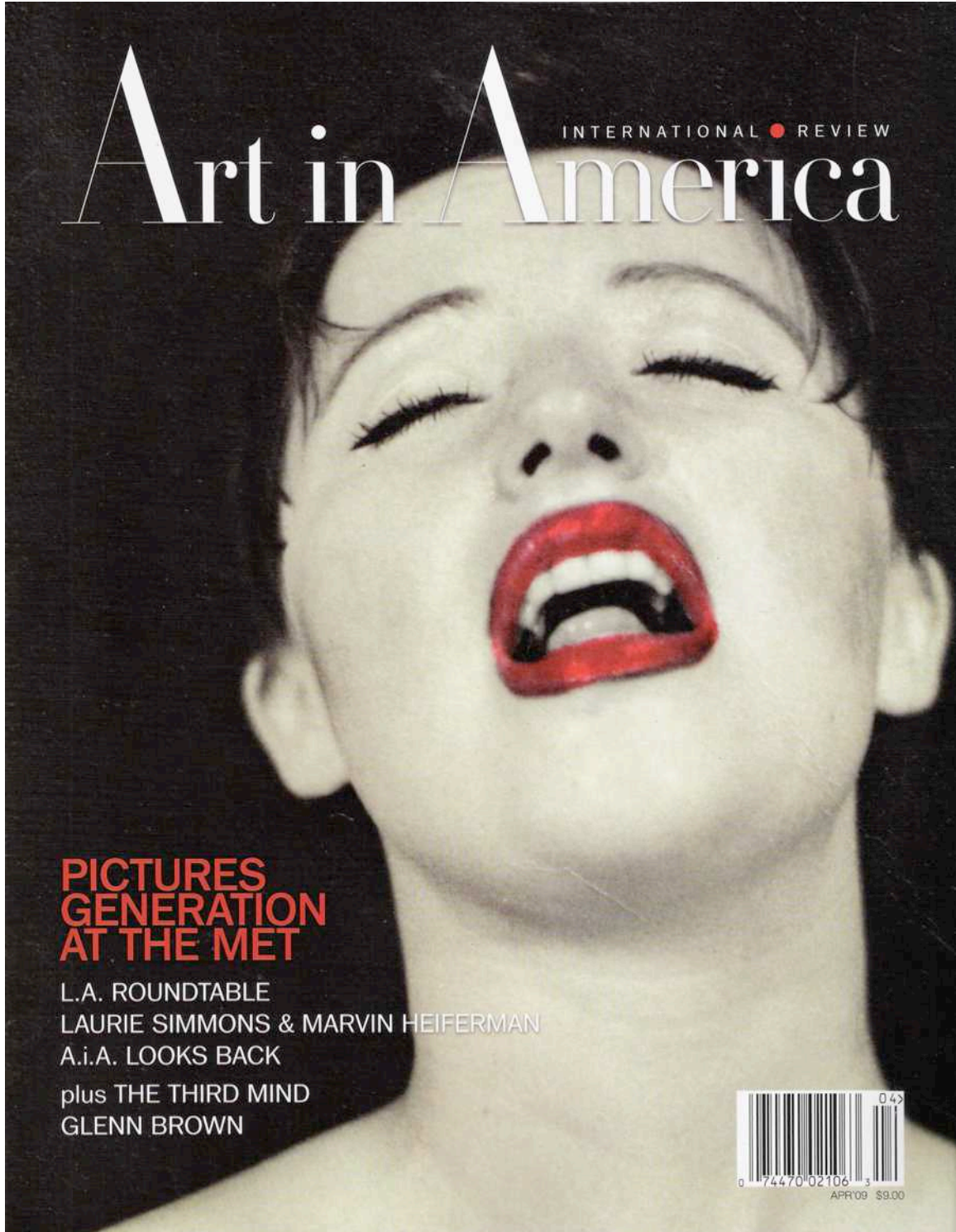


Walead Beshty

Pictures Generation Roundtable: After Materiality and Style

Art in America, April 2009



**PICTURES
GENERATION
AT THE MET**

L.A. ROUNDTABLE

LAURIE SIMMONS & MARVIN HEIFERMAN

A.i.A. LOOKS BACK

plus THE THIRD MIND

GLENN BROWN



AFTER
ANDMATERIALITY
STYLE

Speaking on a panel in Pasadena, four young artists addressed the continuing formal influence—and much-contested critical vocabulary—of the Pictures generation.

ON THE OCCASION OF the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition "The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984," I invited four Los Angeles-based artists, all born in the 1970s, to participate in a roundtable discussion sponsored by Art in America on Jan. 27, 2009, at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. Discussants addressed their relationship to the art-historical lineage of the Pictures generation through the lens of their own photographic, filmic, sculptural and performance-based practices. Throughout their conversation, excerpted below, these critically engaged artists revisited questions related to the persistence of material investigation and the continuing discomfort around notions of style, addressing the legacies of self-reflexivity, medium-specificity and modes of quotation, fragmentation, repetition and staging in contemporary artistic production.

