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FOREWORD

THE MAKING OF THIS BOOK: WHY “THE COLORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY”?

The history of photography—unlike the development of theories about photography—is still astonishingly circumscribed by national and monographic narratives, even though by now there has been critical and problem-oriented research. In the run-up to the conference that took place at the University of Zurich in October 2015 (fig. 1), this led to the following considerations: which topic would allow a different

— 1: Flyer of the conference *The Colors of Photography*, 2015.

approach to be taken without simply borrowing from the established research areas of art history, which topic would not just isolate photography's medium specificity once again but would instead emphasize photography's intermediality and contextuality (meaning the connections between image, art and word, industry and aesthetic, commerce and pleasure, politics and ethics) historically, theoretically and in terms of its aesthetic reception?¹ What element of photography—and not photography as

a whole or a particular historic period of photography—could be particularly well suited for helping to understand this complex, a complex constituted of interstices of mediality, of materiality and practices that incorporate specific actors and participants as well as discourses and theories? “The Colors of Photography” appeared to be the answer to these questions.

Color and colorfulness have long been researched in art history in the German-speaking world under the notion of *Koloritgeschichte*, but without this area having really differentiated itself systematically in terms of terminology and content. The reason for the lack of systematics and acuity of definition lies in the hermeneutic approach to color as a phenomenon of painting, an approach that is often subjectively empathetic as a consequence. Color as material and technique is therefore less examined in historical and cultural contexts, whereas the history of color theories, in contrast, is very precise, that is to say objectified, in both past and present research. Moreover, research on the histories of the theories, materials and practices of color are seldom linked to one another—knowledge about art technology and art history often drift apart—even as individual research is quite advanced.

Yet transferring these research results onto photography lacks intermedial and interdisciplinary viewpoints, which would have to be reflected in a strict and methodical manner. Nonetheless, what can be learned from the art history of color with regard to all other pictorial media is the following: color is a very special challenge for the historical sciences. This isn’t as trite an observation as it may seem, because the methodologically important conclusion that can be drawn from this observation is that it is in no way “medium specific” that color and photography have remained a difficult topic for the humanities to this day. It goes without saying that a historic exploration of the dimensions of color in photography is an important desideratum for historical epistemology, especially in the natural sciences. In other words, “The Colors of Photography” is a specific, tangible and far-reaching field of research—prompted not least by the technological dynamism and thought-provoking intellectual impulses of the digital humanities—that currently appears to have reached a new starting point. This is why it seemed worthwhile to try to put together a small conference as part of a special occasion that would attempt to take a few initial steps towards advancing research into “The Colors of Photography”—focusing not on the history of color photography but instead on the problematization of color in photography. No more, but also no less.

Along with the conference’s presentations, historic photo objects were shown in the auditorium of the former College of Education on Rämistrasse 59 in Zurich, which had recently been renovated for the university. The exhibition objects from the field of early photography were intended to illustrate the fact that color can be understood as a phenomenon that was essential for the various aesthetic and technical variations of photography long before the technical invention of color photography. Yet this

clear finding of the aesthetics and technique of color in photography forms nothing less than the foundation for researching a phenomenon that permeates the history of photography on many interwoven levels to this day: color isn't just an aesthetic and technical matter, but it requires knowledge of these foundations of what color in photography was, what it is and discursively became. Only on the basis of this finding can new questions be developed for research into "The Colors of Photography."

Among the historic photo objects on display were several from the New York gallery and collection of Hans P. Kraus, Jr., illustrating for instance the intense blue of Anna Atkins's (English, 1799–1897) cyanotypes (figs. 2, 3) from her book *British Algae*,² or showing the varied hues of hand-colored albumen prints. In addition, there were a variety of further examples of early photography that show aspects of color from this collection (figs. 4–8). All of these techniques and their aesthetic effects are enjoying a revival in contemporary art photography, for instance in the works of Julian Schnabel, Hiroshi Sugimoto and Cornelia Parker.³

— 2: Anna Atkins, *Halymenia furcellata* from *British Algae* Vol. I., 1843–1850, cyanotype photogram, handwritten title within the plate, 25.9 × 20.4 cm, courtesy of Hans P. Kraus Jr., New York. — 3: Anna Atkins, Cover of Photographs of *British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*, Vol. I, 1843–1850, album pages each approx. 26.0 × 20.5 cm, untrimmed, handwritten titles within the plates, and inserted manuscript notice in ink by Atkins, courtesy of Hans P. Kraus Jr., New York.

