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Photography's Expanded Field

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*Nancy Davenport. Stills from Weekend Campus. 2004.
Courtesy the artist and Nicole Klingsbrun Gallery.*

Photography's Expanded Field

GEORGE BAKER

I begin not with a negative, nor with a print, but with a screen. On the screen can be seen a landscape, a campus it seems, identified by cheerful signage and imposing brutalist buildings. This is a screen in motion, as the view begins to rotate, parading before us the series of changing buildings but also the denizens of this place: various youth, students both bohemian and conformist, potential professors, security and police. Along with the bodies, the camera scans automobiles not so much in motion as sentenced to their destruction, as we see car wreck after car wreck, an obvious homage both to one of the great moments in the history of photography, Andy Warhol's use of catastrophe photographs in his series "Death in America," and to one of the great moments in the history of cinema, Jean-Luc Godard's infamous eight-minute tracking shot of wrecked automobiles in the film *Weekend* (1967). And yet if the cars here do not move, neither do the people; both wrecked object and frozen subject simply pass by in an endless scroll—a rotating frieze—punctuated repetitively by one accident after another, a revolution that reaches its end only to loop and repeat itself again. Indeed, the strangely static moving-image work in question, Nancy Davenport's *Weekend Campus* (2004), was made by a photographer; it consists entirely of a scanned series of photographic still images and was positioned as the introductory piece in a recent exhibition otherwise given over to digital photographic prints.¹

Everywhere one looks today in the world of contemporary art, the photographic object seems to be an object in crisis, or at least in severe transformation. Surely it has been a long time now since reformulating the history and theory of photography has seemed a vital intellectual necessity, an art-historical project born rather of the new importance of the photograph in the art practice of the 1970s and '80s. As theorized then, postmodernism could almost be described as a photographic event, as a series of artistic practices were reorganized around the parameters of photography taken as what Rosalind Krauss has recently called a "theoretical object": the submission of artistic objects to photography's logic of the copy, its recalcitrance to normative conceptions of authorship and style, its

1. Nancy Davenport, *Campus*, Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York, March 5 to April 3, 2004.

embeddedness within mass-cultural formations, its stubborn referentiality and consequent puncturing of aesthetic autonomy.² With hindsight, however, we might now say that the extraordinary efflorescence of both photographic theory and practice at the moment of the initiation of postmodernism was something like the last gasp of the medium, the crepuscular glow before nightfall. For the photographic object theorized then has fully succumbed in the last ten years to its digital recoding, and the world of contemporary art seems rather to have moved on, quite literally, to a turn that we would now have to call cinematic rather than photographic.

We exist in a quite different moment than that described by Krauss twenty-five years ago in her essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field”: the elastic and “infinitely malleable” medium categories decried by the critic then seem not to be our plight.³ Critical consensus would have it that the problem today is not that just about anything image-based can now be considered photographic, but rather that photography itself has been foreclosed, cashiered, abandoned—outmoded technologically and displaced aesthetically. The artist stars of the present photographic firmament are precisely those figures, such as Jeff Wall, who reconcile photography with an older medium like history painting, in a strange reversal of photography’s former revenge on traditional artistic mediums; or those, such as Andreas Gursky, who have most fully embraced the new scale and technology of photography’s digital recoding (this is hardly an opposition of possibilities: Wall has also embraced the digital, and Gursky is also a pictorialist). And even the most traditional of a younger generation of contemporary photographers cannot now resist the impulse to deal the concerns of other mediums into their practice, less utilizing photography to recode other

2. Rosalind Krauss, “Reinventing the Medium,” *Critical Inquiry* 25 (Winter 1999). An expanded version of the essay is reprinted in *James Coleman*, ed. George Baker (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

3. Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” (1979), in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), p. 277.



Jeff Wall. The Storyteller. 1986. Courtesy the artist.



practices than allowing the photograph to be recoded in turn, as when Philip-Lorca diCorcia lights his street photography with the stage lights of theater or cinema, or Thomas Demand now accompanies his constructed photographic simulacra with equally simulated projections placing his constructions into motion, or Rineke Dijkstra feels compelled to place video recordings of her portrait subjects alongside their photographic inscriptions. Even among those artists then who continue in some form the practice of photography, today the medium seems a lamentable expedient, an insufficient bridge to other, more compelling forms.

