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ALFREDO JAAR  
PRESSE / PRESS  
(selection)



# LA PHOTOGRAPHIE TROMPE ET MONTRE QU'ELLE TROMPE

Photography  
Deceives and Shows  
that It Deceives

Mouna Mekouar

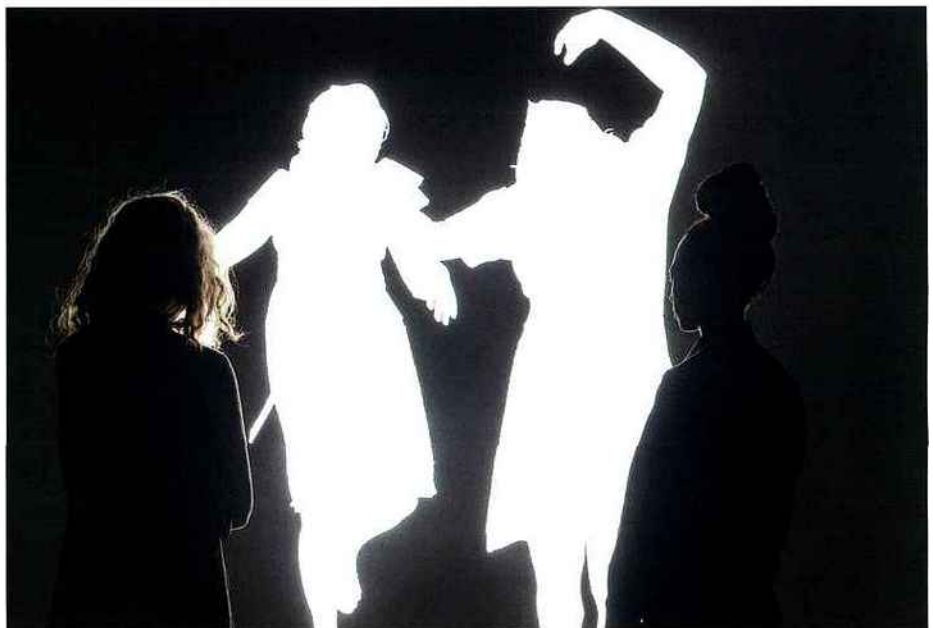


**Pour sa programmation, Mouna Mekouar a formé des duos d'artistes de générations différentes, afin de confronter leurs expériences artistiques: Alfredo Jaar et Ismaïl Bahri, Dirk Braeckman et Alexandre Lenoir. Deux d'entre eux, Masao Yamamoto et Miho Kajioka, proposeront une performance, répondant à la théorie par la pratique.**

■ En 1939, lors du discours du Centenaire de la photographie, Paul Valéry revient, avec lyrisme, sur l'essence du médium « Peu à peu, çà et là, quelques taches apparaissent, pareilles à un balbutiement d'être qui se réveille. Ces fragments se multiplient, se soude, se complètent, et l'on ne peut s'empêcher de songer devant cette formation, d'abord discontinue, qui procède par bonds et éléments insignifiants, mais qui

De haut en bas / *from top* Ismaïl Bahri. « Revers ». 2017  
 Série de vidéos HD 16/9, son stéréo, durées variables  
 (Production du Jeu de Paume)

Alfredo Jaar. « Shadows ». 2014 (Court l'artiste et kamel mennour, Paris)





converge vers une composition reconnaissable, à bien des précipitations qui s'observent dans l'esprit, à des souvenirs qui se précisent, à des certitudes qui tout à coup se cristallisent, à la production de certains vers privilégiés, qui s'établissent, se dégageant brusquement du désordre du langage intérieur » Il insiste aussi sur les écarts générés par les dynamiques de vision le « vrai » et le « faux » se donnent à voir, selon lui, dans un mélange inextricable et fécond Mais qu'est-ce que ce « vrai » que la photographie trahit et en quoi consiste le « faux » auquel cet art finit par aboutir ?

### MÉDIUM INSAISSISSABLE

Les artistes qui s'emparent dans leur travail de la complexité du médium témoignent de la manière dont ils explorent le réel et l'imaginaire, l'invention et la restitution, le documentaire et la fiction, toutes ces notions qui, au gré de leurs travaux, se recoupent ou s'opposent sans parvenir à définir le statut de la photographie. En effet, ces jeux de renvois et de références, qui offrent autant de réponses que de pratiques artistiques, soulignent le caractère insoumis et insaisissable du médium photographique. Fondés sur cette dynamique, de nombreux artistes, de toutes générations, demultiplient, encore aujourd'hui, les approches pour aborder la photographie comme un monde ouvert qui reste à définir et à explorer.

Certains cherchent à circonscrire la photographie à une émanation directe du réel et/ou à une projection intérieure de la psyché. Par exemple, Alfredo Jaar (né en 1956) et Ismaïl Bahri (né en 1978) interrogent, dans leur travail, les dispositifs de visibilité et de monstration de la photographie, révélant son statut changeant et explorant son envers. Leurs œuvres se situent à la périphérie du regard et jouent de la projection mentale pour repenser la notion d'image latente et de surface sensible. Ils proposent aussi une méditation sur l'ombre comme origine de l'image et assoient l'autorité du spectateur comme destination finale.

D'autres aussi engagent une réflexion sur la présence et les limites de l'image photographique dans notre univers visuel. Dirk Braeckman (né en 1958) et Alexandre Lenoir (né en 1992) se tiennent, tous deux, à distance, à la lisière d'un monde sur lequel ils portent – entre peinture et photographie – un regard latéral. Ils transforment et déconstruisent les images, créant un univers anonyme et dépouillé, parsemé de non-lieux et d'espaces transitoires, de corps fragmentés et de détails d'intérieurs. Dirk Braeckman explore les jeux de mise en abyme dans ses prises de vue, soignant le cadrage et travaillant en chambre noire pour suggérer les traces d'un monde enfoui. Alexandre Lenoir explore les textures et les matières

de la surface, pour matérialiser, à l'intérieur de ses compositions, la lumière émanant des images rétroéclairées.

Il y a aussi des artistes comme Masao Yamamoto (né en 1957) qui cherche à restituer, selon une vision onirique, le souvenir tenu qui relie l'image au monde. Ses images sont des éclairs de grâce, des haïkus qui traduisent le mouvement, rapide ou imperceptible, de la nature. Face à ces « petites choses silencieuses » qui évoquent le caractère éphémère de notre présence dans le monde, Miho Kajioka (née en 1973) propose de traduire, avec une délicatesse infinie, la beauté paradoxale d'un environnement dévasté par les catastrophes naturelles et nucléaires. Fragments de mémoire, ses œuvres qui se déploient entre deux strates antagonistes – vide et plein, rêve et réalité, vie et mort – mettent aussi à l'épreuve la nature de la photographie, lorsque celle-ci cherche à élargir le champ de ses pratiques à des formes performatives. ■

*Mouna Mekouar est commissaire d'exposition et auteur indépendante*

**For her program, Mouna Mekouar has decided to form pairs of artists from different generations – Alfredo Jaar and Ismaïl Bahri, Dirk Braeckman and Alexandre Lenoir, for example – in order to compare their experiences. One pair, Masao Yamamoto and Miho Kajioka, will give a performance, thereby answering theory with practice.**

In a speech given for the centenary of the invention of photography, in 1939, Paul Valéry lyrically evoked the essence of the medium: "Gradually, here and there, a few spots appear, like the babbling of a creature awakening. These fragments spread, join, complete each other, and, seeing this formation, which at first is discontinuous, and proceeds by leaps and insignificant elements, yet converges towards a recognizable composition, one cannot help thinking of those many precipitations that can be observed in the mind; of memories taking shape, or certitudes that suddenly crystallize, of the production of certain privileged verses that comes into being and suddenly break free from the disorder of the inner language." He also emphasizes the differences generated by the dynamics of vision: the "true" and the "false" appear

to us, he argues, in an inseparable and productive mix. What, then, is this truth that photography betrays, and what is this "falsity" that this art eventually produces?

### ELUSIVE MEDIUM

Artists who work with the complexity of the medium will discuss the way they explore the real and the imaginary, invention and capture, documentary and fiction, and how all these notions intertwine in their work. The diversity of these references and juxtapositions, and also of the practices, reflects the intractable and elusive nature of photography. For many artists today, photography remains an open world that still has to be defined and explored.

Some try to limit photography to a direct emanation of the real and/or inner projection of the psyche. In their respective practices, for example, Alfredo Jaar (born 1956) and Ismaïl Bahri (born 1978) question its modes of visibility and presentation, revealing its changing status and exploring what lies behind it. Their work stands at the periphery of the gaze and plays on mental projection in order to rethink the notion of the latent image and sensitive surface. They meditate on shadow as the origin of the image and posit the viewer's authority as the final destination.

Others, too, reflect on the presence and limits of the photographic image. Dirk Braeckman (born 1958) and Alexandre Lenoir (1992) take a lateral perspective on the world. Looking from the edge, they transform and deconstruct images, create a spare, autonomous world scattered with non-places and inner details. Braeckman's images are deliberately reflective, using careful framing and developing work to suggest the traces of a lost world. Lenoir explores the textures and materials of the surface to materialize the light from backlit images on a screen.

In his oneiric images Masao Yamamoto (born 1957) tries to recapture the elusive memory that links the image to the world. His pictures are flashes of grace, haïkus of the swift or imperceptible movement of nature. Considering these "little silent things" that evoke the transience of our presence in the world, Miho Kajioka (born 1973) captures, with great delicacy, landscapes devastated by natural and nuclear disasters. Her fragments of memory are articulated between empty and full, dream and reality, life and death. She questions the nature of photography, especially when the opens the photographic field to performance. ■

*Mouna Mekouar is an author and freelance exhibition curator*



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On View

## Inside an Idyllic Sculpture Park, Alfredo Jaar Exposes CIA Black Sites—and British Complicity

The artist's sinister 'Garden of Good and Evil' has become a crowd magnet at Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

Javier Pes, October 23, 2017



Alfredo Jaar at Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Photo by Jonty Wilde

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A sculpture garden in the English countryside seems an unlikely place to explore the shadowy history of the CIA. But Alfredo Jaar's new work, *The Garden of Good and Evil* (2017), has quickly become a popular destination at [the Yorkshire Sculpture Park](#) in the north of England. Nearly 5,000 visitors experienced the installation during its opening week, a spokeswoman tells artnet News. Unveiled on October 14, the work is a series of prison cells surrounded by a "forest" of 101 trees.

The piece refers to the CIA's "black sites": secret prisons created by the US intelligence service around the world after September 11, 2001. Jaar spent years researching the unacknowledged prisons, which are believed to operate in Thailand, Romania, Afghanistan, and other countries.

"It is like a fairy tale—you walk through the forest and then there is the terror inside," notes Clare Lilley, the director of programming at the sculpture park. She has organized the commission and accompanying solo show, the New York-based, Chilean-born artist's first major institutional exhibition in the UK.

Lilley is determined to find the powerful work a permanent place in the park's rolling hills. But the process is more complicated than it sounds. Planting the work's fir trees—which are currently installed in wooden containers—is not straightforward in the historic countryside; the Yorkshire valley is a protected landscape. "We have a pretty good idea of where we want it to go but we have to go through planning," she says.

So until April 8, the trees will remain in their planters. But they still manage to create an ominous feel. A group of them is placed right up against the glazed walls of the sculpture park's Underground Gallery. "The darkness they create inside the gallery and the shadows are really interesting," Lilley says.

The cells—some cages, some windowless structures—are hidden within the grid of trees. The roofless cages frame the sky—but not in a Turrellesque way. You cannot lie down inside and look up, as they are only one square meter wide. Meanwhile, other cells are barely tall enough to crouch inside.

Lilley was concerned that people would not like the work. But in fact, "the reaction from the public has been incredible," she says. "People are saying this issue needs to be discussed. Alfredo is dealing with such difficult things we don't know how to confront."

The issues raised include the UK government. "We are complicit," Lilley notes, referring the island of Diego Garcia, a British territory in the Indian Ocean that is allegedly home to a black site. The UK government forcibly removed the island's inhabitants during the Cold War so that the US could create a military base there. After September 11, the island has reportedly been used as a stop-off for so-called rendition flights of prisoners to other black sites.

*Alfredo Jaar: The Garden of Good and Evil, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, October 14–April 8.*

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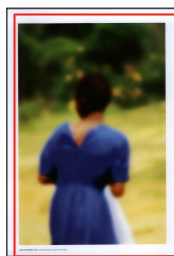
Article topics

Contemporary



Javier Pes  
UK Editor





# The Rwanda Project d'Alfredo Jaar

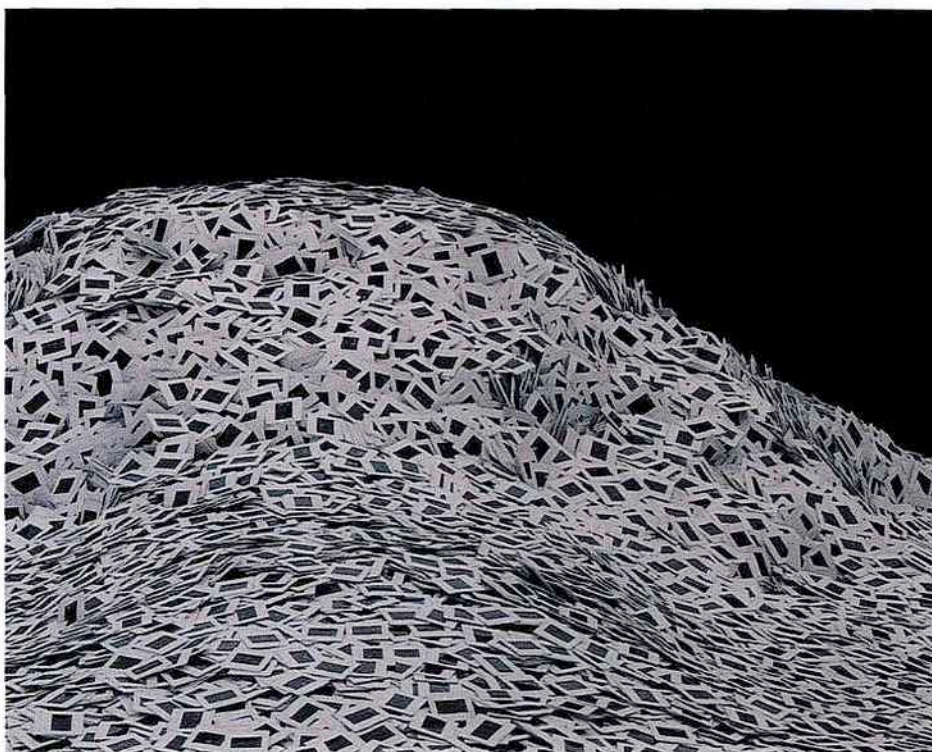
**Les Rencontres d'Arles  
présentent, dans l'église  
des Frères Prêcheurs,  
les œuvres les plus  
significatives de cet artiste  
chilien engagé qui a mené,  
de 1994 à 2000, une réflexion  
sur la représentation  
du génocide rwandais.**

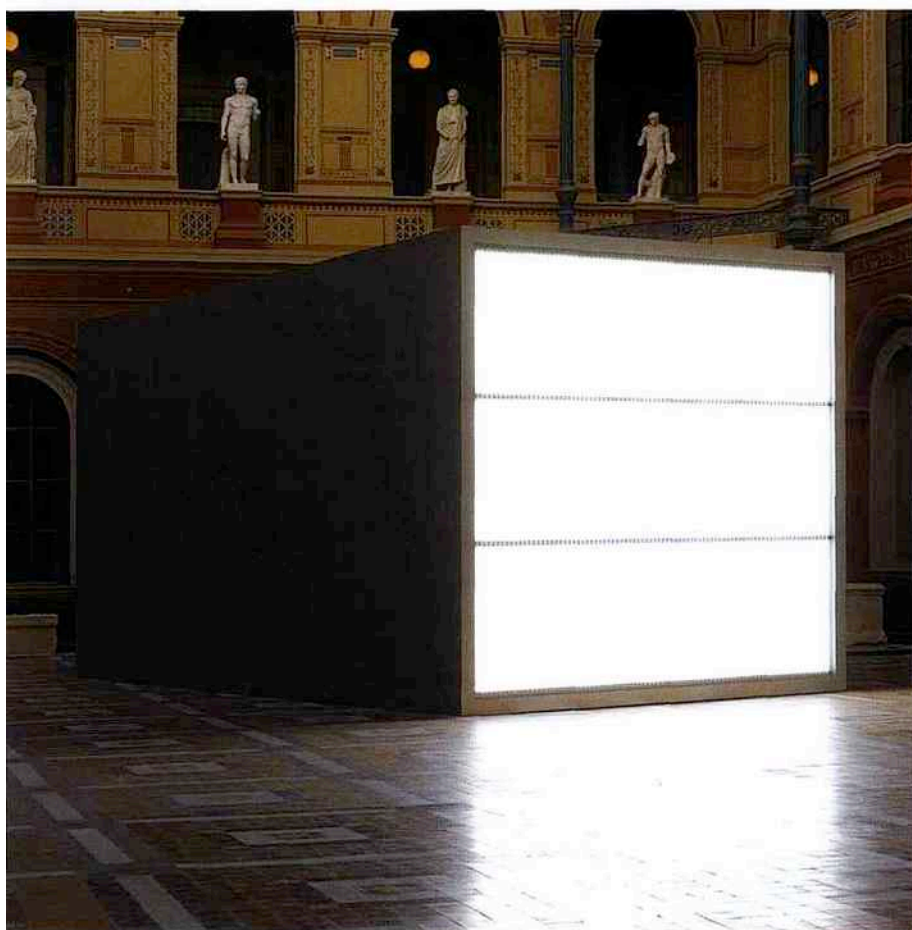
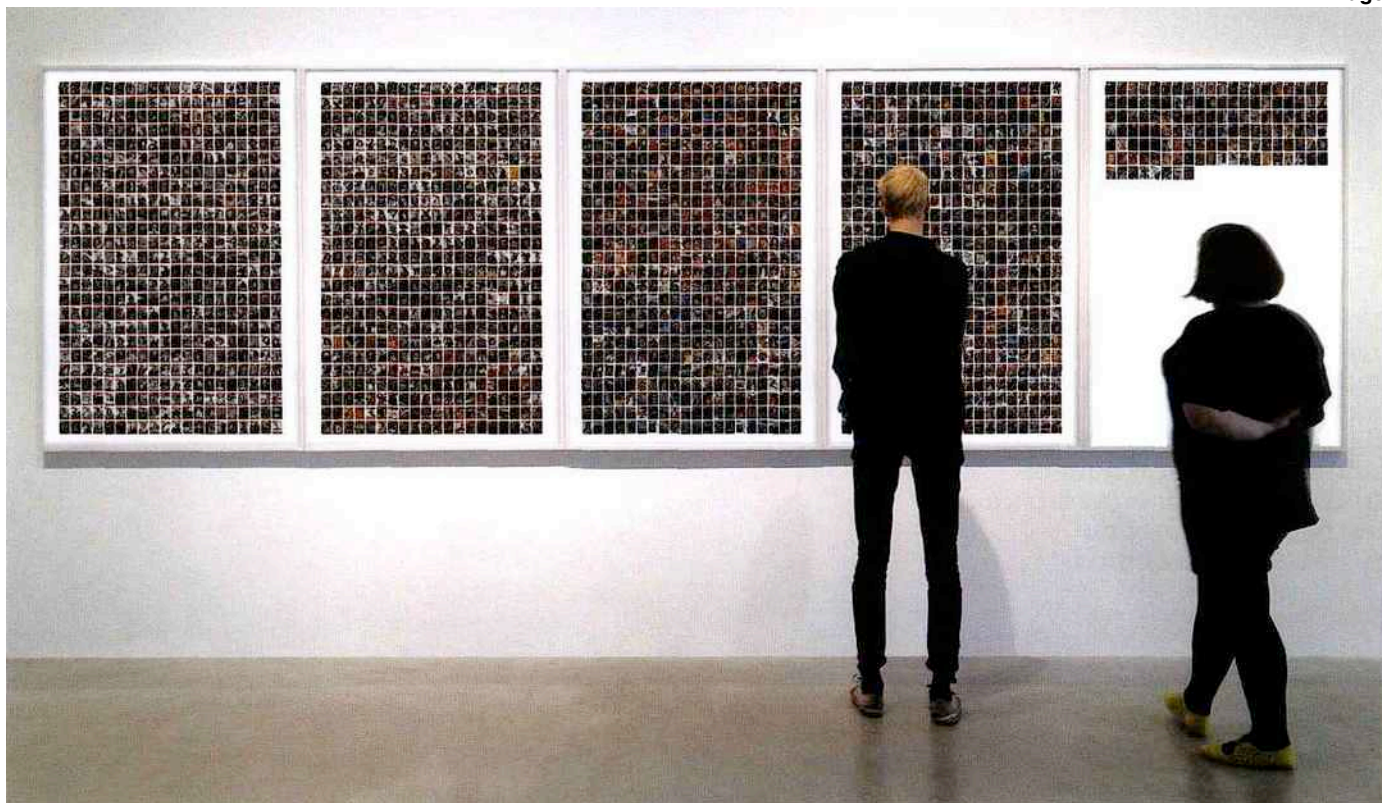
**Texte** MAGALI JAUFFRET

Un jour d'avril 1994, Alfredo Jaar, artiste chilien de 56 ans, lit, en page 7 du *New York Times*, cinq lignes relatant la découverte de 35 000 corps flottant sur le lac Kigala, au Rwanda. Cinq lignes qui, par leur indécence, le sidèrent, le révoltent. Il prend alors la décision folle de partir là-bas avec une ONG. Il ignore, en partant, que le génocide rwandais va l'habiter au point de l'amener à rester sur place toute une année, le temps d'analyser la situation, de recueillir témoignages et informations, de trouver comment penser la catastrophe.

Pour Alfredo Jaar, il s'agit de mettre en route des procédures critiques sur l'usage que font les médias de l'atrocité des guerres, de défricher d'autres formes en partant d'une matière photojournalistique si insupportable qu'elle est réputée intransmissible, inimaginable, inmontrable. L'auteur se détourne donc des représentations formatées par la commande de presse, pousse très loin l'expérimentation des solutions artistiques susceptibles de réveiller, de sortir de sa passivité le spectateur d'alors et celui d'aujourd'hui. À Arles, où les Rencontres ont décidé d'exposer une grande partie de son œuvre, on s'étonne encore aujourd'hui, comme récemment à Berlin ou à la Triennale de Paris, de l'audace d'un artiste qui ose

Page de gauche : *Six Seconds*, 2000, série *The Rwanda Project*, 1994-2000.  
À droite et ci-contre : *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita*, 1996, série *The Rwanda Project*, 1994-2000.





emprunter pareils chemins pour faire comprendre, analyser et montrer les conséquences d'un tel massacre.

### **Une expérience visuelle critique**

Ce n'est pas pour rien que l'œuvre si forte de cet artiste éminemment politique le conduit, par deux fois, à représenter son pays à la Biennale de Venise : la première fois, c'est en 1987, sous Pinochet, que cet architecte, devenu après avoir fui la dictature enseignant et artiste à New York, représente son pays, avec *Gold in the morning*, série photographique retraçant le quotidien des mineurs brésiliens. La seconde fois qu'il est choisi, c'est cette année...

Dans l'impressionnante église des Frères Prêcheurs qui sied si bien au *Rwanda Project* (1994-2000), on découvre ce qu'Alfredo Jaar nomme des « *essais philosophiques de représentation* » qui prennent la forme de films, de performances, d'installations, de caissons lumineux et permettent à leur auteur d'affirmer ses responsabilités, ses convictions, sa volonté de réhabiliter l'honneur perdu de la représentation de guerre.

En haut : *Searching for Africa in Life*, 1996.  
Ci-contre : *The Sound of Silence*, 2006,  
photographié par Charles Duprat à l'École  
nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts  
de Paris en 2011.



### Une esthétique de l'engagement

*Real Pictures* (1995), retenues parmi les trois mille images de l'inimaginable captées par Alfredo Jaar pendant toute une année, sont littéralement mises en boîte. On ne voit pas de cadavres. Leurs images posthumes, escamotées, sont soustraites au regard. Des textes, placés sur les couvercles des boîtes hermétiques en carton noir qui les contiennent, prennent leur place et leur statut en décrivant leur contenu caché, en relatant la vie de ces Tutsis anonymes démembrés vivants à la machette. Ils prennent d'autant plus de force que ce peuple se retrouve privé d'histoire et de parole.

Voir de ses yeux forcément voyeurs, dans une exposition, donc dans un lieu qui a à voir avec le spectacle, des images montrant des amoncellements de squelettes, des lambeaux de cervelle ou de chair ou ne pas les voir directement, comme c'est le cas ici, et bénéficié, au contraire, de la possibilité de s'informer, de comprendre les enjeux, d'être ébranlé en partageant l'expérience d'un photographe-passeur qui a vu et recontextualisé, c'est toute la différence entre l'« esthétique de l'engagement » prônée par Alfredo Jaar et la trivialité de certains journaux, si jamais, choisissant de ne pas l'occulter, ils s'emparent de l'actualité d'un conflit. Autre tentative réussie d'Alfredo Jaar à propos du Rwanda, l'installation *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* (1996). Sur une immense table lumineuse, s'empilent des millions de diapositives dont surgit le regard cadré serré de Gutete, qui a assisté, impuissante, à l'extermination méthodique de son époux et de ses deux enfants, dans l'église de Ntarama, où un charnier de quelque cinq cents corps a été retrouvé. Trois mille photos du massacre prises pour n'en montrer aucune et mettre en avant un seul regard qui, lui, l'a vu.

### Un cri dans le silence

Ainsi se trouve retourné le dispositif médiatique dominant qui un peu plus loin, dans l'église des Frères Prêcheurs, nous confronte à *Untitled*, accrochage des unes de *Newsweek* révélant que l'hebdomadaire américain a attendu le 1<sup>er</sup> août 1994 pour titrer en une sur le génocide perpétré dès le 11 avril. Un autre accrochage, *Searching for Africa in Life*, met en scène deux mille cent vingt-six couvertures du magazine *Life* qui, réalisées entre 1930 et 1990, élargissent le propos en mettant en évidence le désintérêt du magazine pour ce qui se passe sur le continent africain.

Il y a toujours un trou noir, une tache



*Real Pictures*, 1995 (POUR TOUS LES VISUELS : ©ALFREDO JAAR, COURTESY GALERIE KAMEL MENNOUR, PARIS.)

aveugle dans l'œuvre d'Alfredo Jaar. L'artiste a même mis au point un outil, solidaire de ses modalités de monstration, de ses mises en espace critiques, qui rend invisibles les clichés de l'horreur susceptibles de déclencher notre voyeurisme. Il utilise cet éblouissement de façon récurrente. Celui-ci atteint son paroxysme dans l'installation de 8 minutes *The Sound of Silence*, insoutenable récit d'un cliché sensationnel vainqueur du Prix Pulitzer et mettant en scène une enfant soudanaise affamée, un vautour, un jeune photographe suicidé que deux violents éclairs de stroboscope nous empêchent de voir...

Il est ainsi, de par le monde, des intellectuels qui réfléchissent à la production des images de presse et à leur réception par le public. Beaucoup écrivent. Peu d'entre eux parviennent à créer de l'art à partir d'une pensée du désastre qui recouvre des événements cachés, occultés ou déformés par leur médiatisation. Artiste de projets,

Alfredo Jaar est de ceux-là. Il émancipe ces images, les remet à la disposition de notre sens critique. Il nous emmène au-delà des apparences. ■

### À VOIR

« Alfredo Jaar, The Rwanda Project », aux Rencontres d'Arles, église des Frères Prêcheurs, 13200 Arles [www.rencontres-arles.com](http://www.rencontres-arles.com) du 1<sup>er</sup> juillet au 22 septembre. Alfredo Jaar est représenté en France par la galerie Kamel Mennour Paris.

### À LIRE

- Alfredo Jaar, *The Way it is. An Aesthetics of Resistance*, catalogue de l'exposition à la Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin, 2012.  
- Alfredo Jaar, par Lorenzo Fusi, éd. Exorma, 218 pp., 18 €.  
- Alfredo Jaar. *La politique des images*, textes Georges Didi-Huberman, Griselda Pollock, Jacques Rancière, Nicole Schweizer, éd. JRP Ringier, 168 pp., 40 €.

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in allusions are more  
a distinctive rhythm

—*Alessandra Pioselli*  
Italian by *Marguerite Shore*.

## JURY ARTS/ INTEMPORANEA/

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View of "Ettore  
Spalletti," 2014.  
MAXXI National Museum  
of XXI Century Arts,  
Rome. Back wall:  
Voce Bassa (Low  
Voice), 2014. Right  
wall: each Parole di  
colore (Words of  
Color), 2011.

surface like a fine dust, in minuscule fragments of pictorial material in suspension. There is an imperceptible outward movement of the color from inside the work—very similar to the atmospheric effect of Mark Rothko's paintings—that simultaneously presents transparency and depth. And the work has an internal rhythm, like a breath, or a barely discernible humming, which often slides into silence, in the opaque absorbency of the monochromatic surfaces. Whether applied to flat surfaces or volumes or rooms, all of Spalletti's paintings vibrate with these powdery pigments in a sort of temporal continuum, as if the manifestation of the painting were in a state of evolution: something occurring in the air, at that moment. It is not an event that has already occurred in the studio, of which the viewer takes note, but rather something in which the viewer participates, in a continuous present, almost as if to confirm, here and now, the work's vital manifestation in every moment. And the colors dance in this atmosphere, between sky, dawn, and sea, between retina and heart; they give us back the quiet and luminosity of an emotional geography, of an inner panorama emptied of images, but heightened in a dimension of pure event.

—*Ida Panicelli*

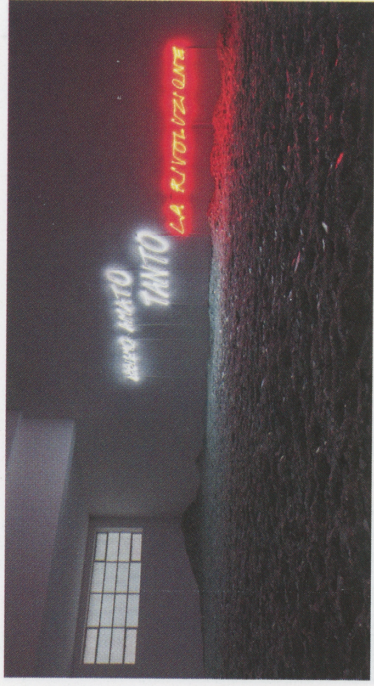
Translated from Italian by *Marguerite Shore*.

## TURIN

### Alfredo Jaar FONDAZIONE MERZ

The squawking sound of a clarinet playing in the background was like a madman's cry: obsessive, desperate, angry, lacerating. The footsteps of visitors, sinking unsteadily into an expanse of broken glass, created a harsh, broken, crunching noise. This was the grating sound of "*Abbiamo amato tanto la rivoluzione*" (We Loved It So Much, the Revolution), an exhibition that Alfredo Jaar dedicated to radical utopia. The title, borrowed from that of a 1986 book by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, appeared on the wall, written in red and white neon, illuminating the fragments of glass (150 tons of it, ground and ready for recycling) that covered the floor of the exhibition space. The phrase reminded us to wonder what has become of the thirst for change, the collective participation in political and cultural action, the utopian charge that characterized the 1960s and '70s.

As a young man in Chile, Jaar, at the age of seventeen, experienced Augusto Pinochet's bloody military coup of September 11, 1973, which overthrew the Socialist government of Salvador Allende. For eight years he lived under Pinochet's repressive regime; only his work as an artist allowed him brief bursts of freedom. The video in which Jaar plays the clarinet badly, *Opus 1981, Andante Desperato*, 1981, conveys the desperation of a voice that cannot form words but can only emit strident



Alfredo Jaar,  
*Abbiamo amato tanto  
 la rivoluzione* (We  
 Loved It So Much,  
 the Revolution),  
 2013, glass, neon,  
 dimensions variable.

sounds in order to let its owner's agony be heard. The films of Pier Paolo Pasolini and the writings of Antonio Gramsci would sustain him through those years, instilling in him a model of the militant intellectual, fully engaged in his society and time. The company of artists and intellectuals who have inspired Jaar and served as points of reference in his life has ranged from Hans Haacke to Alighiero Boetti, from Nancy Spero to Yoko Ono, from Gabriel García Márquez to Giuseppe Ungaretti. In this exhibition, curated by Claudia Gioia, Jaar established a dialogue with them in a small side room densely packed with both their works and his, a multivoiced chorus reflecting on the history and artistic practices of the times: politics and poetry, performance and photography, neon works and video gathered on four image-filled walls. On the rear wall, the light box *Gesamtkunstwerk*, 1988, explained the sense of this intense dialogue: The works that Jaar picked for the show were mostly political. From Spero's *Torture in Chile*, 1975, to Gerhard Richter's *Mao*, 1968, as well as VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants: Genital Panic*, 1969, and Fabio Mauri's *Disegno schermo fine* (Endless Screen), 1962, the works conveyed their shared commitment to politics and to issues of intellectual freedom.

In a second side room, dark and filled with water, Jaar borrowed a red-and-white neon piece by Mario Merz, *Sciopero generale azione politica relativa proclamata relativamente all'arte* (National Strike Associated Political Action Proclaimed Relative to Art), 1970, but turned it upside down so that the text was reflected in the water, as if to say that today, that call for engagement cannot be communicated other than as an echo, entrusting the power of the word to the fragile framework of the reflection. And yet Jaar does not allow himself to slip into nostalgia. Reflecting on the past and present with an awareness of how much has changed, his extended elegy to the years of militancy is also a call to revive that critical dimension, that revolutionary potential of culture that Gramsci theorized.

With the formidable metaphor of the glass detritus, Jaar asked us to confront the shards of a past in which political commitment was an almost inevitable condition—the never-repudiated past with which he continues to contend, reflecting on what little remains today of that ideological fervor, but also reaffirming art's capacity to indicate paths of freedom of action and thought: an amputated history, a possible future.

—*Ida Panicelli*  
*Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.*

## BRUSSELS

### James Casebere GALERIE DANIEL TEMPLON

There's a golden yet unspoken rule in architectural training and practice that scale models should be neither too realistic nor too detailed. Thus,



**Alfredo Jaar: *The Sound of Silence*, Paris :  
Kamel Mennour, 2012**

Publié à l'occasion de deux expositions en février/mars 2011 : *Three Women* (Paris : Galerie Kamel Mennour) et *The Sound of Silence* (Paris : Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts), le catalogue comporte une sélection de *press works* (1984-2011), de projets des trois dernières décennies (depuis 1985), ainsi que quelques interventions publiques récentes d'Alfredo Jaar. La part visuelle constitue un réel défi dans la mesure où elle tente le difficile rendu imprimé d'installations lumineuses, vidéo, et d'effets de lumières mobiles.

Le catalogue s'ouvre sur un texte bilingue du commissaire, critique d'art, écrivain et directeur de Documenta 11 Okwui Enwezor, intitulé « Alfredo Jaar un art de l'éclairement », ce dernier mot traduisant tant bien que mal l'anglais *illumination* (p. 4-29). Le texte décline tout un pôle sémantique autour de la lumière qui à la fois donne à voir et cache, révèle et aveugle avec ses effets de transparence et d'opacité. Il invite à entrer dans l'œuvre d'Alfredo Jaar par le biais de protocoles de visionnage et de perception choisis par l'artiste, et donc à travers les défis et procédures critiques mises en œuvre. Okwui Enwezor montre bien en quoi l'usage des tubes fluorescents, stroboscopes, spots et cubes lumineux dans *Three Women* (2010) et dans *The Sound of Silence* (2006) constitue un travail sur l'utilisation littérale des sources lumineuses. L'exploration critique du statut et des limites de l'image, de la représentation et des artifices pictorialistes fondent l'engagement et la portée sociale de l'art d'Alfredo Jaar. Le principe sous-jacent à son travail devient alors, selon le mot d'Okwui Enwezor « que lumière soit faite », et se décline à trois niveaux : esthétique, avec l'usage technique du médium de l'image comme source d'occul-

tation et de révélation ; politique, questionnant la conscience de chacun face à un point de vue général imposé par les sources de diffusion à grande échelle tels que les affiches et les mass-médias ; et humaniste, tendant à éclairer de l'intérieur la relation fondée sur l'attention à l'autre que l'art peut favoriser.

En plaçant l'œuvre d'Alfredo Jaar à la fois dans son contexte philosophique (Antonio Gramsci, Pier-Paolo Pasolini, Hannah Arendt), et artistique (aux côtés d'artistes engagés comme Hans Haacke, Christian Boltanski, Thomas Hirschhorn, Adrian Piper), Okwui Enwezor met en avant la tension et l'équilibre fragile entre la singularité d'une œuvre et la revendication d'une posture éthique, ou encore la disjonction entre une expérience vécue et sa traduction par l'enregistrement photographique. Alfredo Jaar explore le regard biaisé des médias et des journaux occidentaux, tant au sujet de l'Afrique avec le génocide au Rwanda (les couvertures de *Newsweek* ignorant plus de quatre mois des massacres : *Searching for Africa, From Time to Time, Greed, Au-delà de l'Afrique*), que sur le thème de la xénophobie et de la violence policière, traités à travers la présentation des Unes de *Independent* et de *Libération*, ou bien dans la vidéo *Du voyage, des gens* (2011) qui porte sur l'expulsion violente des Roms de France. C'est précisément en échappant au pathos qu'Alfredo Jaar, ce « boulimique d'information », parvient à poser des questions épurées et d'autant plus fortes : que savons-nous du mal et nous est-il possible de le représenter ? Ce faisant, n'en déplaise aux critiques l'accusant d'esthétisme, l'artiste dépasse le purement esthétique pour mettre le doigt dans les plaies politiques, idéologiques et sociales qui déchirent l'humanité.

**Tania Vladova**

## TURIN

## Alfredo Jaar

FONDAZIONE MERZ

The squawking sound of a clarinet playing in the background was like a madman's cry: obsessive, desperate, angry, lacerating. The footsteps of visitors, sinking unsteadily into an expanse of broken glass, created a harsh, broken, crunching noise. This was the grating sound of "*Abbiamo amato tanto la rivoluzione*" (We Loved It So Much, the Revolution), an exhibition that Alfredo Jaar dedicated to radical utopia. The title, borrowed from that of a 1986 book by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, appeared on the wall, written in red and white neon, illuminating the fragments of glass (150 tons of it, ground and ready for recycling) that covered the floor of the exhibition space. The phrase reminded us to wonder what has become of the thirst for change, the collective participation in political and cultural action, the utopian charge that characterized the 1960s and '70s.

As a young man in Chile, Jaar, at the age of seventeen, experienced Augusto Pinochet's bloody military coup of September 11, 1973, which overthrew the Socialist government of Salvador Allende. For eight years he lived under Pinochet's repressive regime; only his work as an artist allowed him brief bursts of freedom. The video in which Jaar plays the clarinet badly, *Opus 1981, Andante Desperato*, 1981, conveys the desperation of a voice that cannot form words but can only emit strident



Alfredo Jaar,  
Abbiamo amato tanto  
in rivoluzione (We  
Loved It So Much,  
The Revolution),  
2013, glass, neon,  
dimensions variable.

sounds in order to let its owner's agony be heard. The films of Pier Paolo Pasolini and the writings of Antonio Gramsci would sustain him through those years, instilling in him a model of the militant intellectual, fully engaged in his society and time. The company of artists and intellectuals who have inspired Jaar and served as points of reference in his life has ranged from Hans Haacke to Alighiero Boetti, from Nancy Spero to Yoko Ono, from Gabriel García Márquez to Giuseppe Ungaretti. In this exhibition, curated by Claudia Gioia, Jaar established a dialogue with them in a small side room densely packed with both their works and his, a multivoiced chorus reflecting on the history and artistic practices of the times: politics and poetry, performance and photography, neon works and video gathered on four image-filled walls. On the rear wall, the light box *Gesamtkunstwerk*, 1988, explicated the sense of this intense dialogue: The works that Jaar picked for the show were mostly political. From Spero's *Torture in Chile*, 1975, to Gerhard Richter's *Mao*, 1968, as well as VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants: Genital Panic*, 1969, and Fabio Mauri's *Disegno schermo fine* (Endless Screen), 1962, the works conveyed their shared commitment to politics and to issues of intellectual freedom.

In a second side room, dark and filled with water, Jaar burrowed a red-and-white neon piece by Mario Merz, *Sciopero generale azione politica relativa proclamata relativamente all'arte* (National Strike Associated Political Action Proclaimed Relative to Art), 1970, but turned it upside down so that the text was reflected in the water, as if to say that today, that call for engagement cannot be communicated other than as an echo, entrusting the power of the word to the fragile framework of the reflection. And yet Jaar does not allow himself to slip into nostalgia. Reflecting on the past and present with an awareness of how much has changed, his extended elegy to the years of militancy is also a call to revive that critical dimension, that revolutionary potential of culture that Gramsci theorized.

With the formidable metaphor of the glass detritus, Jaar asked us to confront the shards of a past in which political commitment was an almost inevitable condition—the never-repudiated past with which he continues to contend, reflecting on what little remains today of that ideological fervor, but also reaffirming art's capacity to indicate paths of freedom of action and thought: an amputated history, a possible future.

—Ida Panticelli

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shave.

