

werte Frühwerk (1977 – 1990), in dem leider vergriffenen Band *Berlin in einer Hundenacht* (2011) zusammengefasst, bringt dabei einen unerhört neuen Ton in die ostdeutsche Fotografie, der nun etwas Hartes, Ungeschminktes, Verstörendes eignet. Einen Ton, der Schulze Eldowys neben dem Ehrentitel »Diane Arbus der DDR« aber auch noch die Freundschaft mit dem großen Robert Frank einträgt, der sie 1985 bei einem Berlin-Besuch entdeckt – weil er in ihrem Außenseitertum vielleicht auch eine Wesensverwandtschaft wittert, schließlich hatte er seine (Wahl-)Heimat Amerika fotografisch nicht min-

Aber ebenso wie ihr Nomadisieren seine Wurzeln eigentlich bereits im Berliner Flanieren hat, legen diese Polaroids, die zwischen 1991 und 2004 (dem Ende der nämlichen Filmproduktion) entstanden und ursprünglich Teil des Tagebuchs der Fotografin waren, nahe, dass die Leitlinien ihres weiteren Werks, von dem die Polaroids gleichsam so etwas wie eine Rohfassung bieten, auch schon in den frühen Arbeiten vorgezeichnet waren: Arbeiten, die, auch wenn sie später zu Zyklen gebündelt wurden, ebenfalls ohne strenge konzeptuelle Vorgabe auskamen und sich vor allem dem spontanen, auf Intuition be-

The Rules of the Game in Contemporary Photography

Wolfgang Brückle and Rica Cerbarano
in conversation with Matteo Bittanti and
Marco De Mutiis

In 2021, *How to Win at Photography: Image-Making as Play* was shown at Fotomuseum Winterthur. As the title suggests, the exhibition explored the relationship between photography and play without, however, limiting its focus to a narrow notion of play. Photography within and without computer games, gamification in worldwide economies as well as inside our homes, the allure of considering our very identity in terms of role-playing, and the camera as an opponent in a game where residues of creativity are at stake are all part of the panorama. More than forty positions contributed to mapping the paradigm in an assemblage of multimedia artworks and vernacular images. The show will travel to The Photographers' Gallery in London in July 2022. In the following, its two curators enter into a conversation with Wolfgang Brückle and Rica Cerbarano.

Wolfgang Brückle In recent years we've seen quite a few shows explicitly focusing on what we have come to think of as "photography after photography" or "post-photography" and the "networked image," from *Nous sommes tous photographes!* in 2007 to *Le supermarché des images* in 2020 and *Send Me an Image* last year. It strikes us that your *How to Win at Photography* exhibition is best seen in this context, and it seems to bring a genuinely new aspect of today's photographic culture to the table. How does your show relate to previous shows on recent photographic trends?

Marco De Mutiis On the one hand, we have seen the images circulating online becoming part of an increasingly gamified system. Networked images are now measured and quantified through metrics akin to points and scores of video games: a specific kind of value is attributed to images through likes, number of followers, retweets, and similar metrics. Hence, photography can be seen as a highly competitive game within an attention economy that equates sharing, quantifying, and circulation to "success" or "winning." On the other hand, the visuals of computer games have reached such a level of photorealism that some players have basically stopped playing as intended by the designers and have begun taking screenshots of virtual worlds. These players engage with digital environments and characters with a photographic mindset and a knowledge of lighting, composition, and, in some cases, photography history. Taking photographs in a video game becomes an example of meta-play. Finally, there is a larger connection between the notions of play and image-making. Obviously, photography creates images through *the rules* and conventions we are taught to adhere to or reject. We may follow the compositional rule of thirds, catch the decisive moment of Henri Cartier-Bresson, or simply use the camera as a technical dispositif: in each case, we deliberately or unconsciously adhere to an ideology of representation. This exhibition addresses the tension between the alleged freedom of playing with images and the apparatus and the implications of following the game rules, the tension between playing the game or playing against it.