And yet I am pulled back from the finality of this judgment, from this closure of the photographic, by the strange vacillation in the Davenport work with which I began. How to describe its hesitation between motion and stasis, its stubborn petrification in the face of progression, its concatenation into movement of that which stands still—its dual dedication seemingly to both cinema and photography? It is this hiccup of indecision, whether fusion or disruption, that I want to explore here. For it seems that while the medium of photography has been thoroughly transformed today, and while the object forms of traditional photography are no longer in evidence in much advanced artistic practice, something like a photographic effect still remains—*survives*, perhaps, in a new, altered form. And if we could resist the object-bound forms of critical judgment and description, as well as the announcement of a medium's sheer technological demise, we might be able to imagine critically how the photographic object has been “reconstructed” in contemporary artistic practice—an act of critical imagination made necessary by the forms of contemporary art, and one that will answer to neither technological exegesis nor traditional formalist criteria.

To “reconstruct” one’s object: this is a structuralist vocation, as long ago described by Roland Barthes, and it was precisely the critical gesture made twenty-five years ago in Krauss’s demonstration “Sculpture in the Expanded Field.”⁴ At a moment today when the photographic turn no longer seems so dominant in theories of postmodernism, this other explanatory device from that era—the notion of postmodernism as opening onto a culturally and aesthetically “expanded field” of practice—only gains in usefulness.⁵ And yet it is striking to me that the explanatory schema of postmodernism’s expanded field was never, to my knowledge, put into place to explore the transformation that photographic practice underwent twenty-five years ago, during the early years of aesthetic postmodernism, this event that was otherwise sensed by critic after critic as a photographic one. Surely, writers like Abigail Solomon-Godeau absorbed Krauss’s critical lesson and described postmodern photography as opening onto an “expanded” rather than reduced field of practice; and yet the precise mapping of this expansion was never essayed, nor concretely imagined.⁶ If today the object of photography seems to be ever so definitively slipping away, we need to enter into and explore what it might mean to declare photography to have an expanded field of operation; we need to trace what this field has meant for the last two decades of photographic practice, in order to situate ourselves with any accuracy in relationship to the putative dispersal—whether melancholic or joyful—that the medium today is supposedly undergoing.

Perhaps photography’s notorious epistemological slipperiness—think of the famous difficulty faced by Roland Barthes throughout the entirety of his book *Camera Lucida* (1980) to define in any general way the object of his analysis—inherently resists the structural order and analysis of what Krauss called the expanded field. Perhaps, indeed, photography’s expanded field, unlike sculpture’s, might even have to be imagined as a group of expanded *fields*, multiple sets of oppositions and conjunctions, rather than any singular operation. And yet it is striking how consistently photography has been approached by its critics through the rhetoric of oppositional thinking, whether we look to the photograph as torn between ontology and social usage, or between art and technology, or between what Barthes called denotation and connotation, or what he also later called *punctum* and *studium*, between “discourse and document” (to use an invention of Benjamin Buchloh’s), between

4. “The goal of all structuralist activity, whether reflexive or poetic, is to reconstruct an ‘object’ in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning (the ‘functions’) of this object. Structure is therefore actually a *simulacrum* of the object, but a directed, *interested* simulacrum, since the imitated object makes something appear which remained invisible, or, if one prefers, unintelligible in the natural object” (Roland Barthes, “The Structuralist Activity,” in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard [Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972], pp. 214–15).

5. Krauss’s schema has been revisited recently by Anthony Vidler in an essay on contemporary architecture; see “Architecture’s Expanded Field,” *Artforum* 42, no. 8 (April 2004), pp. 142–47. It has also been returned to only to be critiqued by Anne Wagner in a recent essay on 1970s sculpture; see “Splitting and Doubling: Architecture and the Body of Sculpture,” *Grey Room* 14 (Winter 2004), pp. 26–45.

6. “Photography after art photography appears as an expanded rather than a diminished field,” Solomon-Godeau wrote in “Photography After Art Photography,” in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), p. 85.

“Labor and Capital” (to use one of Allan Sekula’s), between index and icon, sequence and series, archive and art photograph. One could go on.

