

# A EMERGENCE OF A GERMAN DOCUMENTARY TRADITION

To define German documentary photography entails, as a fundamental precondition, to understand what the term precisely means, in order to evaluate what concepts, discourses or practices it derives from. As has been exhaustively shown by Olivier Lugon in various publications,<sup>18</sup> the “fluid” term of documentary has been given numerous definitions over time, fluctuating according to period, geographical and linguistic specificities and individual or institutional practices. While the definition of documentary film seems (somehow) more clearly delineated – the documentary is often defined through its opposition to fiction – there is no such equivalent in photography.<sup>19</sup> Despite considerable variation in its understanding, the approaches to documentary nevertheless share some common ground. Aspirations differ considerably, but there remains – common to those various trends – “the desire to reveal ‘things as they are,’ to provide reliable, authentic information, avoiding any embellishment that might alter the integrity of reality.”<sup>20</sup> The history of documentary is thus a history of discourse, a history of positions, whose strength resides in the perpetual interrogation of photography’s own characteristics: “The

18 See for example Olivier Lugon, “L'esthétique du document. 1890 – 2000. Le réel sous toutes ses formes,” in André Gunthert and Michel Poivert (ed.), *L'art de la photographie*, Paris, Citadelles et Mazenod, 2007.

19 Olivier Lugon, “Documentary: Authority and Ambiguities,” in Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (ed.), *The Green Room. Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1*, Berlin, Sternberg Press/Center for Curatorial Studies Bard College, 2008, p. 29.

20 Ibid.

nebulous definition [...] has undoubtedly been the chief factor influencing its viability."<sup>21</sup> Discourse legitimating the documentary has eventually operated as the key parameter that historians could build upon to understand the concept.

Addressing documentary photography not only requires a circumstantial reading, considering particular practices and contextual situations in order to assess one specific object – in our case German documentary photography –, but it also consequently entails the confrontation of varying definitions and heterogeneous enunciating entities. If one is to examine the German case, not only does its own history require a specific historicization, but it also entails that one accounts for geographical and cultural differences in the scientific fields addressing it. As will become apparent throughout this chapter, the concept of documentary and its definition through the discourse on the relationship between image and reality differs considerably in the Anglo-Saxon and German context. Furthermore, the reception and conception of the use of digital imaging technologies diverge noticeably in those two contextual fields, which ultimately allows the reception of those tools to be associated with a given, geographically and culturally conditioned, conception of the documentary. The history of the theorization of photography has, as a matter of fact, evolved differently in Germany than in the United States or the United Kingdom. Grossly schematized, the Anglo-Saxon field has benefitted from a strong post-structural impetus, led by John Tagg and Victor Burgin in the United Kingdom and by Rosalind Krauss and Abigail Solomon-Godeau in the United States.<sup>22</sup> Germany has kept a predominantly historical approach toward the object “photography,” resorting to key thinkers of the Frankfurt School.<sup>23</sup> If this extremely simplified conception has not yet been systematically examined,<sup>24</sup> it can nevertheless be used as a starting point for understanding the conception of the documentary and the reception of digital imageries in Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom – a point of departure that may provide some answers to the question of why digitally retouched photographs from the Becher students were not, until very recently, perceived as digital.

In order to understand the modalities of the reception of digital photography in Düsseldorf, and more generally to establish the reception of digital imaging in Germany, it is thus necessary to point out the specificities of German documentary photography discourse. In the common mainstream understanding, German photography often

21 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

22 Sarah James, “The Truth about Photography,” *Art Monthly*, No. 292, Dec. 2005/Jan. 2006, p. 8.

23 One notable exception remains Klaus Honnef’s rather uncommon resorting to Bazin and French author theory. See for example Klaus Honnef, “Es kommt der Autorenfotograf. Materialien und Gedanken zu einer neuen Ansicht über die Fotografie,” in *In Deutschland. Aspekte gegenwärtiger Dokumentarfotografie*, op. cit., p. 47 ff.

24 Sarah James seems to be one of the few scholars who has started to undertake the examination of those differences in the photo-theoretical field in Germany. See for example Sarah James, “Photography’s Blind Spot. Looking at the German Paradigm,” in *Photographies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, September 2009 and Sarah James, *Common Ground. German Photographic Cultures across the Iron Curtain*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2013.

equals German documentary photography, while German contemporary photography often equals Düsseldorf photography. This is obviously not a scientific fact, but a shared *lieu commun*, which can be found in critical or mainstream literature addressing those particular objects. German photography has over time, at least at first glance, been identified through some of its “main” mind-sets. Despite a multitude of practices, applications, channels of diffusions and uses, German photography is frequently envisioned as a coherent, linear and uninterrupted development. The Neue Sachlichkeit, the paradigmatic documentary movement from which contemporary photographers such as the Becher pupils have supposedly emerged, is often seen as a rectilinear and logical story, disregarding the complexity of its actual history and often ignoring strategies that do not seem to seek to “show things as they are.” German photography is regularly associated with the idea of documentation. The most famous names linked with second generation Düsseldorf photography are figures such as August Sander, Albert Renger-Patzsch or the Bechers themselves, all of whom have, to a certain extent, been read as part of that particular history of German photography. Even figures such as Walter Benjamin show a clear proclivity toward documentary imageries – in his case for political and ideological reasons (not exclusively, obviously) –, which reinforces the documentary paradigm that Ruff, Höfer or Hütte are associated with. The concept of photography as reproduction (*Abbildung*) remains central. While connections with these fatherly figures define the discursive field in which Düsseldorf photography is interpreted, numerous (potentially productive) connections with other photographic models – for example, László Moholy-Nagy or *generative Fotografie*<sup>25</sup> –, remain un- or underexplored. The image as an autonomous entity (*Bild*) is analyzed in relation to painting, omnipresent in the formal genealogy of Düsseldorf photography, but most photographic models, which do not embody a paradigmatic documentary style, are excluded as potential sources.

The Becher students are commonly interpreted as the outcome or logical continuation of that specifically German documentary tradition. Their historiography is considerably shaped by their relationship with a group of iconic fatherly figures. However, while a formal and contextual relationship with these photographers appears unquestionable, the effective impact of previous generations on Düsseldorf photography in the late twentieth century is commonly stated without being methodically established. Often assumed, and established through evident formal features (frontal constructions, homogenous lighting, etc.) and representational strategies (typology, serial construction, etc.), the connection between these models and the younger generation oversees most tangible contextual elements and

25 Gottfried Jäger for instance derives his shift from “reproductive” to “productive” strategies directly from “experimental” photography of the 1920s, quoting László Moholy-Nagy’s *Malerei, Fotografie, Film* (Passau, Passavia Druckerei, 1927, p. 28). See Gottfried Jäger, “Generative Photography. A Systematic, Constructive Approach,” in *Leonardo*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1986 and Anais Feyeux, “La *Generative Fotografie*. Entre démon de l’exactitude et rage de l’histoire,” op. cit.

obvious differences.<sup>26</sup> But until the 1970s, German documentary photography as a coherent entity did not yet exist, for various contextual reasons. The German documentary paradigm merely emerges in these years. This particular period was an incredibly prolific environment for the development of photographic practices and their legitimation as an art form, shaped by numerous factors. Major figures of the New Objectivity, but also Walker Evans or Eugène Atget, were being rediscovered at the time through various channels.<sup>27</sup> Benjamin's work, disregarded for decades due to "unfortunate" edition politics, negative reactions of the photographic community, his Marxist-materialist positions<sup>28</sup> and a "particular" conception of the writing of history,<sup>29</sup> was also newly discovered, and some of his key writings published for the first time.<sup>30</sup> The work of various galleries, such as Lichttropfen in Aachen (created in 1974) or Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf (created in 1967), the activities of collectors such as the Wilde couple, the increasing recognition by various museums and several important exhibitions such as the *documenta 5* (1972) and *documenta 6* (1977) in Kassel or the *In Deutschland. Aspekte gegenwärtiger Dokumentar fotografie* in 1979 exhibition in Bonn, increasingly established photography as an institutionally and economically accepted art form whose definition in Germany derives from the concept of documentation and remains powerfully attached to that very notion.

Before sketching out this context of emergence and outlining the fact that key protagonists such as Klaus Honnef intentionally planned and carried out the construction of a specifically German documentary paradigm in photography, it ought to be highlighted that

- 26 See especially Martina Dobbe's chapter on "Neue Neusachlichkeit," in *Bernd und Hilla Becher. Fachwerkhäuser*, Siegen, Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen, 2013 (2001), p. 53–71 and August Sander, Karl Blossfeldt, Albert Renger-Patzsch, Bernd und Hilla Becher. *Vergleichende Konzeptionen*, exhibition catalogue (Photographische Sammlung/Sk Stiftung Kultur, Cologne), Schirmer/Mosel, Munich, Paris and London, 1997.
- 27 Christoph Schaden, "To Be Sure, That Is Also the Expression of a Particular Vital Consciousness. On the Reception of Stephen Shore's Work in Germany 1972–1995," in *Der Rote Bulli. Stephen Shore and the New Düsseldorf Photography*, op. cit., p. 55.
- 28 Rolf H. Krauss, *Walter Benjamin und der neue Blick auf die Photographie*, op. cit., p. 10–13 and chapter "Zur Rezeption der Benjaminschen Schriften über Photographie und zu deren Wirkung auf Texte über Photographie nach 1963," p. 81–88. Krauss chiefly bases his study of the reception of Benjamin on Detlev Schöttker, "Walter Benjamin und seine Rezeption. Überlegungen zur Wirkungsgeschichte (aus Anlaß des 100. Geburtstags am 15. Juli 1992)," *Leviathan. Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaft*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1992.
- 29 Krauss emphasizes Benjamin's "aporetic [aphoristische]" way of writing and thinking, which combines fragments (Krauss uses the concept of montage as a metaphor to describe it), instead of proceeding linearly. That strategy complicates the reading and understanding, which might be another hindrance to his reception. Rolf H. Krauss, *Walter Benjamin und der neue Blick auf die Photographie*, op. cit., p. 88–89.
- 30 Krauss also suggests more projectively that the uses of photography during the national-socialist regime (and Benjamin's exile and suicide) hindered the spreading of his writings and thought. See Rolf H. Krauss, *Walter Benjamin und der neue Blick auf die Photographie*, op. cit., p. 10–14. On the relationship between photography and National Socialism see for example Rolf Sachsse, "Photography as NS State Design. Power's Abuse of a Medium" and Peter Reichel, "Images of Power – Power of Images," in Klaus Honnef et al. (ed.), *German Photography 1870–1970. Power of a Medium*, exhibition catalogue (Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, 1997), Cologne, DuMont Buchverlag, 1997. On the idea of an impact of the trauma of World War Two on image production in Germany after the conflict, see especially Andrés Mario Zervigón, "Le Wiederaufbau de la perception. La photographie allemande dans l'après-guerre, 1945–1950," *Etudes photographiques*, No. 29, 2012.

this particular context is rather scarcely mentioned in the understanding of Düsseldorf photography. The main reason logically derives from the fact that only few scholars have addressed the phenomenon as a whole.<sup>31</sup> Rolf H. Krauss, among a handful of other historians,<sup>32</sup> has thoroughly reconstructed Benjamin's reception in an artistic context.<sup>33</sup> Inka Graeve has laid out the fundamentals for the understanding of the role of Ann and Jürgen Wilde,<sup>34</sup> who acquired parts of Franz Roh's collection of photographs in the 1960s, which constituted the starting point for one of the most important collections of photography in Germany.<sup>35</sup> But numerous facets of that particular history remain largely unwritten and their implications for Düsseldorf photography underexplored. The role of Wilhelm Schürmann and Rudolf Kicken, who created one of the first photography galleries in Germany (Lichttöpfen, Aachen), the curatorial endeavors of Klaus Honnef or the influence of the first editor of an author photography publisher in Europe, Schirmer/Mosel, have hardly been considered, either as autonomous histories or parts of the history of the Düsseldorf School.

