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Orit Gat

November, 2010

### **Everywhere**

For me, Ellis Island is the place of exile, meaning the absence of a place, the non-place, the nowhere.

– Georges Perec, *Récits d'Ellis Island, histories d'errance et d'espoir*

Is it possible to document an absence?

When Georges Perec arrived in the United States in order to research for his and Robert Bober's book and film project *Ellis Island* in the 1960s, this is how he described the U.S., and this notion defined his experience of it. Perec attempted to document the experience and memory of exile and immigration as a mirror of the place, and this attempt culminated in the book, a collection of Perec's impressions, woven between the stories of migration taken from the interviews he and Bober conducted. When the Leipzig-based artist Edgar Leciejewski arrived in New York, he began his own travelogue, documenting his experience of the place, documenting how the city itself is structured through media—from streetlights to subway signs to Times Square's neon craze. Old and new are intermingled, and the city and the people in it use both old and new media to communicate all the layers that lie beyond the city's grid of streets. Using a cheap and accessible digital camera, Leciejewski began documenting all that surrounded him—incessantly portraying his studio, his apartment, his walks in the city and travels beyond it, the people he met, the sights he's seen; streets, buildings, characters, shades, objects, and the way all these are filtered through a simple camera.

Arriving in a new country with fresh eyes makes one more perceptive. Arriving in the United States even more so—American

culture is very prominent throughout the Western world, and so the experience of it from afar is somewhat shared throughout the Western population. "Are you one of those people who cannot imagine the Germans in their beloved Paris?" The German Major Strasser asks Rick, or Humphrey Bogart. And then, "How about New York?" "Well there are certain sections of New York, Major, that I wouldn't advise you to try to invade." That is one image of New York. Countless others are spread throughout the movies, magazines, pictures, television, advertisements-images of America are far and wide, and none are more present than those of New York City.

Still, like Percec and many others who arrived in the country, many of the foreigners who arrive in the United States document their experience, their version of the place. This place can be Percec's non-place or Steinbeck's every-place, and Leciejewski's project seems to fluctuate between these two.

The photographs in *How to Build a Sun*, Leciejewski's American travelogue, depict a very familiar America through fresh eyes—these are the eyes that see a storefront with Disney-like model homes and the sign "realty," whose font makes it seem like the world "reality," bringing up the much-discussed question of reality and fantasy in a nation whose self-definition is grounded in the notion of "the American dream." Other photographs show streets, portraits, landscapes, objects, or oddities such as the photographs taken in the basement of New York's Natural History Museum. Some of these photographs rejoice in the aesthetic: they are accounts of forms and their repetition in different guises, like the cartons used to store photographs that echo the skyscrapers seen from the window of the printer's office, like the round sewage manhole cast-iron cover lids that duplicate the wheels of a bus; others have a gritty, urban quality to them, playing with layers of images and textures. All of them are personal, all depict a personal experience, and yet mirror a

shared conception of geography, by bringing up themes and questions related to this familiar place. From sky to subway system, Leciejewski's *How to Build a Sun* exposes his version of America that hits the soft belly of the place's definition of itself. His America is the nowhere and the everywhere, at a time in which it is most fragile.

Orit Gat, New York 2011

## **In the Realm of the Camera**

**Robert Renger-Patzsch**

"Photography lets me escape into reality," Edgar Leciejewski replies to the question of why he works with the medium of photography. And escaping has always been a form of emigration.

Leciejewski's art examines the various social and scientific uses of photography. It represents an experimental and analytical attempt to tease out the questions that are relevant today from the medium of photography. In addition to thematic issues and a reflection on his own methods and tools, he is interested in letting the dimension of time influence his photographic work. His pictures are reservoirs or storerooms of time that make it possible to slow down the act of seeing and experiencing.

His work focuses on the uses to which old and new media have been put, and the ways in which they are relevant in the contemporary context. He studies how our perception and communication are changing in the digital age, and how digital technologies are reshaping our thinking and our language. When we humans acquired language, we learned not just to speak, but also to listen. Today, as we are increasingly confronted with a digital reality, we need to learn not only to use programs, but also to create them. Using photography and taking consumer media into account, the artist reflects in a very specific fashion on how communication changes today and on the transformation of patterns of perception that entails. Leciejewski has found a way to use the preinstalled programs in society and in our own heads that enable us to see in the first place and that at once brutally curtail our vision, to hack them and rewrite them.

Over the past few years, Leciejewski has built an archive of found materials and others he has produced himself that now serves as the point of departure for his work and critical engagement. In 2010, he also spent six months in New York City, where he was able

to observe impressive evidence of how man, society, and the city are structured, and reinvent themselves, by means of old and new media; how the old is being preserved and yet subject to rapid transformation. Besides formal questions and analytical approaches, he is interested in methods and concepts that allow us to understand our socialization into art and science. As he interrogates possible avenues of social and artistic evolution, he devotes particular attention to the question of how his reflections might point up a process of deceleration and one oriented toward practical application. Leciejewski's works are not meant to make statements; they want to evoke questions and sensations, to inspire and stimulate us to strain our own eyes. Seeing as cognition, as a work on our own bodies within our reality-related socialization.

Translated by Gerrit Jackson

***des hommes trouvés. Edgar Leciejewski's Urban Ghosts***

by Adriano Sack

"Not even Martin Parr himself would be able to tell his pictures from Flickr shots," the art director Alexander Wiederin speculates. Austrian by birth, he has lived in New York for many years. Which, as we all know, makes it easier to say it like it is: digital modernity has changed the nature and possibilities of photography. It has become difficult to distinguish between photographs randomly produced at the hands of amateurs and art photography, because the traditional criteria—such as composition, exposure, depth of focus—have been called in question, but most importantly because a growing range of ways to make images have become widely available. After the tsunami of December 2004, a cell-phone picture appeared on the cover of *stern* magazine: a tourist in Thailand had snapped the flood wave barreling toward him (luckily, he survived). It was the most impressive picture because the man happened to be in the right place at the right time. The picture's low resolution—in technical terms and judged by traditional standards, it was far from cover material—only made it more powerful. The availability of technology poses a new challenge to the idea of the artistic production of images. Photography, which took a strikingly long time to gain recognition as a form of art and so remains a young genre, articulates itself not just through the picture itself but also through the idea on which it is based (or that floats above it), the referential system within which it is situated, and simply through the attribution the artist imposes. The scans of found dead birds the Leipzig-based artist Edgar Leciejewski creates, for instance, are

images so precise as to resemble illustrations from a textbook of biology. The grace and expressive force of his arrangements (the proudly ruffled feathers, the elegantly contorted neck) are evidence of a clear-sighted creative impulse. And the minute depiction by means of art of what is immediately natural, he says, goes back as far as Leonardo da Vinci's ink prints of leaves.

