A PHOTOGRAPH ALWAYS LOOKS LIKE A PHOTOGRAPH, BECAUSE IT'S A PHOTOGRAPH.[1]

Thomas Ruff's tautological statement in his contribution to the catalogue of the German pavilion of the 1995 Venice Biennial implicitly polarizes a multitude of contradictory beliefs that have aspired to define photographic images. Histories and theories of photography throughout the twentieth century have been animated by the tension between photography's frequent claims to an ideal of transparency, commonly associated with a documentary rhetoric, and more pragmatic approaches that analyze images in terms of their context of emergence, their historicity or their use. Ultimately, Ruff's seemingly naive posture negates one of the strongest beliefs associated with mechanical reproduction: its often-professed truth claim. Throughout the history of the medium, the mythical relationship of the real with its depiction has been deconstructed repeatedly. John Tagg has, for instance, unequivocally noted that "the photograph is not a magical 'emanation' but a material product of a material apparatus set to work in specific contexts, by specific forces, for more or less defined purposes. It requires, therefore, not an alchemy but a history, outside which the existential existence of photography is empty."[2] Yet, despite this apparently indisputable argument, the appearance of digital technologies in photography in the late 1980s triggered a dogmatic

1 Thomas Ruff quoted in *Thomas Ruff. Andere Porträts + 3D*, exhibition catalogue (Venice Biennial, 1995), Ostfildern, Cantz, 1995, p. 17.

2 John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation. Essays on Photographies and Histories*, Houndmills/London, Macmillan Education, 1988, p. 3. Quoted in Bernd Stiegler, *Theoriegeschichte der Photographie (Bild und Text)*, Munich, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2010 (2006), p. 371.

theoretical response that revived what Allan Sekula once called "the folklore of photographic truth."[3] The ontological acceptance of the photographic image, based on the notion of indexicality derived from semiotics, has proven extremely resilient in responses to digital imagery: many proponents of the ongoing debate on the use of these new technologies and their implications have emphatically professed the "end of photography," in an impetus which can be subsumed under the generic label "post-photography." This phenomenon can almost exclusively be traced back to one single book – whose rupture claim is not even as radical as it may seem –, William J. Mitchell's *The Reconfigured Eye. Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era*, which was published in 1992.[4]

Fig. 1: Andreas Gursky, *Paris, Montparnasse*, 1993 (205 × 421 cm)

Approximately at the same time, these technologies began to be adopted among some of the first photographers to be institutionally recognized as artists. In 1987, Thomas Ruff was the first member of the so-called Düsseldorf School, a group of photographers who studied with Bernd and Hilla Becher at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and whose work has been repeatedly associated with a German documentary tradition, to investigate the use of computer-assisted post-production to retouch images. A few years later, Andreas Gursky and Jörg Sasse also adopted this new technical potential, which became increasingly important in the formal and aesthetic development of their work. While the digital primarily constitutes a retouching and composing tool until the mid-1990s, its use progressively fuels far-reaching transformations in the conception of photographic representation, as much technically as conceptually. Twenty-five years later, Thomas Ruff would generate images with specifically designed computer programs (e.g., the *Photograms* series, 2012). He entirely relinquishes the notion of capture from the photographic process, hence challenging the very definition of what a photograph might be.

3 Allan Sekula, "Documentary and Corporate Violence," in Alexander Albero and Blake Stimson (ed.), *Conceptual Art. A Critical Anthology*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1999 (1979), p. 360 (originally published in *Dialogue/Discourse/Research*, exhibition catalogue, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1979 and in an expanded version as "Dismantling Modernism, Re-inventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 19, No. 4, Summer 1978).

4 William J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye. Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 2001 (1992).

