Rainer Ganahl, *Reading Karl Marx, London, England, 2000*, 2000, C-print, dimensions variable (artwork © Rainer Ganahl)

It asks questions about film because film is beginning to ask itself questions. . . . In this sense, the camera that filmed itself in a mirror would make the ultimate movie.
—Jean-Luc Godard, speaking about *La Chinoise*

Chris Mills and Nick Muellner

No Ideas but in Things: Photography at Learning's Limit

Jean-Luc Godard's 1967 film *La Chinoise* is rife with images of books and reading: students with books in their hands or engrossed alone with a text, tableaux of couples entwined with each other and their slim volumes, the actress Anne Wiazemsky peeking, gun in hand, through a wall of Mao's little red books, creating an unforgettable visual link between violence and knowledge. Godard's interest lies in a critique of comfortable bourgeois students playacting at violence and revolution, but it also connects to issues of learning, pedagogy, and the levels of inherent or underwriting coercion they contain. *La Chinoise* was also the title of a 2002 gallery exhibition. The show began a conversation between the two authors of this essay, a project that resulted in the two distinct but interdependent essays that follow. Subsequent encounters with the photographs of Rainer Ganahl and the text *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, by Vilém Flusser, furthered the exchange. The alternating structure of this paper allows common queries and sources to circulate through two associated and separate voices.

A philosophy of photography must reveal the fact that there is no place for human freedom within the area of automated, programmed, and programming apparatuses, in order finally to show a way in which it is nevertheless possible to open up a space for freedom. The task of a philosophy of photography is to reflect upon this possibility of freedom—and thus its significance—in a world dominated by apparatuses; to reflect upon the way in which, despite everything, it is possible for human beings to give significance to their lives in the face of the chance necessity of death. Such a philosophy is necessary because it is the only form of revolution left open to us.
—Vilém Flusser

Learning Seeing

My first exposure to the work of Rainer Ganahl was in 2002 at a show entitled *La Chinoise* in New York's Baumgartner gallery. The show was curated around Jean-Luc Godard's film of the same name (and its tropes). Ganahl's contribution included two large-scale photographs of the philosopher Antonio Negri's library. The photographs stayed with me. Beyond the initial question of any reader when faced with the library of another—what's there?—I also felt that these images from the library of the coauthor of *Empire* offered, more than anything, a sense of potential. *His* book came from *those* books (in the "you are what you eat" model), and to see the books in their setting offered a feeling of immanence, an almost-glow of possibility. It was this preconception, this leaning toward learning, which haunted my reception of Ganahl's project *Reading Karl Marx*.

Reading Karl Marx is an artist's book project, produced with Bookworks, London. The book, composed of photographs taken during a series of seminars in Europe and the United States, features students reading Marx with Ganahl while, presumably, he shoots photographs. The book's text is drawn from online conversations about the project itself, as well as over two hundred listings (from

The initial, italicized part of the title is from William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, Book I (New York: New Directions, 1992), 6. The fuller excerpt reads:
"—Say it, no ideas but in things—
nothing but the blank faces of the houses
and cylindrical trees
bent, forked by preconception and accident—
split, furrowed, creased, mottled, stained—
secret—into the body of the light!"

The epigraph is from "Struggle on Two Fronts: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard," *Film Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (Winter 1968): 21. The second quotation is from Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. Anthony Matthews (London: Reaktion, 2000), 82.

the 1,679 that came up) when Ganahl entered "Karl Marx" in the Amazon.com search engine. Originally conceived and exhibited as a gallery-based installation, *Reading Karl Marx* is framed by Ganahl as a project produced in book form due to fears that installing the images in a gallery "diminishes the potential of a classical exchange, and that [his] beautiful photographs of young people reading Karl Marx with [him would] risk ending up like other Ganahl works: in storage."[1] (That the text has gone out of print and is generally available only in university libraries and gallery collections will remain a footnote here.)

In these images, Ganahl sets up a number of formal and conceptual parallels: from the Innsbruck readings, a photograph of a woman and a glass in a corresponding construction—with Marx's text on the table's center, glass and woman are side by side in a stark room, the top of her head excised, the glass's stem under erasure as well, two waiting receptacles both completed by and in the service of the text on the table.