Although incomplete, three scholars in particular have addressed aspects of that history and emphasized its importance. Historical and geographical distance has allowed Peter Galassi, as Christoph Schaden notes, to understand and sketch out the preconditions for a "paradigmatic change" in the perception of the mechanical image in Germany.<sup>36</sup> Klaus Honnef's theory of "author photography" legitimated documentary photographers as artists, despite the "practical functions and passive realism of their work."<sup>37</sup> Schaden himself has explored the role of Klaus Honnef as curator of *In Deutschland* and of the photography section of *documenta 5*, but

- 31 While this phenomenon has not been studied extensively in correlation with Düsseldorf, the 1960s and 1970s are addressed in the recently published thesis of Alessandra Nappo, *I nuovi documentaristi tedeschi. Forme di sopravvivenza della "Neue Sachlichkeit" nella fotografia degli anni Sessanta e Settanta*, Milano, Scalpendi, 2017, the connection between the Bechers and New Objectivity in the self-published dissertation of Annika Baacke, *Fotografie zwischen Kunst und Dokumentation. Objektivität und Ästhetik, Kontinuität und Veränderung im Werk von Bernd und Hilla Becher, Albert Renger-Patzsch, August Sander und Karl Blossfeldt*, Fachbereich Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften der Freien Universität Berlin, dir. Peter Geimer & Werner Busch, 2013 (Berlin, epubli, 2014).
- 32 For example Jessica Nitsche, *Walter Benjamin's Gebrauch der Fotografie*, Berlin, Kadmos, 2011.
- 33 According to Rolf Sachsse, Krauss has done so in the particular context of the convergence between photography and fine arts, considering the role of Benjamin in a medium-specific reading. He proceeds as if photography were an autonomous technology, disregarding "the interplay of external phenomena such as [...] television, pop music or office copy machines [...]." As such, still according to Sachsse, his account wouldn't be compatible with a history of representations. From our point of view, his study could thus be interpreted as the perpetuation of the construction of the German documentary paradigm, medium oriented and rooted in an artistic context. See Rolf Sachsse, "Rolf H. Krauss, *Walter Benjamin und der neue Blick auf die Photographie*, Ostfildern, Cantz Verlag, 1998, 128 p., chronol., bibl.," *Etudes photographiques*, No. 6, May 1999.
- 34 Inka Graeve (ed.), *Mechanismus und Ausdruck. Die Sammlung Ann und Jürgen Wilde: Fotografien aus dem 20. Jahrhundert*, exhibition catalogue (Sprengel Museum Hannover, 1999, Kunstmuseum Bonn, 2000), Munich, Sprengel Museum Hannover/Schirmer Mosel, 1999.
- 35 Ulrich Krempel and Thomas Weski, "Preface," in Inka Graeve (ed.), *Mechanismus und Ausdruck. Die Sammlung Ann und Jürgen Wilde: Fotografien aus dem 20. Jahrhundert*, op. cit., p. 7 – 9.
- 36 Christoph Schaden, "Denken wir nicht überflüssig, sondern notwendig.' Anmerkungen zur epochalen Photoausstellung *In Deutschland. Aspekte gegenwärtiger Dokumentariefotografie* (1979)," in *Frame #3. Jahrbuch der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Photographie*, Göttingen, 2010, p. 180.
- 37 Peter Galassi, "Gursky's World," op. cit., p. 13.

also of various exhibitions showing “historical” documentary photographers, emphasizing his explicit aim to “artificially” redefine photography. With his essay on the influence of American photography in Germany during that period,<sup>38</sup> Schaden substantially contributes to the understanding of that context, as he is one of the few scholars systematically exploring the “matrix” of the emergence of Düsseldorf photography. With Stefan Gronert's introductory article of “Die Düsseldorfer Photoschule,” in which he lays out various aspects of that history and connects it with Düsseldorf, especially emphasizing Honnef's role,<sup>39</sup> these three scholars have laid out the premises of a historically more accurate account of the emergence of photography as an art form in Germany that plays a key role in the understanding of the Düsseldorf School and its reception.<sup>40</sup> This process will be sketched out by analyzing several of its facets. The study of *In Deutschland* aims at understanding the role of Klaus Honnef as curator and Bernd Becher as mediator of that idea. On a more theoretical side, the impact of the reception of Walter Benjamin, the core theoretical legitimation of that paradigm, will be schematically outlined. The study of several academic attempts to formalize the history of German photography and theory in the late 1970s and early 1980s intends to show how that history has been (re-)written. And although they won't be examined in detail, the role of various factors, such as important galleries, collectors and magazines, will be sketched out in order to understand their role in this history.

Ultimately, the chief endeavor lies in pinning down the idea of documentary advocated altogether, to pose it as counter-model to post-photography. This confrontation poses an important hypothesis for the understanding of the interactions of these “two” histories: Can it be established that the resistance toward digital technologies in the reception of the Düsseldorf School could be attributed to the special role the concept of documentary has played in the institutionalization – as legitimated artists – of the photographers of the Düsseldorf School, and photography in general? And could it more generally be advocated that the legitimizing process of photography as an art form could have been threatened or jeopardized by the discourse on the end of photography?

38 Christoph Schaden, “To Be Sure, That Is Also the Expression of a Particular Vital Consciousness. On the Reception of Stephen Shore's Work in Germany 1972 – 1995,” in *Der Rote Bulli. Stephen Shore and the New Düsseldorf Photography*, op. cit.

39 Stefan Gronert, “Photographische Emanzipation,” in *Die Düsseldorfer Photoschule*, op. cit., especially p. 15 – 23.

40 More generally, it has to be emphasized to which extent these projects highlight the potentially “artistic” nature of the mechanical image, based on formal and historical models (e.g., Sander, Renger-Patzsch, etc.); while not necessarily “inartistic” in their prospect, these figures were *posited* as artistic during the two decades between the mid-1960s and the early 1980s. In Germany, documentary photography as a recognized art form thus emerges simultaneously with photography as an art form at this particular moment in time.

## 1 “IN DEUTSCHLAND” (1979), “AUTORENFOTOGRAFIE” AND “LA POLITIQUE DES AUTEURS”

### Theoretical fundaments of a canon

The first image in the exhibition catalogue for *In Deutschland. Aspekte gegenwärtiger Dokumentarfotografie*, held at the Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn in 1979, shows an evanescent Ingrid Bergman in Alfred Hitchcock's 1946 thriller *Notorious*. The photograph of the feature film appears in an article written by the curator of the exhibition, Klaus Honnef, aiming at situating and defining the (theoretical) stakes of documentary photography in Germany. In a letter to Tata Ronkholz, informing her of his curatorial intentions, Honnef explains his endeavor. “[The exhibition] tries to formulate a new understanding of ‘documentary photography.’ [...] It shall be limited to specifically German themes [...] and its theme selection shall be tied to an obviously already existing photographic tradition in Germany.”<sup>41</sup> Honnef makes explicit three major parameters of his project, which underlie the construction of a specifically German documentary tradition. He sketches out a new “movement,” somehow artificially aiming at constituting a canon. To do so, he limits his body of work to German photography, to create a more coherent entity. And finally, he inscribes that project in a pre-existing German documentary tradition. But the one element missing from his endeavor to promote young documentary photography – which started to get attention through the recognition of the Bechers by American conceptual artists and their galleries (e.g., the 1972 Becher exhibition at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York) – was their theoretical legitimation: How could the photographers exhibited in Bonn – Johannes Bönsel, Ulrich Görlich, Candida Höfer, Axel Hütte, Wilmar Koenig, Hans-Martin Küsters, Martin Manz, Hartmut Neubauer, Heinrich Riebesehl, Tata Ronkholz, Michael Schmidt, Wilhelm Schürmann and Thomas Struth – be fortified and positioned? And how could documentary photography be artistic altogether?

The title of Honnef's essay addressing this very issue, “Es kommt der Autorenfotograf. Materialien und Gedanken zu einer neuen Ansicht über die Fotografie,” not only sounds like a manifesto, but also explicitly refers to Werner Gräff's essay “Es kommt der neue Fotograf”.<sup>42</sup> The author of the avant-garde manifesto also re-emerges in the late 1970s, through a reprint of his book in 1978<sup>43</sup> and in Ute Esildsen's exhibition at the Folkwang Museum Essen *Film und Foto der 20er Jahre*. Honnef overtly refers to the programmatic book to profit

41 Letter from Klaus Honnef to Tata Ronkholz, 1 March 1979, Estate of Tata Ronkholz (managed by Van Ham Kunstauktionen, Cologne). Quoted in Christoph Schaden, “Denken wir nicht überflüssig, sondern notwendig.’ Anmerkungen zur epochalen Photoausstellung *In Deutschland. Aspekte gegenwärtiger Dokumentar-fotografie* (1979),” op. cit., p. 182.

42 Werner Gräff (in collaboration with Hans Richter), *Es kommt der neue Fotograf*, Berlin, Verlag Hermann Reckendorf, 1929.

43 Werner Gräff (in collaboration with Hans Richter), *Es kommt der neue Fotograf*, Cologne, Walter König, 1978.

from its status and inscribe his project in a history.<sup>44</sup> The text itself constitutes a singular occurrence in the theoretical legitimation process of photography altogether. After the death of the author had been advocated in the 1960s by theorists (e.g., Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault) and artists (e.g., conceptual art) alike, “Es kommt der Autorenfotograf” seeks to legitimate photography in that particular context, but to do so it resorts to an alien tradition: cinema.<sup>45</sup> More than many other films, *Notorious* is considered the achievement of what makes Hitchcock “more” than a sheer filmmaker, but an author: his handwriting, his style. In the beginning of his text, Honnef – who was a film critic at the time<sup>46</sup> – mentions Alexandre Astruc’s famous article “Naissance d’une nouvelle avant-garde: La caméra-stylo”<sup>47</sup> of 1948, which legitimates the concept of authorship in cinema (and the medium’s autonomy from other media in a Greenbergian perspective),<sup>48</sup> which will be formalized by the critics of the *Cahiers du cinéma* a few years later. Labeled “la politique des auteurs,” after a text written by French critic and filmmaker François Truffaut in 1955 – “Ali Baba et la ‘Politique des Auteurs’”<sup>49</sup> – the concept is discussed by Honnef to highlight the wide cultural acceptance of film as art after the Second World War, which he imputes to the articulation between the films themselves, their reception and the theorization of the medium. Film theory, Honnef argues, is far more advanced than photography theory: “Film theory [is] worlds ahead of photography theory”.<sup>50</sup> Although he mentions most of the important photography theories in his text (e.g., Benjamin, Kracauer, Bazin), he regrets the fact that photography does not yield an immanent theorization, which derives from the medium itself rather than from the outside, unable to detach itself from the influence of painting, sociology and psychology.<sup>51</sup> Two interrelated key ideas emerge from that assessment, and become Honnef’s argumentative