This tearing of photography between oppositional extremes is precisely what we need to begin to map an expanded field for its practice, and indeed any one of the above oppositions might potentially serve as this field’s basis. However, in the very first art-historical essay I ever published, I introduced my own opposition into the mix, an exceedingly general as well as counterintuitive one, but an opposition intended nevertheless to encompass many of the terms just mentioned, between which photographic history and practice have been suspended since the medium’s invention. In an essay otherwise devoted to an analysis of the photography of August Sander, I asked when would it become necessary to conceive of the photograph as torn between narrative, or what I also called “narrativity,” and stasis.⁷ The question was counterintuitive, for the frozen fullness of the photographic image, its devotion to petrification or stasis, has seemed for so many to characterize the medium as a whole. And yet, by the moment of the early twentieth century, it had become impossible not to consider all the ways in which the social usage of photography—its submission to linguistic captioning, its archival compilations, its referential grip on real conditions of history and everyday life, its aesthetic organization into sequence and series—thrust the photographic signifier

7. George Baker, “Photography Between Narrativity and Stasis: August Sander, Degeneration, and the Decay of the Portrait,” *October* 76 (Spring 1996), pp. 73–113.



August Sander. *Left: Young Farmers. ca. 1914. Right: Streetworkers. 1928–29.* © Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur–August Sander Archiv, Cologne; ARS, New York, 2005.

into motion, engaging it with the communicative functions of narrative diegesis, the unfolding of an unavoidable discursivity. The opposition was counterintuitive then, but also logical, holding at odds such effects of movement and petrification, as well as perhaps the temporal and spatial dimensions themselves, in one contradictory field.

“Photography between narrativity and stasis,” I called this condition, isolating its emplacement within the aesthetics of *Neue Sachlichkeit* at the moment of high modernism, an aesthetic, in Sander’s case, torn between the narrative dimensions of his archival compilation of portraits, and its typological repetitiveness, its inability to avoid freezing its own diegesis through the systematic and serial deployment of identical poses, formats, and types. While Sander’s engagement with a kind of narratological, even literary “noise” in his photography might be dismissed as one sign of *Neue Sachlichkeit*’s anti-modernism, his project complicates such a judgment by rupturing its every claim to narrative cohesion, and by simultaneously rupturing its supposedly photographic dedication to immobility or stasis. In the twentieth century, this had been an unnoticed but increasingly unavoidable condition for photography. While Barthes had always wanted to separate a narrative art such as cinema from the different temporality of the photograph, he was always also unsure that a specific “genius” of photography in fact existed, and in his own most thrilling criticism, would be unable to keep the cinematic and photographic apart at all. For when he would look to find the “genius” of cinema in a series of films by Eisenstein, he would of course focus all of his attention on the photographic film still, in which he would locate the paradoxical essence of the “filmic” (in the essay “The Third Meaning”); and in *Camera Lucida*, the “genius” of photography would ultimately turn out to be its creation, in what Barthes began to call the photographic “punctum,” of a movement onward and away from the image that he also called the image’s “blind field,” a property he had otherwise earlier reserved in his book for the medium of film.

Now, it is this rending of photographic language between the movements of narrative and the stoppage of stasis that might become visible today as a structuring condition for modernist photography as a whole. Applicable both to artists of the avant-garde and the *retour à l’ordre* (return to order), this is a condition that we sense structuring the Soviet model of the photo-file (Rodchenko) as much as the Farm Security Administration legacy of the photo novel (Walker Evans). It haunts every attempt by the modernist artist to create a medium of visual communication as well as the various sequencing and captioning schemes that were devised for so doing. It simultaneously haunts every counter-attempt by other modernist schools of photography to invent modes of silencing the photograph’s referentiality, of inducing the photographic image to a more pure and purely visual stasis, a condition and a limit that no modernist photograph in the history of the medium, however, was ever truly able to achieve. In this way, the modernist usage of photography—what we could call its *rhetoric*—seems to result in a general condition of double negation, like what we find more specifically in the case of Sander. The

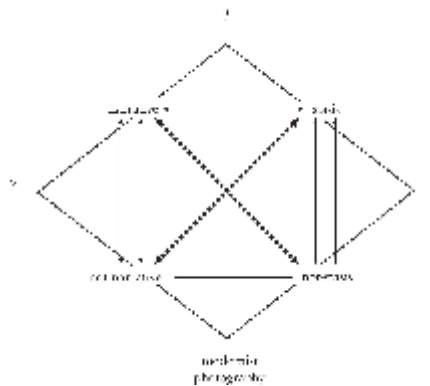
modernist photograph seems suspended in the category of the neither/nor: it is either that object that attempts to produce narrative communication only to be disrupted by the medium's forces of stasis, or it entails the creation of a static image concatenated by the photograph's inherent war between its own denotative and connotative forces. We are dealing, in other words, with the question of *meaning* and its construction in photographic terms—a question to which photographic theories that merely stress shifts in the photograph's technology, or even emphasize a kind of formalist or phenomenological account of the image, have proven blind—and for which the lessons of structuralism might still prove quite useful.