The investigation of these developments, which we aim to trace back in this study, resulted in an account of (historical) continuity and (epistemological) rupture. Across three decades, digital technologies undeniably transformed photographic practices and the conceptions attached to the photographic in a profound way. However, as Jonathan Crary noted in 1991, a year before William J. Mitchell argued that "photography was dead"[5] because of the transformations these new tools implied, "technology is always a concomitant or subordinate part of other forces."[6] The objective of this book lies in the investigation of some of these forces through the examination of the uses and implications of digital technologies in the work of Düsseldorf photography and through the analysis of their critical reception. Its method combines a history of discourse, a history of theories, a history of practices and a history of representations, all of which are necessary to grasp this complex object. The "Düsseldorf School" constitutes a historiographical originality. The label laid out by Isabel Graw in 1988[7] has ever since been perpetrated without critical inquiry until quite recently. Logically associated with a German documentary tradition, it has defined the reception of its proponents and considerably oriented the discourse on early uses of digital technologies by affiliated artists. While Andreas Gursky's digital montages are initially interpreted as enhanced documentaries (e.g., *Paris, Montparnasse*, 1993, Fig. 1) in which technology compensates for the limitations of the human eye, "post-photographic" images such as Nancy Burson's *Composites* (1982–1984), which was shown at the epochal exhibition *Fotografie nach der Fotografie* in 1995, are rather interpreted as the symptom of photography's lost ability to depict truthfully.[8] The appraisal of the "manipulated" aspect of their images interestingly reveals specific sets of discourse and provides distinct interpretative models. The onset of this research consequently derives from a discourse analysis, which will underlie most of its developments, and will also define the analyzed body of work. A first step in understanding the use of computers in Düsseldorf photography implies the resolution of an apparently contradictory question: Why were digital technologies decried by numerous theorists in the 1990s, while their use in Düsseldorf was either ignored or analyzed pragmatically – as if they were compositional tools like any other – and not subjected to that dogmatic stance? From this inceptive question, the digital arises not as a sheer technical tool – a perspective that is not central to our study – but as a discursive counterpoint to a documentary rhetoric that has shaped the reception of the work of the Becher School. The digital as vector of discourse therefore defines the choice of considered photographers as well: since the early 1990s, Thomas Ruff, Andreas Gursky and Jörg Sasse have extensively used digital retouching and capturing technologies

5 Ibid., p. 20.

6 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1992, p. 8.

7 Isabel Graw, "Bernhard Becher's Students," *Flash Art*, No. 143, Nov./Dec. 1988, p. 123 ff.

8 Hulbertus von Amelunxen, Stefan Iglhaut, Florian Rötzer and Alexis Kassel (ed.), *Fotografie nach der Fotografie*, Munich, Verlag der Kunst und Siemens Kulturprogramm, 1996.

and have more recently reflected upon changes in visual culture brought about by digital imaging and distribution technologies. Thomas Struth, Candida Höfer and Axel Hütte on the other hand, have hardly tested such technologies and, although their work can also be interpreted as a reflection of digital visual economies, they did not use or address them explicitly until the late 2000s.

Fig. 2: Axel Hütte, *Elfenweiher 1*, 2004 (147 × 187 cm)

This schism is significant because it reveals a stance that reflects certain beliefs that define photographic practice. For various reasons, Höfer, Struth and Hütte did not use digital retouching or capturing tools until the late 2000s – twenty years after Ruff, Gursky and Sasse started experimenting with them –, and they still predominantly photograph with analogue cameras. Axel Hütte commonly stresses his rejection of digital photography, which he claims to have never used. In 2014, he stated his case in these terms: "Photography is a medium that had been linked to the idea of being a testimony of time and place. With the digital virtual world this truth is fading away," emphasizing about his own work that "whatever you see is not produced by digital technique."[9] Within his conception of photography, the digital clearly jeopardizes the medium's truth claim and its ability to document. While central to post-photographic theories, that radical position is ignored by Ruff, Gursky and Sasse and is barely reflected as such in the discourse or the reading of their work.[10] Candida Höfer experimented with digital cameras in the late 2000s, but most of her images are taken by conventional large-format cameras. Numerous sources, such as press releases of exhibitions, stress the fact that her work

9 Axel Hütte interviewed by *Landscape Stories*, May 2014. Available at http://www.landscape-stories.net/interviews/80-2014-axel-hutte?lang=en, accessed on June 28, 2018.