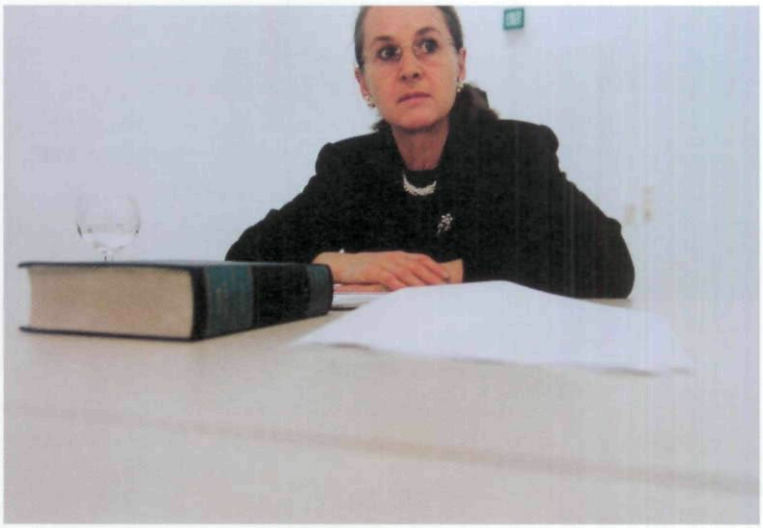
From Frankfurt, a perched grouping: woman and stemmed glasses on tabletop. The flat and scattered texts around them add to the illusion that they are floating. As though knowledge is somehow the air-hockey-table flotation device that levitates, this group is buoyed as we both see and see through them, objects as well as functions: pointers. With appendages close to the body, this woman seems compact and contained, coiled capability, waiting. Receptacles—the woman intent on the distance, the glass, as always, open to its future—their stillness feels active, with potential energy held close. Glasses in these photos are enlivened and become aligned with the humans; together, they are a part of an audience grouping, objects taking in some offstage spectacle.

Last, and my favorite, this young man, also in Germany, stuck in a half-empty/half-full predicament, the glasses here both *repoussoir* and runway for the eye, the push-pull of their focus eventually leading to his earnest stillness. That his face is perfectly framed and yet slightly out of focus seems a dynamic heuristic for the problems and possibilities of the photograph, especially in relation to watching learning, to capturing comprehension in the process of documentation. We look through these beckoning glasses straight to that finger-supported face, and it seems that we, too, are supposed to be learning. Since these framing devices function so potently, it is fair to employ them to question what Ganahl is trying to tell us—what is he meaning? (As Gertrude Stein says, "What is the meaning of photographs/Yes I mean it.")[2] Barthes suggests that we see *through* the photograph to its object, and in these photographs, Ganahl goes further and leads us through the objects as well. Yet it remains unclear to what he is leading us—can one person ever experience the learning of another? In these images of glasses and learners, there is an accreted conceptual suggestion of transparency: if we can see through the glass, so formally located in resonance with the learners, then surely we can see through to the learning; yet, in these flattened offerings, we are refused.

Ganahl's choice to document this process photographically seems one of his smartest moves, for to watch someone learn, to see "learning" performed, is to be excluded, to be excised from precisely the progression that the learner is undergoing. The process of comprehension, so basic and continuous, can only ever be experienced internally, and so the photograph, whose fulfillment is always (also) internal and individual, seems the perfect medium for this project.

1. Rainer Ganahl, *Reading Karl Marx* (London: Bookworks, 2001), x.
2. Gertrude Stein, *Last Operas and Plays* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1949), 152.

Rainer Ganahl, *Reading Karl Marx, Innsbruck, Austria, 1999*, 1999, C-print, dimensions variable (artwork © Rainer Ganahl)



Rainer Ganahl, *Reading Karl Marx, Frankfurt, Germany, 2000*, 2000, C-print, dimensions variable (artwork © Rainer Ganahl)

Rainer Ganahl, *Reading Karl Marx, Frankfurt, Germany, 2000*, 2000, C-print, dimensions variable (artwork © Rainer Ganahl)

Ganahl's photographs resonate in their stillness, and video's ability to capture movement would not enhance the process; the act of learning houses so much repetition, so many aporias, so many excesses—and each one individual. In this case, then, the photograph consciously functions in one of the roles of its critique: as a trace that underscores both what is missing and what overflows it, the photograph is a resonant stand-in for the *process* of photography. In these images, the crossing from text to performance is often marked by students in mid-gesture or on the verge of speech, and these snapshotlike images are culled from experiences that are, at base, quotidian—for if viewers haven't experienced reading Marx in a classroom, they have presumably learned something else, somewhere, or been in a situation of learning that involves the kind of call and response pictured here. But I wonder about the rehearsal of transparency. I wonder what it is that we can see through to.

Vilém Flusser in *Towards A Philosophy of Photography* tells us, "Images signify—mainly—something 'out there' in space and time that they have to make comprehensible to us as abstractions (as reductions of the four dimensions of space and time to the two surface dimensions). The specific ability to abstract surfaces out of space and time and project them back into space is what is known as imagination. It is the precondition for the production and coding of images."[3] Flusser's description of imagination can also be applied to learning—a process certainly bound up with imagination. Is that not exactly what we are watching these students do as they take Marx's abstractions, personalize and concretize them, even as they immediately begin to reabstract these concepts in order to project them into a dimensional future? Is imagination the unseen for Ganahl? Is he attempting to stop us before we follow our own route of reabstraction? The ability to move from the abstract to the imagined concrete—and back again—is a process that may be interrupted and, in the pause, examined. It is a moment of investigating labor—for seeing an object within a photograph and making it the focus, rather than the bounded square you hold in your hand, entails imaginative work. Doubling that process—as the abstraction of learning is opened, made, if you will, see-through—seems a supremely imaginative act, a revolutionary act, seems at heart world-making.