WALEAD BESHTY (b. 1976, London) is an associate professor in the graduate department of Art Center College of Design in Pasadena and has exhibited extensively both nationally and internationally, with 2009 solo shows at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture

Garden, Washington, D.C.; University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor; Wallspace, New York; and LA><ART, Los Angeles. He also publishes in the field of contemporary art and is a regular contributor to *Texte zur Kunst*.

ELAD LASSRY (b. 1977, Tel Aviv), who received an MFA from the University of Southern California in 2007, has widely exhibited his photographs and films, which were included in the 2008 California Biennial at the Orange County Museum of Art and may be seen in New York beginning this month in the New Museum's "The Generational: Younger than Jesus." In September, he will present a new body of work at David Kordansky Gallery, L.A.

CARTER MULL (b. 1977, Atlanta) received an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia in 2006. His most recent solo exhibi-

View of the conference at Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, Jan. 27, 2009, with an image of work by Carter Mull on the screen. Photo Bobby Martin.

MODERATOR:

ARAM MOSHAYEDI

PANELISTS:

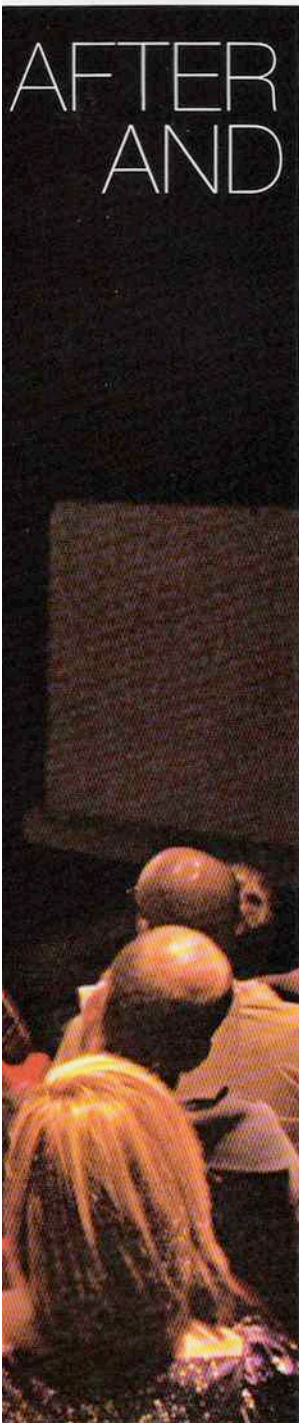
CARTER MULL

ERIKA VOGT

ELAD LASSRY

WALEAD BESHTY

ARAM MOSHAYEDI currently lives in Los Angeles where he is a curator at LA><ART and a PhD student in the department of art history at the University of Southern California.



tion was at Marc Foxx Gallery, L.A., in 2008, and he has upcoming shows at Studio Guenzani, Milan, and Taka Ishii Gallery, Kyoto. Later this year he will be included in "New Photography" at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The artist and filmmaker **ERIKA VOGT** (b. 1973, East Newark, N.J.), who received her MFA from the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia in 2003, recently had her first solo exhibition at Mesler & Hug, L.A. Her films have screened at the Hammer Museum, L.A.; the State Center of Contemporary Art, Moscow; MoMA, New York; and the Centre Pompidou, Paris. She also participated in the 2008 California Biennial at the Orange County Museum of Art.

—Aram Moshayedi

MOSHAYEDI I thought the place to start should be in addressing some of the language that comes up when we're talking about the Pictures generation—terms like "referentiality," "appropriation" and the "found image." How do each of your separate practices engage with these terms? Are there certain conditions of the present moment that perhaps make a relationship to the practices associated with the Pictures lineage difficult to maintain?

MULL This question revolves around just how much the term "appropriation" dominates art writing. Has "appropriation" simply become shorthand for an action? Is its use tied to a generation, and, more importantly, do we need a new term that more accurately describes contemporary artists' relationship to mass-media images?

MOSHAYEDI In your practice, Erika, I think there is a more direct relationship to the history of avant-garde film, where a term such as appropriation doesn't carry as much weight. You rely more on the found image, which, as a concept, evokes a radically different set of problems.

VOGT In my films I occasionally use found footage as part of the image. More appropriately it should be described as stock footage because of the way it is used. For example, in *Lightning Forest Screen Voyage* [2007] I needed lightning, which I didn't have the means to shoot, so I extracted an image from a documentary. In a way,

I'm using it exactly for what it is, as lightning, and there is no additional meaning added to it.

It's been interesting for me to have the word "appropriation" laid over my particular use of footage, since it references experimental filmmaking. Found footage has its own history, which might be similar to that of appropriation, but that also diverges from it in a way. For me, it is related to the idea of small-format filmmaking, which is basically a way to make something by understanding and negotiating limits.

