



Robert Adamson and David Octavius Hill, *Mrs. Elizabeth (Johnstone) Hall, Newhaven Fishwife*, 1843–46. Calotype print, 19 3/8 x 14 7/8 in. (49.3 x 37.6 cm). Bequeathed by Andrew Elliot to the National Galleries, Scotland, 1950.

ONE OF A KIND

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This essay is about pictorial photography: large-format analogue and digital images that look "scenic" or "staged," require a prolonged and attentive viewing, and are made to be hung on the wall of a museum. Until quite recently, those of us who came of age in the seventies and eighties associated this kind of photography with post-structuralist theory and the aesthetics of postmodernism. It seemed a perfect illustration of the axiom that a photograph is only a representation—or, better yet, a representation of a representation, since *everything*, we believed, is a cultural construction. But not only has pictorial photography continued unabated, it has gained more and more momentum. It has also proved resistant to all of our attempts to derealize it—to treat it as a tool, a commodity, a fiction, or any other kind of human artifact. Something else is happening here, something big and important, and we need to figure out what it is.

In 1977, Douglas Crimp curated an exhibition at Artists Space in New York that addressed a tendency that he had noticed in contemporary art, which he called "the renewed impulse to make pictures of recognizable things."¹ The show included work by a diverse group of artists: Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith. In his catalogue essay, Crimp described this work as a semiotic interrogation of the images through which we "experience reality," and some of the featured work seemed to support this reading.² The profiled heads in Levine's *Sons and Lovers* (1977) are flat and diagrammatic, encouraging us to *read* them rather than to *look* at them. The three prints in Brauntuch's 1975–76 triptych *Play/Fame/Song* resemble blackboard drawings, and the words written below each print's architectural schema heighten the discursive effect. Goldstein's *A Suite of Nine 7-inch Records with Sound Effects* (1976) stages a witty encounter between Minimalism, Pop, and Conceptualism. However, Longo's *Seven Seals for Missouri Breaks* (1976) and *The American Soldier* (1977) do not even pretend to be "deconstructive." They are unabashedly pictorial, assume the shapes of what they depict, and have a pleasing "sheen." They renew not just the "impulse to make recognizable things" but also the pleasure that we take in looking at them.

Crimp was also clearly drawn to the works in the show for this reason, as well as the one stated above, because he devotes several long and appreciative paragraphs to the visual qualities of Goldstein's films, and he titled the show "Pictures" rather than "Representations."³ "Representation" is an all-purpose designator for "recognizable things," irrespective of whether they are cartoons, advertisements, movies, illustrations in children's coloring books, or figurative artworks. It is thus implicitly anti-aesthetic. Although "picture" is also a capacious category, it derives from *pictura*, the Latin word

for painting, and it retained this meaning for centuries. It is also a crucial word for many contemporary artists.

Gerhard Richter, for instance, uses it to refer both to his abstract paintings and his photo paintings, which paved the way for large-format photography. Jeff Wall also calls his transparencies "pictures," and the concept of the "Western picture" or "tableau" figures prominently in his writing. He defines the latter as the "independently beautiful depiction and composition that derives from the institutionalization of perspective and dramatic figuration at the origins of modern Western art."⁴ I mention this here because the notion of an "independently beautiful depiction" surfaces in Crimp's catalogue essay as well. As he remarks there, the goal of the artists in his show is not to tear away the veil of the image in order to expose its underlying meaning, but rather to liberate the image from its semantic burden, so that it can be seen in a different way. They demonstrate that the picture is "separable from that which it might be said to picture."⁵

Two years later, Crimp published a significantly different version of his catalogue essay in the journal *October*.⁶ In the preface, he brings his argument into conformity with what was fast becoming critical orthodoxy by equating "picture" with "representation."⁷ He uses the former word, he explains, because it overrides the distinctions between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic, mental and external images, and different mediums (painting, sculpture, drawing, performance, photography, and film). In the essay proper, he distinguishes his view of art from that of the great defender of medium specificity and the autonomous artwork: Michael Fried.

Crimp begins with a spirited defense of work that is situated "between, or outside the traditional arts,"⁸ which Fried had denounced as "theatrical" and associated with the degeneration of art in his 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood."⁹ He then shifts his attention to another quality that Fried finds abhorrent: "presence." Something has presence, Fried argues in "Art and Objecthood," when it encourages us to relate it to ourselves, either through its scale, or through its refusal to look like an artwork. Minimalist sculpture has presence in spades, because it is a physically massive object that occupies the same space we do. Such work also appeals to us to look at it, and so is "confrontational" and "aggressive."¹⁰ And this is only part of the problem. Although Minimal sculpture behaves like a bully, it is embarrassingly dependent, since it cannot be itself without an audience. Since it is huge and three-dimensional, we cannot do this all at once; we have to walk around it, which takes time. During this "extended situation," as Robert Morris calls it,¹¹ we and the sculpture are temporally as well as spatially co-present.