# The Rwanda Project d'Alfredo Jaar

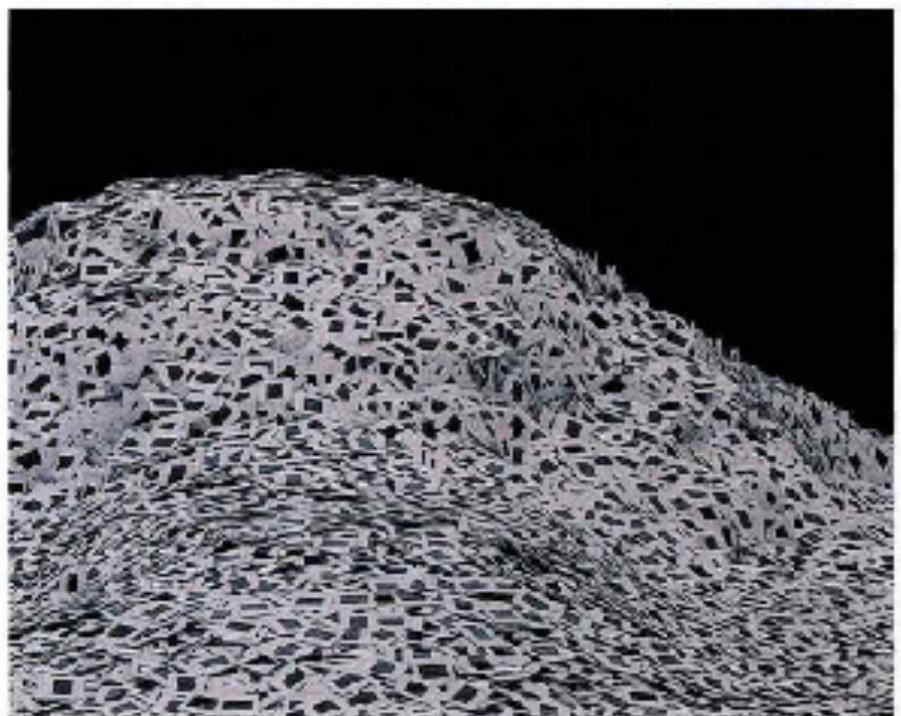
**Les Rencontres d'Arles  
présentent, dans l'église  
des Frères Prêcheurs,  
les œuvres les plus  
significatives de cet artiste  
chilien engagé qui a mené,  
de 1994 à 2000, une réflexion  
sur la représentation  
du génocide rwandais.**

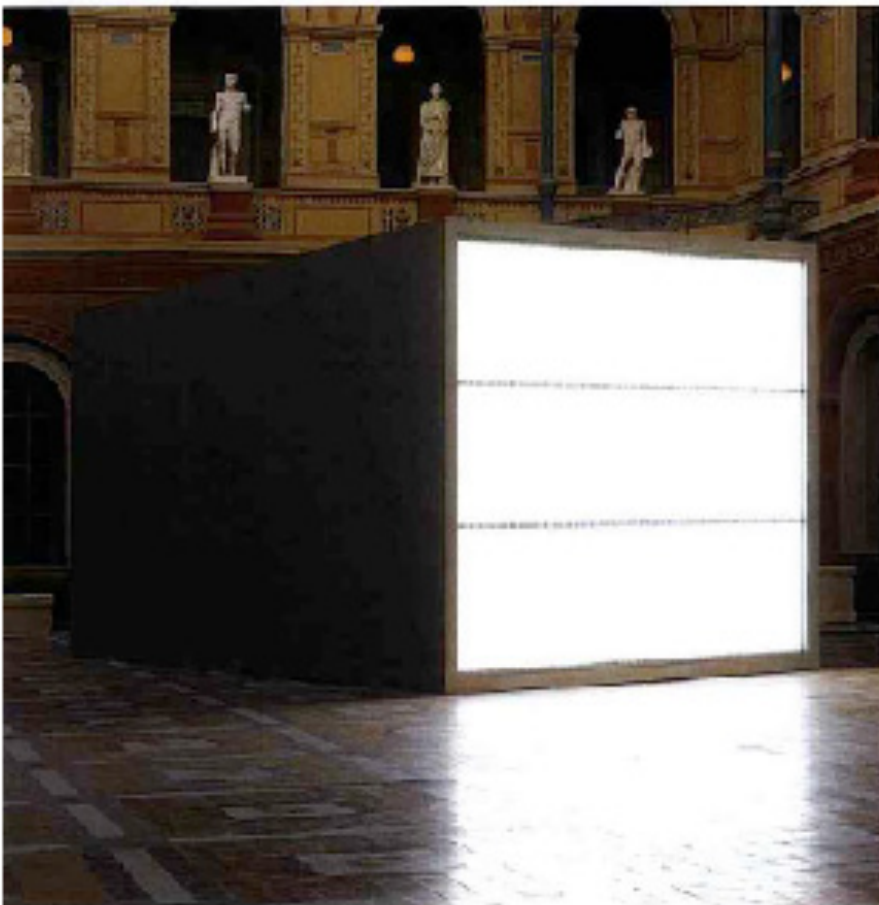
Texte MASALI JAUFFRET

Un jour d'avril 1994, Alfredo Jaar, artiste chilien de 56 ans, lit, en page 7 du *New York Times*, cinq lignes relatant la découverte de 35 000 corps flottant sur le lac Kigali, au Rwanda. Cinq lignes qui, par leur indécence, le aident, le révoltent. Il prend alors la décision folle de partir à l'hasard avec une ONG. Il ignore, en partant, que le génocide rwandais va l'habiter au point de l'amener à rester sur place toute une année, le temps d'analyser la situation, de recueillir témoignages et informations, de trouver comment penser la catastrophe.

Pour Alfredo Jaar, il s'agit de mettre en route des procédures critiques sur l'usage que font les médias de l'atrocité des guerres, de défricher d'autres formes en partant d'une maîtrise photojournalistique si insupportable qu'elle est réputée intraduisible, inimaginable, inmontrable. L'œuvre se détourne donc des représentations formatées par la commande de presse, pousse très loin l'expérimentation des solutions artistiques susceptibles de réveiller, de sortir de sa passivité le spectateur d' alors et celui d'aujourd'hui. À Arles, où les Rencontres ont décidé d'exposer une grande partie de son œuvre, on s'étonne encore aujourd'hui, comme récemment à Berlin ou à la Biennale de Paris, de l'audace d'un artiste qui ose

Page de gauche : *Six Seconds*, 2000.  
série *The Rwanda Project*, 1994-2000.  
À droite et ci-contre : *The Eyes of Gutete Evariste*, 1996, série *The Rwanda Project*, 1994-2000.





emprunter pareils chemins pour faire comprendre, analyser et montrer les conséquences d'un tel massacre.

#### Une expérience visuelle critique

Ce n'est pas pour rien que l'œuvre si forte de cet artiste éminemment politique le conduisit, par deux fois, à représenter son pays à la Biennale de Venise : la première fois, c'est en 1987, sous Pinochet, que cet architecte, devenu après avoir fui la dictature enseignant et artiste à New York, représente son pays, avec *Gulf in the morning*, série photographique retraçant le quotidien des mineurs brésiliens. La seconde fois qu'il est choisi, c'est cette année...

Dans l'impressionnante église des Frères Prêcheurs qui sied si bien au *Joventud Project* (1994-2000), on découvre ce qu'Alfredo Jaar nomme des « essais philosophiques de représentation » qui prennent la forme de films, de performances, d'installations, de caissons lumineux et permettent à leur auteur d'affirmer ses responsabilités, ses convictions, sa volonté de réhabiliter l'honneur perdu de la représentation de guerre.

En haut : *Searching for Africa in Life*, 1996.  
Ci-contre : *The Sound of Silence*, 2006, photographié par Charles Dunnet à l'École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris en 2011.



### Une esthétique de l'engagement

*Real Pictures* (1996), retenues parmi les trois mille images de l'inimaginable captées par Alfredo Jaar pendant toute une année, sont littéralement massées en boîte. On ne voit pas de cadavres. Leurs images posthumes, écarotées, sont épurées au raspad. Des textes, placés sur les couvercles des boîtes hermétiques en carton noir qui les contiennent, prennent leur place et leur statut en décrivant leur contenu au fil, en reliant la vie de ces Tutsis anonymes démembrés vivants à la machete. Ils prennent d'autant plus de force que ce peuple se retrouve privé d'histoire et de parole.

Veut de ce yeux forcément voyeurs, dans une exposition, donc dans un lieu qui a à voir avec le spectacle, des images montrant des amoncements de squelettes, des lambeaux de cervelle ou de chair ou ne pas les voir directement, comme c'est le cas ici, et bénéficient, au contraire, de la possibilité de s'immerger, de comprendre les enjeux, d'être ému et en partageant l'expérience d'un photographe-passeur qui a vu et recontextualisé, c'est toute la différence entre l'« esthétique de l'engagement » prônée par Alfredo Jaar et la trivialité de certains journaux, si jamais, choisissant de ne pas focaliser, ils s'emparent de l'actualité d'un conflit. Autre tentative réussie d'Alfredo Jaar à propos du Rwanda, l'installation *The Spar of Gutere Huzeta* (1996). Sur une immense table lumineuse, s'étalent des millions de diapositives dont se agit le regard cadré serré de Gutere, qui a assisté, impuissante, à l'exécution méthodique de son époux et de ses deux enfants, dans l'église de Ntarama, où un charnier de quelque cinq cents corps a été découverte. Trois mille photos du massacre prises pour n'en montrer aucune et mettre en avant un seul regard qui, lui, l'a vu.

### Un cri dans le silence

Ainsi se trouve retourné le dispositif médiatique dominant qui un peu plus loin, dans l'église des Frères Prêcheurs, nous confronte à *Unfaded*, accrochage des arts de Newsmark révélant que l'archevêque américain a attendu le 1<sup>er</sup> août 1994 pour signer un acte sur le génocide perpétré dès le 11 avril. Un autre accrochage, *Searching for Africa in Lige*, met en scène deux mille cent vingt-six couvertures du magazine *Lige* qui, réalisées entre 1930 et 1990, élargissent le propos en mettant en évidence le désintérêt du magazine pour ce qui se passe sur le continent africain.

Il y a toujours un trou noir, une tache



*Real Pictures*, 1996 (entre autres voir le site [www.alfredojaar.com](http://www.alfredojaar.com) et l'exposition au musée de la Ville de Paris)

aveugle dans l'œuvre d'Alfredo Jaar. L'artiste a même mis au point un outil, acide de ses modalités de manifestation, de ses mises en espace critiques, qui rend invisibles les clichés de l'horreur susceptibles de déclencher notre voyeurisme. Il refuse cet éblouissement de façon sécuritaire. Celui-ci atteint son paroxysme dans l'installation de 8 minutes *The Search of Silence*, inoubliable récit d'un échoué dans le vainqueur du Prix Pulitzer et mettant en scène une enfant soudanaise affamée, un vaurien, un jeune pirate japonais suicidaire que deux vivants éclairs de télescope nous empêchent de voir...

Il est ainsi de par le monde, des intellectuels qui réfléchissent à la production des images de presse et à leur réception par le public. Beaucoup écrivent. Peu d'entre eux parviennent à créer de l'art à partir d'une pensée du désastre qui recouvre des événements cachés, occultés ou déformés par leur médiatisation. Artiste de projets,

Alfredo Jaar est de ceux-là. Il émancipe ces images, les remet à la disposition de notre sens critique. Il nous entraîne au-delà des apparences. ■

### à lire

« Alfredo Jaar, The Rwanda Project », aux Rencontres d'Arles, église des Frères Prêcheurs, 13200 Arles [www.rencontres-arles.com](http://www.rencontres-arles.com) du 1<sup>er</sup> juillet au 22 septembre. Alfredo Jaar est représenté en France par le galerie Komai Nagano | Paris.

### à lire

– Alfredo Jaar, *The Way it is. An Aesthetics of Realism*, catalogue de l'exposition à la Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin, 2012.  
– Alfredo Jaar, par Lorenzo Fusi, éd. Exma, 216 p., 18 €. – *Alfredo Jaar. In politics of images*, textes Georges Didi-Huberman, Griselda Pollock, Jacques Rancière, Éric Côté, Schweizer, éd. JRP Ringier, 168 pp., 40 €.

## Enfin Jaar vint, et le premier... (Arles 4)

[lunettesrouges.blog.lemonde.fr/2013/07/12/enfin-jaar-survint-arles-4/](http://lunettesrouges.blog.lemonde.fr/2013/07/12/enfin-jaar-survint-arles-4/)

Lunettes Rouges

Il reste un éblouissement malgré tout dans ces Rencontres, et c'est celui d'**Alfredo Jaar** dans l'église des Frères Prêcheurs.

Éblouissement réel d'abord, puisque que, dès l'entrée on est accueilli par une batterie de tubes néon impossibles à fixer. Éblouissement de l'écran blanc ci-dessus nous aveuglant au bout d'une chicane sombre qui nous a confrontés à l'impossibilité de voir : impossibilité de voir les archives de **Corbie** que Bill Gates va sécuriser dans une mine

abandonnée de Virginie, où 17 millions (ou 65 millions, je ne sais plus) d'images seront désormais inaccessibles, seule une infime partie en ayant été numérisée ; impossibilité de voir les images satellitaires d'Afghanistan au moment de l'invasion américaine de 2001, celles-ci ayant toutes été achetées par le gouvernement américain pour empêcher tout regard indépendant sur les bombardements ; impossibilité de voir Mandela pleurer quand il est relâché de Robben Island, des années de labour dans les carrières de calcaire ayant, paraît-il, détruit ses glandes lacrymales. Et, de ces impossibilités, de cette lamentation des images, naît, sous une forme esthétique très forte, la plus virulente critique de la photographie jamais faite ici.



Au dos des néons de l'entrée, dans un cube d'inox du plus bel effet où on n'entre qu'au signal, trait horizontal rouge d'interdiction, barre verticale verte d'autorisation d'accès, Jaar conte, sur un mode poétique incantatoire, l'histoire du moment de gloire de Kevin Carter, de ses tourments et de son suicide : une scansion de lettres blanches sur un écran noir, que rompent soudain quatre éclats de flash aveuglant les spectateurs, avant que la photo de la petite fille du vautour n'apparaisse pour



Alfredo Jaar, Sound of Silence, 2006

une fraction de seconde, de manière presque sub-liminale (on sait aujourd'hui que c'était un petit garçon, et qu'il n'est pas mort là, vautour ou pas, mais quinze ans plus tard). Point sur le i final, la photo est aujourd'hui gérée par Corbis. C'est par une telle installation, si simple et si puissante, théâtre dédié à une seule image, que Jaar nous transporte, dans un univers où regarder des images reprend du sens.

Dernière nous, une longue phrase lumineuse, une folie de plus des mots conduisent à une image, celle des yeux de Nduwayezu, orphelin rwandais de cinq ans, qui seul de ses compagnons d'infortune, regarde l'objectif en face. Et cette image est reproduite mille fois peut-être, dans une montagne de diapositives d'où ces yeux ne cessent de nous fixer, de nous accuser sans doute, et, tel Caïn, nous ne pouvons y échapper. Avant l'effondrement (bien plus grand) de Keesele nous décourageait de la photographie, autant cette masse-ci nous attrape et, peut-être, nous redonne espoir, non dans la bonté des hommes, mais dans la force du médium, quand il parvient à échapper au photojournalisme



Alfredo Jaar, Le Silence de Nduwayezu, 1997

commercial médiatique et traduit au contraire un vrai point de vue moral.

Chez Jaar, les mots conduisent donc aux images, qui peuvent être multiples, fugitives, ou même invisibles : *Real Pictures* est un empilement de boîtes noires fermées, évoquant visuellement un monument funéraire. Sur chacune, un titre décrivant l'image contenue dans la boîte, à chaque fois un des drames du génocide rwandais. Mais l'image est invisible, la catastrophe ne se montre pas. On sait que Lanzmann voulait détruire les photos prises par les



Alfredo Jaar, *Real Pictures*, 1999-2012

Sondeikommandos d'Auschwitz : pour lui, seule la parole pouvait rendre compte d'un génocide. Les images des catastrophes libanaises sont aussi invisibles, immontrables, pour *Walid Raad* et *Jalal Toufik* : non qu'il y ait censure explicite (comme la Croix Rouge avec ses images de la Nakba reprises par *Amalia Azoulay*), mais un phénomène au-delà du pensable, au-delà du montrable, une catastrophe telle que seule les mots peuvent en rendre compte, qu'aucune image ne saurait être à la hauteur (on n'en croirait pas ses yeux) ; ou peut-être, si on veut être optimiste, des images à voir dans un hypothétique futur meilleur.

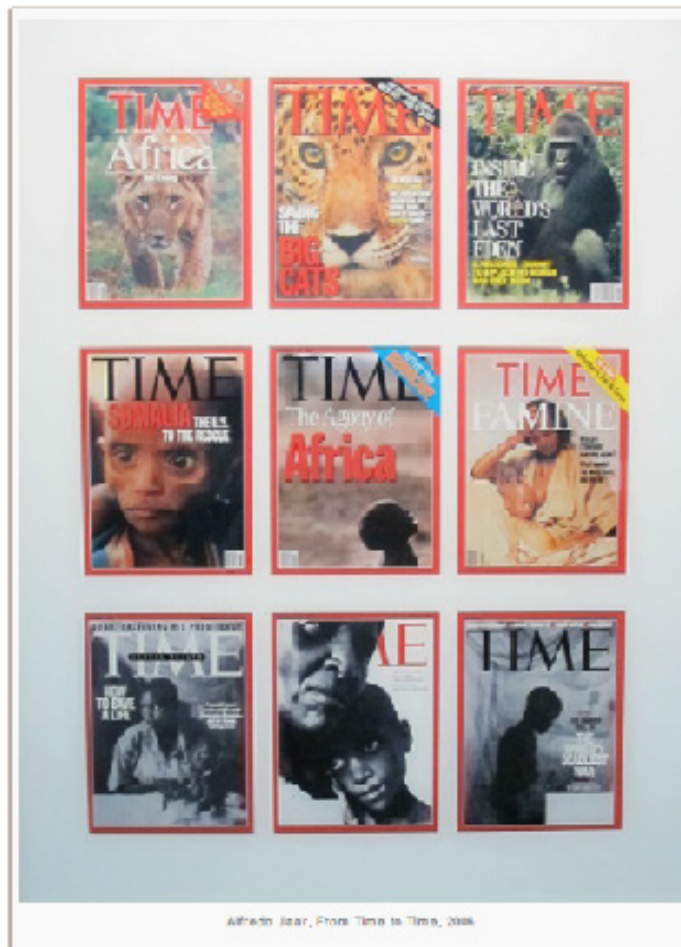
Et la fameuse photo mise en scène de la Maison Blanche où Président, ministres et généraux sont censés regarder l'arrestation et le meurtre de Ben Laden, est accompagnée d'une photo blanche avec une légende blanche : ce que nul ne verra...

Plus attendues sont ses critiques des médias : 2127 couvertures de *Life Magazine* où l'Afrique n'apparaît que trois fois, grâce à sa faune sauvage, -et celles de *Time*



Alfredo Jaar, *May One*, 2001, ph. Fabrice Solvay

magazine ne sont guère mieux - 17 couvertures de Newsweek aux plus moments du génocide rwandais, sur lequel le magazine ne tire que bien tard, ou l'absence dans les mémoires et hagiographies d'Henry Kissinger d'une photographie de sa poignée de mains avec Pinochet. On a honte pour le journalisme, dit Jaar : il faut être conscient que ce que nous voyons, c'est seulement ce qu'on nous permet de voir. Le Chili de sa jeunesse est aussi présent par le biais de photos de presse dans des journaux français, d'où Alfredo Jaar fait surgir de l'image le militant anonyme dans la foule d'une manifestation ou de l'enfermement de Nenida, le résistant arrêté par la police, tous ces figurants anonymes qui sont le tissu même de la démocratie (sans aller toute fois jusqu'à la démarche plus proactive de Miki Krizman en Palestine). À noter aussi son hommage à trois femmes remarquables (début d'une série de cent), minuscules portraits sous les projecteurs : Aung San Suu Kyi, Graça Machel et Ela Bhatt.



Plus que sa seule posture politique, c'est la manière dont Alfredo Jaar met en cause, non seulement le pouvoir des médias, mais surtout l'essence même de la photographie, révélée comme étant intrinsèquement un vecteur de pouvoir et de mensonge dont il faut se méfier sans cesse, son discours et le mode esthétique selon lequel il l'exprime avec force, qui ne peuvent laisser le visiteur indifférent, et qui le hantent longtemps après. Évidemment, après cette expérience unique, de très loin la meilleure de toutes les Rencontres, car la plus radicale, c'est difficile d'aller voir les photos de Lartigue avec Bibi...

Photos de l'auteur excepté n°2, 5 & 7.



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**Tania Vladova**

## Alfredo Jaar

Chile 1981, before leaving, 1981

ALFREDO JAAR IS REPRESENTED BY

GALERIA OLIVA ARAUNA, MADRID

GALERIE LELONG, NEW YORK

KAMEL MENNOUR, PARIS

GALERIA LIA RUMMA, MILANO

GALERIE THOMAS SCHULTE, BERLIN

KENJI TAKI GALLERY, TOKYO

## The way it is. *An Aesthetics of Resistance*

Berlin, June 14, 2012

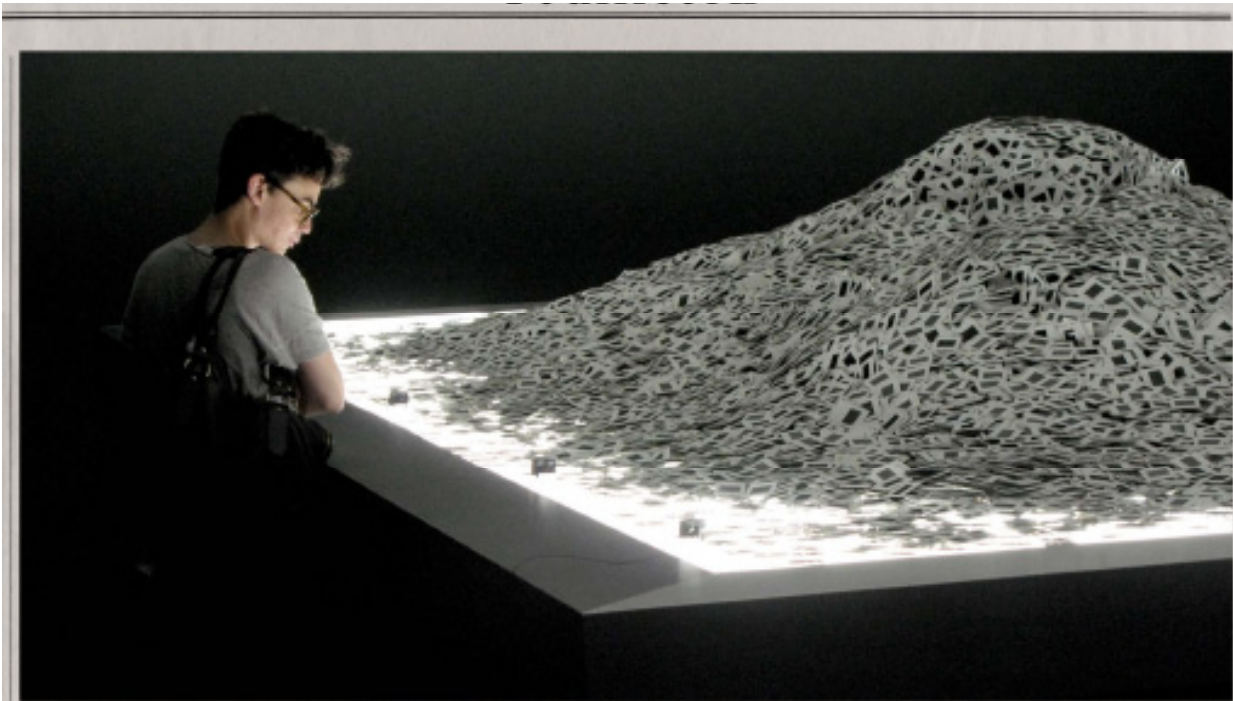
NGBK  
Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst  
[www.ngbk.de](http://www.ngbk.de)  
15 June – 19 August, 2012

Berlinische Galerie  
[www.berlinischegalerie.de](http://www.berlinischegalerie.de)  
15 June – 17 September, 2012

Alte Nationalgalerie  
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin  
[www.smb.museum/smb/standorte](http://www.smb.museum/smb/standorte)  
15 June – 16 September, 2012

An exhibition of the Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK) in cooperation with the Berlinische Galerie, the Nationalgalerie - Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, and the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin-Program. Realized with funding from the Capital Cultural Fund and the Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie Berlin. Supported by the artEDU Stiftung, Zurich.





DAVIS COLLECTION ZÜRICH

Berg des Grauens: Augen, die den Völkermord in Ruanda sahen, reproduziert auf einer Million Dias – „The Eyes of Gutete Emerita“, 1996/2000.

## Die Glut ist nicht erloschen

An drei Orten wird die politische Kunst des Chilenen Alfredo Jaar zelebriert

VON SEBASTIAN PREUSS

Diese Augen, Alfredo Jaar ließen sie nicht mehr los, denn in ihnen spiegelt sich das ganze furchtbare, unfassbare Geschehen des Genozids in Ruanda. Der chilenische Künstler reiste im August 1994 als einer der Ersten in das Land, nachdem die Hutu-Mehrheit in hundert Tagen von April bis Juli rund eine Million Tutsi abgeschlachtet hatte. In einem Flüchtlingscamp traf Jaar Gutete Emerita. Sie erzählte ihm, wie ihr Mann und zwei ihrer Söhne in einer Kirche vor ihren Augen ermordet wurden.

Jetzt schauen wir eine Million Mal in diese traumatisierten Augen. So viele gerahmte Dias hat Jaar von dem Foto reproduzieren lassen, auf dem er nichts als Gutete Emeritas Augen festhielt. Der Bilderberg mit dem immer gleichen Motiv türmt sich auf einem großen Leuchttisch. Die Besucher sind aufgefordert, darin zu stöbern und sich die Dias mit Lupen anzuschauen. So wühlt man sich förmlich durch den Schmerz und die Trauer, die mit diesen beiden Augen eine höchst verdichtete Form gefunden haben. Der Raum ist schwarz, nur der leuchtende Tisch gibt Helligkeit. Alles ist perfekt und minimalistisch gestaltet, wie immer bei Jaar.

Wie lässt sich das Grauen einer solchen Katastrophe darstellen? Was kann Kunst überhaupt erreichen angesichts des Horrors, den Menschen anderen Menschen antun? Mit diesen Fragen hat sich Jaar

zeit lebens beschäftigt. Er geht mit heiligem Ernst an die Dinge heran und mit glattem Design seiner Installationen. Jaar spricht von „Ästhetik des Widerstands“ – so hat er auch die Berliner Ausstellung benannt – und greift dabei ziemlich hoch mit dem Titel von Peter Weiss' epochalem antifaschistischen Roman. Dabei sind Jaars Kunstgriffe im Kontext der Konzeptkunst und der Minimal Art eigentlich Mainstream; das ist der heikle Widerspruch seiner berührenden, oft aufrüttelnden Kunst.

Doch wie man seinen Empathie-Schick auch bewertet: Jaar lässt einen nicht kalt. Auf der Documenta 11 ließ er Leuchttische über den Missbrauch von Bildern in einem schwarzen Gang aufglühen; danach blendete er die Besucher in einem gleißend hellen Raum – Strafe, Aufrüttelung oder (je nach Lesart) auch Läuterung für die Augen. Selbst das leere Bild kann brutal oder heilend wirken. Jaar agiert mit großen Effekten, wenn es um seine politischen und humanen Botschaften geht. Nun ist die Arbeit „Klage der Bilder“ wieder zu sehen, diesmal in der Berlinerischen Galerie. Über gleich drei Häuser erstreckt sich die große Retrospektive, die Jaars Werk von seinen Anfängen in den frühen Siebziger bis heute ausbreitet. Eine Großtat des Kurators Frank Wagner.

*Alfredo Jaar hat seinen Idealismus irgendwann verloren. Ausradiert durch die Grausamkeiten in der Welt.*

Jaar legt schonungslos den Finger in die Wunden menschlicher Grausamkeit, zugleich vermittelt er die wohlthuende Gewissheit, dass die Glut der politischen Kunst nicht erloschen ist. Fast alle Werke in der Berlinerischen Galerie sind dem Völkermord in Ruanda gewidmet. Jaar verbildlicht hier vor allem, dass man ein solches Verbrechen gar nicht darstellen kann. In einem unmerklich sich bewegenden Videobild umklammern sich zwei Jungs in einem Flüchtlingscamp, große Hochglanzfotos zeigen Landschaftsidyllen, wo kurz zuvor Massaker stattfanden.

Die meisten seiner Fotos von 1994 zeigt Jaar aber gar nicht, statt dessen Boxen, auf denen geschrieben steht, was er so kurz nach dem Gemetzel in Ruanda sah. Man darf die Schachteln – auch sie edel gestylt – nicht berühren; es bleibt also ungewiss, ob die beschriebenen Bilder tatsächlich darin liegen.

Die Räume in der NGBK sind Jaars Jahren in Chile bis zur Auswanderung 1982 nach New York gewidmet – der spannendste Teil der Ausstellung. Als 17-Jähriger erlebt Jaar am 11. September 1973 in Santiago den Militärputsch gegen Salvador Allende und dessen Ermordung. In den böiernen Jahren des Pinochet-Regimes versucht der junge Künstler nach Formen, seinen Widerstand auszudrücken. Er bereitet das Datum und die

Uhrzeit der ersten Bombardierung des Präsidentenpalasts grafisch auf. In den Straßen von Santiago betreibt er „Studien des Glückselns“ und zeigt in seinen Fotos Gesichter voller ohnmächtiger Wut oder Resignation. Mit krächzendem Klarinettenspiel zitiert er die Szene eines musizierenden Sandinisten während des Barrikadenkampfes in Nicaragua.

In kühler Präzision zeigt Jaar die Rolle der USA auf, die Pinochets Staatsstreich unterstützten. Besonders Henry Kissinger, Sicherheitsberater und Außenminister unter Präsident Nixon, nimmt er aufs Korn. Nicht zu Unrecht, ein ausgestelltes Telefon-Transskript etwa vershägt einem tatsächlich die Sprache: „Nachts von großer Auswirkung“ sei geschehen versichert Kissinger dem Präsidenten kurz nach dem Putsch, brüstet sich mit dem Erfolg und urteilt zynisch über das Schicksal eines ganzen Volkes.

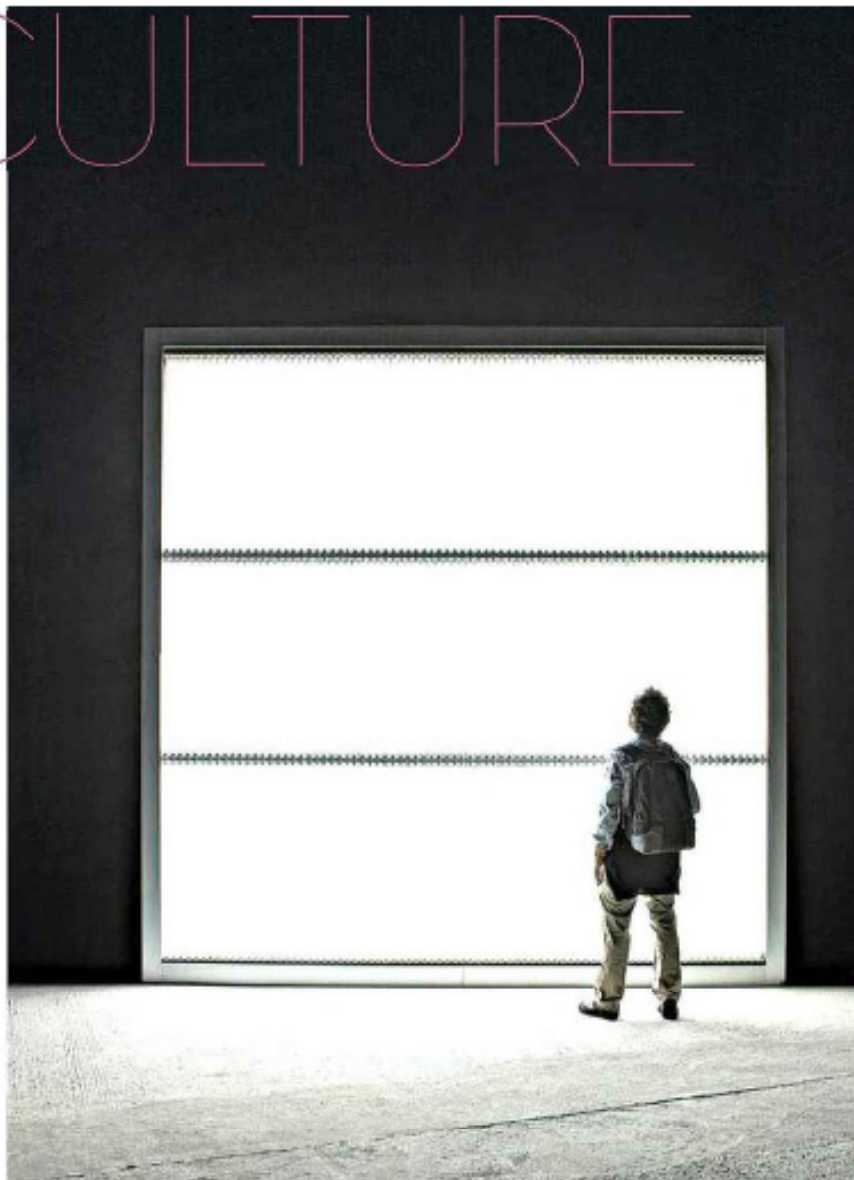
Er habe seinen „poetischen und utopischen Idealismus“ von damals irgendwann verloren, schrieb Jaar 1999. „Durch die jahrzehntelange Arbeit über die menschliche Grausamkeit in der Welt wurde er ausradiert.“ Dennoch arbeitet er weiter.

**Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK)**, bis 19.8., Oranienstraße 25, täglich 12–19 Uhr.

**Berlinerische Galerie**, bis 17.9., Alte Jakobstraße 124–128, Mi–Mo 10–18 Uhr.

**Alte Nationalgalerie**, bis 16.9., Bodestraße 1–3, Di–So 10–18, Do bis 22 Uhr. **Der Katalog** kostet 32 Euro.

CULTURE



*The Sound of Silence (2006),  
d'Alfredo Jaar.*  
PHOTO  
GALERIE THOMAS  
SCHULTE, BERLIN

**ARTS** La capitale allemande fête l'artiste chilien, de ses débuts sous Pinochet à sa critique au néon de l'actualité.

# Alfredo Jaar, surex à Berlin

**A** la Berlinische Galerie, il y a les Yeux de Gutete Emerita (1996). Une seule diapositive, reproduite des milliers de fois, en un énorme tas qui forme deux monticules. Dans le noir, sur une table lumineuse. Personne ne surveille, on pourrait en emporter quelques-unes, ça ne se remarquerait pas. Des visiteurs en ont aligné cinq ou six sur le rebord de la table. Ces yeux sont ceux d'une rescapée des massacres du Rwanda, qui a raconté le meurtre de toute sa famille à l'artiste chilien Alfredo Jaar. Le récit est affiché dans la salle précédente, en une longue phrase au néon qui crève les yeux du visiteur.

Aucune trace ne rend compte de cela, on ne peut rien en faire : ni lire les yeux de Gutete Emerita ni les emporter, rien. La tache aveugle est au centre du travail de Jaar, né en 1956, Parisien d'adoption, auquel Berlin consacre une monographie en trois expositions. On va le dire bêtement : on connaissait surtout le plasticien par sa galerie parisienne, Kamel Mennour ; on avait aperçu à la Triennale de Paris (jusqu'au 26 août) sa célèbre repro de la couve de Libé sur Pinochet avec un point d'interrogation en néon à côté. Ça restait un brin conceptuel. Le parcours proposé dans la capitale allemande est au contraire *über* didactique, en particulier parce qu'il présente au Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK) de Kreuzberg les œuvres réalisées au Chili entre 1974 et 1981, année où Jaar quitte le pays.

**TROP-PLEIN.** Ainsi d'un calendrier, qui porte cette mention : « *Aujourd'hui le 11, seulement 11 disparus.* » Ensuite, l'artiste a figuré le reste

de l'année avec des semaines où les dates sont progressivement remplacées par des 11. Ou bien une série de photos agrandies à partir de scènes de rues, *Etudes sur le bonheur*, titre qui ironise sur une denrée rare dans le Chili de Pinochet. Ce sera par la suite sa méthode : exhiber ce qui cache, montrer le trop-plein d'inintéressant, opposer la lumière éblouissante au regard. Ainsi dans *Searching for Africa in Life* (1996), exposé à la Berlinische Galerie, un collage de dizaines de couvertures de la revue *Life*, où l'Afrique n'apparaît évidemment jamais. Il avait utilisé le même principe en alignant des unes de *Newsweek* au moment du génocide rwandais, qui évoquent un tas de futilités politiques obscènes (l'artiste a fait courir une timeline des horreurs sous celle des numéros) et n'évoquent enfin les massacres que le 1<sup>er</sup> août 1994, alors qu'ils durent depuis quatre mois.

Les médias sont une chose, les politiques en sont une pire : la retranscription de la conversation téléphonique entre Nixon et son ministre des Affaires étrangères, Kissinger, juste après le coup d'Etat de Pinochet, fait frémir d'horreur. Là encore, Jaar l'a affichée dans une boîte à néon, un peu brûlante. Nixon et Kissinger se félicitent de la chute d'Allemagne et s'amusent de ce que la communauté internationale ne pourra pas accuser les Etats-Unis d'une aide « directe » au dictateur. Un peu moins réussi, car plus démonstratif, mais hypnotisant par sa force narrative, *The Sound of Silence* (2006) est d'un côté un mur de néon, de l'autre, un diaporama composé de phrases qui évoquent la vie et le suicide

de Kevin Carter, reporter sud-africain en lutte contre l'apartheid, et ayant réalisé le cliché d'une fillette dont on peut croire qu'un vautour s'apprête à la dévorer. Jaar ne montre cette photo que dans un flash violent, comme une chose invisible. Mort de l'image, mort par l'image.

**CRI.** Mais ce qui marque, c'est la poésie incantatoire du récit écrit de Jaar, reprenant de façon lancinante le nom de « *Kevin, Kevin Carter* », qui fait qu'on ne peut quitter la salle où l'œuvre est projetée. Aussi bien, son usage du verbe, par-delà la satire des omissions médiatiques et la critique des images, est cette « *esthétique de la résistance* », comme il la nomme, qui caractérise le mieux son art. A la Berlinische, on peut voir des photos de l'installation de 1992 au Pergamonmuseum de Berlin : les noms des villes allemandes où des néonazis ont frappé, en néon, simplement posés sur les marches de l'autel de Pergame (on retrouve ici ces néons, accrochés au plafond de la salle d'exposition). Après avoir fait le tour de cette monographie chronologique, on se dit que cet effort vers la poésie, la nomination du crime et le cri étaient déjà là en 1981, quand l'artiste performait *Opus 1981/Andante Desesperato* avec une clarinette. On voit cette vidéo au NGBK, Jaar arrimé à l'instrument et sifflant un pur refus strident, qui obsède toute l'exposition de son lamento aigrelet. ◆

**ALFREDO JAAR**  
**THE WAY IT IS** à Berlin,  
au NGBK, Oranienstrasse 25,  
jusqu'au 19 août,  
à la Berlinische Galerie, Alte  
Jakobstrasse 124-128, et la Alte  
Nationalgalerie, Bodestrasse 1-3,  
jusqu'au 16 septembre.  
Rens. : [www.ngbk.de](http://www.ngbk.de).

## “Artists are Thinkers”: Alfredo Jaar on Creating New Ways of Looking at the World



Courtesy the artist and Galerie Kamel Mennour  
Alfredo Jaar facing his work, *Lament of the Images*, 2002.  
by Coline Milliard, ARTINFO UK  
Published: November 20, 2012

**Alfredo Jaar** is a professional observer, an unremitting globetrotter who has, for three almost three decades, spliced into his work first-hand accounts and in-depth analysis of the way information is distributed and consumed. The Chilean artist — who will represent his country at the next **Venice Biennale** — has tackled some of the world’s thorniest issues head on. His celebrated “Rwanda Project” (1994-2000) is a harrowing take on the genocide and its patchy coverage in the Western press. Other pieces have looked at gold mining in Brazil, immigration in Finland, and the homeless in Montreal.

Always seeking to engage different audiences, Jaar has also made around sixty public interventions — including the 2010 meditative garden “Park of Laments” at **100 Acres: The Virginia B. Fairbanks Art and Nature Park** in Indianapolis — and is a keen educator. The artist talked to **ARTINFO UK** about site-specificity, thinking-versus-making, and his plans for his first stay in Algiers as part of **aria**’s pilot residency program.

**You've dealt with conflicts and complex social and political situations in countries as varied as**

**Canada, Finland, Rwanda, Angola, Brazil or the USA. How do you keep your eyes fresh and stay open to the particulars of a given place?**

I spend an enormous amount of time researching. This research takes place in-situ as nothing compares to the real life experience of a place. Sometimes I feel like a frustrated journalist. Most of my projects, and their corresponding research phases, last between two and six years and involve many trips to the area, numerous contacts with local players, and interviews, workshops, and seminars. I read the local press, I watch television, I do whatever locals do. I do not act before reaching a certain critical mass of information. The objective is to discover what I call the essence of a place. Only at that moment I start formulating ideas. As an architect, I have always believed that I need to understand the world before acting in the world. Context is everything. I consider each place unique and each one requires a unique response to its uniqueness.

**In a [recent interview published in FLUOR](#), you said: "The artist creates models for thinking the world." Could you expand on this?**

I strongly believe that artists are thinkers, as opposed to object makers. My working process is 99% thinking, and 1% making. That thinking process is at the core of what I do. And this process is always triggered by a specific site or issue. In my career I have been incapable of creating a single work of art out of nothing. That is why I am not a studio artist. I define myself as a project artist. I try to propose, with my projects, a creative model that responds to the particulars of a given situation. That model can then be projected into the world. I believe that this is what artists do: with each project we propose a new conception of the world; and that new conception is a new way of looking at the world, that is why I believe that we create models of thinking the world.

**One third of your time is dedicated to your work for museums and galleries — the "art world" — one third to public interventions, and the rest to directing workshops and seminars, teaching and lecturing. How important is it for you to maintain this balance?**

That balance is vital and I cannot conceive my life, professional or personal, any other way. The so-called "art world" is a very insular place and I regularly need to get out and confront myself with the "real world." That is what I do in my public interventions. They help me understand the world. And my teaching is where I share my experience with the younger generations, from whom I learn enormously. This system allows me to teach a much more diverse and larger audience and it helps me to continuously improve my artistic language, as I see art as communication; communication requires a language; and language requires a vocabulary. As my audience is always shifting, I need to keep inventing new languages for my new audiences. As I never studied art, it is a fascinating process to ascertain what communicates, how and with whom. I never forget that communication does not mean to send out a message; it means to receive an answer. If there is no answer, there is no communication. I always remind my students of this fundamental point.

**How has your training as an architect and filmmaker impacted on the way you make art?**

Everything I know about art I learned by being an architect. Studying architecture had a full impact in my career. In fact I consider myself an architect making art. I use the methodology of the architect to research and create. When I confront myself to a given space, I do not see it simply as a physical space, but as a social space, a cultural space, and a political space. And that is what architects do. But film is also very important. I discovered early on all the similarities and parallels between architecture and film and they have fed my creative process. Architecture is not only about space, it is also about bodies moving in that space, it is about scale, it is about light, it is about movement, and all this is also film. I combine the two disciplines with a great sense of freedom. I feel that they define who I am as an artist.

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**You are about to spend a week in Algiers as part of aria's pilot program. What do you expect from your experience in the city and what do you hope to achieve with the residency?**

My friend Zineb Sedira has set up a great program to stimulate the cultural scene in Algeria and has invited me to spend a week there. This will be my first visit to Algeria and North Africa. Unlike the rest of Africa to which I have dedicated an enormous amount of work, I am not at all familiar with this area of the world. But I have been following with utmost interest the development of the crisis in North Mali and I am curious to see if Algeria will intervene, as is the wish of the United States. Hillary Clinton was there a couple of weeks ago. I am a great admirer of [Tinariwen](#), an extraordinary group of Tuareg nomad musicians who have been struggling for self-determination for North Mali with their music.

But this trip is just my first exploration of Algiers. We have scheduled encounters with young artists and journalists and I am offering a lecture at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. I will visit cultural institutions and I hope to listen to Algerian music. And I will get lost in the Kasbah. Normally on these first trips I only try to get a basic sense of the place in order to decide if I may or may not work on a long-term project. In that sense the first moments of discovery are very important as they may content the seeds of a long-term engagement.

*Alfredo Jaar is the third artist to take part in the one-year pilot program [aria](#) (artist residency in Algiers) set up by artist Zineb Sedira. aria will be officially launched in London on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012.*

*On the same day at 6.30pm, Jaar will be discussing how he generates debate through public interventions during an event at Amnesty International UK presented by Iniva in association with aria. For more information, [click here](#).*

http:

ART | CRITIQUES



**Alfredo Jaar**  
Alfredo Jaar  
11 Nov.-12 mars 2011  
Paris Co. Galerie Karol Mannour

A la galerie Karol Mannour, coup de poing sur les discours des médias. Photos, 11 couvertures de magazines, pour Alfredo sont les médias qui (dé)forment notre du monde, et qui «font» les événements est ici mise sur l'Afrique. Œuvre autour de la communication de masses.



Par Marie-Ange de Montaigne

Dans la première salle, une série de projecteurs perchés sur des trépieds de toutes les tailles font penser à ces meutes de journalistes qui se boucourent pour obtenir les meilleurs clichés de leur «cible»: de loin, il est presque impossible de voir ce que ces spots éclairant. Il faut se rapprocher de quelques centimètres à peine du mur pour découvrir l'identité des «stars» bien cochées que vient les projecteurs; il s'agit de trois petits photos-portraits de femmes politiquement engagées: la résistante Bimone Aning San Suu Kyi la militante politique et sociale du Mozambique Graça Machel, ainsi que l'Indienne Ela Bhatt, dite «révolutionnaire douce». Ces femmes ont toutes lutté, chacune dans son pays, contre l'oppression politique. Même si ces résistances ne nous sont pas forcément inconnues, leurs noms ne font pas pour autant le titre des journaux tous les jours. Alfredo Jaar suscite ainsi la réflexion sur le phénomène de médiatisation qui choisit de donner ou non à une personne l'éclatage qu'elle mérite.