MOSHAYEDI In thinking of how to stage this discussion, it was my wish to particularly avoid certain words because of the ways they have been inappropriately adopted. For instance, in his "Pictures" essay, Douglas Crimp uses terms like "quotation," "fragmentation," "repetition" and "staging." It seems to me there may be something about their particular meanings that might shed some light on the continued misuse of a term such as "appropriation."

LASSRY Nowadays these terms have seeped into mainstream culture. Because most people understand it, "appropriation" is helpful now when referring to an image that is borrowed. Legally, when I use film stills, the question of use arises. But even if it is just being used to bridge issues of authorship, "appropriation" is somehow understood by the contemporary art viewer as something of a valid concept in and of itself. That is helpful in terms of gaining access to images and, as Erika was saying, obtaining something that you do not have the means to shoot yourself. I think that is essentially what I find really interesting, and something that people respond to.

BESHTY The understanding that Elad points to presents an interesting dilemma, because it speaks to the solidity that the term "appropriation" is assumed to have, and all the baggage that comes along with it. I think the attempt to modify its meaning, recover it by claiming it as a simple operation, is impossible, and I wonder what would really be gained if this attempt were successful. The term assumes a theoretical armature automatically, one that artists immediately adopt the moment they invoke it. Now, it seems like you are both attempting to

distance the act of using a preexisting image or piece of material from the historical moment that the term "appropriation" is tied to—an attempt to strip it of the theoretical apparatus that developed around it. I wonder if the term should just be left out unless that particular history is being actively commented upon—and by this I mean more than just using found material. Even the decision to name this particular act of taking preexisting material and using it—whether we call that "appropriation" or "bricolage," "montage" or "sampling," or something else—is a decision heavy with implications.

Many of the ideas associated with appropriation, while creating an understanding of the function of images, provided a rather narrow proposition regarding the relationship between art and politics. The term "appropriation" is intertwined with a notion of allegory, an association that framed the relation between art and everything external to it in melancholic terms, those of absence, or loss, or negation—the appropriated material operating as a signifier of the lost context or meaning associated with its initial deployment. On its first face, this seems to be a politically potent refusal of the dominant meanings associated with the mass production of images. But it also limits the political implications of art objects. The dominant theoretical legacy of both the Pictures generation and "appropriation," which began with Peter Bürger and runs through Crimp, to Craig Owens, to Benjamin Buchloh, still lingers. While I think this formulation is a potent one, it seems too narrow. By accepting it, one is left with bleak options, either to extend an alienated notion of esthetics—that art production can only operate in terms of negation and nihilism—or veer into some sort of amnesiac neo-expressionism. I think this is a false choice, but one that is inextricably tied to the use of the term "appropriation."

For me, this is a language-based problem—one of theoretical tools, not of production. It is important not to confuse this; conflating these models lands you in a muddle.

LASSRY A lot of the works from that generation are, in a sense, victims of the overwhelming emphasis on the act of appropriation. When you revisit

"I FIND THE IDEA OF ART AS AN 'INTERROGATION' OR A 'CRITIQUE' TO BE ANACHRONISTIC. IT IMPLIES THAT THERE IS AN OUTSIDE THAT ONE CAN OPERATE FROM." —WALEAD BESHTY

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the works themselves, and you let go of this framework, there is actually so much more that can arise. Jack Goldstein's *The Jump* [1978] is a good example. Neither the fact that the film originates from stock footage nor its rotscope special effects eliminate the possibilities of engaging with another kind of experience or another meaning in the work. I feel the reason the word "appropriation" is so reductive now is because it doesn't allow one to move toward a new set of questions. Issues of context and authorship overwhelm the reading of work of that generation. Some of Goldstein's films that are appropriated obviously become autonomous gestures, but the mere fact that they employ this strategy serves as a dominant theme in the reception of his pieces. They become historicized under this term, when, in fact, there are other things happening within the work, like the negation of cinematic agency and the diffusion of cinematic experience. There is room now to revisit these and

many other works for their contributions to more recent artistic practice. Writers like David Company have written about the "Lumière drive" as a current phenomenon among young artists, characterized by a return to cinematic exploration and an affinity for the fixed frame and the long take.

MOSHAYEDI That is the reason it is important to have this conversation now, because it seems like there is not only the continued application of Crimp's terms as a formula, but also because there is the appearance of a return to the ideals of the Pictures generation in recent artistic practice. It is as if some of the terms themselves have been adopted as a brand of current artistic investigation. In light of this, how is it possible to address issues of content and meaning, in relation to politics especially, as well as recent attempts at foregrounding an interrogation of medium?