• • •

Photography, like Marxism, has a convoluted history of struggle with the questions of abstraction and materiality. The medium is mired in two competing rhetorics: that of the machine outside of abstraction, which makes images only from the phenomenon of light bouncing off the thing itself in front of the lens; and that of the abstraction device par excellence, which immediately and pervasively abstracts three dimensions into two and pulls temporality into the abstracted space of perpetual stillness.

The contradiction at the heart of the photograph's relationship to presence raises profound questions about action, agency, and documentation, and its implications are both epistemological and political. The following encounters consider works that deploy the photograph's ontological bind in an effort to investigate the often paralyzing (and parallel) melancholy that characterizes the current state of Marxist inquiry.

In 1847, Marx elegantly, and with a measure of sarcastic pleasure, responded

3. Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. Anthony Mathews (London: Reaktion, 2000), 8.

to reading his Socialist contemporary Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's *La Philosophie de la misère* in his work, *La Misère de la philosophie*. His most insistent critique of Proudhon concerned the French theorist's constant recourse to "logical categories"—abstractions—in the face of the facts of present conditions and a method of historical materialism. Thus, he wrote:

> Is there occasion to be surprised that everything, in the final abstraction, because it is abstraction and not analysis, presents itself in the state of *logical category*? Is there need to be astonished that in casting down little by little all which constitutes the individuality of a house, that in making abstraction of the materials of which it is composed, of the form which distinguishes it, you would come to have nothing but a body—*that in making abstraction of the limits of this body you would very soon have nothing but an empty space*—that, finally, in making abstraction of the dimensions of this space you would finish by having nothing more than quantity pure and simple, the logical category? . . . Thus the metaphysicians . . . imagine that in making these abstractions they make an analysis, and . . . in proportion as they detach more and more from certain objects imagine that they approach the point of penetrating them . . .[4]

The recent historical period lays Marx's work and its legacies open to the particular dilemma of abstraction versus material conditions that he strove so hard to avoid and critique. A pressing question for Marxist thought in this postcommunist era is precisely to grapple with the evident problems of translating a comprehensive utopian system of ideas into material results.

In *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, Flusser argues the illusionary nature of what he calls the "technical image" in a mode strikingly analogous to Marx's critique of philosophical abstraction—and to the ways this critique returns to haunt his legacy. Cameras are, Flusser insists, "products of applied scientific texts"—the singular results of a particular theory of optical representation. Thus, the photograph, by its nature, "is an image of concepts." Photographs represent "the capacity to transcode concepts from texts into images," while perpetuating the illusion that what we see is "the world out there."[5] Like utopian communism (or any other totalizing ideology), photography encourages theory to pass into the image of reality that Flusser calls a "situation"—a conceptually and temporally removed artifice. As Marx's historical materialism dissolves into the magical illusionism of a utopian future, so photography elides its rhetoric of factuality with an abstraction that stands for concepts and presents itself as reality.

The "photographic program" that Flusser describes can, in the right hands, make for compelling political theater. A brief return to a very different moment in leftist political thought—the early years of the Russian Soviet state—reminds us that utopian Marxism and photography can operate in a mutually supportive mode, reinforcing the representational illusionism that infects both systems.

Following the October Revolution, Aleksandr Rodchenko eagerly took on a three-pronged photographic problem: how to represent material conditions, the dynamic struggle toward communism, *and* the idealized utopian future within a single photographic frame. His solution: collapsing these political mandates of his representational agenda by recourse to a vocabulary of formal abstraction.

His 1929 photographs of the laying of asphalt demonstrate layers of abstraction and materiality that are inseparable and compelling. The workers of today lay