- 44 It could be argued that the comparison is counterproductive, as Gräff argues against a visual system (based on a central perspective) and for a new one, while Honnef’s endeavor is rather based on the inscription of contemporary photography in a documentary tradition. See Olivier Lugon, “Le marcheur. Piétons et photographes au sein des avant-gardes,” *Etudes photographiques*, No. 8, November 2000.
- 45 While film studies and history and theory of photography possess important common references (Benjamin, Kracauer, Adorno, Bazin, etc.), their respective historiographies remain surprisingly dissociated. Attempts to legitimate photography as art based on the model of cinema are rather scarce.
- 46 See Interview of Klaus Honnef by Christoph Schaden, “‘Wilhelm war nicht amüsiert darüber.’ Ein Gespräch zum 70. Geburtstag über die Ausstellung *In Deutschland*,” in *Frame #3. Jahrbuch der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Photographie*, op. cit., p. 195.
- 47 Alexandre Astruc, “Naissance d’une nouvelle avant-garde. La caméra-stylo,” *L’Ecran français*, No. 144, March 1948.
- 48 See Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” in *Partisan Review*, Vol. 6, No. 5, Fall 1939 and Clement Greenberg, “Toward a New Laocoon,” in *Partisan Review*, No. 7, No. 4, July–August 1940.
- 49 François Truffaut, “Ali Baba et la ‘Politique des Auteurs,’” *Cahiers du cinéma*, No. 44, February 1955. The *Cahiers du cinéma* compiled the interviews around the notion in 1972 and edited key texts in the *Petite anthologie du cinéma* series in 2001. See *La politique des auteurs. Les entretiens* (Petite anthologie des Cahiers du cinéma, No. 5), Paris, Les Cahiers du cinéma, 2001 (1972) and Antoine de Baecque (ed.), *La politique des auteurs. Les textes* (Petite anthologie des Cahiers du cinéma, No. 4), Paris, Les Cahiers du cinéma, 2001.
- 50 Klaus Honnef, “Es kommt der Autorenfotograf. Materialien und Gedanken zu einer neuen Ansicht über die Fotografie,” in *In Deutschland. Aspekte gegenwärtiger Dokumentarfotografie*, op. cit., p. 13.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

schema, pursued throughout the text to legitimate photography: the notions of authorship and the concept of autonomy.<sup>52</sup>

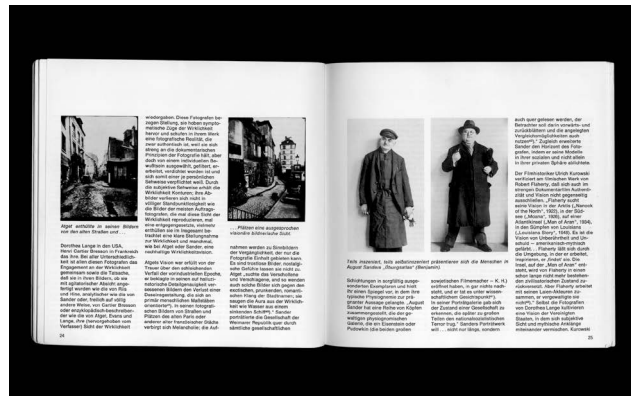


Fig. 9: Illustration of *In Deutschland*: Eugène Atget's "visionary view" of Paris and August Sander's "staged and self-staged" men (captions by Klaus Honnef, page 24 – 25)

Paradoxically, Honnef pursues his reasoning by stating that photography is necessarily connected with documentation, although his theory of authorship derives from fiction. Interestingly, Honnef's project implies both an emphasis on documentation, displayed in the text through the term objectivity, and the idea of handwriting or authorship, mediated through the notion of subjectivity. The first step of his demonstration, stemmed by various illustrious references, discusses the supposed characteristics of photography, interpreting their implications for the conception of the medium. Using Kracauer, he states that "photography has a privileged affinity with non-staged reality,"<sup>53</sup> emphasizing the objective or documentary ambition of photography, while evacuating the importance of experimental models. While he mentions Raoul Hausmann and László Moholy-Nagy and their ability to question the medium in the beginning of his text,<sup>54</sup> these examples are rapidly evacuated; similarly, photographs that might possess aesthetic qualities but that lack artistic intent are not mentioned again

52 The notion of authorship in relation with Honnef's text is associated on a regular basis with Susan Sontag's author theory advocated in *On Photography* (1977, translated into German in 1978 by the Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich). But the American writer is not mentioned by him explicitly or implicitly. Thomas Weski for example argues that "[b]y analogy with Susan Sontag's use of the term *auteur* in her book *On Photography*, Klaus Honnef called these photographers *Autoren-fotografen*, a term which also awakened associations with the *Autorenfilme*," subordinating the importance of cinema to Sontag's concept, more commonly used in photography-specific discourse. See Thomas Weski, "Too Old to Rock'n'Roll: Too Young to Die. A Subjective View of German Photography of the Last Two Decades," in Joachim Brohm and Tim Rautert (ed.), *Joachim Brohm. Kray, Oberhausen*, Edition der Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig/Plitt Verlag, 1995, p. 111 – 112.

53 Siegfried Kracauer, *Theorie des Films. Die Errettung der äusseren Wirklichkeit*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1964, p. 45. Quoted in Klaus Honnef, "Es kommt der Autorenfotograf. Materialien und Gedanken zu einer neuen Ansicht über die Fotografie," op. cit., p. 14.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

in the text.<sup>55</sup> Honnef alludes to the “beauty” of aerial photography noticed by Beaumont Newhall,<sup>56</sup> to differentiate his paragon from vernacular or automated images.<sup>57</sup> He also questions his colleagues’ work – for instance, Wolfgang Kemp’s *Foto-Essays* (1978) – for their too broad understanding of what artistic photography might be. Kemp’s chapter “Das neue Sehen: Problemgeschichtliches zur fotografischen Perspektive,” which discusses Rodchenko, Moholy-Nagy, Strand and the cover image of “Es kommt der neue Fotograf” in relation to perspective issues, is to a certain extent associated with formalistic experiments imitating painting. Although Honnef acknowledges the interest of “untypical” perspectives, he condemns “all types of photographs trying to imitate painting.”<sup>58</sup> The almost abstract appearance of some of the images (e.g., Moholy-Nagy’s *Blick vom Funkturm*, Berlin, 1928), clearly hinder the constitution of the coherent object Honnef aims to sketch out. As a matter of fact, Kemp actually stresses Rodchenko’s emphasis on the “documentary value” of his images and the fact that he aims to move away “as far as possible from painting”.<sup>59</sup> But Kemp does so *against* the artistic value of the photographs; he quotes Rodchenko again, stressing that he aims not to create “photo-paintings [Fotogemälde], but photo-moments [Fotomomente], with documentary value, and not artistic value,”<sup>60</sup> which undermines Honnef’s purpose.

After rejecting irrelevant photographers or scholars, Honnef carries on his justification of documentary photography by discussing its most important practitioners (from Eugène Atget, Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine and Heinrich Zille to August Sander, Robert Flaherty, Jean-Marie Straub or the Bechers). According to Honnef they are not led by aesthetic motives but through “intensive observation,” just like scientists.<sup>61</sup> He argues that documentary is art because of its lack of artistic endeavor. He doesn’t oppose art and document though, which constitutes quite an original position at that time and one of the early attempts of the formalization of a position best embodied by the Bechers themselves, between these “two” fields. But while stressing the impact of objectivity, Honnef highlights the limitation of photographic representation, the fact that the image is not an equivalent of what it shows, but an isolated, frozen moment,<sup>62</sup> imbued with a certain degree of autonomy:

55 One of the rare texts reflecting upon Honnef’s endorsement of documentary photography as an art form and the evacuation of deranging models (i.e., Moholy-Nagy) can be found in *Der Rote Bulli* project. See Gerald Schröder, “Positionings. On the Reception of Bernd and Hilla Becher’s Photographic Oeuvre in the Federal Republic of Germany 1965 – 1990,” in Werner Lippert and Christoph Schaden (ed.), *Der Rote Bulli. Stephen Shore and the New Düsseldorf Photography*, op. cit., p. 311 – 317.

56 Klaus Honnef, “Es kommt der Autorenfotograf,” op. cit., p. 14.

57 Beaumont Newhall discusses automatically recorded aerial photography, for instance. See Beaumont Newhall, *History of Photography, from 1839 to the Present*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1982 (1964).

58 Klaus Honnef, “Es kommt der Autorenfotograf,” op. cit., footnote 38, p. 31.

59 Wolfgang Kemp quoting Rodchenko (no reference), in Wolfgang Kemp, *Foto-Essays*, op. cit., p. 54.

60 Kemp quotes Rodchenko from R. Sartori and H. Rogge, *Sowjetische Fotografie 1928 – 1932*, Munich, 1975, p. 117. *Ibid.*, p. 57 – 58.

61 Klaus Honnef, “Es kommt der Autorenfotograf,” op. cit., p. 21.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

*The objectivity of photography imbues it with strength and credibility, lacking in any other type of visual art. Whatever critical objections we might have, we have to believe in the existence of the represented object, of the actually represented, which means believing in something that has acquired a presence in time and space. Photography benefits from the transfer of the reality of the object onto its reproduction.*<sup>63</sup>

That autonomous character can be expressed or used in two distinct manners by the photographer: either he has to intervene in the image production process to be able to document what he aims to record, or he possesses a certain degree of liberty in the process, as “authenticity and vision are not mutually exclusive.”<sup>64</sup> Using numerous examples, Honnef legitimates these practices, stressing that they do not endanger the documentary prospect. We shall only pursue a few of them, to illustrate these two positions. Honnef discusses Jacob Riis’ work, legitimating his use of artificial light and the staging of his images: “Jacob Riis was forced to ‘stage’ [quotation marks Honnef] many of his images because his technical equipment didn’t allow snapshot photography.”<sup>65</sup> Authenticity is thus guaranteed by technical limitations, an argument stemmed by the statement that “any photographic image feels somehow unsound [befremdlich] anyway.”<sup>66</sup> The case of Robert Flaherty, illustrating a certain autonomy of the (author) cinematographer, proceeds similarly. Honnef argues that the filmmaker, well known for his staged documentary films (most prominently *Nanook of the North* [1922]), aims to mediate a “vision of innocence and untouched character.”<sup>67</sup> The vision therefore legitimates the manipulation or staging.<sup>68</sup> From these examples emerges the concept of “subjective moment,” which is found in the contemporary text “Das subjektive Moment in der Dokumentar-Fotografie”<sup>69</sup> (1978). The touch or handwriting, legitimated through the evocation of the “*politique des auteurs*,” is a metaphor Honnef will repeatedly use. On the cover of volume 18 of *Kunstforum International* on photography edited by Honnef, a pen seemingly annotating a photograph symbolizes the idea of Handschrift and authorship, suggesting the importance of the concept in Honnef’s thought.

63 “Die Objektivität der Fotografie verleiht ihr eine Stärke und Glaubhaftigkeit, die jedem anderen Werk der bildenden Kunst fehlt. Welche kritischen Einwände wir auch immer haben mögen, wir sind gezwungen, an die Existenz des repräsentierten Objektes zu glauben, des tatsächlich repräsentierten, das heißt, des in Zeit und Raum präsent gewordenen. Die Fotografie profitiert von der Übertragung der Realität des Objektes auf seine Reproduktion.” André Bazin, quoted by Honnef from *Was ist Kino ?*, Cologne, 1975, p. 24 ff. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

68 The notion of “vision” that Honnef uses almost literally describes Andreas Gursky’s understanding of the concept of documentary. See especially chapter “Complex Composites. Andreas Gursky’s generic world.”

69 Klaus Honnef, “Das subjektive Moment in der Dokumentar-Fotografie. Materialien und Gedanken zu einer neuen Ansicht über Fotografie,” *Kunstforum International*, Vol. 41, 1980. Initially published in Klaus Honnef, Renate Heidt and Barbara Kückels (ed.), *Schlaglichter. Eine Bestandsaufnahme aktueller Kunst im Rheinland*, exhibition catalogue (Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn, 1979), Cologne, Rheinland Verlag, 1979.