— 4: Kusakabe Kimbei (attr.), *Martial Arts*, 1880s, hand-colored albumen print, 26.3 × 20.8 cm mounted on 35.0 × 27.0 cm card, courtesy of Hans P. Kraus Jr., New York. — 5: Rev. Calvert Richard Jones, *Soldiers in formation, Naples*, 1847, hand-colored salt print from a calotype negative, 15.3 × 19.9 cm, courtesy of Hans P. Kraus Jr., New York. — 6: Nevil Story-Maskelyne, *Magdalen College, Oxford* (Schaaf 4465), 1840s, calotype negative, 20.7 × 15.2 cm, courtesy of Hans P. Kraus Jr., New York.

___ 7: William Henry Fox Talbot, Lesser meadow-rue (*Thalictrum minus*) (Schaaf 3663), probably early 1839, photogenic drawing negative, 22.5 × 18.3 cm tipped onto 28.6 × 21.8 cm paper, courtesy of Hans P. Kraus Jr., New York. ___ 8: William Henry Fox Talbot, Lace (Schaaf 2818), early 1840s, salt print from a photogenic drawing negative, 22.7 × 18.7 cm on 22.9 × 18.8 cm paper, courtesy of Hans P. Kraus Jr., New York.

___ 9: Unknown photographer, Still life with peaches, ca. 1913, raydex color process print, 7.1 × 13.9 cm mounted on 11.1 × 17.7 cm paper mounted on 18.7 × 25.9 cm card, courtesy of Hans P. Kraus Jr., New York. ___ 10: Unknown photographer, Still life with plums, apples and pears, ca. 1913, raydex color process print, 7.5 × 13.5 cm mounted on 11.6 × 17.3 cm paper mounted on 18.8 × 25.4 cm card, courtesy of Hans P. Kraus Jr., New York.

It was even possible to show historically very short-lived color photography methods, such as Raydex, with the presentation of two still lifes from about 1913 (figs. 9, 10).⁴ The highly light-sensitive objects were displayed in showcases covered with fabric during the presentations. Only during the breaks were glimpses of these precious objects permitted. Thus color as a material component of photographic images could be conveyed to the broader audience of the public conference as another factor increasing the fragility of photography. The objects from the private collection of Kim Timby, who also contributed an essay to this book and took part in the conference as a discussant, drew a connection to the popular and entertaining use of color in 3D photography, a topic thoroughly discussed in her dissertation.⁵ Timby researched the phenomenon of the 3D image in a photo-historic manner and with a special focus on color, pursuing the desire of photographers and viewers for

— 11: Anonymous, Portrait of a woman with a fan, 1940s, Kim Timby private collection, courtesy of Kim Timby.

— 12: Roger Salloch, *Paris Dreaming*, 2006, Pentax, 35 mm. “Take a shape, color is charcoal. Black holds things together, sculpts reality, spells words. Black is three dimensional. White leaves room for feelings, for an exchange, pulls words together, seeks meaning. A black and white photograph wants the dream, the green path through the woods in the middle of the winter. Black and white images take us deeper into ourselves, and into others, if we want to go.” (Extract from “Into the Light,” a new short story by Roger Salloch)

“natural” chromatic colors that correspond to human perception (fig. 11). Timby’s selection of objects additionally set an important accent for the conference: it was not only about photography as art. Rather, the conference was intended to highlight potential new topics on and research areas into the phenomenon of color from all areas of photography—art, culture, society, business, science, politics—as well as the category of black-and-white photography. The chronology of the history of color photography was largely ignored, even though this established narrative was considered a separate object of investigation in a historiography that has meanwhile been problematized many times over.

The selection of the presenters was guided by the desire to give the conference a North American focus by mainly choosing experts and themes from a country that identifies with the medium of photography like perhaps no other in the world, given that this pictorial technique was thought to be lacking in tradition, radically new and modern.⁶ In the small exhibition, the photographs of the American writer and photographer Roger Salloch (fig. 12), who lives in Paris, represented traditional black-

and-white photography in the style of Cartier-Bresson.⁷ Salloch, who was invited as a discussant like the US-born Timby, wrote an equal parts personal and literary statement for the conference:

“[...] Digital photography allows one to take pictures of what one wants to see. Analog is ruthless. You take pictures of what you see. Digital is closer to writing, one can explore the flow of memories, look for the ‘real’ shape of last night’s dream. Analog is absolute. This is what the world is made of, these stones, these bricks of light and dark, these suggestions of where the colors might be. Color is an affair of the brain. Your blue is not my blue. But architecture shapes the world through which we move. My wall is your wall too. My brutal landscape is your brutal landscape too. An instant of composition makes it possible, easier, even more fun, to visualize the colors our brains are telling us about.