10 As will be discussed extensively below, their work is paradoxically excluded from that reading and is rather associated with historical documentary forms.

"do[es] not use any form of digital enhancement,"[11] positioning her in line with the Bechers' uncompromising approach. Thomas Struth, who did not use digital editing tools until the late 2000s, is interpreted as having a "cautious" [*zurückhaltend*] approach toward them.[12] He has indeed recently created some composite photographs, such as *Space Shuttle 1, Kennedy Space Center, Cape Canaveral* (2008) based on three distinct shots, which have been digitally stitched together.[13] However, the image – part of Struth's "technological" series focusing on complex scientific facilities (e.g., the Max Planck Institute for Plasma Physics in Garching) – was digitally edited because he avowedly could not spend enough time at the Kennedy Space Center to create a satisfactory image. Moreover, Struth stresses the superior "nuance and detail" of analogue large-format cameras, compared to digital capturing devices. He only uses the latter for preparatory shots.[14]

Clearly, these three photographers express an undeniable attachment to "conventional" forms of photographic capture and are close to the Bechers' ideal of deadpan depictions. They seek to make their representations as objective as possible, and they eschew the "occult power" of the digital representation apparatus.[15] However, despite that position, the work of supporters of digital imaging and their opponents does not necessarily differ radically. An unretouched photograph and a retouched image, such as Axel Hütte's *Elfenweiher 1* (2004, Fig. 2) and Andreas Gursky's *Bangkok II* (2011, see Fig. 3),[16] may display very similar strategies and subjects – in this case, a confrontation of the reflecting qualities of a water surface with the depictive ability of the camera – in which issues related to an alleged truth claim or lost indexicality prove irrelevant. As such, the images themselves resist a differentiation, while a study of the positions commenting on them proves productive. The sets of discourses the two groups – Ruff, Gursky and Sasse on the one hand, and Höfer, Struth and Hütte on the other – might be associated with differ considerably. Hütte stated in 2013 that he does not strictly seek to "document" as he did thirty years before, but he still insists that "in all my pictures I have

11 See for example the press release of her recent exhibition at the Fondazione Bisazza in Vicenza (Italy), *Candida Höfer. Immagini di Architettura*, May 2014. Available at http://fondazionebisazza.it, accessed June 28, 2018.

12 See for example Viola Rühse, "Vom fotografischen Blue Chip zum Masterpiece der jüngeren Kunstgeschichte. Thomas Struth's Retrospektive im Düsseldorfer K20," All-Over. *Magazin für Kunst und Ästhetik*, No. 1, June 2011, p. 46.

13 See Armin Zweite, "'...a certain sense of placelessness.' Thomas Struth between Seoul, Cape Canaveral, Garching and Greifswald," in Anette Kruszynski, Tobia Bezzola and James Lingwood (ed.), *Thomas Struth. Photographs 1978 – 2010*, Munich, Schirmer/Mosel, 2010, p. 154 – 157.

14 See for example Tuesday Gutierrez, "Thomas Struth Searches for the Sublime. Photographs 1978–2010 at the Whitechapel Gallery," at momadi.com, 2011. Available at http://momardi.com/thomas-struth-searches-for-the-sublime-photographs-1978-2010-at-the-whitechapel-gallery, accessed on June 27, 2018.

15 In an article on Thomas Struth's retrospective in the Dallas Museum of Arts (2002), Daniel Birnbaum uses the expression "occult power" as a counterposition to Struth's analogue practice, borrowed from art historian Thomas Crow. See Daniel Birnbaum, "Paradise Reframed. Thomas Struth in Retrospect," *Artforum*, Vol. 40, No. 9, May 2002, p. 142 – 149.

