Jeff Wall, beyond the Borders of the Medium: Photography, History Painting and the Cinema of the Living-dead

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Abstract

How can a work of art reach beyond the borders of the medium to which it would logically seem to belong? Following a brief reflection upon an important essay by Rosalind Krauss, 'Reinventing the Medium', this contribution focuses specifically on one of Jeff Wall's works, allowing the author to deal more directly with the issue of the dialogue between different mediums. Through the analysis of *Dead Troops Talk*, the aim of the article is to demonstrate: first, how the so-called photograph does not exploit the potential of its own medium, but instead applies a compositional strategy borrowed from the pictorial medium; and second, how the same photograph undermines the genre of historical painting (to which it is linked via its compositional strategy) by putting the fictitious — and cinematographic — figure of the zombie at the center of the representation.

> A. P.: Representation of the human body, depending on the construction of micro-gestures, is kind of programmatic in your work. Recently, some unrealistic, improbable bodies have appeared such as […] the zombies in *Dead Troops Talk*. What are these bodies?
> J. W.: I have always thought of my 'realistic' work as populated with spectral characters whose state of being was not that fixed. That, too, is an inherent aspect, or effect, of what I call 'cinematography': things don't have to really exist, or to have existed, to appear in the picture […]. 'What are these bodies?' — that question requires an interpretation of the picture in which they appear, and I'm not the best person to do that.
> (Arielle Pelenc in correspondence with Jeff Wall)

How can a work of art reach beyond the borders of the medium to which it would logically seem to belong? It should be noted at the outset that for quite some time the boundaries between the mediums[1] of photography, painting and

[1] The coinage *mediums* is used here to distinguish the plural of 'medium' — in ordinary usage, 'media' — from the 'media' as widely used in the singular with reference to printed, audiovisual and digital channels of public communication of the kind addressed in the work of Jeff Wall (many thanks to Matthew Hyland for the discussion about 'media versus mediums').

cinema have been dissipating and their autonomy questioned. This, as we know, is suggested by the expression 'post medium era' or 'post medium condition', which was coined in order to define a more or less contemporary state of artistic practices. Before focusing on one of Jeff Wall's works which will allow me to deal more concretely with those questions of open borders and dialogue between different mediums, I will first look back upon 'Reinventing the Medium', an article published by Rosalind Krauss a little more than a decade ago.[2] Indeed, it is the reading of that article which triggered the reasoning developed in the following pages, and, without entering into the finer details of the author's argument, it seems necessary to draw attention to certain aspects of her thinking.

Rosalind Krauss deals with the concept of medium both historically and theoretically. On the one hand, she considers the specific medium of photography in an attempt to recapture its historical development. She traces its first uses and its evolution until the time when it became a rite of passage or indispensable utility for all artists who saw photography as a means of disrupting or undermining the traditional values of art. Among such artists Krauss mentions Dan Graham, Robert Smithson, Victor Burgin, Jeff Wall and James Coleman. On the other hand, Krauss goes beyond the specific instance of the photographic to discuss the concept of medium itself. Essentially, the argument which she develops throughout her article runs as follows: during the 1960s, photography became the primary instrument in a criticism of the supposed specificity and independence of the mediums, as well as (and, thus, consequently) the means of a reinvention of the very concept of medium. Let's add here that:

> […] the reinvention in question does not imply the restoration of any of those earlier forms of support that the 'age of mechanical reproduction' had rendered thoroughly dysfunctional through their own assimilation to the commodity form. Rather, it concerns the idea of a medium as such, a medium as a set of conventions derived from (but not identical with) the material conditions of a given technical support, conventions out of which to develop a form of expressiveness that can be both projective and mnemonic.[3]

By relying on the example of James Coleman turning a museum space into a dark room and projecting a montage of slides featuring comedians in theatrical poses, Krauss shows how a given work can become the place of a confrontation between the *dispositif* of cinema (the projection of lights in a dark room, the principle of temporal succession of projected images), the gestural codes of theatre and the image-object of photography (the slide).[4] Such confrontation results in the invention of an as-yet-unknown medium which simultaneously enacts the specificities of several established mediums without, strictly speaking, belonging