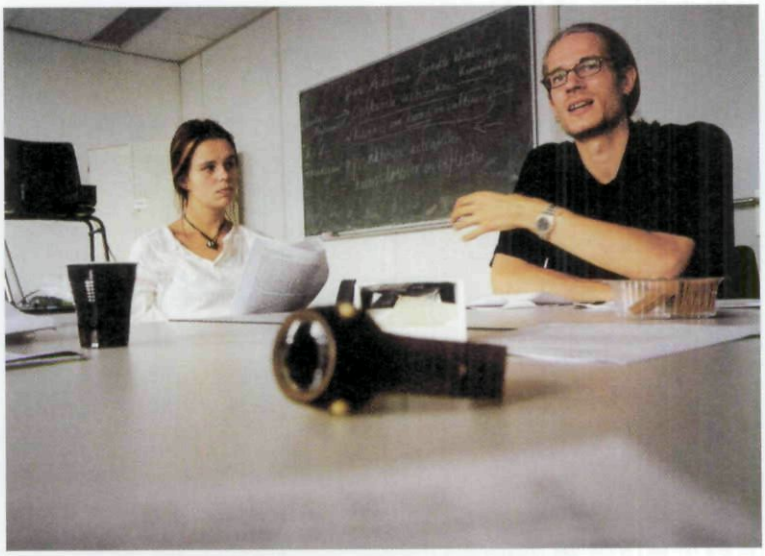
4. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, trans. H. Quelch (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995), 115, emphasis added.
5. Flusser, 11–25.

Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Asphalting a Street in Moscow*, 1929, gelatin silver print, 9⅝ x 11 13/16 in. (24.4 x 30 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gilman Collection, purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew W. Saul Gift, 2005. (Artwork © Estate of Aleksandr Rodchenko/RAO, Moscow/VAGA, New York; image provided by the Metropolitan Museum of Art)

down the pathway to the future (the industrial modernity of asphalt paving being evident to his contemporary viewers), in which are inscribed the iconic shadows of the proletarian crowd. Radical framing, vertiginous angles, and dramatically induced vanishing points urge the abstract sense of utopian possibility when the photograph may not generate it from material subjects. Photography's rhetoric of physical fact provides us with both the conditions and the struggle. A formal language of receding and dynamic planes constitutes the third mandate, standing in for the utopian, theorized future.

Following the recent collapse or capitalist reinvention of many so-called communist states, the prospects of utopian socialism seem radically foreclosed—its idealist narratives dismissed precisely at the juncture of theory and practice that Rodchenko's photographic system celebrates. In the context of this crisis, there is room for a photography about idealizing theory that points to, rather than replicates, this formal and historical sleight of hand. The photographic and formal countermeasures that contemporary works by Ganahl and Joachim Koester employ refocus our reading not on the elision of contradiction, but on the problematic suspension that this paradox creates.

In writing a critical text inspired explicitly by the problems of reading another's work, Marx anticipated or perhaps provoked his own treatment at the hands of the Austrian-born Ganahl in *Reading Karl Marx*. I first encountered this work in 2000 as a series of large, clean, aesthetic, and autonomous photographs of seminar participants in their surroundings, engaged in the acts of reading, discussing, and attempting to understand Marx's work. These bright, well-lit tableaux of attractive youth, smartly dressed and well accessorized, read immediately as lovely pictures. But I was particularly struck by what interferes, physically, with getting to the ideas: the stuff. Materiality, in a myriad of forms, lies between the viewer of the photographs and the ideas allegedly under discussion.



Rainer Ganahl, *Reading Karl Marx, Arnhem, The Netherlands, 2000*, 2000, C-print, dimensions variable (artwork © Rainer Ganahl)

Rainer Ganahl, *Reading Karl Marx, Toulouse, France, 2000*, 2000, C-print, dimensions variable (artwork © Rainer Ganahl)

The viewer must repeatedly navigate a table's-eye view that proposes incidental objects—the things that situate lived presence—as oversized, often blurry and foreshortened blockades to the actions of reading and theoretical understanding. Things, not concepts, dominate the realms of seductive abstraction in the images: the lustrous photographic surface holds expanses of Formica, large planes of books and papers, sculptural forms of drinking glasses. Rather than championing, as Rodchenko did, the fusion of ideal and present conditions, Ganahl's formal structures force the banality of material conditions to place the communication of pure ideas—in the mediated forms of grasped texts, obviously readable thought (in expression), and verbal discourse (indicated by pursed lips, exchanged gazes, gestures)—into a secondary space behind the foregrounded and aestheticized physical props of the material present. Ganahl's photographs have turned the elements of Rodchenko's rhetoric against one another, so that formal construction and material description conspire to stop idealist progress in its tracks.

Learning is a central act necessary to the linear movement of a utopian project —as implicated in this progress as is the paving of roads. But the situation of learning in these images evokes nothing so much as the suspension of it. Understanding, that mark of pedagogical progress, becomes impossible to locate in the glazed faces, confused looks, suspicious stares, and furrowed brows that populate these silent, inarticulable tableaux of trying to know.

Flusser perversely and idealistically defines a photographer as "a person who tries to make photographs with information not contained in the camera system." For him, photographers must be "conscious of the fact that image, apparatus, program, and information constitute their basic problem. They are aware that they are trying to fetch those situations from out of the apparatus."[6] To photograph becomes an act of rebellion against photography, and it is this form of radicalism that constitutes the outrage and honesty of Ganahl's images. The camera cannot (or will not) show us the attainment of knowledge necessary to the logic of the idealist project and implicit in the documentary rhetoric of the "photographic program."