16 Addressing the nine images of the series, the *Bangkok* catalogue states that "Gursky has clearly manipulated the photographs." See John Yau, "Looking at *Bangkok* (2011)," in *Andreas Gursky. Bangkok*, exhibition catalogue (Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, 2012), Göttingen, Steidl, 2012, p. 53.

never used the possibilities of digitization."[17] The recourse to such arguments – an aesthetic position much more than a dogmatic belief in the depiction of reality – clearly differentiates Höfer, Struth and Hütte from Ruff, Gursky and Sasse. If one admits the self-legitimizing discourse as a defining parameter of documentary practices,[18] a clear demarcation between the two "trios" emerges: although both formally re-enact documentary forms and endorse to a certain extent their rhetoric, they do so on different premises. Although visually and aesthetically similar, those two "poles" theoretically stem from opposing sets of discourse: on one hand, a reliance on the traditional objectivist paradigm of photography,[19] and on the other, an investment in self-reflexive photographic practices, freed from a strictly depictive claim. However, as will be argued throughout this research, the filiation to the first pole – and not the strict analysis through its characteristics – tends to be applied to all six photographers. In consequence, the role of these two sets of discourse in the definition of the "Düsseldorf School" ought to be clarified and the nature of their differentiation examined. Eventually, it is through their relationship to the notion of documentary that their individual and collective characteristics shall be explored.

The study of the digital thus serves as a marker to understand the broader discursive context, as much as it is used to examine the role these technologies play in specific photographers' bodies of work. It will be discussed as a discursive counterposition to the documentary rhetoric that the work of most Becher students has been interpreted by; while three pupils seemingly carry on their teachers' legacy, the three others (at least apparently) do not. Analysis of discourse and context around the examined bodies of works accordingly defines the structure of this study. While the third and fourth chapters are entirely dedicated to the analysis of the work of these three photographers – through the examination of the early use of digital tools (1987 – 1998) and the generalized absorption of digital processes and mechanisms (1999 – 2015) –, the first and second chapters approach the object of examination through "extrinsic" histories that have only been occasionally combined with the historiography of Düsseldorf. Part 1 addresses the construction of a documentary tradition, which plays a central role in the reception of Düsseldorf photography. Bernd and Hilla Becher and their students have been recurrently connected by their respective historiographies with a specifically German documentary tradition

17 Ironically, while insisting on his rejection of digital capturing tools, he stresses that in the recent images shown in Venice at the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa (2013), "light and shadows were edited, in order to dramatize the atmosphere." See the interview of Axel Hütte by Peter Elfers, *Salon Magazine*, 2013.

18 See especially Olivier Lugon, *Le style documentaire. D'August Sander à Walker Evans, 1920 – 1945*, Paris, Macula, 2001.

19 In photography theory, Dominique Baqué is one of the few scholars who uses the concept of "objectivist paradigm" in her book *La photographie plasticienne. Un art paradoxal* (Paris, Editions du Regard, 1998), specifically addressing the neutral, deadpan approach of the Bechers. The syntagma is primarily used in social sciences and can be understood as the counterpart of constructivist epistemologies. See for example Angèle Kremer Marietti, "La question du réalisme scientifique. Un problème épistémologique central," *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, Vol. 40, No. 124, 2002. Available on http://journals.openedition.org/ress/575, accessed on June 15, 2018.

that stems from historical models such as August Sander, Albert Renger-Patzsch and Karl Blossfeldt. However, the discontinuous character of that filiation has to be stressed. In the 1960s and 1970s, photography as a legitimate cultural object emerges through the rediscovery of these "historical" figures and numerous foreign photographers. Their association with newly published material – such as a significant part of Walter Benjamin's writings on photography in the 1960s – leads to their inscription in the nascent historicization of photography *as an art form*. The work of a multitude of critics, publishers, collectors, magazine editors, gallery owners and historians converges in the common endeavor to recognize and establish photography, rediscovering historical figures and acknowledging contemporary photographers. In other words, the German documentary tradition that the work of the Becher students has been connected to, especially through the late 1990s, did not exist as such before the 1970s.

