

What Comes Under, After, Beyond:
Notes on Jeff Weber's Kunsthalle Leipzig

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In his seminal essay on photography's role in conceptual art (first published in the catalogue for the 1995 Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, MOCA, exhibition, "Reconsidering the Object of Art"), "Marks of Indifference': Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art," Jeff Wall argues that photography's discovery of its internal logic as and within modern art involved interrogating how one might produce an image "shorn of the Western regime of depiction."¹ (Although it is common to note, as Wall does, that while photographic practice was peripheral to modernity's main artistic preoccupations—painting and sculpture—its industrialization of the image in the nineteenth century "set the historical process of modernism in motion."²)

Deeply invested in concealing its artificiality behind its technical virtuosity, together with the compositional technique of tableau—with its spontaneous and unanticipated affect—the renaissance (Western) picture suggests a moment in time caught as if by happenstance on the tip of the painter's brush; a brush constantly effaced in the unity of the picture surface. Into the twentieth century, the pictorial technicity inherited from this Western modality of picture-making (realistically rendered space, painterly composition, technically exacting

1. Jeff Wall, "Marks of Indifference': Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art," in: *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, eds. Anne Rorimer and Ann Goldstein (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 247.

2. *Ibid.*, 260.

modes of applying paint) continued to exercise a sort of stylistic hegemony over photography long after it had been forsaken within painting itself. It was, in fact, art photography's slavish devotion to this legacy that prevented it from becoming truly modern: "Without a dialectical conception of its own surface, [photography] could not achieve the kind of planned spontaneity painting had put before the eyes of the world as a universal [or at least Western] norm of art."³ For photography to develop historically, it needed to discover the means to perform that work of auto-referentiality (the critique of its own legitimacy—previously the hallmark of the modernist project in painting and sculpture) while lacking the means to reduce the medium to the "unique and irreducible" characteristics delimiting it *as* a medium, because photography, or so Wall suggests, has no dispensable characteristics. An image always ensues from the act of making an exposure, that "instantaneous operation of an integrated mechanism,"⁴ and it was this very automatism which made photography modern even while photographers' slavish devotion to pre-modern painterly technique kept it marginal during the first flourishing of twentieth century modern art.

Despite photography's pivotal role in freeing European painting from the tyranny of its inherited pictorial regime, its importance to the avant-gardes of the 1920s, or the innovations of street photographers in loosening the straightjacket of balanced composition, by the 1960s, or so Wall's argument goes, photography had yet to shake off its marginal status. It was ironic, then, that it was left to artists whose main project involved freeing art altogether from mediality's prison that this marginality was superseded in the course of documenting performative acts, mimicking objective scientific styles of knowledge production or recording our banal (i.e. quotidian) reality via photo-journalistic or documentary projects. Wall

3. Ibid., 248.

4. Ibid., 261.

foregrounds two aspects of this project to undermine the mid-century modernist conception of art as an autonomous endeavor—the first referential, the second negative. In the process of creating an explicitly analytic form of art, undertaken in order to scrutinize the category of art-making, these artists rehearsed—and thus modified—methodologies first employed by the avant-gardes of the 1920s (productivist, factographic, surrealist, and utilitarian modes of picture making). Secondly, this effort involved installing the negative within the artistic project itself, clarifying what art-is-not by integrating this “not” into art-making—for instance, by mimicking other social production processes—industrial, academic, commercial, cinematic, etc. Consequently, the negative definition of art’s putatively “proper” area of operation expanded, transcending what Wall, following Peter Bürger, describes as the institutionalized fact of art’s separation from the other autonomous domains of life, leaping “over that separation and reconnect[ing] high art and the conduct of affairs in the world in order to save [or preserve] the aesthetic dimension.”⁵ However—and this is where the irony of photography’s role in art ultimately lies—in the course of this transcendental project of negation, photography itself could never negate its “unique and irreducible” relationship to the pictorial since cameras could never stop making pictures. All photography could do was to critique the received models of the Western picture or modernism’s critique of that sort of picture’s psychological, ideological, and phenomenological attributes.