Leciejewski points out that one of the first impulses driving the work of early photographers was to create archives; be it of plants, as with the Englishwoman Anna Atkins or the German Karl Blossfeldt, be it of cities, a mission taken on, for example, by Atget in Paris. The medium of photography lent itself to the task. For it seemed to replace the expressive force of the brush brandished by the artist with a soulless mechanism. That idea, of course, turned out, first, not to be true and nonetheless, second, made photography the machine age's congenial medium.

From technological reproducibility to digital volatility. Anyone can make a technically clean picture today. The stars on the covers of fashion and celebrity magazines would be impossible to identify were it not for the headlines, as their faces are made to conform to a vague but powerful ideal of beauty first by means of the scalpel and then using Photoshop. The function "Edit Your Profile" lets us work on our own public images day after day. Earlier versions become blurry, although they presumably continue to exist. "There are different ways for individual people to take over space—to command space [...] Before media there used to be a physical limit on how much space one person could take up by themselves," Andy Warhol writes in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*. The space a person can take up has grown to infinity. The actual attention we garner is measured not in terms of the amount of data we ourselves select but in the numbers of clicks, friends, comments, links. Social success has

become unequivocally measurable and transparent.

New York is a city of fleeting and exact glances. When he stayed there in 2010, Leciejewski noticed the contrast between the freedom and unlimited possibilities that are part of the promise of happiness the city holds out, and the rigid codes its residents observe. The metropolis as a place of organized violence to which people submit. Architecture and social conventions determine how people must move, dress, greet and ignore each other. New Yorkers say "Excuse me" and mean "Move over." The city's density forces them to be polite and brutal.

The cover of Scott Schuman's picture book *The Sartorialist* is graced by a quote from Mario Testino: "The place to be seen." Testino is referring to the photographer's blog—for several years, Schuman has used it to publish pictures of people he saw in the street and captured because of their extraordinary style. Some of the subjects are well known—stylists, designers, bloggers—but their names do not appear on the website. A felicitous combination of jacket and pants or the right shoe is all it takes to get in. Testino's blurb is of course no more than a superstar's favor to a star, but it contains an interesting idea. The Internet as a site to see and be seen, it suggests, is replacing the traditional venues where social structures manifest themselves: restaurants, clubs, opening-night parties. In restaurants that draw a celebrity clientele, New Yorkers call the seats located near the bathrooms or merely in hard-to-see corners "Siberia." On the Internet, you're in Siberia when your pictures do not appear under "Most viewed." The world has become more permeable and, if that is still possible, more merciless.

"The Google algorithm goes by buildings, not by people," Leciejewski says about the cracks, blurry areas, and digital misconstructions in the pictures he uses in his work. They are

taken from Google Street View, the large-scale project for which the corporation deploys camera-equipped vehicles to capture streets all over the world. These cameras—in Germany, the project met with considerable opposition—are the equivalent of Andy Warhol's running tape recorder from the early 1970s. Impassive producers of a testimonial record. The artist processes the images, selects the parts he will use, removes details. Or he will leave them in for compositional reasons, thus with the bottles on the stoop outside the brownstone. The people in his photographs are *hommes trouvés*—their appearance on Google Street View is accidental, whereas their appearance in Leciejewski's work is the result of a precise artistic selection. Their anonymity renders them symbols and projection screens. Where is the gangly boy in the ultramarine T-shirt going? Did the two men recognize each other as they passed in the street? Might that woman with the first-rate legs not be Naomi Campbell? The people in this series are unreal and hence movable images of ideas associated with New York City: sex, success, love, money, danger, beauty, etc. They walk across the street, are captured by the camera, the artist discovers them, shapes their images, then makes large-format prints he mounts in a gallery. This process turns them into ghosts.

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## **The Thickness of Material**

by Orit Gat

Leciejewski talks about the photographs as still lifes. He shows the birds and a series of photographs of eggs, or the white, oval objects that we identify as eggs, scanned and enlarged to create black and white abstractions, that depart from the object and stay representations of it all at once. He shows series of Polaroid images of metal and blue, framed together to create one large image of his studio's window; he leafs through folders in the computer to find a series of images of New York. The photographs are an array of minute details, of moments, places, and objects, and in this sense, they are all still lifes. But they are also portraits of these places and objects, portraits that take on form and narrative, to ask questions about aesthetics and the construction of images and stories from all that surrounds us. Edgar Leciejewski turns his computer on and looks for the word "traurig" in his German-English dictionary. "Sorrow," he says, "that's what it is. There is sorrow in these works." We are looking at the series Aves, Latin for the class of birds, which are high quality scans of dead birds. Leciejewski would collect these bodies in the street, take them home, and scan them. These create compositions of shadows, a still life whose life was sucked away from it, to create immobile silhouettes of color. The reference to still life paintings is plain to see, but these images play on a number of other layers of representation- they are fragile and beautiful, but their subject matter is troublesome; they are full of sorrow and mourning, and yet they

are colorful and pleasing. The images have obviously been touched and reworked, and yet nature, or rather, the natural, pierces through them. And above all-it is not photography. It is non-photography. The creation of an image using a scanner is another round in this game of representations-the act of photography becomes closer to the act of painting using technology.

The real world sneaks in to the images. The seven photographs of eggs are the result of weeks of work, going to the market every day to find seven similar eggs. These were then scanned and enlarged. The daily then changes. What looks similar is actually unique, and it is the enlargement, the unique print, that opens this window of opportunity-to take note of the surrounding, through that which is most accessible. Rather than work with the rare or the precious, these works focus on the small, the familiar, and look for the sorrowful and the alluring nature of the commonplace thing. Anyone can copy these images; all you need is a scanner, and patience.

The humble, daily materials are used to focus the viewer's eyes on the way things are-to see the material for what it really is, to see its real surface-the eggs for their uniqueness, the birds for their texture and form, but also to focus the viewer's eyes on the way images are created. A photograph like those of the studio windows can be first read as a landscape, and only when one approaches it one sees the material, the construction of one image from a myriad of smaller images. Abstraction comes from realism, and form is abstraction to begin with; the primary structure, the window itself, comes before the content, before the amassing of these smaller structures into one whole-an image, a story, a new view. And, like the layers of textures in the images themselves, the layers of meanings pile up one on top of the other. The use of the commonplace as subject matter makes these works accessible for any viewer. They are approachable and immediate, their formal layout is appealing, but the process they document unfolds itself

to those who look at works more theoretically.

Leciejewski's studio walls are an array of stories. Some works are hung on the walls, but there is also a large number of images pasted onto the white surface. Notes, photographs, reproductions, a score of thoughts that are present in the series Wands, or "Walls," a series of photographs of the studio walls, whose titles are the date in which they were taken. Again, images are piled one on top of the other to create layers of photographs. These are photographs of photographs. They are images of interiors, thought-out and built like seventeenth-century Dutch interior paintings, but the human presence is only there in the past. Leciejewski photographs the studio walls in the beginning of the day and in its end. He exposes the intimate process of work in the studio, and the small changes in the space.