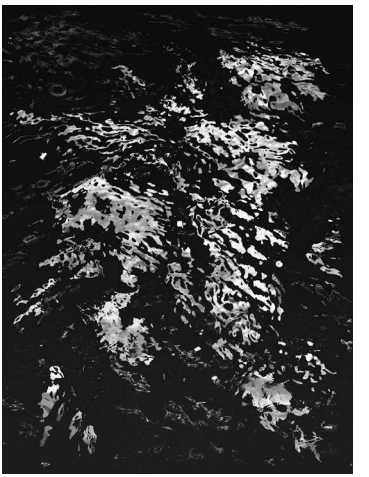

Fig. 3: Andreas Gursky, *Bangkok II*, 2011 (307 × 237 cm)

In 1979, the exhibition *In Deutschland. Aspekte gegenwärtiger Dokumentarfotografie*[20] gathers several pupils of the Bechers and thus constitutes a key moment in the legitimation process of a specifically German photography tradition. Based both on documentary forms and theories stressing the role of authorship, it is inspired by French film theory and by Beaumont Newhall's endeavor to establish photography as art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. As such, this contextual field constitutes the condition of possibility of the Düsseldorf School, a "neue Neusachlichkeit"[21] legitimized through its newly built historical filiation. To give only one example of this activity, it is

20 *In Deutschland. Aspekte gegenwärtiger Dokumentarfotografie*, exhibition catalogue (Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn, 23.06.–29.07.1979), Cologne, Rheinland Verlag/Bonn, Rudolf Habelt Verlag, 1979.

21 The terminology is used by Martina Dobbe. See Martina Dobbe's chapter on "Neue Neusachlichkeit," in *Bernd und Hilla Becher. Fachwerkhäuser*, Siegen, Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen, 2013 (2001), p. 53–71.

noteworthy that in 1973, Volker Kahmen was the first to visually confront August Sander and the Bechers' work in one of the earliest German books on the history of photography as art, *Fotografie als Kunst* (Fig. 4). This precedent will provide the formal and aesthetic model – defined by a neutral, frontal and deadpan depiction – through which the Becher students' work will be primarily analyzed. The main intent of this examination therefore lies in understanding the contextual field through which Düsseldorf photography is commonly interpreted.

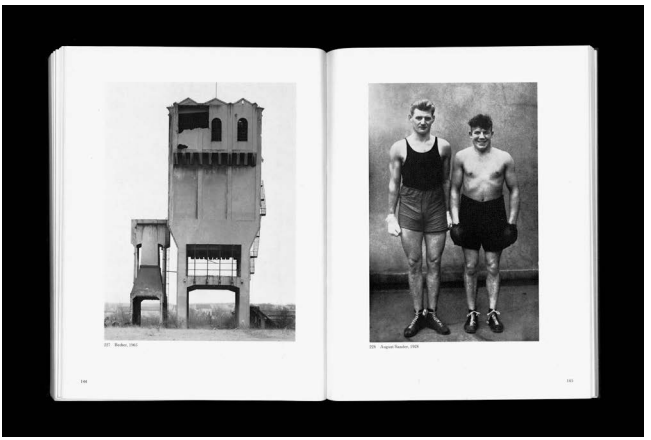

Fig. 4: Juxtaposition of Bernd and Hilla Becher and August Sander in Volker Kahmen, *Die Fotografie als Kunst*, 1973, p. 144 – 145