This is something you've talked about before, Elad, in relation to an image such as *Felicia* [2008]. There is a prob-

Erika Vogt: *Lightning Forest Screen Voyage*, 2007. 16mm film transferred to video, 3 minutes, from the "Motor Post Motor Band Disband" series. Courtesy Mesler & Hug, Los Angeles.

lem related to the specific signifiers that resonate through the work. For instance, the red ribbon seeps through despite the quality of generality in the image. This is something that could not be accounted for by art writing that comes out of the generation we are discussing. Your work occupies an interesting place in the context of what I've tried to describe as a return to self-reflexivity as style. If we can reopen a space that allows artworks to perform tasks on their own—by perhaps allowing the pictorial to both satisfy and resist the mandates imposed by specific materials and forms—then what questions can we start to pose?

LASSRY That is essentially the issue raised by a piece like *Felicia*. I am very interested in toying with the idea of abstraction while returning to that of



Elad Lassry: *Felicia*, 2008.
C-print, 14 by 11 inches.
Courtesy David Kordansky Gallery,
Los Angeles.

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"I CONSIDER PHOTOSHOP AND 'GHOST' PHOTOGRAPHY TO BE THE SAME THING." —ELAD LASSRY

the sitter in relation to the subject, and the impossibility of speaking about a subject through the photographic act. In *Felicia* there is the combination of the headshotlike picture paired with a perceptual exercise as the backdrop. In a way it is a publicity shot of the kind generally made a decade or so ago. I attempt to address Felicia as a subject with whom I spent a day through a set of codes that suffocate the work—the red ribbon is one such distraction, and the Sarah Charlesworth-like colored frame is another. For me, the meaning lies in dealing with abstraction through the subject.

BESHTY I'm curious what you mean when you say abstraction.

LASSRY I guess abstraction here refers to the idea that I don't assume I can make a portrait of Felicia. So I start from a place where I don't see much of a difference between the backdrop and the subject. I'm not sure if the photo is about the red ribbon, or her, or the dots. It is abstraction in the sense that the subject almost disappears. The multiple exposures also help me to arrive at this.

BESHTY But the way you talk about the intimacy of a relationship with this person sounds like the classical model of the artist rendering a sitter, which privileges a private relationship, not a public one. You have this public object, but there is a dynamic that remains private, inaccessible to a viewer, an indication of a withheld process. For the Pictures generation, the meaning of an image is external, sited in public reception, public meaning, even if it refuses accepted "public" meanings in the end. The way you describe it, your work is opposed to establishing that type of distance, instead claiming a kind of intimacy, a sense of connection or collaboration operating at the core of the production of an image.

I am wondering if, in some sense, there is a kind of tension there, an argument, and if this is something that you also see evidenced in work by the Pictures generation. In Goldstein, say. In other words, are you claiming an empathic relationship through the image of this woman? Is that why you were focusing on the role of the sitter and the artist when discussing the work?

LASSRY I think that there is still the

potential of somehow making a good portrait. I don't want to distinguish between spending the day with a subject and finding a photograph of a subject, which itself might activate the same set of questions. Both strategies have the same problems. But this is something I think about, as someone who has been trained to consider the artists we've mentioned.

MOSHAYEDI Carter, in your work there is an attempt to obscure content through processes of modification, filtering and erasure. Your *Los Angeles Times* foldouts, for example, are about the relationships that naturally occur on the page spread. But the material—the newspaper itself—goes through various modes of alteration before it becomes something of a total image. It isn't necessarily concerned with the visual and textual material that defined that specific day in world events, but there is a certain kind of empathy that could be read into the work. This empathy could exist at the level of the everyday ways in which the newspaper reveals what are now the banalities of political violence and consumer spending. But there is instead a pointed attempt to evacuate these possible meanings, to create a distance from them.

MULL To briefly pick up on what Elad was mentioning: In Richard Prince's book *Why I Go to the Movies Alone*, there is this conversation about the picture as preferable to the real thing—which seems to be a preoccupation on the part of some of the artists of the Pictures generation. For me, what is interesting in Prince's early photos, such as the 1980 *Untitled (perfume containers)* and *Untitled (three hands with watches)*, is less the issue of deconstructing the role of images in our lives—via what he chooses to shoot—than the specific photographic realities that condition our response to the work. Essentially, the raster screen that's in the original ad becomes uncannily fuzzy in Prince's photo. It's an engagement with the photographic, however trained or not, that produces photographs that end up haunting our conception of mass-media images.

For me, using the *Los Angeles Times* as a point of departure for a number of works was in some ways an attempt to

articulate my relationship to abstraction. In unfolding the newspaper, we find a preexisting montage. The newspaper becomes an armature upon which to hang abstraction, and it is an abstraction that is produced by using the same means used to edit and correct the original images for the newspaper. I alter the images, filling them with red herrings that somehow force us to focus on the reshaping of images by means of the most common tools of image production. The digital file is treated as a material, with its own specific properties, not unlike any other material that an artist can have agency over.