Crimp defends "presence" through an art form that is even more theatrical than Minimalist sculpture: performance. "The mode that was... to become exemplary during the seventies was performance," he writes, "and not only that narrowly defined activity called performance art, but all those works that were constituted in a situation and for a duration by the artist or the spectator or both together. It can be said quite literally of

the seventies that 'you had to be there.'¹² Crimp then advances a surprising claim: the claim that films and photographs can become present in the same way.

The notion that a recorded image might be capable of becoming temporally and spatially present was inconceivable in 1979. First, "presence" was a completely discredited concept. Derrida had denounced it as "metaphysical," and championed absence and the trace;¹³ Lacan had characterized it as one of the illusory effects of the Imaginary¹⁴ and identified "lack" as the basis of desire;¹⁵ Foucault had transformed the author from a flesh-and-blood person into a discursive "function";¹⁶ and Benjamin had declared "the here and now of the original" to be one of the traditional sources of art's authority and had argued for its destruction through technological reproduction.¹⁷ Even live performers had begun to organize their performances around pain, loss, separation, and near or possible death.¹⁸

Second, the photographic image was still firmly tethered to the "it was" of an earlier moment and another space. This gave it an evidentiary force—the power to expose what might otherwise escape justice.¹⁹ Benjamin links this dimension of photography to absence in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."²⁰ "It has justly been said that [Atget] photographed [the empty streets of Paris] like scenes of crime," he writes. "A crime scene, too, is deserted."²¹ Benjamin also makes photography the privileged representative of a number of other absences, most of which he spells out in the same essay. Photography is the apparatus par excellence for reproducing traditional works of art, he argues there, which permits us to view them in absentia, and for creating artworks that lack an original—that exist only as copies.²² It is also able to perform activities that had previously been performed only by human beings, thereby rendering the latter superfluous.²³ Finally, photography purges images of their aesthetic value, and "sucks" the aura "out of reality."²⁴ These absences are democratizing, and are "creating the conditions" that will "make it possible for capitalism to abolish itself."²⁵

There were only two ways for a leftist writer to connect the photographic image to presence in the late 1970s, and neither of them had anything to do with the *hic et nunc*. The first was to compare it to the fetish, as Christian Metz does in a 1984 essay.²⁶ Like the shine on the nose described by Freud,²⁷ this argument goes, the photographic image stands in for, and assumes the value of, something that is missing: the maternal phallus in the former case, and the referent in the latter. Its presence is consequently an effect of absence. The second way to connect photography with presence was to treat this quality as a theatrical effect—to define it as what something has when it is "presented" as a representation. Brechtian theater was the model for this understanding of presence. "[Epic theater] emphasizes the general gest of showing," the dramaturge writes in "A Short Organum for the Theater" of 1949, "which always undetermines that which is being shown....The actors ought not to 'drop into

song,' but should clearly mark it off from the rest of the text; and this is best reinforced by a few theatrical methods such as changing the lighting or inserting a text."²⁸

Neither of these accounts of "presence" includes the "here and now," nor is either one compatible with the notion of an independently beautiful picture. Freud's account of fetishism is iconophobic; the shine on the nose is the egoic defense through which the fetishist protects himself against the intolerable knowledge of maternal lack, and the goal of psychoanalysis is to dismantle this defense. The visual has a more complicated status in Brecht's writings. When something is presented in a Brechtian way, it is stylized, which heightens its pictorial values, but it is also de-realized. The tension between these two things is enormously interesting, and generated many of the most visually compelling films of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s: Jean-Luc Godard's *Weekend* and *La Chinoise* (both 1967); Masahiro Shinoda's *Double Suicide* (1969); Nagisa Oshima's *Night and Fog in Japan* (1960) and *The Ceremony* (1971), and virtually all of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's oeuvre. However, Brechtian theater is also a means to a pre-given end. "Our representations must take second place to what is represented," we read in the final paragraph of "A Short Organum," "and the pleasure felt in their perfection must be converted into the higher pleasure felt when the rules emerging from this society are treated as imperfect and provisional."²⁹ The more this "functionalism" comes to the fore, the more suspect the pictorial becomes.

The lonely hour of absolute instrumentality never arrives in Brecht's own writings, but it makes a dramatic appearance in "The Author as Producer," Benjamin's 1934 talk to the Paris Institute for the Study of Fascism. Like "The Work of Art," this essay is full of highly questionable assumptions. One of the most damaging—and distressingly durable—of these assumptions is that beauty is counter-revolutionary, particularly when it surfaces in a photograph. "[The medium] has become more and more subtle, more and more modern, and the result is that it is now incapable of photographing a tenement or a rubbish-heap without transfiguring it," Benjamin excoriates. "[I]n front of these, photography can now only say, 'How beautiful.'"³⁰

Since these were the only definitions of presence that were available in 1979, and it is impossible to think outside one's "episteme," Crimp had no choice but to use them. However, he clearly saw that neither was adequate to the task at hand, because he tries to explain pictorial photography by *combining* them. The kinds of photographs and films that interest him, he explains in the second version of "Pictures," are those that present themselves as representations, thereby foregrounding the absence of the referent. This absence confers a kind of presence on these works—a "surplus reality," like that enjoyed by the Freudian fetish.³¹ But these two theoretical models are incompatible, since Brechtian presentation abolishes the conditions for fetishistic belief, and when that belief evaporates, so does the fetish's "surplus reality."