Of the conceptual strategies relying on photography that Wall reviews in his essay, the most germane to this essay’s present subject—the book that you, the reader, are currently holding in your hands presenting documentation from Jeff Weber’s Kunsthalle Leipzig project—is conceptual art’s often parodic uses of the tropes of photojournalism. Following earlier photographers’ exploration of what Wall terms, “the border

5. *Ibid.*, 250.

territories of the utilitarian picture,” in their carefully planned rejection of the Western pictorialist sensibility and the primacy of composition such pictures infer, conceptual artists came to favor spontaneous, contingent forms of picture-making of the sort resulting from reportage. This “introversion, or subjectivization” of reportage manifested, according to Wall, in two distinct directions: firstly, through the “staged, or posed, picture” used to document performative works; and secondly, the enlisting of photography to document a nexus of experimental practices conceptual artists were then exploring, in the course of which different genres of photography were often parodically deployed.

Each tendency took on a synthetic approach to picture genres and in each substitution was the key procedure for carrying out photography’s inscription within conceptual art—the substitution of “the registration of sheer physical presence for the more highly articulated language of aesthetic conventions (and the kind of history which they encode).”⁶

In the first place, a photographic image suggests equivalence between the gesture and the image.

The picture is presented as the subsidiary form of an act, as “photo-documentation.” It has become that, however, by means of a new kind of photographic *mise-en-scène*. That is, it exists and is legitimated as continuous with the project of reportage by moving in precisely the opposite direction, toward a completely designed pictorial method, an introverted masquerade that plays games with the inherited aesthetic proclivities of art-photography-as-reportage.⁷

6. Rosalind Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America,” in: *October* Vol. 3 (Spring 1977), 81. On the topic of photography’s strong psychic allure in terms of equivalency and substitution in photography, Krauss includes the following quote by André Bazin in her essay: “Only a photographic lens can give us the kind of image of the object that is capable of satisfying the deep need man has to substitute for it something more than a mere approximation.”

7. Wall, 254.

In the second, mimicking different established genres of photography (scientific, bureaucratic, etc.) was the means by which conceptual art appropriated the visual language of administration or science (and the techno-rational logic suggested by the administered techno-state that had become ascendant after World War II), as either a critique of the administered state or a sublimated form of submission to its overweening logic.

In canonical works of conceptual art, these two procedures are visibly and variably at work: in the staged documentation of performative acts (Dennis Oppenheim or Bruce Nauman or Gordon Matta-Clark or Bas Jan Ader), or the careful mimicry of magazine layouts (as in Dan Graham), or the quasi systematic investigations of social phenomena or typologies (Douglas Huebler or Bernd and Hilla Becher). In her *Catalysis* series (1970–3), Adrian Piper references the substitutive modality of performance documentation while also embedding the work in the project of sociological observation. And all these photographic practices can be situated on a scale ranging from the picture's total replacement of the processes, performances, and sites documented to some nominal degree of equivalence with these. In other words, each functions by way of the index and inscription—referring to something that remains elsewhere. And yet, while a substitution has been performed, one that undermines or calls into question the autonomy and present-ness of modernism, for all this, in its documentary, presentational mode, conceptual art often fell back on the paradigm of the singular, hermetic, autonomous artwork.

What Jeff Weber proposes in his *An Attempt at a Personal Epistemology* (2008–18) involves two further acts of substitution: one, particularly apropos in the present moment's over-saturated art context, the substitution of the artist-as-photojournalist for the artist-as-art-photographer; and a second, more idiosyncratic indexical project involving Weber's substitution of a select group of artists for an earlier effort to exteriorize his own subjectivity with the aid of a small wooden card file where he collected quotes, indexed and extensively

cross-referenced, related to two subjects—generative mechanisms and the biology of reality. Regarding the latter category, let us allow the projects presented at the Kunsthalle to speak for themselves since in the end they remain a highly subjective take on organizing epistemology. On the former, however, there is much to say.