MOSHAYEDI Walead, what is the role of chance operations in your work? Your photograms, for instance, are produced using simply light and paper; they are given over completely to the practices that occur in the darkroom. Even in your more recent work, you play with the digital code of the image in order to create a new "front end" when it is eventually sent to print. I'm interested in hearing how you see your practice in relationship to Carter's engagement with certain processes of chance in image-making.

BESHTY While there is a set of chance operations and material conditions that define how some of my work is made—in particular with the photograms and glass boxes—in the case of the glass boxes, the means of transportation, FedEx, acts as the generative mechanism of the work. With Carter, the term "chance" might describe the unintended juxtapositions that occur within the printed page, which he emphasizes in re-presenting that page as an autonomous image. The distinction I would make is that I'm not particularly concerned with the denaturalization or decontextualization of a preexisting organizational structure in its static form. I'm more concerned with how the material traffic of an image—the contingencies produced by this traffic—whether the work is on photographic paper or exists in a digital file, or as an object in transit, might generate other possibilities for esthetic production. This is distinct from being simply a reflection of the dominant structures that define, sometimes arbitrarily, the meaning and organization of images. A defining impulse in my work

“THERE IS A CERTAIN PRESUMPTION THAT IN WORKING DIGITALLY WE HAVE TO SUBSCRIBE TO PICTORIAL CONVENTIONS THAT ARE GENERATED BY USES FROM THE 1990s— WHICH AFFIRM THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST AS FILM DIRECTOR.” — CARTER MULL

is an attempt to avoid tacitly reifying these prescribed models for meaning, neither embracing their spectacular, abstract or alienating aspects, nor dealing with them negatively, i.e., proposing them as false models and attempting to undermine them. In the end, to me, these are really one and the same reifying gesture. Negation is, in my understanding, a form of preservation.

In the photograms, the paper is folded into a freestanding geometric form, each side gets a color, and the colors are dependent on the spectrum of emitted and reflective light. I'm blind in the dark room, where I am managing this huge piece of paper, an operation involving the tensions between my body, the material of the paper and the light source. I would not use the word "chance" but would liken the operation, instead, to a game: it's really an aleatory process. There is a set of rules that dictates the parameters for a range of outcomes, and there are no hierarchies for these outcomes, all of which are indicative of the particular rules at work. My procedure might be an "appropriated" model, modified from the *avant-gardes* or Conceptual art, which allowed one to be freed up from certain esthetic conventions. But my emphasis is on the active application of this logic to the contemporary context as a way of moving past certain conventions, of finding another way through that isn't based on the false options of negation or affirmation.

More recently, I have been preoccupied with the idea of how to deal with the material component of the digital image, in that digital images are essentially comprised of text. There is a similarly aleatory process I use with digital images, by dealing with the information that composes the image as a text file, and using automatic functions in word-processing programs to reform the text. In my earlier work the materiality was stable, but things have changed with digital media. When I've shown my work recently, it has essentially functioned like wallpaper, a pattern. A space-filling object, it can be reproduced as many times as one might want for a particular context. This gets away from the photogram, a unique object. Which is not to say that the uniqueness or specificity of the object

was a problem, just a fact. The reflexivity of my work has never really been "about photography" or "about the digital," but a response to the specific conditions related to their use. I'm not particularly invested in, nor do I really care about, photography in particular. But on the other hand, it's something that I'm presented with, and it's something that I have some kind of facility with, and so I use it.

I believe there is a kind of "esthetic unconscious" of the medium, one formed through its applications, cultural associations and technological development. I have heard people claim my work looks like something called "modernist" photography. But when pressed, they seem to be referring to something amorphous, indistinct.

I was wondering about that in relationship to your work, Erika, in terms of your discussion of "structuralist" film—how it gets used in relation to your work, and how you would describe your relationship to it.

VOGT The term "structuralist" is similar to "appropriation" in that both are subject to misuse. I find that the word "structuralist" is thrown around quite a lot, rather than being used to speak to a very particular type of filmmaking and a very particular moment in film history. It is often mistakenly used to identify a particular choice. For example, someone will call an unedited shot structural, or similarly, something that seems to be self-reflexive is considered structural, even though there might be other things present that could be very antagonistic to the term's historical meaning and its relationship to the history of experimental film. To make a structuralist film, in my mind, implies P. Adams Sitney's definition of organizing one's film materials according to the film's structure. This also implies that a series or set of rules, simple or complicated, are the principal organizing force. If there is an absence of rules as a guiding principle, how then does a structuralist film exist, or how can it exist? It seems really elementary to stop at that level of distinction. In a way, it also seems to be a kind of misfire between experimental film and art, which is funny because during the moment of structuralist filmmaking there is a critical collapsing of those two worlds.