Honnef's argumentation inscribes his project in a pre-existing genealogy of now recognized photographers. It could serve the purpose of an author theory as it is, and validly circumscribes strategies or positions, which enter his particular canon. But Honnef further strengthens his argument with the interpretation of a specific use of the photographic image, with important implications for Düsseldorf photography: serial imagery. In the 1970s, Honnef was as fascinated by the "shitty" (sic) quality of images of conceptual photographers, which allowed a critical stance toward the medium,<sup>70</sup> as he was appalled by the "over-aestheticized" documentary photography advocated by John Szarkowski at the MoMA.<sup>71</sup> His main criticism – much harsher in a 2009 interview than in the original text of 1979, where he only mentions Szarkowski in a note<sup>72</sup> – primarily focuses on the individual aspect of such images: to him, Einzelbildfotografien [single photographs] stand for aesthetic autonomy and enact a rapprochement with painting, forsaking documentary value.<sup>73</sup> Their main focus is on visual effect, engendering an "advertising aesthetic" even in images of poverty [Elendbilder].<sup>74</sup> Comparative or analytical strategies – Honnef mentions Eadweard Muybridge or Matthew Brady's portraits – constitute the sole legitimate position, again emphasizing the need for careful observation and a scientific approach.<sup>75</sup>

A further aspect of his theory resides in the sentiment the relationship with reality conveys through the image: melancholy and the idea of loss and decline – in particular through the recurring theme of industrial architecture, which constitutes an important topos in Honnef's text – are key parameters of his understanding of author photography, which becomes a witness of the present and, to a certain extent, an announcer of the future. Atget mediates "the sadness about the ramping downfall of the pre-industrial era," and Sander documents "the state of a society, that produced national-socialist terror."<sup>76</sup> A documentary depiction mediating a sense of melancholy constitutes the dominant parameters of Honnef's vision of documentary photographers as artists. Bernd and Hilla Becher, who "succeed in the art field

70 See Interview of Klaus Honnef by Christoph Schaden, op. cit., p. 195.

71 The Swiss magazine *Camera*, which Honnef reads and repeatedly quotes, constitutes one of the main diffusion vectors of Szarkowski's curatorial practice in Europe; Honnef also mentions his "repelling" exhibition shown at the *Photokina*. See interview of Klaus Honnef by Christoph Schaden, op. cit., p. 195.

72 He mentions Szarkowski's book *Looking At Photographs*, New York, 1973 in a footnote. See Klaus Honnef, "Es kommt der Autorenfotograf," op. cit., p. 19 and footnote 51, p. 31.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 19 – 20.

74 Interview of Klaus Honnef by Christoph Schaden, op. cit., p. 195. It is difficult to exactly pinpoint what Honnef means by over-aestheticized documentary photography. In contradiction of what he seems to suggest, not only has the MoMA played an important role in the legitimation process of photography but has also advocated the documentary photography as an artistic form. (e.g., *New Documents* with Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand, 1967). Although Szarkowski's modernist conception of photography will soon be criticized by various scholars, his overall attempt to legitimate the medium encompasses Honnef's own endeavor.

75 Klaus Honnef, "Es kommt der Autorenfotograf," op. cit., p. 21. Honnef's retrospective statement in 2010 on the "anti-aesthetic" stand of the "bad" and "blurry" photographs of conceptual artists somehow contradicts that position and reveals a non-resolved indefiniteness between photographers and conceptual artists using photography, exhibited indistinctively in *In Deutschland* (1979) or in *Schlaglichter* (1979). Interview of Klaus Honnef by Christoph Schaden, op. cit., p. 195 – 196.

76 Klaus Honnef, "Es kommt der Autorenfotograf," in op. cit., p. 25.

rather than in photography circles,<sup>77</sup> thus constitute the prime example of observers of the present, whose subjective stance doesn't derive from formal characteristics but from a resonance with reality. Quoting Howard Hawks, Honnef stresses the neutrality of the approach (here again the documentary intent resonates with fiction<sup>78</sup>): "I shoot without detour. There are no camera tricks. [...] The audience sees what I see,"<sup>79</sup> but "individual vision" and "individual themes" [Bildthema]<sup>80</sup> guarantee the "artistic" vision. While clearly contributing to the legitimation of photography as an art form in general, Honnef's project clearly contributes to the conditions of possibility of the Düsseldorf School, whose photographers enact many of the features he circumscribed to define the German documentary paradigm. But, ironically, Düsseldorf photography, which Honnef will support in various forthcoming publications (e.g., *Kunstforum International*, Vol. 41, No. 5, 1980, special issue on documentary photography edited by Honnef) or curatorial projects (e.g., exhibition *Schlaglichter. Eine Bestandsaufnahme aktueller Kunst im Rheinland*, Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn, Fall 1979, curated by Honnef), will become such a prominent label, that numerous German documentary photographers will eventually disappear from the spotlight. Several photographers initially supported by Honnef (e.g., Heinrich Riebesehl) or emerging in other contexts (e.g., Joachim Brohm or Manfred Hamm) will only be re-discovered two decades later.

### The exhibition

While *Fotografie nach der Fotografie* will travel to numerous locations in Europe and the United States, *In Deutschland* will only be shown in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn for a limited time during the summer 1979, from June 23 to July 29. The exhibition constitutes a point of convergence of interest for German documentary photography and is one of the first manifestations to gather its young generation. "In Deutschland initiated the worldwide career of the Becher School," Klaus Honnef emphatically (and retrospectively) concludes in an interview with Christoph Schaden in 2010.<sup>81</sup> If Honnef's own account ought obviously to be pondered considering his role in the exhibition, the show clearly constitutes an eminently interesting object of study, where the interest of photography as an art form and a conscious attempt to position young German photographers in that context merge. Retrospectively, it has further to be argued that the exhibition of four Becher pupils, which can be found in numerous editorial and curatorial projects directed by Klaus Honnef since that year, played a central role in the constitution of the Düsseldorf School. Originally,

77 Ibid., p. 26.

78 Honnef's last note explains his use of film theory, whose differences with photography he acknowledges. But besides the concept of author, the use of cinema sounds like an implicit attempt to deny art criticism and theory the role as an instance of legitimation of photography. Ibid., p. 32.

79 Ibid., p. 27.

80 Ibid., p. 29.

81 Interview of Klaus Honnef by Christoph Schaden, "'Wilhelm war nicht amüsiert darüber.' Ein Gespräch zum 70. Geburtstag über die Ausstellung *In Deutschland*," op. cit., p. 196.

the Bechers students weren't even invited to participate, though. Wilhelm Schürmann – in whose mind the idea of a collective exhibition of contemporary German photographers originated<sup>82</sup> – and Klaus Honnef had already made a selection of eleven young photographers, without Becher pupils. Honnef was keen to promote the German scene: “the art scene from the Rheinland is even more vivacious than in New York – Paris isn't even worth mentioning”<sup>83</sup> Honnef argues in a newspaper article on the exhibition *Schlaglichter* on artists of the Rheinland (Cologne, Düsseldorf, Aachen, etc.).<sup>84</sup> After Gabriele und Helmut Nothhelfer, who were supposed to participate, eventually declined, Bernd Becher submitted the idea to exhibit the photographs of four of his students at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf: Tata Ronkholz, Candida Höfer, Thomas Struth and Axel Hütte.<sup>85</sup> Their work “blew [Honnef] away,”<sup>86</sup> and he integrated them into the project, much to the distaste of Schürmann.<sup>87</sup> The project thus became one of the first exhibitions of students of the Bechers outside the academy,<sup>88</sup> before the early exhibitions of Konrad Fischer (e.g., Candida Höfer, 1982), and ten years before the collective exhibition at Johnen and Schöttle Gallery in Cologne, which marks the beginning of the acknowledgement of the idea of the Becher school, formalized by Isabel Graw in *Flash Art International*.<sup>89</sup>

While the exhibition clearly represents an important discursive convergence point advocating German documentary forms and legitimating photography as art, a movement in which Klaus Honnef has played a proactive role, the exhibition itself can serve as a source for understanding the implicit criteria defining that particular paragon to whose definition he contributed. As Christoph Schaden, one of the few scholars who closely studied *In Deutschland*, argues, the exhibition translates the Becher's ability to merge “documentary” and “conceptual” features of photography, an association that considerably influenced Honnef's “photodocumentary gaze.”<sup>90</sup> The photographs of Johannes Bönsel, Ulrich Görlich, Candida Höfer, Axel Hütte, Wilmar Koenig, Hans-Martin Küsters, Martin Manz, Hartmut Neubauer,

82 Christoph Schaden, “Denken wir nicht überflüssig, sondern notwendig.” Anmerkungen zur epochalen Photoausstellung *In Deutschland. Aspekte gegenwärtiger Dokumentar fotografie* (1979),” op. cit., p. 181.

83 Klaus Honnef quoted in Raimund Hoghe, “Brief gegen Bilder,” review of the exhibition “*Schlaglichter*” at the Bonner Landesmuseum, in *Die Zeit*, No. 40, September 28, 1979, p. 42. Available at [www.zeit.de/1979/40/brief-gegen-bilder](http://www.zeit.de/1979/40/brief-gegen-bilder), accessed on January 15, 2018.

84 See Klaus Honnef, Renate Heidt and Barbara Kückels (ed.), *Schlaglichter. Eine Bestandsaufnahme aktueller Kunst im Rheinland*, exhibition catalogue (Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn, 1979), Cologne, Rheinland Verlag, 1979.

85 Christoph Schaden, “Denken wir nicht überflüssig, sondern notwendig.” Anmerkungen zur epochalen Photoausstellung *In Deutschland. Aspekte gegenwärtiger Dokumentar fotografie* (1979),” op. cit., p. 182 – 183.

86 See interview of Klaus Honnef by Christoph Schaden, op. cit., p. 196.

87 Ibid., p. 196.

88 Honnef also edited a postcard portfolio in 1982, with works from Candida Höfer, Axel Hütte, Thomas Ruff, Wilhelm Schürmann and Thomas Struth. Klaus Honnef (ed.), *Junge deutsche Fotografen. 1980 – 1982*, Cologne, Postkartenverlag der Gebr. König, 1982.

89 Isabel Graw, “Bernhard Becher's Students,” *Flash Art*, No. 143, Nov./Dec. 1988, 123 ff.

90 Christoph Schaden, “Denken wir nicht überflüssig, sondern notwendig.” Anmerkungen zur epochalen Photoausstellung *In Deutschland. Aspekte gegenwärtiger Dokumentar fotografie* (1979),” op. cit., p. 183.



Fig. 10: Wilhem Schürmann, *Aachen*, 1978, printed in the catalogue *In Deutschland*, p. 178



Fig. 11: Thomas Struth, *Düsseldorf*, 1978, printed in the catalogue *In Deutschland*, p. 81  
(image not labeled in catalogue)

Heinrich Riebesehl, Tata Ronkholz, Michael Schmidt, Wilhem Schürmann and Thomas Struth possess an evident formal coherence and depict a limited range of subjects – architecture (Fig. 10 and Fig. 11), landscape (Fig. 12), portraits and people in context (Fig. 13) – despite the fact that they come from various backgrounds and schools. The style of their images could be interpreted as filling the gap between “reportage” and “art photography”;<sup>91</sup> Schaden for instance mentions various newspapers puzzled by the status of these images, whose construction dodges common identification. Wilfried Wiegand in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (“Die verweigerte Reportage,” July 23,

91 Ibid.

1979) reflects upon that character and acknowledges that only their serial construction, and the confrontation and juxtaposition of multiple images actually allow a documentary stance. Wiegand stresses the fact that the “sometimes boring” individual images therefore ought to be either gathered in a book or exhibited as a group in a museum,<sup>92</sup> revealing the serial strategy central to numerous photo-conceptual artists and the Bechers themselves.



