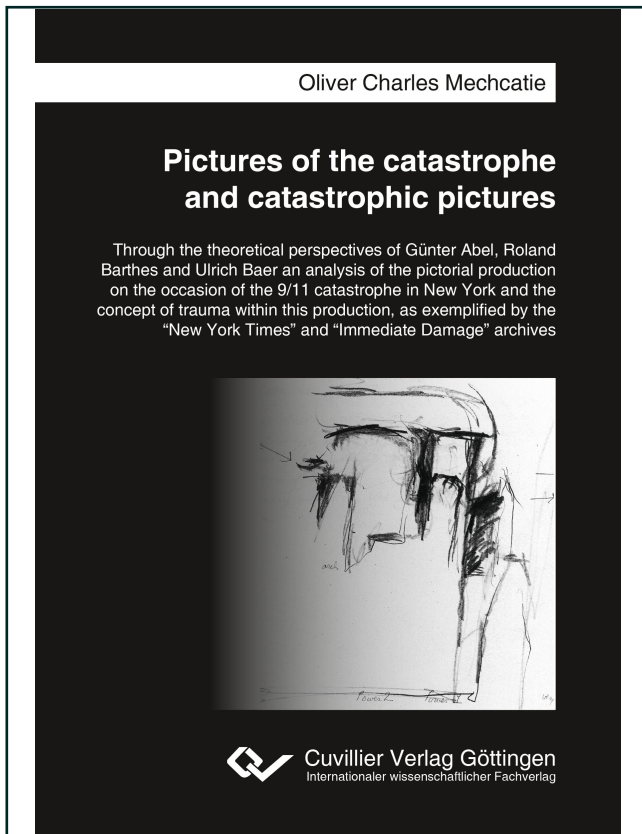




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**Pictures of the catastrophe and catastrophic pictures**

Through the theoretical perspectives of Günter Abel, Roland Barthes and Ulrich Baer an analysis of the pictorial production on the occasion of the 9/11 catastrophe in New York and the concept of trauma within this production, as exemplified by the “New York Times” and “Immediate Damage” archives



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Introduction: A general statement concerning The New York Times and Immediate Damage as two 'communities of images'<sup>1</sup> serving as an empirical background to the theoretical analysis

In this work, pictorial descriptions have been carried out for all of the pictures produced within the daily editions of the New York Times<sup>2</sup> (or NYT) during a two-week period in the immediate wake of the events of '9/11' and approximately 750 pictures of the 'Immediate Damage' (or ID) category of the "here is new york"<sup>3</sup> archive. These 'communities of images' are hypothesized as two wholes, which reveal through the sometimes elaborate descriptive process the dynamics of fundamentally different but interrelated systems of pictorial productions. On the one hand there is the New York Times, the pages of which are highly editorialized and as such create strategies of formatting, which should create contexts which should evoke aspects of the catastrophe and, 'self-reflectively', the production of pictures on the 'occasion' of a catastrophe. On the other hand, the ID production lays out an intricate system of classifications, which, in a seemingly random page-to-page order, results in a multiplication of pictorial genres. These images are realized within a range of realizations, of which ID could be described as amateur. In order to see the two productions as a whole, one production needs the other as a contrast. In the following analysis, while the New York Times is overwhelmingly in the forefront, examples from the Immediate Damage archive form a

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<sup>1</sup> In reference to Barthes' evocation of "the community of images" in: Roland Barthes: Camera Lucida, - Reflections on Photography, New York 1981, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> The image analysis was primarily conducted through the electronic recourse of: ProQuest historical newspapers: The New York Times (1851, Sept. 18 - 2003, Dec. 31). Ann Arbor, Michigan: ProQuest, 2003-.

<sup>3</sup> The "here is new york archive" website, found by browsing under the category of "WTC- Immediate Damage" is no longer as of February of 2015 accessible. [www.hereisnewyork.org](http://www.hereisnewyork.org)

background. As such, in one production there is constantly the evocation of the other photo as a missing presence.