[2] See Rosalind E. Krauss, 'Reinventing the Medium', *Critical Inquiry*, 25.2 (special issue *Angelus Novus*: *Perspectives on Walter Benjamin*, Winter 1999), 289–305.
[3] Ivi, p. 296.
[4] By *dispositif* I mean the apparatus of cinema and its deployment.

to any one of them[5] — unless one places the definition of the medium solely on the material support of the image. The author finally suggests that at that point, the principle of clearly distinguishable mediums has given way to what I would call a 'perpetual interaction between mediums' (although Krauss only goes as far as using the expression of 'post medium').

Whilst rapidly surveying the main aspects of a much more complex analysis, I have bypassed many facets of the art historian's text, for instance the general obsolescence of all mediums which constitutes an essential stage in her reasoning. But beyond Krauss' essay, what interests me in particular and what I would like to develop *via* the analysis of one of Jeff Wall's works is the idea of a decompartmentalization and a recasting of mediums. That is to say, to somewhat pre-empt the rest of my analysis, the idea that the medium of photography can be used to compose a history painting, or the idea that one can use an apparently cinematic motif — which is also in that specific instance, a seed of fiction — outside of cinema. There is more: although the reinvention of the medium postulated by Krauss takes place within the historically determined context of artistic practices in the 1960s and 1970s and although by her reasoning this reinvention implies the specific medium of photography, I believe it is possible to extend her proposal and to define the dialogue between different mediums as part of the general economy of forms, all images included.[6]

As shown by the many ways in which it was dealt with — liberal arts v. mechanical arts, *ut pictura poesis,* etc. —, the problem of the distinction and comparison between the arts has been and still is a cornerstone of the aesthetic debate. It is likely that the dialogue between the mediums which we are considering here — that is to say, the exchanges between the material supports, the *dispositifs* as well as the forms and the modes of composition which they respectively imply

[5] 'But Coleman cannot be said to be returning to a given medium, although the fact that the luminous projections occur in darkened rooms sets up a certain relation to cinema, and the fact that in them actors are portrayed in highly staged situations evokes a connection to theater. Rather, the medium Coleman seems to be elaborating is just this paradoxical collision between stillness and movement that the static slide provokes right at the interstice of its changes, which, since Coleman insists that the projection equipment be placed in the same space as the viewer of his work, is underscored by the click of the carousel's rotation […]'. See Krauss, p. 297. I would add that the author invites us to think of the 'paradoxical collision between stillness and movement' which Coleman creates as inverting the effects of that other collision between stillness and movement on which cinema relies (or at least has long relied). In Coleman's case, the collision is created *via* the discontinuous succession of slides adjusted in the carousel. In cinema, it relies on the equally discontinuous succession of photograms in the projector. Hence the following hypothesis: the aesthetic and technical parameters which define specific mediums should not be seen as characteristics which exclusively and eternally belong to them but rather as elements likely to participate in the elaboration of various *dispositifs* and forms.

[6] In lieu of supporting this statement with a series of examples from Jeff Wall's works, I refer the reader to my book *Entre film et photographie. Essai sur l'empreinte* (Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2004), which contains a few reflections on the dialogue between cinema — *Les Photos d'Alix* (Jean Eustache, 1980) — and stereoscopic photography, as well as between cinema — *Calendar* (Atom Egoyan, 1993) — and the mechanism of the *camera obscura*.

— will amount to a rephrasing of that same problem along the lines of a non-exclusive principle which would substitute the concept of medium for that of art. This leads us to an important question concerning the interaction between the concept of art and that of medium, a question which I will, however, only raise: what evolutionary role can such a re-problematization play in relation to those arts which were once compared and judged according to their supposedly specific qualities? But, let us put an end to this digression or, rather, let us maintain the question as background reference for our analysis in order to take up this problem more concretely.