Seeing Learning

Mom, Dad, I'm OK. I had a few scrapes and stuff, but they washed them up and they're getting OK. And I caught a cold, but they are giving me pills for it and stuff. I am not being starved or beaten or unnecessarily frightened. I have heard some press reports, and so I know that Steve and all the neighbors are OK and that no one was really hurt. . . . I'm kept blindfolded usually so that I can't identify anyone. My hands are often tied, but generally they're not. I'm not gagged or anything, and I'm comfortable. And I think you can tell that I'm not really terrified or anything and that I'm okay.

Alone, and in a tightly framed close-up, video artist Sharon Hayes speaks. She recites a text drawn from the first audiotape that Patricia Hearst recorded after her kidnapping by the Symbionese Liberation Army in 1974. This is a record of the first word that the public received about Hearst's whereabouts or her condition and situation, and it is one of four communications that Hayes performs. Though she has partially memorized the text, there are gaps in her recollection, and as she speaks there are pauses, frozen moments, questioning looks, and repetition. At each glitch, a small audience in the room with Hayes—which we can hear but not see; we see only the artist's face—insistently corrects Hayes's delivery, using scripts of Hearst's speech. Hayes writes that her work "is concerned with developing new representational strategies that confuse the roles of 'self' and 'other' by situating them in constantly shifting and unreliable narratives," and that element is certainly present in this tape.[7] But I am also intrigued, when juxtaposing Hayes's work with Ganahl's, to consider a larger context of the possibilities of learning, coercion, and transparency—because one of the fascinating aspects of this work, beyond the frustration of watching Hayes remember and forget, forget and be told, beyond a feeling that she is compelled to remember, is the hope inherent in it. Watching the artist inhabit and not inhabit the space of the hostage-revolutionary gives a productive account of the action of subjectivization as well as offering a notion of self-fashioning. With every break Hayes takes, every pause, every "wait . . ." or "what . . ." we see the artist at work, trying to embody the very idea that vexes us about the Hearst case—what did Patricia Hearst learn? How much of the SLA rhetoric became personality? Does

6. Ibid., 58–60.
7. Sharon Hayes, artist statement available online at www.shaze.info.

Sharon Hayes, stills from *Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) Screeds #13, 16, 20, and 29*, 2002, videotape, sound (artwork © Sharon Hayes)

learning include cruelty? Can it be avoided? Does somehow sitting in a room reading Marx aloud fulfill some material consequence that his text desires? As Elin Diamond suggests, "When Brecht says that spectators should become historians, he refers both to the spectator's detachment, her 'critical' position *and* to the fact that she is writing her own history even as she absorbs messages from the stage."[8] Hayes functions in this tape as both spectator-historian and actor, situating herself (through Hearst's words) in the trajectory of theoretical history even as she performs her own agency.

Hayes's tape also evidences the power and necessity of a feminist rereading of Hearst in the life of the American public. One of the most powerful effects of the Hearst case—aside from the fact that a child of the famously affluent was abducted, amplified by the idea that she was, according to the SLA, taken in "an arrest warrant issued by the Court of the People"— was the fact that America watched one of its daughters become a terrorist in their midst. From February to April 1974, American viewers were fascinated to track the heiress-cum-revolutionary's arc. From televised photographs of the bright and smiling high-school senior to shots of her as part of a bank-robbery attempt (albeit with guns trained on her) to the infamous image of bereted and gun-toting Tania in front of the Symbionese Liberation Army flag with the rest of the SLA members, a country watched attentively as one of its citizens was radicalized before its mediatized eyes. At a time when women were burning their bras and demanding reproductive rights—including control of their own bodies—this televised image of Hearst's wilding was freighted with a deeper societal prospect. Her tapes, explicitly encoded with revolutionary rhetoric, are implicitly encoded with a sense of the femaleness of her representation. Repeated details about her physical well-being beg the question of whether she has been raped or sexually abused; ongoing discussions of her as a replacement for prisoners in San Quentin or her invocation of the Geneva Conventions remind us that she is a woman in a then-almost-exclusively male game of terrorism and resistance. Hayes's tight close-up and projected vulnerability in the process of remembrance and recitation call these aspects to mind, but also wisely leave them unresolved. Hayes's stops and starts, her hesitations and delivery, hint at a network of qualifiers that are present in the respeaking as a legacy of the codings that were inherent or applied in Hearst's tapes. If Hayes had been too determinate in her performance, the respeaking would have been less available to the viewer. The simple and straightforward presentation of her piece opens a space for viewers' contemplation.