La vidéo de 3 minutes présentée dans la seconde salle illustre également la réflexion de l'artiste sur la mise en lumière et l'exploitation médiatique des événements: *Du voyage*, *dar gema* montre une violoniste gitane ceebe sur le porche du centre Georges Pompidou à Paris. Elle joue presque machinalement une sorte de fugue. Elle ne parle pas, seul son antique instrument s'exprime. Son regard vide ne parvient pas à se fixer, comme si dans son esprit la violoniste gitane se projetait ailleurs, peut-être songe-t-elle désespérément à son pays d'origine? Sa présence contraste fortement avec l'aspect impersonnel de l'architecture postindustrielle du bâtiment, et les passants très divers qui s'y croisent. Cette gitane filmée au premier plan, est comme enveloppée dans un limbe de lumière, tandis qu'au second plan le reste du décor est flou: Alfredo Jaar pointe ici le harcèlement policier qui touche les Roms en France. Ce film simple et sans paroles aborde ainsi le phénomène gitan tel qu'il s'inscrit dans l'imaginaire français: un phénomène qui fait du bruit mais que l'on ne le regarde pas.

À droite une couverture de *Libération* (novembre 2009) titre «La stèle de Lévi Strauss». Le portrait de l'ethnologue s'étend sur toute la page. Alors qu'à cette date, la France est en plein débat sur l'identité nationale, elle voit s'établir ce grand ethnologue. Cette «une» de *Libération* contraste avec le message que délivre la vidéo *Du voyage*, *dar gema*, puisque le quotidien zoome sur celui qui condamnait ses sociétés écrasant les singularités. À droite du cadre, un néon en forme de point d'interrogation interpelle: peut-être Alfredo Jaar s'interroge-t-il ici sur l'incohérence des médias dans leurs prises position.

Une série de couvertures des caractères de

magazines et de journaux du monde est exposée dans la troisième salle, devenue «laboratoire à disséquer les unes de». Toutes ces couvertures ont été choisies pour leur puissance évocatrice, y compris la pièce monumentale *Searching for Africa in L* un dispositif de cinq panneaux verticaux auxquels sont alignées les 2158 couvertures de magazine *Life*, du premier numéro à la réalisation de l'œuvre.

Dans le même ordre d'idées, *From Tin* (1996) — titre en forme de jeu de mots tiré du magazine *Time* — regroupe sur un panneau neuf couvertures de *Time* mais présentant des animaux sauvages de l'Afrique — lion, léopard, gorille —, ou des clichés en proie à la famine. Comme si les seuls passionnés les journalistes étaient les victimes de la famine et le sida.

Autre illustration de la «sélection» médiatique dix-sept couvertures de *Newsweek* datant de presque aucune ne traite du génocide au Rwanda qui pourtant faisait d'avril à juillet 800 victimes.

C'est encore ce regard biaisé des médias internationaux sur le continent noir qui est au cœur de l'œuvre dans *Greed* [avidité] (2007), où la couverture de *Businessweek* proclame le gain, salut de l'Afrique».

L'argent et le pouvoir à la une. La couverture de *Businessweek Magazine* de décembre 2007 rappelle cette convergence mondialisée et du capital. En haut, une jeune femme accroupie, les yeux bandés, se tient la tête; en dessous, le portrait d'un homme de type occidental, à l'air soucieux. C'est Warren Buffett, président du conglomérat chimique américain Union Carbide, dont l'usine indienne de Bhopal a été responsable de la plus grande catastrophe industrielle mondiale, faisant des milliers de victimes. Entre les deux photos, ce titre traversant la couverture: ...

## ALFREDO JAAR: MARX LOUNGE

Date: 15 February - 15 May 2011

Karl Marx's (Trier, Germany, 1818-London, 1883) principal and most influential ideas are still controversial today. This is evidenced in the numerous recent symposiums, publications and exhibitions. The reason for this could be the current economic crisis. However, it would be fair to say that it covers a wider spectrum within the cultural theory and contemporary critique, which constantly question and re-evaluate capitalism.

The *Marx Lounge* is Alfredo Jaar's answer to this. An area providing the public with extensive reading material on Marx's philosophical, political, economic and humanistic ideas. It also presents bibliography by other theorists, philosophers and authors who have followed, analysed or revisited Marx's theories. Žižek, Hall, Rancière, Butler, Laclau, Mouffe, Jameson, Bourdieu, Fanon, etc. bring new patterns of thought which reflect the enormous amount of knowledge gained in the past few decades. According to the artist, a true intellectual revolution has been carried out, although far from the real world. For these reasons, Alfredo Jaar offers a reading lounge in which to sit back and think about the importance and viability of marxism in the current state of affairs, as well as about the latest political and philosophical views. These views may help us better understand the present moment.

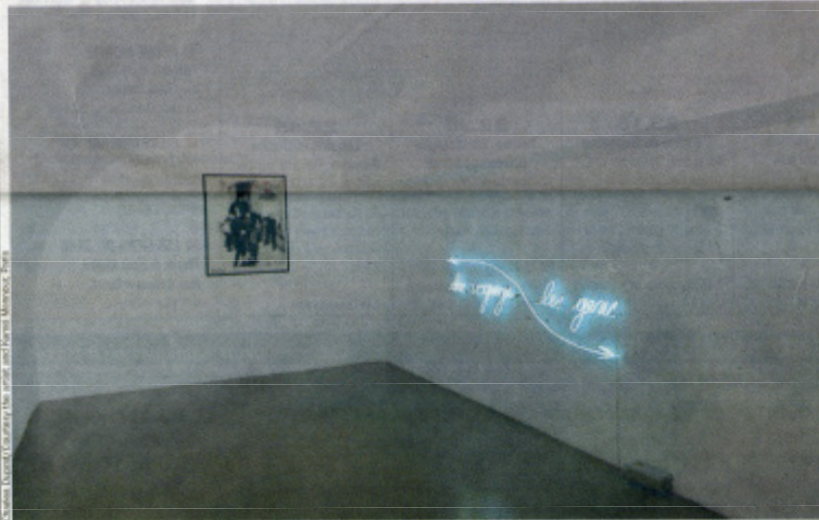
This reading lounge will also house an exhibition of several collectors' editions of important books such as *Capital* or *The Communist Manifesto* in various languages, courtesy of Emili Gasch.



EXPOSITION

# Le retour à Paris de l'artiste Alfredo Jaar

Le Chilien fait événement en exposant des œuvres inédites et d'autres, majeures, qui ont fait date, chez Kamel Mennour et à l'École des beaux-arts.



Du Voyage, des gens, 2011, vidéo d'Alfredo Jaar. Exposition « Three Women », galerie Kamel Mennour, Paris.

**T**he Sound of silence, de l'artiste chilien Alfredo Jaar, présentée ces temps-ci à l'École des beaux-arts de Paris, est une œuvre de salubrité publique. Chaque citoyen devrait y avoir accès. Elle dure huit minutes, mais la réflexion qu'elle suscite sur les conditions dans lesquelles sont fabriqués et montrés les images de presse, sur la façon dont elles nous manipulent, fait son chemin. Longtemps.

Avant de pénétrer dans le petit bunker édifié pour projeter ce récit filmique, il faut contourner une paroi recouverte de plusieurs rangées de tubes fluorescents d'un blanc si éblouissant que l'on ressent une gêne physique et que l'on entre aveuglé dans cette caméra obscure géante. Là, on

nous raconte sur écran, via de courtes phrases blanches sur fond noir, la vie douloureuse de Kevin Carter, jeune Soud-Africain passé par l'armée, le militantisme anti-apartheid, les platines de DJ, une tentative de suicide à la mort-aux-rats, une blessure par bombe... jusqu'à un job de réparateur d'appareils photo qui le conduit au photojournalisme.

#### LE PHOTOGRAPHE S'EXCUSE

Nous sommes le 1<sup>er</sup> mars 1993 à Ayod, épicentre de la famine soudanaise. Kevin Carter tombe sur une fillette prostrée, dans un terrible état d' inanition. Il repère, dans son objectif, un vautour qui guette l'enfant. Espère que le rapace déploiera ses ailes. Fait attention à ne pas le déranger. Attend vingt minutes avant

#### L'exposition d'Alfredo Jaar, à l'École des beaux-arts de Paris, est une œuvre de salubrité publique.

de le chasser. Alors, il s'assoit sous un arbre, allume une cigarette, parle à Dieu et pleure. Le *New York Times*, qui a publié l'image sensationnelle du bébé et du vautour, bientôt couronnée du prestigieux prix Pulitzer, est assailli de lettres dénonçant l'attitude du photographe accusé de n'avoir pas secouru l'enfant et d'être un charognard.

À cet instant précis, Alfredo Jaar, qui, dans une première version de l'œuvre, avait choisi de ne pas la montrer, nous dévoile cette insoutenable photo,

mais le plus furtivement possible et en même temps qu'il nous aveugle de deux éclairs de stroboscope. Puis viennent les mots d'excuses du photographe qui s'est donné la mort, les informations sur le fait que cette image est désormais la propriété de Bill Gates, via Corbis, la plus grande agence photo du monde.

Chez Kamel Mennour, l'artiste chilien, qui n'avait pas exposé à Paris depuis vingt ans, montre deux nouvelles œuvres: *Three women*, une installation beaquant six projecteurs et trépiéds sur les visages de trois militantes remarquables, la Mozambicaine Graça Machel, l'Indienne Ela Bhatt, la Birmane Aung San Suu Kyi, à propos de laquelle il nourrit un projet plus ambitieux, jusque-là entravé par le refus d'obtention

d'un visa birman. Du voyage, des gens, une vidéo sur une violoniste gitane qui joue de son instrument antique sur le parvis du Centre Pompidou. Une façon d'opposer la permanence de la culture non dans l'imaginaire français aux expulsions dont ils sont aujourd'hui victimes.

Mais cette exposition est aussi l'occasion de revoir certaines des œuvres majeures de cet homme de cinquante-cinq ans qui partage son temps entre art, architecture, enseignement et qui, obsédé par la façon dont nous voyons et pensons les images, adapte sa forme (sculpture, installation, vidéo, photographie...) à une pensée philosophique

et politique qui l'a conduit à produire des œuvres sur le génocide rwandais, la catastrophe de Bhopal...

Est ainsi exposé un corpus d'œuvres sur le regard très partial porté sur l'Afrique par l'Occident, parmi lesquelles l'impressionnante pièce monumentale *Searchng for Africa in Life* qui montre 2 158 couvertures du magazine *Life*, du premier numéro de celui-ci à 1996, date de réalisation de cette œuvre à laquelle le temps écoulé donne une incroyable plus-value documentaire...

MAHALL JALOFFRY

Jusqu'au 12 mars à la galerie Kamel Mennour et pour toute des Beaux-Arts.

#### POINTS CHAUDS

##### Préavis de grève aux Archives nationales

Le temps s'accroît aux Archives nationales. Hier matin, l'intersyndicale CFDT-CFIC-CGC-CGT a tenu une AG. Les personnels ont voté, pour le 3 mars, un préavis de grève reconductible afin d'obtenir la mise en œuvre des engagements écrits pris les 27 et 28 janvier dernier par le directeur de cabinet du ministre, Pierre Hanotiaux, qu'ils doivent rencontrer prochainement, quant aux missions scientifiques, culturelles et pédagogiques des Archives nationales. Hier matin, ils ont rencontré Agnès Magnien, leur nouvelle directrice, qui leur a confirmé avoir été nommée pour travailler avec l'équipe chargée d'implanter la Maison de l'histoire de France et pour formuler « des propositions de déploiement des activités du site de Paris, qui doit faire l'objet d'une rénovation profonde ». De quelle rénovation s'agit-il, de quelles missions, à partir du moment où les engagements pris fin janvier excluaient, de fait, l'implantation de la Maison de l'histoire de France sur le quadrilatère du Marais ?

##### Les Trois Grâces dévoilées au public mercredi

Le tableau de Lucas Cranach l'Ancien, acquis par le Louve en partie grâce à des dons privés, sera dévoilé au public à partir de mercredi. Les Trois Grâces seront installées pendant trois mois sur une cimaise protégée par une vitrine, au milieu de la galerie Médicis (où se trouvent les Rubens). Les noms des 7000 donateurs seront inscrits sur des lumières déployées dans une salle attenante. Tous les donateurs sont invités à une visite gratuite du musée pour deux personnes pendant un mois afin de découvrir le tableau.

## Alfredo Jaar

Kamel Mennour  
Paris

For many years now, even before political art had become fashionable, Alfredo Jaar (1956, Santiago, Chile) has been investigating the nature of images and the place the African Continent occupies in the world: the relationship between the spectator and the image understood as the possibility to produce an artwork based on events which are concealed or distorted by the media. The artist travels and develops works that include the intervention of public spaces, installations, photographs and videos through which he denounces the limit situation that different human groups are undergoing for political, social or economic reasons. An artist, architect and filmmaker, Alfredo Jaar creates a complex oeuvre that has never ceased to be considered polemic. Notwithstanding this, he offers the viewer memorable, politically intense images.

In the impeccable space of Kamel Mennour Gallery, the Chilean artist, who had not shown in Paris for twenty years, presented a purposely limited number of works displayed in a non-chronological order. He offered a wide variety of interconnections which included a view of the formal and thematic development he has perfected from 1979 to the present, and which generated a melancholy and reflective space. The exhibition featured two new works: *Three women*, an installation comprising six spotlights and tripods focusing the light on the faces of three extraordinary women, Graça Machel (Mozambique), Ha Bhatt (India) and Aung San Suu Kyi (Burma), with whom he plans to develop a project momentarily hindered by the refusal of a Burmese visa; and *Da voyage, des gens*, the only video in the exhibit, which makes reference to police attacks against gypsies in France, and the expulsion of many of them. It shows an aged female gypsy fiddler playing an ancient instrument in

Desde hace ya muchos años, desde antes de que el arte político fuera una moda, Alfredo Jaar (1956, Santiago, Chile) investiga la naturaleza de las imágenes y el sitio que ocupa el continente africano en el mundo; la relación entre el espectador y la imagen como la posibilidad de realizar una obra de arte a partir de eventos que son ocultados o deformados por los medios de información. Viaja y elabora trabajos en los que a través de las intervenciones públicas, las instalaciones, las fotografías y videos denuncia la situación de diversos grupos humanos en situación límite por cuestiones políticas, sociales o económicas. Artista, arquitecto y realizador, Alfredo Jaar crea una obra compleja que no ha dejado de considerarse polémica. Una polémica que ha estirado no tanto en los problemas que denuncia, sino en la resolución formal de esa denuncia. Sin embargo, a pesar de ella, nos ofrece imágenes memorables, políticamente intensas.

En el impecable espacio de la galería Kamel Mennour, el artista chileno, que no expone en París desde hace veinte años, presenta un número de obras voluntariamente reducido con un recorrido no cronológico. Ofrece una multitud de interconexiones que incluyen una mirada al desarrollo formal y temático que ha depurado desde 1979 hasta el presente y que conforman un espacio melancólico y reflexivo. La muestra presenta dos nuevas obras: *Three women*, una instalación, formada por seis focos y trípodes que dirige una iluminación sobre los rostros de tres mujeres notables, Graça Machel (Mozambique), Elo Bhatt (India) y Aung San Suu Kyi (Birmania), con quien abraja un proyecto momentáneamente obstaculizado por la denegación de un visado birmano; y *Da voyage, des gens*, el único video de la exposición, que hace referencia al hostigamiento de la policía y a la expulsión de los gitanos de Francia. Muestra a

the square in front of the Centre Pompidou. The simple and wordless image of this itinerant musician in the heart of Paris is highlighted through this nimbus of light – like the ones used to spotlight the portraits of the militant women.

This exhibition also provided the viewer a chance to revisit some of Jaar's most emblematic works; obsessed with the way in which we see and think the image, the artist adapts forms [sculptures, installations, videos, photographs...] to a political and philosophical thinking that leads him to produce widely known works, like his works on Brazilian miners, or on the genocide in Rwanda, or the catastrophe in Bhopal. A specialist in installations which are eminently political, Jaar dedicates himself especially to the African continent, to which

he is linked by a personal passion undoubtedly derived from his multiple trips. Examining the covers of American newspapers and magazines, he demonstrates that there are only three topics that fascinate journalists: animals, AIDS, and extreme poverty. Through media information, it is easy to misunderstand this continent and consider it a single entity with countless problems. This reductionist interpretation of the continent and the absence of intervention in its problems is at the center of Jaar's works, which prudently examine the delicate lines between shock value and human value, between the visible and the implicit.

The shrewd selection inside the four walls of one of the galleries featured works that addressed African issues and revealed the artist's constant interest in representing Africa in the media and the difficulties inherent in graphic journalism. Among these, the monumental 1996 work *Searching for Africa in Life*, organized in five vertical panels, assembled the 2158 covers of *Life* magazine from the first issue to the issue corresponding to the execution of the work. Composed by nine covers of *TIME* Magazine grouped in a single panel, *From Time to Time* (1996) showed wild African animals (lions, leopards...).

Simultaneously, Jaar showed in the Cour vitrée of the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts in Paris his installation *The Sound of Silence* (2006). Although the text of the work was written in 1995, the artist could only create the installation ten years later. Using a nominal language, Alfredo Jaar briefly narrates the life of photographer Kevin Carter, his beginnings as a graphic journalist and his untimely suicide three months after one of his photographs earned him a Pulitzer Prize. *The Sound of Silence* has been presented around the world since 2006.

Jaar's approach to his work through a generally political vision is based on the preservation of a general pattern of classical tragedy, in which the image alone suffices to denounce violence despite the absence of words. Jaar's work has been characterized by its revelation of certain situations which would otherwise have continued to be concealed. Through a process of accumulation of texts and images, the artist seeks to question the viewer, but always leaving to him/her the responsibility for the interpretation. He proposes an encounter, the result of a collective and silent manifestation, of a kind of *summi* literally strewn with crosses.

una violinista gitana tocando un instrumento antiguo en la plaza del Centro Pompidou. Esta imagen, simple y sin palabras,

de esta música ambiente en pleno París, se destaca a través de ese halo de luz, a semejanza de los rostros de las militantes iluminados por de las focas.

Esta exposición es también la ocasión de rever algunas de las primordiales obras de Jaar quien, obsesionado por la manera como miramos y pensamos las imágenes, adapta la forma [sculpturas, instalaciones, videos, fotografías...] a un pensamiento político y filosófico que lo lleva a realizar obras ampliamente conocidas, como sus trabajos sobre los mineros brasileños, el genocidio de Ruanda, la catástrofe de Bhopal. Especialista en instalaciones eminentemente políticas, Jaar se consagra especialmente al continente africano, al que lo

usa una pasión personal derivada sin duda de sus múltiples viajes. Analizando la portada de los periódicos y revistas americanas, nos demuestra que solamente hay tres temas que entran a los periodistas: los animales, el sida y la miseria. A través de los medios, es fácil malinterpretar a este continente como una sola entidad con innumerable problemas. Esta representación reduccionista del continente y la falta de intervención en sus problemas se encuentra en el centro de las obras de Jaar que, de manera prudente, examinan las delicadas líneas entre el valor del impacto y el valor humano, entre lo visible y lo implícito.

La genérica adrección que habita las cuatro paredes de una de las salas presenta obras que tratan temas africanos y revelan el constante interés de este artista en abordar la representación de África en los medios y las dificultades que presenta el reportaje gráfico. Entre ellas, la obra monumental de 1996 *Searching for Africa in Life*, ordenada en cinco paneles verticales, muestra las 2158 portadas de la revista *Life* desde el primer número hasta el número correspondiente a la fecha de realización de la obra. Constituida por nueve portadas de *Time* magazine agrupadas en un solo panel, *From Time to Time* (1996) muestra animales salvajes de África (leones, leopardos...).

Jaar presenta, al mismo tiempo, en el patio vidriado de la Escuela Nacional Superior de Bellas Artes de París, su instalación *The Sound of Silence* (2006). A pesar de que la obra fue escrita en 1995, el artista sólo pudo crear la instalación diez años más tarde. Utilizando un lenguaje nominal, Alfredo Jaar narra brevemente la vida del fotógrafo Kevin Carter, su ingreso al periodismo gráfico y su interpestivo suicidio tres meses después de que su fotografía le valiera el premio Pulitzer. *Sound of Silence* ha sido presentada en el mundo entero desde 2006.

La aproximación de Jaar, con una visión verdaderamente política, está dada a partir de la conservación de un patrón general de la tragedia clásica, en donde la imagen por sí sola logra denunciar la violencia, a pesar de la ausencia de lenguajes. Su obra se ha caracterizado por revelar ciertas situaciones que de otra manera permanecerían ocultas. Procediendo por acumulación de textos y de imágenes, el artista busca interpelar al espectador, pero siempre dejándole la responsabilidad de la interpretación. Un encuentro, resultado de una manifestación colectiva y silenciosa, de una especie de *summi* sembrado literalmente de cruces.

Jatricia Azevedo Naveira



Three Women, 2010. Photographs, projector and tripods. Variable dimensions. Courtesy the Artiz and Karol Meunier, Paris. Two images, 2010. Fotografías, proyectores y trípodes. Dimensiones variables. Cortesía del Artiz y Karol Meunier, París.

Francis Frascina revisits Lament of the Images

> FEATURES 02

# GAZA



Alfredo Jaar, Lament of the Images 2002 Installation

ALFREDO JAAR'S *LAMENT OF THE IMAGES*, 2002, IS A CRITIQUE OF CONTEMPORARY VISUAL COMMUNICATION AS A "REGIME TO BE MANAGED". Absent images are mourned in his installation, an outcome of the artist becoming overwhelmed by the ethical dilemma of looking at and displaying his photographs of survivors of genocide in Rwanda, 1994. As Johanna Drucker argues (*Cultural Politics*, March 2008), Jaar lost faith in photographic documentation because it seemed complicit with media bids for attention in image-saturated cultures. This dilemma is compounded by powerful nation states attempting to control the flow of photographs and video, particularly during military operations: In *Lament of the Images* one focus is the American bombing of Afghanistan in October 2001. More recently, similar issues of power and permissibility are at the forefront of contested representations of attacks on Gaza by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).



Alfredo Jaar  
*Witness of the Inauguration*  
Installation

Jean Baudrillard offers a compelling but pessimistic analysis of our condition (see September 11, 2001). Looking back to the Gulf War of 1990-91 he argues that images, including those of disaster, violence and war, are the product of totalising image cultures that are consensual and 'televsual' ('Pornographie de la guerre', 1994). Contemporary cultures are increasingly dominated by regimes of high-speed visualisation that provoke feelings of, for example, abjection with the photographs of US abuse and torture at Abu Ghraib, Iraq. However, for Baudrillard such feelings are only virtual responses to representations: the lived and the represented are identical. These images are 'war porn' in the 'prevailing rule of the world of making everything visible' in a 'desperate simulacrum of power'. Compliant viewers are addicted to spectacle.

Feier, which is a gathering of writers, artists, activists and activists based in the San Francisco Bay Area, produced analyses of similar conditions with different conclusions to Baudrillard, and in 2008 made an artwork that is the antithesis of Jaar's lament. Peter's installation, titled *Affiliated Feiers*, is full of images, including baroque acts of war from the dropping of US napalm on Vietnam, to dead Lebanese children wrapped in plastic. Both Jaar and Peter engage with the symbolic economy, the image-war characteristic of media-saturated and militarised cultures.

The contrast between absence, in *Lament of the Images* and presence in *Affiliated Feiers*, constitutes a dialectic thought (from Walter Benjamin): 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.' If works of art, with these installations as examples, are documents of both civilisation and barbarism, how do we think about the twoibilities together in experiences that engender critical judgments about representations and human agency in ways different from Baudrillard's view of addiction to the present and to spectacle?

These issues have a renewed relevance given that images of the recent bombardment of Gaza are regarded by the IDF as a visual regime to be managed in order to

neutralise morally those 'posts' that preempt critical assessments of the present. In 2006 horrific stills and video footage of Israel's bombing of Lebanon raised ethical questions about the production, dissemination and viewing of photographs of dead and mutilated bodies. Many of these questions have deep historical roots in debates about photography, representations of war and, more recently, the role of digital communications as sources of knowledge and evidence, which includes not only material transmitted by civilian victims of violence but also text and picture messages sent by members of the IDF from Lebanon. Because these communications were subsequently regarded as undermining official propaganda, Israel removed mobile phones from soldiers invading Gaza on January 3, 2009, after a week of aerial bombing. Such acts refocus attention on relationships between the practices of housing and attempts by the state to control the availability of imagery.

Some journalists and media staff, mostly from Arab networks, were in Gaza when bombing began on December 27, 2008. However, the IDF refused journalists and photographers entry into the territory in defiance of their own Supreme Court ruling that international media should be allowed into Gaza to report on the effect of air strikes on Palestinians. Further, to obtain an accredited Israeli press pass, journalists had to accept extensive printed propaganda material on the IDF's actions and provide their mobile phone numbers to enable a stream of text messages to be sent from the Israeli military communications unit. Western media with their mobile satellite dishes were forced to park on what became known as the 'hill of shame', looking from Israel far into the distance at the Gaza strip. Denied independence, these journalists were – in their own jargon – condemned to be 'fish monkeys'. At the same time, the IDF bombed media targets in Gaza, including the Al-Shrouq tower that contained offices of satellite channels, further curtailing reports and uploaded more than 30,000 of their own 'action clips' onto YouTube and elsewhere. Here was a mixed strategy of media control

by the IDF refusing access to Gaza; blockading of digital communications, such as text messaging journalists and targeting internet video sharing sites; constant availability of state-approved commentators to news corporations; full access to sites of Hamas rocket strikes on Israel; and what many commentators described as an unrestricted dissemination.

Western media had to rely primarily on edited footage from Reuters and Associated Press. Those frustrated by these constraints or wishing to test the veracity of broadcasts and illustrated reports sought alternative sources, including Arab television networks and internet sources, many displaying images and footage that bypassed conventional news agencies and editorial codes. Here, too, there is a further process of negotiation between printed reports and internet sources. For better or worse, newspapers rely on editorial agencies and decisions about lead stories and images. Internet news sites often highlight images and stories in relation to the number of user hits, thus altering conventional editorial choices in response to audience demands.

There are several issues here. Who has access to information and images? What are the contours of access, mediation and the editorial agendas of suppliers? What are the ethical and political dilemmas of taking images of dead or mutilated bodies? What are the consequences of looking away? On the one hand, there is the need to respect human dignity and rights, as well as the need to address the issue of complicity, recurrence and hybridity that have been central to discussions of colonialist imagery and objectified bodies. On the other hand, there are requirements to look at the full horrors of brutal violence in order to awaken critical and historical understanding of media rhetoric and representation.

In Jaar's installation visitors enter a darkened room with three illuminated texts describing particular examples of visual communication as 'a regime to be managed'. The third one is titled *Kabul, Afghanistan, October 7, 2001*, just before the carpet bombing of Afghanistan, the US Defense Department entered into a contract with Space Imaging Inc. to purchase exclusive rights to all available satellite images of Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. In doing so, western media were prevented not only from seeing the effects of the bombing but also from independent verification or refutation of government claims. As is well known, one of the first targets for US missiles was the Kabul office and satellite transmission dish of Al Jazeera, the Arabic television company based in Qatar and partly staffed by ex-BBC World Service personnel. Jaar's text panel ends with a quote from the CEO of Space Imaging Inc. on the US Defense Department buying 'all the imagery that is available' and concluding 'but there is nothing left to see'. After reading these texts visitors follow a faintly lit narrow corridor leading to another darkened space, only to be confronted by a painfully dazzling blank white screen. Any image is absent, withdrawn, withheld. There is nothing left to see.

Attempts to manipulate the flow of imagery and mediate visual communication are consistent with cultures

of reception dependent upon instant gratification, mobilising particular costs and a lack of empathy with depicted bodies. This has continued with representations of Afghanistan. For example, US military reports of their air strike on Azizabad on August 22, 2001, claimed that 32 to 35 Taliban militants and 'only five to seven civilians had been killed. However, alternative sources provided a different account. A mobile phone video recorded palpable shock and grief over at least 10 dead children among some thirty to 40 bodies laid out in the village mosque. In the light of this and other images, the UN backed up villagers' accounts that more than 90 civilians, the majority being women and children, had been killed, though the US disputes the accuracy of these figures. The policy of image control, military attack and denial of alternative evidence has been adopted by client states such as Israel. Active resistance to and refutation of representations produced by this policy have relied on sources often described as 'unverifiable' by embedded journalists and led to a loss of faith in established conventions of documentary photography corrupted by media agencies.

Drucker argues that Jaar's current of the images registers clearly that traditions of activism have become impotent. The overwhelming effects of image culture seem to have crushed the avant-garde impulse. Artists have lost belief in the effect of de-familiarisation that was central to the self-critical historic *Asa et Gaudet*; the very identity of art was in part linked to its capacity for making strange. Artists used to have the capacity to disturb ideological beliefs and values, to reveal how representations in society served particular interests and powers.

However, Drucker believes that Jaar's *Louise* shows the need for re-politicization, an act of correction and association that takes full account of the gap between image and content, between images and systems of belief. To resist the dystopian vision of a totalizing virtuality, she asks: can art objects reveal the conditions of belief that produce them? Can they function as image-events, documents of relations? For Drucker, 'Jaar despises of documentary efficacy, but not of the space made by art, so we can have space to imagine'. She argues that the space made by image events is that space of interpretative activity.

Retort's installation at the Second International Biennial of Contemporary Art in Sevilla includes a wall-sized video projection (by Gail Wight) that, in both technique and content, runs counter to corporate news reports of war and dissent on millions of flickering television screens. The video begins with footage of mass Republican demonstrations during the Spanish Civil War merging into images of protests against the US led invasion of Iraq with chanting marchers holding a large banner of Picasso's *Guernica*. Documentary film of the banner becomes a full screen image of Picasso's painting, still a sign of creative antithesis to propaganda. At the US's insistence a tapestry version of *Guernica* at the UN in New York was covered up when, in February 2003, Colin Powell presented dubious evidence for war against Iraq.

Members of Retort argue that corporate news networks

ART

IN CONVERSATION

# Alfredo Jaar

WITH DORE ASHTON,  
PHONG BUI,  
& DAVID LEVI STRAUSS

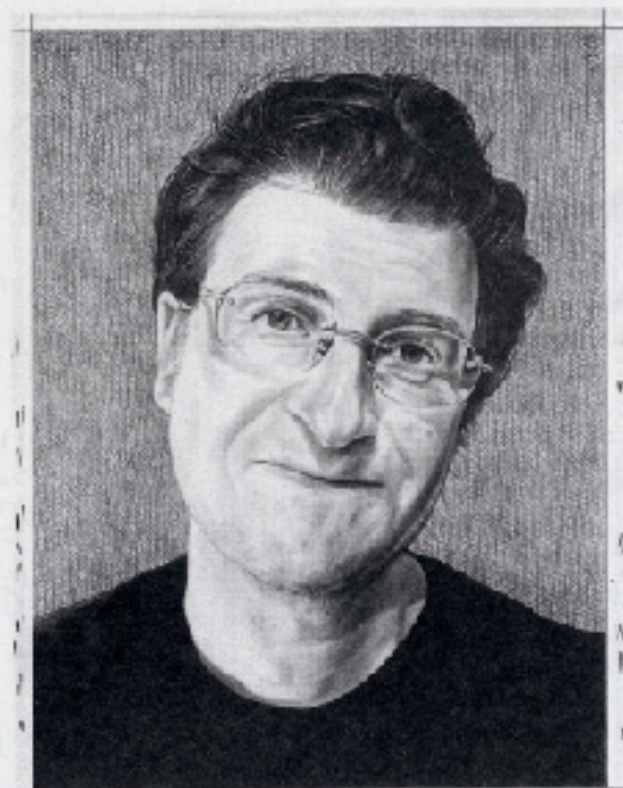
On the occasion of the artist's current exhibition *The Sound of Silence*, which will be on view at Galerie Lelong until May 2nd, Alfredo Jaar paid a visit to the *Rail's* Headquarters to discuss some aspects of his life and work with Publisher Phong Bui, Consulting Editors Dore Ashton and David Levi Strauss, and a group of graduate students in the Art Criticism & Writing program at the School of Visual Arts.

**Phong Bui:** What strikes me the most about "The Sound of Silence" is that, based on the available news report and the photographer's own writing, you were able to construct your own and that was concise and effective. In exactly eight minutes, not only do we get the entire story of Kevin Carter and the award of a Nobel, we're also reminded of the greater political struggle and human tragedy, which has been more or less the central focus of your preoccupation as an artist ever since you did your first project, "Studies on Happiness" in 1979. Could you tell us how it came about since there was a few years between when you first learned of the subject and when the piece was made?

**Alfredo Jaar:** When I first saw the photographs by Kevin Carter published along with the article, "Nadar, a Described as Trying to 'Pilate the West,'" on March 26, 1993, in *The New York Times*, I was struck and taken by its polemical power immediately. My first impulse was to print them and show them in my studios. Then, a year later, came the news that Carter had received the Pulitzer Prize, which, only a few months later, led to his suicide. A year was when I felt something that I had to do something about this event. It took me a right a year to write the piece, and so I wrote it in 1995, and knew exactly what I wanted to do with it, but there was no technical way of doing it at the time—computers had yet to become available. I first thought of being like a performance, or a play. Then I thought about doing it with a video projector, and I had done once for a similar

piece for the Kennedy Project out of "Shit and Sacred Places," but it became too complicated, so I abandoned the whole project and let it lay dormant for exactly ten years. Then, in 2001, I met David Jaar, who is a technological genius, and during one of our conversations I told him about the technological difficulties I had with the piece, and he said he could design a new program that would correct the color, the gain for the green and red lights, as well as the brightness, and that it could be easily converted into one portable installation. It was so coincidental with my being invited to participate in the event in Berlin that for almost a year offered funding. He wrote it in 99, there are things in the installation that are not today, for example, Carter, owned by the Getty, was the largest private agency in the world then; now that it is a company to Getty Images, and for the time I wrote that it held more than 100 million images, which I realized later was an exaggeration, but that number became real later on when Carter acquired quite a few more photo archives. But now Getty Images is way beyond that number. However, I thought it was important to leave the facts as they were at that moment. At any rate, the piece has been incredibly well received. We have shown it in cities already, and we, not all an Italian version but over. This year we're doing Chinese, a French, and a Russian version, because language is such an important component in this piece.

These artists always have found in your work an ethical component, or critique of human behavior. I remember



Portrait of the artist, David on paper by Phong Bui

in a video, Wojtyła's Love in Theory, which he got while studying after the witness of the boy who falls into the bear pit, the one he had made for a minute. Instead of seeing the little boy hit with the photographic wand only, the child of the experience, photographer engaged in your piece. Could you tell us what you think about that position?

**Jaar:** Well, it is a very complex question, one that really is at the heart of the piece. As we all know, the objective and mission of the photograph is to witness to the reality of the world. And in order to capture that reality, they go to dangerous and fragile places at the expense of their lives. I want to see as true evidence of our humanity; they represent for me what is left of our humanity. And I think of them in these situations as signs of solidarity if not of love, because they are there. They truly understand that they are there to show you what they see for the rest of us would rather ignore. There's great admiration for what they do. In fact I am a friend of quite a few of them. I would say that most photographers of my early career and their limitations, which doesn't mean that they don't overcome. Some is also dangerous when they are simply because when they take a position in the middle of a lot of these situations, they will most likely get shot at, and there will be no way to escape. So you can imagine, that there is a battle to balance between bringing the images home, and their moral humanitarian impulse. And believe me, when I try to show these images and do not intervene directly, they too may have moral difficulties. But

and moral justification. But for them, to document these conditions is their way of intervening. I can assure you that the rate of suicide among photojournalists is one of the highest in the world.

**Ashton:** I read that there were 200 photojournalists killed in the last five to six years, while many are still missing.

**Jaar:** Exactly. They are there trying to do work that very few people are willing to do. They are trying to balance but when these two impulses, and they suffer from it. Most people do not experience this, and I am not a photojournalist, but also my Rwanda experience when I saw there was a way to see the genocide, crossing the genocide, I wanted to kill myself. I was ashamed of being a human being. I had to seek psychiatric counsel in order to cope with this situation. And this was just one experience. Imagine that now these people live with I can call. They go from one conflict, one tragedy, to another. This is a very, very difficult issue. I do not have an answer myself, and I am not sure any of us do.

**Bui:** I remember seeing the documentary made by Dan Krauss, *The Death of Kevin Carter*, or *Cinema of Hope*, in 2000, which dealt with details of Carter's own tragedy as well as his own humanity. The reason why that photo was so widely criticized by Western audiences, so much of us agree, is largely because they saw all of Africa interpreted within that small frame. And the conflict is not just on one hand, that lack of understanding of the context in which the piece was







your "A Logo for America," which you did in Times Square in a dot?

**Jaar:** That project went into space. [Laughs.] The most frustrating was to see when NPR was a journal but around interviewing people while they were watching it on the screen in Times Square. Some of them said live on national radio, "This is illegal. How could they let him do this?" It is so embedded in their education that the U.S. is a merit, whereas the rest of the continent is created. I think it is important to remember language, again, is an expression of reality, and language will change only when the reality changes. In this case the geopolitical reality is that this country dominates the entire hemisphere. If that doesn't change, then language will never change. However, you should be very happy to know that "A Logo for America" is my most reproduced work. It is used in a dozen textbooks to teach young students about globalization.

**Ashley:** That's good news!

**Jaar:** That's what [Antonio] Gramsci was trying to raise the distribution between the direct domination of political society and the indirect domination of civil society, which brings to mind, when did your fascination with Gramsci begin?

**Jaar:** It started in Chile when I was growing up. Gramsci was very important for the Chilean resistance. And then, after my invitation to the Venice Biennale in 1988, I started painting. Early on, I read Gramsci, and I began to read his writings again. And while I was there, I rediscovered Pío Barbaud's books, whom I had been fascinated with during my film studies and so these two Italian intellectuals have been a great influence on my work. If I ever make a video explanation why I adore Gramsci, it will be belated, even from prison, that culture can affect change, which is a really an extraordinary thought and I strongly believe in it.

**Ashley:** How do you define culture?

**Jaar:** Well, for example I believe that it was culture that made possible for Barack Obama became the president of the United States. Through many work films, works of art, and cultural actions, which were created by artists and intellectuals in the world of culture, who essentially made that voter possible. That is what I learned from Gramsci. Pizzini, on the other hand, was the most complete intellectual actualizer. Not only was he a film maker, a poet, a writer, a filmmaker in a newspaper, but he also was a critic and a theorist. He was really serious of his time in every level, and he did it so effectively with such commitment. The poet Giuseppe Ungueti whose extraordinary capacity for an economy of means also had a great idea in 1927: to look I think about my work. That is why I have created six important projects in Italy in the last five years and they are all dedicated to these intellectuals. I am working in their shadows.

**Bulk:** Can you talk about how "Searching for Africa in LIFE" came about?

**Jaar:** Well, I've been obsessed with the media ever since I was a kid.

**Bulk:** Why do you learned from your father who couldn't go one day without reading the newspaper for at least two to three hours in the morning?

**Jaar:** That's absolutely true. What I've done for a long time is compile material from various media, what I call prose works: coverage of certain issues. "Searching for Africa in LIFE," in fact, shows LIFE Magazine's lack of coverage of the African continent from 1936 to 1947 and when they do cover it, which is two or six times, it's mostly animals. This is the most important magazine in terms of making photographic decisions to the rest of the world.

**Levi Strauss:** It certainly captures a lot of things that continue to this day in press images—press images that become iconic still have to look like those that appeared in LIFE.

**Jaar:** Exactly, and, most importantly, it gives me a sense of the U.S. and the rest of the world as a single of the world. So, even if the generations were educated by school by their parents and by the media and the media was mostly LIFE Magazine, I created this piece in '96, but it had never been shown till this year, and in this current show, I felt that it paired well with *The Search of Science*.

**Bulk:** Africa seems to be a special place for you. It's not just a place full of human conflicts and tragedies. I know you love the music and have collected various records that came from different countries, so there are other cultural aspects that don't get expressed in this is your work.

**Jaar:** It was in Martinique where my strong links with Africa began. Ever though it was a difficult beginning. I arrived at the age of six and I was the only white kid with red hair in my class so I was a very strange character. I was the only out of focus at first, but slowly after a while, everyone adjusted means. I became a local, somewhat. I really identified myself with this place, which gradually linked into the greater culture of Africa. Of course, later in life, when I discovered the tragedy of how they were represented in the so-called Western media, I decided to dedicate 50 to 70 percent of my work to African-related projects. I went to live and at the lower school where the intellectual elite of Martinique came from: Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Édouard Glissant. At that time, Césaire was also the Mayor of Fort de France, the capital.

**Ashley:** Your Rwanda project, which was such a hugely important one even way much like was I'm just reading now in Chloé Lamerand's autobiography where he talks about when he did the epic *MURAV* (1986), how both the main ones were from the audience, partly because they didn't want to deal with

what he was trying to bring to their attention. The curious, how did you deal with pain?

**Jaar:** I don't know if I was really drawn with it, and that's why the project went on for six years, which was the longest project I had ever created. I really because I wasn't satisfied with the one way I was finishing. I thought didn't have the right language to express what I felt when I witnessed the genocide. Normally I would see someone, I'd photograph, but there are just two words in it: do not forget to convey what I want to convey about what we do as a world community. I've thought of it as a criminal indifference.

**Levi Strauss:** This is something that you really showed me by exposing me to LIFE and read the story of Edwards and it was printed daily in the New York Times. And it was all there in black and white, from the beginning, it wasn't a surprise. It wasn't as if people didn't know what was going to happen. All you had to do was read the newspaper. That's terrifying.

**Jaar:** It's the Security Council who die it, really, they were told that if they just gave the okay, it could be stopped immediately. But, unfortunately, it would never happen because of two factors: one, really, there is no will in Rwanda, in my opinion and one I think is nature but I'll talk us.

**Uma Thurman:** It's one thing to take photographs on site like those of the photographers, but when you rearrange that experience into a gallery space, which essentially has to be orchestrated, unbridled, or manipulated in order to draw the attention of the visitors to the screen, how do you balance between the content of what you want to communicate and the way it is made?

**Jaar:** There is no way to represent something without aestheticizing it. In other words, there is no representation without aestheticization.

**Miriam Atkins:** I have just the piece as a sort of sense of death that occur on many different levels. There's the suicide of Carter, the death of the victims of the Svalbard famine, and there is the termination of the images of the present presentation of the image that was appropriated by the media industry then. Finally, the image of a subject, once it is displaced by the image. Let's say, if *The Search of Science* has a tragedy for these many losses, does it attempt to re-establish a living relationship with the dead to create the stage for a productive discourse around these irremediable losses?

**Jaar:** It was Roland Barthes who said that every photograph is about death. One way or another, it's always about death. I think that the one I haven't the most, it's not even death as human beings. What I mean is that I am afraid we have lost most of our humanity, we are already dead, or almost, as human beings.



Alfredo Jaar, detail of "Searching for Africa in LIFE" (2006). © C. Jaar. Produced on Replika. Each panel 40 x 40 cm (15.7 x 15.7 in). Courtesy of Replika.

# Alfredo Jaar

## interviene las calles y el metro de Barcelona

El artista chileno radicado en Nueva York también adelanta que hará un monumento sobre los detenidos desaparecidos que se erigirá desde el año frente al Museo de la Memoria en Santiago.



### Soledad Ortega (Barcelona)

"La cultura es necesaria?" esta un cartel publicitario por estos días en los vagones del metro de Barcelona. Se trata de una de las creaciones de nuevas intervenciones públicas de Alfredo Jaar, artista chileno afincado en Nueva York. Québécois, pregunta se articula como una campaña publicitaria que a través de 15 preguntas llama a reflexionar sobre la vigencia de la cultura en la sociedad actual, en medio del bombardeo mediático diario de la ciudad.

"En tiempos de crisis se olvida la importancia de la cultura y cómo cambia nuestras vidas. La cultura es un modo de pensamiento. Obama es un cambio fundamental, pero fue la cultura la que llevó a Obama. ¿Culturas políticas y élites ya habían tenido un presidente negro?", dice el artista, que inaugura la nueva programación del Centro Artístico Santa Mònica, principal referente del arte contemporáneo en Cataluña.