Dead Troops Talk *(1): the History Painting, the 'Pregnant Moment'*

Let us consider *Dead Troops Talk (a vision after an ambush of a Red Army patrol, near Moqor, Afghanistan, winter 1986*), a photograph by Jeff Wall completed in 1992 (fig. 1). This image of a war scene represented in the aftermath of the fight features thirteen corpses of soldiers[7] lying on a slope of stones and gravel, an ensemble of nearly-lifeless ragged and mutilated bodies whose posture and faces perform the entire expressive spectrum of the passions of the soul, from melancholy and pain to fury. The work has been commented upon at length and has triggered statements such as the following: 'The structure and the theme of *Dead Troops Talk* relate to the French nineteenth-century Salon Machine paintings such as Antoine-Jean Gros's *Napoleon on the Battlefield at Eylau, February 9, 1807*, 1808.[8] In the text referred to at the beginning of this paper, Rosalind Krauss briefly considers Wall's photographs and cites two other nineteenth-century paintings featuring the characteristic piling up of agonizing or dead bodies which Wall's photographs and the Salon machine paintings have in common: *The Raft of the Medusa* by Théodore Géricault (1819), and *The Barricade rue de la Mortellerie 1848* (1849) by Ernest Meissonier. Those references constitute a web or network which fleshes out, disturbs, that is to say complexifies the *istoria* of the photograph. *Self-Portrait at the Age of Twenty* — also known as *Self-portrait with a Bandage* — could also be introduced as further reference '(fig. 2)'. Indeed, this drawing by Dürer dated around 1491–92 is strangely echoed in the melancholy motif of the meditative man holding his wounded head on the left-hand side of Wall's photograph.[9] But my aim here is not to examine in detail

[7] The image contains as well two or three other characters of lesser relevance to my analysis.
[8] See Craig Burnett, *Jeff Wall* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), p. 58. Slightly further down (p. 59), Jeff Wall himself adds that: '[…] it could have a relationship to the Salon machine paintings of the nineteenth century — but without Napoleon, without the hero'.
[9] Other references have been mentioned, which underlie the photograph either globally or locally — motif by motif, that is to say: the engraving *Melencholia* by Albrecht Dürer (1514), the painting *The Calling of Saint Matthew* by Caravaggio (1599–1600), the etching 'The Revenge of the Peasants' from *The Miseries and Misfortunes of War* (1633) by Jacques Callot, the series of etchings *The Disasters of War* (1810–20) by Francisco Goya y Lucientes. See Paola Checcoli, 'Sur l'efficacité

Fig. 1: Jeff Wall, *Dead Troops Talk (a vision after an ambush of a Red Army patrol, near Moqor, Afghanistan, winter 1986*), 1992.

Fig. 2: Albrecht Dürer, *Self-Portrait at the Age of Twenty* (or *Self-portrait with a Bandage*), 1491-92

the system of references which operate within the work. I intend rather to demonstrate that the concerted representation of a more or less historical event links up *Dead Troops Walk* with a certain pictorial tradition and in particular with the compositional mode specifically attached to it.

From a technical point of view, *Dead Troops Talk* was produced through the means of digital photography, a time-consuming not to say complex pro-

symbolique de la citation. Le cas de deux photographies de guerre', in *Citer l'autre*, ed. by Marie-Dominique Popelard and Anthony Wall (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2005), pp. 149–58.

cess which from the outset goes beyond the realms of the initial photographic medium. Jeff Wall began by recreating a mountainous relief intended to evoke (and even stand for) Afghanistan. In this studio setting,[10] he then arranged actors made-up as corpses of soldiers from 'the Red Army'[11] in order to enact the dead troops from the title. To start with, the artist had carefully drawn the corpses of the soldiers, designing all at one time their poses, gestures, expressions and wounds in fine detail. The actors modelled themselves on the sketches (fig. 3), were photographed one by one and finally their individual images were assembled into a seamless image, the separation between the distinct photographs having been erased thanks to digital technology.[12] Géricault himself had begun by having a small-scale raft built inside his studio and he had drafted around twenty preparatory sketches prior to the composition of his painting. By doing so, he hoped to make his depiction of the agonizing faces and wounded bodies as acute as possible.[13]