A beginning example in the New York Times serves to pose a fundamental question in relation to the theoretical emphasis of this work, which will follow:

Example. Picasso cut-out and pedestrians fleeing: The first two pages of “The Arts Page” E1 & E2 on 9/13<sup>4</sup>

The first and second pages of the “Arts” of the New York Times<sup>5</sup> in the September 13, 2001 (or ‘9/13’) edition make explicit the recourse to the traditional medium of painting in order to invest the immediate experience of perceiving the catastrophe as a pictorial production with iconic importance. Through their image choice and format these pages represent a repetition of the function of the headline photo on A1 in the ‘9/12’ edition, the first page published after the events of 9/11, which in itself and in interaction with the format of the A1 page serves as a gate post to the ensuing flood of images after the 9/11 catastrophe.<sup>6</sup> However, unlike A1, the bringing together of two images on E1 and E2 9/13 - of a fragment of a famous art work which has basically been positioned near a photograph - do not work in association with one another or in association with the other pictorial contexts of the NYT on a level where form and content become one. Rather, the pictures on these pages work in association with one another on a level of content.

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<sup>4</sup> The page and day of each edition will henceforth be abbreviated as, for instance, E1 9/13, meaning that page E1 is published on September 13, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Also abbreviated in this work as the Times or the NYT.

<sup>6</sup> This page will experience a thorough pictorial analysis shortly.

On this level, form is fully subordinate to meaning, or plays only the most obvious role in entering into connections with other images.

In the case of the 'detail' of Pablo Picasso's "Guernica" (1937) on E1 9/13, a section cut out of the canvas is newly framed and defined by the surrounding context of photographs. In the case of the photograph on E2 9/13, which focuses the point of collapse of the towers, a banal photo typifies a certain photo type found in the pictorial production, which doesn't 'mean more' than this characterization of the typical. The use of iconic art to invest the status of one image anchored in the collective consciousness (the "Guernica" fragment) would invest another (the banal picture) with a legitimacy. Through this obviously hierarchal position, however, an association is forced.

To explain this and its consequences for the production of pictures within the NYT context, it is first necessary to describe how the 'detail' of the painting on E1 formally relates to other images within and near the same 9/13 edition. That no other image is placed on this page highlights its positioning as being of iconic importance to the context of the catastrophe.<sup>7</sup> Formally, one could point to the cropping of the painting: What is left is the white, squarish rectangle centered in the middle top, with at the right of the opening a rectangle seen at an oblique angle, so that its top right edge goes up, indicating that the open window cuts into the black backdrop. There is through this an emphasis on the formal meaning of the white rectangle of 90 degree angles in interaction with the expressive lines of the figure over that of the rectangle's 'meaning' as a window. In addition, there is no sign that the window frame has any width, in that the frame is presented as a thin piece of material, without depth. In this the form is also

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the anchoring of this picture into a pictorial consciousness possesses a local meaning, in that it was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art on West 53rd St. until 1981.

identical to the shallow sides of some representations of buildings in the same edition, such as in an emblem representing a building shown on A8 9/13 (see figure 18).

The rectangle of white is thus essentially a window frame framed within a frame, before and below which a figure wildly gesticulates. This relation of a figure to a frame within a frame lets the cropped image enter into relation with the photo of A3 9/13, in which a figure within a frame is holding a frame that is also centrally placed in the image. The window as a framed frame could also serve as a reference to the silvery box present but also apart in the inset photo of A1 9/12 (the small picture seen to the side of the main image of A1). In the inset photo a square of empty sky is determined by points holding a frame of tension, so that it too is in effect a frame within a frame. As such it literally represents a missing element.