Art documentation is the indexical act *par excellence*. I do not mean the artist who produces “artistic” photographs, but that second, more maligned definition, the professional photographer with a clientele of galleries, institutions, and artists, who documents works of art, art installations, and performances for a living. He or she is truly an inhabitant of the border territories of the utilitarian picture. A second category of this type of image-making involves the more paparazzi-like assignment of documenting the artistic scene—conferences, openings, and other gala events—for magazines, journals, websites, and on social media where the artist joins professional photographers and everyone else in becoming his/her own publicist. While differences may exist between the commercial and the institutional, or the journalistic and archival, images produced within either context—institutional documentation or commercial/social media (in any case, the two categories appear to me by now as hopelessly blurred)—share a conceptual link, subordinated as they are to the dictates of the artwork, project, or exhibition for which they have been produced.

Here we should pause to note certain conceptual propinquities between this body of scarcely remarkable images and those made by conceptual artists, the photographic documentation of first generation institutional critique artists, and the disparate body of photographs that have entered the historical record documenting this milieu. The first group constitutes a technically proficient if artless genre of images. The second, artful on account of stripping away (deskilling or amateurizing) the craft element from the photographic process. Recall that both photography-based conceptual artworks and artwork documentation share a common logic—that of the assignment.

It is the former category of photographs that we, of course, value, because the intention behind them is artistic—to create “a new kind of anti-autonomous yet autonomous” art by using photography in such a way that it blurs the boundaries between the photograph-as-artwork and the many and diffuse sorts of photographs the world uses and consumes, making art that “oscillate[s] at the threshold of the autonomous work, crossing and recrossing it, refusing to depart from the artistic dilemma of reportage and thereby establishing an aesthetic model of just that threshold condition”⁸—while the former are, ordinarily, determined by their context, their function (documentation, promotion), and their contingency.

And yet, here exists a further contradiction. In producing unremarkable images of remarkable acts (Ed Ruscha’s *Royal Road Test* (1967) for instance), and because they play in so many ways with the different vernacular forms of the snapshot and institutional/scientific photography alike, conceptual artists may have participated in a reciprocal valorization of vernacular photography—especially those photographs that, in retrospect, are later found to be remarkable due to the fact that even while documenting the most quotidian of subjects they are also documents of a particular moment in time we take interest in today. Our understanding of conceptual art is inflected by this conjuncture, because they are evidence both of an artistic project that remains profoundly influential and due to the fact this body of work, including those photographs recording a specific “artistic milieu,” coincided with a time of great cultural fervor, galvanized by shared opposition to the Vietnam War. This observation leads to a second. To state that consuming art via its documented form has become second nature is banal: that we have come to regard, understand, appreciate or wax nostalgic for the conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s because its documentary form (reportage) incidentally records this interesting historical context means, ironically, our critical reception

8. Ibid., 257.

of such works is equally conditioned by nostalgic longing. Thus, if documenting art, the singularly most ubiquitous type of *assignment* for photographers associated with the artistic field is most often executed using a neutral, uninflected aesthetic—one akin to the neutral homogeneity of the television or radio news presenter’s voice—don’t such images possess a homologous logic with historical documentation of conceptual art performances, events, and happenings?

It is easy to overlook this shared logic: we valorize one and tend to overlook the other, thinking that here the map is not the territory. But what if the territory is the map? I myself am an aficionado of conceptual art from the sixties and seventies and its photographic record. I am also aware that the appeal in such documentation is to a romanticism unsupported by the antiseptic nature of the work itself (the artist not as inner explorer, but as reflexive social scientist)—and which, at the same time, tends towards reinforcing the figure of the singular, heroic (and usually male) artist. Take as an emblem of this contrapuntal tendency a famous photograph from 1969 of Michael Heizer squatting next to the temporarily inert wrecking ball he is using to destroy the pavement in front of Kunsthalle Bern. This image has long emblemized for me the contradiction in this work—the trope of the conceptual-artist-as-rock-star. And it is not a contradiction to say this allure extends to the images of conceptual art’s more collegial manifestations: conceptual-artists-as-rock-group. The two are, in fact, complimentary, as anyone with a passing familiarity with the semiology of counter cultures well knows. The appeal in this case is to the cadre, the illuminated, the chosen few, and in style far different from prior group portraits of artists, such as those capturing those abstract expressionists, the “Irascibles,” associated with the Eighth Street Club, who in group photographs resemble more a learned society than a subversive cell. (Images suggesting such a read litter the pages of Alexander Alberro’s *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (2003), a book concerning the group of artists—Douglas Huebler, Lawrence Weiner, Carl Andre,

Robert Barry, Joseph Kosuth—who worked with Seth Siegel early on in his curatorial career.) The first speaks to the transgressive singularity of the rebel, the second to a broadly felt desire to become historical within the collective, a group working in concert even while engaged in separate projects, bound by common ideals, a part of something larger than oneself, and a manifestation of collective enunciation.