Crimp talks about this “fudge,” as he calls it, in a third essay, “The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism” (1980).³² “What I wanted to explain [in my 1979 “Pictures”],” he writes near the beginning of the 1980 essay, “was how to get from ... the *being there* necessitated by performance ... to the kind of presence that is possible only through the absence which we know to be the condition of representation.”³³ Crimp also chastises himself for trying to leap over this difficulty in his 1979 essay by quoting a line from Henry James: “the presence before him was a presence.”³⁴ He devotes the rest of “The Photographic Activity” to three photographers, all of whom make pictures that refer to other images, albeit in very different ways: Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, and Richard Prince. He characterizes the relationship between their work and what it references as “appropriation,” thereby linking it not just to *one* but *two* absent terms. “Their images,” he writes, “are always purloined, confiscated, appropriated, *stolen*. In their work, the original cannot be located, is always deferred; even the self that might have generated an original is shown to be itself a copy.”³⁵

This account of Sherman’s, Levine’s, and Prince’s work, which now holds almost universal sway, is firmly grounded in the principles Benjamin espouses in “The Work of Art.” Interestingly, though, Crimp persists in his 1980 essay in maintaining that pictorial photography has presence, and although he once again attributes this presence to absence, he notes that Benjamin defines the *hic et nunc* very differently in “Little History of Photography” than he does in “The Work of Art.” Instead of the shell in which a unique work of art is embedded, it is the “tiny spark of chance” with which “reality” has “seared the character of the picture.”³⁶ Benjamin thereby gestures toward a different kind of presentation than the one described by Brecht—a presentation that is conducted by the world, rather than a human agent, and that is realizing, rather than derealizing. There is also the all-important preposition in the sentence Crimp quotes from James (“the presence *before him* was a presence”), which reminds us that if we want to see a pictorial photograph, we must go to the place where it hangs, and stand in front of it. This preposition transforms what would otherwise be a tautology into a relationship, one based on a mysterious kind of equality.

The paragraph from “Little History of Photography” that Crimp invokes in “The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism” is one of the most important passages in all of Benjamin’s writing. It begins with a discussion of the daguerreotype, which he calls “one of a kind,” and segues into a deeply moving account of David Octavius Hill’s *Mrs. Elizabeth (Johnstone) Hill, Newhaven Fishwife* (1843–46) and Karl Dauthendey’s *Karl Dauthendey (Father of the Poet), with his Fiancé* (1857).³⁷ Benjamin talks about the emotions awakened in him by the women in these photographs, who are as singular as the daguerreotype, and whom he finds mysteriously “real.” “In Hill’s Newhaven fishwife,” he writes, “there remains something that goes beyond testimony to the photographer’s art, something that cannot

be silenced, that fills you with an unruly desire to know what her name was, the woman who was alive there, who even now is still real and will never consent to be wholly absorbed in ‘art.’”³⁸

The vertiginous sense of presence that Benjamin experiences while looking at these photographs prompts him to develop a different account of photographic temporality than he elaborates in “The Work of Art”: one based on the future perfect, instead of simple anteriority, and that hinges on the moment in the history of every photograph when it becomes contemporary with its viewer. The phrase Crimp quotes in the second version of “Pictures” is embedded in this sentence. “No matter how artful the photographer,” Benjamin writes, “the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality has ... seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may re-discover it.”³⁹ This account of photographic temporality anticipates what Benjamin will later call the “now of recognizability,”⁴⁰ which is the basis of his messianic account of history.

Benjamin’s meditation on the women in the Hill and Dauthendey photographs also leads him to another crucial concept: the optical unconscious. Like everything else in this passage, the optical unconscious privileges the world over the human eye and attributes a disclosive power to photography. The paragraph ends with a quotation from Dauthendey that loops back to the topic with which Benjamin begins the temporal and spatial co-presence of the beholder and the figures who appear in early photographs: “We didn’t trust ourselves at first to look long at the first [daguerreotypes]. We were abashed by the distinctness of these human images, and believed that the little tiny faces in the picture could see us...”⁴¹