The documentary rhetoric acts as a counter-model to the reception of the appearance of digital post-production tools, the former being rather associated with truthfulness and verisimilitude and the latter with manipulation or painterly effects. That opposition influences the reception of Düsseldorf photography, as their proponents' images are usually not considered "manipulated." Between these two histories, hardly any circumstantial fact sustains an explicit connection. The Düsseldorf example is not discussed by post-photographic theories. And the privileged illustrations of these theories primarily revolve around the representation of manipulated bodies, which often explicitly reveals the retouched nature of the images. As has been increasingly pointed out by scholars in recent years, the post-photographic theoretical "movement" is not a homogeneous entity, and the rupture claims it sustains are far more complex than a simple rejection of digital tools.[22] Its analysis in relation to post-photographic imagery further complicates its comprehension: although the theoretical discourse often expresses a fear of the loss of photography's truth claim, and although the label "post-photographic," with which artistic projects are tagged, reflects that apprehension, all reactions are not

22 See especially Martin Lister, "Photography in the Age of Electronic Imaging," in Liz Wells (ed.), *Photography. A Critical Introduction*, New York and London, Routledge, 2004 (1996), p. 295 – 336 and Bernd Stiegler, *Theoriegeschichte der Photographie*, chapter "Die digitale Fotografie," op. cit., p. 403–422.

negative. The artists featured at the *Fotografie nach der Fotografie* exhibition, for example, are associated with this discourse of rupture, which they often do not – either explicitly or implicitly – endorse.

Fig. 5: Andreas Gursky, *Rhein I*, 1996 (185.4 × 221 cm)

The author's examination of the theoretical field of post-photography and its confrontation with the work of post-photographic artists in German editorial and curatorial projects consequently seeks to establish that this discursive field polarized the reactions toward new technologies. If digital retouching was not acknowledged in Düsseldorf, it was partially due to the documentary inscription of the Becher School but also to the fact that overtly manipulated post-photographic imageries were interpreted as the logical result of the appearance of digital technologies. As such "post-photography," whose visual outcome blatantly displayed its manipulated nature, logically illustrated the end of photography, while the verisimilitude of Düsseldorf photographers' production could be interpreted within the lineage of a documentary tradition. The methodological difficulties deriving from that comparison are twofold. On one hand, we have to cope with a reception of Düsseldorf photography that does not necessarily mention digital retouching – a stance whose implications are difficult to trace. On the other, we have to evaluate theoretical idiosyncrasies that impacted the reception of post-photographic images but that didn't affect the interpretation of Düsseldorf photography. However, comparison of the discourse on the digital and the documentary – both associated with specific characteristics of photographic representation (such as claim for objectivity vs. overt manipulation and construction vs. verisimilitude, etc.) – and their confrontation with concrete images eventually reveals various visual and discursive points of convergence.

Another paramount precondition for the understanding of Düsseldorf photography – which constitutes part 2 of this research – is rooted in the 1960s and 1970s. The formal and conceptual positions that brought about the convergence of the Bechers' work with conceptual

and photo-conceptual art establish most key processes underlying the work of the young generation of Düsseldorf photography. Serial imagery, comparative mechanisms, grid structure, typologies, permutations, frontality and single-image autonomization have – via the reinterpretation of the protocoled depiction established by the Bechers – considerably shaped the work of the Düsseldorf School. The use of serial image constructions in the work of Sol LeWitt, Ed Ruscha, Ana Mendieta and Mel Bochner reflects conceptual interrogations of codification systems (e.g., language, numbers and photography). In the photographic context, this stance is translated by a systematic and mechanical depiction of the world. While these generative processes formally and conceptually converge with early computer art, their experiments ultimately address the status of images altogether: the autonomy of the single image produced by serial mechanisms eventually leads to the understanding and conceptualization of photographs as autonomous images, rather than as depictions. Thomas Ruff's statement that "a photograph always looks like a photograph, because it's a photograph" not only produced self-reflexive experiments acknowledging such a claim but ultimately also altered the very conception of photographic depiction, whose point of reference is no longer a physical reality.