These images are composed, but have to develop organically. The image of a process cannot be created, it has to be experienced, thought out, told, and then documented. And their documentation asks questions about representation, about the way in which images function one next to the other, or next to text, or in different sizes. The layered work, which was seen in the texture of the imagery in other works, here plays on the question of number and representation—there is no hierarchy, no image is more important than the other, not even the photograph itself—the portrait of dancer Vaslav Nijinsky is no more important than the photograph of the portrait hung on the wall. What is important is the way the two work together, the low-resolution print out of the portrait within the high-resolution composed photograph. Only then another layer of content is considered—the story the portrait tells, the person himself. And then another layer—of the history of photography, the use of portraiture then and now. And again, another layer, exploring the creation of the image itself. The process is evident in the result; the accumulation of images is both physical, as in the studio wall photographs, and abstract,

**text (selection) – Edgar Leciejewski, 10.2011**

as in the photographs taken out the window. Inanimate objects tell stories. Still lifes have done so throughout the history of art, and here the eggs, the birds, the posters hung on the studio walls, all tell us a new story about the color of photography, about the layers threaded together to create images, about the way meaning is created.

Orit Gat, NYC 05.2010

**Easy**

by Carsten Tabel

1.

He rubbed the last bits of sleep from his eyes. If only all the other crusty stuff could be rubbed off just like this. Coffee, juggled in big gulps, eggs. The weak winter sun almost managed to flood the kitchen with light but it just couldn't get passed a dusty layer of nicotine and greasy kitchen residue. He got up and opened the window to let her in and retired to the living room. A three foot tower of photographs was sitting on the table. On the carpet a spread out attempt to get this bulk of imagery into a subjective order. This was going to be his ultimate attempt because all previous measures of organizing the photos according to standard categories had turned out to lead nowhere. Pointless, brutal waste of time. A meek tweet came from the bathroom. The fucking bird. It's still alive. It was a beautiful wild bird - in danger of extinction. He'd bought the bird online a couple of weeks ago, paid quite a sum, expecting however that the bird would be dead, a proud, magnificent animal sitting on a tiny bough. Just like the picture that he'd clicked on to initiate the order. The fact that he was able to buy a living creature with the click of a mouse button and a debt order made him sick. Computerbird made him sick.

Without much of a choice he'd bought a cage for the bird, a death room, an outsourced waiting room for a famous taxidermist to whom he intended to give the bird after its passing. But this proud creature wasn't going to put up with the situation. Not just like that. Entirely ignored by this man who spent all day digging through masses of snapshot photographs. Sitting on a bar while waiting to die of thirst. Exasperated by the seemingly endless nagging of the animal he'd placed the cage in the bathroom , threw a dark felt rug over it in order to finally shut the beast up and

to keep it away from aggressive sunbeams, preserve its lovely plumage.

She stood at the traffic light, looking solid and confident. She was carved in the air, human architecture waiting for the light to turn green. She was capable of outgrowing herself, but not carelessly. No extensions without proper statics calculations. The goal was to expand but at the same time to prevent herself from collapsing, from breaking apart and from crumbling to dust. Dust, that would then fall on her hair and make her look old, ready for demolition.

She was on her way to lunch, no extraordinary appointment, no reason to get excited, but a table for two at the best Chinese restaurant in town. She'd invited him for a short hour of far eastern delicacy, just to be seen every now and then, to keep from being forgotten, to extend those feelers. She wasn't nervous at all, well in order, well spirited. When she turned into seventh avenue, paper cup of coffee in her hand, she was hit right in the face by a pixel ray from a passing car. She felt hot, wiped her face and stood still without standing still.

Sparrows, tomtits and all kinds of ordinary birds knocked against the windowpane with bleeding heads. They hammered against the glass of his cabinet, the bizarre diorama in which he dwelled. They remained in vertical poses, stood still in mid air and leaned against the glass. In the background - a monochrome surface. This monochromacity conceals a total fiction, an incomparable invention. We sat in a blue living room surrounded by portraits of our chosen relatives and discussed the possibility of posthumous adoption. Well, if it is possible to buy into an aristocratic title, why not a similar system for intellectual aristocracy. To let everyone see this felt belonging, to free from the intimacy of love and adoration, to give it an official eternity that would protect us from losing control and from losing our way.

How does one disappear from the screen? Does that mean slipping into invisible regions beyond the frame, or into nothingness? Does one splash like a wet sack of pixels head first into reality?

The bird, leaning against the glass, is a made up individualist without a god or a clan, it performs something that frees it from the prison of generic behavior and converts it to the canon of the artificial. It was a dark and icy winter night. The taxidermist went to work at his desk. He'd dumped the carcass. The remains of the animal were pure information in the dormancy of the immaterial on a bough, the purgatory of data processing. Years ago he'd moved to the city, straight from college. Sure to turn into one of the faceless thousand who are begrudged by millions for the money they are making. They gained a lot of respect at work and were highly successful. However, their success was meaningless to society. Disregarded by millions. Like all of his kind, he liked the taste of the fruits of his labor. This same taste just made everyone else sick. They just wanted to throw up. It tasted extraordinarily, the food prepared bei the Chinese chef right in front of their eyes. At a lunatic speed, Asian singing birds were beheaded, plucked and boned and poached in fish stock. Her face was burning. Talking and eating was difficult because everything was stiff and blurry, lips and tongue refused to work. He noticed it. This was an insignificant, almost dispensable meeting but her behavior was enough to make him lose interest and to end a yearlong business relationship.

2.

Her black claw shoes clattered across the tiles. The first drink is on the house. The dishwasher two stories above burped and puked all night. My teeth were clattering. Two of them already loose from fear. The photos on the magnet board fluttered. An open window. Papers swirling about. A sudden midsummer gust - the last

thing I could use right now. It was impossible to reconstruct the original order. I had to live with the newly emerged chaos, had to accept it, had to embrace it, had to learn to find my way around in it. This required time, took all my strength. There aren't many greats in my life and I want you to be one of them. That's what she wrote.

I don't think so, I answered and went down to the mailbox. It was snowing when I arrived at her place and the letter lay unopened among her dirty underwear. I put it in my bag and never talked about it. Zebra finches and budgies. Of all places they had to be in the kitchen and the dining room. Birds and owners died from lung cancer. The birds killed by injections, the humans ailing and suffering. When the car came to a screeching halt right before her feet, placed on a crosswalk, on a reflex she slammed the hood with all her strength. The vehicle didn't seem to be very affected, the driver jumped out of the car and exploded. Her cheeks were burning. The unshaved stranger that she'd been exchanging ugly kisses with all night. Red spots on her skin, dark circles around her eyes and a love bite on her neck - what an asshole. She remembered time spent abroad in college. How much she still had all of that before her eyes, how easy these memories were to recall. She could return at any time, back to the streets, to the people, taste the air and the food. In her memory, a certain person belonged to each place, with whom the place would disappear, turn into desolate terrain. That's why she couldn't go back. Because nothing but desert awaited her.

