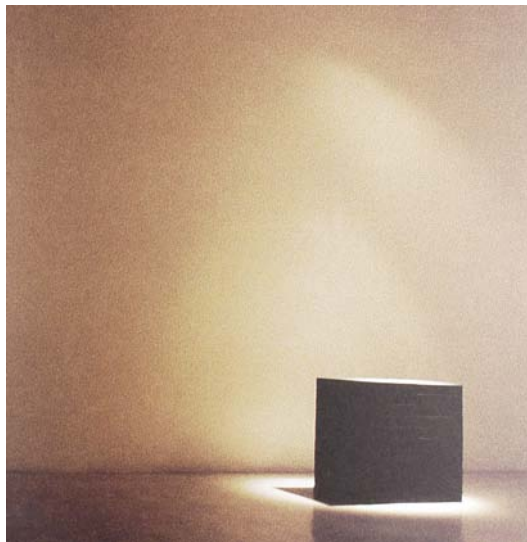
In the summer of 1964, Mandela and his fellow inmates in the isolation block were chained together and taken to a limestone quarry in the center of the island, where they were put to work breaking rocks and digging lime. The lime was used to turn the island's roads white. At the end of each day, the black men had themselves turned white with limedust. As they worked, the lime reflected the glare of the sun, blinding the prisoners. They repeated requests for sunglasses to protect their eyes were denied.

There are no photographs that show Nelson Mandela weeping on the day he was released from prison. It is said that the blinding light from the lime had taken away his ability to cry.

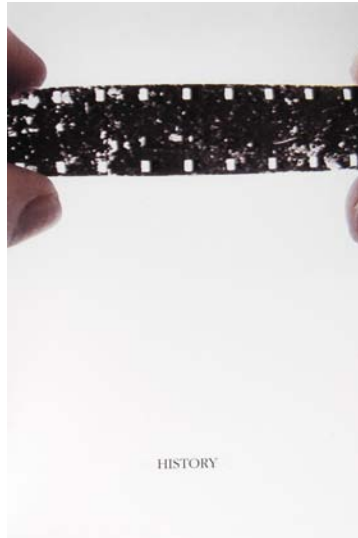
[Fig. 2] Alfredo Jaar, *Lament of the Images*, Installation Documenta 11, 2002, detail



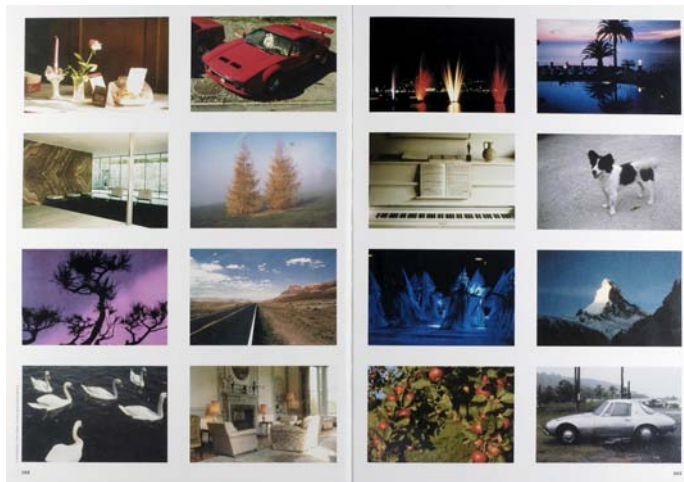
[Fig. 3] Alfredo Jaar, *Lament of the Images*, Installation Documenta 11, 2002, detail



[Fig. 4] Alfredo Jaar, *Real Pictures*, part of the Rwanda Project (1994-2000), 1995, detail



[Fig. 5] René Pulfer, *Expose*, Image is not identical with Pulfers' video and to be understood as a self contained contribution to the catalogue of the exhibition Partitions in 1991



[Fig. 6] Hans-Peter Feldmann, *Contribution from Peter Fischli and David Weiss*, Detail, Abstract of the catalogue: *Hans-Peter Feldmann 272 Pages*, ed. Helena Tatay, catalogue to the exhibition at the Museum Ludwig 2001, Köln, Barcelona 2001, pp. 162-163



[Fig. 7] Christoph Weber, *Sehnsucht, Reichtum, Glück*, 1st Edition, book, 2250 pages, light weight paper, hardcover, 20 x 24 x 10 cm, 2001



[Fig. 8] Christoph Weber, *Sehnsucht, Reichtum, Glück*, 1st Edition, book, 2250 pages, light weight paper, hardcover, 20 x 24 x 10 cm, 2001, detail.