### ¿El arte es político?

La instalación se exhibe automáticamente en Milán, de octubre a enero pasado. La actual versión se lleva a cabo en catalán. Preguntas como "¿No hemos olvidado de la cultura?", "¿El arte es político?" o "¿El intelectual es inútil?" se reparten hasta fines de abril a través de unos postales por correo y puntos gratuitos en bares y restaurantes, y de 12.000 afiches en 11 museos y centros de Barcelona. Además de beneficiar en las calles, carteles publicitarios en metro y buses, y contenidos que se transmitirán en la cadena de TV autonómica de Cataluña y una cadena de cine. Junto a ello, el público podrá responder a las preguntas a través de la web del espacio cultural ([www.artsanautonoma.cat](http://www.artsanautonoma.cat)). Este tipo tuvo tanto impacto en la exposición italiana, que actualmente se prepara una publicación con las respuestas de la gente.



"Las preguntas son las que dan la razón de ser a este proyecto. Se pueden dividir en dos categorías: unas, tratan de conectar las preguntas de manera poética y sensible, de exponer sobre el significado de las cosas. Otras, de utilizar el proyecto como una plataforma política para demostrar el desmoronamiento con las actuaciones de Berlusconi, especialmente en el ámbito cultural", cuenta el artista en conversación con La Tercera.

Alfredo Jaar, el artista chileno vivo de mayor influencia internacion-

1. ¿El arte es necesario? En uno de las 15 preguntas que Jaar hace a los catalanes, quienes pueden contestar a través de la web.
2. Los mensajes también están dispuestos en catalán por toda Barcelona.
3. 25.000 afiches de Jaar se reparten en museos y centros, espacios que son gratis en Milán.
4. El Museo de la Ciudad también se benefició de los carteles de la intervención pública (últimas preguntas).

nal, ha desarrollado su carrera fuera del país. De profesión arquitecto y radicado en Nueva York desde 1981, ha articulado su discurso a partir de la reflexión de las injusticias de la sociedad contemporánea, cuestionando lo que él considera la condición obsoleta de los medios de comunicación.

"El trabajo en la calle lo uso como una extensión de mi trabajo, fuera del 'mundo del arte' y el 'tubo blanco'. De hecho, mi primer proyecto en Chile ocurrió en este lugar", apunta. "Esta necesidad surgió porque de

mi formación como arquitecto, sentía que el público del museo era representativo al mundo real. Estos trabajos son los que me mantienen vivos y real. ¿Por qué digo sobre la palabra real? En contrapunto a lo ficticio que a veces me parece el mundo del arte". Y continúa: "La calle es fascinante, porque la gente va a un museo preguntando a ver arte, por lo tanto, el artista puede hacer cualquier cosa, y no se cuestiona, aunque no gane ni se sea exitoso. Pero ese privilegio no existe en la calle, cuando por eso la gente no le va a leer automáticamente como arte, hay una serie de responsabilidades. Es un gran desafío".

### Museo de la Memoria y Gore

Hasta 2008, las intervenciones públicas de Alfredo Jaar se remitían a proyectos efímeros, pero actualmente se encuentra embarcado en varias obras permanentes, donde destaca el monumento que se erigirá frente al Museo de la Memoria en Santiago. Actualmente, Jaar diseñó esta obra que se inaugurará en 2011 y que presentará a fines de mes en Chile a las autoridades del Museo de la Memoria y del Ministerio de Obras Públicas. "Abordar el tema de los detenidos desaparecidos y la tragedia de la dictadura", adelantó el artista.

Paralelamente, en el próximo verano europeo presentará en Noruega Rjukan, sobre el calentamiento global. La obra será inaugurada por Al Gore y consistirá en una serie de flujos de un metro de alto que convergirá del agua cada medianoche durante un minuto, desde la ciudad de Strananger, dejando el ruidito del resaca a partir de los pitones conectados que se venía afectando por el efecto invernadero. En Indianapolis, EEUU, inaugurará en septiembre El pasaje de los laureatos, instalación que reflexiona sobre los laureados de la guerra. Además, prepara un monumento para los víctimas del genocidio en Ruanda.



El destacado artista chileno recorren su paso por la Isla de Robben, en las costas de Sudáfrica. Uno de sus viajes más conmovedores, dice.

Por Alfredo Jaar



Cuevas de piedras caliza

**H**e visitado el costero africano numerosas veces, pero descubrir la Isla de Robben fue una experiencia particularmente conmovedora.

En esta pequeña isla, situada a 13 kilómetros de las costas de Ciudad del Cabo, Sudafrica, el régimen del apartheid mantuvo recluidos a algunas de sus más destacadas personas políticas, entre ellas, Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada y Gona Moko, presidente del ex presidente del país, Thabo Mbeki. Hoy es posible visitar allí los centros de detención y sus instalaciones, así como una zona de piedra caliza donde brinca y dan de los más lindos peces coloridos se gustan al día trabajando. Entre trabajos forzados, siete horas al día durante cinco días a la semana, fue un pedicero ad de sereno a soportando el crudo frío del invierno.

La piedra caliza se utilizó simplemente para mantener el terreno de las caveritas de aquella isla infértil. La descomposición la y el fango que produce engloba a peces y viejitas, por igual, ya que todos tenían prohibido llevar guías. A veces, pocas, simplemente se permitía dejarles ciegos y a los otros porque las guías se formaban parte del sistema. El peso de la piedra, además, dañaba lentamente los pulmones. Se dice que Mandela no pasó el día que ahumbró la prisión debido al efecto de esa luz en sus ojos. Había perdido la facultad de visión.

Aquella desafiante actividad tenía como principal objetivo: hacerles perder el juicio, envolver sus huesos y quebrar su voluntad. Sin embargo, Mandela y el resto de sus compañeros de prisión descubrieron



la Isla de Robben es un centro de aprendizaje desde organizaciones grupas de ciudad, en los que incluso reciben a algunos visitantes.

En 1993, para conmemorar el quinto aniversario de la liberación, los ex presos, encabezados por Mandela, regresaron a la isla, donde hicieron una demostración ante la prensa de cómo transcurrían sus jornadas de trabajo. Durante la demostración, Mandela se apartó de la multitud cogió una piedra y lanzó algunas pocas para luego depositar de nuevo la piedra en el suelo, a escasos centímetros del centro de la caverita. Al verlo, los demás ex presos hicieron lo mismo, apilando las piedras en un montón. Según la cultura Xhosa, de la que Nelson Mandela es heredero, tal construcción recibe el nombre de 'ukhulani' y representa un monumento de memoria colectiva.

Este sencillo momento vivió por Mandela y los demás ex presos sigue así en pie por algún misterioso motivo, ya que es extraordinariamente fúgil y decoran así al centro de los corredores, a pocos centímetros de donde circulan los autobuses turísticos cada día.

No he dejado nunca de pensar en este montón de piedras y en la Isla de Robben. Es, en mi opinión, un entorno donde momento público de reconciliación. Su enorme fragilidad es una perfecta metáfora de la extrema precariedad de un largo y complejo proceso. En tiempos especialmente difíciles como nos ha tocado vivir en nuestro país, es nuestra obligación pensar en esos peajes, senderos y en ese monumento de reconciliación concebido por hombres que no pueden fallar".



Partial view of Alfredo Jaar's installation *The Sound of Silence*, 2006, fluorescent lights, video projection and mixed mediums, 14 by 15 by 30 feet overall; at LeLong.

## ALFREDO JAAR LELONG

Alfredo Jaar wrote the script on which *The Sound of Silence* is based in 1996, and then waited more than a decade before he figured out what to do with it. (Completed in 2006, the project varies slightly from one venue to the next; this was its first appearance in New York.) He says the delay was a matter of waiting for the right technology, but it is as readily explained in emotional terms. Delivered as a series of terse, projected text frames in Courier font (the kind associated with typewriters), the story concerns Kevin Carter, a photojournalist from South Africa who was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1984 for a picture he took in Sudan during a period of war and famine. It shows an emaciated little girl doubled over on the ground; looming behind her, a conspicuously robust vulture waits patiently. Three months after he won the Pulitzer, Carter committed suicide. [Also see Xu Zhan review this issue.]

The presentation of these and other scarcely less gut-grabbing facts about Carter and his subjects takes 8 minutes. All but one pass in silence. The only source of light in the box-shaped, metal-walled room that houses the projection is the words themselves. Vaguely penal, this room presents its rear exterior wall to viewers first, a wall that is covered with a battery of ferociously bright white fluorescent tubes. On the other side of the structure is an entry guarded by a cross-shaped sign—one axis red, the other green, lit in alternation. Coming into the story in the middle is not encouraged.

And for good reason. Though this review is a spoiler, no written summary can really diminish the blistering impact of the projection's climax. After an account of the circumstances in which the famous photo was taken and of its outcome—which included enraged letters to the editors of the many newspapers in which it appeared, asking why Carter hadn't helped the girl instead of recording her misery—a blinding flash of light fills the room, accompanied by a muffled explosion. Following this flash, experienced as a snapshot with the pun fully intended, we see the image in question, very briefly. It is, in every sense, stunning. Then the text resumes.

Compunctions about displaying photographs of atrocities, and a determination to engage viewers viscerally and if possible actively, are the competing impulses that together have shaped a great deal of Jaar's work. The agonizing choices faced by witnesses with cameras—sensationalize and injure; withhold and enable potentially lethal neglect—are forcefully articulated in the projects he undertook following his documentation, in thousands of photographs that he mostly declined to exhibit, of the aftermath of mass killings in Rwanda in 1994. Nowhere, perhaps, are those choices given greater dramatic force than in *The Sound of Silence*.

Two other works were on view in this exhibition: the small framed white-on-black print of the word "Why" (2009) and a five-panel assembly of 2,126 postage-stamp-size photoreproductions of *Life* magazine covers, ironically titled

*Searching for Africa in Life* (1996); the search is mostly in vain. Fung together, they address political injustice with careful dispassion. It is the inescapably personal meaning of *The Sound of Silence* that makes its impact so much closer to universal.

—Nancy Princenthal

## Alfredo Jaar

GALERIE LELONG

Alfredo Jaar, an artist who has committed many years to examining the potentialities of art's response (and perhaps responsibility) to those at the extreme margins of life or in the crosshairs of social/political/existential crisis, produced an unremittingly complex and disturbing installation in 2006, *The Sound of Silence*. Originally presented at DiverseWorks in Houston within the context of FotoFest 2006 (and subsequently in a number of international contexts), the work here made a long overdue appearance in New York.

Passing in front of a vast array of vertically organized fluorescent bulbs—a veritable wall of light on one side of a large aluminum-clad structure—viewers are momentarily optically overloaded. Here, light materializes as space, swiftly dematerializing into all-consuming luminosity. This is perceptual manipulation of the highest order, certainly strategic on Jaar's part, effectively provoking questions about the visual, cultural, and political conditions (or consequences) of how we allow ourselves to be manipulated. To venture further into this installation might lead one into optical and cognitive obliteration. Yet there is a desire to continue, to be further manipulated. A wall text indicates the rules of the game: not to enter the enclosure until the red light turns green. Jaar interpellates the viewer as subject and controlled body, thereby reenacting the inscription of power within space—an ironically critical maneuver.

Playing within the darkened enclosure is a soundless film in which a textual sequence appears on a black ground, conveying a narrative about the peculiarly tragic life of freelance South African photojournalist Kevin Carter. We are informed that Carter became known as a risk-taking photojournalist in apartheid South Africa, and eventually traveled to Sudan, shooting an image that would be published in the *New York Times* in 1993: a picture of a starving, emaciated Sudanese child watched over by a patient vulture. A narrative excerpt:

20 MINUTES / HE WAS HOPING THE VULTURE WOULD SPREAD ITS WINGS / BUT IT DID NOT / HE TOOK HIS PHOTOGRAPHS / AND CHASED THE BIRD AWAY / HE WATCHED AS THE LITTLE GIRL RESUMED HER STRUGGLE / HE SAT UNDER A TREE AND LIT A CIGARETTE / TALKED TO GOD / AND CRIED / KEVIN / KEVIN. We then read that, in 1994, just a couple of months after receiving a Pulitzer Prize for this very picture, a distraught, haunted, and perhaps guilt-ridden Carter committed suicide; and that the fate of the child in the photograph remains unknown. We also learn that the rights to the image are held under the auspices of Corbis, owned by Bill Gates. Flashes of light then violently penetrate the space, and we are interpellated once again, becoming the unsuspecting object-victims of a feigned photographic gaze, and Carter's photograph appears furtively onscreen, like an afterimage.

*The Sound of Silence* triggers some important questions. Do we need such images so that we can be confronted with what we might not want to believe is inextricably connected to our own lives: the suffering of others? Is Jaar here endeavoring to deconstruct the relentless transfiguration of bare human empathy into its banalized cousin: manufactured pity? Does the eliciting or production of our suffering (a guilty conscience, or the pain of knowledge itself) have a chance of becoming politically transformative or socially restorative? If everything is connected to everything else, how might we understand where our "responsibility" as alienated observers begins and ends? As traumatized, incapacitated witnesses, groping about in the space between passive outrage and mobilized action, are we unwitting accomplices in the symbolic reproduction of conditions of power that produce inequity? Jaar may be suggesting that we are perpetrators and victims, objects and subjects, endlessly exchanging roles in the grand feedback loop of the scopic field, at once complicit and exonerated. Is art sufficient to the task of unpacking these contradictions, or should it complicate matters further?

—Joshua Decker



Alfredo Jaar, *The Sound of Silence* (detail), 2006, wood, aluminum, fluorescent lights, strobe lights, video projection, dimensions variable.

EXHIBITIONS > REVIEWS

## ■ Alfredo Jaar

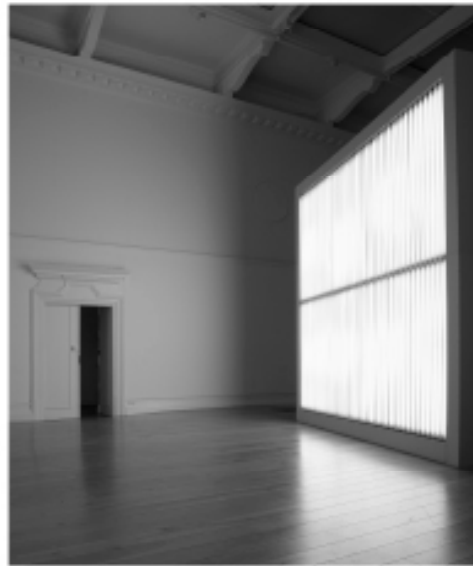
South London Gallery London February 6 to April 6

For some time now the New York-based Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar has been making probing work on the power of photographic images – particularly those in the news – to inform and misinform, to focus and divert attention, to prick and salve consciences. Now, some 15 years after his show at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, British gallery-goers can reacquire themselves with his work. It was about time.

The pieces on display at the South London Gallery are impelled by his longstanding preoccupation with Africa and its representation in the news media, but they vary widely in tone, from the blunt to the elegiac. On the walls are a few prints that reproduce magazine covers, arranging them in neat grids and highlighting, with brutal economy, the skewed and episodic character of mainstream news reporting on African affairs. In *Searching for Africa in LIFE*, 2007, we see the features of statesmen and celebrities beaming from many hundreds of *LIFE* covers but struggle to find a single image of Africa. *From TIME to TIME*, 2006, consists of nine covers, eight of which reproduce a rote manoeuvre of colonial thought in considering Africa under the rubric of nature, the cover stories revolving around wild animals and natural disasters, while the ninth carries the caption 'Somalia: The US to the Rescue', a line that perfectly captures the mix of naivety and hubris that prompted the ultimately disastrous interventions of 1992-93.

In *Maxima*, 2005, a 36-minute video, Jaar strikes a completely different note, painting a lyrical but clear-eyed picture of modern Angola. In a series of 'cantos', the camera scans the still water and luxuriant banks of a broad river, it catches a large group of children as they lark around on a beach, it follows an intravenous drip down to the hand of a hospital patient, it records the silky gestures of a sapper as he locates and detonates a landmine. The film is held together by a musical thread: each canto is accompanied by a different rendition of the song, written in 1956 by the musician and anti-colonial militant Liceu Vieira Dias, that gives the work its title. The result is a hypnotic film that touches on the struggle against colonialism and the civil war that raged later as Angola became a peripheral theatre of the Cold War, setting the lives of contemporary Angolans against a richly drawn historical backdrop while also conveying, in the lushness of the imagery and score, the artist's intense fondness for the country.

In the show's pivotal work, *The Sound of Silence*, 2006, Jaar has created a piece that is more complex than the prints and more abrasive than the film. In an aluminium-clad structure that can be entered, so the gallery attendant will tell you, only when the lights at the entrance turn from red to green, the viewer finds four flash lights on tripods flanking a screen on which is projected, slowly, phrase by phrase, the story of the South African photojournalist Kevin Carter. We learn that Carter rebelled against apartheid while serving as a soldier, later turning to photojournalism to document its



Alfredo Jaar  
*The Sound of Silence* 2006

effects; and that, when in Sudan in 1993 to cover the war-induced famine, he took a picture of a starving girl stalked by a vulture. The photo was published in *The New York Times* and won him the Pulitzer Prize but also brought fierce criticism, many readers reproaching him for not immediately attending to the girl. Not long afterwards he committed suicide. At this point in the story, the four flash lights emit a sudden blaze and Carter's iconic photo appears briefly before the dazed viewer. Then the narrative comes to a bitter close as Jaar explains that the photographic rights are managed by Corbis, a large Bill Gates-owned corporation, while the girl's fate is unknown.

What is striking about this work is the forcefulness of Jaar's address to the gallery-goer, whose movements are constrained and whose viewing habits are put under stress. The viewer is held back at the entrance before being interpellated by the flash of light, which binds together the taking of the picture and the photographer's suicide while extending their implications to embrace the audience. The flash executes an imaginary reversal; it makes as if to invite the girl and vulture to contemplate the gallery-goer, and in the process it raises questions about the act of looking – about what motivates it, about its psychological and proto-political effects. And it raises those questions not in abstract, generalised terms but urgently and immediately, by turning the viewer's gaze back on itself with a jolt. This is not an accusatory work but a fiercely quizzical one by an artist who, for all his reservations, passionately believes in the need to look, and to go on looking, at the conditions in which other people live. ||

MARCUS VERHAGEN is an art historian and critic.



*The Sound of Silence*, 2006, mixed-media installation, dimensions variable. Photo: Andy Stapp. Courtesy the artist

## ALFREDO JAAR: THE POLITICS OF THE IMAGE

SOUTH LONDON GALLERY  
16 FEBRUARY - 6 APRIL

Alfredo Jaar has long been a restless investigator of the politics of images, especially in the power relations between developed Western countries and the so-called Third World. For this exhibition he presents an ensemble of six pieces relating to Africa, a subject of choice for the artist for some 25 years. *The Sound of Silence* (2006) is an iron-clad projection room, the screen of which spells out a short biography of South African photojournalist Kevin Carter. The white typewriter lettering narrates Carter's tumultuous life, and the crucial moment in his career when he travelled to Sudan and photographed a child crawling towards a feeding centre under a vulture's threatening eyes. Behind this famous shot is a cruel story: Carter waited 20 minutes hoping that the bird would spread its wings and give a more spectacular image. The photo was bought by *The New York Times* and won Carter the Pulitzer Prize, but it caused massive outrage – why didn't the photographer help? – and he gassed himself a few months later. As the mention of his suicide appears on the projection, an explosion of blinding flashbulbs interrupts the narrative and turns the viewer, for a second, into another helpless subject of a photographic act.

In *Searching for Africa in Life* (2007) Jaar displays miniature reproductions of *Life* magazine covers published from the 1930s to the 90s. Strangely, or embarrassingly, Africa is mentioned less than five times, and almost always in relation to animal documentaries or other exotica. This work belongs to a series of Jaar's pieces highlighting what he calls the international community's 'criminal indifference' to the continent. It resonates with one of Jaar's older pieces, *Untitled (Newsweek)* (1994),

in which the artist puts in parallel the unfolding of the Rwandan genocide with *Newsweek's* covers for those dates: 'More than 80,000 hordes down the Kagera river / Men, Women and Computers'. By the time the magazine finally devoted a headline to Rwanda, in August 1994, more than one million people had been killed. *Untitled (Newsweek)* belongs to *The Rwanda Project* (1994–2000), perhaps the greatest of Jaar's achievements to date. Composed of 21 individual works, it is a memorial to the victims of the genocide, a personal resolution of the artist's harrowing experience in Rwanda immediately following the genocide and a questioning of Western responsibility.

Despite a whole career committed to denouncing injustices throughout the world – gold miners in Brazil, boat-people refugee camps in Hong Kong, the homeless in Montreal – Jaar is highly aware of the limitations of art as a mode of action. 'I am a little sceptical about the responsibility of the art world to these issues,' he said in 2002, 'but it offers a space that is not available anywhere else. We should use every available space.' And Jaar's tone is not only one of anger. His first film, *Muxima* (2006), also on show here, is based on ten different versions of an Angolan folk song, and unravels like a message of hope, a reassertion that even in one of the most difficult areas of the world, beauty and joy still have their say. *Coline Millard*



# Alfredo Jaar

## des images et des hommes

Évence Verdier

En 2006, le Musée de Genève, puis, en 2007, le musée des beaux arts de Lausanne offraient à Alfredo Jaar ses premières expositions monographiques dans un pays francophone, nous faisant regretter que le travail de cet artiste majeur, pourtant présente dans de nombreuses biennales (Venise, Sao Paulo, etc.) ou à Documenta (Cassel), n'ait pas plus de visibilité en France... Depuis une trentaine d'années Alfredo Jaar élabore une œuvre qui, paradoxalement, conçue dans un monde médiatisé, est un modèle de résistance à l'irréversibilité des images. Ce plasticien, également architecte et cinéaste, expose à la Kanji Taki Gallery (Nagoya et Tokyo, respectivement du 21 mai et du 29 mai au 2 juillet), au Hangar Biccoca et au Spazio Cibo-din (Milan, en automne). Une intervention urbaine, donnant lieu à une pièce permanente, est prévue le 7 septembre à Stavanger (Norvège), «capitale européenne de la Culture 2008».

■ Alfredo Jaar prend acte de l'économie cruelle de la photographie de reportage dans les médias et des divers pouvoirs écrits qui s'exercent sur le regard – qu'ils relèvent de la manipulation, de la censure ou même du conformisme (habitudes, clichés, etc.), signes de l'arnoiement des esprits en proie à l'incorporation des normes. Depuis presque trente ans, il construit une œuvre qui ne mise pas sur la capacité d'excitation des images.



«Introduction to a Distant World». 1995. Vidéo, couleur, avec son, 11 min. (toutes les photos, court. de l'artiste et galeries Loleng, New York ; Oliva Arana, Madrid ; Lia Rumma, Milan ; Thomas Schulte, Berlin). Color video (V) with sound

excitation propre à l'instiller, cependant il oublie que la mémoire des événements auxquels elles se réfèrent – et an appelle à travers sa production plastique à une expérience visuelle critique. Recourant à l'installation, la photographie, la vidéo, l'affichage urbain, etc., l'artiste se saisit de documents témoignant de la réalité du monde contemporain pour les révéler et les révéler au moyen de procédés divers : montage contrasté de mots et d'images, arrangements sérielles d'informations, agencements elliptiques de formes, modulation temporelle du matériel au filmique... C'est ainsi qu'à travers différentes mises en scène minimalistes, l'œuvre en surplus d'intelligibilité au contenu réaliste des témoignages fragmentaires retenus.

L'installation *Out of Balance* (1989) consiste l'une des diverses formes de visibilité données à la documentation collectée en 1985 à Serra Pelada, mine d'or à ciel ouvert située au nord-est de la forêt amazonienne du Brésil. Six portraits lumineux oblongs sont accrochés à diverses hauteurs sur les quatre murs d'une salle. À chacun de ces «fenêtres», placées plus ou moins à notre portée, apparaît l'effacement d'un visage maculé de boue d'un des *garimpeiros*, mineurs indépendants venus «libérer» chercher fortune. Chaque portrait, placé tantôt à droite tantôt à gauche du bordure de cadre, est comme décalé sur un fond vierge qui occupe les 6/6<sup>e</sup> de l'image. Le système lumineux recouvre la fragilité de sa position frontalière puisque il suffit d'éteindre pour qu'il disparaisse. Ainsi, «notre espace n'est réellement défini que par ces visages «nous regardent» et nous nous décalons, décalant l'idée illusoire d'une perception globale et absolue, pour faire l'expérience d'une vision rapprochée et intime : un trouvant face à face...

Par ce dispositif qui joue de l'opposition le/veilleur, du contraste centre/périphérie, d'un accrochage proche/lointain et d'un potentiel «switch on/off», Alfredo Jaar souligne tout à la fois la possibilité de voir / ne voir pas de soi. Il conteste l'idée-dictée d'une «société du spectacle» médiatique, nos yeux en situation d'overdose. À l'exemple de ces mineurs d'Amazonie, nombre d'images ne nous parviennent pas suffisamment ou sont carrément indisponibles. Il faut, comme l'artiste, aller les chercher soi-même, de toute façon, comme son œuvre nous y invite, se rendre compte que *«we are all viewers»* (Daniel Arsham).

Si ces portraits «créés» révèlent le potentiel signifiant de l'image, ils montrent aussi la limite de ce qu'on appelle improprement l'information : le document de reportage apparaît ici comme un fragment prélevé dans un contexte dont il ne dit rien. Le motif se défonce lui-même comme un détail dans beaucoup de blanc, un indice dans beaucoup de silence. En frustrant le spectateur de sa présence figurative habituelle, l'artiste dévoile sa résis-

## Not Seeing, Believing



«Mudira», 2005. Vidéo-Amérique, couleur, son, 33 min. Musiciens : E. de Almeida, P. de Oliveira, Os Kizos, Fred., T. Lendo, N. Ramos, Duda Muelque, R. Mingos, Strauss, M. Rui Silva, Night & Day, W. Bastos, L. Bez.

In 2008 the MAMCO in Geneva, and in 2007 the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne gave Alfredo Jaar his first solo shows in a French-speaking country, heightening our regrets that this important artist whose work has been shown in numerous biennials (Venice, São Paulo, etc.) and at Documenta (Kassel) could not have a higher profile in France. For thirty years now, Jaar has been developing a body of work that, in this overmediated world, offers exemplary resistance to the paradoxical invisibility of images. An architect and filmmaker as well as a visual artist, Jaar is exhibiting at Keiji Taki Gallery (Nagoya and Tokyo, starting, respectively May 24 and May 29 and ending July 3), and at the Hanger Dacoco and Spazio Oberdan in Milan (this fall). An urban intervention giving rise to a permanent piece is planned in September in Stavanger, Norway (in its "European Capital of Culture" program).

Alfredo Jaar's work is a response to the economy of photojournalism in the media today and the various cognitive powers that it exercises on the gaze – be it through manipulation, censorship or even simple conformism (heaps, clichés, etc.), signs of the slackening of souls as they incorporate its norms. For nearly thirty years now he has been constructing a body of work that refuses to exploit images' capacity to excite, knowing that excitement is more likely to make us forget than remember the events to which those images pertain. He has used his visual strategy to call for the possibility of a genuinely critical visual experience.

Using installation, photography, video, urban posters, etc., the artist "de-frames" or "re-frames" documents attesting contemporary realities by means of montage, the contrasting use of windows: images, serial displays of information, elliptical compositions and temporal mutations of filmic material. His minimalist mise-en-scènes limit gaze and intelligibility to the residual contents of their fragmentary, serial contents. The installation *Out of Balance* (1989) consists of several different frames given to the documentation gathered in 1985 at Serra Pelada, an open-strip gold mine in the northeast part of the

Amazonian forest, in Brazil. Six oblong light-boxes are hung at different heights on the four walls of a room. In each of these "windows," which are more or less accessible to us, we see the astonishing, mud-spattered face of one of these *garimpeiros*, the self-employed miners who go out there to seek their fortunes. Each portrait, placed either to the right or the left, towards the frame, seems to have been transferred onto the blank background that occupies five sixths of the image. The lighting system heightens the fragility of its frontier position, for a simple flick of the switch would cause it to disappear. And so we move around abandoning the illusory idea of a global, absolute perception to experience a close, intimate vision: a disturbing face-to-face confrontation.

With this device, which plays on the opposition between here and elsewhere, center and periphery and near and far, and on the potential for switching on/off, Jaar emphasizes the point that "seeing" is not self-sufficient. He contests the clichéd idea of a "society of the spectacle" in which our eyes overdose. Many images do not reach us fully like those of the miners in Amazonia, or are equally (if not) inaccessible. Like the artist, we have no choice but to go and look



«Out of Balance», 2005. Installation. Six caissons lamineux avec transparents de couleur. Dimensions totales variables. Chaque caisson : 40 x 244 x 23 cm. Six lightboxes with color transparencies

tanco à remplir l'image à ses bords pour donner au spectateur une illusion de saturation.

Alfredo Jaar s'attache aussi, à partir d'un même matériel documentaire, à démultiplier les modes d'énonciation et les niveaux de signification : *Introduction to a Distant World* (1983) est une vidéo qui présente deux types de documents contrastés. D'une part, une information visuelle complexe : citation de plans rapprochés sur les visages des mineurs, sur leurs gestes et leur pas cadencés, et de plans plus larges sur une fourmière de corps pressés nus qui, à la recherche de poches, travaillent durement et seurrent éreuant inlassablement la terre, passant celle-ci du tanné au remontant du fond de la mine en longues files indiennes, la nuque chargée d'un sac de boue. D'autre part, une information textuelle leconique : le film est entrecoupé à cinq reprises d'images muettes indiquant le cours de l'or dans différentes pièces boursières. Ce même hiatus s'inscrit avec *Ruines* (1985) dans un contexte urbain. Des affiches sont placardées dans les espaces publicitaires du métro new-yorkais, station Spring Street sur la ligne du métro à Wall Street... Elles montrent des photographies de mineurs et des données chiffrées du type «World gold Frankfurt: \$426 88 up \$8.08». Au cours de ce montage de mots et d'images, Alfredo Jaar inscrit une énigme que le badaud doit faire l'effort de décrypter. Chacune d'elles est aussi une manière d'interroger la nature des autres images dispersées dans la ville et d'appuyer

aux nouvelles médiations du monde des représentations alternatives.

### Voir moins, voir plus

En 1994, trois semaines après les massacres de la montagne tués par les Hutus, l'artiste se rend au Rwanda sur les lieux du génocide et dans les camps de réfugiés. Quelle forme donner aux milliers de photographies récoltées et aux témoignages de survivants ? Comment attester des traumatismes de ce crime de masse ? De 1994 à 2002, Alfredo Jaar produit vingt et une réponses en forme d'agencement poétiques. C'est au début de «Un de ceux-ci, intitulé *SAD / Sound Piece* (1992), que l'on trouve inscrit : «L'art est la lutte constante de l'homme pour se créer une réalité sans que celle dont il hérite» (Chinua Achebe). Cette citation, ou pourrait servir d'épigraphe à toute l'œuvre d'Alfredo Jaar, rappelle à nécessité de ce qu'Éric Rondapierre nomme le *weyane de spectateur*. *United Newsweek* (1994) se compose d'une suite chronologique de deux textes/image «disjonctifs». Chacune des couvertures de l'hebdomadaire *Newsweek*, depuis le 6 avril 1994 date du début des massacres au Rwanda, y est systématiquement associée à des informations sur le génocide conformément à la parution du magazine. Celles-ci, indiquant régulièrement le nombre croissant des morts en centaines de milliers, travaillent pour le moins avec les couvertures consacrées aux pilotes magiques

«Better than vitamins», au portrait de Jackie Kennedy, à l'America's cup, etc. L'artiste souligne ainsi l'insuffisance de la revue qui attend seize semaines pour, le 1<sup>er</sup> août 1994, tirer sur le Rwanda. On compte alors un million de personnes tuées. À ce marquage des médias s'ajoute l'indifférence de la communauté internationale, comme en témoigne *Waiting* (1998), photographie où l'on voit le bordure de onze, trente-cinq Rwandais qui, placés en ligne, nous font face. Le cadrage laisse apparaître que cette file d'attente se prolonge hors champ sur le sol africain. Dans le film *Epilogue* (1998), la figure d'une Rwandaise âgée (allégorie de la patience ?) prend les allures d'un signal optique discret. Dans l'image restée totalement blanche pendant une bonne minute, elle apparaît en motif central puis disparaît lentement durant trente secondes pour laisser place pendant encore plus d'une minute à la blancheur de l'écran vide. *Signs of Life* (2004) est une suite de cartes postales envoyées d'Ouganda, dont la recto montre divers aspects de la beauté du Rwanda et au dos desquelles Alfredo Jaar a écrit quelques mots sur le mot «Cécilia Namazuri, la still alive!». À la pratique de l'image à sensation, l'artiste oppose une stratégie de représentation marquée par la retenue et par une grande humanité.

À partir du milieu des années 1990, il en vient, comme on le voit dans le projet *Real Pictures* (1999-2002), à se passer de la monstration des images. «(...) Si les médias et leurs images nous ramènent à une illusion de présence qui nous laisse ensuite un sentiment d'absence, pourquoi ne pas essayer le contraire ? C'est-à-dire offrir une absence qui puisse peut-être évoquer une présence.» *Real Pictures* est une installation constituée de «boîtes noires» en lin. Dans chacune d'elles se trouve cachée l'image documentaire. Sur chaque boîte, un texte blanc bilingue décrit le photographique «inhumain». Des séries de boîtes, et empilées en «stair», la disposées en «allées», forment de multiples boîtes qui, dispersées dans une grande salle, ponctuent notre parcours entre chien et loup. Nous traversons une installation tenant à la fois du cimetière et de la salle d'archives ; nous lions un à un les textes, étiqués et datés, et prenons peu à peu conscience, dans une atmosphère propice au recueillement, de divers aspects du génocide rwandais. N'ayant accès qu'aux messages des boîtes placées en surface, nous sommes esblouis de vertige à l'idée de la quantité d'information visuelle et textuelle qui se trouve en toute dans ces blocs en forme de sculptures minimalistes. En frustrant le spectateur de l'image mordière, Alfredo Jaar lui offre la possibilité d'un espace symbolique de représentation et un appel à son imagination. En recourant à l'ellipse, en désamorçant le système de monstration d'images visuelles stéréotypées, et somme toute bismement les cherchables, l'œuvre les images de corps

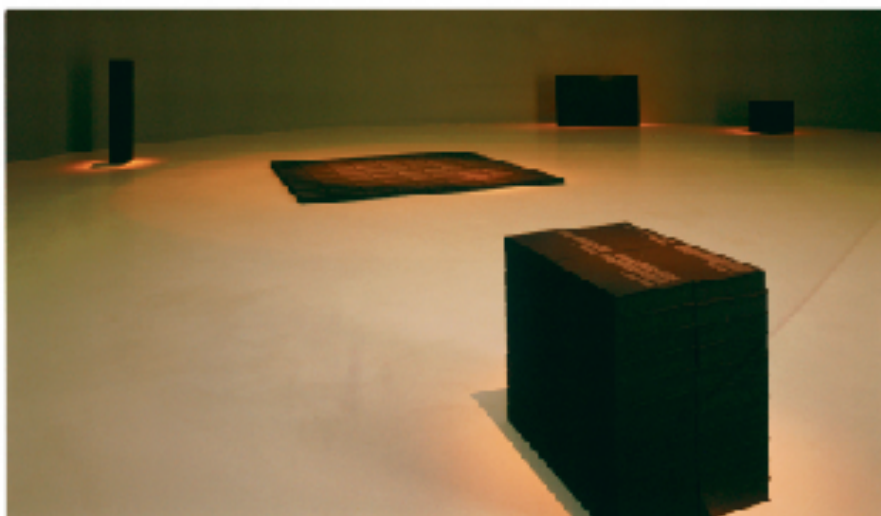
them ourselves, as his work encouraged us to do, only to realize that, to quote Daniel Broussé, "we can't see a thing."

If Jaar's "reframed" portraits reveal the signifying potential of images, they also show the limits of what is inappropriately called information: the reportage document can be seen here as a fragment plucked from a context about which it tells us nothing. The motif designates itself as a detail amidst a lot of whiteness or index in a great deal of silence. By depriving the beholder of his usual figurative pabulum, the artist is declaring his resistance: he will not provide a check-full image in order to give the beholder the illusion of satiety.

Alfredo Jaar aims to multiply modes of acceptance and levels of meaning. *Introduction to a Distant World* (1985) is a video that presents two contrasting types of documents: on the one hand, complex visual information, with an attention to close-ups on the faces of the miners, their actions and the rhythm of their steps, and wider shots on the ants' nest of almost naked bodies hunting for nuggets, slaving away, getting covered in mud, digging away tirelessly and sifting the earth or coming up from the mine in long Indian files, socks of mud peeling down on their backs; on the other hand, laconic textual information: the text is interarded with five silent inserts giving the price of gold on various commodity exchanges. In *Rushes* (1986) this contrast was deployed in an urban context. Posters put up on billboards at Spring Street subway station, on the line to Wall Street, showed photographs of miners and statistical data such as "World gold Frankfurt: \$426.08 up \$C.00." In the midst of this montage of words and images, Jaar inscribed an enigma that the viewer must make the effort to decipher. Each poster was also a way of questioning the nature of the other images spread

confrontations to the mediated news of the world. In 1987, three weeks after the massacre of the Tutsi minority by the Hutus, Jaar went out to Rwanda to see the sites of the genocide and visit the refugee camps. What form should he give to the thousands of photographs he took there and the words of the survivors? How could he bear witness to the trauma of this mass crime? From 1994 to 2000, Jaar came up with no less than twenty-one answers, each one a different poetic composition. At the beginning of one of these, *Sube + Sound Piece* (1995), we find the words: "Art is man's constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him." This quote from China, a Chinese couple, serve as an epigraph to all Jaar's works, and reminds us of the necessity of what Eric Rothemann has called the "viewer's revenge." *Unlabeled (Newsweek)* (1994) consists of a chronological sequence of "disjunctive" image-text pairings. In this work, all three covers of *Newsweek*, starting on April 6, 1994, the date the massacres started, are shown in association with information on the killings occurring at the same time as publication of each issue. The death toll, steadily mounting into the hundreds of thousands, contrasts brutally with the covers dedicated to magic oils ("Better than Vitamins"), Jackie Kennedy, the America's Cup, etc. The art thus points up the slowness of the news magazine's response: it did not dedicate a front page to Rwanda until August 1, 1994. By then, a million men, women and children had been killed. To this failure on the part of the media can be added the indifference of the international community, as attested by *Waiting* (1995). In this photograph we see thirty-five Rwandans lined up along the road, facing us. The frame informs us that this long line continues well beyond it, on African soil. In the film *Épilogue* (1998), an old Rwandan woman (an allegory of

patience?) acquires a role as a decreed visual sign. In the image, which remains totally white for a good minute, she appears as the central motif and then takes about thirty seconds to slowly disappear and be replaced for another minute by the white of the empty screen. *Signs of Life* (1994) is a succession of postcards sent from Uganda, each one featuring some beauty spot in Rwanda. Jaar's message on the back is limited to a few words, such as "Carlos Namazuru is alive." Instead of sensationalist images, Jaar chooses a strategy of representation based on restraint and a strong sense of humanity. Starting in the mid-1990s, the artist started to go without the presentation of stories. "If the media send their images filled with an illusion of presence only to leave us with a feeling of absence, then why not try the contrary? That is to say, offer an absence that may announce a presence." This was the idea in his *Red Pictures* (in jet), involving an installation of "black boxes" in Lima. In each one, Jaar hid a documentary image, which was described in a white, all-caps red text on the outside of the box. He then assembled these outside boxes in steel-like alaba or floors, creating an installation that he presented in a twilight room. Walking through it is like being in a cemetery or archive. One by one we read the texts, which give locations and dates, and gradually grow in awareness of the various aspects of the Rwandan genocide. The atmosphere is conducive to meditation. Because all we can see are the messages on the outside of these boxes reminding minimalist sculptures, the mind reels at the thought of all the visual and textual information contained within. By depriving the viewer of images of death, Jaar instead opens up a symbolic space of representation and sets the imagination working. By using all-glass, by joining the system for showing violent, stereotyped and easily interchangeable images, he faces those images of nameless bodies out to



«Red Pictures», 1995-2007. Installation. Boîtes d'archives en jet, texte sériographié, photographies. Dimensions totales variables. À droite : détail (Coll. Musée national des beaux-arts, Luxembourg). L'œuvre utilise l'absence, silhouettes et text, photographes. Total dimensions variables





«Tuahaa», 1996. Intervention urbaine, impressions numériques couleur. Dista I : l'un des nombreux panneaux d'affichage, station de métro de Spring Street, New York. One of Jaar's many posters at Spring Street subway station. Digital print

by mediated from our voyeuristic impulses and restores their dignity. By showing their effort to inform and the despair of being unable to say, these documents "reframed" by Jaar's more evocative become what he calls "Real Pictures." The admission of failure gives them the power to "communicate the human" (Judith Butler). Here the real has been "fictitious so that it can be thought" (Jacques Rancière), and it is out of "respect for the capacity of the documentary image to promote and conserve historic memory" that Jaar involves them in this composition. In order not to be "fabricated," the photographs are hidden, so that we must meditate on human atrocity on the basis of their description only.

### Resisting cliché

And so, with Jaar, the visible designates the invisible and absence reveals presence. And intelligence partakes of the baseness of the formal arrangement. His latest installation, *The Sound of Silence* (2006) takes the form of a screaming room that we apprehend through the "back," lined with dazzling neon. It brings to mind an earlier installation, *Lament of Images* (first version) shown at Documenta 11, Kassel, in 2002, in which three texts followed by the experience of the blinding light coming from a big blank screen spoke of a metaphorical blindness, of the "impossibility of seeing reality outside the media," of the non-availability of images, of their confiscation and retention by public or private power (1). In *The Sound of Silence*, we move round the structure and before entering it, walk for the first time behind a wall, right away into the veil-

ed green neon. We then see a silent video lasting eight minutes. White words evoking the complexity and contradictions of human nature pass slowly over the black screen. This is the story of Kevin Carter, a South African photojournalist who was arrested many times for protesting against apartheid. Carter was also the author of a shocking image taken in March 1993 in Sudan. This image appears fleetingly on the screen just as "koko" go off on the other side of the screen, giving the spectator/visitor the impression that he too is the target of a reporter's lens. What the image shows is an emaciated young girl on all fours, being stalked by a vulture. The story tells us that in order to get the most dramatic image, Carter waited twenty minutes for the vulture to spread its wings (which it didn't) and then broke down and sobbed. He committed suicide in July 1994, three months after winning the Pulitzer Prize for that same image. We also learn that the image rights are managed by Corbis, the huge photographic agency owned by Bill Gates. Jaar even provides the image's reference number. Because, as he says, "the media have become a business like any other," we must feel our own responsibility as consumers. The work points to the continuing urge to feast on images, like cartons, whether in Africa or elsewhere.

Kevin Carter wrote that "life's suffering outweighs its joys." In contrast, Jaar's works tirelessly send out visual signals hinting at the hope of a "better world." In the same vein as the postcards of *Signs of Life*, mentioned above, the album *Mudans* (2005) is a poetic essay about Angola, a succession of cinematic re-chambering of different points of view, without the illusion of a global,

documentary perspective. The music, an evocation of a popular local chant called "Muxima" (meaning heart), oscillates between a melancholy, radio-like sound and livelier rhythms. It accompanies images showing the country's natural (and scenic) and mineral wealth (oil), the traces of its history (Portuguese colonization, ethnic civil war) and its current travail (AIDS, anti-personnel mines). To break with the prevailing gloom of reports on Africa is to break free of defeatism and thereby help create other expectations. In *Hope* (2006), a short, playful animation film made for the Nelson Mandela Foundation, the black and white portrait of Mandela gradually grows bigger, revealing the white shape of Africa on his left cheek. White like an empty bag, rich in possibility, it then fills with a patchwork of colors, each representing a state, which in turn are transformed into butterflies that flutter away and return carrying 49864, Mandela's ID number as a prisoner and the name of his foundation, which then turns into the word "HOPE."