The second part of the book addresses the production realized in a digital context. Part 3 and 4 reflect two distinct phases in the history of Düsseldorf photography: the period of the emergence of digital tools (1987–1998) and the generalization of digital aesthetics (1999 – 2015). In the period of the emergence of retouching and composing tools, the strategies of Thomas Ruff, Andreas Gursky and Jörg Sasse can be interpreted as an attempt to posit their images *as* images rather than depictions, re-enacting processual and comparative mechanisms shared with the Bechers. Jörg Sasse digitally manipulates found imagery to stress the contingencies of digital formats and compression algorithms (i.e., the *Tableaus* series) and makes their digital origins visible. Andreas Gursky's photographs progressively shift toward two-dimensional images whose generic nature is emphasized through his compositional strategies. In this period, Thomas Ruff creates various mostly non-digital series (the *Häuser* and the *Porträts*) whose large formats and ensuing "de-realization" effect seemingly reject any relationship with the depicted object. Although the three artists proceed differently, their work expresses mechanisms already present in Bernd and Hilla Becher's typologies. Through the investigation of the resilience of frontal construction, grid patterns and comparative mechanisms in the work of the younger generation, it appears that although the strictly serial or typological components are absent, all three reactivate the main formal and conceptual contingencies of the Becher protocol. Focusing on single, large format images, they transpose the typological character *within* their photographs, their work being hardly ever conceived as a series intended to be visually confronted. The grid structure of Andreas Gursky's *Paris Montparnasse* (1993), for example, re-inscribes comparative processes *within* the single image. The reception of their work commonly associates

them with documentary forms. Ruff's images are assessed as documentary *despite* the use of retouching tools, while Gursky's ability to document is even perceived as enhanced by digital tools. The case of Jörg Sasse is perceived quite differently, as his work is commonly associated with a painterly tradition, and the overt digital nature of his *Tableaus* is usually not reflected upon.

Fig. 6: Digitally stretched version of *Rhein I*, equivalent to *Rhein II*

In the period of the generalization of digital aesthetics (1999–2015), the use of such technologies in Düsseldorf photography reflects their growing assimilation by the broader public. The wide-ranging impact of image circulation through the Internet leads Thomas Ruff to interrogate these new visual economies by appropriating low-resolution images on the web. The *nudes* series initiated in 1999 marks a shift in the use of digital technologies in Düsseldorf, as it visually enacts its digital nature and its condition *as image*; the digital becomes at that point the object of investigation with multiple implications (circulation of photography on the web, spectatorship, visual culture, etc.), transcending its former status as a technology primarily used as a retouching tool of photographic images. During that period, Andreas Gursky further shifts toward generic digital imagery by completely building images with photographic fragments. On a technical and compositional level, the late 1990s mark an important shift in his oeuvre: *Rhein II* (1999), is a digitally stretched version (Fig. 6) of *Rhein I* (1996, Fig. 5), a painterly view of the Rhine in Düsseldorf, in which most elements (e.g., buildings) had already been digitally erased by the artist. While the first version was heavily retouched already (the post-production massively intervened in the photographic depiction), *Rhein II* was entirely computer "generated:" the picture was stretched horizontally and was not – as it has often been argued – created from two distinct photographs. Besides the formal-aesthetic transformations of his work, the increasingly complex uses of these tools also reflect a new relationship toward photographic sources. From the late 1990s, Düsseldorf photography progressively addresses serial mechanisms within image *systems*, rather than in single images. Gursky increasingly generates generic images based on his recurrent grid

structure, which depict globalized activities or symptoms (advertising, architecture, Formula 1, etc.) and inscribe his imagery into a global image circulation system. In his project *Speicher* (2008), a physical database whose core articulation resides in the defining mechanisms of computing, Jörg Sasse questions this notion even more explicitly. Ultimately, through the correlation between the preconditions of the Düsseldorf School and the evaluation of the work of its proponents, we aim to explore in detail the role digital technologies have played in the strategies of Jörg Sasse, Andreas Gursky and Thomas Ruff individually. Concomitantly, through the use of the Becher protocol as an analytical framework, the aim of this study is to address the broader context in which these developments took place.