Benjamin eventually launches into a partial version of the argument he makes in “The Work of Art,” but he returns before doing so to the notion that the world rather than technology is the source of the photographic image. Surprisingly, he also attributes the aesthetic complexity of early photography to this worldly source. During the “considerable period” during which people were initially obliged to sit in front of the camera, he writes, they “grew into the picture.”⁴² Because of this, the people in early photographs don’t “look out at the world in so excluded and godforsaken a manner” as those in later photographs do.⁴³ It is also what makes the photographs themselves look like “well-drawn or well-painted pictures.”⁴⁴

Early viewers of the photographic image described it in strikingly similar ways: as an aesthetically satisfying picture, drawn with the “pencil of Nature,” through which the world presented itself to the human eye. “Wonderful wonder of wonders!!” Henry Fox Talbot wrote in 1839, “Vanish acqua-tints and mezzotints—as chimneys that consume their own smoke, devour yourselves! Steel engravers, copper engravers, and etchers, drink up your aquafortis and die! ... [B]y virtue of the sun’s patent, all nature, animate and inanimate, shall be henceforth its own painter, engraver,

printer, and publisher. Here is a revolution in art....⁴⁵ They did so because photography is the world's way of showing itself to us⁴⁶—what Heidegger calls "poesis in the highest sense."⁴⁷

The world had a lot of self-showing to do in the first half of the nineteenth century. When man decided that he was the measure of all things, he eliminated the external authority that he had created to vouch for the truth of his perceptions, and that opened the door to doubt. He held this doubt at bay for almost two centuries, but in 1637 he found himself wondering whether "the earth, skies, stars and all other objects that [he] apprehended by means of the senses" do, in fact, exist. Unable to prove that his sensory perceptions were a reliable source of knowledge, he decided to "close [his] eyes," "stop [his] ears," and base all future determinations on his mental representations. The world continued to be physically present, but it was psychically "gone."⁴⁸

The world tried revealing itself through the camera obscura, as it had been doing for centuries, but mankind soon devised ways of subordinating this device to the human look,⁴⁹ so in 1839 it presented itself in an even more emphatically pictorial form: through chemical photography. Not everyone was as enthusiastic about this as Fox Talbot. If there really is a world, and it is capable of "presencing toward" us in this way, as Heidegger would say,⁵⁰ then we are not its lord and master. We cannot even claim the aesthetic domain as our exclusive preserve.

Baudelaire was willing to cede the world to photography, but not art. He pried the two apart by defining the photographic image as the mechanical reproduction of physical reality, positing "industry" as its source, and identifying its viewer as the "idolatrous multitude."⁵¹ He diminished the photographic image further by associating it with "exactitude"—i.e., with an evidentiary rather than a disclosive truth—and assigning it a utilitarian function: the function of documenting and archiving crumbling buildings, prints, and books.⁵² Artworks, Baudelaire declares, are the complete opposite. They are made by individual subjects for individual viewers. They are also unique and non-mimetic. Rather than representing "material reality," which is "useless" and "tedious,"⁵³ they are concerned with a higher truth: one that is created through the addition of man's "soul."⁵⁴ The industrialization of photography reinforced this machinic definition of the medium, and subordinated it to its human user.

But the discovery of chemical photography was as epochal an event as the Copernican revolution, and its shock waves continued to be felt well into the twentieth century—in psychoanalysis, philosophy, and (most importantly) literature and art. "An artist is only a receptacle for sensations, a brain, a recording device," Cézanne is reported to have said around 1900. "He must forget, forget, be quiet, be a perfect echo. Then the full landscape will record itself on his photographic plate."⁵⁵ Proust and Rilke also compared the human psyche to a photographic plate and saw the exposure of this metaphoric plate to the external world as the basis of their writing.⁵⁶ Robert Rauschenberg wrote that the camera

forced him "to see whatever the light or darkness touches, and [to] care," and Richter and Vija Celmins conceptualize what they do as "photography by other means."⁵⁷

Thirty-three years after the publication of the second version of Crimp's catalogue essay, Michael Fried published a book on pictorial photography, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*.⁵⁸ These two events are oppositionally connected; Crimp defined his show against Fried's "Art and Objecthood," and Fried's book is clearly an attempt to rebut Crimp's argument. This might seem a warrantless claim, since Fried relegates Crimp to a footnote,⁵⁹ but the author of *Why Photography Matters* spends a lot of time trying to show that pictorial photography isn't present in the way a live performance is. Although we can no longer ignore the fact that pictures are made to be seen, he writes, theatricality is still unacceptable. Contemporary art needs to acknowledge its "to-be-seenness" in ways that do not include the spectator. Large-format photography accomplishes this by formalizing its specularly: by defining it as a feature of the picture, rather than of what appears in the picture. Fried calls this feature "facingness."⁶⁰