Rica Cerbarano Your curatorial concept triggers reflection on photography beyond its

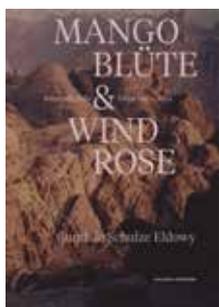


Gundula Schulze Eldowys, Berlin 1983, aus: Aktporträts. Vintage-Print, 28 × 38 cm. Courtesy: die Künstlerin.

der gegen den Strich gebürstet – und sie, vor allem mit einer Einladung nach New York 1990, konsequent fördern wird. Die Fotografin wird ab da eine äußerst unetete, ja geradezu nomadische Existenz führen, mit langen Aufenthalten in Ägypten und Peru und weiteren Stationen etwa in Italien, Japan oder der Türkei. Und sie wird, wie die Ausstellung der bisher noch nie gezeigten Polaroids in der ihr Werk schon länger begleitenden Galerie Pankow eindrücklich illustriert, auch eine ausgedehnte Reise ins Innere antreten, sich also ihrer Spiritualität öffnen, und damit natürlich ihr Repertoire, über die sozialdokumentarische Fotografie hinaus, empfindlich erweitern.

ruhenden Zugriff Schulze Eldowys verdanken; und Arbeiten, die von Anbeginn an das Eigene, das Innere oder, wenn man so will, das von der Fotografin instinktiv erfasste Wesen eines Dings oder eines Menschen mit vor Augen führen wollten. Und so nimmt es nicht weiter wunder, dass diese thematisch oder zumeist gänzlich assoziativ, das heißt nach bloß formalen oder farblichen Analogien gehängten Polaroids – die eine Erfahrung, Begegnung oder Entdeckung erinnern sollen –, sich nicht selten daran versuchen, über die reine Erscheinung hinauszugelangen und sozusagen die Essenz eines Moments einzufangen: ein Versuch, der allerdings, vermutlich der geringen Größe der Fotos wegen, nicht immer wirklich gelingt. Weshalb wir vielleicht gut daran tun, hier zusätzlich auch noch dem handwerklichen Können der Fotografin, also ihrer Augenfertigkeit Rechnung zu tragen, die sich in ihrem geübten Einsatz von Geometrien (Kreisen!), ihrer versierten Inszenierung von Farbintensitäten, ihrem virtuellen Spiel mit Licht und Schatten manifestiert. Um damit letztlich zu der Erkenntnis zu gelangen, dass Schulze Eldowys ganzes Sinnen (Über-Sinnen möchte man da fast sagen) mittlerweile einer, und Max Weber würde hier gespannt aufpassen, poetischen Wiederverzauberung der Welt gilt – und folglich Harald Hauswalds Bemühen diametral entgegensteht, der sich ja, wie beschrieben, eher an die Prosa des Lebens hielt.

Peter Kunitzky, geb. in Wien (AT), Studium der Kunstgeschichte und Philosophie. Lebhafte in Berlin (DE) als Autor, Übersetzer und Lektor.



Gundula Schulze Eldowys: Mangoblüte & Windrose. Polaroids, Stills und Filme 1991 – 2004.

Hrsg. von Annette Tietz, Galerie Pankow für das Bezirksamt Pankow von Berlin.

Mit einem Textbeitrag von J.L.A. (ger./eng.). Galerie Pankow, Berlin 2021.

80 Seiten, 21 × 29,7 cm, zahlreiche Farbabbildungen.

€ 20,- / ISBN 978-3-00-069829-3

pure and simple nature: What is it that makes the relationship between photography and play so important today?

Matteo Bittanti An allegedly “playful” element haunts the so-called post-photographic. However, far from being joyful and carefree, this attitude seems to be a by-product of neoliberal phantasies of pseudo-empowerment through consumption and self-branding, on the one hand, and proto-fascist celebration of masculinity and white supremacy, on the other. This tension also informs contemporary gaming culture as a whole. And since gaming exerts such a powerful influence on pop culture, it is no surprise that the iconsphere, as a whole, has been “gamified.” The exhibition was meant as a survey of this phenomenon.