We met at a cafe to share some old memories. She'd mentioned something like that when we talked on the phone before we met. She brought a photo album; I put pen and paper on the table as usual, in order to hold onto these items if necessary. We'd just warmed up talking, left the here and now behind us, when a Dutch travel group entered the place. The TV set was turned on, the Tour de France, the place got noisy. I longed for the world out there, the

sky-rise canyons, the urban jungle. I couldn't stop repeating these two words to myself. It was just before we shook hands to say goodbye when she told me that she'd only wanted to see me because she'd forgotten what I looked like. She'd brought the album from "our" year to show me that I did not appear on any of those photos. She just wanted to see me and that's it. His mind once jumped from razor sharp to absolute emptiness. Sometimes he remembers this during his endless brain drained nights. The old gray box drowns and shrinks irregularly in height, width and depth. Under a streetlight, a crouched flickering, whining mess. When it broke down they opened the lid and dug through the pixilated chaos, hoping to find a last grain of intelligence. What they found though was a marble sized lump of undigested poultry that smelled like fish. Sleeplessness took over. He was in a state of ultimate fatigue. The rings around his eyes changed in color, from black to dark red. The world relocated and the body comforted the mind. At eight in the morning I ran into a long lost friend. He smelled of liquor. My resolution was low. I was a ghost fed up with talking. My obvious misery lifted his spirits, distracted him from his own. I fumbled through my pockets and brought out a photo of myself, he a pocket flask. I took one or two sips - what the hell - things were going great for him. The alcohol pounded my wasted eyes a millimeter further inward, I felt veins bursting in my cheek and my bowels were offended. Without saying a word I handed the photograph to him. He took it and put it in his pocket without sparing a glance at it. He just took it. I couldn't do a thing about it.

Carsten Tabel, Leipzig 2011

translated by Arlo Ibisch

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**"An Enormous Collection of Forms"**

by Prof. Dr. Steffen Siegel

*Gaze into the mirror*

This mirror might tilt forward at any moment, or so it seems. And if worst comes to worst, it will fall over and shatter on the hard parquet floor. Rather than leaning against the wall at an angle, it stands bolt upright, resting on the narrow edge of its frame, its reflection casting an almost imperceptible sheen on the floorboards, which have been polished to a shine. The photograph directs our gaze onto this inconspicuous scene at an angle and from an elevated vantage point. And this perspective, to be sure, actually fosters the impression of instability. Two black cables run across the picture, although we cannot tell which appliances are to be supplied with power. A computer, perhaps, or a television set? But then it does not quite seem to matter, as we lose track of these cables on the left edge of the picture in the space outside the photographic view. But that is not entirely correct: for the surface of the mirror glass repeats not only the double cord. Only here, in the mirror image, do the cables curl into loops and knots to such a degree that their meandering course finds itself oddly condensed.

The traveler needs to have forgotten to pack his adapters only once to realize that this picture cannot have been taken in central Europe. The shape of the two unused power outlets on the

right-hand side of the picture suggests instead that this mirror stands in an American household. Yet the composition of the picture is so withdrawn, so self-absorbed that we remain dependent on such vague conjectures. And it is only with hesitation that a part of a room opens up before our eyes, a room that is oddly vacant and yet full of expressive force. Perhaps a closer forensic examination of the scuffed parquet flooring might be worth our while? And do we not see more along the upper edge of the mirror image than just the tangle of cables? The solipsistic gesture with which this picture confronts the eye of the beholder challenges our vision. And raises two seemingly simple questions: what is it in fact that allows itself to be seen here? And what, finally, can we say about this vision?

*The presence of the pictures*

These, however, are the very questions any photographer will bring with him—in addition to the indispensable adapters—when departing for an extended stay in New York City, as Edgar Leciejewski did in 2010. Being a photographer between the Hudson and East Rivers today means arriving, willy-nilly, on the scene of a tough competition that has now been going on for well over a century: a competition to create images of this metropolis that aspire to show more than the obligatory views of urban canyons and skyscrapers, which have long curdled into visual clichés. The whole thing really already got started in 1839. No more than a few weeks after photographic processes were first talked about in Paris, on April 20, 1839, Samuel Morse, who was not only the inventor of the telegraph but at the time also president of the National Academy of Design, reported of Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre's astonishing invention in the *New York Observer*.<sup>1</sup> And probably a month to the day after Daguerre had published the

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<sup>1</sup> Repr. in Helmut Gernsheim, Alison Gernsheim, *L.J.M. Daguerre. The History of the Diorama and the Daguerreotype*, 2<sup>nd</sup>, revised ed. (New York: Dover, 1968), 89–90.

principle of his photographic process, on September 20 of that same year, the first daguerreotypes taken in New York went on public display at James R. Chilton's store on Broadway.<sup>2</sup> Since then, explorers of New York City have used the photo camera to build a record of the metropolis whose thoroughness and abundance is probably unparalleled by that of any other city. Alfred Stieglitz's *Winter–Fifth Avenue* has long become an icon of modern pictorial art; so has Edward Steichen's mystical evocation of the Flatiron Building, created only a few years later. Over the course of the twentieth century, artists such as Helen Levitt and Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander and Joel Meyerowitz, each working in his or her very own way, have probed the artistic means of street photography and expanded the genre in remarkable ways. The result has been the visual archive of a city that still deeply informs our ideas of what a metropolis looks like and how its inhabitants live. This archive also includes Walker Evans's portraits, captured with a hidden camera, of passersby sitting across from him on the subway for hardly more than a minute—an idea, by the way, that Philip-Lorca diCorcia adapted in his series of likenesses *Heads* taken around 2000 on intersections amid the bustle of Manhattan. Credit for the most unique testament to everyday life in New York, however, is surely due to the police reporter Weegee and his drastic crime scene photographs, which complement the tableau of life in the city with images of how people die in it.

It can be said of many metropolises in this world, but it is especially true of New York: the photographer working in this city will find it difficult to escape the gaze that more than a hundred and fifty years of photographic history have gradually shaped and condensed. And indeed we can effortlessly find many traces of that gaze in the photographs contained in Edgar Leciejewski's series *how to build a sun*. Yet these pictures do not merely tell the

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<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*, 130.

story of how our vision is predetermined by the multiplicity of photographic appropriations. Instead, they focus their attention on that point where this sort of general latency of the photographic suddenly turns into the actual presence of a specific image, a presence that insistently takes possession of the metropolitan public space. For as a closer look reveals, neither the Metropolitan Museum nor the MoMA is the city's biggest gallery: it is the public space itself, portrayed in Edgar Leciejewski's pictures as an omnipresent site of the production and exhibition of photographic images.