The first thing romanticism did as the model for avant-garde groups was to make group structure one of the requirements. It placed the avant-garde in the category of plural voice. The group breaks in on the individual. Once community breaks in, voices are divided and speech is pluralized. The group functions as an instance of enunciation that would be the modern equivalent of the (collective) myths of antiquity and the (anonymous) epics of the Middle Ages. Having made a break with any authorial regime, it would allow the resurgence of that anonymous enunciation, belonging to great periods of community, in a contemporary setting.⁹

In his 2007 lecture at the Akademie der Künste, Mark Wigley focused not so much on the work of Gordon Matta-Clark—ostensibly the subject of his talk—as on the appeal held by the abundant images of collectivity in the photographic record of his career. Though my recollection of his lecture is now vague, I recall Wigley illustrating his talk with multiple photographs of the artist—possessor, as has often been noted, of puckish good looks—surrounded by a group of friends and collaborators, rolling joints and drinking beer in Clark’s Soho loft, preparing for, in the midst of, or celebrating their most recent artistic lucubration. He emphasized the attractiveness of these images, how easy it was to project oneself into this milieu,

9. Denis Hollier, “Foreword: Collage,” in: *The College of Sociology (1937–1939)*, ed. Denis Hollier (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), xiv.

and to wish one had been a member of the club. Images of this type, Wigley suggested, remain compelling because they conjure up a whole way of life: easy artistic camaraderie, unfixed schedules, afternoon sex, and poverty unmarked by deprivation (with here and there, perhaps, an inheritance lurking not too far beneath the surface—as was the case with *FOOD* (1971–4), a restaurant-cum-collective co-founded by Matta-Clark, and an early instance of “relational art,” which was underwritten to a great extent by his artistic partner Carol Goodden’s inheritance). The photographs documenting *FOOD* share in this appeal. Matta-Clark and Co. are demonstrably full of bonhomie *and* high ideals, ambassadors of a cool conceptualism not afraid to get its hands dirty. It is their very *jouissance* that forms a kind of collective visual unconscious to the self-stylization of contemporary artists.

An Attempt at a Personal Epistemology is not immune from this tendency—conflating the artistic milieu with artwork as such. There are other notable similarities between Weber’s Kunsthalle Leipzig and Matta-Clark’s *FOOD* project. Both are, to a certain extent, conditioned by economic necessity. Matta-Clark and his collaborators thought of the restaurant as a vehicle for artistic expression, an artistic “intervention in an urban setting,” that would also offer subventions to his circle of friends. With Weber, it was a matter of choosing a city for his Kunsthalle sufficiently affordable to avoid crippling running costs while also providing an outlet for the work of friends, colleagues, and established artists whose work he respected. Particularity and locale as a precondition of cultural work are thus reaffirmed by Weber having embedded his project in a concrete social milieu. By doing so, he takes on the salutary task of arguing that culture is a localized activity and not simply something becoming recognizable as such upon its appearance in New York or London or Berlin or Tokyo. And though the photo-file documenting this endeavor speaks to this engagement while retaining a certain subjective idiosyncrasy, Weber’s appeal to the *genius loci* that place offers contains within it a

riposte to globalized placelessness, privileging the necessity of laboring in the garden of somewhere over designing the citadel of anywhere.

Both projects are also, notably, species of non-autonomous art practice, working through the historically-received possibility of the sublation of non-autonomous practice into the category of the autonomous work of art: recursive iterations of other forms of social production, attempts to reconnect art and life and make Bürger's leap "over that separation, and reconnect high art [with] the conduct of affairs in the world" (by championing the use of the open kitchen, now a feature of many modern restaurants, *FOOD* actually might have accomplished this leap).