Alfredo Jaar puts the emphasis on our shared responsibility, as artist and spectators together, in the economy of "clients" and in the management of reportage. By preferring distance to fusion, multiplicity to oneness, the part to the whole, the individual to the crowd and the light of hope to the darkness of defeatism, his works reveal the political content of images and the decisive role they can play in representing and shaping the emerging reality of the world. ■

Translation, C. Perwardier

(1) Santiago Antezano de Ulloa: "Line a une vision de l'indivisible," in art press "Censures" issue, June 2003.

CRISTINA SAMALIC

**NUEVO LIBRO** | "La política de las imágenes"

**A**lfredo Jaar es uno de esos peculiares artistas chilenos que han hecho de la investigación del espacio visual su rasgo característico. Y ahora un libro editado en nuestro país intenta poder explicar la relevancia de sus creaciones.

Esta empresa, debe reconocerse el hecho de haberse hecho por la Editorial Metatexto Pensados, cuyas publicaciones forman parte de un proyecto consistente por mantenerse actualizados en la difusión de textos que generen un espacio de diálogo y reflexión sobre el arte actual.

En este contexto específico, se agradece también la rapidez para haber editado una publicación que originalmente fue pensada como un catálogo bilingüe ilustrado, para la muestra que Alfredo Jaar realizó en el Museo de Bellas Artes de Lausana, Suiza, a mediados de 2007. El título del texto es "La política de las imágenes", con la diferencia de que el catálogo original se refiere a los trabajos de la chilena Alicia Schreiner y especialistas en la obra de Jaar como Giorgio Di Stefano y Jacques Rancière y Graciela Piniello. Para esta edición incluye el aporte de Adriana Valdés, una pensadora crítica de arte, que no sólo traduce el ensayo de G. Pollock del inglés, sino que a su vez aporta un iluminado prefacio contextualizando los textos chilenos en particular y de larga tradición en general. Camilo Valdés, se trata de un material realizado para permitir un espacio de reflexión del "tema de la imagen en las artes y en la

# ALFREDO JAAR: sobre el ordenamiento de lo visible

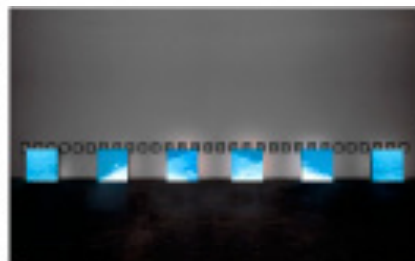
Tomando como punto de partida las obras de Jaar exhibidas en Suiza el año pasado, los textos reunidos en este valioso libro sobre el artista visual también dan cuenta del estado actual de la reflexión estética.



**ALFREDO JAAR, LA POLÍTICA DE LAS IMÁGENES**

Edición de Adriana Valdés, Metatexto Pensados, Santiago, 2008. 120 páginas. \$20.000.

cultura visual". Por su parte, si bien los ensayos que contiene tienen como punto de partida las obras de Jaar exhibidas en Suiza, al mismo tiempo dan cuenta del estado actual de la reflexión estética sobre tópicos prominentes. Por mencionar algunos, las múltiples convergencias y divergencias entre arte y política, el papel que le cabe jugar al pensamiento crítico frente al bombardeo de imágenes a que nos somete nuestra conciencia y, por fin, el last,



**"WHITTLED MATTER"**— La situación de los refugiados sirios en Hong Kong inspiró esta serie.

del cómo debemos plantearnos frente a la extendida ilusión de que somos capaces de controlar, paratizando al poeta Juan Luis Martínez, el desfile de presencias invisibles que habitan en silencio nuestra mente. En ese sentido, el texto plantea una exploración de la tensión dialéctica entre el silencio trascendente por las imágenes presentes en las meditaciones comunicativas y su incorporación en el depósito de nuestro pensamiento individual.



**INSTALACIÓN**— "The sound of silence", del artista chileno Alfredo Jaar.

De ahí que las preguntas que Graciela Piniello Valdés hacen una resonancia perturbadora, jactan la sobriedad de imágenes que vemos cuando la opción de plantearse críticamente ante ellas, ¿hay alguna posibilidad de tener nuestra conciencia de menos conscientes de imágenes seleccionadas en forma "para la paz silenciosa"? La gran pregunta que atraviesa la obra de Jaar, ¿cómo podría representarse aquello que nos po-

demos —o nos impiden— ver? Como sugiere, tales interrogantes serían incómodos, pero conforman un buen pretexto para explorar el rango de lecturas posibles que contiene el trabajo de Alfredo Jaar, que ha hecho de la pregunta sobre las implicancias ocultas sobre el fondo de nuestras conciencias un leit motiv digno de reflexiones. O mejor dicho, de un exploración de las conciencia-

das surgidas de ese mirar sin "ver" al que cualquier persona de la calle reconocer como el tema polifónico que identifica su trabajo artístico. Mi punto es que esta implicación y puesta en escena de las consecuencias de la mirada a través de los medios de comunicación es una buena perspectiva para pensar sobre los múltiples acontecimientos que se formalizan en el arte. Por otra parte, como bien consigna Adriana Valdés, parece conveniente la extensión del ensayo sobre el arte visual en nuestro país un poco más allá de las fronteras del pensamiento continental en francés o alemán, aunque me permitiría sugerir, por citar un buen ejemplo, la interesante bibliografía relativa a la comprensión de aspectos visuales (o audiovisuales) en la filosofía anglosajona. Otros elementos dignos de mencionar sobre el conjunto de textos es el ensayo de N. Schreiner, que ofrece una buena descripción jurística de la soberanía del trabajo de Jaar como indagación y réplica de las estrategias que regulan el flujo de información en los medios, como autónoma el ensayo de J. Rancière dedicado a analizar el espacio de imágenes como una relevancia del cuerpo social a nivel filosófico y político.

La mención al pensamiento en lengua inglesa obedece a que la contribución de G. Pollock era mi juicio muy relevante, no sólo por representar un precedente dialéctico expresivo (cosa que siempre se agradecerá, sino en cuanto river ejemplo de lo bien que combinan el sentido común y la memoria histórica. A finales de cuentas, éste es un texto que contribuye a discutir sobre el efecto de las imágenes que vemos y sus incidencias en nuestra conciencia. Pero esto sería seguramente volver al punto de partida.

CULTURA

Alfredo Jaar. "Out of balance". Sotto da sinistra: "Embrace"; "Emergencia"

# C'è posta per Milano

Migliaia di cartoline. Con domande sulla cultura firmate da Bertolucci. La nuova provocazione di Alfredo Jaar, geniale "pessimista attivo"

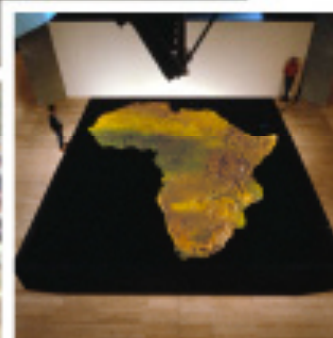
DI ALESSANDRA MAMMI

**P**reparatevi a rispondere, cittadini di Milano, perché sarete subissati di domande. Le vedrete ovunque. Dentro e fuori gli autobus, nelle stazioni del metro, sui cartelloni per strada, e in forma di cartolina in ogni baretto, edicola e supermercato. Vi verranno posti dei seri quesiti. Tipo: cos'è la cultura? L'intellettuale è inutile? La politica ha bisogno della cultura? La religione è cultura? Abbiamo dimenticato la cultura? Come trovare Gramsci a Milano? Come trovare Pasolini a Milano? Attenzione, questo non è un sondaggio, ma un progetto artistico. Di quelli che hanno una firma internazionalmente ben nota, la firma di uno dei pochi artisti che si pone tali domande, che ha dedicato anni di vita e lavoro a dare immagine al genocidio in Ruanda e che crede ancora (come dice lui citando Godard) che non bisogna scegliere fra etica ed estetica perché alla fine del cammino, se il cammino è corretto l'una incontra inevitabilmente l'altra. Così arrivando a Milano per installare la sua prima grande antologica italiana (dal 3 ottobre), ad Alfredo Jaar non bastavano i due ampi spazi che la città gli ha offerto: lo Spazio Oberdan e l'Hangar Bicocca. Lui come sempre ha bisogno di capire: «Perché davvero non capisco come questo paese possa ancora una volta aver scelto come premier un uomo come Berlusconi. Non capisco questi venti di fascismo che arriva-

no dalle notizie dei vostri giornali. E non capisco come nello stesso tempo l'Italia sia uno dei pochi posti dove sulla prima pagina di un quotidiano si può leggere un testo meraviglioso come quello di Bernardo Bertolucci sulla necessità della cultura».

Dal testo di Bertolucci arrivano le domande, dalla vita di Jaar l'impegno. Architetto, filmmaker, artista, nato in Cile e approdato da tempo a New York, Jaar nel suo vagare ha conosciuto il bene e il male del mondo. Era a Santiago nei primi anni della dittatura di Pinochet, fu testimone oculare del genocidio in Ruanda, ha dedicato all'Angola un film di struggente lirismo, "Muxima", ha realizzato oltre cinquanta interventi pubblici in ogni continente, ha visto pubblicare ben 36 monografie sul suo lavoro. «Un pessimista attivo», lo ha definito Gianni Vattimo. Un ostinato umanista, si potrebbe dire guardando il suo lavoro. Jaar non si concentra mai sulle vittime, ma sempre sui sopravvissuti: «Chi sopravvive ha la missione di cambiare le cose e io mi rivolgo a loro». «It is difficult» come il titolo della sua mostra a Milano, ma non impossibile. «It is difficult» come la poesia di William Carlos Williams che apre il suo sito.

Cliccando sul poema si entra nel mondo di Jaar: un omino che si tuffa nell'universo rende omaggio al volo di Yves Klein, un te-



sto di Cioran illustra quegli strani lavori che cercano di portare un po' di riflessione e di civiltà nel mondo. Come liberare migliaia palloncini

bianchi sul confine fra Stati Uniti e Messico, uno per ogni vittima del desiderio di passare la frontiera. Come costruire casupole ("Culture box") per osservare opere d'arte e natura in una regione del Giappone famosa per i panorami ma priva di musei contemporanei. O l'idea di collegare, a Montreal, un ospizio per homeless con la cupola del Marché Bonsecours in modo che ogni volta che un uomo chiede asilo la cupola si illumini. «Io lavoro studiando le comunità. La loro storia, la loro organizzazione, la loro cultura, i loro giornali. Lavoro sullo spazio, politico, sociale e fisico. Quello che mi interessa sono gli uomini». In questo caso noi, chiamati a rispondere su quel che resta della nostra idea di cultura ai tempi di Berlusconi. Poi Jaar darà forma ai tempi. Ma urge pensare alle risposte e compilare le cartoline. Poi basta imbucarle: sono preaffrancate. ■







**Eventi**

Le provocazioni del maestro cileno in due mostre e in una serie di poster affissi da oggi sui muri e nella metro

# Aprite gli occhi

Jaar, artista di lotta contro le ingiustizie

**HANGAR BICOCCA**  
"Un logo per l'America", un video di nuovi in cui Jaar ricorda come America non vuol dire solo Stati Uniti



**SPAZIO OBERTAN**  
L'immagine del film "Munira" di Jaar, presentato alla Biennale di Venezia, dedicato all'Angola.



**IL TRAFFICO DEI RIFIUTI**  
L'installazione "Geografia e Guerra" sugli affetti dal traffico di rifiuti tossici dall'Italia alla Nigeria



**I media e la guerra**

Dal Vietnam in poi stampa e tv tacciono, oggi è perfino vietato fotografare le bare dei soldati morti in Iraq



**Viaggio in Ruanda**  
Ero rimasto scioccato dall'indifferenza per il genocidio, per questo ho voluto andare a vedere di persona

**BARBARA CASAVOLICA**

C'è un'etica oltre all'etica oggi, questa domanda, insieme a quindici altri: «La cultura è necessaria? La religione è cultura? Invece le strade e il metro di Milano, campeggiando sui poster, cartelloni, corridoi. È il progetto *Questioni* (Questioni con cui Alfredo Jaar, con il sostegno della Provincia) ha deciso di coinvolgere la città, provocare e sfidare un dialogo etologico che gli dice: ma? Il Hangar Bicozza e lo Spazio Obertan (in un'area di 100 metri quadrati).

In mostra, foto, video, film, sculture e installazioni in tre canali: Bicozza e Obertan e i Café Scavelli di un artista scandinavo, che si è guadagnato un podio internazionale battendo i nomi politici. Il risultato è un'opera che dopo averci reso vigili, affiora con la famiglia, poco prima del golpe Pinochet (11 settembre '73), ha stritolato cinetico e si è laureato in archeologia a Santiago. Il suo primo esposto è stato a New York e ha lavorato a New York.

Al Hangar, all'ombra delle Torri di Klief - finalmente aperte al pubblico - è esposta una serie di grandi installazioni legate al tema del bar barico. Perché non c'è troppa luce abbagliante, troppo luminosità, letture di violenza, mistero, supponiamo: non sono ciechi, insensibili - di fronte al dolore degli altri - come racconta Susan Sontag. La mostra si apre col primo progetto pubblico di Jaar: un'animazione apparsa nel '87 sui tabelloni di Times Square, che invitava i passanti a ricordare che l'America non è il

## LA CULTURA FA VOLARE L'ITALIA



**IN CITTA'**  
Uno dei poster di Jaar che appaiono in questi giorni sui muri milanesi: alle domande si può rispondere sul sito dell'artista

mondo di USA, stelle e strisce, ma un intero continente. L'abbacchiere *Sound of Silence* racconta la storia di Kevin Carter, il fotoreporter e giurista ungherese sudaficano premiato nel '83 col Pulitzer per l'immagine simbolo di una bimba sudanese demagica socchiusa da un avvoltoio, ma socchiusa dopo un anno, squartato dal silenzio per non aver assistito. *Geografia e Guerra* racconta il traffico di rifiuti tossici dall'Italia alla Nigeria, nei primi anni Novanta. In *Law of the Image*, tre soci sulla manipolazione delle immagini vengono seguiti da un bambino di un villaggio rurale, come se per saturazione d'informazione il suo sguardo al mondo non della comunicazione. «È la lezione del Vietnam, che ha

evitato il potere della stampa», dice Jaar. «Durante la prima Guerra del Golfo, ci impongono solo fascisti d'arrivare sulla CNN: che si videro prendere fotografare le bare dei caduti, per non parlare dei civili uccisi in Iraq».

Al Obertan si concentrano alcuni lavori dedicati all'Africa. Ci sono gli spogli delle coperte di Tano e Lilo, che associano il Contintente Nero solo a carastria o animali selvaggi ed esotici, e di *Silence*, che lascia trascorrere 17 settimane prima di dare spazio al Ruanda, nell'aprile '94. Perché l'Africa? Perché il viaggio, approssima la scena di sfollamenti col ruandese, l'irriducibile. Ma anche per ragioni autobiografiche. Sono cresciuto a Martinica, a scuola ero l'unico bianco e coperti non in una classe di 35 bambini neri. Tra le opere del ciclo *The Ruanda Project*, la più esplicita è *Gli occhi di Gustav Emmerich*: un fotografo lussemburghese, che riproduceva lo sguardo di una donna che ha visto uccidere i colpi di fucile il marito e due figli. Il pubblico è invitato a osservarlo con un binocolo, accarezzando le distanze.

«Sono rimasto scioccato dall'indifferenza del mondo verso il genocidio ruandese. Ho deciso di andare a vedere di persona, ed è stata l'esperienza più terribile della mia vita. Ho scattato più di 3000 foto». Al ritorno ho capito che non avrei mai potuto tornare. È in quel momento che il mio lavoro ha cominciato a diventare.

Spazio Obertan e Hangar Bicozza (dal 3 ottobre, info Obertan 02.77406300, info Bicozza 02.863581764)

**L'ALBUM**  
Sul nostro sito web rilanciamo quotidianamente immagini delle opere e delle installazioni di Alfredo Jaar e lo domande di "Questioni Questioni"





## **Cruelty of the Image Alfredo Jaar: The Politics of the Image, Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland**

**Olivier Chow**

The exhibition at the Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne, Switzerland, is a unique opportunity to explore and encounter some of Alfredo Jaar's earlier as well as more recent inquiries into the politics of the image. The importance and relevance of Alfredo Jaar's work is indexed in the catalogue of the exhibition which features essays by Georges Didi-Huberman, Jacques Rancière and Griselda Pollock. Alfredo Jaar has extensively investigated the power-relations which affect, govern and structure images, in particular their perception and reception by the viewer/witness/consumer in the age of globalization. The art of Alfredo Jaar exposes and frames the mechanics of power of the image thus performing a critique of the nature of seeing by revealing and exposing the underlying operations of montage and editing which sustain our perception of the world and its global events, that is the reality presented by the media and the world of so-called 'information'. 'Information' is as much about information as it is about disinformation because images are selected, edited, presented and promoted while others are ignored or denied on a basis which ultimately obeys the master narrative of a political agenda.

This disjunction between reality and information is exposed in Jaar's 1994 *Untitled (Newsweek)* which displays all the *Newsweek* covers that appeared during the unfolding of the Rwandan genocide. Every cover is accompanied by the historical facts pertaining to the genocide and its monstrous body count which every week adds up another hundred thousand additional unreported and anonymous victims. The reality of genocide is absent from the *Newsweek* covers which focus instead on in comparison trivial Americana such as the deaths of Kurt Cobain, Jackie Kennedy, the trial of OJ Simpson and the high-tech 'gender gap'. It is only in August 1994 that the first *Newsweek* cover dedicated to the Rwandan

genocide appears, when the genocide has literally been consummated in  
abject indifference.



*The Sound of Silence*, 2006  
© Alfredo Jaar  
Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York

In the age of global information, the viewer is a consumer of images and Jaar challenges us as viewers/consumers by confronting us and even, in the case of *The Sound of Silence* (2006), by trapping us into the political fabric of the image. *The Sound of Silence* (2006), the most recent and most powerful work displayed in the Lausanne exhibition *The Sound of Silence* contextualizes the infamous Pulitzer-Prize winning Kevin Carter photograph first published in the *New York Times* in 1993 of a child starving on its way to a feeding centre in the Sudan under the hungry gaze of a vulture. *The Sound of Silence* sets up the space of the image in a large cube. One of the external sides of the cubic structure is illuminated by a series of blinding white neon lights which violently contrast with the dark interior of the cube. It takes eight minutes in the small *camera obscura* to understand and experience the multiple and interwoven tragedies of the Kevin Carter photograph. The story of Kevin Carter unfolds in writing and silence on the screen. The biographical narrative of the South-African freelance photographer is a narrative of failure, soul-searching and trauma which enables the viewer to identify and empathize

with Carter who sadly committed suicide in 1994, aged 33. Kevin Carter's narrative culminates in the traumatic encounter with the starving little girl in the Sudanese bush, encounter captured in the photograph. The cruel subtext lies in the fact that Carter waited twenty minutes, watching the little girl crawl in desperation in the hope that the vulture would spread its wings - which it does not - in order to get a better photograph. The text is only interrupted once by four violent and blinding flashes turned against the viewer. The violent breach of the scopic field reverses the position of the voyeur/viewer, now violated by the flash and victimized like the Sudanese child. Carter's picture then appears furtively on the screen and the narrative ends with the destiny of the image and suicide of the photographer. The image has only appeared for a fraction of a second – the actual time it took for the image to be recorded – but the frame of its cruel history will haunt the viewer throughout the rest of the visit.

The image in *Jaar* is thus a site of trauma, especially when it comes to his explorations of Africa. Some of Jaar's most powerful and haunted works are those that have dealt with the Rwandan genocide. In 1994, a few weeks after the end of the genocide, Jaar leaves for Rwanda where he takes some 3000 pictures. *Real Pictures* (1995) is an installation where Jaar's Rwandan pictures are not visible but buried in black boxes. Every box bears the factual description and narrative of the photograph and the visitor is overloaded with the narratives of genocide which contrast with the minimalist aesthetic arrangement of the scene. The image, buried in its box/tomb, is transformed into a 'document' where the image is suppressed and the narrative exposed, like in *Sound of Silence*. One of the narratives reads as follows:

Gutele Ementa, 30 years old, is standing in front of the church. Dressed in modest, worn clothing, her hair is hidden in faded pink cotton kerchief. She was attending mass in the church when the massacre began. Killed with machetes, in front of her eyes, were her husband Tito Kahinamura (40) and her two sons Muhoza (10) and Matingan (7). Somehow, she managed to escape with her daughter Marie-Louise Unamaramunga (12), and hid in a swamp for 3 weeks, only coming out at night for food. When she speaks about her lost family, she gestures to corpses on the ground, rotting in the African sun.

The boxes are piled onto each other, monumental mass graves of various sizes and heights but also archive, and the darkened room of the Palais de Rumine is transformed into a mausoleum and non place of memory where Jaar's Rwandan experience rests. *Real Pictures* is an obsessive monument dedicated to a traumatic encounter between an artist/witness and the people of Rwanda, present and dead. *Real Pictures* is a site of mourning, not only of the victims of the Rwandan genocide captured in the images, directly or indirectly, but also the artist's 'own private Rwanda'. Alfredo Jaar resurrects, objectifies and engages with the archive of his traumatic memories. In *Real Pictures*, the traumatic memory is both acknowledged and mourned, quietly resting within the non place of the Rwandan archive.

The most haunting of his works on Rwanda is probably *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* (1996). In *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita*, the viewer is not confronted directly with the atrocities of the genocide but is faced with the eyes of Gutete Emerita, the gaze of a survivor whose narrative has been mentioned above. The traumatic nature of this missed encounter is indexed by the hundreds of senalized slides of her eyes, heaped up on a white neon screen. The material of the Real – this gaze of which the event is absent – like the buried images of *Real Pictures* is here again sculpted into a mass grave or funerary heap in a gesture which both revives and buries the post-traumatic gaze of Gutete Emerita. The powerful and haunting nature of *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* lies in the gaze of this missed encounter not only between the photographer and its subject but between the West and Rwanda. What Alfredo Jaar manages to conjure within the space of the museum is the very experience of our failed engagement not only with certain images but with the very political processes that make those realities possible. We have failed Rwanda and we are failing Africa, most notably Darfur. Global events are not foreign, nor exterior to us; on the contrary, as Jaar has relentlessly demonstrated, we are very much part of their fabric.

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ART **A Critical Week in Chile** *by David Levi Strauss*



From left: Carlos Díaz, María Elena Barra, Pablo Elberfeld, Felipe Díaz, Soledad Ramírez, María Elena Barra, and Soledad Barra.

At the end of October, Alfredo Jaar invited a number of artists and writers from all over the world to join him in Santiago de Chile for a *Semana Crítica* (Week of Criticism or Discussion). The guest list included: Cildo Meireles fresh from his triumph at São Paulo, Shirin Neshat on her way to Morocco to work on her first feature film, Valje Fespert from Vienna, the poet and critic Vicente Aleixandre from Barcelona, artist and curator David Bailey from London, and architect Richard Scahill, geographer/anthropologist David Harvey (author, most recently, of *The New Imperialism* and *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*), photographer Susan Meiselas (editor of *Chile from Within*, a 1990 anthology of images by Chilean photographers working against the dictatorship), and me, all from New York.

Note: All events at *Alcornoque*, and we certainly have an excellent track, but most of us didn't know each other personally very well, and I felt I'd come for reasons of my personal interest in the situation in Chile, not to see a group. It was a nice event to attend, but I was not interested in all of these presentations. In simultaneous translation, both and more, through various languages, I was able to see the most interesting ones. Alfredo Jaar said he assembled the group in Chile as a kind of lightning rod to attract a good deal of energy, attention, and money to the situation in Chile, which he felt was being ignored. He said he could not get it covered outside on closed-circuit TV. The proceedings were also broadcast on a speaking and by others on the radio, and by satellite in Chile.

The *Semana Crítica* took place in a building with the opening of the 19th century, and Alfredo Jaar says the building in Chile was built 20 years ago, began and ended with a scandal for corruption while named *Palacio Valdivia*. Soledad Barra was the first person to see the building, and she was standing in Chile, and Jaar said to the artist who encouraged her to come, said from New York he said, she had a certain paper project for her, she had to be present, and he was coming. Soledad Barra said by assembling a group of five young artists and writers— all graduates of her art school program— and organizers at the University of Chile, to respond to different work in various ways for the exhibition, and by the group of artists who organized the events of the *Semana Crítica*.



Alfredo Jaar speaking at the event.

In my meeting with some of them over the past 24 hours, Alfredo Jaar said he had a lot of ideas for a new project, well defined, and he says he had a lot of ideas and ways to write about art. Now I've used the group of five artists and writers to help me "bring artists of Chile" to respond to what happened in Chile in October. To me, closely as you read, you may be hearing some of the future work of the group of Chileans.

## The Outsiders: A Jarring Note?

by *Adriana Valdés*

**A**lfredo Jaar has been an outsider in the Chilean art world since leaving for New York in 1981. The thought of coming back after such an extended time period has its perils; as another artist said, the outsiders the initial welcome can turn rapidly into a minefield. Established artists and critics may even feel invaded—Jaar's work and his success abroad owe nothing to them, and might well work against their own interests. For many, though Jaar's comeback was long overdue, and his reception at least to a nationwide change in mood that has been percolating since his visit to Santiago in 2004, when crowds of young people arrived to see him speak about his work, and left in a wave of emotion. This extraordinary event gave Jaar much food for thought, and was probably the final push he needed. To honor the artist's homecoming, *JAAF SCL 2006*, a retrospective that opened in October, is currently being presented in three different venues around the city.

The renewed appreciation of Jaar's life and work is reflected in *JAAF SCL 2006*, our recently compiled book accompanying the exhibition, which includes work from 1979-2005. In order to properly approach the subject, we had to identify other outsiders: young writers, still free, willing and able to respond to a radically new challenge. We hope this process will signal a generational shift, and a change in the way art is written about. We feel a need for art criticism and documentation to be more open and accessible: it has to be translatable, not only in terms of language but also in terms of attracting a non-specialized public and thus being able to considerably broaden the social impact of visual art. Jaar's work certainly strives to be in the public domain. He offered a poignant piece of advice in one of our extended conversations with him: "Don't just think like a artist, think like a human being."

As a friend of his since 1981, and the author of many texts about him, it was my job to make a connection between Jaar and the other writers in the book, an eclectic and extraordinary group of people with whom I was very honored to work. I have had the opportunity to witness their abilities first hand and see them in action in the postgraduate art program at the University of Chile, where I am a professor. I looked to them not only for their academic skills but for other, subtler qualities, which I believe are apparent in the book. It was a long, shared process of thought, in which we all learned from each other—a process we shared also with Jaar when it was in its last stages. Because the "discussion week" that followed the October opening of *JAAF SCL 2006* had a great impact on all the contributors, that is what they have chosen to write about. ■

## A Public Intervention?

by *Pablo Chiurruatto*

**M**aybe what we witnessed in October was a public intervention by Alfredo Jaar, 25 years after he set off for New York. The core of *The Five Tails* (five stoves flames engulfing a full-sized paper museum in a city that lives by manufacturing paper, but has no artistic institution [Sloughall Konsthall, Sweden, 2000]. Jaar gave the community a museum, then burnt it down exactly 20 years later. One of the other artists on a plan to build a permanent facility, Jaar's project showed them a need they were unaware they had: he gave and then he took away again.

My first question during *JAAF SCL 2006* was what Jaar's project for Chile would be? Although none of the artists exhibited were created for this exhibition, the discussion week provided an answer. The week itself was embedded in a long list of public interventions through which Jaar holds up contexts to question them, underscores differences, and transforms "reality." To the layman, it was an international seminar, but here in Chile, there was more at stake than the presentation of some papers.

The history of our continent is one of kapokedness in the movement of cultural and political ideas, with the predominant direction of travel, in this case, other respects, being from north to south. The revolutions, movements, and fashions that reach our shores are subject to the same economic variables that govern the market place. Countries that have enjoyed periods of economic affluence have more direct and lasting influences, and are identified as "modern" cultural systems. Chile has not had the experience of Brazil, Argentina, or Venezuela in its cultural relationship with Europe and North America. It is sufficient to point out that those countries are on the Atlantic seaboard, and the workings of globalization are plain to see. Now that Chile's economy has made the country visible to these northern influences, Jaar has decided, as he did with the Sloughall Konsthall, to give and then take away, this time by inviting a group of internationally renowned artists, photographers, architects, curators, and writers to share their thinking with us.

Santiago has no port, no coastline or shores along which these journeys can be made. Yet Jaar offered something that is now a necessity, a week of mutual recognition. As in a port, we saw and were seen, said our greetings and farewells. Then he cut off the flow, leaving ashes to mark the absence. We were not unaware of our situation, and it is sad to have to acknowledge it. Perhaps this was the second part of the "Swedish Happiness" Jaar carried out from 1979 to 1981, before leaving Chile. We were happy for a few days, and now we have been left with this feeling of responsibility. Jaar did not just highlight what was lacking—he helped us imagine it. ■



MARTELA, 2005



Artwork by artist: Flowers, Mexico.

## Flags in Open Country

by *Sandra Accatino*

The calle Alameda is a pedestrian street in Santiago that is always crowded with people. Located in the heart of the city, just yards from the Plaza de Armas, the government palace, the law courts, the central administration of the University of Chile, and the stock exchange, it swarms incessantly with legal and illegal traders, evangelical preachers, performers, strikers, beggars, and office workers. On one street corner stands a screen used to advertise various products, such as televisions, cell phones, and automobiles. On exceptional occasions a crucial soccer or tennis match is shown instead and people crowd around.

But over the last few days, the screen has been showing a work by Alfredo Jaar. It is one of his oldest, but also one of his most recent: *Linea Chile* (1981). *Before Departure*, a series of photos apocryphally from 1981 showing a long line of Chilean flags running across open country. These images of flags, shaken by wind and surf and reflected in water and wet sand, are charged with beauty and nostalgia. Nicanor Parra, a Chilean poet, wrote: "We think we are a country. / But actually, we are a landscape at best." In this work, landscape becomes a metaphor for country: from dunes to sea, the line of flags makes visible a divide. The most obvious divide of that time—between supporters and opponents of the military regime—was followed by other and perhaps more dangerous divides that clarity and invisibly undermined the country, making normal social relationships difficult.

In Jaar's retrospective exhibition and the *Sermons Critics* that accompanied it, it was this work that engaged me most—the one work in the whole exhibit that is being shown for the first time. For the condition of its exhibition was its author's return, an event that has led to a series of critical, diverse, important, and mutually responsive voices being installed in Santiago, like flags in open country. In this way Jaar has answered the intellectual intolerance that barred him from the circuits of reflection and exhibition in the years prior to his departure with an inclusive, meticulous, and generous act, making a dialogue out of what might have been a monologue. Subtly, without fuss, Jaar has thus demonstrated the ethical engagement that is inseparable from his work. ■

## A Question of Accent

by *Ana María Risco*

When Alfredo Jaar presented his work in Chile, he made it speak with a "local accent." The book accompanying the exhibition was written from beginning to end, by Chileans. And not just Chileans, but people—us—whose careers in art criticism are as yet more desire than reality.

From our vantage point in the university system—which has been the undisputed center for the visual arts in Chile since political institutions were re-established in the late 1980s—we have observed Jaar's work as firm and poetical operations grounded in social and geopolitical issues shaped by the global model. By way of contrast, we drew attention during the *Sermons Critics* to the isolation of the Chilean artistic field, sometimes too self-referential and essentialist.

Two presentations left a deep impression on me: that of David Levi Strauss who made striking use of an image-based study reconstructing the aberrant cultural and sexual matrix produced by the photographs of prisoners in Abu Ghurib; and that of the artist-curator David Bailey, whose account of the rise of culture of African origin in 1960s Britain brought the experience of a subject whose thinking and activities were nourished by post-colonial experience and a way of looking at new cultural realities as multi-racial phenomena. Bailey's eloquent presentation brought us into contact with the work of artists who are energetically reformulating and multiplying the civic and political representation of the black world in Europe and the United States.

Bailey's "Afro-British" accent and Levi Strauss's critical American one, like the other voices we heard during the week, gave us the measure of a type of intellectual action that has been emerging in central spaces of social signification as an increasingly potent alternative to dominant policies of representation. "Challenging the notion of a single representation is a matter of human rights," said David Bailey, leaving us with the desire to discuss these ideas, brought by Jaar in his work, here in Chile. ■

ALFREDO JAAR

## “LA ABSOLUTA MAYORÍA DE LO QUE SE CONSTRUYE ES DE UNA FEALDAD INSOPORTABLE”

DESPUÉS DE SU ÉXITOSA EXPOSICIÓN JAAR SCL 2006, QUE LO TRAJÓ A CHILE POR PRIMERA VEZ, ESTE ARTISTA VISUAL CHILENO ANALIZA EL ESCENARIO ARQUITECTÓNICO DE SANTIAGO Y DE CÓMO EL EXCESO DE IMÁGENES COMERCIALES EN LA CIUDAD NUBLAN LA CULTURA.

PERFECTO BELLIS/COUPON

Alfredo Jaar es arquitecto y cineasta, pero ha decidido su vida a las artes visuales, principalmente a la fotografía, que utiliza para desarrollar los problemas que giran en torno a las crisis geopolíticas y sociales. En 1982 partió a Nueva York, el epicentro que eligió para desarrollar su carrera que le trajo considerable prestigio y le ha valido una serie de premios en distintos países.

Luego de 25 años fuera de Chile, el artista finalizó su primera exposición en nuestro país, JAAR SCL 2006, en la Sala de Arte de la Fundación Telefónica, con gran éxito de asistencia. Fue una muestra múltiple que mostró lo mejor de su trabajo.

El tema que hoy se discute en las imágenes es una preocupación que a veces es protagonista de la obra de este artista. En sus montajes trata de evidenciar la sequera que produce el extremo bombardeo de los medios de comunicación, lo que según él anula la capacidad de las personas para ver y tomar conciencia de lo que pasa en el mundo.

En sus exposiciones también denuncia la indiferencia e indolencia que existe en los países desarrollados hacia los más pobres, y la mirada esquiva de ceder ante tragedias como el genocidio en Ruanda el año 1994, hecho que dio origen al Proyecto Huan de, una de las obras más importantes del chileno.

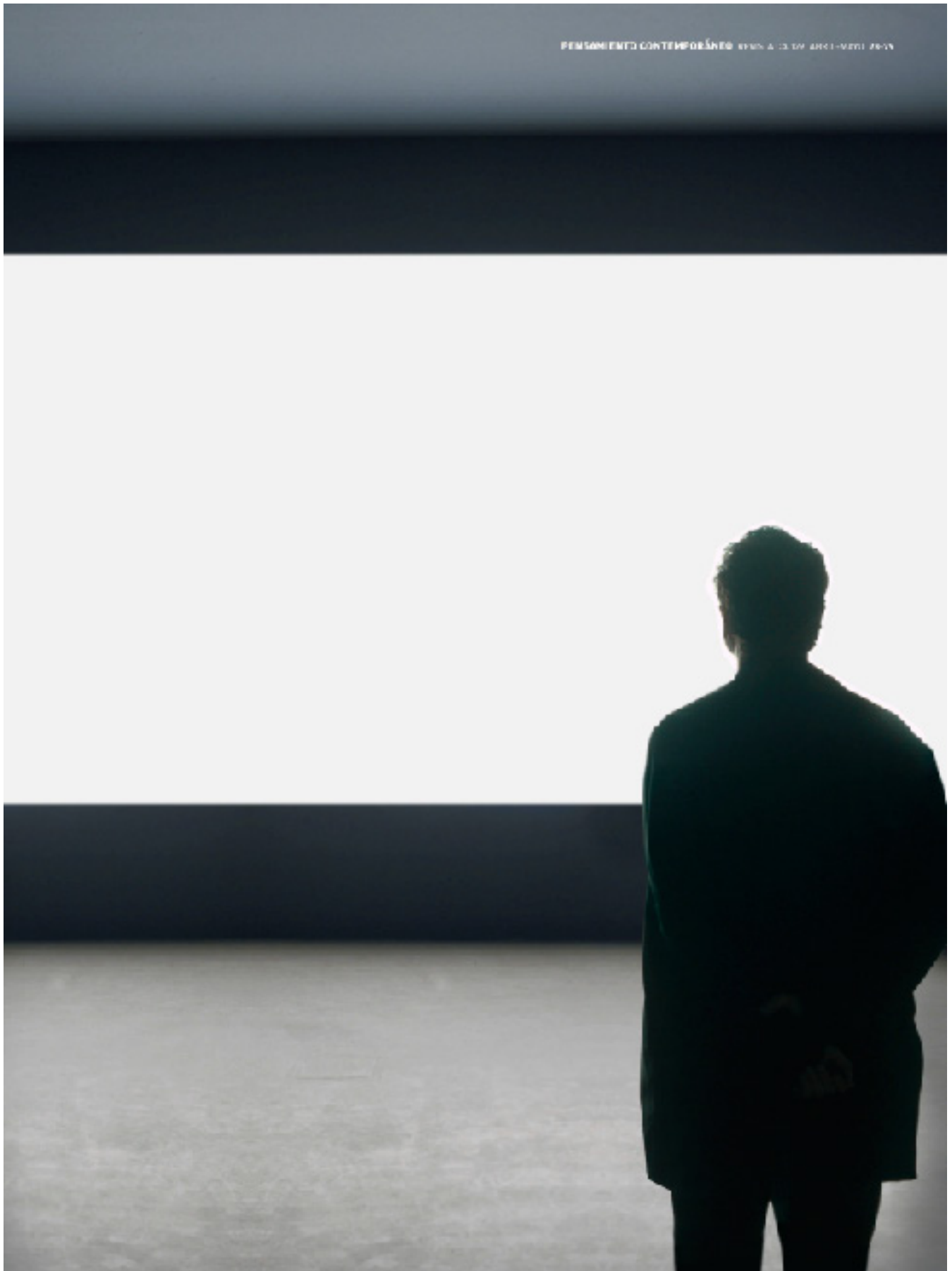
En su estadía en Chile, aprovechó la oportunidad para conversar con UN y analizar la arquitectura y el espacio público de Santiago. “La verdad es que cada vez que voy a Santiago, y eso lo hago con cierta frecuencia, suro me mucho a ver cómo la ciudad ha sido destruida y el automóvil ha reemplazado al peatón como eje de valer de nuestro urbanismo. Calles y barrios desaparecen sin pena ni gloria. La historia no existe”, señala Jaar.

Me gustaría hacerle saber a una que viviste antes de irte a Nueva York, donde preguntaste ¿Es usted feliz? A tu regreso a exponer JAAR SCL, ¿crees que hemos logrado una sociedad en que la gente es feliz?

Chile es si puede decirse infinitamente más feliz en 2006 que en 1980, pero a mí también me pregunta en las calles de Santiago. La democracia fue bella y hermosa al igual a una mujer presidente, quien a su vez ha revolucionado nuestra sociedad institucional significativamente la participación de la mujer en la vida política y social. La imagen extraordinaria de miles de mujeres chilenas celebrando el triunfo de Michelle Bachelet, todas llevando una bandera presidencial y lagrimas en los ojos, es una de las más memorables para mí. Además, nuestro país vive un boom económico impresionante y eso se nota no sólo en las calles de Santiago, sino también en el extranjero. Está claro que busca mucho por hacer en materia social, pero es indudable que los avances son notorios.

¿La arquitectura y la ciudad que hemos construido y expandido, con todos sus avances y problemas, refleja una sociedad feliz?

Santiago es una ciudad horrible por parte de lo primero porque la absoluta mayoría de lo que se construye es de una fealdad insostenible, una pseudoarquitectura dictada por un mercado inmobiliario muy poco iluminado. Además, la ciudad ha sido herida físicamente por una serie brutal de incisiones y rasas que le piden peso al automóvil, pero a la vez crean un paisaje muy triste y desolador. Por supuesto hoy excepciones y de vez en cuando aparece una joya arquitectónica que nos recuerda discretamente lo que es verdaderamente la arquitectura, pero estos encuentros se hacen cada vez más raros. Son pequeños milagros, un oasis en el desierto. **CA**



### LA IMAGEN EN SANTIAGO

El mensaje de cada trabajo de Alfredo Jaar habla de una apatía generalizada mundialmente, principalmente de occidente hacia África, continente cuyas tragedias están muy presentes en su obra. La conclusión que se desprende es categórica: la gente ya no se conmueve con el dolor.

Jaar ve en Chile un fenómeno que ha detectado en otras partes del mundo, y tiene que ver con un escenario dominado por imágenes comerciales, que incitan sólo al consumo desmedido y que ofrecen la idea de una felicidad falsa.

La arquitectura se encuentra efectivamente asfixiada por este mar de consumo que nos rodea. En ese contexto, las imágenes de dolor no tienen lugar. Sólo aparecen mensajes comerciales, imágenes de una exuberancia feliz pero falsa, resultado de estudios sofisticados de marketing. El ciudadano se confronta a este paisaje diariamente y no logra escapar. Y sucumbe. Y consume.

**¿Cuál es a tu juicio, como arquitecto y artista, el lugar que ocupará la imagen como elemento comunicador en la ciudad moderna y globalizada?**

- La producción de cultura se hace imperativa. Porque una cultura viva es una cultura que crea. Los artistas debemos crear fisuras en este paisaje implacable, fisuras que demuestran que otro mundo es posible, que detrás de esta fachada consumista hay otras realidades que merecen nuestra atención. Debemos proponer nuevos modelos de pensamiento, interrogar la realidad, cuestionarlo todo. Es difícil. Es por eso que se necesitan hoy nuevas estrategias de representación. En eso estamos los artistas.





SABEDI-DIMANCHE 2-5 JUIN 2007  
24 HEURES

## CULTURE

# Alfredo Jaar, guérillero de l'image, face au «miroir» du réel



**UN REGARD ÉCLAIRANT** Alfredo Jaar interroge depuis trente ans les images qui déforment au quotidien et travaille à les réinterpréter. Une rétrospective passionnante. LAUSANNE, MUSEE DES BEAUX-ARTS, LE 25 MAI 2007

### EXPOSITION

Depuis trente ans, avec autant de pertinence que d'effacement, Alfredo Jaar questionne et détourne les images et les médias. Visite guidée dans la rétrospective que lui dédie le Musée des beaux-arts à Lausanne.

## Parcours d'un humaniste

Pas question de le cacher: le gras est gras, sucrés tagapuz, et la déesse inscrite dans l'héritage de l'art conceptuel animaliste.

Yella qui pourrait faire croire à une exposition difficile, cérébrale, désincarnée ou misérabiliste. Rien de tout cela pourtant! Et non, non plus, de la démonstration d'un donateur de leçons. Mais d'un humaniste peut-être, et d'un humaniste amoureux.

Si les sujets qui l'ont intéressés et touchés sont grandes questions lancinantes de notre temps, il les traite avec autant de sensibilité que de rigueur, d'esthétique que d'empirisme, de modestie que d'urgence intellectuelle et offensive que de simplicité. Par la photo, la vidéo, les installations, les performances et les interventions publiques, le Chilien d'origine (né en

1956 à Santiago, il a été exposé par le régime dictatorial de Pinochet) et New-Yorkais depuis 1981 se confronte depuis près de trente ans avec les questions de l'image et de la représentation, de leur usage politique et éthique, de leur symbolisme ou de leur insidiosité, en les désamorçant, les déconstruisant, les détournant ou les revoquant à travers des dispositifs artistiques à chaque fois différents.

Malgré un parcours très international entre Biennales de Venise, São Paulo ou Sydney, Documenta de Kassel et grands musées de New York, Londres, Berlin, Madrid ou Santiago du Chili, Alfredo Jaar n'est encore jamais en d'exposition d'ensemble en Suisse ni en France. L'occasion idéale d'une lecture, et ici dédiée aussi à première monographie en français.