In both A3 of 9/13 and A1 of 9/12, the framed space acts as another space, purely white within the larger frame, the formal potential of which allows the entire image to lift its frame and enter dynamically into another formal context. But the white frame framed within the “Guernica” detail (see figure 21) does not possess this potential as do A3 of 9/13 and the A1 inset photograph of 9/12. Instead, the image’s meaning is also cropped to being brought into a purely hierarchal association with the photo on the following page. This page E2 9/13, also showing only one photo, is also positioned, directly following the painting, as being of ‘direct’ iconic importance to the catastrophe. In this E2 9/13 is invested with the hierarchal importance of a canonic art work. On a purely content-based level, one image of a crying figure before the white frame (E1), is brought into connection with an image, also a rectangle, which should represent the immediate experience of perceiving the catastrophe (E2). In the explicitness of the anguished of



the figure and the hierarchal referencing of a detail of an iconic painting to a pedestrian picture, an element of ambivalence is registered about the production of images on the occasion of a catastrophe itself. That this is brought in reference to the image on E2 9/13 *may* be hypothesized as the inadequacy of so-called iconic images, which are ideas which do not bear being looked at, and which have been ascertained as being banal images without potential for an ongoing and developing pictorial context having to do with the catastrophe, as seen in the pictorial analysis of the Immediate Damage production.<sup>8</sup> That this is also true of the use of “Guernica” is clear, in that as an iconic image it is evident that what is a complex work of art has been reduced to the ‘detail’ or motif of a wailing figure over a frame that is also an open window. In order to understand the dull banality of the image, one could draw the image into the qualities used to describe the pictures of the ‘Immediate Damage’ category, in which qualitative judgements based on factual content and aesthetic judgement could be formed according to the categorizations as formed in a template. Indeed the caption of the photograph - “Pedestrians fleeing the area of the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan as the center’s south tower collapsed on Tuesday” - already includes the obligatory ‘Point in Time’ category combined with a further possible categorization (pedestrians fleeing). As such, it falls into the Immediate Damage category as a developing system of categorizations which ensue through the general focus on the World Trade Center Towers (as exploding, burning, falling, fallen or missing). At the same time, it does not fulfill anything more than being a banal statement of the ID

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, examples described in the “Immediate Damage” category, which were brought into association with the photos of the Hiroshima explosion, experience a one word description, namely “Hiroshima”: There was nothing more to write.

category. In the photograph E2 9/13 (see figure 22), a point of the collapse is in comparison to most of the photographs taken from this vantage point exceedingly framed by the architecture of the central local viewing point of the disaster<sup>9</sup> to the extent that the top tower of the building opposite St. Paul's is seen, as well as the adjacent facades.<sup>10</sup> In this photo, only the top of the World Trade Center Tower One (WTC1) seems visible, parallel to the top of the Moorish tower. The smoke, with a black underside appears to be coming out of this building. Central in the bottom middle is an Asian man running. To his right above him is what looks like a cross form, probably an old sign or lamp post. To the top left pointing down is the wide cornice of the nearest building. To its right, one sees just a bit of the Bosley building, otherwise all else is smoke. A man stands passively to the far right. Finally, the picture E2 9/13 is characterized by the attempt to capture the left, mostly 'unseen' side in the production of an important collection point of seeing the catastrophe before St. Paul's and in effect closes the circle of this collection point.

Here, iconic art lends the photographic motif a legitimacy as well as a *literally* direct canalization to the immediate perception of the catastrophe. The canal to the dynamic of photos of the collective production exemplified in ID, which is so clearly and lucidly realized in A1 9/12 as the exemplary first page of image production after the attacks,<sup>11</sup> is attempted again here. What is achieved here however, is the reduction of a painting to a graphic pointing to and not the realization of the canalization. The directly experienced is neither direct nor experienced, but is realized only as an idea. The bringing together

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<sup>9</sup> One of the main places crowds collected to look and photograph the burning towers.

<sup>10</sup> The top tower of the building opposite St. Paul's is seen only in a few photos in the ID archive.

<sup>11</sup> A1 9/12 will be described shortly.



of the painting detail and the picture borders on kitsch. That the cutting out of a fragment from an iconic work and the bringing it together in connection with an image, which within the field of ID would be rated as being full of contents but without any formal dynamic, could represent a realization of the moment of tastelessness as represented by kitsch, which may be termed the moment when the aesthetic becomes social, according to Frank Illing<sup>12</sup>. This may also be connected with the 'too much' of the concept of kitsch, which overlaps with the 'too much' of the trauma. The realization of bad taste is used in place of the balance between content and form, which is realized in the headline photograph of A1 9/12: The clear and lucid canal as gatepost to the image production in the NYT in the direct aftermath of 9/11 is replaced by the gatepost of (here in literal reference to the highlighted figure in "Guernica") screeching associations. This may also be seen as a construction which is created to point to a trauma which is experienced in a direct way.