WB It is telling that Friedrich Schiller, in his se-

through other means. Amusement, as described in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is simply capitalism under a different guise. When I look at video games, all I see are powerful ideological training tools. Video games allow the exploited to feel like exploiters: alpha males colonizing entire worlds. Like apps, video games are highly addictive. They are all based on the slot machine. A whole generation of kids has sunk their childhood into Minecraft and Roblox before graduating to Fortnite. In short, there’s nothing “playful” about video games. Most gamers do not play. It does not surprise me that after leaving Paris for good, a) Debord spent most of his life designing war games, and b) self-medicated through alcohol, and c) quit playing before the end of the Game.

RC One part of the show focuses on in-game

becoming more and more photorealistic and being “photographed.”

RC Photography’s gamification can be considered from two points of view: on the one hand, the mechanisms of video games are replicated in the context of the production and circulation of images; on the other hand, video games are in some way influencing photographic aesthetics, and vice versa. Where is this phenomenon particularly evident in our approach to photography?

MDM The influence is mutual and complex. The camera isn’t usually presented as something to play with. It comes with buttons, levers, and parameters to be learned and mastered. We are taught rules of composition and lighting in art school, so in a way, taking photographs has always been inherently playful and filled with regulations. More recently, game mechanics have been applied to online platforms of image exchange. Basically, we have seen scores and point systems introduced to networked images, creating a new system of values which grounds the success of images based on their circulation. We have also seen the development of machine vision systems and artificial intelligence algorithms which analyze and “read” images, detecting objects and faces, but also giving an aesthetic score.

WB With how you comment on the photographer’s tool, it seems evident that you’re aware of Vilém Flusser’s apparatus theory. I wonder if he is the *éminence grise* in your show: in his writing, he complains about how photography limits our freedom of choice, and that we’re bound to fulfill the machine’s program rather than investing our own creative self when we use the camera without reserve. This being said, Flusser didn’t waste much time commenting on alternatives to what was the mainstream at the time of his writing. What do you think about Flusser in regard to more recent developments of man-machine relations in photography and in related fields?

MB Flusser argued that in order to be playful, images must be dialectic, and he defined dialogues as an exchange in which information is generated. He argued that telematics is “a game strategy with the goal of steering dialogues toward the production of new information.” Based on these statements, we can conclude that a) we can make images dialogically through memes, for instance, and b) 4chan’s anonymous posters are artists or, better still, “envisioners.”

WB What is the relevance of historical references in your show? Ed Ruscha’s rule-plays



Emily Hadrich, *Neue Gefilde – Altes Ich*, 2019–20; Aram Bartholl, *de_dust*, 2004; Joan Pamboukes, *Videogame Color Fields*, 2006–ongoing; Cory Arcangel, *Super Landscape 1*, 2005. Installation view at Fotomuseum Winterthur, 2021. Photo: Fotomuseum Winterthur / Conradin Frei.

ries of letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, connected “play” to emancipation and the very essence of humanity. In what is obviously a very simplified sketch of the problem, you can go in different directions from here: arguing, with Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*, that play is the primary experiment at the roots of any social institution, or, with Guy Debord, taking the stance that play is a most suitable paradigm for subversive behavior in an institutionalized society of the spectacle. Whatever Debord debts to Huizinga, his political position is closer to Schiller’s vision. Now, many exhibits in your show imply that our society has become more spectacular than Debord could have imagined in his worst nightmares. How does this relate to your concept of play?

MB In his book *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*, David Graeber reminds us that games require rules, while play doesn’t necessarily imply the existence of rules at all. He says that play can be improvisational, and he concludes that, in its pure form, play can be understood as “a pure expression of creative energy.” It can be open-ended, disruptive, and subversive. Dangerous, even. We are also reminded that games, according to Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, are nothing more than a continuation of work

photography. Where did your interest in this topic originate, and what do you think makes in-game photography relevant for photography at large?

MB My epiphany happened in 2005 when Marco Cadioli produced the pioneering work *ARENAE*, a performance with online first-person shooters culminating in a photographic documentation of simulated warfare. He actively disregarded the intended gameplay to role-play his way through this violent game as an ersatz photographer, which was, in many ways, a declaration of pacifism.

