



F&D CARTIER

Wait and See

Wait and See is the title of a series of site-specific installations that address what the artists define as "*photo-graphy's* fundamentals: Light & Photosensitive materials. Without camera or dark room or chemicals."

Exemplifying the intersection of F&D Cartier practices – Françoise, a plastic artist, Daniel, a photographer – the primary concrete medium on display are unfixed sheets of photographic paper, glass negatives, films (predominantly black and white) dating from anywhere between 1890 and 1980. Outdated and continually exposed to light during their exhibition, these materials are unstable, ephemeral and unique visual objects. This shared evolving experience with the public engages to face reality instead of looking at an image.

In part, a work of "concrete photography" (Jäger 2005), the Cartiers jettison key components of the normative photographic apparatus, principally camera and fixed image, reminding us of photography's heterogeneous anatomy, inherent temporality and ever-present historical legacy. As Rory Duckhouse has noted, "Revealed in the process is the advancement of technology, with newer papers reacting faster than their predecessors. Each paper has its own unique history and is left to develop its own future depending on its contact to light and the space."

Visual artist duo **F&D Cartier** (CH) live and work in Biel/Bienne, Switzerland. They merged their practices in 1995 – plastic arts & photography – to move toward new experimental approaches, initiating the on site installations work *Wait and See*, photographic works produced without camera or dark room or chemicals. They question the role of the artist and of the evolution of the image in today's society. www.fdcartier.ch Seen at Houston FotoFest 2012



Most photographers are reluctant to adopt such a rebellious approach, however, spontaneously asserting that they produce traditional images, create artworks and represent the world. And critics and historians of photography often adopt the same line of thought. With the sole exception, according to Flusser, of “experimental” photographers: “They are conscious that *image*, *apparatus*, *program* and *information* are the basic problems that they have to come to terms with. They are in fact consciously attempting to create unpredictable information – i.e. to release themselves from the camera, and to place within the image something that is not in its program. They know that they are playing against the camera. Yet even they are not conscious of the consequence of their practice: they are not aware that they are attempting to address the question of freedom in the context of apparatus in general”.⁵

In Flusser’s view, the experimental photographer does not aim to document the world, but to give it a new meaning: “He is not really interested in the world outside but in hidden camera virtualities which he is trying to discover”.⁶ What matters is to distance oneself from the representation of the world as reality, to turn one’s attention to the mechanics of photography, its very essence, perceived through the “hidden virtualities” of the apparatus. Flusser often waxes lyrical about the perspective of freedom that could be opened by this new photographic approach; in one fervent passage with libertarian overtones, he forecasts the way in which society would free itself from the totalitarianism of the apparatus: “In this sense it is not exaggeration to say that the true photographer is one engaged in opening a space for human freedom within a context which is ever more automated. And that

De fleste fotografer er imidlertid tilbageholdende med at antage en sådan oprørske tilgang, spontant hævde, at de producerer traditionelle billeder, skaber kunstværker og repræsenterer verden. Og fotograferingens kritikere og historikere tilslutter sig ofte samme tankegang. Med den ene undtagelse, ifølge Flusser, af “eksperimentelle” fotografer: “De er bevidste om, at *billede*, *apparat*, *program* og *information* er de grundlæggende problemer, de skal komme overens med. De forsøger faktisk bevidst at skabe uforudsigelig information – dvs. at frigøre sig fra kameraet og anbringe noget i billedet, der ikke er i dets program. De ved, at de spiller imod kameraet. Dog er end ikke de bevidste om konsekvensen af deres praksis: De er ikke klar over, at de forsøger at løse spørgsmålet om frihed i forbindelse med apparater generelt”.⁵