But Crimp's essay and Fried's book are more than two arrows moving in slow motion across a three-decade divide. Pictorial photography is also an important chapter within a larger narrative—one that began with the first pinhole camera, and will end only when we do. There are also other players in this chapter of the narrative, one of the most notable of whom is Jean-François Chevrier.⁶¹ In a 1989 essay called "The Adventures of the Picture Form in the History of Photography," Chevrier presents a much more fully elaborated version of the claim that Crimp makes in the second version of "Pictures" and that Fried attempts to refute. Unlike traditional photographs, he writes, pictorial photographs are not "mere prints—mobile, manipulable sheets that are framed and mounted on a wall for the duration of an exhibition and go back into their boxes afterward." They are "designed and produced for the wall," have a human scale, and summon "a confrontational experience on the part of the spectator that sharply contrasts with the habitual processes of appropriation and projection whereby photographic images are normally received and 'consumed.'"⁶²

Although I would not call pictorial photography "confrontational," I really like Chevrier's account of its attributes. As he prepares us to see, this kind of photography breaks every rule in the "Work of Art" Bible. Rather than one of a potentially infinite number of copies that meets us halfway in the form of a postcard, a book or magazine illustration, or a poster, and that we can exhibit whenever and wherever we want, a large-format photograph is a unique artwork (or part of a very limited edition) that hangs on the wall of a museum or a gallery. When laminated to a sheet of Plexiglas or housed in a light-box, it also has the "thickness" of a painting. It isn't evidentiary, doesn't have a caption, and can't be reduced to its meaning. Finally, if we want to see it, we have to go to the museum or gallery where

it is exhibited and stand in front of it. When we do so, we find ourselves face-to-face with a picture that behaves more like a person than a thing; that resists our attempts to assimilate or subordinate it to our look; and that says "this is" instead of "this was." The "this" in "this is" also indexes a relationship rather than an absent referent—the relationship we have with the photograph for the duration of our viewing experience.

The museum might seem an unlikely venue for a rendezvous with the world, but rather than hastening capitalism's death, industrial photography has extended its life. Not only is it one of the primary vehicles for commodification, it also speaks the "language" of commodification. The market depends upon the substitution of multiple copies for a unique original, and more often than not, there *is* no original. The creation of an aura and its subsequent liquidation are also defining events in the history of every commodity. A "successful" financial transaction begins with the illusion that a commodity is either unique, or the embodiment of a unique category, and ends with the discovery that it is identical to millions of others. Acquisition ("getting hold of an object at close range") and consumption ("stripping away [its] veil") are the means through which we get from the former to the latter.⁶³ The passage Benjamin devotes to the "cult of the movie star"⁶⁴ shows that this logic had also invaded the sphere of human relations by the mid-1930s, and since then it has colonized virtually every aspect of our lives.

As Warhol has repeatedly shown, the introduction of chance variations into this reign of copies poses a far more powerful challenge to capitalism than a "perception whose 'sense for sameness in the world' ... extracts sameness from what is unique." It is also more inherently photographic. Photography has no more to do with identity than it does with absolute difference; it teaches us to see and embrace *similarity*. It did so in 1839 through the notion of the "likeness." It is doing so now by helping us to see the "small differences" that render every being not only part of the same totality, but also one of a kind.

Although the three artists whom Crimp discusses in "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism"—Sherman, Levine, and Prince—are associated with mechanical reproduction, the work of Sherman and Levine is actually closer in spirit to "Little History of Photography." (Prince is indisputably an appropriation artist, and a very funny one at that, but he also has a phenomenological project, which keeps some of us looking long after the laughter has stopped. This is, however, a topic for another essay.) The same is true of Louise Lawler, another artist in this circle, whose photographs figure prominently in Crimp's 1993 book, *On the Museum's Ruins*.

As I argue at length in *The Threshold of the Visible World*, self-presentation is a crucial part of Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–80). The women in these photographs appeal to us to see them in a particular way through their poses, their clothing, and the objects with which they

surround themselves. They ask us to ratify their self-display, so that it can become real.⁶⁵ The artist herself is also present in this work, as Marina Abramović would say.⁶⁶ *Untitled Film Stills* is an extension of what Sherman had been doing for years before she began making it: giving herself to be seen. She took numerous black-and-white photographs of herself in the period extending from 1964 to 1975, and put twenty-six of them into an album called "A Cindy Book." Beneath each photo she wrote the words "That's me" followed by a comma.⁶⁷

In a 2004 conversation with Andrea Fraser, art historian George Baker suggests that Lawler's photographs are not representations, but rather "re-presentations." He also notes their "openness" to being "presented again," and becoming different through each of these re-presentations.⁶⁸ The title of Lawler's 2000 book *An Arrangement of Pictures* foregrounds this aspect of her work and links what she does to what she shows.⁶⁹ The word "pictures" designates both Lawler's photographs and the paintings, photographs, and sculptures that appear in them, and the word "arrangements" refers to three intersecting displays: the one created by the official or unofficial curators of the spaces Lawler photographed; the one created through the framing of each photograph; and the one created through the selection and ordering of the photographs.