MDM I first read about the concept of in-game photography in 2012 on a blog by the game journalist Rainer Sigl. I felt we had reached a turning point: even if the practice of screen-grabbing was not a new phenomenon per se, remarkable technical advances in visualization were suddenly allowing players to think “photographically” when exploring game worlds. Companies eventually took note and encouraged players to take pictures in-game by introducing advanced photo modes that mimicked the interface of advanced DSLR cameras and photo-editing tools. As it often happens, a vernacular practice was subsequently validated by the industry and “normalized.” It’s been interesting to follow the development of in-game photography since then and the addition of photo modes in computer games. In a sense, we witnessed game spaces



Marco Cadioli, *ARENAE—Omaha Beach*, 2005. Digital Print. Courtesy: the artist.

made him an obvious candidate, but there’s also Claude Cahun and Florence Henri, amongst other protagonists. With Cindy Sherman also being shown, visitors will feel invited to draw a line from modernism to post-modernity . . . but where are they supposed to draw the line from there? We can read all these modern classics as a tongue-in-cheek allusion to what photography

was once upon a time—when museum walls seemed like just the right place to contemplate them. However, you may have had more ambitious historiographical intentions. The implication may be that we can look at the so-called clas-



Dries Depoorter & Max Pinckers, *Trophy Camera v0.9*, 2017. Interactive installation and website (www.trophy.camera), 16 × 10.5 × 8.5 cm. Courtesy: Photography Museum Antwerp. Copyright: the artists.

sics in an entirely different way in what I feel tempted to call your show's rear-view mirror.

MB This is an area in which Marco and I do not necessarily see eye to eye, but far from being paralyzing, I believe this ongoing dialogue is productive. Let's say that Marco is role-playing Walter Benjamin. His point is that photography has no aura. Post-photography does not even know the meaning of aura, although it is desperately trying to get one through various cons, including NFTs. Okay. Let's also say that I am role-playing Susan Sontag, who, in her essay "Photographic Evangels," argued that museums could confer an aura on photography through their institutional power. So who's right? Perhaps it doesn't really matter. Perhaps we just wanted to compare and contrast, juxtaposing different approaches to image-making that are, at once, anachronistic and brand new. We convinced ourselves that these various fictions would create some kind of critical friction. We were, in other words, playing.

RC Gamification includes a strong presence of interaction, which, if framed in the contemporary exhibition context, solicits reflection on the perception of the work of art beyond the mere observation of photographs hanging on museum walls. How is this interactive component translated on the physical level of the exhibition? Is there anything that turns the museum space into the playground that you argue photography helps to create?

MDM There are a few playable works in the show, including Dries Depoorter and Max Pinckers's *Trophy Camera v0.95* from 2021, but also a modified version of *DOOM II* from 2015 by Andrew Stine, where visitors can equip a selfie stick instead of a gun and take selfies instead of shooting down monsters. Akihiko Taniguchi's *Parallax*, developed in 2021, is also a playable environment, a "game essay" in which the artist has created different scenes to reflect on digital images, screenshotting, and simulation. However, we didn't endeavor to create a playground. Visitors are encouraged to play with images, but most importantly they are invited to think of images as the result of a play activity, and of a negotiation with a game that we should always be able to shape, rather than blindly following its rules. If anything, interaction is overrated.

WB In one of the rooms of your show, visitors came across Harun Farocki's *Parallel I–IV* made in 2012–14. If seen with the same artist's *Bilder-*

krieg from 1987 in mind, it is particularly revealing. He had investigated industrialized ways of seeing or photographic machine vision in his earlier film, and analyzes how photography has come to be replaced by simulation in the latter. Farocki may be commenting on game worlds, but we're also invited to think about how this shift affects our view of the world at large. Do you agree that this is why Farocki is necessary for your show?

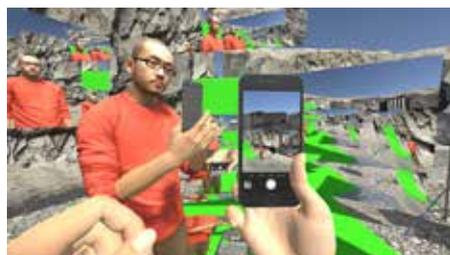
MB Mos def. It's a paradigm shift: simulation replaces representation. Debord is out, Jean Baudrillard is in. Meanwhile, Farocki was taking notes.

RC What are the sociocultural implications behind "playful" photography?