In a clumsy way then, the use of the "Guernica" detail of E1 in relation to the photo of E2 which exemplifies in a banal way the photos of Immediate Damage, is an evocation of the contradictory quality of the immediate perception of the pictorial in its reference to the prerequisites, namely that the direct impression emerges from the prerequisites of seeing. This sense of immediacy is also evoked in the photo of the dancer and choreographer Martha Graham in "Grief"<sup>13</sup> on E5 9/13 from 1942 (see figure 23), in that

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<sup>12</sup> See Frank Illing: *Kitsch, Kommerz und Kult : Soziologie des schlechten Geschmacks*, Konstanz 2006. Here in particular reference to Jan Mukarovsky's concept of the art work being determined through a scale of the aesthetic component in relation to functions outside of the aesthetic, as well as to Illing's description of kitsch as bringing together in the art work the aesthetic value with values outside of the aesthetic in a crassly formulaic way, which denies the depth of developments behind the aesthetic value. See correspondingly "Jan Mukarovsky" in chapter 3, part 1 of "Soziologische Annäherungen an den (schlechten) Geschmack", pp. 77-101, as well as in "Kitsch" (219 ff.), p.223.f.

<sup>13</sup> Dmitri Ba Hermant is the photographer.

dance as an art form is immediately performed before the spectator. The showing of the Graham photo with the stage-like photo of E2 9/13 makes explicit the element of a moment in a performance caught by the camera of the catastrophic production.

Another example illustrates the use of Picasso's "Guernica" in order to legitimize through a canonic precedent in art history a motif that has become present in the production of pictures after 9/11. In the middle of the page of B11 9/15 the center panel of a triptych by Jan van Eyck of the crucifixion (1425-30) is shown. Within a detailed landscape is realized the dynamic of a winding road leading up to the open space where the three men being crucified jut out into the sky. Indeed, like the half circle from which the men jut, there are hints of a semi-circle in the long horizon line near the top of the photograph of the ruin on A8 9/15 (figure 26). What is vaguely present in the photograph of A8 is made explicit through the formal conventions of van Eyck's work.

In contrast is on A17 9/15 (figure 29) a picture of a wide open canyon, identified as the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. It contains the same wide horizon of A8 9/15, but is farther away. Without a line of anonymous figures providing entry to the space, as the helmeted workers do in the ruin photo of A8 9/15, there is no entry point to the seeing of this space. It is clean of debris and effects through this as both pure and foreign.

In view of citations of art historical precedents in the New York Times as being 'triggered' in the catastrophic production, and as such as automatically bringing the photographs produced on a daily basis into association with these precedents, the following questions may be posed: Does the explicitness, with which the New York Times 'exposes' its photographs as falling into models of perception traditional to the

history of Western painting, act to expose a gap between representations in terms of evidentiary power through the experiencing of perceiving them as an immediacy? And does this gap have to do with the photographs either being experienced as historical documents or as documents that stand outside of time?

The pictures focused in the NYT article are implicitly referenced as being exemplary for a plethora of images which relate to some degree to the events of 9/11 and its immediate aftermath. In light of the questions posed above, does the art historical piece in its concise determination of a range of pictures as fulfilling perspectival and thematic ideals to the exclusion of aspects outside this focus in representing the 9/11 catastrophe, function as a kind of 'caption' to the massive production of pictures, which fall into explicit or coincidental relation to the 9/11 catastrophe? And does this 'caption' reinforce the 'self-understood' quality of the photograph as a conduit of cultural ways of perception which neutralize pictorial realizations found within the wide swaths of production in the wake of the catastrophe, as pictures which may exist in contradiction to that which is self-understood?<sup>14</sup> It has been exemplified how images such as E2 9/13 literally and figuratively fall into orbit around those images such as E1 9/13, which are explicitly established as the prerequisites of seeing as implicitly referencing the art-historical model. Are these images that fall into the orbit of exemplary images in this way held in a kind of suspension, and as such are enabled to be seen without being understood as a kind of message? And do certain forms of these pictures come into analogy with aspects of the concept of trauma as this seeing through the quality of their