It may be due to an American inclination toward high pathos that some of these pictures are integrated into the public space with an intent that is hard to miss, almost obtrusive. Be that as it may, any schoolchild entering a particular exhibition room on Governors Island will certainly recognize the image of a woman pensively looking down from the panes of a window at first glance: it is Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother*.<sup>3</sup> Leciejewski's shot makes palpably clear what it means when a specific photograph is not only symbolically elevated to the status of collective memory but also publicly displayed in that same function. To confront a photograph taken in 1936 with the skyline of today's New York in this fashion means to suffuse the visitor's gaze across the water with the recollection of recent American history. Far from all conceptual abstraction, the view of the southeastern tip of Manhattan and Lange's photograph, which has become iconic, fuse into a point about the relationship between past and present. Yet this sort of observation also enables us to derive an urban principle of visibility: the public space becomes the site of a combinatorial use of signs placing images and texts in interrelation. To move through a space of this kind means to be forced to undertake an ongoing work of decoding. In the simplest case, we may for instance ask ourselves whether a random message

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<sup>3</sup> Regarding the social function of such rapid recognition see Robert Hariman, John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), especially pp. 49–67.

captured from the passenger seat of a car might be correct. Does the advertising slogan—certainly intended to be read differently—perhaps also suggest that all of New York is a “Wonderland”? As though the poster had been put up like a headline accompanying the view of the skyline? More compelling, however, and certainly more complex is the deliberate overkill of the billboards around Times Square assaulting and overwhelming the pedestrian. Running in the trillions, the current level of the United States national debt would surely be oppressive enough even when not displayed across the entire width of a façade. The figure of Uncle Sam, another icon from the public visual memory, enjoys the dubious privilege of drowning, in a photograph measuring dozens of feet, in a maelstrom of public debt.

But as closer inspection reveals, this billboard-sized picture of the United States mascot going under exemplifies an old-fashioned way of using photography that has gotten a little long in the tooth. As though we needed reminding, the blue sign installed in a window beneath the billboards and visible in the same photograph points out that with the “Internet Access” it advertises, the circulation of images has become a matter we take into our own hands day after day. Quite literally so: when we leave our homes, we now carry our mobile phones, and so our cameras are always at hand. As a picture Leciejewski took during an art show opening demonstrates, seeing each other has become a matter of photographic observation. The glance cast in return is here consumed by the opposing photographers’ glaring flashlights. Finally, another photograph by Edgar Leciejewski appealingly blurs the boundaries between image and reality. To the fleeting glance at least it will have to remain unclear who it is that, amid the streets of the city, has a hand in the public use of a tablet computer, accessing today’s most prominent online picture gallery, a motif surely not chosen at random to be placed before every passerby’s eyes in this advertising poster.

*Gathering glances*

It altogether seems as though now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, an old utopian idea about the use of images has finally come true. A full century and a half ago, the American scientist and writer Oliver Wendell Holmes, patently fascinated by the subject, had written about the possibilities photography harbors for the visual exploration of the city. Holmes was particularly interested in the stereoscope, an implement that he more than virtually anyone else successfully popularized as a true mass medium. Without using the term, he envisioned the virtualization of our experience. In a shrewd move, Holmes inverts the relationship between the original and its image: "*Form is henceforth divorced from matter.* In fact, matter as a visible object is of no great use any longer, except as the mould on which form is shaped. Give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view, and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please."<sup>4</sup>

Once captured in the picture, that is to say, the outward world is little more than a redundant repetition of what can more conveniently be seen in the stereoscope. Yet if we believe Holmes, it is not the pictures but the "moulds" on which they are based that are threatened by withdrawal from circulation as superfluous doubles that may be "pulled down" or "burnt up." Iconoclasm is supplanted by the renunciation of an outward reality that, it is said, in any case appears more variegated and richer in the image. What may look like an eccentric utopian view of media from the depths of the nineteenth century has in fact long found its way into commonplace image practices. "There is only one Coliseum or Pantheon; but how many millions of potential negatives have they shed, –representatives of billions of pictures, –since they were

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<sup>4</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 1859, 738–48 (Holmes's italics).

erected! Matter in large masses must always be fixed and dear; form is cheap and transportable.”<sup>5</sup> The examples Holmes had at his disposal were the famous sights of Rome, but he might just as well have been writing about New York.

The movements of the amateur photographer—in most instances, he is probably a tourist—through the city resemble a photographic track that accompanies the flow of sightseeing with a continuous production of images: using photography, it provides the necessary authentication of what the naked eye probably did not even really see. As this practice of picture-collecting has become commonplace, the problem of how to use the forms thus captured and turned into images—Holmes already put the number in the billions—has become urgent. In the twenty-first century, we no longer need to look into the double eyepiece of a stereoscope. We can now simply go to Google Maps in order to complement the cartographic location of the attraction with a photograph of the same location. This practice, called “tagging,” seeks to make the “fixed and dear matter” coincide, in the medium of the city map, with the forms it has come to inhabit, its billions of representatives.

Astonishingly enough, Holmes incidentally also already envisioned the upshot this practice of picture-collecting would have: “The consequence of this will soon be such an enormous collection of forms that they will have to be classified and arranged in vast libraries, as books are now. The time will come when a man who wishes to see any object, natural or artificial, will go to the Imperial, National, or City Stereographic Library.”<sup>6</sup>

Today, we no longer strictly speaking even need to make our way to a library. For what if not an “enormous collection of forms” are those maps annotated by thousands of photographs that Google Maps maintains? And even more: as Google Street View works to build a virtually seamless photographic record of cities and eventually entire countries, the “tagging” of amateur photographers, too,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

comes to look like little more than a modest gesture, an attempt to recycle pictures. As early as 2007, users at computers anywhere in the world can comfortably step into the streets of New York City. Sitting at our computer screens, we thus become visual flâneurs in a picture gallery that has declared nothing less than the entire metropolis an exhibit on display. Filling the walls of this gallery, however, has not been the work of the thousands upon thousands of snapshot-takers roaming the city every day; nor did an ambitious artist contribute to the preparations for this exhibition. In contrast with such forms of subjective appropriation, Google Street View relies on the automatism of a moving photographic apparatus: the mechanical eye of a camera, mounted to the roof of a car, has taken these photographs, urging us to reframe the idea of the photographic appropriation of urban space.<sup>7</sup>

Yet as Edgar Leciejewski demonstrates in his series *ghosts and flowers*, this very redefinition broadens the spectrum of visual expression beyond the forms available to more traditional street photography. It may well be that the anonymous driver-photographers who, at Google's behest, went for endless rides up and down the streets, were really not interested in anything but the city's architectural built environment. But the by-catch—a word fishermen use with regard to their nets—is quite considerable also in the case of Google Street View. We only need to pull our eyes away from the buildings and, looking at the pictures, turn our attention to what the producers of these images would probably have liked to efface altogether. Once we allow ourselves to be drawn into this game of spotting the casual detail, we realize what lofty visual poetry this process of total photographic recording paves the way for. A focused search through the photographic documentation of urban space aiming to overwhelm us with its thoroughness enables us to isolate, amid the prosaic

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<sup>7</sup> As Nana Last has demonstrated, the photographic practices of Rem Koolhaas, Thomas Struth, and others anticipate this sort of aesthetic experience of urban space. See Nana Last, "Reimag(in)ing the Urban," *Visual Resources* 26 (2010), 61–78.

continuum, such traces in which the commonplace condenses into poetic expression. And it is to these traces that Leciejewski's method of the appropriation of an appropriation draws our attention.