P. L.





# A force d'images

**EXPO • Au Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne, le Chilien Alfredo Jaar interroge la nature des images et souligne leur essence politique. Incontournable.**

**SAMUEL SCHELLENBERG**

Les œuvres s'appellent *Nost 1*, *2*, et *3* (2006). Elles sont formées de trois grandes photos horizontales, dont Alfredo Jaar ne montre qu'un cinquième, en l'occurrence trois jeunes gens. «En cachant une partie de l'image, j'en dis plus que si je la montrais en entier», explique l'artiste chilien établi à New York. En mai, dans les salles du Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne, où une grande expo lui est consacrée, «je souligne l'incapacité d'une photo à tout montrer – notamment ce qui est autour, mais aussi l'avant, l'après et le contexte.» Or cette manière de faire parler l'image, de pointer ses omissions, de montrer ce que pour dire plus est au centre de la démarche d'Alfredo Jaar, tel qu'il la développe depuis la fin des années 1980 (de notre portrait du 26 mai). Que ce soit par le biais de la performance, de la photo, de la vidéo ou de l'installation.

## Mini photo, grande œuvre

Au fil d'un parcours intelligent, imaginé par l'artiste et la conservatrice Nicole Schweitzer, l'expo «Alfredo Jaar. La politique des images» ne se cloisonne pas dans un format chronologique: les œuvres dialoguent entre passé, présent et futur. A l'entrée, on insérera pour se faire remettre le petit dépliant (gratuit) préparé pour l'occasion: outre un poster, il précise le contenu de certaines œuvres, dont la beauté formelle n'est qu'une infime partie du message.

Dans la deuxième salle, impossible de voir *The Sound of Silence* (2006), une installation basée

d'innombrables réseaux, inversement proportionnelle à la taille de la photo qu'elle décrypte – un cliché de 1993 montrant une silhouette fumélique, au Soudan; à côté d'elle, un vautour guette. Dans la salle suivante, *Real Pictures* (1995-2007) est l'un des 21 projets réalisés par Alfredo Jaar à la suite de son séjour au Rwanda en 1994, trois semaines après la fin du génocide. L'œuvre est composée de dizaines de boîtes noires, à l'intérieur desquelles se trouve un cliché témoin de l'horreur. Les boîtes doivent rester fermées: le public découvre les images et leur contexte par le biais d'un texte sur le bord supérieur du contenant.

Ailleurs, la vidéo *Muziris* (2006) raconte un autre aspect de l'Afrique, par le biais d'une épopée en dix oses et à travers l'Angola contemporain. Paradoxalement, des ruines naît une lueur d'espoir, bercée aux sons de différentes versions de la chanson populaire qui donne son nom à l'œuvre. Et les visiteurs de continuer leur visite en sifflant malgré eux cette incantation à la divinité Muziris, à qui il est demandé de libérer le pays du joug portugais.

Plus loin, les médias ont un langage droit de cité, puisqu'ils sont la cause première de la surabondance d'images qui nous assaille au quotidien. Ainsi, *Searching for*

*Africa in LIFE* (1988) aligne plus de 2000 «unes» du célèbre magazine éditorial, en format réduit. Stupeur: l'Afrique n'y est à l'honneur que deux ou trois fois – et par le biais de... reportages animaliers. Quant à l'Europe, son score n'est guère meilleur.

## Etes-vous heureux?

A côté, des affiches déjouées par l'artiste – et infiltrées en 1986 dans le métro new-yorkais – changent le sens d'un slogan publicitaire: accompagnant la photo d'un présentateur TV de CBS, la phrase «Si ça vous concerne, ça nous concerne» devient: «Si ça nous concerne, ça vous concerne». Vingt-trois ans après cette œuvre, CBS est devenue la chaîne la plus regardée des Etats-Unis.

Les deux dernières salles reviennent sur certains travaux de jeunesse de l'artiste, effectués dans le Chili de Pinochet, comme *Snafes or Happiness* (1979-81): une «étude» destinée à sonder le degré de bonheur de la population chilienne. Aujourd'hui, les affiches de l'expo posent la même question, dans toute la Suisse: *Et vous, êtes-vous heureux?* Presque aussi subversif qu'à l'époque. |

Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, palais de Rumine, Lausanne, jusqu'au 23 septembre, ma-ma 10h-18h, je-di 10h-17h.  
Bor. • 021 306 54 45, www.beaux-arts.ch



«Real Pictures» cache les images de l'horreur rwandaise pour mieux les montrer. MUSÉE CANTONAL DE LAUSANNE



**ALFREDO JAAR: THE POLITICS OF IMAGES**  
Edited by Nicole Schweizer  
Zurich: JRP/ Ringier, 2007

What distinguishes this book (published in French and English) from other recent publications on the vast oeuvre of Alfredo Jaar—now the subject of thirty-six monographs—is that, in keeping with one of his main strategies, the plates and essays are given a great degree of autonomy. Except for a useful introduction by Nicole Schweizer, the texts are general reflections on the violence of unilateral representation, the moral quandary of spectatorship, and the dialectics between verbal and visual signs, rather than accounts of Jaar's individual projects. Conversely, the many reproductions document works spanning thirty years, with an emphasis on those in

which Jaar has given sharp focus to the politics of the images found in the mainstream media. A poignant example is the "Newsweek" series (1994) in which the artist, in an effort to make visible the media's omissions, displayed the magazine's covers from the beginning of the Rwandan genocide to the time that a cover image was actually devoted to it—seventeen covers in all—coupled with weekly summaries of the harrowing events taking place there at a dumbfounding pace.

The plates also give visibility to a number of early works, among them Jaar's computer-generated self-portraits from 1977—visionary since they address the total collapse of individual identity within the corporate social order—and documentation from his series "Studies on Happiness" (1979–1981), for which he

conducted seemingly innocent surveys asking passersby questions about their individual fulfillment and posed the question "Are you happy?" on billboards scattered throughout the militarized streets of Santiago, Chile. This project especially, for its being completed only through the public's participation, subtly insists on the impossibility of a totalizing viewpoint and, therefore, relates to Jaar's later works. One such work, the emblematic *The Eyes of Genta Escobar* (1996), features a massive pile of slides of the eyes of a woman who was a witness to the murder of her family. Part of the larger "Rwanda Project" (1994–1998), this work is a necessary complement to the "Newsweek" series, done at the same time.

We all know media cover-

age seldom translates into effective political action or the public's mobilization. In the essay "Theater of Images," included here, Jacques Rancière fortuitously parses the commonplace that images have become powerless owing to their overwhelming proliferation—actually one of the claims of Georges Dick-Haberman, who also contributed an essay to the book. Rancière instead laments the inescapable absence of images that play a role other than that of bolstering the ideology-laden prattle of those in power, whose images, by the way, do abound. For Rancière the spectacle society cliché is especially problematic since it ultimately justifies the hierarchical structure that is keeping a select few in charge of choosing the images shown to the masses.

Fittingly, Jaar, as this book shows, dares to leave the issue

open to debate by allowing his work to alternate between projects that dissect what the media chooses to reveal and those, such as the "Universe of the Images" series, which explore the effects of suppressing visual images altogether and instead describing them verbally. All in all, few artists other than he have so consistently and effectively refused to force language into one-dimensional narratives and to reduce images to evidential illustrations.

—Mónica de la Torre

LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND

## Alfredo Jaar

MUSÉE CANTONAL DES BEAUX-ARTS

"There is no torrent of images," according to Jacques Rancière. In his essay for the catalogue to *La politique des images*, the recent retrospective devoted to Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar, the philosopher writes that the oft-stated idea that there is an excess of images—seducing and anesthetizing us—is a cliché generated by the very machinery of power that lies behind these images. The media don't show us too many images of the ugliness of our world, Rancière argues, but rather too few. Since the late '70s, Jaar has used his sharp eye and great sensitivity to cast light on the mechanisms of strategic omission.

Conceived by the artist in collaboration with curator Nicole Schweizer, the exhibition presented a nonchronological overview of his work. It opened with *Out of Balance*, 1989, an installation comprised of six long, narrow light boxes mounted on the wall horizontally at various heights, which display portraits of Brazilian gold miners photographed against a white background. As in many of Jaar's installations, light becomes a metaphor for rendering images visible or invisible, the authorial power that can choose to illuminate an image or consign it to darkness.

Light also plays a central role in the installation *The Sound of Silence*, 2006. Three hundred neon tubes cover one side of the exterior of a room within the room, swathing it in blinding white light. The viewer's eyes eventually adjust, painfully but also cathartically—as if Jaar were proclaiming, "Let there be light," and bidding us to cast off our old viewing habits to achieve a conscious seeing. The interior, by contrast, is illuminated only by a film projection that soundlessly relates, using white typewriter graphics against a black background, the story of South African photojournalist Kevin Carter and a famous photograph he took in Sudan in 1993. The text of the story is interrupted by a jarring explosion of flashbulbs, which subsides to show the photograph of a half-starved girl dragging herself along on all fours (watched by a vulture), as if it were a ghostly afterimage. The text returns to relate the fate of Carter: He won a Pulitzer Prize for the photograph but was condemned by some for having failed to help the girl; soon afterward, he committed suicide.

The problematic nature of images is at issue as well in *Real Pictures*, 1995–2007. Three weeks after the genocide in Rwanda ended, Jaar traveled to the country and collected thousands of photographs of survivors, writing down their stories. The pictures, however, are not visible in the final work: They are encased in black boxes arranged in such a way that they simultaneously recall archival storage boxes and gravestones; each box bears a text that describes the photograph contained therein. Jaar uses the strategy of ellipsis to rethink representational systems.

Both *Untitled (Newsweek)*, 1994, and *Searching for Africa in LIFE*, 1996, address the war in Rwanda as well as the media's general indifference to Africa. Jaar collected *Newsweek* covers to demonstrate that the magazine waited sixteen weeks after the start of the massacre before featuring the topic. The second work shows sixty years of *Life* magazine covers, 1936 to 1996, presented in miniature on five panels, making it clear that when Africa appears at all, it is represented by wildlife, masks, and other exotica.

The exhibition concluded with Jaar's well-known early series of interventions, *Studies on Happiness*, 1979–81, created in Santiago during the military dictatorship. In the first section of this seven-part work, Jaar asked passersby in the street, "Are you happy?" Under a regime that suppressed freedom of expression, this innocuous question—which the artist also inscribed on signs throughout the city—became a politically subversive act. Like all of Jaar's work, it gives voice to what is suppressed and silenced.

—Valérie Knoff

Translated from German by Susan Bernstein

Alfredo Jaar, *The Sound of Silence*, 2006. wood, sheet metal, neon, flashing lights, video projection. Installation view.



Arte

ARTES Y LETRAS E 9

EL MERCURIO
CONTENIDO DE LA PAGINA 10 DEL 2007



GRILLER— El video 'Andar desorganizado' de Alfredo Jaar muestra una foto fija que cambia gradualmente por el desmoronamiento.

EXPOSICIÓN ANTELOJICA | Los caminos de un andar desorganizado

Alfredo Jaar
EN LAUSANNE

Un completo recorrido por la esencia de la obra del artista chileno fue posible apreciar en una muestra del Museo Cantonal de Beau-Arts de la ciudad Suiza.

INTERNACIONAL

Alfonso Espinosa de Caceres, hasta, está en el mundo de Europa. Llamado por sus tradiciones, a pesar de las diferencias que existen a gran parte del mundo. Como resultado de un viaje latino que lo llevó a la ciudad de Bogotá, Colombia, y a la ciudad de Bogotá, Colombia, y a la ciudad de Bogotá, Colombia...

Hacia el resaca de las imágenes

La muestra, a la que el museo de la ciudad de Lausana le ha dedicado un espacio de las primeras intervenciones públicas realizadas por Alfredo Jaar en el año de 1984, hasta su última instalación en Chile en el 2006, muestra una serie de obras que se relacionan entre sí y que muestran un camino de la pintura a la fotografía, pasando por el video y la instalación.

En el taller de construcción de un edificio nuevo, entre otros aspectos técnicos y, por otro lado, disponer un espacio para el arte...

Al final la sensación era la de haber atravesado el corazón de su obra.

Las obras de Jaar muestran un camino de la pintura a la fotografía, pasando por el video y la instalación. En el taller de construcción de un edificio nuevo, entre otros aspectos técnicos y, por otro lado, disponer un espacio para el arte...

El taller de construcción de un edificio nuevo, entre otros aspectos técnicos y, por otro lado, disponer un espacio para el arte...

El taller de construcción de un edificio nuevo, entre otros aspectos técnicos y, por otro lado, disponer un espacio para el arte...



ESPINOSA DE CACERES— El video 'Andar desorganizado' de Alfredo Jaar muestra una foto fija que cambia gradualmente por el desmoronamiento.

El taller de construcción de un edificio nuevo, entre otros aspectos técnicos y, por otro lado, disponer un espacio para el arte...

El taller de construcción de un edificio nuevo, entre otros aspectos técnicos y, por otro lado, disponer un espacio para el arte...

En la actualidad, Jaar muestra un camino de la pintura a la fotografía, pasando por el video y la instalación. En el taller de construcción de un edificio nuevo, entre otros aspectos técnicos y, por otro lado, disponer un espacio para el arte...

Lectura crítica de los medios

La presencia de lo que se muestra en el mundo de la pintura a la fotografía, pasando por el video y la instalación. En el taller de construcción de un edificio nuevo, entre otros aspectos técnicos y, por otro lado, disponer un espacio para el arte...

El taller de construcción de un edificio nuevo, entre otros aspectos técnicos y, por otro lado, disponer un espacio para el arte...

ARTE

# GRACIAS POR ATERRIZAR

June 2006, la mejor muestra del año. Incluye obras chilenas las obras más destacadas del artista que luego de Chile está en la casa de todos. ¿Puede ser mejor? **POR FELIX MAGNINSTE**

**C**omo artista, el arte es un trabajo cotidiano, un modo de vida, una manera de pensar y de sentir. En Chile, eso se manifiesta en una serie de imágenes, símbolos y signos que nos acompañan en nuestra vida cotidiana. Desde la bandera hasta el logo de la Universidad de Chile, pasando por el diseño de los edificios, el arte está presente en todas partes. Pero ¿cómo se manifiesta el arte en Chile? ¿Qué rol juega el arte en la vida cotidiana? ¿Cómo se relaciona el arte con la cultura y la identidad? Estas son algunas de las preguntas que se hacen en Chile.

Para las autoridades en Chile, el arte es un instrumento de desarrollo social. Desde la creación de la Universidad de Chile, hasta el plan para Chile en el 2000, el arte ha sido un instrumento de desarrollo social. Pero ¿cómo se manifiesta el arte en Chile? ¿Qué rol juega el arte en la vida cotidiana? ¿Cómo se relaciona el arte con la cultura y la identidad? Estas son algunas de las preguntas que se hacen en Chile.

El arte que se manifiesta en Chile, es un arte que se relaciona con la cultura y la identidad. Desde la creación de la Universidad de Chile, hasta el plan para Chile en el 2000, el arte ha sido un instrumento de desarrollo social. Pero ¿cómo se manifiesta el arte en Chile? ¿Qué rol juega el arte en la vida cotidiana? ¿Cómo se relaciona el arte con la cultura y la identidad? Estas son algunas de las preguntas que se hacen en Chile.

Y a pesar de esto, el arte en Chile es un arte que se relaciona con la cultura y la identidad. Desde la creación de la Universidad de Chile, hasta el plan para Chile en el 2000, el arte ha sido un instrumento de desarrollo social. Pero ¿cómo se manifiesta el arte en Chile? ¿Qué rol juega el arte en la vida cotidiana? ¿Cómo se relaciona el arte con la cultura y la identidad? Estas son algunas de las preguntas que se hacen en Chile.

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**LA ASPIRANTE EN CHILE NO ES UNA OBRERA, SINO UNA OBRERA QUE SE MANIFIESTA EN LA CULTURA Y LA IDENTIDAD.**



Alfredo Jaar, el artista chileno más conocido en el extranjero.



La muestra de Alfredo Jaar en el Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Santiago.

El arte que se manifiesta en Chile, es un arte que se relaciona con la cultura y la identidad. Desde la creación de la Universidad de Chile, hasta el plan para Chile en el 2000, el arte ha sido un instrumento de desarrollo social. Pero ¿cómo se manifiesta el arte en Chile? ¿Qué rol juega el arte en la vida cotidiana? ¿Cómo se relaciona el arte con la cultura y la identidad? Estas son algunas de las preguntas que se hacen en Chile.

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# Alfredo Jaar, le sens de l'humanité

**FESTIVAL.** Au rendez-vous photo et vidéo de Biarritz, nous avons rencontré l'artiste chilien venu présenter son bouleversant film *Machos*. Interview.

**C**'est un monde... Alfredo Jaar, 47 ans, est un artiste chilien qui vit à New York. Il est connu pour ses œuvres qui abordent des thèmes sociaux et politiques. Il a travaillé avec des artistes comme Christo et Jeanne-Claude, et a été directeur artistique du Festival de Cannes en 2004. Il est également un activiste engagé, notamment pour les droits de l'homme.



Alfredo Jaar dans le film *Machos* d'Alfredo Jaar et François.

Alfredo Jaar, le directeur artistique du Festival de Cannes en 2004, est un artiste engagé. Il a travaillé avec des artistes comme Christo et Jeanne-Claude, et a été directeur artistique du Festival de Cannes en 2004. Il est également un activiste engagé, notamment pour les droits de l'homme.

**L'essentiel**

- Belgique. Le parti-secrète de Christian Vigneron**  
Le parti-secrète de Christian Vigneron, député belge, a été déclaré illégal par le tribunal administratif de Bruxelles. Le parti était considéré comme un instrument de propagande pour le régime de Vigneron.
- Hubert Robert et François-Marie Krauss au Louvre**  
Le Louvre a organisé une exposition consacrée à Hubert Robert et François-Marie Krauss. Les œuvres de ces deux artistes sont présentées dans une salle dédiée.
- Le prix de la coupe-Manuel de Falla à Pierre Haldi**  
Le prix de la coupe-Manuel de Falla a été attribué à Pierre Haldi pour son opéra *Le roi des rois*.

**Thème central de l'exposition**  
Alfredo Jaar, le directeur artistique du Festival de Cannes en 2004, est un artiste engagé. Il a travaillé avec des artistes comme Christo et Jeanne-Claude, et a été directeur artistique du Festival de Cannes en 2004. Il est également un activiste engagé, notamment pour les droits de l'homme.

**ANULECTARI**

**Manque de visibilité**  
Le manque de visibilité des artistes émergents est un problème majeur. Les galeries d'art et les musées ont tendance à privilégier les artistes établis, laissant peu de place aux nouveaux talents.

## Ça s'est passé à Biarritz

Une exposition de photos de collection et plusieurs films pour réfléchir sur la place de l'œuvre dans le monde globalisé.

Le festival de Biarritz a été consacré à l'œuvre de l'artiste chilien Alfredo Jaar. Une exposition de photos de collection et plusieurs films ont été présentés. Les œuvres de Jaar abordent des thèmes sociaux et politiques, et sont présentées dans une salle dédiée.

Cette exposition a permis de réfléchir sur la place de l'œuvre dans le monde globalisé. Les œuvres de Jaar sont présentées dans une salle dédiée, et ont été accompagnées de films qui abordent des thèmes sociaux et politiques.

**ARTE / ENTREVISTA**

Alfredo Jaar inaugura hoy la temporada en Oliva Arauna con su penúltimo proyecto, la película *Mucina*, con el que vuelve al territorio de las imágenes tras años de silencio visual. Jaar ha hablado con El Cultural sobre los temas que vertebran su trabajo, la precaria salud de la recepción del arte, el lenguaje del cine y, sobre todo, de África, el lugar en el, desde hace años, mantiene un hondo compromiso.



# Alfredo Jaar

**“El cine ofrece un mayor nivel de comunicación y afecto”**

Hay quienes piensan que esta nueva presentación del trabajo de Alfredo Jaar en España es una cita imprescindible. Se proyecta *Mucina*, primera film del artista chileno y, en consecuencia, su retorno al campo de la imagen, territorio que abandonó tras acabar su proyecto dedicado a Ruanda, en el año 2000. Porque desde entonces, Jaar ha centrado su interés artístico en África, lugar donde se condensan muchas de las ligunas éticas de Occidente.

—El título de *Mucina*, ¿cómo surge el proyecto?

—Hace ya más de veinte años que colecciono música africana contemporánea, es una de mis grandes pasiones. El enfoque principal de mi colección es la música de influencia portuguesa, es decir la música que se produce en Angola, Mozambique y Cabo Verde. Hace unos años estaba organizando mi colección de música angoleña cuando descubrí que tenía seis versiones diferentes de una misma canción llamada *Mucina*. Al principio y escuchas en un orden cronológico, desde 1956 a 1998, me di cuenta de que se podía entender la historia de Angola: es decir que a pe-

sele que en la misma canción, cada interpretación reflejaba el momento en que había sido grabada. Descubrí que la había compuesta “Lívira” Viana Días, un gran músico pero también intelectual y fundador de MPLA, el Movimiento para la

Liberación de Angola. Un personaje extraordinario, artista, intelectual y activista, un personaje modelo finalmente en África y América Latina. A partir de ese momento decidí viajar a Angola a descubrir el país, y empezó a escribir un guión.

—Usted es el cine pero ésta es la primera vez que presenta una película. ¿Por qué ahora?

—Sé que me he considerado un cineasta frustrado y hacer cine ha sido un gran deseo desde hace más de 25 años. Pero nunca tuve la oportunidad ni el tiempo, ni los medios. Al leer en el guión de *Mucina* recibí sorprendentemente una beta importante y eso me dio el impulso necesario para hacer la película. Pero también, aunque uno de mis grandes frustraciones en el mundo del arte es la poca capacidad de concentración de espectadores. Se estima que el promedio de tiempo que un espectador pasa frente a una obra de arte en un museo son 5 segundos. Me obses ha tratado de prolongar ese tiempo utilizando diferentes mecanismos. El cine ofrece un privilegio extraordinario: el espectador está en tus manos, en la oscuridad, entregado a tu obra. El cine captura la atención del espectador de una manera única, tal y como experimenta la artística que se le compare en el mundo de las artes visuales.

*Tito de Rivas* *Project*, que aborda el silencio de Occidente ante

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**"Estoy condenado a no olvidar Ruanda y me es imposible ver el mundo sin el filtro triste de mi experiencia allí"**

el genocidio de 1994. Alfredo Jaar optó por dejar de trabajar con imágenes. Fue una actitud radical y honesta que derivó en su *Arca de Noé*, un "ensayo filosófico sobre el fracaso de la representación", como una vez lo definió.

—¿Ha superado el escepticismo?

—*Arca de Noé* es mi retorno a las imágenes, a pesar de que sigo siendo bastante escéptico, no de la capacidad de las imágenes de conmover ni producir afecto, sino de un ensaísmo que no facilita esta relación. Estamos sumergidos en un paisaje mediático que sólo nos pide que consumamos, consumamos, consumamos. ¿Cómo puede una imagen de dolor sobrevivir en este contexto? No puede. Por eso trabajo con el dispositivo cinematográfico en forma de proyección en un contexto de concentración donde exista un nivel más o menos de cante de comunicación y afecto.

—¿Qué relación tiene *Arca de Noé* con sus otros trabajos africanos?

—África es el continente en el que he realizado la mayor parte de mi obra: primero en Nigeria, luego en Sudafrica, después fue Ruanda y ahora en Angola. Además hace tres años lancé un sitio web en internet, [www.proyectordeemergencia.net](http://www.proyectordeemergencia.net), dando trato de informar sobre el afecto devastador del SIDA en África. Estos proyectos son modestos signos de solidaridad en un mundo abandonado por el resto del mundo y que merece nuestra atención y afecto.

**Indolencia barbárica**

«A mi juicio es absolutamente inaceptable la manera en que el resto del mundo se relaciona con los habitantes de ese continente: épticamente en su indiferencia crítica al lo que allí ocurre, estéticamente en la manera insulante y degradante en que son representados en los medios. No sólo: los habitantes de ese continente, también de avaricia e insensibilidad, una indolencia que calificaría de barbárica.

—¿Dónde se siente más cómodo: al abrigo de la "Institución Arte" o en el espacio público?

—Desde hace unos años que he vivido mi quehacer en tres áreas de trabajo: un tercio de mi tiempo lo dedico a crear obras para museos, fundaciones y galerías de arte. Debido a la gran insularidad de este mundo, dedico otro tercio a lo que llamo intervenciones públicas, proyectos que tienen lugar generalmente en comunidades alejadas del mundo del arte, donde me enfrento a problemas locales específicos. Son siempre intervenciones públicas afirmativas. El último tercio lo dedico a talleres y seminarios con estudiantes, a un diálogo con las nuevas generaciones. Sólo con esta estructura triple me siento completamente satisfecho y como ser humano. Me complica mucho la vida y mi calendario es infame pero no concibo mi vida sin estas tres actividades, perdidas.

—Le he leído decir que ha "perdido su idealismo utópico-poético". ¿Qué le mueve a seguir trabajando? ¿Sigue convaleciente de Ruanda?

**Mirado Jaar (Santiago de Chile, 1956) estudió arquitectura y vino en su país antes de trasladarse a Nueva York, donde vive desde hace 25 años. Su obra es bien conocida en nuestro país. *The Arca de Noé Project* se vio en San Sebastián y Barcelona. En 2004**



**participó en Feriados del Sur del MERCOSUR y también en *El Final del Eclipse* de la Fundación Telefónica. Ha participado en las bienales más importantes (Venecia, São Paulo, Estambul...) y en la Documenta 11. La presentación de la colección del MUSAC de la inauguró en torno a un trabajo suyo: *Emergencias*.**

¿Parecería que *Arca de Noé* es un intento de ofrecer una imagen diámetralmente opuesta de África...

**Ruanda, siempre en la memoria**

Estoy condenado a no olvidar Ruanda, ya es parte de mi sistema, y me es imposible ver el mundo sin el filtro triste de mi experiencia allí. Efectivamente fue en Ruanda donde perdí el idealismo utópico del comienzo de mi carrera. Lo que me queda que nunca he perdido por suerte es mi necesidad vital de lo poético y *Arca de Noé*, entre otras cosas, un intento poético de hacer una imagen de África yemplazarla por otra, más alegre, más viva. Pero me temo que no lo he logrado. El resultado de este intento está lejos del honor del genocidio, es verdad, pero tampoco es una obra muy optimista. Yo diría que es un lamento melancólico, lleno de nostalgia, algo muy difícil de definir en palabras, pero algo que me siento al momento de darse cuenta de que todo en la vida es efímero.

**JAVIER HONTORIA**

**Registros contra el tiempo**

Una selección de fotos y videos de Alfredo Jaar, 2004-2005


Del 22 de julio al 24 de septiembre de 2006

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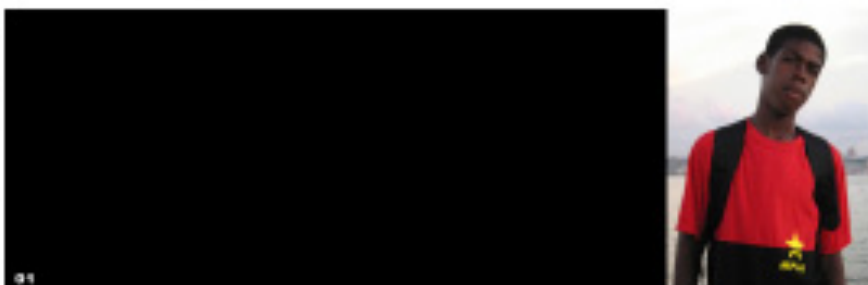
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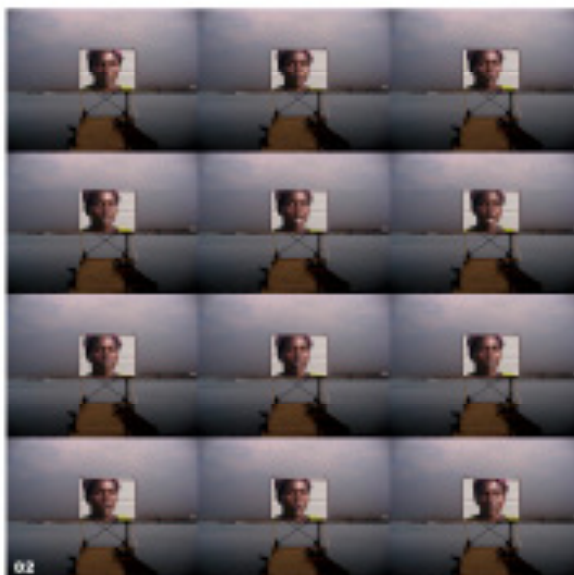
01 'Hopi I', 2006  
Fotografía en  
color

02 'The salt of the  
sea', 2006  
Fotografía en  
color

03 Fotografías de  
'Máxima', 2006  
Película digital



Alfredo Jaar  
**Canto general  
para África**



**Alfredo Jaar**  
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**ROCIÓN DE LA VILLA**  
De la imagen esfíndrica a la colidez del poema visual, del rasallado contra la representación al filar, es el trayecto que ha recorrido Jaar en la última década. Todo por llevar África en el corazón. La rabia y la indignación ante uno de los más escandalosos genocidios del siglo XX, la masacre en Ruanda, le empujaron en 1994 a realizar un millón de diapositivas -una por víctima-, material al que sometió a un variado proceso de selección, ante el desgarro habitual de las imágenes en los crucis medía: las apiló sobre una masa de luz, las enterró en cajas con una nota que describía lo que mostraban -llevando al paroxismo la reconstrucción de Susan Sontag para dotar, mediante el texto, de crítica polí-

tica a la fotografía trada y manipulable. Durante seis años continuó desarrollando estrategias de contubernio visual para recuperar la capacidad de ver el drama humano, hasta la coexistencia. En 2001, presentó en Kassel Lo mismo de Jaar, dos cajas de luz efímeras que en un acople masinal, vertical y repetitivo se juntaban para volver a separarse, sumiendo al observador en la oscuridad y en la ospeira del resplandor, a modo de metáfora de nuestra relación con los media. El ritmo de la canción negra y *Allegro* fue utilizado también sobre un enorme mapa físico de África que dio título, en nuestro país, a la inauguración del MUSAC de León: en una cámara helada, como una capilla gótica de velatorio.



Tras un viaje diez años después, en 2004, en Angola, una parte importante del castigado por las guerras tras la descolonización de Portugal en 1974, la mirada de Jaar parece haberse restituido, siendo. En un intento de hacer justicia poética a la belleza y dignidad de su gente, de su historia y de su tierra, produce *Máxima*. Sus intenciones no han cambiado, pero sí hay un giro decisivo, marcado por la temperatura emocional, fría. Alfredo Jaar (Santiago, 1966), formado en Chile como arquitecto y cineasta, absorbe toda la teoría crítica postestructuralista del posmodernismo de resistencia antropológica, semiótica y antropológica, cuando se instaló a Nueva York hace veinticinco años. En 1987 rotula la barra del lujoso de Times Square: *This is not America*, y desde entonces se entrega a una triple producción: de obra, intervenciones y contribuciones en foros de discusión, cuestionando los discursos de Sontag, Barthes, Godard, Chabrol, y convirtiéndose en el artista latinoamericano más solicitado en el escenario contemporáneo, por su penetrante claridad reflexiva y analítica resoluciones firmes. Ahora Jaar ha abandonado la rabia y su cortante frialdad.

**Poder de transferencia**

A partir de la idea benjaminiana de que la imagen en movimiento tiene un poder de seducción y de sujeción del espectador superior a la representación estática, Jaar realizó su primer vídeo *Máxima*, de 20 minutos de duración, reducción de 20 horas de rodaje en Uganda. Olvida las pulsiones y el papel intelectual que habían jugado en la composición y contemplación de sus obras anteriores. Ahora todo viene regido por la emoción y su honesta transparencia, esa cualidad de ingenuidad, incluso si no se reconoce la letra, a la que confía el poder de transferencia de los sentimientos evocados por las imágenes en el film. Compuesto por diez cantos, estructura poética que evoca a Neruda y Ezra Pound, cada canto es un poema visual con el que se alude a la historia de Uganda, de la esclavitud a las minas por desarrollar, su arquitectura colonial y la vida de la gente obrera. Se trata de una mirada subjetiva, parcial, que indirectamente remite a dar una idea verosímil supuestamente coherente, acortada. Jaar espera que la repetición de seis versiones de la canción *Máxima* a lo largo del vídeo, fije la colidez de sus imágenes en el espectador. Con diferentes arreglos, todas mantienen ese sentimiento de afirmación, de la escuela portuguesa convertida en curso al arribar a la costa africana. *Máxima* en kimbundu, lengua indígena angoleña, significa corazón.

En la exposición también hay fotografías. Las seis imágenes de nubes que componen *An Atlas of Clouds* fueron tomadas en Ruanda, Angola, Sudáfrica, Nigeria, Namibia y el Congo. En otro, captada en Luanda, se muestra una puesta que dice: la más importante es resolver los problemas de la gente. |

EL PAÍS, SÁBADO 9 DE SEPTIEMBRE DE 2006

BABELIA 19

**ARTE**

Uno de los más influyentes creadores latinoamericanos, con presencia en las más importantes citas internacionales del arte, presenta ahora en Madrid sus trabajos más recientes. *Muxima* es un filme que parte de una canción angoleña. Un lamento por la agonía de un continente luminoso.

**Alfredo Jaar**  
"África ha sido abandonada por racismo"

PIETRA JARQUE

**A**lfredo Jaar (Santiago de Chile, 1957) lleva más de una década viajando a África. El primer proyecto artístico que realizó allí surgió tras sus vivencias en Nigeria durante dos años. Con *Guerra* fue un trabajo sobre los desechos tóxicos que Europa desecha a África. Después desarrolló un largo proyecto que le llevó seis años, titulado *Ruanda*, enfocado en el genocidio de 1994. Autor de una obra que combina la fotografía, el cine, las instalaciones y las cajas de luz, así como intervenciones urbanas, sostiene una clara posición ética que pretende despertar la sobresensada sensibilidad por algunos de los grandes dramas sociales en el Tercer Mundo. Residente en Nueva York desde 1981, Alfredo Jaar presenta ahora una exposición en la galería Oliva Arana de Madrid, que gira en torno a *Muxima*, una película realizada en Angola. El pasado miércoles recibió el Premio Internacional de Creación 2005 a toda su carrera, con un jurado presidido por José Saramago.

**PREGUNTA.** Su fascinación por África se viene reflejando en su obra desde hace años. ¿Se ha transformado su mirada con el tiempo?

**RESPUESTA.** Donde quiera que voy, siempre seré un extranjero. No pretendo transformarme en una persona del lugar, soy y seré siempre un outsider. Y cuando hago mis trabajos lo hago siempre en mi nombre, no intento representar a ninguna comunidad o hablar en nombre de ella de forma paternalista, intentar ser la voz de los desposeídos. Es mi opinión lo que expreso en mis trabajos. En África me siento un testigo, un amigo, un observador crítico y solidario. África es un continente totalmente abandonado, de una riqueza extraordinaria, una gente bellísima, una cultura maravillosa. Y el mundo simplemente la ha abandonado por razones de racismo total.

**P. ¿El racismo por encima de las razones sociales y económicas?**

R. Pienso que lo que explica realmente la relación que el resto del mundo mantiene con África radica en el racismo. Puedes ponerle otras etiquetas: racismo político, racismo económico, social. Pero es racismo al fin y al cabo.

**P. Incluso en el arte occidental, la mirada a África de artistas como Picasso o los surrealistas fue siempre en busca de lo exótico. Lo otro. Sin ninguna identificación o aproximación entre iguales.**

R. Exacto. África ha sido vista, desde el punto de vista cultural, como materia prima que se usa para nuestros propios propósitos. Finalmente ahora están emergiendo voces y figuras importantes de la cultura africana contemporánea y están empezando a ser vistas y reconocidas en el mundo occidental. Y esas son buenas noticias.

**P. ¿Piensa usted que sus tres**



Imagen del filme *Muxima*, de Alfredo Jaar.

proyectos africanos han servido para que la gente haya tomado conciencia de los asuntos que de verdad le afectan?

R. Creo en la capacidad del arte de afectar. De provocar afecto. Quizá el arte sea hoy el último espacio de libertad que nos queda para plantearnos estas preguntas. Obviamente, es un proceso muy lento. A veces tengo la impresión de que no vamos a ninguna parte, que el mundo del arte está encerrado en un espacio muy estrecho. Es un mundo insular y lo que hacemos sólo tiene efecto en unos pocos que ya están convencidos de esto mismo. Por lo tanto, hace años que decidí dividir mi trabajo en tres áreas de trabajo. Sólo un tercio lo dedico al circuito internacional del arte (galerías, museos, bienales, etcétera). Luego, debido a la extrema limitación de esta escena, he decidido hacer también intervenciones públicas. Proyectos en lugares y comunidades bastante alejados del mundo del arte donde

"Quizá el arte sea hoy el último espacio de libertad que nos queda para plantearnos las preguntas más urgentes"



El artista chileno Alfredo Jaar.

me enfrento a situaciones y personas reales. En el mundo del arte a veces todo parece más falso, una permanente puesta en escena. En las intervenciones públicas me enfrento al mundo real y eso me mantiene despierto, alerta, más vivo. El último tercio de mi actividad es la enseñanza. Algo que me he impuesto a mí mismo porque la cercanía de los jóvenes me resulta siempre muy estimulante. No enseño regularmente en ninguna universidad, pero sí hago talleres, seminarios y conferencias.

**P. Sus puntos de partida como artista suelen ser las informaciones de prensa, la televisión. ¿Cómo vive, como individuo, como espectador, el mundo que le ofrece los medios de comunicación?**

R. Yo soy un periodista frustrado. Admiro el periodismo bien hecho, el que trata genuinamente de informar, de contextualizar y de ofrecer los datos que uno necesita para comprender una situación. Pero que tenga sentido y para que uno actúe en ella. Mi otra gran frustración es la forma en que los grandes medios tratan la información actualmente. Es un circo, es un negocio en manos de unas pocas multinacionales que desconectan todo, que se pasean de una noticia a otra sin el mayor respeto por el drama humano y que dan informaciones que, en conjunto, no tienen sentido alguno. La gente de a pie no se entera de nada. Vivimos en un caos informativo. Y en ese caos, las imágenes de dolor auténtico no se aceptan. Estamos como anestesiados ante ellas. Los artistas que trabajamos con estas imágenes nos debatimos en cómo hacer para que estas imágenes de dolor vuelvan a despertar, a resusitar conciencias.

**P. Su filme *Muxima* está dividido en diez poemas visuales basándose en versiones distintas de la misma canción popular. ¿Por qué da tanta relevancia a la música?**

R. Empecé a coleccionar música africana hace muchos años, sobre todo la de origen portugués. La que combina la cadencia melancólica del fado con los sonidos populares del África contemporánea. El resultado me conmueve. Pero aparte de eso, fue a partir de mi regreso de Ruanda que descubrí el poder curativo de la música, fue lo que me ayudó a superar el dolor de ese terrible genocidio. La música ha sido mi salvación. Por eso fue algo natural empezar este nuevo proyecto de Angola a partir de una canción. *Muxima* significa corazón en la lengua kimbundu.

**El lamento de las imágenes**

CARLOS BARRAL dijo alguna vez que con Mario Vargas Llosa había comenzado todo. O sea, el boom de la literatura latinoamericana, que tanto hizo por la renovación de la literatura en castellano y que se saldó con dos premios Nobel y una generación de narradores latinoamericanos que, tras matar al padre, han devorado alegremente su cadáver. Y cito a Barreal porque de Alfredo Jaar puede decirse lo mismo: "Con él empecé todo". O sea, la internacionalización del arte latinoamericano que hoy permite que en las bienales y los centros y museos de arte contemporáneo del mundo sea habitual la inclusión de los artistas de ese continente. También en la Documenta de Kassel, en cuya edición de 1986 fue incluido Jaar, a despecho de las opiniones de su director, Manfred Schneckenburger, quien respondió a la queja de Berta Sichel por la representación marginal de los latinoamericanos en la misma, afirmando

que la Documenta era un evento de la cultura de Occidente, de la que América Latina estaba excluida. Y así como la obra de Vargas Llosa ha dado la vuelta al planeta y a sus lenguas, Jaar ha hecho lo mismo con una obra marcada radicalmente por su cuestionamiento del lado salvaje de la globalización, y por su crítica consistente de las manipulaciones a las que está sometida la imagen del Otro cuando no es abiertamente censurada. De hecho, su debut en la Bienal de Venecia de 1985 fue protagonizado por las fotografías en cajas de luz, que nos ponían delante de las impactantes imágenes del infierno que era la mina de oro a tumba abierta de Cerro Pelado, en Brasil. Jaar, sin embargo, advirtió pronto que las imágenes del dolor ajeno pierden del todo su capacidad de indignar cuando las gestiona la pornografía de la miseria. África fue crucial en el fin de su inocencia. Cosmovido por el genocidio de Ruanda de 1994, via-

jó allí, y en vez de mostrar nuevas imágenes de una de las peores atrocidades del siglo pasado prefirió enseñarnos primero los ojos de Ndiwiyazi —una superviviente—, imágenes copiadas un millón de veces. Y luego: lápidas estremecedoras compuestas por cajas negras en cuya cubierta sólo podía leerse la descripción de la foto que contenían. El problema —dijo con su obra Jaar— no es qué se ve sino quién ve y por qué razones no está dispuesto a ver lo que ve. O indignarse por lo que ve. Que mejor no vea nada, para que no pueda utilizar como pretexto de su ceguera que lo visto "ya lo tiene muy visto". En *Lamento de los indios* —su instalación en la Documenta de 2002—, dio un nuevo giro a su estrategia sometándonos a una experiencia tan reconocedora como la que padeció en prisión Nelson Mandela, que le lesionó los ojos de tal manera que nunca más pudo volver a mirar. CARLOS JIMÉNEZ

# ARTES Y LETRAS

CUERPO  
**E**

EL MERCURIO

Santiago de Chile, Domingo 13 de Diciembre de 2006

- Nos hemos estado perdiendo algo. No se ha visto aquí casi nada de la obra de un artista chileno que, a los cuarenta años, tiene una sorprendente presencia en el mundo.
- Sus instalaciones entregan un fragmento de sentido, el reflejo momentáneo y esquivo de una certidumbre que permite a la vez percibir intelectualmente y sentir de manera profunda y misteriosa el alcance de una determinada situación humana.

Por Adriana Valdés



Noticias y Poemas

## Alfredo Jaar:

ENTRE marzo y noviembre de este año, los trabajos de Alfredo Jaar se han presentado en Estados Unidos (Nueva York, Seattle, Raleigh, Cleveland), en Caracas y Buenos Aires; en Canberra; en Barcelona, Hasselt, Düsseldorf, Cahors, Amberes, Berlín, Vigo y Coimbra. En 1966, Jaar cumplió con el encargo de crear para Hiroshima una obra en conmemoración de los cincuenta años de la devastación producida por la explosión de la primera bomba atómica, y eligió hacerlo sobre uno de los libros del Premio Nobel de Literatura, Kenzaburo Oe; además, el Palacio de las Naciones, en Ginebra, acogió su obra en la exposición colectiva *Dialogues de paix*, sobre los cincuenta años de las Naciones Unidas. Sus más recientes exposiciones en Europa —Helsinki, Stuttgart— abordan temas doloro-

sos, como la violencia y la discriminación contra los inmigrantes, y crean polémica allá mismo. Y su obra sobre Ruanda —hasta ahora, cuatro instalaciones presentadas en diversos lugares, entre ellos Nueva York, donde reside desde 1981— se completará con dos instalaciones más; la serie será presentada en cinco museos de Europa, Estados Unidos y Japón a partir de 1997.

En Chile hemos visto apenas una obra suya, en la exposición *Los límites de la fotografía*, este año. Si nos vamos a la historia de las artes visuales chilenas, vemos que se recuerda su "Obra abierta y de registro continuo"; premiada en un importante concurso en 1981; nada más. Hay, pues, un punto ciego, hasta ahora, en nuestra crítica y en nuestra difusión.