Fig. 12: Ulrich Görlich, *Untitled*, n.d., printed in the catalogue *In Deutschland*, p. 118

For the exhibition, all photographers indeed produced a series of nine to eighteen images reproduced on prints of approximately twenty by thirty centimeters, hung horizontally next to one another. Formally, they not only echo the Bechers' approach – some of Wilhelm Schürmann's houses are reminiscent of the couple's “anonymous sculptures” as are Dan Graham's minimal *Homes for America* – but also surprisingly prefigure various series of Düsseldorf photographers, in form and conceptual approach: Ulrich Görlich's geometrical close-ups of forests (Fig. 12) inescapably prompt a comparison with Thomas Struth's *Paradise* series. Although the comparison of documentary style of the exhibition's body of work with Düsseldorf photography isn't as such necessary to understand the historical importance of the exhibition, it is intriguing to realize that only few of the presented photographers became as successful as the Bechers' students. Except Michael Schmidt, none have experienced similar careers, and the importance of figures such as Heinrich Riebesehl have only been acknowledged very recently.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, the subjective “counterpart” of *In Deutschland, Vorstellung und Wirklichkeit. Sieben Aspekte*

92 Wilfried Wiegand, “Die verweigerte Reportage,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 23, 1979, quoted in Christoph Schaden, *ibid.*, p. 184.

93 See Christoph Schaden, “Denken wir nicht überflüssig, sondern notwendig.’ Anmerkungen zur epochalen Photoausstellung *In Deutschland. Aspekte gegenwärtiger Dokumentar fotografie* (1979),” *op. cit.*, p. 184 – 185.



Fig. 13: Hans-Martin Küsters, *Würselen*, 1978, printed in the catalogue *In Deutschland*, p. 184

*subjektiver Fotografie*, shown the following year in the Museum Schloß Morsbroich in Leverkusen,<sup>94</sup> didn't have the same impact, as if the emergence of photography as an art form were necessarily connected with a documentary tradition<sup>95</sup> and an attempt to differentiate itself from other fields of visual arts (e.g., painting). The coherence of the German documentary paradigm, with the emergence of a lineage of photographers and discourses, seems to have excluded subjective forms of photography in that emerging period, built in a second step *from* documentary forms, as the tableau-like images of Andreas Gursky or Thomas Struth of the 1990s attest.

- 94 Esther Ruelfs, "Zeitgenössische Deutsche Fotografie. Stipendiaten der Alfred Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach-Stiftung," in Ute Eskildsen and Esther Ruelfs (ed.), *Zeitgenössische Deutsche Fotografie. Stipendiaten der Alfred Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach-Stiftung*, exhibition catalogue, Göttingen, Folkwang Museum and Steidl, 2018. Available at [http://www.fotokritik.de/artikel\\_120.html](http://www.fotokritik.de/artikel_120.html), accessed on June 27, 2018.
- 95 Esther Ruelfs argues that the focus on documentary forms in the 1980s might also have been influenced by the emerging means of financing of photography such as grants, primarily focused on "political or social" themes (e.g., "Youth in the Federal Republic of Germany" for the Alfred Krupp Grant in 1982), while experimental or "formal-aesthetic" works were excluded. See Esther Ruelfs, "Zeitgenössische Deutsche Fotografie. Stipendiaten der Alfred Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach-Stiftung," op. cit.

## 2 PHOTOGRAPHY HISTORY AND DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY HISTORY

While the theoretical fundamentals of an author theory connected with documentary forms are exemplarily laid out in "Es kommt der Autorenfotograf. Materialien und Gedanken zu einer neuen Ansicht über die Fotografie," their diffusion and reception underlie a much broader curatorial and editorial project carried out by Honnef from the early 1970s to the early 1980s. Besides the various exhibitions of documentary photographers – the last pages of the *In Deutschland* catalogue mention his Zille, Renger-Patzsch and Krull shows<sup>96</sup> – Honnef oversees several issues of *Kunstforum International* on photography, carrying on his project in which the shift between author photography (i.e., *Kunstforum International*, Vol. 022, 1977, titled "150 Jahre Fotografie") and documentary author photography (i.e., *Kunstforum International*, Vol. 041, 1980, titled "Dokumentarfotografie") increasingly appears. At the time, Honnef's endeavor meets an increasingly vivid scene of photographers, gallery owners, collectors, editors and curators. Numerous scholars have also responded and participated in the emerging acknowledgement of the medium, addressing the ongoing legitimation process by either discussing its validity, or more proactively stating defining parameters of photography as art, similar to other cultural contexts.<sup>97</sup> Wolfgang Kemp's texts "Anmerkungen zur Legitimationsproblematik der Fotografie" (1981)<sup>98</sup> or "Neue Einschätzung der sogenannten Kunstfotografie vor und nach der Jahrhundertwende" (1978),<sup>99</sup> for example, address issues of legitimacy, while Rolf H. Krauss' *Photographie als Medium. Zehn Thesen zur konventionellen und konzeptionellen Photographie*<sup>100</sup> assesses its value, from the (endorsed) position of a collector and promoter of photography as an autonomous art form. Numerous important texts on photography are published in this timespan, either perpetrating the concept of author photographers stemming from Beaumont Newhall's *Photography*,

96 Klaus Honnef, *In Deutschland. Aspekte gegenwärtiger Dokumentarfotografie*, op. cit., p. 222 – 223.

97 Many of the most influential photo-theoretical works, often revolving around the newly defined notion of index, were written at this very moment. See for example Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index. Seventies Art in America, Part I and II" (New York, 1977), Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York, 1977), Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire* (Paris, 1980), Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning" (London, 1982), Victor Burgin (ed.), *Thinking Photography* (London, 1982), Philippe Dubois, *L'acte photographique* (Paris, 1983). See for example Katia Schneller, "Sur les traces de Rosalind Krauss. La réception française de la notion d'index. 1977 – 1990," op. cit. and more generally Bernd Stiegler, *Theoriegeschichte der Photographie* (Bild und Text), op. cit. or James Elkins (ed.), *Photography Theory*, New York, London, Routledge, 2007.

98 Wolfgang Kemp, "Anmerkungen zur Legitimationsproblematik der Fotografie," in Erika Kiffel (ed.), "Ist Fotografie Kunst? Gehört Fotografie ins Museum?" Internationales Fotosymposium 1981 Schloß Mickeln bei Düsseldorf, Munich, Mahnert-Lueg Verlag, 1982.

99 Wolfgang Kemp, "Neue Einschätzung der sogenannten Kunstfotografie vor und nach der Jahrhundertwende," in Wolfgang Kemp, *Foto-Essays zur Geschichte und Theorie der Fotografie*, Munich, Schirmer/Mosel, 1978.

100 Rolf H. Krauss, *Photographie als Medium. 10 Thesen zur konventionellen und konzeptionellen Photographie*, Ostfildern, Cantz Verlag, 1995 (1979).

1839–1937. *A Short Critical History* (New York, MoMA, 1937)<sup>101</sup> or starting to build a critical history of the medium and its uses. The first of three volumes of the influential *Theorie der Fotografie*, edited by Wolfgang Kemp, was published in 1979. Many histories and lexica – such as Volker Kahmen's *Die Fotografie als Kunst* (1973),<sup>102</sup> Fritz Kempe's *Fotografie zwischen Daguerreotypie und Kunstfotografie* (Hamburg, 1979), Ursula Peter's *Stilgeschichte der Fotografie in Deutschland 1839–1900* (Cologne, 1979), Floris M. Neusüss' *Fotografie als Kunst – Kunst als Fotografie/Photography as Art – Art as Photography* (Dumont Buchverlag, Cologne, 1979) or Jörg Kriebbaum's *Lexikon der Fotografie* (Frankfurt/Main, 1981)<sup>103</sup> – are written during these years. In 1980, Rolf H. Krauss, Frank Heidtmann and Hans-Joachim Bresemann publish the seven-hundred-page, bilingual (German/English) *Die deutsche Photoliteratur 1839–1978*, synthesizing the recent effort to acknowledge photography and its German historicization.<sup>104</sup>

Schirmer/Mosel, the first author photography book publisher in Europe, founded in 1974,<sup>105</sup> also plays an important role in the acknowledgement and distribution of photography in that decade. Founded by Lothar Schirmer and Erik Mosel, the art book publisher issues August Sander's *Rheinlandschaften* in 1975, *Antlitz der Zeit* in 1976 and *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* in 1980, Bernd and Hilla Becher's *Fachwerkhäuser des Siegener Industriegebietes* in 1977 and Moholy-Nagy's *Fotos und Fotogramme* in 1978, which becomes its first international sales hit.<sup>106</sup> The company's financial success in its early years and its survival is connected with the publication of the catalogue of Heinrich Zille's newly discovered photographs,<sup>107</sup> shown at the Bonner Landesmuseum in 1975, and curated by Klaus Honnef. It was a huge sales success – more than 50,000 copies were sold – and was

101 See Olivier Lugon, "Critical Review of *Nouvelle Histoire de la photographie*," *Critique d'art*, No. 5, Spring, 1995, Marta Braun, "Beaumont Newhall et l'historiographie de la photographie anglophone," *Etudes photographiques*, No. 16, May 2005 and Douglas Crimp, "The Museum's Old, The Library's New Subject," in Richard Bolton (ed.), *The Contest of Meaning. Critical Histories of Photography*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1989.

102 Volker Kahmen, *Fotografie als Kunst*. Tübingen, Verlag E. Wasmuth, 1973. The book has surprisingly been translated to English and to French in 1973 and 1974 already. Volker Kahmen, *Photography as Art*, trans. Brian Tubb, London, 1973 and Volker Kahmen, *La photographie est-elle un art?*, trans. Anne Frejjer, Paris, Chêne, 1974.

103 See Wolfgang Kemp's bibliography for the chapter "1970/80 bis zur Gegenwart," in Wolfgang Kemp, *Geschichte der Fotografie. Von Daguerre bis Gursky*, Munich, C. H. Beck, 2011, p. 125–126.

104 Rolf H. Krauss, Frank Heidtmann and Hans Joachim, *Die deutsche Photoliteratur 1839–1978*, Munich/London/New York/Paris, KG Saur, 1980.

105 See "Kleine Verlagsgeschichte 1974–2014," at [www.schirmer-mosel.de/homed1/about\\_sm.htm](http://www.schirmer-mosel.de/homed1/about_sm.htm), accessed on January 9, 2018.

106 The book is sold in Germany, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands and the United States. *Ibid.*

107 An important number of photographic negatives of Heinrich Zille, primarily known as illustrator and painter, was discovered in 1966 in his family's apartment in Charlottenburg. A representative body of work was acquired by the Berlinische Galerie in 1987. See for example "Photos. Konkurrenz um Zille," *Der Spiegel*, No. 39, 1975, p. 124, Winfried Ranke (ed.), *Heinrich Zille. Photographien Berlin 1890–1910*, Munich, Schirmer/Mosel, 1975. Concerning the debate on the origin and attribution of the photographs, see Detlef Zille, "Heinrich Zille und die Fotografie. Die zweifelhafte Zuschreibung von Fotografien," in *Fotogeschichte*, No. 130, 2013 and Pay Matthis Karstens, "[...] Trotzdem ich das Haus fotogr. wollte [...]. Unbekannte und unbeachtete Belege der fotografischen Tätigkeit Heinrich Zilles," *Fotogeschichte*, No. 130, 2013.