Black is form, shadows, charcoal lines come to life. Black holds things together, white suggests what might be there, on the other side of the open door. It constitutes the narrative, and the feelings, the desires and the dreams, the green leaves of spring in winter, and the full moon of that morning when... Of course, it is not always easy just to walk through an open door.

Susan Sontag has written that for her, photography is a constant return to what has been. I would like to suggest another possibility: Suppose photography were an advance. Suppose light could be accumulated, one square of light leading to the next and then to another, stepping stones of light across the shadows until finally, there was enough, a constant progress in the images until what is in shadows is left behind, and ahead of you, everything else slowly becomes visible. The river has deepened but you never look back.”

To this day, a majority of the general public still associates the striking and therefore memorable manifestation of the black-and-white image with aesthetically superior artistic photography. However, there’s been hardly any examination of the more-or-less juxtaposed tracks of color and black-and-white photography in their historical discursivity, the legendary narratives, their institutional histories and the relations inherent in the works. For instance, illuminating cases such as Ellsworth Kelly’s representational black-and-white photographs, which were important for his abstract painting, were only recently discovered and explored (fig. 13). The interplay between the exhibited objects and the presentations during the conference could not be preserved for this book. We hope that one point nevertheless remains clear in its essays: that the study of the material object is what leads to the epistemological object, particularly in the digital era.

— 13: Ellsworth Kelly, *Hangar Doorway*, St. Barthélemy, 1977, gelatin silver print, 22.0 × 32.0 cm, © Ellsworth Kelly Foundation, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

Sally A. Stein's contribution to the conference, which was titled "'Pretty in Pink' or 'Pretty Poison'? Modern Color Photography's Market Sources & Environmental Consequences," was unavailable for the book but discussed an aspect that has scarcely been examined to date: namely, the consequences that the globally industrialized production of color for photography has for the environment and therefore also for the climate. Instead of asking for more written contributions, it seemed to make more sense to supplement the essays with two artistic pieces that present current experiments and movements of digital color photography. Two photographers—Hans Danuser and Raymond Meier—are each represented with a series of their own choosing and additional explanatory texts.⁸ The texts—an essay and an interview—were prepared by the photographers in conversations with the two authors. In their respective oeuvres, Danuser and Meier—the one as an artist, the other as an advertising and fashion photographer—have processed the experience of change from analog to digital photography. Both have worked with mixed techniques and hybrid processes, thus making it particularly clear that the so frequently invoked paradigm shift from analog to digital must be examined in just as differentiated a manner as the so often proclaimed new beginnings and ends of photography. Yes, it is actually the case that photography as an experiential medium is characterized by a contingency that can be historically contextualized. Beginning and end, change, old and new are to be

understood in relation to historically malleable perception. The desire to force these elements into a causally stringent narration with a step-by-step order is not terribly informative, which is precisely what the theme of color in photography makes clear. Danuser and Meier, as photographers who have a genuine interest in color, can show by way of example that color is ultimately (and always has been) suitable for photographic work in a hybrid setting. As a result, color has not remained a kind of utopia of the medium. Moreover, taking both Danuser's and Meier's work into account makes us aware that familiar distinctions such as art vs. business, or photography vs. commercial images, are not very productive when it comes to investigating "The Colors of Photography" in a fresh manner.⁹

The marketing of photography's materials alone—paper, chemicals, equipment—has barely been considered for the "business" of photography and its research as of yet. The demarcation between art and commerce has to do with categories that are important for the art market, categories that are used merely to generate symbolic value, as Abigail Solomon-Godeau showed. Individual artists, groups of artists and museums also continue to build their myths and legends, although that's not all they're building, on categories of creative invention, pure idea and chance—all imagined with the greatest possible distance to business and marketing. Yet there is more and more frequently a commingling of art and commerce, freelance photography and commissioned works, which has meant that art museums increasingly have to cope with such hybrid concepts. From this perspective, it seems very long ago that Moholy-Nagy vehemently raised black-and-white photography up to the status of an idiom at Bauhaus, to then later experiment with color in exile in Amsterdam and realize advertising commissions in color in London.¹⁰ The international Bauhaus style as represented and disseminated by the Museum of Modern Art in New York and Bauhaus exiles in the United States is still identified to this day with the black-and-white aesthetic of Modernism, even though intensive discussions about the relationships between basic colors and basic forms at Bauhaus do not confirm the aesthetic dominance of black-and-white in Bauhaus's practice and theory.¹¹ The case of Walker Evans shows that color(fulness) did not fit in with the legend formation and aesthetic individuation of the creative pictorial medium of "photography," which wanted to be radically modern. Evans was a true figurehead of traditional black-and-white photography. His colorful Polaroids from the 1970s received a very positive, if very late, reception, but then in the context of digital photography, while Evans himself remained an advocate for black-and-white photography when he said that no photographer should experiment with color before the age of sixty.¹²