Another important aspect of this work concerns the way in which Hayes distributes her tapes. Installation in the gallery does not involve projectors or monitors; instead, there are stacks of tapes, labeled in white according to their content. The viewer is intended to take them out of the gallery and watch at home. The silent and object-based presentation of a performance text is the first connection—a felt one—between viewer and tape. The performance of the text will not be completed until the viewer is sitting at home, remote in hand, waiting

8. Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater* (London: Routledge, 1997), 49, emphasis in original.

Sharon Hayes, *Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) Screeds #13, 16, 20, and 29*, 2002, installation views, Occidental College, Los Angeles, 2003 (artwork © Sharon Hayes)

for Hayes to appear. If Viet Nam was the war America watched in its living room, there is a compelling echo in the enforced home viewing of a reimagined and traumatic event originally from 1974. Hearst's reports and ventriloquized demands arrived, via the news, in homes across the country, and Hayes mirrors this placement. Domestic space, frequently associated with the feminine, undergoes an aggressive and fragile incursion, akin to Viet Nam's arrival in American dens and dining rooms, adding historical resonance to the work's layering. Intimate space is affected, becomes close and charged; Hayes requires viewers to navigate Hearst where the heart is: at home.

In productively direct metaphor, Hayes uses the others in the recording room to nail down specific wording and rhetorical details of the speeches, but the moments of frustrated hesitation—as they grow increasingly frequent—resonate with Hearst's original performance on the tapes. Hayes's coached articulations of course mirror Hearst's enforced delivery: when Hearst says, "I am starting and stopping the tape myself . . . [pause] . . . to collect my thoughts," the absurdity is reevidenced in the collective laughter of those in the room with Hayes. However, this hesitation and implication of (coercive?) assistance can also read as a metaphoric stand-in for the work of identity as a project—precisely because the subject can't, even under duress, "stop the tape" to, literally, compose herself. Identity formation, for good or ill, is an unrelenting and constant process. This is the power of Ganahl's photographs as well, since we see the students so often *on the verge*—of thought, of comprehension, of speech—as they make selves through opaque instances of apprehension. The historian-spectator meets the performer in these moments of pause. Flusser's notion of "human freedom . . . in a world dominated by apparatuses" is demonstrated, with the apparatus itself as the instrument of capture. It is in the "freeze" that the work of the camera and the work of the learner come together for our inspection. These moments allow a reader-viewer to actively engage with the work, to move past

the work of the apparatus and into the conceptual paradigm and the occurrence of the artist's thought.

In the work of both of these artists, there is a doubled drive to see through to something else. As the notion of text, after decades of deconstruction and the poststructural, has broadened and complicated, so has the idea of reading and its corollary, learning. Reading has often been pictured as silent, solitary students engaged with their books, like Godard's bourgeois students—and Ganahl shows that too—but what is more prevalent is a sense of active reading, of students engaged with each other in the space of social relation. In the work of both of these artists, there is a sense of groupthink when the image of learning is suspended. Those on the verge of comprehending an externally imposed text offer a moment of transparency: *how* are they learning? Photography's frozen moments offer a succinct readability as they "stop the tape" for the viewer. Ganahl's seminar rooms, with their often overwhelming textual presences, remind us of the nascent coercion that is embedded within learning—for, like every other normativizing rehearsal, there is the instinctive understanding of punitive results for bad mimesis. Hayes's reading through the complex layers of the recordings made while Hearst was a prisoner gets to the heart of this pressure with visceral clarity. The idea of coercion is here, of course, in its not-so-nascent form and is enhanced in the moment of performance: the off-camera voices mark Hayes's performance as much as anything else. The compromises of learning come to the fore in these works and clear a space to consider how learning is continually forced on the subjectivizing subject.

Ganahl's press release for *Reading Karl Marx* states: "The main focus of Rainer Ganahl's exhibitions is Karl Marx as an intellectual, ideological, and political perforated receptacle that—over the past twentieth century—has been filled with intelligence and stupidity; hope and despair; social and economic self-awareness and ordered famine and misery; liberation and terror with total control. This list of contradictions could be endlessly continued."[9] Learning also means grappling with the burden of history, and perhaps a glance at the pause in learning—through artworks produced by documenting the details of its process—is the moment of transparency Ganahl is hinting toward. Nestled within the spaces of contradictory binaries, Ganahl's waiting glasses make sense alongside his thinking subjects, and from this view the multivalent force of Hayes's reconfigured codes translate as well. In watching the learner muddle through learning, implicit coercive codes are momentarily suspended. These moments of suspense and their resulting liberation may be fleeting, but that is the nature of hope.