“Schirmer/Mosel’s *de facto* grounding book.”<sup>108</sup> Over time, Schirmer/Mosel published six books on Blossfeldt (edited by Jürgen and Ann Wilde), twelve on August Sander, sixteen on Henri Cartier-Bresson, three on Stephen Shore, four on Walker Evans and nineteen on the Bechers.<sup>109</sup> But it also edited various books on the theory and history of photography, such as Kemp’s *Foto-Essays* in 1978 and his *Theorie der Fotografie* series between 1979 and 2000 (see Fig. 18). In a second “legitimation” step, Schirmer/Mosel eventually became the unofficial editor of the Düsseldorf School since the 1990s (see Fig. 15 – 17).

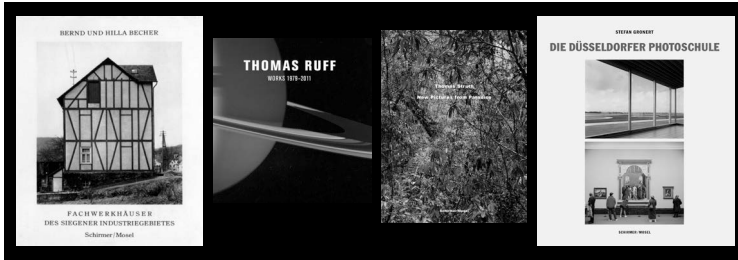


Fig. 14: Bernd and Hilla Becher. *Fachwerkhäuser* (1980)

Fig. 15: Thomas Ruff. *Fotografien 1979 – 2011* (2012)

Fig. 16: Thomas Struth. *New Pictures from Paradise* (2002/2017)

Fig. 17: *Die Düsseldorfer Photoschule* (2009)

By its thirty-fifth year of existence in 2009, Schirmer/Mosel had published fourteen books on Thomas Struth, twelve on Candida Höfer, nine on Axel Hütte, five on Jörg Sasse, four on Elger Esser, two on Andreas Gursky, two on Laurenz Berges, one on Thomas Ruff (*Nudes*), one on Simone Nieweg, three on the Düsseldorf School and twenty on history and theory of photography, which led to Lothar Schirmer’s statement that “[he] became *à la longue* the publisher of [Bernd Becher’s] professorship.”<sup>110</sup> The company thus played an important role both as distributor of documentary photography in general and as advocate of the Düsseldorf School more specifically. As Rolf H. Krauss points out, Schirmer/Mosel also played an important role in the recognition of photography by art history as a discipline. While the journal *Kritische Berichte* discussed photography in the academic field through articles on photography exhibitions and catalogues – Herbert Molderings contributed texts on August Sander’s *Rheinlandschaften* (1975) and to the Heinrich Zille exhibition and catalogue

108 See “Interview of Lothar Schirmer by Arno Widmann,” *Berliner Zeitung*, No. 75, March 29 – 30, 2014, p. 4 – 5 and Lothar Schirmer, “A Short History of Schirmer/Mosel Publishers,” Munich, March 2014. Available at [http://www.schirmer-mosel.de/homed1/pdf/Verlagsgeschichte\\_SM\\_2014\\_e.pdf](http://www.schirmer-mosel.de/homed1/pdf/Verlagsgeschichte_SM_2014_e.pdf), accessed on June 27, 2018.

109 See *35 Jahre Schirmer/Mosel. Die Bibliographie aller Titel 1974 – 2009*, Munich, November 2009. Available at [www.schirmer-mosel.de/homed1/pdf/S\\_M\\_Biblio\\_gesamt.pdf](http://www.schirmer-mosel.de/homed1/pdf/S_M_Biblio_gesamt.pdf), accessed on June 27, 2018.

110 Lothar Schirmer, “Düsseldorf verlegen und sammeln,” in *Die Düsseldorfer Schule. Photographien aus der Sammlung Lothar Schirmer*, op. cit., p. 9.

(1975)<sup>111</sup> –, Winfried Ranke's text for the Zille catalogue and Wolfgang Kemp's essay for the Sander catalogue constitute important contributions to the history and theory of photography.<sup>112</sup>

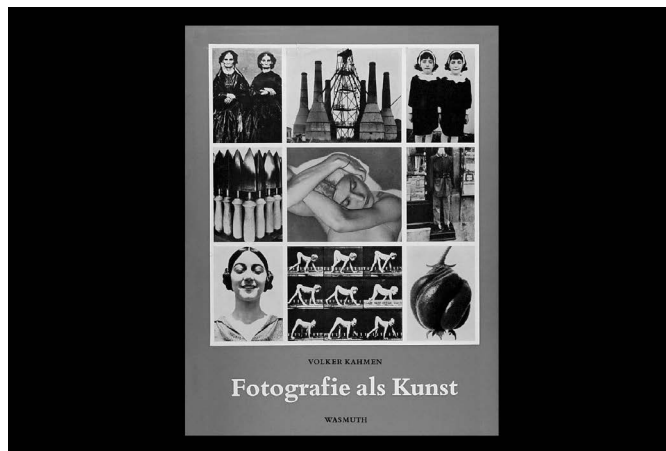


Fig. 19: Cover of Volker Kahmen, *Fotografie als Kunst* (Tübingen, Verlag E. Wasmuth, 1973)

Although most of these 1970s projects clearly seek to institutionalize photography – or reflect its ongoing legitimation process – a differentiation ought to be established between discourse advocating photography in general, which encompasses undertakings that support the documentary more specifically. While Schirmer/Mosel and the Wilde couple have played a central role in exhibiting and spreading documentary photography, they also address other types of photography. Schirmer/Mosel published various artists and photographers (Joseph Beuys, Cy Twombly and Cindy Sherman are among the artists with the most books), but they also publish illustrative or “beautiful” photography books on four fields outside the strictly artistic context: cinema, pop music, fashion and erotica. The numerous projects of that period, which address photography as a whole, obviously contribute to the establishment of documentary forms as well. Volker Kahmen's *Die Fotografie als Kunst* (1973) seems to be one of the first documented occurrences of the juxtaposition of an image of the Bechers' and of August Sander (Fig. 19) – a “stunning” formal acquaintance Klaus Honnef will explore in the future, exhibiting the work of these photographers in the “Sander/Becher” exhibition at the Permanent Representation of the Federal Republic of Germany in Berlin, in 1980 (Fig. 20).<sup>113</sup> But it also clearly has to be posited as a general

111 Herbert Molderings, “August Sander. Rheinlandschaften,” in *Kritische Berichte*, Vol. 5/6, 1975 and Herbert Molderings, “Berlin und die Jahrhundertwende. Winfried Ranke: Heinrich Zille Photographien Berlin 1890 – 1910,” *Kritische Berichte*, Vol. 1, 1976. Quoted in Rolf H. Krauss, *Walter Benjamin und der neue Blick auf die Photographie*, op. cit., p. 125.

112 Rolf H. Krauss, *Walter Benjamin und der neue Blick auf die Photographie*, op. cit., p. 72 – 75.

113 See Gerald Schröder, “Positionings. On the Reception of Bernd and Hilla Becher's Photographic Oeuvre in the Federal Republic of Germany 1965 – 1990,” in Werner Lippert and Christoph Schaden (ed.), *Der Rote Bulli. Stephen Shore and the New Düsseldorf Photography*, op. cit., p. 310.

1969	<i>Bernd und Hilla Becher. Anonyme Skulpturen</i> exhibition at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf.
1972	<i>Bilderschau</i> (slideshow) of Stephen Shore at <i>Photokina</i> , Cologne. Steven Shore featured in <i>Camera</i> magazine. Ann and Jürgen Wilde create a photo gallery in Cologne. August Sander exhibition at Galerie Wilde, Cologne. Heinrich Riebesehl creates the Spectrum photo gallery in Cologne. Last issue of <i>Life</i> magazine.
1973	Volker Kahmen publishes <i>Fotografie als Kunst</i> .
1974	Rudolf Kicken and Wilhelm Schürmann create the Lichttropfen Gallery, Aachen. Klaus Honnef curates Bernd and Hilla Becher exhibition at the Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn.
1975	Kicken Gallery exhibits Stephen Shore. Schirmer/Mosel publishes August Sander's <i>Rheinlandschaften</i> . Klaus Honnef curates Albert Renger-Patzsch show at the Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn.
1976	Schirmer/Mosel publishes August Sander's <i>Antlitz der Zeit</i> . <i>Walker Evans</i> exhibition at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (with MoMA holdings). Bernd Becher accepts a teaching position at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. Klaus Honnef and Evelyn Weiss show at the Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn. Klaus Honnef, "Die Arbeit des Fotografen," published in <i>Kunstforum</i> .
1977	Schirmer/Mosel publishes Bernd and Hilla Becher's <i>Fachwerkhäuser des Siegener Industriegebietes</i> and <i>Fotografie der 30er Jahre. Eine Anthologie</i> . <i>Stephen Shore. Fotografien</i> exhibition at Kunsthalle Düsseldorf. Klaus Honnef and Evelyn Weiss curate the first photography section in <i>documenta 6</i> , Kassel. The Bechers lend Stephen Shore images for <i>documenta 6</i> , Kassel. Lichttropfen Gallery re-named Kicken-Schürman.
1978	Schirmer/Mosel publishes Moholy-Nagy's <i>Fotos und Fotogramme</i> . Klaus Honnef curates <i>Eugène Atget (1857 - 1927): Das alte Paris</i> at the Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn. Klaus Honnef and Wilhelm Schürmann curate <i>In Deutschland</i> . The presence of Becher students is instigated by Bernd Becher. Rolf H. Krauss publishes <i>10 Thesen zur konventionellen und konzeptionellen Photographie</i> . Voker Kahmen publishes <i>Lewis W. Hine: Kinderarbeit, USA um 1910</i> .
1979	Schirmer/Mosel publishes Wolfgang Kemp's <i>Foto-Essays zur Geschichte und Theorie der Fotografie</i> . Schirmer/Mosel publishes Wolfgang Kemp's <i>Theorie der Fotografie II (1912 - 1945)</i> .
1980	Schirmer/Mosel publishes Wolfgang Kemp's <i>Theorie der Fotografie I (1839 - 1913)</i> . Schirmer/Mosel publishes August Sander's <i>Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts</i> . Sander/Becher exhibition the Ständige Vertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, (East) Berlin. Atget exhibition at the Kicken Gallery.
1981	Schirmer/Mosel publishes Karl Blossfeldt's <i>Das fotografische Werk</i> . First issue of <i>Fotogeschichte</i> , founded by Timm Starl.
1982	Exhibition <i>Works by Young Photographers from Germany</i> at Art Galaxy Gallery (NYC) (Döhne, Höfer, Hütte, Ronkholz, Struth).
1983	Schirmer/Mosel publishes <i>Eisenkonstruktionen des 19. Jahrhunderts</i> . Schirmer/Mosel publishes Wolfgang Kemp's <i>Theorie der Fotografie III (1945 - 1980)</i> .
1984	Schirmer/Mosel publishes Beaumont Newhall's <i>Geschichte der Photographie</i> .
1985	Schirmer/Mosel publishes Bernd and Hilla Becher's <i>Fördertürme/Chevalements/Mineheads</i> .
1986	Thomas Ruff creates the first large-format <i>Porträts</i> .
1987	Ute Eskildsen curates <i>Endlich so wie überall? Bilder und Texte aus dem Ruhrgebiet</i> at the Museum Folkwang Essen. Exhibition <i>Foto/Realismen: Ludger Gerdes, Candida Höfer, Daniel Poensgen, Thomas Ruff and Thomas Struth</i> at Villa Dessauer, Bamberg, 1987, Kunstverein, Munich, 1987 and Kunstforum Berlin-West, 1988.
1988	<i>Bernhard Becher's Students</i> exhibition at Johnen und Schöttle Gallery, Cologne.