MDM It's crucial not to forget the political aspect of image play. I mean, it's all fun and games until somebody loses an eye. Images are part of disinformation campaigns and trolling tactics by bad actors. Consider what happened in 2017 when the official Twitter account of the Russian Ministry of Defence published an image that was later discovered to be a screenshot from a video game as irrefutable proof of the US helping ISIS. Yet image play can become a tactic to challenge truth and fiction, reality and representation. By appropriating and recontextualizing images, artists and photographers question the dominant authorities. They generate counter-narratives that can shape reality.

WB It isn't easy to conclude what's in it for photography after recapitulating your visual analysis of the field. Your exhibition title implies that we can win at photography, but some of the exhibits in the show suggest that it may be more appealing to win against photography. What is more, photography has become a hallucination, an afterimage, or a side effect in many works in the show. Is photography a losing game?

MB Well, I find "winning" very boring. Or perhaps "losing" might be the only way to win. I think it would be more fruitful to examine the logic and the aesthetics of *failure*, which is an en-



Akihiko Taniguchi, *Parallax*, 2021. Custom software. Courtesy and copyright: the artist.

tire field in itself—here, I'm specifically thinking about the book *Failure* by Arjun Appadurai and Neta Alexander. What may "losing as winning" look like? Not to engage with the medium itself? For instance, John Berger wrote extensively about photography but refused to become a photographer. He taught us how to read a photograph. Is he a winner? Is he a loser? Ditto for Sontag, who crafted an essential book on photography completely devoid of images and remained at arm's length from the camera for her entire life. On the other hand, at one point Baudrillard found more joy in photography than in writing. He fully embraced the simulacra. He was happy with the blue pill. Full disclosure: the title of the exhibition evokes the "how-to" vernacular genre on YouTube, an expanding universe of tutorial videos which are supposed to explain in ten minutes how to game anything

from cryptocurrency to climate change, from make-up to cheating on online exams. How-to videos are the layman's TED Talk. My all-time favorite is "How to Become a Curator."

MDM If we go back to Flusser one more time, photography has always been a Kafkaesque game, and photographers have almost always been mere functionaries of the apparatus. So perhaps the only way to win at photography really is not to take any more pictures.

Wolfgang Brückle, art historian, is a senior lecturer at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (CH). He was the head of two photography-related SNSF research projects from 2018 to 2022.

Matteo Bittanti's research and practice focus on media studies. He lives in San Francisco (US) and Milan (IT).

Rica Cerbarano is an independent curator and producer. She writes about photography for *Vogue* (IT) and other international magazines.

Marco De Mutiis is Digital Curator at Fotomuseum Winterthur (CH) and researcher at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (CH) and London South Bank University (GB). He is interested in digital and networked images and cultures.

Data Streams: Art, Algorithms and Artificial Intelligence

The Glucksman, University College Cork, 3. 12. 2021 – 13. 3. 2022

by Fiona Hallinan

"All technology reflects the society that produces it," writes Legacy Russell in her bold book *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, "including its power structures and prejudices. This is true all the way down to the level of the algorithm." Through the work of ten artists, the exhibition *Data Streams* explores the ways in which algorithms, data collection, and digital surveillance reproduce existing systemic structures, and how these underlying systems play out in influences on our lives and bodies. The show points to urgent issues that surround the Internet today, of surveillance and its risks, while also exploring how algorithms predict and guide patterns of behavior, and touching on the duty of care for users, makers, and moderators of digital spaces.

In designing the show, the curator Chris Clarke and the media scholar and lecturer in French studies Anaïs Nony wanted to make the visitor aware of the "impact of digital surveillance on actual bodies." This embodied sense is immediately felt upon entering the exhibition space on foot, as a staircase approach reveals, line by line, *All I Know and Then Some* (2014/2021), a wall work by Addie Wagenknecht, of oversized handwritten text.

Wagenknecht's mural suggests a devolution from control as its message dissolves from the virtuous proclamation "I will not download things that get me in trouble," into the more passive resignation "I will download things." Handwriting may be a comparatively slow and messy technology today, but as a physical gesture unique to each person, it contributes to a sense of agency in our actions. In articulating a loss of control through that format, Wagenknecht draws attention to the too-familiar feeling while online of slippery unseen forces directing our hands.