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In 1996 the Danish photographer Joachim Koester produced a body of work entitled *Day for Night Christiania, 1996*. Koester made these landscapes at the Christiania commune in Copenhagen—a utopian social project started by activists who took over (and still occupy) an abandoned military base in the city in 1971. His photographs describe this space through the cinematic device of the "day for night" filter—allowing daytime filming of nighttime scenes—most famously referenced in François Truffaut's 1973 film *La Nuit américaine*. (The title comes from the ironically pointed French term for the process; the film's English release title is *Day for Night*). Truffaut suggests cinema's mediated and staged drama—in which the construction

9. Ganahl's text, made available at the exhibition, is also published online: www.ganahl.info/bg00pressrelease.html.

Joachim Koester, *Day for Night Christiania, 1996 (The Lotus House/Copper Mill)*, 1996, C-print, 26 x 38½ in. (66 x 97.8 cm), edition of 5 (artwork © Joachim Koester; image provided by Greene Naftali Gallery)

Joachim Koester, *Day for Night Christiania, 1996 (Path/Ramparts #3)*, 1996, C-print, 26 x 38½ in. (66 x 97.8 cm), edition of 5 (artwork © Joachim Koester; image provided by Greene Naftali Gallery)

Joachim Koester, *Day for Night Christiania, 1996 (The Future Forest/Maintenance Area)*, 1996, C-print, 26 x 38½ in. (66 x 97.8 cm), edition of 5 (artwork © Joachim Koester; image provided by Greene Naftali Gallery)

of shallow artifice stands in for the fullness of lived experience—as a parable of the human tendency to live by the pictures we imagine rather than confronting the irreducible complexity of our lives. Koester's photographs transpose this melancholy observation to the sociohistorical legacy of leftist optimism.

In *Day for Night Christiania, 1996*, Koester literally deploys the illusionistic photographic filter, casting the temporal suspensions of "day for night" onto the problems of utopian progress within a historical period that rejects the Marxist narrative of evolutionary socialism as naive or impossible. His images manifestly refute the syntax of ideological certainty, suspending time and progress in a stage set meant to contain utopian hope. Material conditions, the narrative of struggle, and an idealized vision are all suggested, only to be thoroughly distanced. The artificial cinematic twilight is neither day nor night, but a colored—blue—melancholy devoid of temporal possibility.

Koester's technical process and compositional choices foreclose the viewer's ability to move through the setting—to make progress into the classical landscape narrative of receding space. Shadows quickly drop to complete blackness, so that the darkening recesses of the scenes become impenetrable. Pathways, which abound in these photographs, invariably veer off the edge of the frame, disintegrate in a mass of vegetation, or dissolve into the encroaching shadows before they can recede into deep distance. The viewer is always at the foreground of the frame, moved around but never forward by complex and disrupted formal structures. Even a flight of stairs, at center frame—usually an immediate visual indicator of upward or inward motion (think what Rodchenko would do with stairs)—is flattened by depthless shadows and dead-on, nonreceding perspective, culminating on a flat plane whose surface and content are not visible to us: a nonarrival at precisely nowhere.

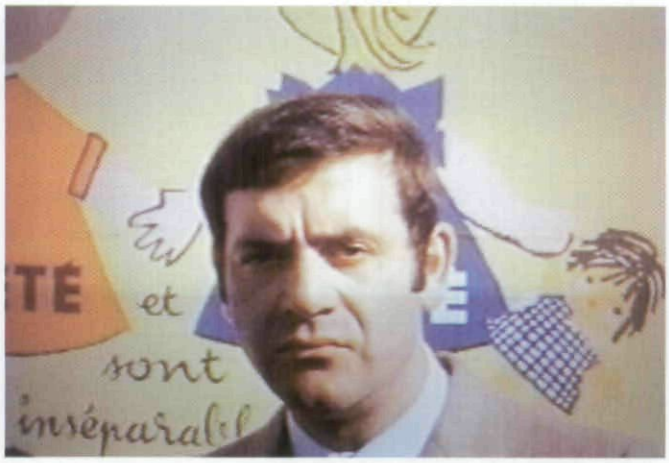
Koester deploys these perspectival spatial refusals to land us squarely in the flattened conceptual space where Marx and Flusser locate the problems of logical abstraction. In Marx's critique of what he dismissively calls "the affair of reason itself and of its apologists," he questions a rigid Hegelian dialectic that is held hostage by an abstract logical system, noting that once reason

> has placed itself in thesis, this thesis, this thought, opposed to itself, doubles itself into two contradictory thoughts, the positive and the negative, the yes and no. The struggle of these two antagonistic elements, comprised in the antithesis, constitutes the dialectic movement. The yes becoming no, the no becoming yes, the yes becoming at once yes and no, the no becoming at once no and yes, the contraries balance themselves, neutralize themselves, paralyse themselves.[10]

The result of what Marx terms the "metaphysics of political economy" is an entirely alienated (and equivocal) "scaffolding of categories" in place of historically dynamic and materially specific conditions. Koester's photographic system presents and collapses this scaffolding. Cloaked in the romantic despondency of bourgeois metaphysical aesthetics (a seduction that none of us can ignore), his Christiania landscapes anaesthetize both sides of the dialectic, and the foreshortened stillness directs us to the abstracting paralysis of ideological systems.