Dead Troops Talk constitutes a contemporary version of the history painting[14] not only through the theme it represents (a war scene in the immediate aftermath of the fight), but also and essentially because Jeff Wall delocalizes and by doing

[10] According to Thierry de Duve, 'Wall did not go "*sur le motif*", he imagined the set, conceived it and constructed it freely, with no constraint other than having to think, simultaneously, like a stage director arranging his actors in a real depth of space; like a painter composing a space from a plane; and like a photographer (or a filmmaker of the 'still image') lighting the scene and knowing where to place his camera.' See de Duve, 'The Mainstream and the Crooked Path', in *Jeff Wall*, ed. by Thierry de Duve and others (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), pp. 24–53 (p. 37).

[11] If I'm not mistaken, the Soviet Army, in 1986. Most likely, the term 'Red Army' is being used as an ironical term or to invoke the Soviet Army's Past (many thanks to Diana Wade for this suggestion).

[12] These operations are recounted by Jeff Wall in an instalment of the series *Contacts* devoted to him (directed by J.-P Krief). See *Contacts. Volume 2. Le renouveau de la photographie contemporaine* (Arte/La sept vidéo, 2000).

[13] It is worth adding a few more details which give further insight not only into the painter's work but also into Jeff Wall's own artistic choice: 'Le charpentier de la *Méduse* fit pour Géricault un petit modèle du radeau qui reproduisait, avec la plus scrupuleuse exactitude, tous les détails de la construction; le peintre y disposa des maquettes de terre. Il avait loué un grand atelier en haut du Faubourg Saint Honoré, près de l'hôpital Beaujon. Il allait souvent dans les salles des malades pour suivre sur le visage des agonisants toutes les phases de la souffrance, pour étudier toutes les expressions de la douleur et des suprêmes angoisses. Son atelier devint la succursale de la Morgue. Il s'était entendu avec les internes et les infirmiers qui lui apportaient pour ses études des membres coupés et des cadavres […].' In Henry Houssaye, 'Un maître de l'école française - Théodore Géricault', *Revue des deux mondes*, 36.3 (1879), 374–91 (p. 385).

[14] The relation of photography to the *tableau* has been widely discussed by Jean-François Chevrier, see Jean-François Chevrier, 'Les aventures de la forme tableau dans l'histoire de la photographie', in *Photo Kunst, Arbeiten aus 150 Jahren – du XX^e au XIX^e, Aller et retour*, exhibition catalogue ed. by Chevrier (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, 1990), pp. 9–81. For a further comment on the modes of presence of the *tableau* (in general, not limited to history painting) in Jeff Wall's photographs, as well as on the stakes of their relation to pictorial tradition, and amongst many other references, I may refer the reader to Chevrier, 'The Spectres of the Everyday', in *Jeff Wall*, pp. 162–91. In this same book (pp. 23–53), one may also consult De Duve's essay dealing, in particular, with the relation between painting and photography suggested by Wall's work and focusing, on the one hand, on the issue of modernity and, on the other hand, on the issue of transparency (as '*the* convention common to Renaissance (painting) and photography').

Fig. 3: Preparatory drawing for *Dead Troops Talk (a vision after an ambush of a Red Army patrol, near Moqor, Afghanistan, winter 1986)*.

so renews a logic attached to such a type of representation, namely the logic of the 'pregnant moment'. I emphasize the fact that, although the artist had made several preparatory drafts, this renewal took place outside of the pictorial medium for which this particular logic had originally been invented.