But I want to go back to something Elad said earlier, because it reminded me of my own approach to issues of meaning. It seemed as if you could not decide what was most important or what kind of hierarchy there was within the image.

LASSRY But there is also the exciting possibility of photographing a subject and having multiple meanings arise. I think it has something to do with an interrogation of the digital.

BESHTY This is very difficult, because digital photographs are so ubiquitous, and the material is almost invisible in the contemporary moment. We are still using analogies to older models in order to deal with it.

LASSRY There have always been certain mysteries that have surrounded the singularity of an image, be it analog or digital. Did Bauhaus photography, for example, actually investigate the medium by manipulating the negative, the photographic paper and methods of printing? I like to think of digital manipulation and the occult in photography as having to do with each other. I consider Photoshop and "ghost" photography as the same thing. There is an attempt to go back and forth between something misunderstood in analog to something as yet misunderstood in the digital.

BESHTY I find the idea of art as an "interrogation" or a "critique" to be anachronistic. It implies that there is an outside that one can operate from. That said, most technological processes are bound up tight, treated as singular operations. For example, a photograph. One could say that a photograph is something that you make with a lens, and it produces a likeness, an image. But there is no space in this idea; you can fiddle with it, misuse it, but usually such manipulations are excused as experiments, which in the end are overshadowed by the proper, conventional applications. Bauhaus photography, for example, is often discussed as experimentation, not as a model for a viable production. Anyway, my interest is in opening up what feel like closed procedures. Trying to find something within the translation of states—that can become a site of production. Perhaps my connection to the

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Pictures generation would be that I see the implications, or meaning, of working this way as situated within a public field, not within a private or hermetic zone of art-making.

LASSRY Thinking about what we describe as a self-reflexive facility, in photography or filmmaking, I am a little bit overwhelmed by the number of recent works that look like they are from the 1920s. It's as if we have this fetish of the analog.

MULL Elad, what you're saying is somehow opening up space between

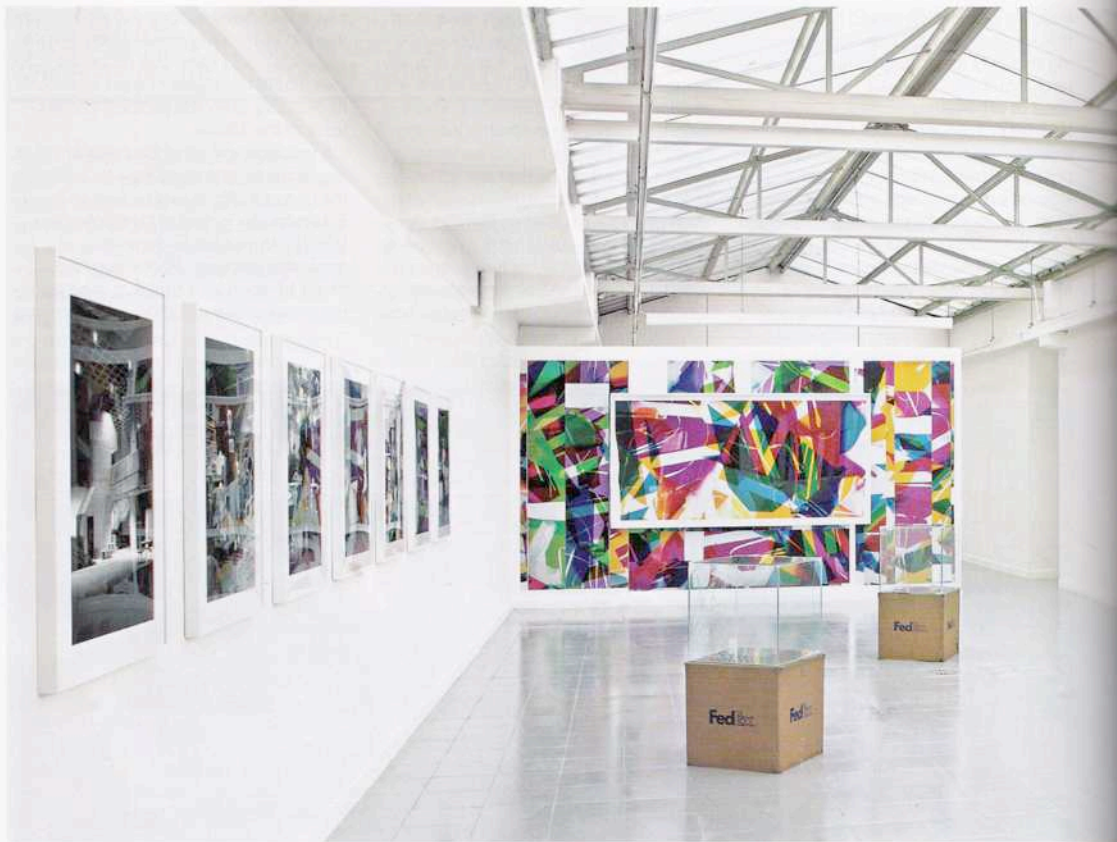
the poles of materiality and style. Your idea is a really interesting proposition about what a picture is. It is as though Photoshop can only be used in line with previous pictorial conventions. There is a certain presumption that in working digitally we have to subscribe to certain pictorial conventions that are generated by uses from the 1990s—which affirm the role of artist as film director. But at this moment of what might be a potential ontological rupture in image-making, there is an interesting question that arises in relation to the digital: how

can artists have agency in their involvement in the workspace of photographic apparatuses? I think one response is to investigate the digital in ways that don't necessarily obey the pictorial conventions of the 1990s.