Indeed, another, less confusing way of generalizing the structural condition of modernist photography is to depict it as suspended between the conditions of being neither narrative nor fully static; the modernist photograph is that image that is paradoxically then both a function of *not-narrative* and *not-stasis* at the same time. My terms here begin to echo the logical conjugation explored by Krauss in her "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." As was the case with her structuring opposition for (modernist) sculpture of "not-landscape" and "not-architecture"—modernist sculpture, for Krauss, having become simply that thing in the landscape that is not landscape, or that thing in the architecture that is not architecture—the depiction of modernist photography as being suspended between not-narrative and not-stasis has a compelling interest. For, like the terms "landscape" and "architecture," these two terms open onto what we could also call the "built" (or constructed) and the "non-built," with narrative signaling something like the cultural dimension of the photograph, and stasis its unthinking "nature" (Barthes's terms of "connotation" and "denotation" are not far away). This opposition of nature and culture has long been one around which theories of the advent of postmodernism themselves turned, and in the history of photography it would seem that it was the gradual relaxing of the rending suspension of photography between the conditions of not-narrative and not-stasis that would signal the emergence of postmodernism in photographic terms: the reevaluation in the 1970s of narrative functions, of documentary in all its forms, and of many types of discursive framings and supplements for photographic works.

In "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," Krauss utilized the mathematician's Klein group or the structuralist's Piaget group to open up the logical opposition she had constructed. I will paraphrase her terms and her usage of this structure here. For if modernist photography was somehow caught between two negations, between the conditions of being neither truly narrative nor static in its meaning effects—if the modernist photograph had become a sum of exclusions—then this opposition of negative terms easily generates a similar opposition but expressed positively. "That is," to really paraphrase Krauss, "the [*not-narrative*] is, according to the logic of a certain kind of expansion, just another way of expressing the term [*stasis*], and the [*not-stasis*] is, simply, [*narrative*]."⁸ The expansion to which Krauss referred, the Klein group, would then transform a set of binaries "into a quaternary

8. Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," p. 283.

field which both mirrors the original opposition and at the same time opens it up.”⁹ For modernist photography, that expanded field would look like this:



Now, I have been drawing Klein groups and semiotic squares ever since I first met Rosalind Krauss, and the reader by this point will not be surprised to learn of how fondly I remember sitting in her office conjugating the semiotic neutralization of things like the terms of gender and sexuality, some twelve years ago. When I first drew this particular graph, however, about three years ago, I was at first unclear as to what new forms might correspond to the expanded field of which modernist photography, with its medium-specific truths, was now not the master term, but only one displaced part. The graph became immediately compelling, however, when I began to think of the major uses to which the photograph had been put in the most important artistic practices to emerge since the mid to late 1970s, after the closure of modernism and the legitimization of avant-garde uses of photography by movements such as Conceptual art.

I was struck, first, by how the so-called “Pictures” generation of artists (Douglas Crimp’s term) most often foregrounded the use of the photograph as a self-conscious fragment of a larger field, the most compelling example of this being, of course, Cindy Sherman’s untitled “film stills.” Such works were photographic images that, crucially, would not call themselves photographs, and that would hold open the static image to a cultural field of codes and other forces of what I am calling *not-stasis*. At the very same moment, however, post-Conceptual uses of projected images would see an artist like James Coleman producing, in the 1970s, works based directly on narrative cinema, works that would, as in *La Tache Aveugle* (1978–90), freeze the cinematic forms of movement into still images to be projected over long delays; or that would eventually freeze films more generally into the durational projection of continuous still images (*Untitled: Philippe VACHER* [1990]); or, in Coleman’s most characteristic working mode, would seize upon slide projections with poetic voice-overs continually disrupted in their narrative diegesis