The principle of the 'pregnant moment' was proposed in 1766 by Gotthold Ephraïm Lessing in the general context of a comparison between painting and poetry (the *ut pictura poesis* previously mentioned), and it aimed to solve the problem of the representation of a historical event. How could one represent the complete unfolding of a historical event in a single painting? How could one capture its full complexity and duration without turning the picture into an unidentifiable accumulation of bodies and postures? The 'pregnant moment' meant that the representation had to focus on one particular stage of the event, not just any random moment but, rather, the moment which would allow the painter to best convey the global significance of the event: the so-called 'pregnant moment' is not just any meaningless moment; it is a symbolic and eloquent moment. Importantly, it never existed as such in reality. Indeed, although the painter relies on a precise point in time which is deemed emblematic of the event as a whole, he nevertheless proceeds to slightly alter the as-yet-unwritten facts of history and will for instance — among other such modifications — cut out less important characters and add elements from before or after the chosen moment in order to make the historical implications of the event more explicit. To quote Lessing:

> [In the support of this view] I will not cite the fact, that in great historical pictures, the single moment is almost always extended; and that perhaps there is scarcely any piece, very rich in figures, in which every one of them is in the same motion and attitude, in which he would have been at the moment of the main action, some being represented in the posture of a little earlier, others in that of a little later period.[15]

[15] Gotthold Ephraïm Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), trans. by E. C. Beasley (1853) (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans; Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons; Oxford: F. Mac Pherson; Rugby: Crossley and Billington), p. 121.

As I have said, Jeff Wall's photograph was constructed piece by piece, motif by motif, and thus reenacts the principle of a carefully constructed and composed moment as opposed to the instantly recorded moment created by the photographic medium and theorized later on by Henri-Cartier Bresson as the decisive moment. Considering the subject of Jeff Wall's image — the contemporary Afghanistan war — the spectator could have the right to expect a documentary photograph determined by the logic of the decisive moment, rather than a painting reconstituting the war in a studio and substituting the real event (or the real referent) and its possible *reproduction* with such a grotesque *imitation*. We clearly see here to what extent Jeff Wall recasts different mediums by applying a compositional strategy more or less borrowed from the pictorial medium to a photograph which is, as it were, separated from the potential of its own medium, especially with regard to the temporal logic of the snapshot and the relation between the photographic image and its referent. In the end, Jeff Wall creates a separation between the photographic image and the photographic medium, thus establishing that no medium can entirely prescribe or control the aesthetic logic of its images. The artist is not reinventing painting by using the technical means of photography — and further Jeff Wall does not paint, he composes a *tableau* — what he is doing rather is freeing the construction of the image from the conventions of its medium.

Dead Troops Talk *(2): the Motif of the Zombie, the Utopian Scene*

The play on mediums does not end there. Indeed, as soon as we set them against their pictorial homonyms, such as the corpses of the nineteenth-century French paintings previously mentioned (those by Meissonier, Géricault, as well as Gros), the specificity of Jeff Wall's motifs becomes particularly striking. These bluish and blood-dripping cadavers are 'coming back to life'. Their gnawed limbs, their gaping wounds revealing the inside of an abdomen or skull and their somewhat carnal tendencies[16] indicate that these are not just straight-up cadavers but zombies. In other words, creatures which have been exemplarily featured through the means of cinema, especially in the movies of George A. Romero (fig. 4), the filmmaker who most notably contributed to the elaboration of the motif, at least in its cannibalistic version.[17] The figure of the zombie first appeared in the cinema

[16] One of the cadavers at the centre of the image offers an open-mouthed companion a morsel of what resembles blood-soaked entrails.

[17] Indeed, the cinematic zombie was originally represented according to the Voodoo tradition as a soulless slave quite distinct from Romero's mordant creatures — as an example, it is only necessary to mention *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932). The anthropologist Alfred Métraux has insisted on the slave status of the zombie in Haitian Voodoo: 'Le *zombi* est une bête de somme que son maître exploite sans merci, le forçant à travailler dans les champs, l'accablant de besogne, ne lui ménageant pas les coups de fouet et ne le nourrissant que d'aliments insipides.' Alfred Métraux, *Le Vaudou Haïtien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), p. 250.