All of Koester's images bear double names, describing the subject both by its idealist commune title and its functional, military-base title: *The Lotus House/Copper*

10. Marx, 117.



Jean-Luc Godard, stills from *Weekend*, 1967, 35mm sound film, 105 min. (photographs © New Yorker Films)

Mill, The Future Forest/Maintenance Area, The Milky Way/Officers' Quarters. These twinned titles amplify the deliberate refusal of these images, in both the descriptive and ideological modes of a representational program. The brooding space of *Future Forest/Maintenance Area* is neither a transcendent Arcadia, nor can it plausibly be understood as a functional maintenance area. The pure logics of both the repressive capitalist state and the commune have ceased to cohere. Such is the deliberate visual and conceptual failure that pervades this descriptive project. The visual program that we wishfully mistook for historical materialism has abandoned us. As *Day for Night Christiania 1996* describes the politically freighted social spaces of this anachronistic utopian community, the intellectual and physical labor of socialism, as well as the theorized future at the heart of it, are hauntingly and pervasively unavailable. Ganahl's images suspend our entry into the possibilities of leftist learning; Koester's landscapes won't permit us to read or move through the landscape of idealist living. His Christiania is an unpopulated ideological soundstage on which the production has been stopped. The photograph has abandoned Marx in the scaffolding of metaphysics that he so despised.

This frustrated staging of utopian living, making, and learning suggests an earlier, more contentious and chaotic intersection of cinema, photography, and ideological failure: a scene from Godard's 1967 film *Weekend*. Titled—in blue letters on a black ground—"The Class Struggle," it unfolds as a brief narrative parable—allegedly a pedagogical encounter for the viewer. A young playboy and his stylish female passenger careen into a tractor on a village street. The rich youth is killed—limp, bloodied, and still perfectly beautiful in his convertible—and the young woman begins to violently accuse the older, tractor-driving farmer, on the grounds that he had no right, as an aesthetically and economically inferior subject, to inflict death on the erotic, moneyed entitlements of wealth and youth. The farmer responds bitterly in kind until, when both are rebuffed in an attempt to gather alliances from bystanders, they jointly turn on their new enemies, hurling insults and walking off with their arms around each other.

As the story unravels into shifting, indeterminate pettiness, the scene begins to flicker between the temporal cinematic space of action and a series of "photographic" "still" portraits of characters in the scene: individuals, pairs, and groups, each against a wall, blinking and smiling at the camera for up to ten seconds at a time. A cut to black is followed by a new intertitle—"Fauxtography"—and the scene concludes in a group portrait, over ten seconds long, with all the actors, gathered together, happy and serious as in a family picture, frozen for a photograph. Godard has taken us from the clear illustration of a Marxist category—the Class Struggle—to an incoherent melodrama of arbitrary human weakness and inconstancy. This dissolution has progressed in lockstep with the deterioration from an unfolding temporal narrative—a present that we move with—to the unreliable illusionism of the photographic program, in which our eyes scan and deduct a demonstrably inaccurate conclusion of human relations.

Flusser suspects that photographs present themselves as maps when they are actually screens.[11] But sometimes an image evacuates the plausibility of both class conflict and class harmony, or fixes the explication of ideology unspoken in the student's frozen gesture; it describes the artist perpetually about to become the heiress in the process of becoming the revolutionary, or offers the commune as a *mise-en-scène* without time, space, or actors. Sometimes an image is a *map* of a *screen*, and

11. Flusser, 13.

rather than doubling the obfuscation, it opens onto a richer, more complex topography. We are implicated in this contradictory, tragicomic landscape because it disconcerts the boundaries that the self-supporting image demands. Instead, these paused actors and stages unmask naturalized construction, insisting that the latter-day idealist navigate the contradictions of actions, passions, and imagination as the actual space of dialectical learning.

A fuller picture of the screens we live through may not allow us to reconstruct a utopian social vision. It may, though, help us to dismantle the illusionary program by which contemporary global capital and its political regimes elide reactionary and coercive ideology with an imagery of individual freedom and a rhetoric of universal democracy. Rodchenko manipulated the photographic program—collapsing ideological abstraction and narrative fiction into a language of material fact—in support of a revolutionary regime that he initially embraced. Today in the United States, only the political Right deftly deploys this compelling visual feint. The camera and the language of pure ideology create situations that are not lived experience. The picture and the idea always exceed the cluttered, ambivalent, and inconstant frame of the real. And this is why an art that insists on the complexity of learning matters.

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