9. Ibid.



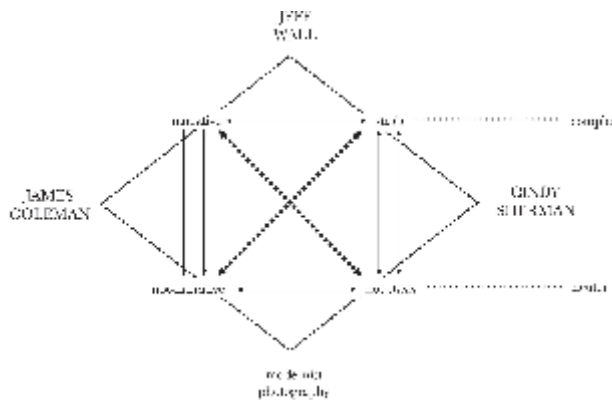
by the frozen photographic forces of what I have been calling *not-narrative* (as in the projected image “trilogy” of *Background*, *Lapsus Exposure*, and *INITIALS*, works created in the early 1990s but linked to projects that Coleman completed in the early to mid-1970s).¹⁰ Two expansions of my quaternary field had thus been spoken for, the schemas of *narrative* and *not-narrative* as well as *stasis* and *not-stasis*, and the uncanny connection—but also the opposition—that had always puzzled me between the projects of Sherman and Coleman logically explained. More puzzling, perhaps, was what the structuralist would call the “complex” axis of my graph, the inverted expression of the suspension of modernist photography as a sum of

10. While Coleman would only be widely recognized for his “projected images” (the artist’s term) in the 1990s, his first uses of the slide projection with voiceover date to the early to mid-1970s, e.g., *Slide Piece* (1972) and *Clara and Dario* (1975).



Top left: Cindy Sherman. Untitled Film Still #6. 1977. *Top right:* Sherman. Untitled Film Still #21. 1978. *Courtesy the artist and Metro Pictures Gallery, New York.*
Above: James Coleman. Clara and Dario. 1975. © James Coleman. *Courtesy the artist.*

exclusions, neither narrative nor stasis in its neuter state. What would it mean to invert this exclusion, to locate a project not as the photographic suspension between the not-narrative and the not-stasis, but as some new combination of both terms, involving both narrative *and* stasis at the same time? But of course Sherman and Coleman in the late 1970s have a rather compelling and logical counterpart in the claiming of new uses for “photography,” even if the medium-specific term now evidently needs to be reconsidered; if Sherman claims the “film still” and Coleman the “projected image,” Jeff Wall’s appropriation then of the advertising format of the light box for his image tableaux arrives as yet another major form invented at precisely that same moment that now seems to complete our expanded field.



Critics have often wondered about the operation of the condition of pastiche in Wall’s images; they have wondered too about his reclamation of history painting, disparaging his aesthetic as the false resuscitation of the “talking picture.”¹¹ These questions too we can now answer, as Wall’s aesthetic gambit was to occupy the complex axis of photography’s expanded field, positioning his own practice as the logical and diametric inversion of modernist practice, as opposed to the oblique continuation of at least partial forms of modernist disruption or negation in the opposed projects of Coleman and Sherman (the *not-narrative* in the one, the *not-stasis* in the other). Two artists here, then, move obliquely away from and yet thus manage to continue the critical hopes of modernism; the other simply inverts its terms, allowing the ideological exclusions of modernism to shine forth without disruption.¹²

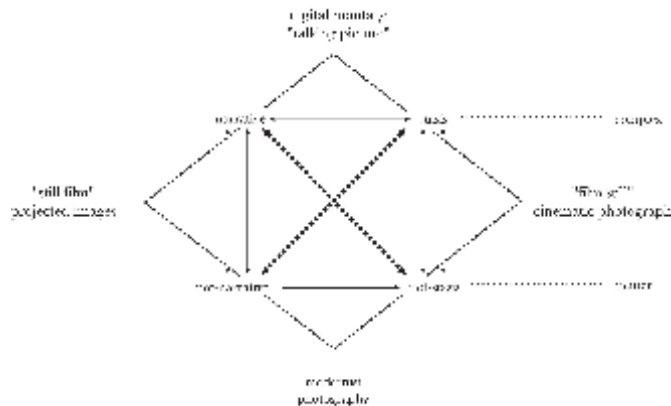
11. See Rosalind Krauss, “. . . And Then Turn Away,” in *James Coleman*, pp. 177–78, 183: “The role of pastiche within postmodernism has long been an issue of particular theoretical concern. . . . Ever since my first experience with Wall’s *Picture for Women* (1979), a restaging of Manet’s *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, I have been interested in accounting *structurally* for this condition in his work.” The expanded field explored in the present essay would seem to provide this structural explanation.

12. To the extent that this claim holds, my account of Wall’s project would stand diametrically opposed to recent claims by Michael Fried attaching Wall precisely to the modernist tradition, namely to the author’s complex genealogy of “absorption” and anti-theatricality as elaborated in modernist painting. See, for example, Michael Fried, “Barthes’s *Punctum*,” *Critical Inquiry* 31 (Spring 2005), pp. 539–74.