Tal vez convendría preguntarse por qué. Un primer

motivo puede ser que la destacada presencia de Jaar en importantes escenarios mundiales —en el Aperto de la Bienal de Venecia en 1986, y en Documenta 8 en 1987, en ambas como primer latinoamericano invitado, y en la Bienal de Sao Paulo, como invitado especial, también en 1987— no se debió a su nacionalidad, sino a los méritos propios. Su obra y sus convicciones eran incompatibles con una representación oficial durante el gobierno militar. Tampoco su carácter de chileno influyó en los amplios espacios que le dedicaron las revistas internacionales de arte. No es ésta, sin embargo, una razón suficiente, pensando años después. Hay que complementarla, tal vez entrando un poco en las características de nuestro propio medio, en sus hábitos, en sus expectativas, en sus referencias. (Pase a E 28)



Alfredo Jaar, stills from *Mozina*, 2005,  
11 min, sound film (artwork © Alfredo  
Jaar)

Patricia C. Phillips

## The Aesthetics of Witnessing: A Conversation with Alfredo Jaar

**Patricia C. Phillips:** Alfredo, as I was walking to your studio today I thought back to the many conversations we have had over the years. We enjoyed many conversations at your studio on Warren Street that are continued here in your studio on Twenty-sixth Street.

**Alfredo Jaar:** Patti, actually you were the first person I met when I came to New York in 1982. We were both working for SITE on Spring Street. To meet you so early was an extraordinary occurrence and I feel very lucky that this happened.

**Phillips:** I would like to begin by talking about your most recent project on Angola. What prompted you to choose to work in Angola? There are so many incredible events, developments, horrors, and challenges in the world. What is it about the circumstances in Angola that you find compelling?

**Jaar:** I am irresistibly attracted to Africa. There is something about that continent that moves me deeply. I feel that I must devote concentrated effort and energy in order to expose what is happening there and to trigger some kind of reaction and solidarity. Since I finished my project on Rwanda that took six years (1994–2000), I have wanted to go back to Africa. The reason I decided to go to Angola is based on my collection of African music and not necessarily because of a particular event. As you know, I collect African music. I find African music incredibly creative and moving. I think it is some of the most extraordinary music being created today, in spite of the difficulties that African musicians have accessing materials and instruments.

An important focus of my collection is African music of Portuguese influence. This includes music from Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and Cape Verde. I like the nostalgic sound of Portuguese music. When you combine this melancholic sound, which the Portuguese call *sabade*, with African music, the result is extremely touching and sad, but beautiful at the same time. About four years ago when I was organizing my collection, I realized that I had six different versions of a song called "Mozina." As I listened to these different versions, I realized they were recorded at different times in Angolan history. Listening to them, I could practically visualize the recent history of Angola: colonialism, independence, civil war, land mines, AIDS, and so on. I could hear all of these events in the music—through the same song. I thought that it could be an interesting device to use this music as a structural element to create a film about Angola. The discovery of this song in my collection triggered the idea of this film.

**Phillips:** I remember hearing you give several different lectures based on your Rwanda project. In fact, I vividly recall a lecture you gave at SUNY New Paltz to open the 2001 conference *Sites of Conflict: Art in a Culture of Violence*. Music figured prominently in that moving and memorable lecture. But is this the first time that music has been so central to your work, providing both a concept and structure for a piece?

**Jaar:** I have used music in a couple of works and in a performance, but it never before had the kind of protagonism it does in this project. I've been interested in

The conversation took place in Alfredo Jaar's  
New York studio on Tuesday, May 3, 2005.

Features

**Alfredo Jaar, One Million Finnish Passports, 1995, one million passport facsimiles, high-security glass, installation view, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki (artwork © Alfredo Jaar)**

In a room-sized space, Jaar stacked replicas of actual passports. The enormous, minimal accumulation represented the one million immigrants whom Finland would host if the country had the same immigration policy as most of its European neighbors (approximately 20 percent of its population).

music since I was very young. I even dreamed of being a musician. But I first discovered the healing powers of music after my trip to Rwanda. As you know, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda was a tragedy that is impossible to describe adequately. It took me years to recover from what I saw, and music was a significant part of this healing process. And then when, for other reasons, my work confronted a crisis regarding the use of images—a subject that I have explored in different projects—I thought that perhaps I could use music, instead of images, as an element to structure the work. This is how the idea for the film began to take shape.

**Phillips:** Do you feel that music is more honest and dependable than images, with which you have developed a very skeptical relationship?

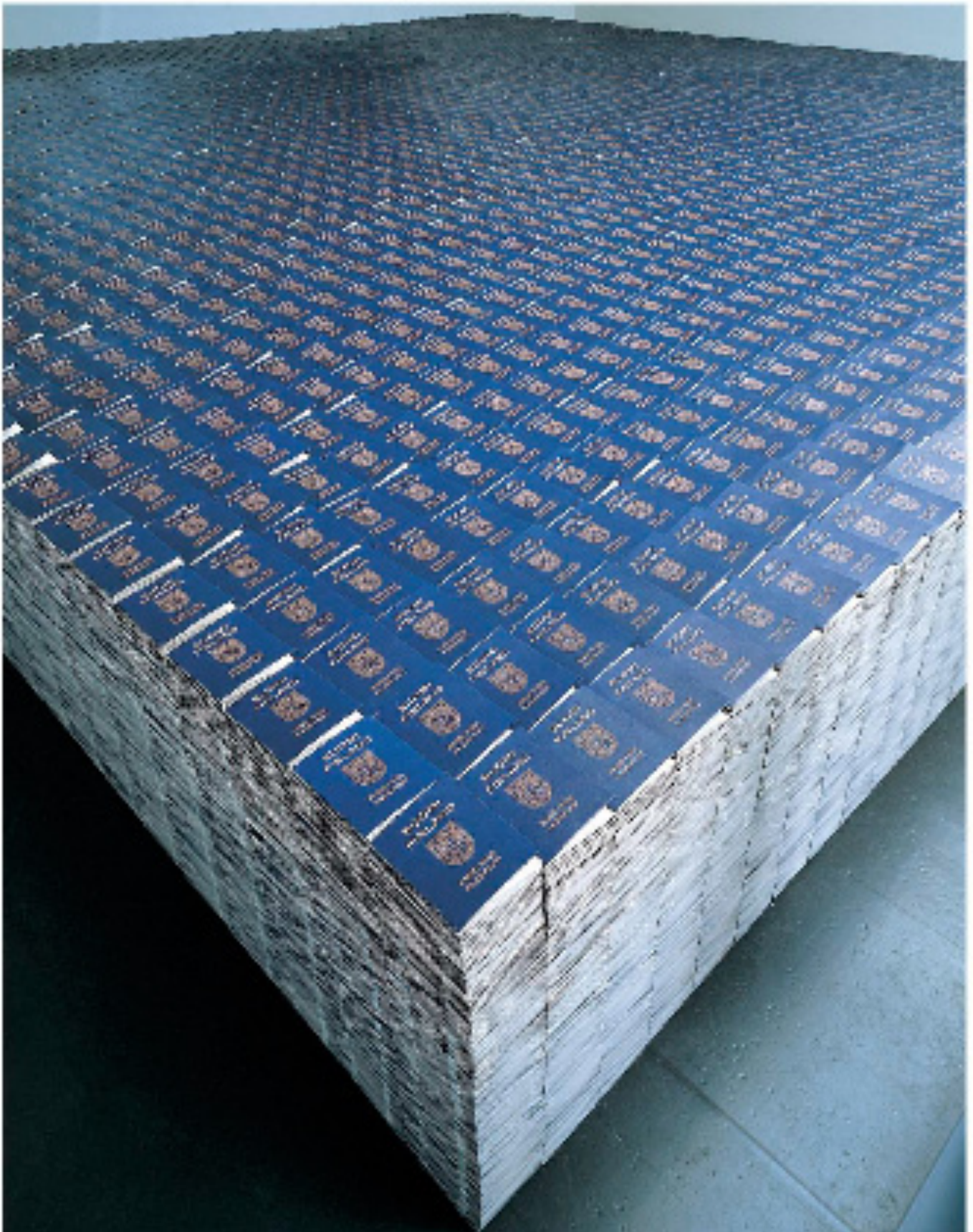
**Jaar:** Absolutely. I think that music is honest. When you listen to music, everything is on the table. You recognize the instruments, the tempo, the rhythm; the structure of a musical piece is transparent. Even if you do not fully understand the meaning of the lyrics, music communicates in a very compelling and undeniable way.

**Phillips:** I often think that music is embodied in a way that images generally are not. For many people there is a very direct and vivid connection between music, a particular moment, and individual and collective memory.

**Jaar:** When I was young, I would listen to a particular song all of the time for an entire year or more. I can't believe I was that obsessed! And my attraction to "Muzima" reminds me of that kind of obsession. In the film, which is also titled *Muzima*, we hear the song seven, eight—actually ten times. I hope that the song will be unforgettable for the audience—and will remind them later of the feelings and images evoked by the film. There are so many special things happening with music. I haven't theorized very much about this, but I intend to explore it further.

**Phillips:** Could you talk about your process with this film, but also more generally about your methodology? Your trip to Angola was self-initiated. I understand that you went there to look, travel, talk with people, but without a specific project in mind. It was a form of reconnaissance. This generally is the first step for you, is it not?

**Jaar:** I begin with reading and research. In this case, I had followed Angola's history as part of my larger interest and understanding of African history. I knew about the civil war and the AIDS crisis. I was also perfectly aware of the phenomenal developments in the oil and diamond trades. But it was by going there, talking with people, and seeing Angola with my own eyes that I began to conceive of the possibility of a short film. On the first trip I didn't film at all. I did, however, photograph places that I thought might be locations for a film. And then I started working on a possible script. Although it was very flexible and open, I wanted to make very precise points. For example, I wanted to somehow communicate that this fantastic wealth from oil has not had the effect we might expect. It has not trickled down to improve health and social services for most Angolans. There are sadly not many visible signs of this oil wealth, which amounts to billions of dollars annually, when you visit most of the country.



**Phillips:** There are two disparate economies: the economy of oil and the conditions of poverty that most Angolans endure.

**Jaar:** Yes, and the film tries to connect these economies in every frame.

**Phillips:** I know that, in addition to music, film has been a sustained influence for you. But I think this is the first time that you have made a film. Could you talk about your process, how you developed a concept and structure?

**Jaar:** I didn't want to give the spectator the kind of insulting stereotypical images of Africa we normally receive from the media, of course, and I wanted to show Angola in a unique and different light. I also imposed on myself certain directives that I called dogma. It is loosely based on *Dogma 95*, by Lars von Trier. No actors, no special effects, no lighting, no special sounds, etc. . . . I wanted to show as little as possible while expressing as much as I could. We filmed twenty hours and reduced it to thirty-three minutes. I wanted to do a short visual poem and was thinking of the poetry of Giuseppe Ungaretti, who expresses so much with two or three words in a poem. I wondered if this was possible to achieve with a film.

Structurally, I divided the film into ten cantos. I was thinking of *Canto General*, the epic poem by Pablo Neruda that is divided into hundreds of shorter poems. I also thought of Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. Each canto in the film is a visual poem and, in order to keep it to a minimum, I used the additional structure of a haiku. As you know a haiku is a very short Japanese poem composed following certain specific rules. In the film, each canto focuses on one or two issues, and I hoped that the clash of one issue with another would produce not one plus one equals two, but rather one plus one equals three, five, or more. This is what a haiku does—this is the power of poetry. I tried to do this with the language of film.

**Phillips:** Do you plan to return to Angola? I know that you did a great deal of filming while you were there, but after doing this film are there new questions, issues, or perspectives raised that you need to revisit or reexamine?

**Jaar:** The film had its U.S. premiere in May 2005, and I am still nervous and insecure about the public reaction. It opened at Grand Arts in Kansas City. I really hope the film will be able to establish a dialogue with its audience. Perhaps this reaction will suggest to me what to do next. There are many possibilities. I might expand the film, increase the number of cantos, and make a more complex feature-length film. Or perhaps I might do another kind of film. I really don't know yet. I have to see if what I have tried to accomplish is working. Who knows, perhaps the film is totally unreadable!

As you know, I have relied on text a great deal in my work because I am obsessed with clarity. Because I want to communicate something very specific with each piece, I've used a lot of text in one fashion or another. When I first designed the film, I was going to use text at the beginning of the film to introduce the audience to Angola and give a panoramic view of the country's problems. So I wrote a very comprehensive essay. I analyzed it for a long time, finally asking myself the question: if this essay is so complete, why do I need to make a film?

**Phillips:** And if the film communicates, why would you need the essay?

1. The Dogma 95 manifesto, written by the Danish directors Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, promulgates a set of rules with the aim of establishing an anti-fictional cinema. To read the manifesto and related texts, see [martweiss.com/film/dogma95.html](http://martweiss.com/film/dogma95.html).



**Jaar:** Ultimately, I decided to let the film communicate solely through images and sounds. I decided that the text was unnecessary. I used the form of multiple cantos because I wanted a fragmented structure that suggests the difficulties in capturing the complexity of Angola. I could make ten films on Angola, but since I cannot practically do this, I thought that the fragments would suggest that this is a partial view—and that there is much more.

But I really struggled with the decision of leaving the text out. I even thought of another idea: with the introduction of each canto, I would include a brief text. For example, the title for Canto Six would have been something like: "Canto Six, or how to deactivate a land mine, one of 18 million." I was desperate to include this kind of information. But I managed to control myself! As you saw, there is no text whatsoever. I am eager to know how people will respond here. The film was shown in Windhoek, Namibia. We edited the film there, as I wanted to achieve a totally African production. Audience members understood every thing—it was fantastic! But the knowledge of Angola in Namibia is of course radically different from what an audience here might know about Angola. As you know, only 15 percent of Americans have a passport, and their lack of knowledge about other cultures is truly dramatic.

**Phillips:** You describe this interesting moment or threshold in your thinking. We live within a reading and riotous visual culture. Strategically, at one point you began to withhold or withdraw the image in your work. Now you are working with images again, but with great restraint. I don't think that your work attempts to control people's responses, but you think very carefully about what people might understand about the work. It seems to me that you are in a new place in your relationship to an audience. Do you currently seek a more open, perhaps less controlled experience or investigation of your work that, I believe, is demonstrated in *Musini*?

**Jaar:** This may have to do with using film. As you know, I studied film while studying architecture in Chile. When I moved to New York I could do neither film nor architecture, so I ended up doing art that, in many ways, was a combination of both. But during all these years I have thought of myself as a frustrated filmmaker who just never found the means and opportunity to work in film. The extraordinary privilege of the filmmaker is that she or he has an audience in a very particular state of mind. In a movie theater, a spectator arrives mentally prepared to spend time with the film, sits in a comfortable chair, and there is one focal point of attention that attracts all the senses. The kind of attention that film commands is extraordinary, and I have always envied this power that filmmakers have to communicate with an audience.

This is why I was able to be more free than ever before. To view *Musini*, people are encouraged to enter at the beginning and to watch the entire thirty-three-minute film. There is a schedule and the film will not be looped. As much as possible, I would like to create a real cinematographic experience. Working within the film language and context for the first time, I thought that I could give up the text and other elements because people have the opportunity to watch and listen to the film under ideal conditions—something that is alarmingly absent in a museum or gallery context. I observe people in museums and galleries all the time, and I am shocked at the speed at which they walk by a work

Alfredo Jaar, *Ruher*, 1986, installation  
views of public project, Spring Street sub-  
way station, New York (artwork © Alfredo  
Jaar)

of art. It is appalling. It is very frustrating. This is why I have created installations that encourage people to take time, to stop, to read. I can't force people to see, but I can provide conditions for people to slow down so that the work can engage them in a dialogue. I have been desperate to slow down people within the context of my installations.

**Phillips:** In so many of your installations you use architecture as an instrument for and of navigation. There is expectation, surprise, and delay. Much of the work has a sequential, progressive quality that is very cinematic and filmlike. There are determined spatial configurations, and light plays a dramatic role as well. Often people move from "twilight" areas to shockingly illuminated spaces that create a sense of disorientation. This has been your strategy for overcoming the "drive-by" experience that so many people have of art.

**Jaar:** Yes, and because attention without distraction is part of a normal film-viewing experience, I do not have to think about this in this new film project.

**Phillips:** And perhaps the music is part of this more open process. When we first discussed the Angola project, we listened to several versions of "Muximbo" recorded at different times in the country's history. Although these versions did not convey a concise or factual history, they were evocative in their capacity to communicate historical conditions.

I am pleased that you brought up your background in architecture and film and the ways that these theories and fields have influenced your work in the past twenty-five years. I'd like to discuss other aspects of your work. You have made significant choices about places to research and visit, whether it is a Brazilian gold mine, a Vietnam refugee detention center in Hong Kong, the Mexican-United States border, or the site of toxic dumping in Nigeria. There is significant research that precedes these projects, but why or how did you choose these sites instead of other places of crisis or disruption in the world?

**Jaar:** When I started to work as an artist there was no Internet. This made life more complicated. I have always been very interested in the news and how different news stories communicate the reality of the world to us as citizens. This fascination with the mechanism of news came to me from my father, who could not start his day without reading the newspaper. I learned from him how to critically read a newspaper. I was always fascinated by the different ideological agendas of newspapers and magazines—to discover the subtle or more obvious differences between different reports about a same event.

Like my father, I would begin my day in the studio reading two, three, sometimes five newspapers, depending on how many I could afford that day. Prior to the Internet, we had to buy the papers, some of which were only available in the United States a day or two after their publication.

**Phillips:** And you read in three languages.

**Jaar:** Yes. I would encounter news stories that would attract my interest for different reasons. The access to images was also very limited. There were few images illustrating news stories, or the same images were published by different newspapers, often to support distinctly different ideological positions. I found this really fascinating. This was parallel to my discovery of New York, which I found



incredibly exciting but incredibly insular. As I got to know the art world, I was shocked by its provincialism. I decided early in my career that I wanted to bring the news of the world to the art world. I wanted to construct bridges to link the almost fictitious reality of the art world with the realities of the real world.

When I began reading about the gold mine at Serra Pelada in Brazil, there were no images. No photographer had ever been there. I just read about this vast crater in the rain forest surrounded by one hundred thousand miners. Roughly at this same time, I received a Guggenheim Fellowship, and this allowed me to travel to Serra Pelada. This was the first time I decided to go see a place I had read about in the newspapers. Once I got there, I realized there was nothing equal to the experience of witnessing something rather than reading about it. From this moment on, I decided to be a witness as often as I could.

Why did I go here rather than there? Each case would need close examination. After weeks of killings, reading the most outrageous reports in the newspapers, and observing a general disinterest and neglect of the international community I felt that I had to go to Rwanda. It is not just a matter of witnessing, but it is about being present and sharing with other people who have left their homes and families to be there. It is about being part of a developing network of support and assistance. You simply react as a human being. This is how Rwanda happened for me.

**Phillips:** I don't know if I have heard you talk so vividly about the process of witnessing, but I think it is a central feature of your work. The idea of bearing witness invokes a kind of gravity and weight that is vividly palpable.

**Jaar:** It pushes you as an artist. There is no way to translate what I see into an artwork. It is absolutely impossible. The challenge is enormous, and it forces me to come up with different strategies of representation. This is why I describe my work also as a series of exercises in representation. How do we translate this lived experience? I've always thought that we cannot represent this reality. Instead, you create a new reality with the work. Because I have faced and lived a specific reality, seen it with my own eyes, it demands a certain level of responsibility. This is not fiction! So I create little realities for the art world that are based on lived experiences. These experiences have changed me. I am who I am because I have been here and there. And the work is what it is because of where I have been. I cannot think of a better education—not only as an artist, but as a human being. It is an extraordinary challenge for me as an artist to communicate these experiences. I think this is why each project looks so different. I don't have a particular medium or format. I use different aesthetic strategies based on my response to a particular lived experience.

**Phillips:** Yes, but there is a familial character to the work that is connected to a restraint that we discussed earlier, as well as an idea of what it means to work responsibly with particular subject matter, situations, and lived experiences. You make choices as an artist and human being about what to investigate, where to go, and what to do when you get there. And then there is the difficult choice of what to make or produce. You often go to sites of extremity, crisis, and conflict that too often are depicted in a stereotypical or sensationalized manner in the press. So no matter how different the media or formats you use, all of the work

reflects a highly calibrated process of editing and refinement. I don't want to overlook this character that connects work over the years inspired by so many different places.

You talk frequently about responsibility. What are the other issues raised by the work? As human beings, we seek to understand what it means to do our work—and the consequences of our work. Art is always a process of ethical reflection. What does it mean to do our work ethically, if imperfectly? I know this is a dilemma for you—the fact that all work fails in some way. How do you keep your bearings as you move between sites of extremity and the pleasures and frustrations of the art world? What are the distractions and dissonances because of this for you? Actually, let me be simplistic and graphic. I often show and discuss your work with students. Every now and then, a student will question the fact that you go to witness the horrors of genocide in Rwanda, for instance, and return to New York to make money from selling your work based on other people's suffering or trauma.

**Jaar:** This kind of question comes up all of the time. I expected to be confronted with it when I returned from Rwanda, so I wrote my own personal manifesto. Interestingly, the reception of the project was very positive, so I never had to use it. In a way, the question is: are we allowed as artists to create art out of suffering? Or should we let these tragedies sink into invisibility? Why can't I resist their invisibility in the media and offer my own reading, my own image, my own outrage, my own accusations about this tragic situation? To create these works is not only to put Rwanda on the map but is also a modest way to express solidarity, to create, as I did, a memorial for the victims of genocide in Rwanda. Now, how many gestures of solidarity have you seen? How many memorials to Rwanda have you seen? This is a memorial for one million people. What is this worth?

Why should an exhibition about Rwanda cost less money than, say, an exhibition about "the tree in eighteenth-century painting"? How much does a film or a rock concert cost? Thousand of times more than my little Rwanda Project. Why can't I dedicate time and resources to this subject? Why can't I dignify this subject with resources? Tens of thousands of people have seen the Rwanda Project in dozens of cities around the world. If only a small percentage of the viewers are affected, this still is a few thousand people who will look at Rwanda and Africa in a different way and perhaps express their solidarity. How much does this cost? How much is this worth?

These are just a few of the possible responses to this question. Regarding this question of ethics, I always cite Jean-Luc Godard. He said that "it may be true that one has to choose between ethics or aesthetics, but it is no less true that, whichever one chooses, one will always find the other one at the end of the road. For the very definition of the human condition should be in the mise-en-scène itself."<sup>1</sup> There is no way to escape ethics. Whatever aesthetic decisions we make about our work, about our strategies of representation, they also reflect an ethical position. Accepting this, I think it is important to confront this unavoidable choice in the work from the beginning, as part of its structure.

**Phillips:** It is interesting that, with a few exceptions, there is little sustained institutional critique of the media. On the other hand, when Philip Gourevitch goes to Rwanda and writes about what he saw, there was no ethical challenge.<sup>2</sup>

1. Jean-Luc Godard, quoted in Susan Sontag, "Godard," in *A Susan Sontag Reader* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 735.  
2. Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Random, 1998).

Alfredo Jaar, *Real Pictures*, 1995, archival boxes, silk-screen, color photographs, installation view, Centre d'Art Santa Monica, Barcelona (artwork © Alfredo Jaar)

Is there something about visual art that makes it very vulnerable to these critiques? Does this tie in with our very challenged and challenging relationship with images? Why are visual artists often challenged, if not condemned, when other people go to Rwanda and produce work?

**Jaar:** If you take the case of Gurevitch, he probably spent the same amount of money that I did in Rwanda and the result is a book. I am relatively sure that he does not confront these kinds of challenges to his ethical stand regarding writing about Rwanda. I think that one reason we are challenged is that artists do not have a good reputation. People do not respect artists in the same way that they respect intellectuals. I think that people place intellectuals above artists.

**Phillips:** Alfredo, I consider you a public intellectual, but generally when people identify a public intellectual, they look to writers, scholars, and academics. Generally, art is not seen as a form of intellectual work, in the same way that art production often is not understood as research in the university. I find it troubling that this physical and material evidence that artists develop and produce generally is not perceived as part of the intellectual culture.

**Jaar:** As a critic you have helped the general audience see and understand art as intellectual work—that visibility communicates intellectual ideas. The role of the critic is absolutely fundamental, but I do not think that culture today gives critics the kind of space and means they need to enlighten the public with their analysis of visual work. The daily press creates a significant part of the general landscape of our culture, but it does not provide a space for critical ideas. We read the late Susan Sontag, Noam Chomsky, the late Edward Said, and dozens of other intellectuals, but more often we read their work in European and Latin American publications. They have columns and ongoing forums to express their opinions. The press in this country does not have respect for these and other intellectuals. It does not offer the space. It is shocking that we do not find them here. I think this is a key element why artists and critics are seen in such a poor light. It is pathetic. This is why I feel very privileged to speak and read a few languages.

**Phillips:** Your relationship with images and strategies about representation has always been at the heart of your work. You think clearly, ethically, and theoretically about these issues and ideas. Could you talk about *Lament of the Images* (2002)? It is a disquieting and complex project, architecturally and spatially. And light is a powerful agent in the work. There are concisely selected texts about the increasing controls of visual culture along with the withholding and absence of images. In some respects, you did this as well with *Real Pictures* where the images—the Rwandan photographs—were withheld. They were stored in archival boxes, each with a description on the lid of the photograph secreted within. I am fascinated by this very complicated relationship that you have with images. With your background in film, architecture, installations, and photography, perhaps it is unsurprising that you would focus on the perilous nature of images. You did encounter a crisis of images after Rwanda. How has this changed your work?

**Jaar:** Rwanda required me to shift my perspective quite radically. If I spent six years working on this project, it was trying different strategies of representation. Each project was a new exercise, a new strategy, and a new failure. I would learn



Alfredo Jaar, *Levels of the Image*, 2001.  
Three illuminated books mounted on plastic  
glass, light screen, text compiled by  
David Levi Strauss, installation view and  
detail of first window, Documents 11,  
Knoed (artwork © Alfredo Jaar)

and move on to the next exercise that also would fail and so on. Basically this serial structure of exercises was forced by the Kwanda project and my incapacity to represent it in a way that made sense.

**Phillipa:** Serial exercises that are intransparent or fail yet inform the next project are an intriguing way to think about process. There is a long history in art of withholding images, so it is striking when images are withheld. And yet this process of withholding in your work actually creates very vivid effects about the absence of images.

**Jaar:** These exercises were a response to the dimension of the project and my incapacity to communicate this to an audience that, in most cases, did not want to hear about it. I was at a loss. I spent almost a year before I started to create these works. And then I felt that I had to keep trying new strategies, but was always frustrated with the results. It is true that after the Kwanda project, I gained a new insight on images and photography. I was never the same again as an artist. The most or more projects that I have done since Kwanda, for not an

images—until this most recent work in Angola. I am suspicious and disillusioned about the uses and misuses of photography in the art world, the press, and the world of entertainment. And to make things more complicated, I don't think that the general public is well educated regarding images. Generally, we are taught how to read, but we are not taught how to look.

**Phillips:** To bring critical capacities to what we see—or the kind of discernment that you learned from your father about reading and analyzing three or four different newspapers—must be developed.

**Jaar:** How do you function as a visual artist in this system where the reception of images is innocent—and never critical? All of my works after Rwanda became exercises in representation. *Lament of the Images* was an exercise. I described it as a philosophical essay on the failure of representation.

I had read an article in the *New York Times* about Corbis, a photo agency owned by Bill Gates, becoming the largest photo agency in the world, purchasing millions of images from different international photo agencies and signing contracts with the most important museums of the world. Then he bought the Bettmann and UPI archive that has some of the most significant images of the twentieth century. Today I think he owns one hundred million images, but he will archive in an abandoned quarry in Pennsylvania. Although he plans to digitize this vast collection, the process will take about five hundred years to complete.

A year or two later I was in Cape Town, South Africa. I visited Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was a prisoner for almost thirty years. It was a sad and curious experience because the tour guides are former prisoners. After I finished the official tour, I asked to visit the limestone quarry where the prisoners were required to work. I learned about the work and how sunlight reflected off the white limestone damaged prisoners' eyes. So I connected Gates's quarry with the quarry where black men were blinded. Several weeks later the war in Afghanistan started and, like everyone else, I read about the purchase of all available satellite images by the United States. We all were blinded by this decision. So I decided to connect these three stories.

**Phillips:** The texts richly reweberate.

**Jaar:** Because of my poor English, I asked my friend David Levi Strauss to compose the texts for me. As you know, he is one of the most brilliant critics and thinkers on photography today. I wanted to complete the piece by offering a final "blinding" experience to the audience. So the next space offered a large illuminated screen that simply contained light without images, but a very powerful light that left the audience temporarily out of sight and shocked into blindness.

We are living today in a paradoxical situation. There has never been so much access to information and images. Our landscape is saturated by images. But at the same time, we never have had so much control of images by private corporations and governments. I wanted to speculate about this situation. *Lament of the Images* is a modest philosophical essay on our relationship to images today.

**Phillips:** You mention that you try to maintain a balance in your work between projects for galleries and museums, public projects, and teaching and pedagogy. Is there a recent public project that you feel was successful or where you learned something or observed consequences that you might bring to future projects?



Alfredo Jaar, *Lights in the City*, 1999, installation views of public project, Montreal (copyright © Alfredo Jaar)



Alfredo Jaar, *The Skoghall Konsthall*, 2000,  
Installation views of public project,  
Skoghall, Sweden (artwork © Alfredo Jaar)

**Jaar:** The Montréal project was interesting but difficult for me. I accepted this opportunity shortly after I finished the Rwanda project. I was offered a space to display images in windows in a prominent former Parliament building called the Cupola. The images were going to be lit from behind, transforming the windows into light boxes. But after the Rwanda Project, I knew it would be difficult for me to use images. I accepted this project because it was a challenge. I often put myself in these difficult situations. I don't know why, but this is how I function best. I visited Montréal several times, and I discovered next to the Cupola a homeless shelter that offered meals to 3,200 people each month. The shelter had a moving dignity, and it was also invisible. When I asked about this, people told me that it was invisible just like the homeless in the city. They sent me to visit two other shelters near the Cupola. It became clear: people suffer the tragedy of homelessness in invisibility and silence. I began to talk with the women and men in the shelters. They talked about the fact that they felt invisible. Often they asked for money on the streets, they told me, not only because they needed it but also because they sought a public recognition of their humanity. They wanted people to acknowledge their presence, through a smile, a hello, but they were overlooked, as a garbage can or a lamppost is ignored.

At the same time, I started to study the Cupola, which had burned five times in its history. Each time the city decided to rebuild this national monument. After the fifth fire, the Parliament decided to move to another building. So the Cupola stood abandoned. In a moment of lucidity, I connected the fires in the Cupola with the situation of the homeless in Montréal. I thought: Why don't we put the fire back in the Cupola to call attention to the fifteen thousand homeless in a city as prosperous as Montréal? Why don't we "burn" it again so that people can see the plight of the homeless in the city? My simple solution was that as people entered the shelters to eat or sleep, they could hit a switch to trigger a hundred thousand watts of red lights illuminating the Cupola to signal their presence in the shelters.

I submitted my proposal to the people at the shelters. They appreciated that I was not exposing them through photography. They liked and approved my idea. These red lights connected to the shelters were my way of sending a distress signal to the city—of making the homeless visible without pointing at them directly. Of course, the red lights also recalled the fires that consumed the building many times, but metaphorically, I was trying to suggest another kind of fire, one that immobilizes and consumes society itself. This project was part of a photography biennial, so the piece had another theoretical meaning. Each red light was, in fact, a portrait without the person in sight. For six magical weeks the issue of homelessness became prominent in Montréal. We wanted the Cupola to become a permanent monument of shame, and other shelters wanted to join us and get connected, but six weeks later the mayor cancelled it. Like all of my projects, it failed. We did not give the homeless a home. We did not resolve their problem. We gave them a brief, hopeful moment when they regained their humanity, when people started acknowledging their presence, smiled at them, when the press also contributed to the dialogue, but eventually they returned to their status as homeless. With these projects you change so little . . .

**Phillips:** There are so many vagaries regarding reception, perception, and control in public art. It is a very fraught process.





Alfredo Jaar, *Infinite Cell (Grand Theory One)*, 2004, composite installation view, Galleria Lia Rummena, Milan (artwork © Alfredo Jaar)

**Jaar:** Absolutely. As an artist and architect, I meticulously design each detail, but you lose control because it is in the public realm. It is difficult to predict what a project may provoke. One night, I observed a group of drunken men waiting half an hour for the red lights to appear. It was an uncharacteristically quiet night, but suddenly the red lights brightened and then disappeared. The men began to cheer. I was saddened and frustrated that they applauded the lights, but did not acknowledge what they represented. I was very frustrated. You lose control. You cannot predict what will happen when your work is in the public space.

**Phillips:** In conclusion, I want to try to make some connection between control and theatricality in your work. This theatricality seems to be very strategic. I think

that visual art can provide—to question, to speculate, and to search. It blew my mind. I sought a spectacular way to deal with this lack. I created an exhibition space for twenty-four hours and then burned it away. I wanted to offer a glimpse of what contemporary art is and what it can do in a community. Then by “disappearing” it in such a spectacular way, I hoped to reveal its absence.

Yes, it was obviously a theatrical strategy. I studied theater for many years. I even wrote plays and was a terrible actor. I am interested in theater as a discipline and communicative device. As an artist and architect, everything I do is to facilitate the reading of the work. In this case, the theatrics of a project are just that. They respond to the needs of the piece to communicate specific ideas. I hope that any theatricality is understood as just one element in the language that I need to communicate an idea. I am sure that I sometimes fall into an excess or suppression of the theatrical. The work is either too much or is too dry and obscure. You always walk a fine line between excess and constraint. I never know if I reach the perfect balance between information and spectacle.

**Phillips:** But you recognize that the ideas and sensations can richly resonate.

**Jaar:** For the outside observer, the Skoghall project may seem more spectacle than information, but for the citizens of this town, I can assure you that the spectacle was all about the visual materialization of their lack of cultural life. The spectacle made this lack physical and visceral. I am proud that a year later, when Sweden created a countrywide register of significant buildings, Skoghall nominated my short-lived structure as its most important building. The after-effect of this project has created a movement among concerned citizens to seek funds to build a real kunsthalle in their community.

**Phillips:** I think of you as neither pessimistic nor optimistic. Alternately, I think of you as both pessimistic and optimistic. It is such an understatement, but you do not deal with frivolous topics in your work. How do you keep your sense of resolve and your freshness in the work in such challenging circumstances? You deal with subjects of tremendous gravity. It would be understandable if you became discouraged. In a recent issue of *The Nation*, ninety-three-year-old Studs Terkel wrote a testimonial to Pete Seeger on his eighty-sixth birthday. They have retained an incredible sense of conviction and commitment to progressive ideas and work through their long lives. How does this happen?

**Jaar:** I don't know how to answer this almost existential question. I was thinking of Gramsci, to whom I recently dedicated a trilogy of projects in Italy. He wrote about the pessimism of the intellect and the optimism of the will. I still believe in the capacity of culture, like Gramsci did, to make a difference in our lives. It is only through cultural productions, actions, and programs that we can improve our lives and the lives of people around us. I am very critical of the role of politics and disillusioned by the role of most of the media, which is in the hands of a few corporations that have transformed it into a business like any other. I still believe, because we have no choice, that the world of culture is the only space left in the world today where we can speculate and suggest new ways of understanding the world—the only place where we can dream. I have seen enough to be a pessimist, and I am a depressing character [laughter], but I think we have no choice. Hope or nothing.

**Phillips:** This is a good way to end, but let me present this brief coda. What do you think of the artist interview, this frequently used genre of "art writing"? Can the interview be a fruitful and effective form of critical exchange? The interview has become a ubiquitous form. Every museum publication has critical essays and an interview with the artist. Interviews proliferate in art magazines and journals. And here I am doing one with you! It is a curious but insufficiently examined phenomenon.

**Jaar:** I generally don't like interviews. Often there isn't enough knowledge in common between the interviewer and interviewee. I accepted this interview because of our twenty-five years of common history and relationship. You have followed my work for such a long time. Only when there is this deep knowledge shared by the participants, perhaps some illuminating truth can be shared with the reader. When there isn't this trust and shared knowledge, then it becomes more of a play between actors, where the interviewer seeks to display her or his knowledge and the respondent also plays the game of presenting her or his best image in the face of poor circumstances. I enjoy reading interviews when the given conditions enable a truly shared and honest exchange.

Alfredo Jaar is an artist, architect, and filmmaker who lives and works in New York. His work has been shown extensively around the world. He was named a MacArthur Fellow in the year 2000. He currently holds the Winton Chair in Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

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## LAMENT OF THE IMAGES

### ALFREDO JAAR AND THE ETHICS OF REPRESENTATION

ABIGAIL SOLOMON GODEAU

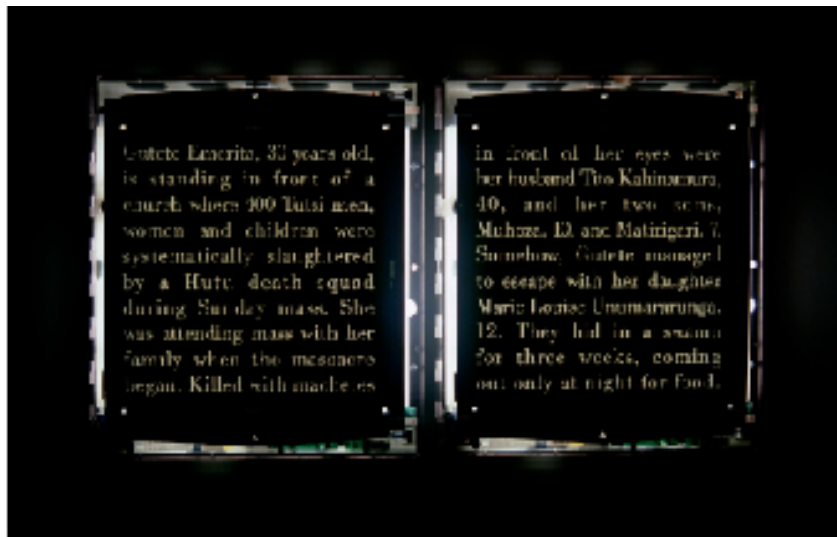
In August of 1994, four weeks after the genocide in Rwanda had taken its course and an estimated one million Rwandese men, women, and children, mostly Tutsi, lay slaughtered, Alfredo Jaar arrived in Kigali with his assistant, Carlos Vázquez, bringing with them film, cameras, and other recording material. Jaar, a Chilean-born, New York-based artist of international reputation, was by no means the first foreigner to have arrived there with a camera. Throughout the previous three months, during which the genocide continued and the international community did nothing, photojournalists and TV cameramen had recorded the carnage, including footage broadcast on American television showing Tutsis lashed to death with machetes.

What distinguished Jaar's presence on the scene was that he made his pilgrimage to the killing fields as an artist, not as a journalist. What did it mean for an artist, albeit one identified as "political," to go to Rwanda as a self-appointed witness of the aftermath of genocide, and then, during the following four years, to make artworks based on that act of witnessing? How ought we to think about the use of catastrophe as the subject of art, and perhaps more important, to what ends are artistic practices such as Jaar's directed?

Such questions are by no means new. They have been raised each time art has taken on subjects such as the Holocaust, war, or other crimes against humanity as foci of their work, which is not to say that these questions necessarily have hard and fast

answers. Obviously, much depends on the nature of the artwork itself, but visual art poses a set of issues that are not raised by textual forms. This is evident in the fact that fictional accounts of the Holocaust are numerous, but—outside of film—there are relatively few examples among the visual arts where genocide is the subject of the work. This disproportion in cultural production between textual and (nonfilmic) visual forms follows from the material specificity of the media involved. The individual reader of a poem or novel creates her own mental images of what is recounted on the page. Visual representation, however, especially in photographic form, is frozen once and for all, a static artifact that is far less amenable to the spectator's own interiorized re-vision.

Moreover, divorced from duration and temporality and fixed on its paper or celluloid support, the photographic image is a kind of brute and speechless fact, an arrest of a sight, whose possible claim on the viewer generally endures only for the time of viewing. There are, of course, any number of photographers, including those designated as artists (I am thinking here of Sebastião Salgado), who represent catastrophe in the form of aestheticized photographic imagery: beautiful, poignant images of calamity, misery, and extremity. But this type of production tends not to acknowledge, or indeed manifest, much awareness of the ethical problems such forms of representation actually pose, including the problem of aestheticism itself. To those I shall return, but the



explanatory limits of any given photographic image, its inability to indicate causality, has been critically noted at least since the 1930s. "Images," Jaar has said, quoting the Catalan poet Vicenç Altaió, "have an advanced religion: they bury history."

Accordingly, for certain artists who address the catastrophic in its myriad incursions and who desire their work to bear witness within the institutional spaces of art (and sometimes outside them), the fundamental issue could be defined as the ethics of representation. In other words, if the artist is to avoid the spectacularization of others' catastrophe, what are the possibilities of representing it otherwise, especially when the camera is the medium? Furthermore, if, as critics such as Susan Sontag have argued, we have been effectively "inoculated" against the horror of photographs of mass death and suffering (insofar as such imagery has been ubiquitous for decades, what is the capacity of art addressing such subjects to foster effective knowledge and ethical responsibility?)

Given both the scale and availability of the visual archive of horrors, both man-made and natural, Sontag's contention that regular exposure to such imagery produces its own form of anaesthesia can hardly be dismissed. American relief agencies employ the term "compassion fatigue" to describe this deadening of empathetic capacities. Indeed, the massive charitable response to the 2004 tsunami disaster (a response that significantly dwarfed those prompted by the ongoing genocide in the Sudan, or by the current wars in Chechnya and Uganda) suggests that we respond more readily to natural catastrophes than to man-made ones. In part, this is itself ideological. By definition, nature's deprecations are no one's fault, which would suggest that they more readily prompt feelings of empathetic identification ("I here but for the grace of God . . .") that are rarely felt when the catastrophe is caused by human action, and also happens far away. Moreover, to the extent that for Westerners contemporary catastrophe appears as both endemic and—especially insidious—"natural" to the non-Western world, it becomes easy to relegate African or Asian catastrophes to the order of destiny, fatality, or cultural pathology.<sup>3</sup>

Jaar's work has long been photographically based, but relatively few of his projects are constituted as series of discrete images; in this respect it would appear that Jaar has never considered photographs alone as sufficient to his purposes.<sup>4</sup> His varied artistic practice often provides implicit criticism of the

limits of photographic representation. In some cases, his work has refused the image altogether, as in his 1995 installation in Helsinki titled *One Million Finnish Passports*, which consisted of precisely that: one million passports, stacked in the gallery space, metaphorically representing the many people refused entry to Finland due to its restrictive immigration policies.

Jaar's art, notwithstanding its subject matter, is art, and as such, it has at times been conceived in dialogue with other artists' work. *Signs of Life* (1994), the first of Jaar's works on the Rwanda genocide, consisted of a set of touristic Rwandan postcards, depicting scenic landscapes, exotic wildlife, and the like, salvaged from a ruined post office. Two hundred of these were mailed to various friends and associates upon Jaar's arrival in neighboring Uganda. On the blank face of the card, adjacent to the recipient's address, he sent a euphoric message of survival: "Musine Munarungu is still alive!" "Caritas Namazuru is still alive!" "Jerome Uwaronero is still alive!" etc. (These were among the survivors he had met and interviewed.) In form, *Signs of Life* made pointed reference to the conceptual artist On Kawara's 1969–70 postcard project, which consisted of messages to his friends succinctly characterizing his psychological state. Other references to contemporary artists (and filmmakers) are scattered through Jaar's projects—for example, to Joseph Beuys, to Hans Haacke, to minimalists such as Donald Judd—sometimes such references are made in homage, sometimes as wry counterpoint.

None of Jaar's subsequent Rwanda works offer the comfort in the exhilarating fact of survival that is the message of *Signs of Life*. By the time he produced *Rwanda, Rwanda* (1994), the second of the works in what ultimately became "Let There Be Light: The Rwanda Projects 1994–2000," it was the crime of the genocide itself and the world's indifference to it that had become the dominant theme. In this instance, it was precisely the text that conveyed the message. A public art project commissioned by the city of Malmö, it consisted of a series of fifty light-boxes scattered throughout the city, bearing only the word *Rwanda* repeated vertically eight times in bold type. In this condensed format, the signs operated as an accusatory reminder of the failure of civilized Europe to intervene. Deployed on the clean and orderly streets and roadways of the city, they reminded passersby of the catastrophe elsewhere, and functioned as well as a kind of textual, exclamatory





every, insofar as the country's very name had become inescapably associated with mass murder and global indifference. To graphically indicate the indifference of the American public, Jaar later explicated into center of his installation the weekly covers of *Newsweek* that appeared during the three months of genocide (i.e., "Better than Vietnam: The Search for the Malaria Pill," "America's Cup: Plying Home to the World," "To Walk on Mars," etc.)