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<sup>14</sup> *Selbstverständlichkeit* as used by Günter Abel in his work *Zeichen der Wirklichkeit*, Frankfurt a. M. 2004 (for instance on p.125) is translated in this work as 'self-understood', 'self-evidentiary', 'the quality of being self-understood' and even 'self-understoodness'.



realization as pictorial constructions as inevitably being an expression of the prerequisites of seeing?

The answer to all of these questions is yes. Two central questions are posed in light of this bald statement: Firstly, how is trauma expressed in the catastrophic production of 9/11? Secondly, how does the catastrophic production itself effect as traumatic?

To begin answering these two, basic questions, an active exchange is located between the pictorial analysis of hundreds of pictures in two 'communities of images'<sup>15</sup> made up mostly of photographs, which are within their communities placed in reference to other photographs and to text on the page, and finally posed as both suggesting and being suggested by theses related to the perception of the pictorial as the photograph. These theses are culled from the body of work of Roland Barthes<sup>16</sup>, or are germane to single works by Günter Abel<sup>17</sup> and Ulrich Baer<sup>18</sup>.

The catastrophic production as such is perceived as a flow of (mostly) photographs which is caught between being endless and being halted. The catastrophe as an event is discerned within the ensuing context as key photos which are positioned as being exemplary for key aspects relating to the definition of the photograph as pictorial, which

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<sup>15</sup>As formulated in: Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.3.

<sup>16</sup> To cite these in full: Roland Barthes: *Camera Lucida*, - Reflections on Photography. Trans. from the French by Richard Howard. Original title: *La Chambre Claire*, Edition du Seuil, 1980. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981. Also: *Image, Music, Text*. Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. Also: "Rhetoric of the Image", pp. 269-284. In: Trachtenberg, Alan (ed.): *Classic Essays on Photography*. New Haven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1980.

<sup>17</sup> To cite these in full: Günter Abel: *Zeichen der Wirklichkeit*. 1st ed. 2004. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2004 (=suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 1651). In particular the introduction, chapter 3 ("Die Macht der Weltbilder und Bildwelten") and chapter 11 ("Zeichen- und Interpretationsphilosophie der Bilder") are focused in this work. Also focused is: *Sprache, Zeichen, Interpretation*. 1st ed. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1999. In particular chapter 8 ("Sagen und Zeigen").

<sup>18</sup> To cite this in full: Ulrich Baer: *Spectral Evidence*, - The Photography of Trauma, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002.



is 'seen' through written description. How can one through a descriptive process, - which according to Abel is too long and redundant in describing the picture, and never fully captures that which is pictorial,<sup>19</sup> - be made to express that which is traumatic within the production? It is in this 'translation' of photographs, by which the photograph is seen within the strictures of Western art as captured to a degree by the alphabetical signs of writing, that photographs within the context of a production showing pictures which are exemplary for this production may be held in analogy to aspects of the trauma thematic.

The concept of trauma is focused as Ulrich Baer's synthesis of central concepts of trauma as falling into analogy with an analysis of the photograph captured to the highest degree through a descriptive process. Baer does this particularly in relation to descriptive analyses of photos of and in relation to the Holocaust.<sup>20</sup> I hold Baer's points of analysis before the background of the development of the trauma concept, which as an overwhelming of the subject by outside excitements is described by Werner Bohleber as becoming increasingly generalized in current usage to the point of the traumatic experience in essence being an experience of "too much".<sup>21</sup> In this work the concept of trauma thus veers from being 'triggered' in the description as the highly specific detail to a general feeling. Baer's simultaneous usage of as well as distancing from Barthes' theses focuses the development of theses in the work of Barthes himself

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<sup>19</sup> Günter Abel, *Zeichen der Wirklichkeit*, Frankfurt a. M. 2004, p.365.