Wall. Picture for Women. 1979. Courtesy the artist.

It is clear to me now that in the art of the last ten years, rather than speaking tendentiously, as critics are wont to do, about the “influence” of Cindy Sherman on a younger generation of photographers, or of Coleman’s or Wall’s “impact” on contemporary art, we should instead be tracing the life and potential transformation of a former medium’s expanded field. We are dealing less with “authors” and their influence than with a structural field of new formal and cultural possibilities, all of them ratified logically by the expansion of the medium of photography.





For the positions occupied by the great triumvirate of postmodernist “photographers” in the late 1970s have themselves spawned the more general birth of new forms we have witnessed in recent years. By the moment of the early to mid-1990s, a whole generation of artists using photography began to mine the possibilities of *stasis* and *not-stasis*, embracing the impulse to what could be called “counter-presence” that such an action upon the photograph provides, always pushing the still image into a field of both multiple social layers and incomplete image fragments. And so it will be apparent now that the intense investment in what might be called the “film still” or what I will call the “cinematic photograph” in contemporary art lies not in the closure of photography *tout court*, but in an expansion of its terms into a more fully cultural arena.¹³ Thus we witness the mad multiplication of connotational codes within a single still image (the project in the 1990s, most conspicuously, of Sharon Lockhart’s photographs, whose series, for example from *Shaun* to *Goshogaoka*, are often made in relation to a simultaneous film project); or the opening of the still image onto manipulations from other cultural domains (such as Danish artist Joachim Koester’s use of the blue filters popularized by the director François Truffaut in the former’s series *Day for Night*, *Christiania* or the sci-fi menace of Norwegian artist Knut Åsdam’s nighttime documents of urban housing projects). The latter work by Åsdam has been presented as both an open-ended series of photographic prints, but also, significantly, reconfigured into slide projections where the sequencing and narrative possibilities discovered would lead to the artist’s subsequent dedication to producing semi-narrative films.

Thus, singular artists will now occupy opposing and quite different positions within this expanded field; Lockhart, for one, is known for her production not only

13. It is true that Wall invokes the “cinematic” quite often in discussing his images. And while all the axes of photography’s expanded field open potentially onto cinema through the folding of narrative concerns into the photographic construct, Wall’s cinematic images and their progeny need to be rigorously distinguished from that category of work that I am here calling “cinematic photographs.” While such images hardly engage with the actual cinematographic motion of the “still film” or “projected image,” they also refuse the singularity and unified nature of the tableaux of photographers like Wall or Gregory Crewdson. Their engagement with cinema leads to an embrace of the fragment, of absence, discontinuity, and the particular phenomenology of what can be called “counter-presence.” (By “counter-presence,” I do not mean for the reader to hear anything like an echo of Michael Fried’s terms of “absorption” or the “anti-theatrical”; rather, the opposite would be more true.) That said, it must also be admitted that Wall’s aesthetic production is hardly monolithic, and like almost all of the artists under consideration here, many of his works—especially those conceived in series, such as his *Young Workers* photographs (1978–83)—would belong to axes of photography’s expanded field other than the primary one asserted here.



*Lockhart. Teatro Amazonas. 1999. © Sharon Lockhart 1999.
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York.*



*Joachim Koester. Day for Night,
Christiania. 1996. Courtesy the artist.*



*Koester. Set-up. 1992.
Courtesy the artist.*

of cinematic photographs but also for a series of nearly static films, like *Teatro Amazonas*, that we can call instead of the film still the “still film.”¹⁴ Both the still film and many forms of the projected image began to give expression, at the same moment in the mid-1990s, to the possibilities opened up by the specific combination of *narrative* and *not-narrative*. For during the last decade, the projected slide sequence has attracted a whole new group of adherents, an example again being an artist whom I have just associated with another aspect of my field, namely Joachim Koester’s use of found slides abandoned at the developers’ to create fleeting narratives (e.g., *Set-up* [1992]). New forms will be invented in each position within the field. Tacita Dean’s frozen films might occupy this position of *narrative* and *not-narrative* along with Lockhart’s, just as Dean will devote as much of her practice to still photography as the photographer Lockhart does to film. And Douglas Gordon’s “slowed” films—which in their most extreme versions reduce the narrative cinematic product to the foundation of the still frame by extending films to playtimes of twenty-four hours or even a time span of years—will occupy the position of the “still film” just as much as Lockhart’s *Teatro Amazonas*. For even though one project may depend upon *video* and the other on *film*, both are actually linked conceptually to a field mapped out by the expansion of *photography*, to which, however, neither of them will of course correspond.