Fig. 4: *Day of the Dead* (George A. Romero, 1985).

of the 1930s and was then still part of the Voodoo tradition, which it has since emancipated itself from. In the last ten years, it has regained an unprecedented popularity and it now frequents horror movies, comedies and video games. We should however point out that when Jeff Wall embarked on his work, this motif was a long way from holding the centre of the cinematic stage.

Before continuing any further with the motif of the zombie, let us briefly revisit the sketches which Géricault had drafted in preparation of *The Raft of the Medusa.* Indeed, these included *Cannibalism on the Raft of the Medusa*, a drawing[18] which he eventually chose to exclude from the setting up of his pregnant moment (fig. 5). The complexity of this scene was part of the drama which the painting reiterated. Cannibalism had also been featured in prior representations and texts:

> […] One critic in *Le Courrier Royal* noted the group's resemblance to Joshua Reynolds' painting of Ugolino and his sons, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1773 […]. Ugolino is cruel and, in the context of the *Medusa* shipwreck, resonant episode from Dante's *Inferno*, involving incarceration, prolonged suffering, despair, cannibalism and death. It was thus a signifier of a number of nightmarish events, including cannibalism, which occurred on the raft.[19]

[18] See Théodore Géricault, *Cannibalism on the Raft of the Medusa (Scène de Cannibalisme, le Radeau de la Méduse)*, 1818–19, crayon, ink wash and gouache on paper, Musée du Louvre, Paris.
[19] See Christine Riding, 'Staging *The Raft of the Medusa*', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 5.2 (2004), 1–26 (p. 11).

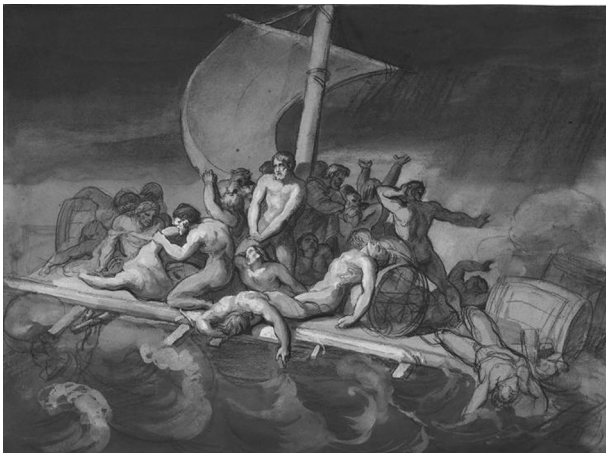

Fig. 5: Théodore Géricault, *Cannibalism on the Raft of the Medusa* (*Scène de Cannibalisme, le Radeau de la Méduse*), 1818–19.

I will speculate further into the specific role of the zombie motif in the 'photographic painting', but we can already say that the choice of this motif unearths the cannibalism which Géricault had excluded from his own composition. In brief, there is neither raft nor shipwreck in Jeff Wall's picture, but his zombies, it might be suggested, are the ghosts or spirits of the cannibals of *The Medusa*: Wall skilfully acknowledges the reality banned from the nineteenth-century painting. Indeed, as we shall soon demonstrate, it is through the motif of the zombie, a motif hardly compatible with the logic of historical discourse, that the historical fact — the shipwrecked cannibals of *The Medusa* — is reintegrated within the 'photographic painting'. But what exact role does the zombie play in this war scene, beyond that of a mere corpse?