In their non-autonomy each project forsakes the utopian or spectacular in favor of a contingent, provisional, and more human scale of working. And these tactical decisions—to run a restaurant in what was then a fairly derelict part of Manhattan; to open a project space in a city at the periphery of established German art centers—also celebrate a kind of regional specificity at odds with the placeless-yet-always-present modality of the modern autonomous artwork, limning the nomenclatural distinction between the closed category of a "work" and the softer-edged modality of the "project." And finally, both projects take as one significant, if retrospective, form of presentation the documentary photo book. In this book-form each presents a pastiche of historical modes of action and received genres of vernacular image-making—artful and artless alike—that productively refer to the semantic and aesthetic rules and typologies upon which image genres are based. In the case of *FOOD*, this process appears slapdash and improvisational. In the case of Weber's Kunsthalle, he deliberately elevates the status of art documentation and related forms of documentation to something notable and not merely the condition for twenty-first century artistic dissemination. Ordinarily, such images are relegated to the category of a necessary evil, a kind of desultory metonymy we accept as an inevitable part of the contemporary art system. The sly way in which Weber subverts

their normative status, calling attention to their ubiquity by subtly shifting the registers at which their image-rhetorics function, is, to my mind, as much the subject of this book as the individual artistic works he presents.

Of course, the referencing of photographic genres is also part and parcel of the threshold condition Wall identified two decades ago, as well as a function of photography's very instrumentality, which at this late moment in its history is nearly indistinguishable from the medium itself. To what might we account the plasticity between the medium's use in fine art and its myriad other uses?

Photographs, or "photographies," to borrow John Tagg's appellation, appear on the surface to belong to the same undifferentiated category of objective images—"which, to common sense, defines the photograph"¹⁰—yet the medium's instrumentality differs according to the sphere in which it operates. Media, art, the criminal justice system, various government bureaucracies, the military, and the scientific realm might all use photography to disclose "truth" and to reinforce the ideological validity and objective veracity of these institutions and their other "systems of documentation," to borrow Wall's phrase. Yet, as Tagg asserts, "no absolute set of criteria crosses these zones."¹¹ Photographs are always divided between the putative truth content stemming from their analogical precision and an instrumental functionality arising from their use in the various institutional settings where they operate. Thus, photography's meaning has been divided for over a century between a certain illuminative, affective potential and a social instrumentality within a given society's "regime of truth . . . that circular relation which truth has to the systems of power that produce and sustain it, and to the effects of power which

10. Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 17.

11. John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 18–19.

it induces and which redirects it.”¹² Upon closer examination, these two poles become less diametrically opposed, since photography as poetic truth and photography as evidence are undertaken within concrete historical settings by “individuals who are themselves reciprocally constituted as the subjects of ideology in the unfolding historical process.”¹³

The professional and amateur, creative or commercial, expressive and instrumental, licit and illicit were thus produced in difference and identity so that, at one point, market forces could operate uncontested; while at another point, a special aesthetic value and cultural status might be secured for certain photographic practices, giving them a peculiar precedence; and while, at yet another point, photography might come stripped of all cultural privilege in order that it might exert a different power—the power of evidence, record and truth.¹⁴

Returning to photography’s long history within the historical avant-gardes, the issue of how artists-cum-photographers have played with and masqueraded behind the various social and scientifically constituted genres of photography has been abundantly documented, both in terms of its role within Russian constructivism, productivism, factography, etc., and its later use by conceptual artists to mimic amateur, journalistic, scientific, or bureaucratic modes of photographic image-making. Weber’s documentation implicitly refers to the codes distinguishing these various categories of images—portraiture, candid snapshots (taken, for instance, to document installation work, site visits, and excursions), scientific photography, the standard installation view and other forms of documentation.

12. *Ibid.*, 94.

13. *Ibid.*, 188.

14. John Tagg, *Grounds of Dispute: Art History, Cultural Politics and the Discursive Field* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 99.