<sup>20</sup>These examples occur in the second half of his work (chapters 3 and 4). See (in a full citation) Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence, - The Photography of Trauma*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> To cite this in full: Werner Bohleber: "Die Entwicklung der Traumatheorie in der Psychoanalyse", in: "Psyche, - Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und ihre Anwendungen. Trauma, Gewalt und Kollektives Gedächtnis." Sept./Oct. 2000, p.798.

as being central in giving descriptions of the 9/11 production meaning. Barthes' reference to models of art as the central orientation of early photography, which highlights both photography's divergence from Western traditions of pictorial production as well as the powers inherent in the photographic medium to 'represent', presents a link to Abel's concept of the pictorial sign of reality<sup>22</sup>, under which works of art are placed as exemplary constructions.<sup>23</sup> Three analogies may suffice to indicate parallels between the theses which reveal central dynamics within the production, which lead to the defining action of Baer's analysis as the level of trauma in the photographic production as a fine line between what can be perceived as the pictorial as felt as an event and what can be seen and felt as the pictorial without being understood.

To name these central parallels: Firstly, just as with Barthes, there is a realization of the photograph in its most intrinsic form as bringing forth an evidentiary power in relation to its divergence from and orientation towards models of representations in Western painting, with Abel there is a realization of the pictorial sign<sup>24</sup> of a reality held in relation to the all-encompassing concept of the 'world picture', which - as the self-understood quality of this realization - is both confirmed by and confirms the pictorial realization as a

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<sup>22</sup>Namely, the "unified theory of sign and phenomenon-related aspects of understanding and explication of the sign and picture and the pictorial" "by which all differentiation between sign and phenomenon are to be given up." Both quotes from: Abel, *Zeichen der Wirklichkeit*, p.360. (All translations in this work from the German into English from sources published in German are by the author.)

<sup>23</sup> Although Abel insists on the inclusivity of all which is perceived as visual as part of his unified theory of sign and interpretation in reference to the phenomenon of perception, he resorts to art-history for an example in the reconstruction of the sign. See, for instance, A.a.O., p.359 (footnote 10).

<sup>24</sup> Abel's concept of the *Zeichen Vollzug* (A.a.O., p.353) is referred to in this work as the 'realization of the sign'.



sign.<sup>25</sup> In both cases a interrelatedness exists between the model (art work/world picture) and the divergence from or affirmation of this model (photograph/pictorial sign) to the extent that they both define each other (the art work defines the photograph/the world picture defines the pictorial sign) and also hold the power of their mutual negation (the art work negates the photograph/the world picture negates the pictorial sign).

Secondly, with Barthes the purely linguistic message of the photograph is defined as being supported by the text of the caption which confirms to a concise degree the pictorial, reinforcing that which leaves out aspects of the pictorial as that which remains in suspension and thus as the excised is allowed to be 'seen'.<sup>26</sup> With Abel the alphabetical sign is posed (as the alphabetically distinct and containing discrete elements) in relation to the syntactic density and repleteness of the pictorial<sup>27</sup> as that which is both lesser in powers of immediacy in realization as signs of reality and yet must be utilized in order to approach what the pictorial even is.<sup>28</sup> In both cases the limited, alphabetical signs define the pictorial as that which must be (at least partly) left undefinable but experienced.

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<sup>25</sup> To list key concepts of Abel which appear throughout this work: 'Reality' is understood here in the sense of a 'modality' which embodies a full force of effectiveness, and not a mere potential or a state of ambivalence (p.25). The sign as 'real' has an effect and can change the inner and outer reality (p.26). The 'world picture' forms the basis of each human culture (p.120). As the "so and so reality" (p.25), it cannot be separated from 'us'. The world picture concentrates itself into a unified view of the world as a 'background'(p.120). Abel is focusing in his work on the character of interpretation (p.123), which is (here in reference to Wittgenstein's text "Über GewiPheit", see p.123) of this "überkommene Hintergrund" (p. 125). All quotes and references in this note from: A.a.O.