The “talking picture” or complex axis of our field—the fusion of *narrative* and *stasis*—has encompassed the wildest variety of solutions in recent years, from the painterly manipulations of digital montage (from Wall to Davenport and others), to the large-scale Hollywood tableaux of the school of Gregory Crewdson (i.e., Anna Gaskell, Justine Kurland, et al.), to the invention of what I would call the “narrative caption” in the photographic projects of artists as diverse as Andrea Robbins + Max Becher and the Irish artist Gerard Byrne, whose images

14. This is a term coined, I believe, by Douglas Crimp to account for similar work in the 1970s (his example is a film by Robert Longo). See “Pictures,” in *Art After Modernism*, p. 183. The reversibility of film still and still film is already fully recognized by Crimp in this 1979 essay (written, then, in the same year as Krauss’s publication of “Sculpture in the Expanded Field”).



Above and facing page: Tacita Dean. Fernsehturm. 2000.
 Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.



*Douglas Gordon. 24 Hour Psycho. 1993.
Courtesy the artist.*



are often accompanied by the most incontinent of supplements.¹⁵ In addition to digital recoding and linguistic supplements, new forms will be invented here as well, even if pastiche will most often be their domain: one thinks of the *Five Revolutionary Seconds* or *Soliloquy* series of Sam Taylor-Wood, panoramic still photographs made by a special camera that rotates over time and through space, often restaging historical paintings, and which are most often accompanied, upon exhibition, by wall-mounted speakers spouting literal soundtracks.¹⁶ Here, it would seem, is a picture where the condition of “talking” has been taken as far as it can go, and where the complex axis, the fusion of both/and, perhaps cries out for a renewed dedication to disruption once more (the negation of the “not”).

Thus, to paraphrase Krauss one last time, “[*Photography*] is no longer the privileged middle term between two things that it isn’t. [*Photography*] is rather only one term on the periphery of a field in which there are other, differently structured possibilities.”¹⁷ That this is a cultural as opposed to merely aesthetic field is something that certain recent attempts to recuperate object-bound notions of medium-specificity seem in potential danger of forgetting. For such was one of the great lessons of Krauss’s expanded field: not that modernist medium-specificity would simply dissipate into the pluralist state of anything goes, but rather that such mediums would quite precisely *expand*, marking out a strategic movement whereby both art and world, or art and the larger cultural field, would stand in new, formerly unimaginable relations to one another. In this connection, I think of artists such as Pierre Huyghe, whose photographs and projections are essentially positioned as waystations between his expanded forms and the cultural realms that these forms reference; in Huyghe, the postmodern play with representational codes seeks a form that would allow such codes to exceed their place within an image, within a frame, and return to re-code the reality or cultural realms that they can no longer

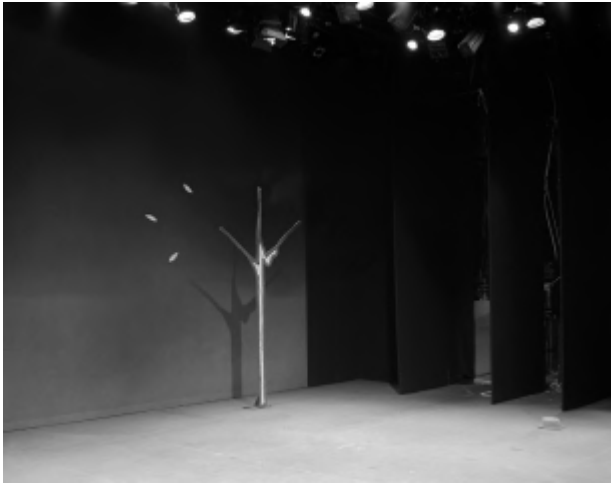
15. On Byrne’s work, still unfortunately under-known in the American context, I point the reader to my essay, “The Storyteller: Notes on the Work of Gerard Byrne,” in *Gerard Byrne: Books, Magazines, and Newspapers* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg Press, 2003). Byrne’s work has progressed to the making of a series of films using “found scenarios” based on historical advertising and outmoded journalistic texts and photographs.