Leciejewski is particularly interested in passersby. Serving as involuntary models, these nameless and faceless New Yorkers fill Google Street View's pictures with a sense of everyday life. Here a young man stands by a stoop, while there a young woman in a white dress is just turning a street corner; this man is obviously carrying groceries home, as the bags in his hands indicate, while that one is running on the hard pavement of Leroy Street. All these interactions not only take place in urban space; they much rather point to that space as one of everyday experience the endless photographic image of Google Street View unlocks and then keeps open for the subsequent observation of a single fleeting moment.

At the same time, however, the selection of details and the translation into the format of the large photographic print deliberately transfigures these passersby in Leciejewski's pictures, stripping them of the last vestiges of the semblance of casualness. As privacy-protection regulations require, they have been rendered anonymous, deprived of their faces, and thus turned into specters. Yet they can nonetheless be read as witnesses to a present that now, when we cast a look straight into their everyday lives, lies years in the past. As Leciejewski's cautious approach illustrates, what we gain by so looking is a fascinating gallery of photographic images that claims to be a document of the metropolis and its residents. A document, however, that is predicated on a twofold exclusion: the first takes place by virtue of the movement of a camera mounted to the roof of a vehicle and guided through the city at a specific point in time. The second

exclusion concerns the isolation of details, as Leciejewski condenses individual views into fixed tableaux.<sup>8</sup> The “enormous collection of forms” Holmes prophesied a full century and a half ago—in the ongoing photographic survey of Google Street View it has finally become reality. Holmes’s fantasy in the genre of media history was explicitly conceived with a collection of buildings in mind, and the same objective was behind the launch of Google Street View a few years ago, or so it must seem to the superficial observer. But throughout its history, street photography—the very name of Google’s project is token of the intention to continue this tradition—has always been more than an exclusively architectural picture gallery. For just as an architectonic setting can be simulated in the studio in order to place human beings about to be photographed in simulated contexts, the architectonic setting of the street will always be a conspicuously unreal place when it explicitly renounces the image of the human being.<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin had already wondered about Eugène Atget’s photographs of Paris from the turn of the century before the last one: “Remarkably, however, almost all of these pictures are empty. Empty is the Porte d’Arcueil by the fortifications, empty are the triumphal steps, empty are the courtyards, empty the café terraces, empty, as it should be, is the Place du Tertre. They are not lonely, merely without mood; the city in these pictures looks cleared out, like a lodging that has not yet found a new tenant.”<sup>10</sup>

What the earliest artists in the history of photography, such as Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot, had to accept as the effect of overly long exposure times, what was the product of an aesthetic decision in Eugène Atget or, once again,

8 On this principle of an appropriating gesture see also Elisabeth Neudörfl, “Photography vs. Visibility: Seeing Unseen Aspects of the City,” *Visual Resources* 26 (2010), 13–29.

9 See Ute Eskildsen (ed.), *Street & Studio. An Urban History of Photography* (London: Tate, 2008), and Lydia Yee, Whitney Rugg (eds.), *Street Art, Street Life. From the 1950s to Now* (New York: Aperture, 2008).

10 Walter Benjamin, “Little History of Photography” [1931], in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2: 1927–1934, Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, Gary Smith (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 507–30, quote p. 519 (translation modified). At the end of the twentieth century, Thomas Struth will apply a comparable gesture of photographic abstraction in his series of street photographs. For a more extensive discussion, see Annette Emde, *Thomas Struth—Stadt- und Straßensbilder. Architektur und öffentlicher Raum in der Fotografie der Gegenwartskunst* (Marburg: Jonas, 2008).

in Thomas Struth—in the urban gallery Google Street View places at the disposal of the onscreen flâneur it becomes a challenge: the removal of the human being from his own habitat. Against the idea of a deserted city, Edgar Leciejewski's research in the space of photography offers a collection of images that emphasizes the presence of people in that same space. If Cindy Sherman's shrewd *Bus Riders* series literally blanked out the interactions of its subjects by removing not the people but the city, Leciejewski's series *ghosts and flowers* insistently brings out the interplay between people and space, between resident and city. But these pictures are most "remarkable," as Benjamin might put it, when the crack becomes apparent that remains the unimpeachable precondition of this labor to produce an automatic survey of everyday life in New York. The suture between two pictures running straight through a passerby's body is probably the most forceful reminder that we ought not to shed the skepticism with which we rightly regard all pictures even in the face of this indeed "enormous collection of forms."

*Gaze through the mirror*

The act of the photographic recording of entire cities and the subsequent inauguration of photo galleries on the Internet that keep a metropolis at hand as a single great continuum would seem to have fulfilled, and indeed more than fulfilled, Oliver Wendell Holmes's idea of the picture collection so large it will require vast libraries. But the import of the distinction between "matter" and "form" Holmes spoke of becomes clear once we examine the pictures in the series *ghosts and flowers* more closely with a view to how they are made as photographs. They were taken by a machine that appropriates the city to itself with the cold gaze of automatic recording, while mercilessly dissecting the continuity of that city into individual panoramic images. Subsequently

composed into an encompassing whole by what is without a doubt an impressive feat of computing, these images are nonetheless rarely free of traces of displacement that, as some of Leciejewski's pictures make explicit, may even run straight through a passerby's body. These cracks must, at least for the time being, shatter the utopia of the exchangeability of matter and its form transformed into an image.

The gaze at these pictures is a gaze right into the streets of New York—under the conditions of a reality engendered by photographic means. Since 1839, the year photographic processes were first brought to public notice and exhibited in display windows on Broadway, New York has been a particularly prominent example of the exploration of ways of using the picture to describe and experience the metropolitan space. The sediments of the history of the picture that have gradually built up in this fashion are today without a doubt the central challenge the attempt to see in this city faces. What, then, can we even see here for all these images? Images we carry with ourselves? Images that surround us in the public space? Images in a space we believe we can walk through from anywhere, sitting at our computer screens? And what can we say about this seeing? Focusing our gaze, Leciejewski's appropriations of an "enormous collection of forms" offer one decisive hint: to find answers to these questions we would do well to examine the mirror all these photographs constitute with an eye sensitive to detail; so that ultimately we may manage to catch a glimpse, through the mirrors, of what is behind.

Prof. Dr. Steffen Siegel, Berlin 2010

translated by Gerrit Jackson

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## Definitions

by Christin Krause

In an essay entitled *The Museum's Old, The Library's New Subject*, Douglas Crimp recounts how, researching in New York's Public Library for documentary material for a film, he comes across Ed Ruscha's book *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* in the "transportation" section rather than, as he would have expected, the "art" department.<sup>11</sup> Edgar Leciejewski's *Aves* likewise defies the attempt to assign it to an unequivocal systematic place. Located at the intersection between art and natural science, the artist's scanographs might also be found under the headword "ornithology."