Fig. 19: Timeline of events contributing to the legitimization of photography and the documentary discourse between the institutional consecration of the Bechers as artists to the first collective exhibitions of the "Becher School" (1969 - 1988)

history of photography acknowledging the cultural importance of the medium,<sup>114</sup> and not exclusively a part of the legitimation process of a German documentary photography paradigm.



Fig. 20: Exhibition "Sander/Becher," Ständige Vertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Berlin, 1980 (catalogue cover)

While we do not aim to address this discursive field as a whole – the history of the documentary discourse and the legitimation process of photography in Germany has yet to be written – we can nevertheless discuss numerous protagonists who inscribe German photography into a specific rhetoric. Even though Bernd and Hilla Becher showed their students images of Stephen Shore and the recently rediscovered Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine, Walker Evans and Eugène Atget and were prominently discussed by Honnef in "Es kommt der Autorenfotograf," it is predominantly, at least until very recently, a linear filiation with a German documentary tradition, which commentators have reflected upon when addressing Düsseldorf photography.<sup>115</sup> Klaus Honnef plays a central role as an author photography advocate and as a curator establishing a specific paragon – German documentary photography. As such, *In Deutschland* – created with the input of Bernd Becher, who

114 Wolfgang Kemp interprets the end of photography as a mass medium in the early 1970s – exemplified by the end of *Life* magazine in 1972, supplanted by television – as the condition of possibility of its elevation to an art form. See Wolfgang Kemp, *Geschichte der Fotografie. Von Daguerre bis Gursky*, op. cit., p. 90 – 92.

115 Christoph Schaden notes that despite numerous studies on Stephen Shore, his impact on German photography had until recently not been studied consequently. See Christoph Schaden, "To Be Sure, That Is Also the Expression of a Particular Vital Consciousness. On the Reception of Stephen Shore's Work in Germany 1972 – 1995," in Werner Lippert and Christoph Schaden (ed.), *Der Rote Bulli. Stephen Shore and the New Düsseldorf Photography*, op. cit., p. 29 – 30.

promoted his students in the process – constitutes a strong discursive moment for the legitimization of the Düsseldorf School, even though it schematically proceeds in two steps: the texts written by Honnef legitimize the status of photography, while the exhibition establishes a more specific formal program. But Honnef's curatorial work more generally, especially the linking of discrete elements of a yet to be built history, reveals itself as extremely resilient. The juxtaposition of August Sander and the Bechers, or the re-actualization of nineteenth-century documentary photography during the *documenta 6*,<sup>116</sup> extends the numerous comparative projects of individual photographers. Klaus Honnef and Evelyn Weiss had curated a retrospective exhibition of photography for the sixth edition of the *documenta*, investigating the medium from its origins throughout the 1970s, exhibiting roughly eight hundred images.<sup>117</sup> The selection addressed three sections. "Spectrum of the medium" tackled the history of the medium through various categories, such as pioneers, portraits, fashion and society, landscape, city and architecture, industry and technology and war. "Photographic methods" showed reportage, thematic encyclopedic inventories and photographic analysis and comparative depictions. In the second section, many examples explicitly investigated a comparative stance: the Bechers were, for example, connected with Karl Blossfeldt, August Sander and Eadweard Muybridge.<sup>118</sup> The third section, "Reflection and extension of the medium," shows contemporary experimental forms, such as Hans-Peter Feldmann, Gordon Matta-Clark, Joseph Kosuth or Christian Boltanski. The curators did not explicitly situate photography in the context of art – "photography is at best a document," Honnef argued when commenting on Renger-Patzsch<sup>119</sup> –, and the show clearly focused on the depictive ability of the medium, rather than experimental forms. Despite its dodging of the question whether photography is art, Honnef nonetheless concluded the essay he wrote for the catalogue by saying that photographs "probably are artworks as a matter of principle."<sup>120</sup> Throughout the text, Honnef stresses the importance of the depictive power of the medium: "Photography is not a copy of reality, [...] but a formal and visual [Bildnerisch] transformation with its own sets of rules."<sup>121</sup> In his text for *In Deutschland* two years later, it is from these premise that he formulates the medium's artistic dimension. As several commentators have noted, both Otto Steinert's *Subjektive Fotografie* and

116 This will even lead to a clash and the eventual departure of Pontus Hultén from the committee. See Stefan Gronert, "Photographische Emanzipation," in *Die Düsseldorfer Photoschule*, op. cit., p. 20 and Peter Sager, "Photographie und Video auf der *documenta 6*. Im Dschungel der Medien. In Kassel dominieren die technischen Bilder," *Die Zeit*, July 15, 1977. Available at <http://www.zeit.de/1977/29/im-dschungel-der-medien>, accessed on June 27, 2018.

117 See *documenta 6. Fotografie, Film, Video* (Vol. 2), exhibition catalogue (Kassel, Museum Fridericianum, 1977), 1977.

118 Ibid, p. 29, 94, 147.

119 Peter Sager, "Photographie und Video auf der *documenta 6*. Im Dschungel der Medien, in Kassel dominieren die technischen Bilder," op. cit.

120 Klaus Honnef, "Fotografie zwischen Authentizität und Fiktion," in *documenta 6. Fotografie, Film, Video* (Vol. 2), op. cit., p. 26.

121 Ibid.

Bauhaus photography are absent from the selection.<sup>122</sup> Although the curators did not make categorical statements on the relationship between art and documentary,<sup>123</sup> the exhibition shows a proclivity toward documentary forms. Most non-contemporary forms of photography, whose main aspiration lay outside documentation, were excluded from the show.

The re-actualization of historical models such as Muybridge, Atget and Sander causes an increased level of comparability within the whole field of photography and of German documentary photography more specifically, which produces a trans-historical grid. While not focusing solely on the documentary aspect, Kahmen had in 1973 already acknowledged its importance. As Gerhard Schröder notes, Kahmen inscribes the Bechers' work in that tradition, and more specifically "within the lineage of those photographers whom Walter Benjamin regarded as key figures,"<sup>124</sup> "a few artists [whose work] runs through [photography's] historical development like a red thread, artists who have (in Benjamin's terms) the quasi-scientific awareness of Muybridge via Atget, Sander, Blossfeldt, up to the Bechers."<sup>125</sup> Comparing the Bechers' work with Blossfeldt's, he quotes Benjamin again to conclude that an immanent power underlies their work, inscribing them in a genealogy similar to natural evolution: "*Natura non facit saltus* – nature does not make jumps."<sup>126</sup>

122 See for example Peter Sager, "Photographie und Video auf der *documenta 6*. Im Dschungel der Medien, in Kassel dominieren die technischen Bilder," op. cit. or Enno Kaufhold, "Fotografie 'und' Kunst. Bemerkungen zur Ausstellung 'Malerei und Photographie im Dialog' in Zürich und zur Abteilung Fotografie der *documenta 6* in Kassel," op. cit.

123 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

124 Gerald Schröder, "Positionings. On the Reception of Bernd and Hilla Becher's Photographic Oeuvre in the Federal Republic of Germany 1965 – 1990," op. cit., p. 313.

125 Volker Kahmen, *Photography as Art*, op. cit., p. 35. Quoted in Gerald Schröder, "Positionings. On the Reception of Bernd and Hilla Becher's Photographic Oeuvre in the Federal Republic of Germany 1965 – 1990," op. cit., p. 313.

126 Volker Kahmen, *Photography as Art*, op. cit., p. 35.

### 3 THE REBIRTH OF DOCUMENTARY FORMS AND NEW GERMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Through a multitude of agents – galleries (e.g., Lichttropfen), magazines (e.g., *Camera*<sup>127</sup> or *Volksfoto*<sup>128</sup>), collectors (e.g., Ana und Jürgen Wilde<sup>129</sup>), curators, editors, exhibitions (e.g., *documenta*), museums and grants – photography gained a new status throughout the 1970s, paving the way to a widespread acceptance of the medium both as an art form and as a popular practice. The latter development is, for example, attested by projects such as the *Volksfoto* magazine, which primarily focused on vernacular imagery, or Hans-Peter Feldmann's use of found photographs to create cheap, reproducible and anti-institutional art. But although an interest in all types of photographic practices in multiple fields emerged in the 1970s, concomitantly with its institutionalization and recognition, various personalities in general and Klaus Honnef in particular showed a proclivity for documentary forms. When Düsseldorf photography started to emerge in the early 1990s alongside digital photography, a coherent set of discourse had been established. While obviously multiple non-documentary photographers were active and recognized during that time, the idea of documentation reborn from the re-discovery of Sander, Evans or Blossfeldt, from the publication of Benjamin's key texts and from the confrontation with American color photography – a visual expression only adopted "tardily" by the young generation of German photographers – clearly sketches out a context in which non-subjective photography occupies an important role. The legitimation of photography seems to have been enacted by its primary function – to depict, "to reveal things as they are," which plays a central role in the reception of the Düsseldorf School.

127 The photography magazine founded in Lucerne in 1922 became particularly influential internationally under editor in chief Allan Porter (1965–1981) and was distributed in thirty-five countries. Its publication ended in 1981 and resumed in 2013. Most texts featured in Honnef's *In Deutschland* catalogue are taken from *Camera* issues between 1966 and 1979. See Nadine Olonetzky, *Ein Amerikaner in Luzern. Allan Porter und camera – eine Biografie*, Lucerne, Verlag Pro Libro, 2007 and Stephan Wehowsky, "Allan Porter und die Zeitschrift camera," [www.journal21.ch](http://www.journal21.ch). Available at <http://www.journal21.ch/allan-porter-und-die-zeitschrift-camera>, accessed on June 27, 2018.

128 Founded by Dieter Hacker and Andreas Selzer, *Volksfoto* published six issues between 1976 and 1981, focusing primarily on amateur photography. See Thomas Weski, "Too Old to Rock'n'Roll: Too Young to Die. A Subjective View of German Photography of the Last Two Decades," op. cit., p. 110–111 and entry "Dieter Hacker" at <http://www.personal-views.com/friends/dieter-hacker/>, accessed on June 27, 2018.

129 Inka Graeve (ed.), *Mechanismus und Ausdruck. Die Sammlung Ann und Jürgen Wilde: Fotografien aus dem 20. Jahrhundert*, exhibition catalogue (Sprengel Museum Hannover, 1999, Kunstmuseum Bonn, 2000), Munich, Sprengel Museum Hannover and Schirmer/Mosel, 1999.

The emergence of what *European Photography* called “New German photography” in 1981 already,<sup>130</sup> in the timespan between Honnef’s *In Deutschland* (1979) and *Klasse Bernhard Becher* (1989), constitutes an important phenomenon in the understanding of the connection between the German documentary paradigm and Düsseldorf photography. The title of the special issue of the American journal *Aperture* published in the spring 1991, “Between Past and Future: New German Photography,”<sup>131</sup> highlights the consolidation of a certain type of photography hinted at in the 1981 issue of *European Photography*,<sup>132</sup> through its reception in the United States.<sup>133</sup> In an article published in that issue,<sup>134</sup> the German art and photography historian Enno Kaufhold lays out the peculiarities of Bernd and Hilla Bechers’ students in regard to their teachers, addressing – without naming – the concept of the Düsseldorf School. The author stresses two important aspects relevant to our research. The first is related to the economic circumstances, in which independent photographic practices emerged: “After the integration of photography into the international art market during the 1970s and especially the 1980s, the Bechers’ disciples managed to establish themselves in the art world very quickly.”<sup>135</sup> The second comments on the status of photographic depiction and its relation with art: “[T]here has [...] been a change of paradigm in their work, from pure photography to a self-conscious form of work which, sloughing off the rules of traditional photography, aims unmistakably at achieving the status of art.”<sup>136</sup> What Kaufhold describes is the radically new situation that the Becher students emerged from throughout the 1980s. Barbara Engelbach, in a recent exhibition project on German documentary photography around 1979<sup>137</sup> at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, pragmatically analyses the shift that occurred in photographic practices at that time: “The emphasis on an authorial figure [...]