I Flussers opfattelse sigter den eksperimentelle fotograf ikke mod at dokumentere verden, men at give den en ny betydning: “Han er ikke rigtig interesseret i verden udenfor, men i skjulte kamera-virtualiteter, som han forsøger at opdage”.⁶ Det gælder om at fjerne sig fra verdens repræsentation som virkelighed, at vende sin opmærksomhed mod fotograferingens mekanik, dens egentlige kerne, opfattet gennem apparatets “skjulte virtualiteter”. Flusser polerer ofte lyrisk det frihedsperspektiv, der kunne åbnes ved denne nye fotografiske tilgang; i en inderlig passage med frihedskæmpende overtoner forudsiger han den måde, hvorpå samfundet vil frigøre sig fra apparatets totalitarisme: “I den forstand er det ikke overdrevet at sige, at den sande fotograf er den, der er engageret i at åbne et rum for menneskelig frihed inden for en kontekst, der bliver stadig mere automatiseret. Og at hvert billede produceret med et sådant engagement er et vindue



each photo produced in such an engagement is a window within our photo universe open toward freedom".⁷

Flusser sees photography as the terrain of an avant-garde battle that might then spread to all the political, economic and social apparatus, "the only form of revolution left open to us".⁸

So what is "experimental" photography? Flusser wrote few reviews of photographic works, so there are few examples to elucidate his thinking. But some of his theoretical writings provide more concrete evidence of precisely what he meant by "experimental" or "rebellious" photography, further to the above-mentioned ideas. [...] Flusser gives an indication in his final text on photography (written shortly before his death), perhaps after his discovery of the photograms created by German artist Floris Neusüss. In this text, Flusser refers to images made without a camera; this could refer to photograms among other things, but he does not clarify further. According to Flusser, such images transcend the apparatus, and differ from technical images and images from the past: "Those who produce images without cameras are in search of voids left vacant until now by the apparatus; they are looking for something that the latter are incapable of producing. It is therefore mistaken (and injurious to those who make them) to consider their images as extra links in an age-old chain. This chain was broken by the invention of photography..."⁹

Their difference from technical images stems from the fact that photograms denounce the limits of apparatus but, having done away with it, they do not force the camera to do anything it was not programmed to do. Although to my knowledge Flusser did

i vores fotounivers, åbent ud mod friheden".⁷

Flusser ser fotografering som et terræn for en avantgarde-kamp, der da kunne spredes til hele det politiske, økonomiske og sociale apparat, "den eneste form for revolution, ladet åben for os".⁸

Så hvad er "eksperimentel" fotografering? Flusser skrev få anmeldelser af fotografiske værker, så der er få eksempler til at belyse hans tænkning. Men nogle af hans teoretiske skrifter giver mere konkrete beviser for, hvad han præcis mente med "eksperimentel" eller "oprørsk" fotografi, ud over de ovennævnte ideer. [...] Flusser giver en indikation i hans sidste tekst om fotografering (skrevet kort før hans død), måske efter hans opdagelse af fotogrammerne skabt af den tyske kunstner Floris Neusüss. I denne tekst henviser Flusser til billeder lavet uden kamera; dette kunne henviser til bl.a. fotogrammer, men han præciserer ikke yderligere. Ifølge Flusser overskrider sådanne billeder apparatet og adskiller sig fra tekniske billeder og billeder fra fortiden: "De, der producerer billeder uden kameraer, er på udkig efter tomrum, ladet ledige indtil nu af apparatet; de leder efter noget, sidstnævnte ikke er i stand til at producere. Det er derfor forkert (og skadeligt for dem, der gør det) at opfatte deres billeder som ekstra led i en ældgammel kæde. Den kæde blev brudt med opfindelsen af fotografering..."⁹

Deres forskellighed fra tekniske billeder stammer fra det faktum, at fotogrammer afviser apparatets begrænsninger, men efter at have fjernet dem, tvinger de ikke kameraet til at gøre noget, det ikke var programmeret til at gøre. Selvom Flusser, så vidt jeg ved, ikke udviklede denne præmis andetsteds, åbner denne



not develop this premise elsewhere, this brief text opens some interesting perspectives on the nature of images made without a camera.