Perhaps we can compare them to the illustrations in eighteenth-century encyclopedic works whose draftsmen, rather than merely recording what they actually saw, interpreted their object, emphasizing, correcting, or idealizing features they believed were important. With the invention of photography, science turned its back on its illustrators, thinking it now had an instrument at its disposal that let nature speak for itself, registering instead of interpreting. The photographic lens was to serve the analysis of scientific objects as a guarantor of objectivity, registering in order to compare, classify, and archive.

The scanographic procedure on which the series *Aves* is based is fundamentally comparable to the photogram, the direct imprint of an object positioned atop light-sensitive material, considered to be a *vera icon* of nature, authentic and objective, unaffected by artistic interpretation and creative intervention. Edgar Leciejewski, however, flouts the expectation of objectivity people

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<sup>11</sup> Douglas Crimp, "The Museum's Old, the Library's New Subject," in *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 66–83.

bring to his medium, leading us back to the way illustrators worked: arranges, corrects, interprets. In so doing, he abandons important features that distinguish the genres in favor of aesthetic decisions. The postures of song thrush, siskin, and great titmouse, for instance, hide the shapes of their beaks, and physical proportions, which the photogram renders unaltered, are virtually impossible to tell from Leciejewski's scanographs. Yet whereas the photogram is compelled to renounce the representation of surface structures, the scanographs depict these same structures with striking physical intensity and acuity.

In many respects, *Aves* recalls the plant studies Karl Blossfeldt published in 1928 in the book *Urformen der Kunst*. Like Blossfeldt, Leciejewski strives to compile the greatest possible variety of species and shapes, presenting his objects as though they needed to meet the requirements of scientific study, and yet they are ultimately useless. The artists are interested not so much in scientific value as rather in shapes and structures. Making these shapes and structures visible takes more than mere photographic reproduction, as Karl Blossfeldt explains:

"When I put a common horsetail in someone's hand, they will have no difficulty producing a photographic magnification of it—anyone can do that. But observing, seeing and finding the shapes, that is something only very few people are capable of."<sup>12</sup>

Blossfeldt was interested not in the object as such but in the shapes that appeared when he prepared that object and arranged it before photographing. In so doing, he increasingly removed the plant from its natural shape,<sup>13</sup> bringing ornaments to light that served him and his students at the Institute of the Museum of Decorative Arts, Berlin, as templates on which they modeled their

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<sup>12</sup> Karl Blossfeldt, unpublished essay [1929], quoted in Agnes Matthias, "Der Fotograf als Modelleur. Karl Blossfeldt fotografiert Pflanzen," in *Bilder machen. Fotografie als Praxis*, Bertram Kaschek, Jürgen Müller, Wilfried Wiegand (eds.) (Dresden: Technische Universität, 2010), 47.

<sup>13</sup> Ulrike Meyer Stump, "Karl Blossfeldts Arbeitscollagen: Ein fotografisches Skizzenbuch," in *Karl Blossfeldt. Arbeitscollagen*, Ann Wilde, Jürgen Wilde (eds.) (Munich: Schirmer & Mosel, 2000), 11.

creations. Leciejewski's series *Aves* likewise foregrounds shapes and structures. He, too, stages his object. And as the latter changes its form, the gaze upon it changes as well, balancing uneasily between the recognition of a blackbird or a starling and the perception of abstract shapes.

Leciejewski fixes each animal in a different posture. The eighteenth-century scientific illustrator would presumably present the birds in a way that underlines their characteristic features. The taxidermist, by contrast, would prefer a posture that is characteristic of the species, the aim being to convey the greatest possible sense of animation. Their decisions, no less than those the artist makes, are motivated by their personal histories as well as historical and cultural factors, as the taxidermist and ornithologist Hermann Funk in Marcel Beyer's novel *Kaltenburg* explains, relating the story of two mounted white-tailed eagles Crown Prince Rudolf von Habsburg shot during a hunt only days before committing suicide:

"It is unlikely that there should be similarly strange mounted animals anywhere, the posture, the facial expression, the plumage: after all, the taxidermist, going to work, had not only two dead birds on the table in front of him but another, a third dead body on his mind, and so the two eagles—we might even say: the one double eagle—turned under his hands into grief-stricken birds staring mournfully, their wings drooping, as though they already sensed on the day of the hunt that their shooter would soon take his own life."<sup>14</sup>

Leciejewski deceives his beholder, whom the sculptural quality of his pictures strikes as a *trompe-l'oeil* of sorts. So do the studio shots, photographs taken on different days in the fashion of a diary that document considerations on how photography is used

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<sup>14</sup> Marcel Beyer, *Kaltenburg* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), 71.

and how it operates. Here, too, the gaze wavers, between the illusion of three-dimensionality and the plane surface on which it emerges, between optical illusion and disillusionment. Hung on the studio walls are prints of the artist's photographs, but also printouts of found photographs as well as newspaper clippings and notes—loose leaves that seem to detach themselves from the plane surface of the picture. In *Lauter Fetzen*, a text that consists of a collection of quotes, Edgar Leciejewski himself gives what is probably the best description of his work on the wall, as a sequential arrangement of fragments, borrowed ones and others that are his. A model for Edgar Leciejewski's studio photographs can be found in an early photograph by Alfred Stieglitz, *Sunlight and Shadows: Paula/Berlin*. Following Rosalind Krauss's analysis, we can recognize in that picture also something we might almost call a "catalogue of self-definition: an elaborate construction through which we are shown what, in its very nature, a photograph is."<sup>15</sup> Edgar Leciejewski's work studies the same question.

Christin Krause, Paris, 2011  
translated by Gerrit Jackson

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Edgar Leciejewski, *Himmel ohne Wolken*, 2011 Berlin

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<sup>15</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Stieglitz/Equivalents," *October* 11 (Winter 1979), 129–140.

Appendix: **Lauter Fetzen [Nothing But Rags]**

This is not about human fallibility. Imagine someone trying to fly by imitating, as best he can, the strokes of a pigeon's wings with his hands and arms. Can we describe his inability to fly as an instance of failure? Perhaps we can say that it was a failure, but failure of what? Where there is no prospect of success there is no failure. O you, beloved of my 27 senses, I lurv you! Hello, your red dresses, sawn apart into white folds, let's leave the fatty scaffold out that makes reality round. Not to invent anything, no idea, no composition, no object, no form—and to preserve everything, composition, object, form, idea, image. That fire will burn me when I stretch my hand into it: that is certainty. Which is to say, there we see what certainty means. Not just what the word "certainty" means, but also what it is about. We are not here to find each other nice. In the technical exploration of the invisible we can observe a "self-will" in the apparatuses, two women and a boy. *We are made in the dark.* Arrival in everyday life. Bones paper and tubes, do not throw them into the ash pits! Ah, there is no more painful yearning than that for things that never were! What I feel when I remember my real past, when I cry over the dead body of the life of my childhood that has passed ... is incomparable to the painfully trembling fervor with which I lament the unreality of my modest dream-visions. Even of those less important ones I remember having seen no more than once in my pseudo-life, when they turned a street corner in the world of my vision or passed a doorway off a street I walked up and down in my dream.