130 See *European Photography* 5, issue “New German Photography,” Vol. 2, No. 1, 1981 and Gisela Parak, “Schöne neue BRD? Autorenefotografie der 1980er Jahre,” in Gisela Parak (ed.), *Schöne neue BRD? Autorenefotografie der 1980er Jahre*, exhibition catalogue, Braunschweig Museum für Photographie, 2014. The Photographer’s Gallery in London curated a show in 1981 also bearing the title “New German Photography,” showing the works of Thomas Anschutz, Heiner Blum, Verena von Gagern, Andre Gelpke, Ulrich Gorlich, Arno Jansen, Erika Kiffel, Andreas Müller-Pohle, Gabriele and Helmut Nothelfer, Heinrich Reibesehl, Wilhelm Schürmann and Hermann Stamm. See *Exhibitions at The Photographer’s Gallery 1971–Present* [2017]. Available at [https://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/sites/default/files/1971–2017\\_TPGExhList.pdf](https://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/sites/default/files/1971–2017_TPGExhList.pdf), accessed on June 27, 2018.

131 *Aperture*, issue “Between Past and Future. New German Photography,” No. 123, Spring 1991. Introduction written by Klaus Honnef.

132 The journal was founded in 1980 by German photographer Andreas Müller-Pohle.

133 *Aperture* was founded in 1952 by photographers and critics (Minor White, Dorothea Lange, Barbara Morgan, Ansel Adams, Nancy and Beaumont Newhall, Ernest Louie, Melton Ferris and Dody Warren) and constitutes a major vector of diffusion of photography in the United States. What later became a foundation also edited several iconic catalogues such as Robert Frank’s *The Americans* prefaced by Jack Kerouac (1968) or *Diane Arbus. An Aperture Monograph* (1972), created in collaboration with John Szarkowski. See for example [aperture.org/about](http://aperture.org/about), accessed on September 8, 2014.

134 Enno Kaufhold, “The Mask of Opticality,” *Aperture*, No. 123 (Between Past and Future. New German Photography), Spring 1991.

135 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

136 *Ibid.*, p. 60 and 64.

137 “Unbeugsam und ungebündigt. Dokumentarische Fotografie um 1979 / Intractable and Untamed. Documentary Photography from 1979,” Museum Ludwig, Cologne, June 28–October 5, 2014.

had to push documentary photography outside its legitimizing discursive spaces – such as geology, ethnography or architecture – and into an aesthetic realm.<sup>138</sup> Engelbach bases her analysis on the 1982 text of Rosalind Krauss, “Photography’s Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View,”<sup>139</sup> stressing the role and implications of the authorial model – also promoted by Klaus Honnef. The group of Düsseldorf photographers, many of whom initially advocated “photographs without any personal signature,”<sup>140</sup> all emerged in a field where the signature defined their practice as art, a paradoxical stance that has evolved diversely in their respective work and in the discourse on their photography over time. The model Klaus Honnef had advocated throughout the 1970s is retrospectively analyzed as the chief parameter through which photography acquired an artistic status in the 1980s.

While German photography is often associated with documentary forms, highlighting the filiation from Sander to the Bechers and their students, the concept of “New German Photography” entails a broader definition, which even Honnef himself has increasingly endorsed. In the introduction of the *Aperture* issue titled “Between Past and Future: New German photography,”<sup>141</sup> Honnef still stresses the importance of the documentary tradition. In an article titled “Reclaiming a Legacy: Photography in Germany and German History,” for instance, Honnef mentions Walker Evans’ review of three famous German photo books in the magazine *Hound and Horn* in 1931, in an effort to legitimate German photography through important American figures: Renger-Patzsch’s *Die Welt ist schön*, Franz Roh and Jan Tischhold’s *foto-auge* and Sander’s *Antlitz der Zeit; sechzig Aufnahmen deutscher Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts*.<sup>142</sup> But in his text, Honnef extends his understanding of author photography to subjective photography – he also uses the term “vanguard” –, which he tended to disregard in the 1970s, primarily focusing on “traditional” deadpan documentary forms. The work of László Moholy-Nagy, Otto Steinert, UMBO and Sigmar Polke is discussed alongside Sander and Renger-Patzsch and several important contemporary trends are addressed in connection with academies in which photography was taught – the Düsseldorf School, the Kunsthochschule Kassel (e.g., Floris M. Neusüss) or the Fachhochschule Bielefeld (e.g., Gottfried Jäger) –, to circumscribe “the specific German accent”<sup>143</sup> that had developed in the country. While there seems to have been a focus on the document in the 1970s, as if the legitimation process of photography was predicated upon the medium’s ability to depict – *documenta 5* and *6* played an important role in the formalization and diffusion of that conception –, the 1980s can be interpreted as a more heterogeneous

138 Barbara Engelbach, “Unbeugsam und ungebändigt. Dokumentarische Fotografie um 1979,” in Barbara Engelbach (ed.), *Um 1979*, Cologne, Snoeck, 2014, p. 8–14.

139 Rosalind Krauss, “Photography’s Discursive Spaces. Landscape/View,” *Art Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (The Crisis in the Discipline), Winter, 1982, p. 311–319.

140 Thomas Struth in 1979, quoted in Enno Kaufhold, “The Mask of Opticality,” op. cit., p. 64.

141 Klaus Honnef, “Reclaiming a Legacy,” *Aperture*, op. cit., p. 2–10.

142 *Ibid.*, p. 3–4. See also Walker Evans, “The Reappearance of Photography,” *Hound and Horn*, No. 5, October/December 1931.

143 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

period, in terms of photographic practice. A multitude of artist-photographers were increasingly acknowledged, and the focus on strictly documentary forms declined. The Museum Folkwang in Essen, one of the first major fine art museums in Germany that dedicated a department to photography (1979), led by Ute Eskildsen, played a major role in that process. Her epochal exhibition *Reste des Authentischen: Deutsche Fotobilder der 80er Jahre*, held in 1986,<sup>144</sup> crystallizes the idea that photographs are mere reflections or “leftovers” of reality<sup>145</sup> and become autonomous artistic objects. As Esther Ruelfs who in 2003 curated an important exhibition of German contemporary photography with Eskildsen at the Museum Folkwang<sup>146</sup> notes: “Unlike in the early 1980s, nobody would think of large format artistic objects as depictions of reality anymore.”<sup>147</sup>

The reception of the young Düsseldorf photographers who had their first important solo shows in the 1980s – Thomas Ruff exhibited his large format *Porträts* for the first time in Lyon,<sup>148</sup> Candida Höfer had a solo show at Museum Folkwang in 1982<sup>149</sup> and Andreas Gursky in the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld in 1989 – thus seems rather paradoxical. Although they clearly benefit from the contextual preconditions to be accepted as artists in the 1980s, their historiography in the 1990s, as will be extensively discussed, rather associates them with a documentary tradition – “true photography,” as Kaufhold noted. The coherence of the filiation between Düsseldorf and these documentary forms has considerably impacted its historicization, which has led to the exclusion of other photographic practices. The appropriative use of photography for example, common in Hans-Peter Feldmann or Gerhard Richter’s work and taken up by Thomas Ruff and Jörg Sasse, has been largely discarded from that early discourse on documentary; similarly, the use of digital technologies or proto-digital works, such as Gottfried Jäger’s *generative Fotografie*, have been excluded from the discourse on Düsseldorf.

144 The exhibition showed the work of Gosbert Adler, Pidder Auberger, Rudolf Bonvie, Joachim Brohm, Walter Dahn, Dorte Eissfelt, Jean-Francois Guiton, Monika Hasse, Volker Heinze, Astrid Klein, Wilmar Koenig, Dieter Neubert, Thomas Ruff and Michael Schmidt. On the exhibition, which was partially reconstructed at the Museum Folkwang Essen in 2016, see for example Florian Ebner, “Sortir du cadre, ou comment exposer l’histoire d’une ‘photographie rebelle’ sans la domestiquer ?,” *Transbordeur. Photographie, histoire, société*, No. 2 (Photographie et exposition), 2018 and more generally Gisela Parak (ed.), *Fotogeschichte*, No. 137 (Die wilde Vielfalt. Zur deutschen Fotoszene der 1970er und 1980er Jahre), Fall 2015.

145 See Ute Eskildsen, “Die Realitäten der Bilder,” in Ute Eskildsen and Esther Ruelfs (ed.), *Zeitgenössische Deutsche Fotografie. Stipendiaten der Alfred Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach-Stiftung*, op. cit., p. 6.

146 *Zeitgenössische Deutsche Fotografie. Stipendiaten der Alfred Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach-Stiftung*. 1982 – 2002, Museum Folkwang, Essen, 2003.

147 Esther Ruelfs, “*Zeitgenössische Deutsche Fotografie. Stipendiaten der Alfred Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach-Stiftung*,” in Ute Eskildsen and Esther Ruelfs (ed.), *Zeitgenössische Deutsche Fotografie. Stipendiaten der Alfred Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach-Stiftung*, op. cit.

148 Galerie Philip Nelson, Villeurbanne, 1986.

149 *Öffentliche Innenräume 1979 – 1982*, Museum Folkwang, Essen, 1982.

In the context of the reconstruction of the “original” truth claim of photography,<sup>150</sup> the arrival of an endangering practice can be interpreted as a threat not only to that claim but also to photography more generally, putting photography’s relatively recent recognition as an artistic practice legitimated by institutions and markets at risk. The legitimization discourse of documentary photography in Germany, which ought to be interpreted as the main reason for the theory-meager Düsseldorf School, is confronted in the late 1980s and early 1990s with a massive theoretical effort addressing the impact of digital technologies in photography, most of which examines the possible death of the medium. Although considerably influenced by media theories and not necessarily photography specific, this body of texts engages with the future of photography, which digital retouching technologies and online distribution of images potentially implies. This period thus constitutes a point of convergence, where a mature photographic activity, exemplified by established institutional presence and market, collides with a potentially endangering moment. If a retrospective historical overview shows that photography has not died or radically changed, the source of such vehement claims ought to be evaluated, as should the impact they had on the reception of photography in an artistic context, and, even more so, how they affected German documentary photography, which the preceding decades had unequivocally established as a legitimate art form. The reception and understanding of the position toward Düsseldorf photography in that timespan hence derives from that confrontation. The resilience of the inscription of Düsseldorf photography in the German documentary paradigm, which will be addressed extensively in the third and fourth chapter of this book, not only with regard to its relationship with digital technologies and the hypothetical endangering of its often asserted truth claim but also with regard to the specific discourse in Germany on the digital and its visual manifestation, post-photography. But at this point, the “rupture” induced by the appearance of digital technologies has to be examined, as the recent “German photo renaissance”<sup>151</sup> was already threatened by its demise.

150 “Original” aims to point at the discursive reconstruction of photography’s ability to depict truthfully, which has considerably fluctuated throughout its history. If the dogmatic belief in a certain truth is counter-balanced by its deconstruction, the question of objectivity in photo-theoretical discourse in the context of artistic photography ought to be addressed systematically, using, for example, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison’s study of the construction of scientific objectivity as a model. See Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity*, New York, Zone Books, 2007.

151 In his *Aperture* article Klaus Honnef quotes Evans, who describes the “first” German renaissance in photographic activity between World War I and World War II, focusing particularly on *Film and Photo* (1929). Klaus Honnef, “Reclaiming a Legacy,” op. cit., p. 3 – 4.