If you look at a lot of Bauhaus or other experimental photography—for instance, the use of multiple exposures, as in El Lissitzky's *Portrait of Kurt Schwitters* [1924]—those are in-darkroom, in-apparatus gestures. Photoshop, too, might be seen as a tool that is an apparatus, not unlike a camera, and working



Carter Mull: *Silver Platter*, 2008, C-print on metallic paper and Type R print, 21 1/2 by 23 1/2 inches. Courtesy Marc Foxx, Los Angeles.



View of Walead Beshty's exhibition "Industrial Pictures," 2008, at Galerie Rodolphe Janssen, Brussels.

with it might be seen as a series of in-apparatus gestures.

LASSRY I find this interesting because it is a return to the medium.

BESHTY What Elad points to is a problem that is endemic to categorizations, of things being lumped together in a patently ahistorical fashion—as if there's a historical argument, when in fact all we have is a pale echo of history. But perhaps this is where the occult picks up, the persistence of the "shadows" of history, because I would agree in some sense that Photoshop has a "ghost" occupying it. I'd say the ghost is the simulation of the analog processes that Photoshop is designed around, its "curve tools," etc. These have a certain notion about chemical process built into them, but this is fundamentally a symbolic relation, an abstraction.

There is nothing that inherently makes a digital file subject to analog continuities of "contrast" or "tonal range." This is a narrative that facilitated the transition to digital image-making. The story it tells is inseparable from the tool, and it obscures as much as it reveals.

VOGT I am curious, though, if you could explain how you arrive at meaning. Is it located within your images, or is it expanded upon outside of them?

MOSHAYEDI This question relates to something that Walead mentioned earlier, having to do with the problems associated with the historicization of the Pictures generation and the theoretical miscalculations applied to work from this era by a particular group of critics. The question that Erika raises about meaning has to do with the role and function of an object. Where does the meaning sit in the art object, given that there is so much extra-textual information that

surrounds it? Can it communicate its properties on its own? This is something W.J.T. Mitchell has written about in terms of desire, when he asks the question, "What do pictures want?" But it is also a problem Howard Singerman and others have discussed as the historicizing role art criticism (and Crimp's especially) played in this period.

BESHTY I hesitate to take up the term "meaning" in a specific sense, or the word "content" for that matter. Terms like these tend to treat the art object as a delivery system for some kind of message, and propose that there is some sort of prescription regarding the interpretation of the work. I don't think of some meaning being locked inside my work, but situated around it. This meaning is always, to use your term, "extra-textual." There is a generative relationship to the viewer that I try to instigate, and the "meaning" is present

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in the way the work traffics from that point, in how it circulates, what conventions it accepts or rejects, basically how it dialectically defines a moment of reception in positive terms. I suppose that attempt is what constitutes "meaning" from my position.

LASSRY I think that my question was more about the emphasis on process. I'm interested in where these questions of process are now, where these very common uses of the analog and the digital are coming from. I'm asking the same question in regard to meaning, when practices that refer directly to reality, like that of Eileen Quinlan . . .

BESHTY But I'd be hesitant about reducing Eileen Quinlan's work to an

exemplar of process-based photography, or some sort of reaction against the Pictures generation. In terms of the multiple, Sherrie Levine seems just as strong a precedent as what might be called process-based or "abstract" photography.

LASSRY Yeah, but she [Quinlan] calls it smoke and mirrors.

BESHTY Yeah, but it's a *picture* of smoke and mirrors, and that's part of the humor of it. It's still based on a representational model. That's a very specific choice. She doesn't seem to be approaching these questions in the same way as say, James Welling, or Liz Deschenes, or Gottfried Jäger, or Moholy-Nagy, regardless of whatever

formal or material similarities there might be. As for my work, I don't think I would say I emphasize process, but rather that I actively try not to obscure it.

MOSHAYEDI This is an important distinction to make—between those practices on the one hand which merely refer to process and those which more or less bear the burden of a difficult relationship to production. I worry, though, that this leaves us at an impasse separating "materiality" from "style" that I felt was essential to work beyond in order to ask questions of what comes after such categorizations. I think the need to expose process is an important one, but there should also be a greater amount of skepticism toward practices like Quinlan's, or Anne Collier's, that instead represent, picture or objectify self-reflexivity. This is not to say that one approach is necessarily better than the other, but rather that each is performing a different set of tasks which may or may not have anything to do with investigation, interrogation or critique, or any of the other terms that have been adopted in this regard.