Edgar Leciejewski, Berlin 2008

translated by Gerrit Jackson

***Ghostbusting the Image Machine***

*Berliner Zeitung 2011 January*

*by Kito Nedo*

The photographic world of the online service Google Street View is a peculiar place. The camera vehicles that roam the streets on behalf of the search engine corporation usually fan out on sunny days and at times when the streets they capture tend to be deserted, and so they produce a different picture of urban life. When people nonetheless make it into the shots, an image recognition software erases their faces, just as it renders the number plates of cars illegible. In Germany, many residents have also exercised their right, guaranteed by privacy protection laws, to have their homes blurred by digital fog.

The result is an incredible large and surreal collection of images that are at once blurry and rich in detail, a snap-frozen present that has for some time held a magical allure, inspiring the work especially of younger artists. One of them is the photographer Edgar Leciejewski, who was born in 1977 and currently lives in Leipzig.

In his first solo exhibition at Schlechtriem Brothers, the artist, who graduated from the Leipzig Academy of Visual Arts in 2009, presents eight out of eighteen large-format pictures contained in the series "Ghosts and Flowers," created in 2010.

The photographs are based on New York streetscapes the artist found on Google Street View. They show people blurred into anonymity as they move through the streets of Harlem, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens—places Leciejewski roamed during a six-month study visit to the American metropolis.

The quality of the images indicates their digital origins: they are strangely lacking in clear contours, the colors blend into one another. Where

individual digital tiles abut, slight displacements appear—cracks and invisible edges that crisscross the pictures. The faces appear shrouded in fog, and here and there the Google watermark with which the corporation brands its images shows through—Leciejewski has not effaced all impurities in the process of digital post-production.

Where the photographers of classical American street photography were determined to put the human being at the center of their visual practice, Leciejewski chooses a different path. Since Google Street View is primarily interested in buildings and streets—people are felt to be a nuisance—the artist turns the medium against its original intention.

The results look like ghost stories that have floated up from the depths of the Internet. Some time ago, in the 1990s, Nicholas Negroponte said that the encounter between the computer and art brings out “mostly the negative aspects of each side.” That has long ceased to be true.

Galerie Schlechtriem Brothers, Rosa- Luxemburg-Straße 27 (Berlin-Mitte). Until February 26, Wed-Sat, 12noon-6pm. A catalogue is being prepared.

Kito Nedo, Berlin 2011  
translated by Gerrit Jackson

**With my eyelids cut out**

**By Edgar Leciejewski**

Objects mark destinations. He looked at me. I looked through him, into myself, glanced out the window. We sat at the table, it was early morning, we drank tea and ate dry bread with honey. The sweetness of the crystals could not distract us from the fact that a new day had broken.

I looked out the window at the roofs, at the disused chimneys, at the church spire on which the sun, the light of the day, had appeared a short while ago. Behind them more chimneys and roofs and sky. The antennas on the roofs, the new smokestacks of our civilization. You can't see the ground from here, I thought, and turned my gaze toward the sky, the sun, which would soon disappear from the frame of the window. Last ray falling into the room as signs of the arrival of noon, the circuit of the sun. My window north-east, a morning window. I at the table, my gaze through it, through him. He was there, I smelled him, heard him breathe and heard the cracking of the dry bread. His incisors bit, the molars did the rest.

Roofs staggered in front of and behind one another formed the depth of my vision. The window frame a closed unit. The window itself, a coffered window, one of those old industrial windows with many small individual panes separated by metal braces that structured my gaze the way graph paper structures the mathematical drawing. The cross on the spire, the tallest peak in the territory, resembled the antennas on the adjacent roofs. They formed the crosshairs, points of rest for my wandering eyes. Strolling from peak to peak, to roof, to tower, methodically ordered by metal braces, refracted in the glass of the panes.

The helicopter always flies to the accident site. I looked for his

circling in the sky, in the frame of the window. None was in sight that morning. No accident, no site. Only roofs covered with black tar paper and a few with red bricks. In the distance a yellow prefabricated flat-roofed building. The spire, pointed in its greenish-gray leaden attire, the chimneys of red brick and the antennas black, the sky without clouds. I listened to the grinding molars. The dry bread crackled.

In an old photograph I once saw many industrial smokestacks and even more chimneys projecting above the roofs. Smoke and soot rose from all of them. Gazing into the distance must have been impossible. Vision cut off by white, soot-soaked plumes. Now that the spire formed the only remaining rise, that the great smokestacks no longer steamed, that they had altogether disappeared, that the small ones no longer smoked, the antennas and the cross on the spire formed the new exhaust channels. The gaze, free. Free of industrial smoke. Free for the depth, for the destinations of my vision.

I saw. That is the main function of seeing. The destinations of the roofs, the chimneys, the spire, the antennas enveloped in morning light. But he who sat in front of me, through whom I gazed, was the central union of my here and now. Together, he and I, here at the table, we were the proposition, the closed statement in space, and in the corners of the mouth breadcrumbs and honeybee crystals.

*Bubble*

*by Edgar Leciejewski*

*The bubble doesn't make you, but it's you that makes the bubble.*

*To put it more concretely: You're like a child blowing soap bubbles, blowing or producing more and more bubbles, never stopping, because you hope you'll blow one bubble more colorful than the last one. You therefore forget that you're blowing bubbles.*

*So that one bubble will remain?*

*That's the problem. They just explode. They pop in and pop out.*

*Isn't it pretty?*

*Sure, pretty bubbles in the air. Pop goes the weasel. They fly so high, nearly reach the sky. That's the problem. That's why it begins at all, the blowing, the senseless part of it.*

*Because one wants a bubble that really exists?*

*A bubble that ,should' exist, I'd say, because they don't actually exist at all. It should be one that could retain its form for more than a few seconds. To put it in a more abstract way:  
You don't want utopia just flying around in your*

*mind, you want to see utopia realized in a concrete way.*

*Bubbles flying around, popping in and out, isn't it so?*

*A bubble that was just blown by your own hands and mouth is touchable. You feel it when it explodes on your hands and face. While you're blowing and producing bubbles instantly, the bubble performs it's own appearance.*

*Are you interested in natural sciences*

*I am interested in molecules. The Sufis say every single man is a planet, turning in a circle, full of ecstasy. But I say every single man is a sentence of different molecules, turning in a circle, full of ecstasy. In the near future one will be able to make used things new again, reconfiguring their molecules.*

*Utopia grows ever better the longer we wait.*