While bearing in mind that other definitions are possible, at this point we can propose the following tentative definition of experimental photography: “A deliberate act of critical rejection of the rules of the apparatus of photographic production, whereby the photographer calls into question one or more established parameters of the photographic process”.¹⁰

As indicated in the introduction to my book, which I am reproducing here,¹¹ my research was prompted by the realization that experimental photography was missing from the history of photography [quote]:

“Originally, almost all the historians and critics of this medium, and the philosophers who have written about it, have contented themselves with a very limited definition of photography, implying that it should necessarily represent the photographic object and be obtained exclusively by means of a negative/positive technique, yet without clarifying or analyzing the reasons for their restrictive choices. But this definition, which has framed all photographic theory, has prevented the emergence of a reflection on a form of photography that would stand out from it – an experimental photography.

Admittedly, some authors [including Jean-Claude Lemagny, Michel Poivert and James Elkins] turn their attention beyond representation: they refer to photography in search of internal coherence, photography anxious about itself, the pleasure of trial and test, the taste for uncertainty of form. They note the existence of images that do not necessarily represent something, that can be considered abstract, that are, in a sense, useless within the logic of representation. Their chief concern is the photographic object itself, its materiality rather than its representativeness. In their view, some photographs that are no longer representations according to the established norms, that “go beyond the operation of shooting to work on substance, space, object or action”,¹² may appear to be enigmas or visual oddities but are photographs nonetheless because of the action of light on a photosensitive surface. However, few photographers attempt to explore these new fields, to approach the possibilities of experimental photography.

korte tekst nogle interessante perspektiver på beskaffenheden af billeder lavet uden kamera.

Mens vi holder os for øje, at andre definitioner er mulige, kan vi på nuværende tidspunkt foreslå følgende foreløbige definition af eksperimentel fotografering: “En bevidst handling af kritisk afvisning af reglerne for apparatet til fotografisk produktion, hvorved fotografen sætter spørgsmålstegn ved et eller flere etablerede parametre for den fotografiske proces”.¹⁰

Som angivet i indledningen til min bog, hvilket jeg gengiver her,¹¹ blev min forskning tilskyndet af den erkendelse, at eksperimentel fotografering manglede i fotograferingens historie [citater]:

“Oprindeligt har næsten alle historikere og kritikere af dette medium og de filosoffer, der har skrevet om det, været tilfredse med en meget begrænset definition af fotografi, forudsættende at det nødvendigvis skulle repræsentere det fotografiske objekt og udelukkende opnås ved en negativ/positiv teknik, men uden at præcisere eller analysere begrundelserne for deres restriktive valg. Men denne definition, der har udgjort rammen for al fotografisk teori, har forhindret fremkomsten af en refleksion over en form for fotografering, der kunne adskille sig fra den – en eksperimentel fotografering.

Indrømmet, nogle forfattere [herunder Jean-Claude Lemagny, Michel Poivert og James Elkins] lader deres opmærksomhed række ud over repræsentation: De refererer til fotografering i søgen efter indvendig sammenhæng, fotografering der er ivrigt optaget af sig selv, fornøjelsen ved at afprøve og teste, smagen for usikkerhed ved formen. De bemærker eksistensen af billeder, der ikke nødvendigvis repræsenterer noget, billeder der kan betragtes som abstrakte, som på en vis måde er ubrugelige indenfor repræsentationslogikken. Deres hovedinteresse er selve det fotografiske objekt, dets fysiske tilstedeværelse snarere end dets repræsentativitet. Efter deres opfattelse kan nogle fotografier, der ikke længere er repræsentationer i henhold til de etablerede normer, som “bevæger sig udover operationen med at skyde for at arbejde med stof, rum, objekt eller handling”,¹² synes at være gåder eller visuelle mærkværdigheder, men er ikke desto mindre alligevel fotografier som følge af lysets virkning på en lysfølsom overflade. Dog, få fotografer forsøger at udforske disse nye områder, at nærme sig mulighederne ved eksperimentel fotografering.