MULL Perhaps the question of opacity and transparency in photography is somehow central to this, if we think about the way that meaning can be carried in a photograph. If we start to think about meaning as being the result of likeness, the likeness somehow related to an image that has certain properties of direct signification, in a split second, we've realized we're looking at a picture—one with a specific cultural and social context. The relationship between a viewer and a surface—that is a relationship that is rendered more or less opaque, in terms of the ways that pictures work. Maybe what the photograph is pointing to, or what you think the photograph is pointing to, does not have such a direct relationship to signification. Maybe we can speak of the referent of the photograph as being deferred on some level. There are obvious historical precedents—James Welling's photographs, the foil series for instance. There may be an overt or obvious set of references—versus something where we're not sure what the camera is looking at.

These are very different ways in which

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"FOUND FOOTAGE IS RELATED TO THE IDEA OF SMALL-FORMAT FILMMAKING, WHICH IS BASICALLY A WAY TO MAKE SOMETHING BY UNDERSTANDING AND NEGOTIATING LIMITS." —ERIKA VOGT

ROUNDTABLE

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View of the panel, showing a still from Vogt's "Motor Post Motor Band Disband" video series, 2008. Photo Bobby Martin.

photography can be meaningful, and for me, I'm not really interested in setting up a hierarchy. For my own practice, I am engaged with slowing down the viewer's recognition of the referent.

LASSRY I'm curious about a popularized conception of photography, described by Carter as having to do with a digital revolution, and the concerns of the Pictures generation. In their minds, pictures were already ubiquitous and mobile in a radical way. Was it really the introduction of the digital that has since made such ubiquity truly possible?

BESHTY I don't know that I think digital is a major shift; it's simply another set of operations that have become unavoidable. I think that was a really interesting point that Carter made about Prince, and this notion of viewers becoming conscious of the materiality of the thing in front of them. Whether or not process is present is on some level moot. It's not so much whether or not something has more process than something else, because there is always process, but how certain conventions are negotiated at a particular point in time in a way that calls attention to themselves—say,

the choice between making a video and making a film. Elad, for instance, uses film. Right now, a film projector isn't a common object, so I notice this choice when I see his work. I assume as a viewer that the artist is calling my attention to the technology, and I consider it as I look at the work.

LASSRY I think that the reason I use film has a lot to do with concerns that are outside of this tension with the digital. There are questions around photography that are not linear, that for me go back to this idea of the filmic frame in relationship to a photograph, and the possibility of a mental photograph. Meaning that it's relevant to open questions that are outside of those of digital or analog production, and that have to do with the agency, the mental space and the currency of a picture.

VOGT Which obviously is a questioning of meaning, right? I think this is really interesting, but for me it's somehow separate. I don't use the word "pictures" pointedly, but whether you take pictures on film or digitally doesn't seem to be a matter of importance in my estimation. In a work such as my own *I Arrive When I Am Foreign* [2006-08], there was the idea of almost exit-

ing a certain type of image production in order to enter into another place of new images, of things unseen or yet to be imagined, or of things unknown. I can agree with Elad when he talks about navigating between poles; I'm not interested in notions of abstraction or representation that fall into specific categories. My image practice comes out of a thought process. It's actually not even based in a still camera; for the most part it's video-based. So, it puts different things into play for me. At some point digital will also be obsolete. I'm not nostalgic for film, nor am I attached to digital. It's just an image-making technology. It's a human tool. It makes me think of anthropology.

MULL This does elucidate a certain divide in how we think that a photograph, or a picture, can carry meaning. At the same time, it seems that both a pictorial approach and a material methodology result from a similar high-stakes situation. What is the imperative for this? At the risk of stepping outside cultural meaning, maybe we can say that we've experienced a dimensional shift in how we relate to images. Our digital paradigm is not only a conversation in esthetics but a new mode of production that affects what we see in the culture around us. For example, consider the spatial phenomenon of checking e-mail—looking into one frame of a screen while an animation dances in an adjacent frame. This is just one minor example of many new visual dimensions in our landscape. With this, there's a different spatial or phenomenological role that pictures play in our lives. Could this bring up a set of questions about what a picture could mean? It's not about digital versus analog, it's about the spectrum from image to picture to photograph, and how these visual forms respond to our time. And with this, there is a space that has opened up for the material investigation of the apparatus of image-making. On this panel, maybe there are two poles that are being drawn out, but what I'm proposing is that there is an underlying current that is less cultural, that is less related to the Pictures generation, and that is more related to something that is economically or technologically driven, which perhaps has an even greater significance. ○