16. Characteristically, Taylor-Wood has accompanied such photographic expansions with simultaneous projects involving “static” videos and film. On the split between photography and projection in Taylor-Wood’s project, see my review of her 2001 exhibition at the Centre National de Photographie in Paris, “Sam Taylor-Wood,” *Artforum* 40, no. 4 (December 2001), p. 115.

17. Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” p. 284.



Sam Taylor-Wood. *Five Revolutionary Seconds IV*. 1996 © The artist. Courtesy Jay Jopling/White Cube (London).



Gerard Byrne. *Left: Waiting for Godot. 2002. Below: In the News. 2002. Courtesy the artist.*

Murphy (Estragon) and McGovern (Vladimir) stand center stage looking at the Tree:

Estragon: Everything oozes.

Vladimir: Look at the tree.

Estragon: It's never the same pus from one second to the next.

Vladimir: The tree, look at the tree.

(Estragon looks at the tree.)

Estragon: Was it not there yesterday?

Vladimir: Yes, of course it was there. Do you not remember? We nearly hanged ourselves from it. But you wouldn't. Do you not remember?

Estragon: You dreamt it.

(Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett [Faber & Faber, 1956])



"Driver killed in B.Q.E. truck tragedy"—New York Post, 7/23/2000. View from the southeast corner, Meeher and McGuinness.

adequately represent. This cultural expansion amounts to one reason why I have felt it necessary to recuperate the model of the expanded field, and to map its photographic dimension in this essay. I am not so much worried about the return of ideas of the medium in recent essays by Krauss or Hal Foster—in Krauss’s work, this concern never really disappeared—for the idea of the medium that these critics are trying to explore seems fully in line with the expansions mapped in their own earlier work (in fact, seen in retrospect, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” amounts to a profound meditation on what a medium in the era of postmodernism might be). But their breaking of a postmodernist and interdisciplinary taboo has let loose a series of much more conservative appeals to medium-specificity, a return to traditional artistic objects and practices and discourses, that we must resist.

The problem is not to “return” to a medium that has been decentered, if not expanded. The problem, as Foster remarked upon Krauss’s essay now quite a long time ago, is to resist the latent urge to “recentering” implicit in the expanded field model of the postmodern in the first place: in the “Expanded Field,” Foster wrote, “the work is freed of the term ‘sculpture’ . . . but only to be bound by other terms, ‘landscape,’ ‘architecture,’ etc. Though no longer defined in one code, practice remains within a *field*. Decentered, it is recentered: the field is (precisely) ‘expanded’ rather than ‘deconstructed.’ The model for this field is a structuralist one, as is the activity of the Krauss essay. . . . ‘The Expanded Field’ thus posits a logic of cultural oppositions questioned by poststructuralism—and also, it would seem, by postmodernism.”¹⁸ This problem is ours now too. If the photographic object seems in crisis today, it might now mean that we are entering a period not when the medium has come to an end, nor where the expanded field has simply collapsed under its own dispersal, but rather that the terms involved only now become more complex, the need to map their effects more necessary, because these effects are both less obvious and self-evident.

For as I hinted earlier, other expanded fields for photography may be possible to envision than even the one mapped quickly here, an example of which I would point to in the more fully *spatial* (as opposed to *temporal*) expansion of the photograph we perhaps face in practices stemming from Louise Lawler and James Welling to younger artists such as Rachel Harrison, Tom Burr, Zoe Leonard, and Gabriel Orozco (think, for example, of the latter’s *Extension of a Reflection* [1992] or his work *Yielding Stone* [1992]). Given these potential expansions, we need now to resist the lure of the traditional object and medium in contemporary art, just as much as we need to work against the blindness and amnesia folded into our present, so-called “post-medium condition.” As Fredric Jameson suggested at an earlier fork in the development of postmodernity, what we need in the contemporary moment are maps: we should not retreat from the expanded field of contemporary photographic practice, rather we should map its possibilities, but also deconstruct its potential closure and further open its multiple logics. At any rate, when I first sketched my graph

18. Hal Foster, “Re: Post,” in *Art After Modernism*, p. 195.



Gabriel Orozco. Top: Extension of a Reflection. 1992. Bottom: Yielding Stone. 1992. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

for the artist with which I began, Nancy Davenport, she quickly grabbed my pen and paper and began to swirl lines in every direction, circling around my oppositions and squares, with a look that seemed to say, "Well, what about these possibilities?" My graph was a mess. But the photographer's lines, though revolving around the field, had no center, and they extended in every direction.