Let us state it bluntly: in this particular case, the zombie is the instrument that undermines the genre of history painting. Indeed, this essentially fictitious figure introduces its ontological contradiction within the war painting, a subversive interaction between the living and the dead, which initially contradicts the principle of the representation of a historical event. In other words, the zombie figure is that impossibility which transforms the supposedly real historical scene into a utopian scene. Jeff Wall recurrently uses the terms 'hallucination' or 'fantastic vision' in order to describe the status of the depicted scene,[20] something which further demonstrates the discrepancy between history and its representation. Similarly, he insists that his reconstruction does not rely on any particular stage of the war evoked in his photograph: the ambush mentioned in the work's title could very well have taken place, but as it happens it was entirely imagined by the artist. In the end, the photograph retains only one motif from the absent or eclipsed

[20] Jeff Wall explains: 'It always seemed to me that the work was going to have a relationship to war photography. I was going to advance a claim to authenticity that couldn't be satisfied and, in the suspension of that area — the fantasy — the hallucination could occur.' See Burnett, p. 59.

cinematographic medium, a mere fragment of the cinematic imaginary. Albeit displaced from its medium, this motif still retains all the power of cinema, that is, its fiction effect. Through those aimless zombies who have lost their ability to bite and groan and are equally deprived of the narrative economy of cinema,[21] *fiction descends and enters the supposedly historical scene.* Now such an operation undoubtedly constitutes the game or the pretence of a utopian discourse. Louis Marin has used Thomas More's seminal work as his starting point to discuss the paradoxical nature of the Utopia as a literary genre. He summarizes the problem in the following manner: 'Comment peut-il mettre en scène une contradiction historique en la dissimulant ou plus précisément en la jouant dans une fiction?'[22] Thomas More's *Utopia* mainly revolves around such an exchange between fiction and history and this relation is cunningly managed by its author. In other words, the utopian discourse implies the projection of the historical present within a fiction that reconsiders it, and inversely, the projection of fiction within the preexisting context of history. The implications of Thomas More's work can obviously not be reduced to those of Jeff Wall's piece, since the photograph is concerned with the representation of history rather than with a political model. I believe nevertheless that both works essentially revolve around an interaction between fiction and history and a conversion of the historical scene into a utopian scene.

To summarize, we are confronted with a photograph whose mode of composition is borrowed from the history painting and its main motif from the horror movie. This ultimately produces what I have referred to as a conversion of the historical scene into a utopian scene. In such a context, one might wonder what becomes of the photographic medium. In opposition to the law (and the transparency) of the imprint, Wall's piece valorizes the conception of the photographic image as *istoria*[23] so that, along with the history painting, it is the traditionally established relation between the photograph and its referent which is subverted.

Looking Back upon the Question of the Medium

I will now conclude on two points and come back to the question of the medium in order to open up the scope of my analysis. Firstly, the phenomenon which Rosalind Krauss theorized in the late 1990s seems to have emancipated itself from its well-circumscribed historical and aesthetic context and to have spread so widely as to become more generally relevant. Indeed the repeated use of the filmic medium in contemporary art (by Tacita Dean or Mark Lewis, for instance)

[21] Let me add that although the zombie is deprived of the ordinary economy of the cinematic narrative, it is not irrevocably excluded from the narrative register, since in this particular case it enters the *istoria* of the photography.

[22] Louis Marin, *Utopiques: jeux d'espace* (Paris: Minuit, 1973), p. 87.

[23] For a discussion about this concept, see Anthony Grafton, 'Historia and Istoria: Alberti's Terminology in Context', *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance*, 8 (1999), 37–68.

sufficiently proves that the re-elaboration discussed throughout this paper does not only apply to photography — this could be stated even if the filmic medium did not systematically imply all the critical aspects which Krauss attributes to its photographic homologue.

Secondly, as a result of this general recasting of all mediums, it is necessary to reexamine the concept of medium itself. Post-medium era or not, I do not think that the discussion of the image can dispense with the theoretical tool of the medium (and it has to be noted that within 'post-medium' we *still* have the word medium). However, the assemblage lying at the core of the concept of medium — that is the correlation between the material support of a work and its aesthetic reason, or its expressive reason to take up Krauss's words — has to be re-considered as soon as this correlation ceases to be systematic. The question which I will eventually raise is the following: to what extent was the correlation between material support and aesthetic reason ever in effect?

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