In terms of the history of the medium, the "digital revolution" is probably the most important event for being able to historically understand the relationship between black-and-white and color in photography in all of its facets. It would be a worthwhile undertaking to systematically examine many of these historical cases

for their doctrine of black-and-white photography, thus revealing the functions of this doctrine within national and international narratives as well as the works' immanent foundations of meaning and concepts. This book aims to initiate by way of example such a systematic approach toward specifically defined topics. It presents interventions into "The Colors of Photography" research field to show that "color" is much more than a matter of technique and aesthetics.¹³

Bettina Gockel Zurich, October 2020

NOTES

- 1 On the methods and theory of intermediality, see for instance: Gabriele Rippl, ed., *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music*, Handbooks of English and American Studies: Text and Theory 1 (Berlin; Boston: DeGruyter, 2015); Corina Caduff et al., eds., *Die Künste im Gespräch: Zum Verhältnis von Kunst, Musik, Literatur und Film* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2007).
- 2 See Larry J. Schaaf, *Sun Gardens. Cyanotypes by Anna Atkins*, ed. Joshua Chuang, with contributions by Joshua Chuang, Emily Walz and Mike Ware (Munich; London; New York: Prestel, 2018).
- 3 See the Hans P. Kraus Jr. Gallery, which specializes in early photography and pictorialism and fine art photography overall, <http://www.sunpictures.com/html/index.php>. Accessed August 4, 2020. On the re-making of historic photographic processes and experiments in contemporary photography, see the exhibition "Back to the Future. The 19th Century in the 21st Century," curated by Kim Knoppers and Ann-Christin Bertrand, C/O Berlin Foundation, Amerika Haus, Berlin, September 29, 2018–December 1, 2018.
- 4 Raydex was a forerunner of the "cabro" (carbon prints) color-print process, which in turn is related to the pigment printing of digital photography. For the carbon print see Joseph Solomon Friedman, *History of Color Photography* (Boston: The American Photographic Publishing Company Boston, 1945 [1st printing 1944]), 451; Dusan Stulik and Art Kaplan, *The Atlas of Analytical Signatures of Photographic Processes: Carbon* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Conservation Institute, 2013).
- 5 See Kim Timby, *3D and Animated Lenticular Photography*, Studies in Theory and History of Photography 5 (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2015).
- 6 See Bettina Gockel, ed., in collaboration with Patrizia Munforte, *American Photography: Local and Global Contexts*, Studies in Theory and History of Photography 2 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012).
- 7 See <http://whiteshadows.org/index.html>. Accessed August 4, 2020.
- 8 See the official websites of both photographers: <http://www.hans-danuser.ch/>; <http://raymondmeier.com/>. Accessed August 4, 2020.
- 9 On this, see the conference "The Business of Photography," Leicester, June 17–18, 2019, <https://photographichistory.wordpress.com/annual-conference-2019>. Accessed August 4, 2020.
- 10 Devin Fore, "The Myth Reversed: Perspectives of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy," in idem, *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 21–74.

- 11 See most recently regarding the forming the legend of the Bauhaus: Robin Schuldenfrei, *Luxury and Modernism: Architecture and the Object in Germany 1900–1933* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018); Mark Lamster, *The Man in the Glass House: Philip Johnson, Architect of the Modern Century* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2018).
- 12 *Walker Evans – Polaroids*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art (Zurich: Scalo, 2002). Cf. most recently Svetlana Alpers, *Walker Evans. Starting from Scratch* (Princeton University Press, 2020), German translation: Svetlana Alpers, *Walker Evans. Leser, Autor, Photograph* (München: Schirmer/Mosel, 2020). [Kind advise by Wolfgang Kemp].
- 13 The book therefore also positions itself in the context of many new projects about color and photography. One example is the project “COLOR. History of the Theory and Practice of Color” at the University of Konstanz (German only): <https://www.litwiss.uni-konstanz.de/kunstwissenschaft/forschung/forschungsprojekte/>. Accessed August 4, 2020; or the research project about the chemicals of photography conceived by Herta Wolf, Department of Art History, University of Cologne, Germany: <https://khi.phil-fak.uni-koeln.de/en/forschung/laufende-projekte/puffer-seite/fotografie-als-angewandte-wissenschaft>. Accessed August 4, 2020. See most recently the conference “Farbreproduktion im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Praktiken und Funktionen,” October 9–10, 2020, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Siegen, organized by Joseph Imorde, Monika Wagner, Barbara Welzel, Andreas Zeising.