Additionally, the logic of Weber's book is not that of the singular image at all but photography-as-multiplicity: the photobook, one of the signature forms of modernism, and one that appears in no danger at present of falling out of fashion. Then as now, photography will no longer be conceived as a single image/print, "[t]he organizational and distributional form [is] the archive, or as Rodchenko called it, the photo-file—a loosely organized, more or less coherent accumulation of snapshots relating and documenting one particular subject."¹⁵

At the time of the historical avant-gardes, and even the neo-avant-gardes of the sixties and seventies, photography's popular ubiquity made it inherently revolutionary—an ambition also expressed through the expansion of what was considered a proper photographic subject (workers, factories, and so on)¹⁶—and a fitting tool for overturning the regime of specialized high art picture-making that continued to be used to buttress and legitimate power. The reductive and, for the most part, specious assumption of the neo-avant-gardes, according to Wall, was that it was the collectors' and patrons' lack of interest in art photography—their very indifference—which first suggested the tantalizing possibility that a photograph "might be the Picture which could not be integrated into 'the regime,' the commercial-bureaucratic-discursive order which was rapidly becoming the object of criticisms animated by the attitudes of the Student Movement and the New Left,"¹⁷

15. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Gerhard Richter's 'Atlas': The Anomic Archive," *October*, vol. 88 (Spring, 1999), 133.

16. Buchloh includes the following quote by the literary scholar Ossi Brik in the above-noted essay on Richter: "[T]o differentiate individual objects so as to make a pictorial record of them is not only a technical but also an ideological phenomenon. In the pre-revolutionary (feudal and bourgeois) period, both painting and literature set themselves the aim of differentiating individual people and events from their general context and concentrating attention on them... To the contemporary consciousness, an individual person can be understood and assessed only in connection with all the other people—with those who used to be regarded by the pre-revolutionary consciousness as background."

17. Wall, 252.

returning to the medium the revolutionary social potential it had possessed in the early days of the USSR. Artistic choices made first in the heady post-revolutionary period in order to enact an ideological critique of Western (read as bourgeois) tendencies in artistic representation were repeated as a consequence of collectors' and museums' indifference to art photography.¹⁸

Save in certain cases, artists of the present moment work outside this revolutionary ideology, operating without the illusion that their work is either authentically revolutionary in a political sense or authentically resistant to commodification in a commercial sense. Detached from revolutionary party politics and authentically contestatory institutional practices, during the long epilogue to postmodernity we have witnessed in the last two decades what one frequently encounters as a solution to this scission is, as a generalized tendency, a historicist turn, an epicurean sense of history where both granular narratives and historically received styles become vehicles for artistic recapitulation. In this recursive snare that at times appears to be our present-day aesthetic condition, we bounce between reprising or rehearsing different positions inherited from the twentieth century or, variously, reprising the rehearsal or rehearsing the reprise. Considered charitably, one might say that instead of being a tiger's leap into the future, to borrow Walter Benjamin's metaphor, this epicurean approach causes historical memory to leap into present-time. One could state with equal justification that the future's foreclosure blocks the tiger's passage and our obsession with history and historical styles is symptomatic of this impasse. Or to return to Wall's assertion with which I began this essay concerning the processes

18. In a similar vein, Alexander Alberro writes in *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003): "The development of a type of work that could be presented without originals—a syntagmatic work whose materiality slid along a chain of signifiers—also problematized the issue of ownership... For if elements of documentary information now constituted the work, then possession of those elements became ownership, and documents became artworks." 74.

of dialectical reevaluation about what constitutes an artistic image—from the spontaneously composed snapshot to the snapshot composed to look spontaneous—that have shaped photography from the Russian Revolution onwards, we have arrived at one further iteration: the snapshot in its spontaneous or composed varieties taken already with an eye towards becoming historical.

This is the historical situation in which I would situate Jeff Weber's overall project, along with his curatorial choices, which also participate in the at times elegiac urge to revisit significant tropes in twentieth century art while eschewing grander utopian propositions. Like Matta-Clark's *FOOD* project before him (which could claim to be engaged without being overtly or topically political), we might view the human scale of Weber's project as a deliberate forsaking of a certain strain of ostentatiously political contemporary art in favor of a quietist project embedded within and susceptible to the social and the particular.