Most of the unofficial curators (whether in homes, auction houses, or elsewhere) are people, but there is no human intentionality behind a few of the arrangements Lawler shows us. As we can see from their turned backs, the canvases in *The Drawing Is for Sale* (1985) have been removed from view, and the outward-facing drawing was presumably propped on top of one of them for a quick, informal look, but the drawing's colors rhyme with those of the wood frames, suggesting that they belong together. The statues wrapped in plastic in *Storage* (1984) and the framed artworks lying neatly on shelves lined with blue paper in *Pictures that May or May Not Go Together* (1997/98) form an even more aesthetically satisfying ensemble, although they too have been put away by their human caretakers.⁷⁰ And Lawler prevents us from attributing the curatorial panache of these unplanned arrangements to her through their titles, which register her own surprise. Indeed, she offers the following description of her work process: "I'm not ... comfortable taking photographs when I know what I'm taking. I feel as if approaching something with too much clarity in advance could eliminate possibilities."⁷¹

Since *An Arrangement of Pictures* is a book rather than an exhibition in a medium or a gallery, we cannot enter the space in which Lawler's photographs are displayed. Consequently, although these photographs are presentational, they are not present in the way a pictorial photograph is. They are also technologically reproduced, and these reproductions have been widely disseminated. Interestingly, Lawler comments on this herself in an interview with Crimp that appears in the same volume. She tells him that the photographs in *An Arrangement of Pictures* "straddle the line" between being her work and being representations of her work, thereby sug-

gesting that they are not fully themselves in this form. Lawler and Crimp also spend most of their interview discussing her gallery shows.⁷²

Most viewers find it virtually impossible to distinguish the photographs in Levine's *After Walker Evans* (1979) from Evans's photographs, or the photographs in Evans and James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) from simple reportage. Levine's work also seems "recessional" rather than presentational: to refer back to an earlier image, which (since the photographic image has no original) refers back to a yet earlier image, etc., thereby doing away both with the author and the notion of an original. The self-effacing way in which Levine displays the photographs in this series also strips them of conventional exhibition value. However, anyone who thinks that Levine isn't interested in physical presence or aesthetic presentation would be well advised to look at her 1991 work *Fountain (After Marcel Duchamp: A.P.)*. The sculpture's Brancusi-esque beauty and pedestal replant two things that are rooted in the past—Duchamp's urinal and Stieglitz's 1917 photograph of it—firmly in the soil of the "here and now."

"Newborn," Levine's 1993 installation at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, was an even more dramatic demonstration of her interest in spatial and temporal presence. She filled the front hall of the museum with six grand pianos and placed a glass version of Brancusi's *Newborn* (1920) on top of each of them. The pianos, which had a Minimalist girth, reflected the sculptures that rested on their glossy surfaces. They also functioned simultaneously as expensive readymades and as supporting bases, wreaking havoc on the distinction between "art" and "object."

The show was inspired by and in dialogue with two images, which Levine displayed in the catalogue instead of the installation: a rephotographed photograph of Brancusi's *Prometheus* (1911) resting on a grand piano in the residence of H.S. Ede, in Cambridge, England, and a rephotographed production still from Busby Berkeley's 1935 film *Gold Diggers of 1935* that displays a mise-en-abyme of identically dressed women sitting at grand pianos. But I do not mean to suggest that these two photographs were absent from the show—to the contrary. Although they were not displayed on the walls of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, they were *more present than they had ever been before*, because the installation transported elements from each into the three-dimensional space of the museum. The six pianos in the museum's front hallway made the immaterial pianos in the two photographs part of the physical universe, and the glass sculptures that rested on them did the same both for the similarly shaped sculpture in the Ede photograph and the women sitting at the pianos in the Berkeley photograph. "Newborn" also showed those who had the good fortune to see it that we need to stop looking at, rather than *through*, Levine's other photographs.

The first time I surveyed the exhibition catalogue, I construed the photograph of Brancusi's *Prometheus* as a signifier of the bourgeois values that Benjamin argues against (originality, singularity, genius, an elite viewer), and the Berkeley production still as a signifier of what he champions

(mechanical reproduction). Since Levine's installation consisted of multiple pianos and sculptures, I also saw it as an endorsement of the latter rather than the former. However, I soon realized that this is an unsustainable reading, since *Prometheus* and *Newborn* are both Brancusi works, and were both industrially made. The Berkeley photograph also attests to the chilling consequences of mechanical reproduction for human relationality; it's hard to embrace seriality when it is embodied through a long line of interchangeable women. Finally, the reflections of the sculptures on the shiny surfaces of Levine's grand pianos had the delicacy and evanescence that Benjamin associates with the daguerreotype. "Daguerre's photographs were iodized silver plates exposed in the camera obscura," he writes at the beginning of the already-discussed paragraph in "Little History of Photography," "which had to be turned this way and that until, in the proper light, a pale gray image could be discerned."⁷³ They consequently evoked an unreproducible rather than a reproducible kind of photographic image.