<sup>26</sup> Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image", in: Trachtenberg, Alan (ed.): *Classic Essays on Photography*, New Haven, Conn. 1980, p.270 ff. Here the purely linguistic message of the 'Panzoni' advertisement possesses a 'repressive value' in relation to the two other messages of the image, namely the denotational image and the connoted image.

<sup>27</sup> Abel, *Zeichen der Wirklichkeit*, p.352. Here in reference to Nelson Goodman.

<sup>28</sup> A.a.O., p.364. Particularly with the loss of meaning of pictures, when the perception of the picture is made into a spoken predicate.

And thirdly, Barthes diagnoses an increasing distancing of the photograph from the expression of its roots as a contradiction in seeing, which might be perceived as a loss of the central vein of the photograph, namely as a manifestation of evidentiary power.<sup>29</sup> Parallel to this, with Abel there is a defining of the pictorial sign of reality through the failure of the pictorial sign to be realized as such. This failure takes on two forms: first as the 'pale illustration' of the pictorial sign,<sup>30</sup> and secondly as the pictorial sign which passes out of perception as being pictorial altogether,<sup>31</sup> and through this breaks away from the quality of the world picture as being self-understood, and as such is no longer 'seen' as pictorial. According to Abel, this passing out of perception of a pictorial sign requires a kind of excavation of meaning in order to literally turn a stone which has turned into an art work within the museum setting back from being a stone into an art work again.<sup>32</sup> In both cases of the pale illustration and the pictorial sign which is no longer perceived as the work of art, there is the complete loss of valency of the object of perception, so that the object itself takes on an aspect of concrete separateness (and nothing could be a more concrete object than a stone) which is at some point no longer perceived as the pictorial sign.

The question posed by these parallels is how the distancing from 'true' forms offering potential powers of realization may be discerned through specific photographs as the evocation of these powers in the absence of their realization respectively as an

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<sup>29</sup> Barthes describes this on p.117 as a 'taming' of the photograph, by which photography is made into art, "when there is no longer any madness in it, when its *noeme* is forgotten". Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.117.

<sup>30</sup> Abel, *Zeichen der Wirklichkeit*, p.360f.

<sup>31</sup> A.a.O., p.353 f. Such pictures have lost their cognitive role as pictures and require a *Deutung* in order to become relevant again.

<sup>32</sup> A.a.O., p.350. The form of the art work is here highly dependent on context.





immediacy of time and space, according to Barthes<sup>33</sup>, or of the pictorial sign as a cognitive act, according to Abel.<sup>34</sup> By Baer, a surmounting of pathetic identification with that which is photographed in order to perceive a photograph as a formal means of expressing an emptiness, into which no imagination may be projected, presents another form of realization, namely as one of an absence. A background as an emptiness is repeatedly evoked as that which cannot be defined and as such cannot be overcome in order to realize the act of perception. It is where the power of realization is expressed as its own negation, where it begins to define. And it is here where it is discovered that the 'catastrophic production' itself effects as traumatic. It is thus how the presence of a realization evoked as its absence becomes explicit in forms related to the concept of trauma, namely as forms which tendentially come to the fore in contexts of catastrophic contents, as well as forms which seem to transcend these contexts, by which 'worlds of pictures' begin to confirm the banal 'self-understoodness' of the 'world picture' (to evoke two central concepts of Abel)<sup>35</sup> through the evocation of the realization as its absence as the traumatic, which is focused here.

Indeed all three theories of Abel, Barthes and Baer permit a concept of 'immediacy' to evolve as the realization of the photograph (Barthes)/as the realization of the pictorial sign of reality (Abel)<sup>36</sup> and as the realization of the trauma (Baer through a theoretical orientation towards Barthes). But there are contradictions held between one concept of

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<sup>33</sup> Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image", p.278.

<sup>34</sup> Abel, Zeichen der Wirklichkeit, p.353.

<sup>35</sup> A.a.O., p.117. Abel evokes the 'flood' of worlds of pictures as well as the wide array of differing world pictures.

<sup>36</sup> A.a.O., p.353. 'Immediacy' is in terms of Abel meant here in the sense of the realization of the sign as being direct.