For me, this tendency is emblemized by the images of the empty, pristine premises of the Kunsthalle with which he begins his book and the deliberate choice to follow these with documentation of the actual labor of renovation that are the former's material precondition. This ordering playfully foregrounds the concrete labor (and capital) involved in rendering artistic space legible as such, laying out the spatial parameters in which he is operating and the processes involved in creating this architectonic ground; a specific space counter-posed to Donald Judd's specific object (and also, one might suggest, referencing Christopher D'Arcangelo's "work" pieces of the late 1970s, in which he nominated as art his renovations of loft spaces in lower Manhattan, sending out invitation cards announcing these "jobs," otherwise not in any way "visible" as such, as "works"; or, in a reversal, Michael Asher's famous installation at Galleria Toselli in Milan, in which he stripped the paint from the gallery walls). They are, in a way, the most lambent images in his book, the most filled with potential and expectation. The images which follow, mark, and delimit

the Kunsthalle as a site, articulate it, fill it up with content recorded in specific documentary modalities, note its having been, and they do this while employing the historically conditioned genres of image-making that have been one principal preoccupation of this essay—the rhetorical tropes of photographing, if you can call them that, he has invoked in the process of recording this transient, ephemeral and ultimately impermanent moment of institutional space-time. That in his montage Weber chose to reverse the order and begin with images of his pristine empty art space immediately followed by documentation of the labor that brought that space into being is one of the canniest editorial choices in the book, for following a linear chronology would naturalize (and neutralize) the DIY nature of his project, making it appear as if one state followed inevitably from the other.

Returning for a second time to Wall's narrative recounting how photography dialectically shook off the received lineage of composition and tableau in the process of working through its role within modern art, I would again cite John Tagg who reframes this lineage and these dialectical movements within the broader field of social operation which Wall alludes to in his essay, but only insofar as it bolsters his argument and foregrounds the distinctness of the artistic field.

[We] must try to grasp historically produced relations not only as levels in the market, but as levels in a hierarchy of practices whose most privileged strata, increasingly sustained by post-market institutions, are called "Art," whose middle ground ranges from "commercial art" to "craft," and whose lower registers are designated "kitsch," "vernacular," "amateur" or "popular culture." These are distinctions articulated within a particular historical cultural formation and lent substance by the particular historiographies it sustains. Their hierarchical ordering is a function of the tensions and conflicts of the development of cultural production under the political and economic relations of

capitalism and the dissonant drives of market expansion and social reproduction.¹⁹

As indicated by my prior reference to his work, Tagg takes a more Foucauldian tack than Wall in his writings on photography and Jeff Weber's project can be productively read through the former's analysis of the historically conditioned hierarchies of image-making Weber references abundantly in his book, anchoring them further within a materialist genealogy of image-making. One might elaborate Tagg's thought by stating that to the extent this hierarchy of practices and their orderings is not a matter of the intrinsic aesthetic "quality" of an image but "a function of tensions and conflicts of the development of cultural production under the political and economic relations of capitalism," the policing of distinction is done by context —by the valorizing capacity of the white cube in general and the prestige of institutional affiliation in particular. To further complicate Tagg's topos, the overwhelming power of Web-based social media in constituting images as simultaneously a form of play and a form repression must be considered, for these are both an expression of the contemporary subject's willing capture within prescribed circuits of dissemination and the omnipresence of evaluative (and in many cases valuative) criteria for "liking" an image. In this, and as further evidence of the inescapability of image genres in understanding contemporary pictorial practices, judgment is aided by its cognizing already familiar and readily comprehended cultural and historical tropes. As Roland Barthes writes, "the photograph clearly only signifies because of the existence of a store of stereotyped attitudes which form ready-made elements of signification."²⁰

If it was not Weber's project to directly point to the distinctions Tagg speaks of as conditioning hierarchies in practice, his work does with deliberation unsettle the common tropes

19. Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 18–19.

20. Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 22.

found in different registers and genre conventions of image-making. While speaking the vernacular of the local, this is still a political work. For although the works Weber exhibited in his space were rarely overtly political or “engaged,” his engagement, as such, is clearly evident in the decision to locate his project within a specific locality—the city of Leipzig. In fact, this intention to work locally is broadcast in the very name he gave his institution: Kunsthalle Leipzig.