In addition to these two photographs, and a number of ancillary images, the exhibition catalogue contains a short essay by Levine, called "After Brancusi," and a lengthier essay by Ann Temkin,⁷⁴ the curator of the show. Both of these texts also point resolutely away from mechanical reproduction. Levine notes in her essay that although she likes repetition, she gravitates to "the contingent and the unstable," and that she is interested, as Brancusi was, in "originality."⁷⁵ Temkin reminds us in her text that the Romanian artist had an unconventional view of originality.⁷⁶ He made many versions of *Bird*, *Muse*, and *Newborn*, some of which are remarkably similar, but he always insisted that each version stemmed "from a new inspiration, independent of the preceding one."⁷⁷ The title of one of his most famous works, *Newborn*, extends this principle to human beings, and Levine showed that it also has social traction. The glass sculptures resting on the grand pianos in her 1993 were not multiples, as I had initially thought; they were, rather, a multiplicity.

I am of course thinking here of Hannah Arendt, who forges a link between the birth of a child and the plurality of human beings and who opposes both to mechanical reproduction. "Action would be an unnecessary luxury," Arendt writes in *The Human Condition* (1958), "if men were endlessly reproducible repetitions of the same model, whose nature or essence were the same for all and as predictable as the nature or essence of any other thing. Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who lived, lives or will live."⁷⁸ Natality and mortality are the two most capacious and enabling of all analogies; they both link us to, and differentiate us from, every other being.

Presentation is every bit as important in *After Walker Evans*, although it may be harder for us to see. When Evans and Agee first arrived in rural Alabama to work on their essay on tenant farmers, Evans photographed his subjects on the sly, but they found this experience lacerating.⁷⁹ Since

he wanted them to feel “at home in their setting, and in command of themselves,”⁸⁰ he began waiting until they were ready to be seen—letting them “grow” into the photographs he made of them. Evans showed a similar deference toward the farmers’ houses and belongings. As Lincoln Kirstein puts it, “even the inanimate things” in his photographs—“bureau drawers, pots, tires, bricks, signs”—seem waiting in their own patient dignity, posing for their picture.”⁸¹ Levine also makes room for the farmers and their things in her photographs, but she does so in a new time, and a new place: *the present*.

NOTES

1. Douglas Crimp, “Pictures,” *X-TRA* 8, no. 1, (Fall 2005), 18. This is a reprint of the original catalogue essay.
2. *Ibid.*, 17.
3. *Ibid.*, 20–22.
4. Jeff Wall, “Marks of Indifference: Aspects of Photography in, and as, Conceptual Art,” in Wall, *Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 144.
5. Crimp, “Pictures,” 22.
6. Douglas Crimp, “Pictures,” *October* 8, (Spring 1979), 75–88. This essay was republished in a book appropriately called *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 175–87, and it is from this source that I will be quoting.
7. Crimp, “Pictures,” 175.
8. *Ibid.*, 176.
9. Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” in *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 164.
10. *Ibid.*, 153–55.
11. Fried quotes the passage in which Morris uses this formulation on page 154, without citing the source.
12. Crimp, “Pictures,” 176–77.
13. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), and *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
14. Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage,” in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 75–81.
15. Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), 216–29.
16. Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Daniel F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113–38.
17. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,” second version, in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 3: 1935–1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 103.
18. I am thinking in particular here of Chris Burden, Marina Abramović, and Vito Acconci.
19. Benjamin maintains that it constitutes the “hidden political significance” of photography. See “The Work of Art,” 108.
20. Although I am using the later translation of this essay, which is called “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,” I refer to it here through the title under which it circulated during the height of its influence: “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”
21. *Ibid.*, 108.
22. *Ibid.*, 103, 110.
23. *Ibid.*, 102.
24. Walter Benjamin, “Little History of Photography,” in *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 518.
25. Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” 101–102 and 120–122.
26. Christian Metz, “Photography and Fetish,” in *The Critical Image*, ed. Carol Squiers (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), 155–64.
27. Sigmund Freud, “Fetishism,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1964), vol. 21, 152–57.
28. Bertolt Brecht, “A Short Organum for the Theatre,” in *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. John Willett (New York: Hill & Wang, 1957), 203.
29. *Ibid.*, 205.
30. Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934*, 775.
31. Crimp, “Pictures,” 177.
32. Douglas Crimp, “The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism,” *October* 15 (Winter 1980). Crimp republished this essay in *On the Museum’s Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 108–24, and it is from this source that I am quoting. *On the Museum’s Ruins*, 109.
33. *Ibid.*, 108.
34. *Ibid.*, 109.
35. *Ibid.*, 118.
36. *Ibid.*, 113.
37. Benjamin, “Little History of Photography,” 508–510.
38. *Ibid.*, 510.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” and “Paralipomena to ‘On the Concept of History,’” in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1928–1940*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 389–411.
41. Benjamin, “Little History of Photography,” 512.
42. *Ibid.*, 514.
43. *Ibid.*, 515.
44. *Ibid.*, 514.
45. Henry Fox Talbot, “New Discovery in the Fine Arts,” *New Yorker* 7, no. 4 (April 13, 1839), 49–51.
46. I develop this argument more fully in the first chapter of the book I am currently writing, *The Miracle of Analogy*.
47. Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 10–11 and 34–35.
48. I am of course speaking somewhat allegorically here, and basing my account of the modern subject on Descartes. 1637 is the year when he published *The Discourse on Method*, in which he describes the process through which he arrived at his famous axiom “I think, therefore I am.” The passage I quote in this paragraph comes from a closely related volume, Descartes’s *Meditations on First Philosophy*. See René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, ed. David Weissman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 70–71. I develop this argument more fully—and more discursively—in *The Miracle of Analogy*.
49. I explore the relationship between the camera obscura and chemical photography in considerable detail in the first chapter of *The Miracle of Analogy*.
50. “Being means presencing,” Heidegger writes in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 5.
51. Charles Baudelaire, “The Salon of 1859,” in *Baudelaire, Selected Writings on Art & Artists*, trans. P.E. Charvet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 295.
52. *Ibid.*, 295, 297.
53. *Ibid.*, 298.
54. *Ibid.*, 297.
55. The source of this quotation, which is impossible to verify, is Joachim Gasquet, *Conversations with Cézanne*, ed. Michale Doran (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 110.
56. Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time, Volume VI: Time Regained*, trans. Andreas Mayor, Terence Kilmartin and D.J. Enright (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 274–75 and 616–17; and Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters: 1910–1926*, trans. Jane Bannard Greene and M.D. Herter Norton (New York: Norton, 1969), 96.
57. Robert Rauschenberg, *Photographs* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1981), 34. The phrase comes from Richter, who uses it to describe his painting. See Gerhard Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings, 1962–1993*, ed. Hans Ulrich Obrist, trans. David Britt (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1995), 73. Celmins bases most of her drawings and paintings on photographs, and some of her sculptural work is also implicitly photographic.
58. Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).
59. *Ibid.*, 253–54, fn 7.
60. *Ibid.*, 43.

