

Johannes Lothar Schröder

Photographed, Printed, Found, Performed + Photographed

On “Indexical” a Performance by Andrés Galeano
at the *hühnerhaus volksdorf* in Hamburg¹

In 2012 the Spanish artist Andrés Galeano, who lives and works in Berlin, held a residency at the *hühnerhaus volksdorf* from June 7th to 18th. The venue, a former henhouse, is run by Edith Sticker, who transformed it into an art-space in 2009. Since then it features exhibitions, installations and performances² and participated in the Architektur Sommer Hamburg this year.



Photocredit: Johannes Lothar Schröder, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

¹This review and essay is part of a larger essay on performances by visual artists and photography called THE POWER OF THE DISPOSITIVE. It will appear in the Book *Blende + Traumzeit, Vol. 2* by Johannes Lothar Schröder 2013

²Documentations of 2010 and 2011 are available at hyperzine verlag, www.hyperzine.org

Found Photo Prints in Performances

Additional to his installation titled OVAL Galeano showed his performance “Indexical”, which he presented at the opening weekend of his show. The performance dealt with a series of pictures of people using their fingers to index a point outside the frame. The artist doubled the theme of indexing as a doing and a gesture of communication.



Photocredit: Johannes Lothar Schröder, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

This seemed to be just a banal act as long as one ignores the artist's interest as a researcher in documenting performances³. With his academic background he made visible that most of the photographers are witnessing aspects of performativity when taking a picture. Sometimes indexing is used, when a person realizes that a picture is taken of him or her, to appear in a more impressive pose. The growing awareness of performance in the public sphere caused an inflation of this pose, as it is part of training people in positions. Galeano underlined this later in his own performance by indexing at a member of the audience, taking a picture with his smart-phone and then showing the picture of this person to every member of the audience. By his action he could specify more aspects of performativity and photography, as there is the relation of a passive audience and an active performer, who used the indexing-finger to underline his role. The presentation of the instant image at the display of his smart-phone indicated the rupture between the previously shown chemical prints of samples of analogue photography and the digital photograph on the electronic display. Here spectators had

³His thesis for his diploma in visual arts at Berlin Weissensee in 2011 was: *Performancedokumentation als Kunstwerk/Documentation of Performances as Artwork*

the chance to realize not only a picture shown, but also the medium itself, which became a function in the ritual of displaying pictures. This action also shows evidence as it goes beyond communication indicating the dispositive of photography. This means that by reproducing the obvious, the artist was not only presenting his new smart-phone but also the name of the company or trademark and its scoring as a covetable gadget. By observing the tools and machines the artist uses in his performance the spectators represent the working of the dispositive. They value the status of the artist and his professional competence in relation to the picture, photography as a genre and the equipment, which is used. That's why within certain audiences the gadget can underscore power and superiority of the owner of a tool often more effective than the picture or the performance he or she is delivering.



Photocredit: Johannes Lothar Schröder, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Dispositive + Displacement in Performances + Documentary

However there is a relation between the use of documentary photography which is popular in contemporary art and the ephemerality of performance-art. First of all we are able to see pictures of the disappearing that once was only present by repetition and eventually was given in paintings as a summary of a performance. That is why

photography had an impact on both: the performance and the image.⁴ The later one could be reproduced and by being doubled it took over aspects of the performance – as place and time become subject of change. And there are aspects of the performance that can be frozen and thus be camouflaged as an image. Observing the impact of photographic reproduction Walter Benjamin realized that, and stated that it took away the aura off the original, as it dislocates the artwork by distributing copies of it. Not being of any relevance before, when the artwork was exclusively part of a space, a building or a public square and had its function in the rituals, the aura appeared in the moment it was dismantled from the original, that no longer could kept exclusively separated from everyday life. This made art popular but in the same time its magic was taken away. The ritual, which also is an act of distribution, went into the hands of the owner of a camera, who in a technical process – a profane ceremony – was able to reproduce the original. And as an optical device is not able to store images by itself, chemicals, photographic papers, electronic tools and programs as well as the industries which produce this are required. Together with the act of taking pictures they form a dispositive which is involved in that process and takes over the magic images once had.

It is the resonance of the aura, which even today leads to the use of documentation as an artwork, as Boris Groys explicates it in his essay “Kunst im Zeitalter der Biopolitik”⁵. This is a topic, which highlights the use of photography in the installations and performances of Galeano. However by using pictures in a performance and by the re-doing of moments and gestures on the found photographs he relocates the lost place and time in the here and now of his performances. Doing so he defines the power of a re-doing by reviving the moment, which was taken apart from one place – which is unknown, place-less without an index and the experience of the photographer and the photographed person.

By these magical and ritual aspects the former ceremonial presence of images returns in the ephemerality of performance art. Combined with the effort of catching these moments by documenting a performance by photographs, films or video an endless game of locating and dislocating is driving the rituals of the contemporary art practice.

⁴It is pittyfull that this aspect was left out in the book „Performance und Bild/ Performance als Bild“ hg. von Christian Janecke, Berlin 2004. In his introduction Janecke pretends explicitly that ephemeral acts in art-history „Bilderprozessionen, barocke Liturgie, Feierliche Enthüllung von Gemälden“ have to be left out (13) as well as anthropological and ethnological implications (42). As he prefers to proclaim this in an ironical tone you cannot expect to find a passage on the photography of amateurs. In the contrary he jokes about the photography, which gains growing attention in exhibitions since 2000 (p. 42/3, note 58) This seems a little arrogant as he pretends not to see a contradiction between Performance and Photography, when stating with Derrida, that the image is an object of constant change (pp45), then – dialectically seen – a performance is an act of high stability.

⁵Vom Kunstwerk zur Kunstdokumentation, in: documenta 11, plattform_5, Ausstellung, Kassel 2002, S. 107 – 113, S. 110ff.