61. I also want to mention three exhibitions in this context: "'Pictures' at an Exhibition," a partial recreation of the original "Pictures" exhibition, curated by Jenelle Porter at Artists Space in New York 2001; "The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960-1982," curated by Douglas Fogle at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 2004; and "The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984," curated by Douglas Eklund at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2009.
62. Jean-François Chevner, "The Adventures of the Picture Form in the History of Photography," trans. Michael Gilson, in *The Last Picture Show*, ed. Douglas Fogle (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003), 116. See Also Chevner, "The Tableau and the Document of Experience," in *click doubleclick: The Documentary Factor*, ed. Thomas Weski (Munich: Haus der Kunst, 2006), 51-61.
63. Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 105.
64. *Ibid.*, 113.
65. Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 195-227. I updated this reading of *Untitled Film Stills* at the request of Johanna Burton, an editor of and contributor to *Cindy Sherman* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006). It appears there under the title "How to Face the Gaze" (143-70).
66. I am of course referencing the title of Abramović's 2010 performance at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, "The Artist Is Present."
67. All twelve pages of the album are reproduced at the beginning of *Cindy Sherman*, ed. Julie Rouart and Clément Diré, trans. Louise Rogers (Paris: Jeu de Paume, 2006).
68. George Baker and Andrea Fraser, "Displacement and Condensation: A Conversation on the Work of Louise Lawler," in *Louise Lawler and Others* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 120.
69. Louise Lawler, *An Arrangement of Pictures* (New York: Assouline, 2000).
70. Baker also comments on this aspect of Lawler's photographs. "Lawler's project is not just to string together art world positions, to create relations between the functions of artist, curator and gallery worker," he says in "Displacement and Condensation." "She is involved in revealing relations that inhere between disparate objects in the world" (139).
71. I am quoting from an interview with Lawler that was conducted by Crimp, called "Prominence Give, Authority Taken." It appears in *An Arrangement of Pictures*, before the plates.
72. *Ibid.*
73. Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," 508.
74. Ann Temkin, "Newborn," in *Sherrie Levine: Newborn* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1993), 10-39.
75. Sherrie Levine, Introduction, *Sherrie Levine: Newborn* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1993), 7-8.
76. Temkin, 7-8.
77. This passage, which Temkin quotes on page 27 of her text, comes from a 1936 letter from Brancusi to the Maharajah of Indore. Brancusi wrote this letter the year Benjamin finished the second version of "The Work of Art," and one year after the release of *The Gold Diggers of 1935*.
78. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 8.
79. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), 364-65.
80. John Hersey, "Introduction: Agee," in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, xxviii.
81. Lincoln Kirstein, in *Walker Evans: American Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), 197.