While Jaar's earlier work represented the notion of a purely photographic content as adequate for political contextualization, it is clear that his various transitions and writings that the experience in Rwanda served to put further in question the role of photography in the representation of catastrophe. Photographing a mass of decomposing bodies, such as that which Jaar performed at the Rwanda Genocide, could in no way communicate the causes of what happened. "It would not make a difference," Jaar was told, "showing more images of the massacre, more images than had been seen in the media."

In 1995, Jaar produced an installation of the Rwanda work that he titled *The Genocide of the Wasoga*, a project occasioned both by what the images depict, and by the marked failure of photographic imagery, in most instances, to have prompted action or redress. Certain of Jaar's Rwanda projects include a written chronological narrative of the course of the genocide and its most immediate identifiable causes. There were, however, while crucial to the installations in which they feature (and necessary, moreover, to correct simplistic explanations of why the genocide occurred, and a partial answer to his claim. In one of the most powerful of the Rwanda works, *The Eyes of Gacaca Rwanda* (2008), produced in several editions, Jaar employed single images of the individual victims, depicting only the eyes of his individual victims. These are the eyes of the witness, the victim, the one whose experience of catastrophe is, in the final analysis, unrepresentable. The text of these installations reads as follows:

Gacaca Rwanda, 22 years old, bristling in rows of a trench when 400 Tutsi men, women and children were spotted already sleeping by a Hutu soldier passing through the camp. She was attractive cause with her beauty when she

maneuvered to get. She had no money to buy an eye was for another. The rain was too, and she had seen. Makusa, 22, and Mungira, 7, were close, close enough to dance with her daughter Marie-Louise (1998), 10. They were a couple for some weeks, coming out every night for food. Her eyes were lost and she was dead. Her face is the face of someone who has witnessed an unbearable tragedy and now must live. She has returned to this place in the world because she has nowhere else to go. When she speaks about her own family, she gestures to objects on the ground, saying in the African way:

*Ukubwira uruho, umuho umuho umuho.*

In the third edition of *The Eyes of Gacaca Rwanda*, which also included the running text, Jaar created an overhead lightbox in a defunct space. Upon the lightbox were heaped one million 25mm slides of Rwanda's eyes. With lenses attached to the corners of the box, the spectacle could examine any of the slides, and would assure visitors that they were all the same. But the act of peering through the loupe functioned to make the viewer's encounter intimate and private, for gaze meeting the gaze of Rwanda.

In acknowledging that the trauma of the slide is ultimately unrepresentable, just as historical catastrophe is unrepresentable, Jaar continued the iconographic logic of earlier installations, such as *Red America* (1996). This work contained 375 tiny photographic images, each containing one of his photographs of the traces of the genocide, and within. A written description of the intense photograph was attached at the top of each container, and the boxes were arranged in four into configurations in a circular room. The objectivity of genocide was thus located off scene (which is, in fact, the epistemological core of the work's content.) The work of the work, as it were, is not to show us the evidence of massacre, but to spare in the viewer a personal interrogation of one's place in relation to the genocide of which we had knowledge, just as the intimate encounter in the eyes of Rwanda is in the traces of an unrepresentable to learn between our circumstances and hers.

THIS PAGE: (top, color installation, 2008) OPPOSITE: *The Search*, March 8, 2002

In other of the Rwandese works, as well as those later projects, collectively titled "Let There Be Light," utilizing text and similarly "unspectacular" images, Jaar makes allusion to the structural paradoxes of photography with respect to visual perception and knowledge. Jaar's frequent use of illuminated light-box presentations of both image and text suggests a metaphorical deployment of radiant light, which is itself ambivalent: the illuminated image of commercial space, such as those on kiosks or in advertising imagery, is hardly the radiance of enlightenment, or the metaphorical light of reason.

The resonances of the biblical creation myth—beginning, of course, with light—for photography are obvious: light is both the medium and the agent of the photographic image. And although the symbolic aspects of light are, for the most part, those of perception, knowledge, and reason, as Plato cautions in his allegory of the cave, when the benighted prisoner leaves the cave with its shadow-play of illusion, the light of day is blinding, painful. There is a distance to go before the sunlit world is even perceptible. Plato also insists that the image, which is itself an illusion (as is the photograph: an illusion of presence), is a seductive lure. From this descends all manner of iconoclasms, including contemporary artistic practices that refuse the ostensible plenitude and allure of the photographic picture, the picture that we take for reality.

It is significant, therefore, that Jaar has again utilized the phrase from Genesis as the motto for one of his recent works, first shown at Documenta XI, 2002. In this installation, the spectator first enters a room in which three texts (composed with the writer David Levi Strauss), inscribed on mounted light-boxes, tell three stories. The first of the texts is datelined "Capetown, South Africa, 1990," the date of Nelson Mandela's release after twenty-eight years in prison. The final passage of the text reads as follows:

*Nelson Mandela is released from prison, after 28 years of brutal treatment by the apartheid regime. The images of his release, broadcast live around the world, show a man squinting into the light as if blinded. . . . Mandela later said that Robben Island was "intended to cripple us so that we should never again have the strength and courage to pursue our ideals."*

*In the summer of 1964, Mandela and his fellow inmates in the isolation block were chained together and taken to a*

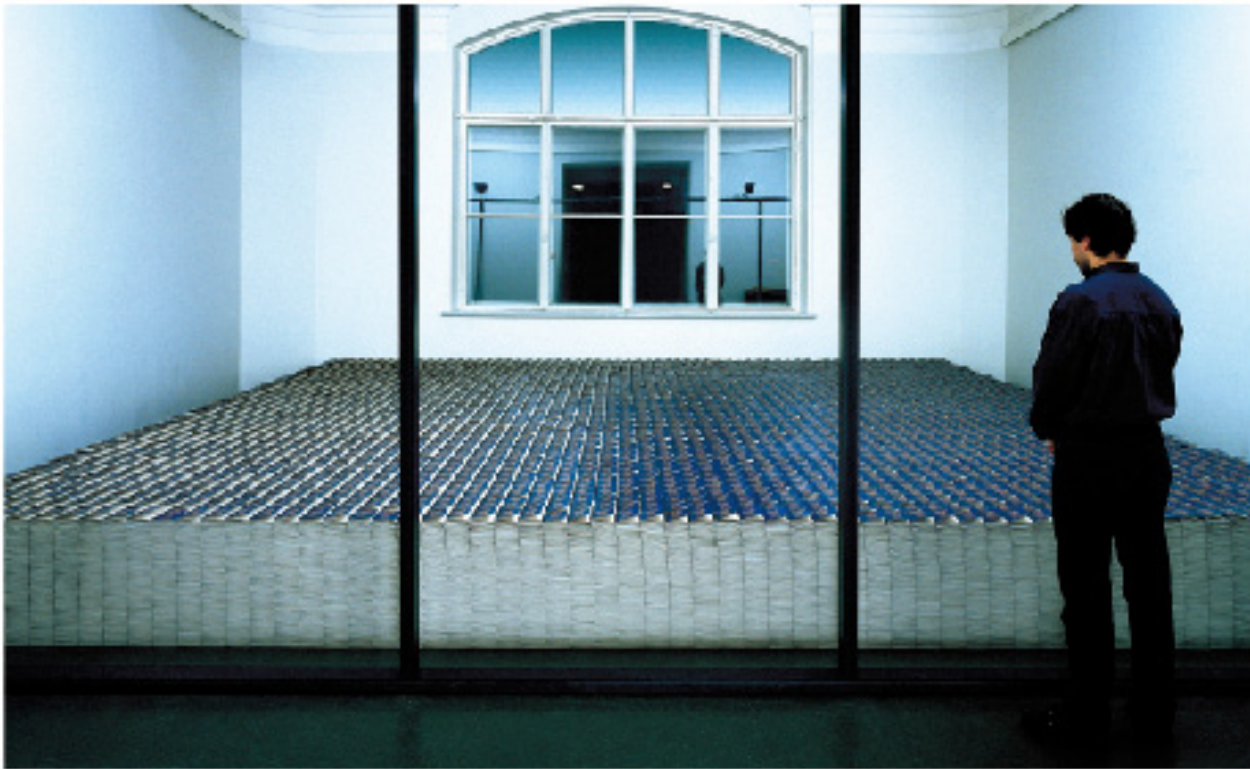
*limestone quarry in the center of the island, where they were sent out to work breaking rocks and digging lime. The lime was used to turn the island's roofs white. At the end of each day the black men had themselves turned white with lime dust. As they worked, the lime reflected the glare of the sun, blinding the prisoners. Their repeated request for sunglasses to protect their eyes was denied.*

*There are no photographs that show Nelson Mandela weeping on the day he was released from prison. It is said that the blinding light from the lime had taken away his ability to cry.*

The second text, also a news item, details the monopolization of image access by Microsoft, which had purchased major picture archives such as UPI and the Bettmann Archive, as well as digital images of museum works all stored underground, giving Bill Gates the exclusive rights to some 65 million images, historical and contemporary. The third text is a news item datelined "Oct. 7, Kabul," recounting the information that after launching its first air strikes against Afghanistan, the U.S. Defense Department secured exclusive rights to all available satellite images of Afghanistan and neighboring countries. This permitted the United States to control (i.e., censor) all images of the bombing and its effects on the ground.

After reading these texts, the spectator passes into another space, on one wall of which is projected only a painfully bright white light, the effects of which are temporarily blinding. In one sense, the installation physically mimics Mandela's and the other prisoners' experience in the quarry. But it returns us as well to the metaphors of vision and blindness, sight and insight, to what is obscured (censored imagery), controlled (ownership of the image), to the limits of both visibility and image. The excess of light, like the excess of images in our postmodern world, may well occlude the light of knowledge, the insight of knowledge. "The work," Jaar said in an interview, "is a metaphor for the blindness in our society. . . . I believe we have lost the ability to see and be moved by images."<sup>1</sup> But as Plato insisted two thousand years ago, it is not by means of the image that moral, ethical, or political knowledge is produced. As Jaar's

**OPPOSITE:** *One Million Finnish Passports*, 1999; **PAGES 44–45:** *Untitled (Newsworld)*, 2004; **PAGE 46:** *Lament of the Images (second version)*, 2002; **PAGE 47:** *Lament of the Images*, 2002. Image courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York.



works suggest, it is with respect to this acknowledged limitation that a heuristic but affective art of protest, contestation, or critique must invert its forms and shape its messages. ■

In conjunction with this article, Alfredo Jaar has produced a work specifically for Aperture's website titled *Roland, Susan, David and the Others*. To view, please log on to [www.aperture.org/magazine](http://www.aperture.org/magazine).

#### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> This citation served as the title of one of Jaar's projects, a brochure that accompanied the installation *Real Pictures* of the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago (1995).

<sup>2</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003). Certain of these arguments are in her earlier book, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> Among the many useful commentaries on this notion are Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1998) and Linda Newson's *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> However, in 1993, Jaar organized (as curator) an exhibition with two accompanying catalogs titled *Interno and Aussen*. In the former were assembled photographs by photojournalists representing what they considered the single most hellish of their pictures; conversely, *Paradiso* consisted of pictures that evoked utopian or paradisiacal states or emotions. Predominantly, in its catalog form, *Interno* was a contest-less series of images of war, starvation, and the like; *Paradiso* featured pictures of lovers, children, etc. It was as though Jaar's practice as a curator only served to confirm his own more nuanced practice as an artist. See *Interno and Paradiso*, ed. by Alfredo Jaar (Stockholm: Bildmuseet, 1993).

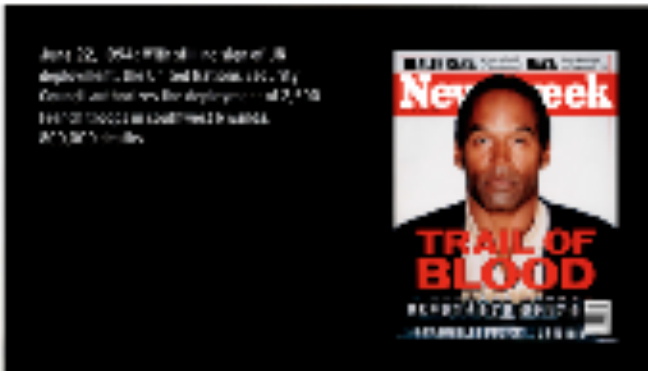
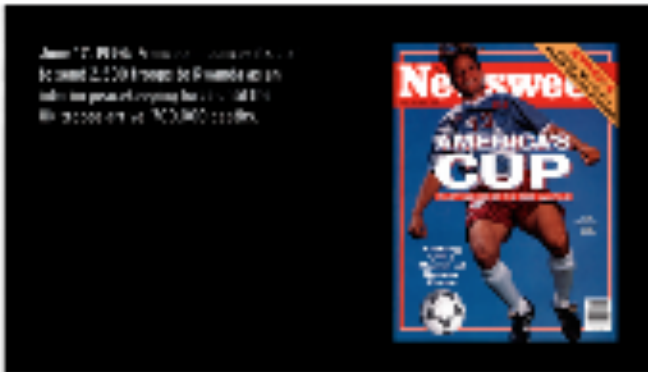
<sup>5</sup> Rwanda did not become a *Morane* cover story until three weeks after the Rwandan Patriotic Front had taken the country. The story was thus about the enormous diaspora of Hutus fleeing the country and the nightmarish conditions in the refugee camps, including the epicomic of the era that dehumanized the refugees. (i.e. "Hell on Earth: Racing Against Death in Rwanda," *Newsweek*, August 1, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Debra Brickey Baker, "Alfredo Jaar: Lament of the Images," in *Alfredo Jaar: Lament of the Images*, edn. cat. (Cambridge, Mass.: List Visual Arts Center, MIT, 1999), p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> From an interview by Pat Binder and Gerhard Heupt produced for *Documents XI*, 2002.







# Alfredo Jaar

A conversation with / ein Gespräch mit Wolfgang Brückle and / und Rachel Mader

## THE MISE-EN SCÈNE IS FUNDAMENTAL

*Wolfgang Brückle / Rachel Mader: Your work is usually labeled as »politically concerned art«. How would you describe your work besides the binary system of arts and politics?*

Alfredo Jaar: I totally reject the label of political art or political artist. Simply because there is nothing we can do as artists or cultural producers that is not in one way or another essentially political. I always quote Jean-Luc Godard who said that »it might be true that we have to choose between ethics and aesthetics but it is also true that whichever one we choose we will always find the other one at the end of the road«. He then adds that »the definition of the human condition is in the *mise-en-scène* itself«. Like him, I believe that all our decisions are ethical and aesthetical at the same time. So when I am asked to define myself, I always respond that I am an artist. I am an artist and I comment on the state of things, on the state of the world, I speculate and try to engage my audience regarding very precise events occurring in very specific places.

*W. B. / R. M.: Some critics label you as a voice of the marginalised. Are you affected by such comments?*

A. J.: What is clear to me, and hopefully to my audience, is that I do not speak for the marginalised, I do not speak for anybody but for myself. I think that this is one of the most essential basics of my work. I am not representing Rwandan refugees or the victims of genocide, I am not representing Mexican immigrants, I am not representing gold miners in the Amazon. I am only and always speaking for myself and I think it is essential not to patronise, not to be condescending. The work is always about my relationship to another world, and how do we, as a society, relate to others. I try to create bridges between different worlds that I think are incredibly connected, when most people do not perceive this connection. I am just trying to make sense of different realities, to articulate certain connections between certain realities. And I try to accomplish this as an outsider who remains an outsider. It is difficult and complicated, but I feel that I have no choice, I prefer to take risks and make mistakes rather than condemn certain situations to invisibility because of inaction. That is why I like Heiner Müller's concept of »choosing mistakes«. As I have said in the past, I am a guilty victim choosing mistakes.

*W. B. / R. M.: As a trained filmmaker and architect, why do you confront these kind of issues within the art world?*

A. J.: Well, it goes back to the way things happened in my life. I was an architect, but I was frustrated with the architecture system, more precisely what I felt was the total dependence of architecture to capital, to the commissioner of the work. I then decided to move into film. I studied film, became a filmmaker and, at that point, suffocated by the military dictatorship (in Santiago de Chile where I lived), I moved to New York. The city was experiencing the so-called culture wars during the Reagan presidency. I immediately found a fertile ground where to develop my ideas about culture and politics. I started responding to certain social and political issues with what I knew how to do: with architecture and film. I tried to combine those two disciplines, architecture and film, to comment on those issues. This combination produced a hybrid between architecture and film, and also theatre and art, and they became installations. I started doing installations and slowly transformed myself into an installation artist. Since then my work has been project-based, projects in response to specific issues. But as I am aware

## DIE MISE-EN SCÈNE IST FUNDAMENTAL

*Wolfgang Brückle / Rachel Mader: Sie gelten als ein Künstler, der sich mit politischen Themen auseinandersetzt. Wie würden Sie Ihre Arbeit außerhalb des binären Systems von Kunst und Politik beschreiben?*

Alfredo Jaar: Den Begriff der politischen Kunst und des politischen Künstlers lehne ich ab. Als Künstler und Kulturschaffende können wir gar nichts tun, was nicht in der einen oder anderen Form politisch wäre. Ich zitiere gern Jean-Luc Godard, der sagte: »Vielleicht müssen wir uns tatsächlich zwischen Ethik und Ästhetik entscheiden, aber wie wir uns auch entscheiden, am Ende des Weges werden wir immer auf das jeweils andere treffen«. Ferner sagt er, die Definition der Condition humaine liege in der *Mise-en-scène* selbst. Ich glaube wie er, dass unsere Entscheidungen ästhetisch und ethisch zugleich sind. Wenn ich mich also schon definieren muss, so sage ich: Ich bin Künstler, ein Künstler, der den Stand der Dinge, den Zustand der Welt kommentiert. Ich spekuliere und ich versuche, mein Publikum mit ganz bestimmten Ereignissen an ganz bestimmten Orten zu konfrontieren.

*W. B. / R. M.: Sie werden, vielleicht etwas überspitzt, als ein Sprachrohr der Marginalisierten bezeichnet. Wie stehen Sie zu einer solchen Kritik?*

A. J.: Für mich ist klar, und für mein Publikum hoffentlich auch, dass ich nicht für die Marginalisierten spreche. Ich spreche nur für mich selbst. Das ist vermutlich eine der wesentlichsten Voraussetzungen meiner Arbeit. Ich repräsentiere nicht ruandische Flüchtlinge oder Völkermordopfer. Ich repräsentiere nicht mexikanische Immigranten oder Minenarbeiter am Amazonas. Ich spreche immer nur für mich selbst und halte es für sehr wichtig, nicht paternalistisch und herablassend zu erscheinen. Meine Arbeit dreht sich immer um meine Beziehung zu einer anderen Welt, darum, wie wir uns als Gesellschaft anderen gegenüber verhalten. Ich versuche, Brücken zwischen verschiedenen Welten zu schlagen, die meines Erachtens überaus eng miteinander verflochten sind, deren Verflechtung aber von den meisten Menschen nicht gesehen wird. Ich versuche einfach nur, verschiedene Realitäten mit Sinn zu erfüllen, bestimmte Zusammenhänge zwischen bestimmten Realitäten zu artikulieren. Und ich versuche das als ein Außenstehender und außen Bleibender zu tun. Das ist schwierig, aber ich habe das Gefühl, keine andere Wahl zu haben. Ich gehe lieber Risiken ein und mache Fehler als bestimmte Situationen durch meine Unfähigkeit zur Unsichtbarkeit zu verdammern. Darum mag ich auch Heiner Müllers Gedanken des »Sich-Entscheidens für Fehler«. Ich bin, wie ich schon früher gesagt habe, ein schuldigtes Opfer, das sich für Fehler entscheidet.

*W. B. / R. M.: Warum legen Sie es als ausgebildeter Filmemacher und Architekt darauf an, innerhalb der Kunstwelt zu arbeiten?*

A. J.: Das hat mit meinem Werdegang zu tun. Ich war als Architekt unzufrieden mit dem Architektursystem, genauer gesagt, der totalen Abhängigkeit meiner Arbeit vom Kapital, vom Bauherrn, und so wechselte ich zum Film. Ich studierte Film, wurde Filmemacher und ging dann, weil mir die Militärdiktatur (in Santiago de Chile, wo ich damals lebte) die Luft zum Arbeiten nahm, nach New York. Die Stadt erlebte zu der Zeit gerade die so genannten Culture Wars der Reagan-Ära. Damit hatte ich sofort einen fruchtbaren Boden für die Entwicklung meiner Ideen über Kultur und Politik. Ich begann also, mit meinen Mitteln – Architektur und Film – auf be-



4. Ich thematisiere immer wieder die Politik der Repräsentation, das wird generell eher dokumentarisch abgefragt, im die meiste Zeit kommt es zu einem Interview mit dem Regisseur und dem Kameramann. Aber während dieser Zeit überlege ich, ob die Kamera nicht ein wenig mehr über die Handlung zu sagen hätte.

Die Arbeit ist ein bisschen länger, aber es lohnt sich. Ich habe mich mit der Arbeit an der Kamera beschäftigt und ich habe mich mit der Arbeit an der Kamera beschäftigt. Ich habe mich mit der Arbeit an der Kamera beschäftigt und ich habe mich mit der Arbeit an der Kamera beschäftigt.

ALFREDO JAAR, Interview of the magazine, 2003, *Prozess*, 1, S. 10-11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000.

all the limitations of our small, insular, art world. I have always divided my work in three areas. Approximately one third of my time is spent working in the art world doing projects for museums, institutions and foundations. A second third is spent working on public projects outside of these institutions. And the last third of my time is spent working with students in different academic settings, directing seminars, workshops, and meetings. These three areas are absolutely equal and necessary and each one feeding the other.

**W. B. / R. M.:** Are there any specific strategies with respect to collaboration with specific institutions of the art world? Do you have any preferences for a certain kind of setting, and how do you choose them?

**A. J.:** I generally do not approach an institution myself. I do generate the subject, the issues I'm interested in, for example the Rwandan genocide. It was my decision to go to Rwanda and to do a six-year long project about the genocide and the barbaric indifference of the world community. During that time period different institutions approached me and since I was working on the Rwandan issue, they funded some of the projects and exhibited them. The other kind of projects I have been involved in is when institutions, generally cities, municipalities, foundations, or museums invite me to be interested and then the work becomes a response to a very specific invitation, in a place, in certain social conditions.

**W. B. / R. M.:** The Rwandan project was almost a very different

thematisch, politische und gesellschaftliche Probleme zu reagenieren, vor allem, um diese Probleme Stellung zu beziehen, indem ich die Arbeit durchzuführen beginne. Das ist eine Problematik, niemand hat mich dazu gezwungen und ich bin, aber auch Kunst und Theater, und es werden viele Möglichkeiten geschaffen. Ich bin immer involviert in Projekten und werde eingeladen, mich an verschiedenen Institutionen zu beteiligen und werde eingeladen, mich an verschiedenen Institutionen zu beteiligen. Seit dem Jahr 2000 habe ich mich auf Projekte, die sich auf bestimmte Probleme beziehen, konzentriert. Ich bin immer involviert in Projekten und werde eingeladen, mich an verschiedenen Institutionen zu beteiligen und werde eingeladen, mich an verschiedenen Institutionen zu beteiligen. Seit dem Jahr 2000 habe ich mich auf Projekte, die sich auf bestimmte Probleme beziehen, konzentriert. Ich bin immer involviert in Projekten und werde eingeladen, mich an verschiedenen Institutionen zu beteiligen und werde eingeladen, mich an verschiedenen Institutionen zu beteiligen.

**W. B. / R. M.:** Liegen Ihren Zusammenarbeiten mit den Kunstwelt bestimmte Strategien zugrunde? Haben Sie irgendwelche Präferenzen für bestimmte Umfelder und wie wählen Sie die aus?

**A. J.:** Ich gehe normalerweise nicht selbst auf eine Institution zu. Meiner Projekte entstehen aus meinem Interesse an bestimmten, das sind meine eigenen Entscheidungen, auch dann, wenn ich in ein bestimmtes Projekt über eine Institution und als barbarische Gleichgültigkeit der ganzen Welt gegenüber zu reagieren.











ALFREDO JAAR: Lights in the City, Montreal 2009.

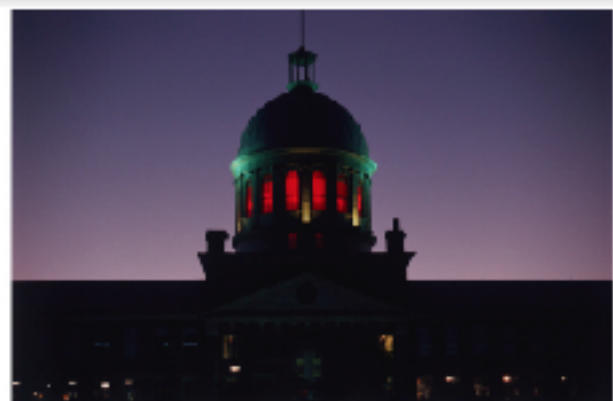
One hundred thousand watts of red lights have been installed by the artist inside the Cappella, a well known monument in the Old Montreal. An activating device has been installed in three homeless shelters in the area. Every time that a homeless person enters a shelter, he or she is invited to push a button that will illuminate the Cappella in red light for just a fraction of a second, sending a distress signal to the people of Montreal who have a population of more than 25000 homeless. The idea was to call attention of homelessness to the city, but respecting the privacy and dignity of the people, without violating their identity. The Mayor of the City closed the project after six weeks.

W. B. / R. M.: Your work is much about the necessity of being informed. Do you think it makes sense to make when Walter Benjamin called a difference between information and experience? If you make this difference, is there a special way you try to fill that gap?

A. J.: I am obviously a frustrated journalist. All my work is based on real-life experiences. I went to Rwanda, I went to Hong-Kong, I went to the Amazon. I went to Nigeria, and so on. My entire work is based on my own life experience, and it is my life experience itself that feeds my work. So my challenge is: How do I, as an artist, communicate that real-life experience to someone else, how can I translate that experience and communicate it to an audience. I think that it cannot be done. That is why all these exercises in representation fail. That is why I continue to try and persistently change strategies because I am trying something unfeasible. Really cannot be represented, we can only create a new reality with our work. That is my dilemma as an artist and this makes me do what I do. It is a life experience and it is the impossible attempt to transform and communicate this life experience to others. The gap between lived experience and representation will always exist, and I try to incorporate that gap into the work. The gap, the doubts, the failings, all must be part of the work, in total transparency. By incorporating these into the work, it makes the exercise more real. But does it bridge the gap? No, never.

W. B. / R. M.: Some of your installations are very tapirical. Do you find this theatre-situation to a specific notion of the spectator, less contemplating than he or she is traditionally framed. Are you trying to provide essentially new forms of experience?

A. J.: I studied and worked in the theatre world for many years. At the same time that I studied film, I wrote some plays and actually even directed them. Theatre is very important for me. Let me go back to what I quoted from Godard about the *mise-en-scène*. I think the *mise en scène* is fundamental. The *mise-en-scène* is the context that allows me to present my information in a seductive way. I'm not afraid of seduction. And this theatricality is absolutely designed by me as a way to seduce the spectator. And I use it as one more element in order to attract the spectator into the work. Because I deal with information that most of us would rather ignore, I need to use certain seduction devices like theatre or *mise-en-scène*. My

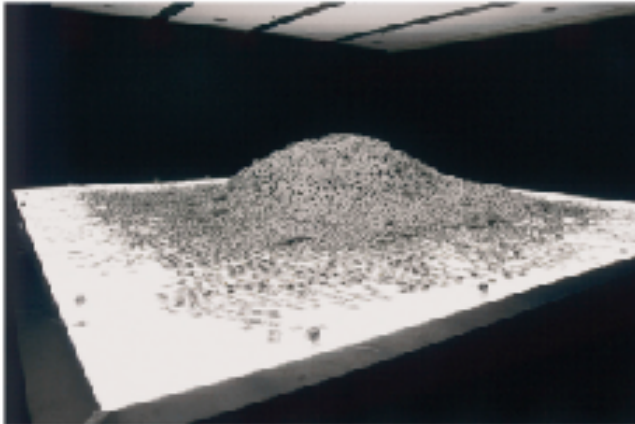


in der Cappella, einem berühmten Monument in Alt-Montreal, wurden vom Künstler 100.000 Watt an rotem Licht installiert und in drei Obdachlosenheimen ein Aktivierungsgeschaltensystem ein gerichtet. In nur wenn eine Obdachlose Person eines der Heime betrat, sollte sie einen Knopf drücken, der die Cappella für den Bruchteil einer Sekunde in rotes Licht tauchte und so ein Stresssignal an die Bewohner von Montreal sandte, wo es über 15.000 Obdachlose gibt. Die Idee des Projekts war, die Obdachlosigkeit der Stadt darzustellen, ohne die Privatsphäre und Würde der Betroffenen durch die Visualisierung zu verletzen. Der Bürgermeister der Stadt ließ das Projekt nach sechs Wochen schließen.

als Künstler, und deshalb handle ich so, wie ich es tue. Es geht um eine persönliche Erfahrung und den unmöglichen Versuch, diese Erfahrung zu transformieren und anderen mitzuteilen. Die Lücke zwischen gelebter Erfahrung und Darstellung wird immer bestehen bleiben, aber ich versuche, sie in die Arbeit zu integrieren. Die Lücke, die Zweifel, das Mislingen, all das muss ein offensichtlich-er Teil der Arbeit sein. Integriert man das alles in die Arbeit, wird sie realer. Aber vermag das die Lücke zu schließen? Nein, niemals.

W. B. / R. M.: Einige Ihrer Installationen zeigen von einem Hong zum Theatralischen. Hängt das mit einer bestimmten, im Vergleich zu traditionellen Auffassungen, weniger kontemplativen Vorstellung vom Betrachter zusammen? Versuchen Sie, fundamental neue Erfahrungsweisen zu ermöglichen?

A. J.: Ich habe Film studiert und am Theater gearbeitet, habe ein paar Stücke geschrieben und auch selbst inszeniert. Das Theater ist für mich sehr wichtig. Lassen Sie mich auf das Godard-Zitat über die *Mise-en-scène* zurückkommen. Die *Mise-en-scène* ist wirklich fundamental. Sie zwingt den Künstler, in dem ich meine Informationen verführerisch präsentieren kann. Ich fürchte die Verführung nicht. Ich genieße theatralisch, um den Betrachter zu verführen. Das Theatralische ist nur eine weitere Möglichkeit, den Betrachter ins Werk hineinziehen. Da ich mit Informationen handle, die die meisten von uns lieber nicht wahrhaben möchten, benötige ich gewisse Verführungsmittel wie das Theater oder die *Mise en scène*. Präsentierte man die Informationen in einer weniger verführerischen Weise, würden sie die meisten gar nicht erst beachten. Deshalb muß ich auch Strategien suchen, mittels derer ich zuerst verführe, um dann zu kommunizieren. Aber das Theatralische ist nur ein Element der *Mise en scène*. Manche Leute empören sich darüber, dass diese Inszenierungen manchmal so schön sind, wo sie doch um so unangenehme Dinge und um den Rand geladene Themen handeln. Meine Antwort darauf war immer: Diese Themen verdienen es, als wertvolle Gegenstände sowohl der Forschung als auch der Repräsentation behandelt zu werden. Warum sollte ein Ikona in einer Landschaft der 18. Jahrhunderts mehr Anstrengungen und Mühe wert sein als der Völkermord in Ruanda? Man kann einem Thema Würde verleihen, indem man alle verfügbaren Mittel dazu heranzieht, bestimmte Realitäten zu repräsentieren oder aus den vorhandenen Realitäten neue zu schaffen. Die *Mise en scène*



ALFREDO JAAR, *The Eyes of Gutete Ererita*, 1996. Light Table Version.

The spectator is invited to walk along a 12 feet long illuminated table about the genocide in Rwanda. As she/he enters a second space, she/he is confronted by an enormous light table on top of which lie one million slides. Upon closer examination, she/he discovers that all the slides are identical and belong to the eyes of Gutete Ererita, a Rwandan woman who witnessed the murder of her husband and two sons. The international community refused to see and act in the face of the genocide that claimed one million lives in less than one hundred days in 1994.

view is that if you present it in a less seductive way most people would not even approach it. That is why I have had to devise strategies in order to seduce you first so I can communicate with you. But the theoretical aspect is just one element of the *mise-en-scène*. Some people are outraged that these *mise en scènes* can be so beautiful while dealing with so horrific subjects, so marginalised subjects. Well, my answer has always been that these subjects deserve to be recognised as valid subjects and as worthy of research and of representation. Why is a subject like the tree in eighteenth century landscape painting worth more research and resources than the Rwandan genocide? It is my way of dignifying the subject in dedicating all the resources available in order to represent certain realities, or to create new realities from an existing reality. The *mise-en-scène* should dignify my subjects and contextualise properly the issue I am focusing on.

W. B. / R. M.: But are you still confident in the power of images?

A. J.: I still believe images are more necessary than ever. But I also believe that the political and corporate landscape of our times is full of control mechanisms that will not allow certain images to exist in their proper context. As artists are producers of meaning, we need to contextualise images properly. We must create a framework for their political efficiency. And the space of culture is probably the last free space remaining where this can be done.

The conversation took place in Berlin, July 21, 2003.

1 Cf. Howard Friedel, Michael W. Jennings (Ed.), Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1931-1936, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), 2003.



Die BetrachterInnen sind aufgefordert, eine fünf Meter lange Leuchttafel mit einem Text über den Völkermord in Ruanda entlang zu gehen. Beim Hinsetzen eines zweiten Raums werden sie mit einem gigantischen Lichtspiel konfrontiert, in dem eine Million Dias liegen. Bei näherer Betrachtung zeigt sich, dass alle Dias identisch sind und die Augen von Gutete Ererita zeigen, einer rassistischen Frau, die Zeugin des Mordes an ihrem Ehemann und ihren zwei Söhnen wurde. Die internationale Gemeinschaft sah dies als Verbrechen, das 1994 in weniger als hundert Tagen eine Million Menschenleben forderte.

soll meinen Gegenständen Würde verleihen und die Themen, die ich behandle, angemessen kontextualisieren

W. B. / R. M.: Vertrauen Sie also der Macht der Bilder?

A. J.: Ich glaube, dass Bilder wichtiger sind als je zuvor. Ich glaube aber auch, dass die politische und wirtschaftliche Landschaft von vielen Kontrollmechanismen durchzogen ist, die verhindern, dass bestimmte Bilder in ihrem angemessenen Kontext existieren können. Da Künstler Bedeutungsstifter sind, müssen wir Bilder richtig kontextualisieren. Wir müssen einen Rahmen für ihre politische Wirksamkeit schaffen. Und die kulturelle Sphäre bildet vermutlich den letzten Freierraum, in dem das möglich ist.

(Übersetzung: Wilfried Prantner)

Das Gespräch fand am 21. Juli 2003 in Berlin statt.

1 Vgl. Walter Benjamin, «Über einige Motive bei Brecht'schen, in: *Widerstandsworte*, dtg-Verlag Schöningh, Band I, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp 1977, S. 185 - 229.

# Alfredo Jaar

## Une autre version de l'invisible

VANGELIS ATHANASSOPOULOS

*«Les mass media sont un système de communication de symboles et de messages destiné au plus grand nombre. Leur rôle consiste à divertir et informer les individus en leur inculquant les valeurs, les croyances et les codes de conduite qui faciliteront leur intégration sociale. Dans un monde de concentration des richesses et de conflits d'intérêts de classe, cela exige un recours systématique à la propagande (1).»*

### 1. Le Cap, Afrique du Sud, 11 février 1990

Nelson Mandela est libéré de prison après 28 ans de traitement brutal par le régime d'apartheid. Les images de sa libération, diffusées dans le monde entier, montrent un homme touchant sous la lumière comme s'il en était aveuglé.

Mandela a purgé la majeure partie de sa peine à Robben Island, un rocher entouré par les eaux du cap de Bonne-Espérance. À dix kilomètres seulement du Cap, l'île était utilisée comme prison de haute sécurité pour «non-blancs» depuis 1959. Parmi les co-détenus de Mandela figuraient Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada et Govan Mbeki, le père de l'actuel président de l'Afrique du Sud, Thabo Mbeki. Selon Mandela, Robben Island était «entraîné à nous accabler tant nous n'avions plus la force et le courage de poursuivre la quête de nos idéaux.»

Pendant l'été de 1964, Mandela et ses co-détenus ont été enchaînés ensemble dans les locaux d'isolement et conduits à des carrières de pierre au centre de l'île, où ils durent casser des rochers et creuser le calcaire. Le chaux de calcaire était utilisée pour blanchir les rues de l'île. À la fin de chaque journée, les hommes noirs étaient eux-mêmes devenus blancs de chaux. Pendant qu'ils travaillaient, le calcaire reflétait les rayons du soleil, aveuglant les prisonniers. Leurs requêtes répétées pour avoir des lunettes noires afin de protéger leurs yeux avaient été refusées.

Il n'y a pas de photographies de Nelson Mandela versant des larmes le jour de sa libération. Il semblerait que la lumière aveuglante du calcaire l'ait privé de la capacité de pleurer.

### 2. Pennsylvanie, États-Unis d'Amérique, 15 avril 2001

On a annoncé qu'une des plus grandes collections de photographies historiques au monde est en passe d'être enterrée pour toujours dans des anciennes carrières de calcaire. Les carrières, situées dans une région retirée de la Pennsylvanie de l'Ouest, ont été recouvertes en acier anti-acidrien dans les années 1950 et sont actuellement connues comme le site de Iron Mountain National Underground Storage.

Le fonds d'archives Betmann et United Press International, comprenant quelque 17 millions d'images, a été acheté en 1995 par le président de Microsoft, Bill Gates. Cobis, société appartenant à Gates, a décidé de

(1) Edward S. Herman et Noam Chomsky, *La propagande de l'impérialisme américain. Le secret des médias*, 2002, p.1



Alfredo Jaar. «Lament of the Images». 2002. Installation (écran blanc) à la Documenta 11, Cassel

transférer ces images de New York aux carrières et de les enterrer à une profondeur de 70 mètres, sous une voûte, à faible taux d'humidité et à basse température.

Ce geste sert à préserver les images, mais les rendra aussi totalement inaccessibles. À leur place, Gates projette de vendre des impressions numériques. Ces six dernières années, 225 000 images, soit moins de 2 % de l'ensemble, ont été scannées. À ce rythme, il faudra 455 ans pour numériser l'ensemble des archives.

La collection contient des images des frères Wright en vol, JFK le saluant le cercueil de son père, des images importantes de la guerre du Vietnam et de Nelson Mandela en prison.

Gates possède également deux autres agences de photographies et s'est assuré les droits de reproduction numérique d'œuvres de plusieurs musées d'art dans le monde. Actuellement, Gates a le droit de montrer (ou d'enterrer) presque 85 millions d'images.

### 3. Kaboul, Afghanistan, 7 octobre 2001

La nuit à peine tombée sur Kaboul, les États-Unis lancent leurs premières attaques aériennes contre l'Afghanistan, comprenant des bombardements massifs par des B 52 volant à 13 000 mètres, et plus de 50 missiles Cruise. Le président Bush décrit les attaques comme «*enormement précises*» pour éviter des dommages collatéraux.

Juste avant de lancer les attaques, le ministère de la Défense américain a

obtenu l'exclusivité des droits de toutes les images satellite disponibles de l'Afghanistan et des pays avoisinants. La National Imagery and Mapping Agency, unité ultra secrète du service de renseignements du ministère de la Défense, a signé un contrat d'exclusivité avec la compagnie privée Space Imaging Inc. afin d'acheter des images de leur satellite Ikonos. Bien qu'il possède ses propres satellites d'espionnage, qui sont dix fois plus puissants que les satellites commerciaux, le Pentagone a justifié son achat des images Ikonos comme une décision professionnelle qui «*est devenue un surplús de capacités*».

L'accord a aussi produit un réel effacement de l'opération, empêchant les médias occidentaux de voir les résultats des bombardements, et éliminant toute possibilité de vérification ou de réfutation indépendante de la version officielle.

Les agences de presse aux États-Unis et en Europe ont été contraintes d'utiliser des images d'archives pour accompagner leurs reportages.

Le président de Space Imaging Inc. a déclaré : «*Ils sont en train d'acheter toutes les images disponibles*». Il n'y a plus rien à voir. (2)

#### Lament of the Images

Ces trois textes (en anglais) font partie de l'installation *Lament of the Images* (2002), présentée par Alfredo Jaar dans le cadre de la Documenta 11 de Cassel. Ils étaient disposés côte à côte dans une salle obscure, en négatif sur caisson lumineux. Le visiteur passait devant les textes lumineux avant d'entrer dans une autre pièce, complètement noire celle-ci, où il se trouvait littéralement ébloui par la lumière aveuglante venant d'un grand écran.

Comme Gianni Vattimo l'a remarqué dans les années 1980, ce n'est plus le contrôle des moyens de production, mais le degré de participation de chaque société au réseau mondial de l'information, sa plus ou moins grande aptitude à gérer, contrôler, manipuler et diffuser (co-focuser) (3) l'information qui définit sa position dans «*le village mondial*» (4). Dans ce contexte, le travail de Jaar est une sorte de commentaire critique sur l'importance stratégique de l'image et surtout de son absence, de son indisponibilité, de son invisibilité, bref, un travail sur la cécité. L'image entre ici en équation de premier degré avec le pouvoir, de telle sorte qu'il devient clair qu'à l'époque de l'échange généralisé et prétendument libre de l'information (et de l'image, si l'on peut faire la différence), le vrai pouvoir est celui de la rétention d'information, de l'interdiction d'accès à l'image, de l'exclusion du réseau (cécité allégorique).

Malgré l'évidente dimension iconoclaste de l'installation, des images primaires, ou plutôt des couples d'images, se forment : noir (apartheid, Mandela, obscurité des profondeurs souterraines, impossibilité de voir la réalité en dehors des médias) et blanc (le calcaire, la chaux, la lumière éblouissante du soleil, mais aussi celle de l'écran, de l'image). Mais il s'agit plutôt d'images impossibles : l'incapacité de Mandela de pleurer provoquée par la même lumière dont l'image (photographique) a besoin pour exister, la même avec la lumière qui rend visible toute image : l'impossibilité de voir les photographies historiques, car elles ont été rendues invisibles, d'est-à-dire cachées, indisponibles, défendues.

D'une certaine manière, tout en évitant de tomber dans le mysticisme, les trois textes sont résumés dans la pièce sombre avec l'écran éblouissant : le regard s'y avère faible, impossible : à l'époque peut-être de la plus grande surencheîre d'images spectaculaires que l'histoire ait connue, le vide devient presque une évidence, l'enjeu se déplace vers le contexte de l'image. La problématique adoptée n'est plus celle d'une ontologie de l'image technique, mais se présente plutôt comme un questionnement des conditions historiques immanentes de sa visibilité, d'est-à-dire de l'ensemble des modes culturellement codifiés d'accès à l'image

(2) Alfredo Jaar, *Lament of the Images*, 2002, installation (traduction de l'auteur).

(3) Sur la notion de «*co-focuser*» dans le contexte de la stratégie de l'image publicitaire, voir *Communication n°13*, Seuil, 1971, p. 200 particulièrement l'article de Georges Pénelon, «*Le cas, le nom et le sens*», pp. 67-81.

(4) Gianni Vattimo, *Le Nom et la visibilité*, trad. C. Alford, Paris, Seuil, 1987.





Alfredo Jaar, «Lament of the Images», 2002 (seconde version). Installation (deux tables lumineuses, moteur ; la table supérieure se soulève toutes les 67)

(craux d'information) [5]. L'œuvre de Jaar correspond à ce que Paul de Man et Craig Owens appelaient «*allégorie d'illibitilité*», le premier en littérature, le second en arts visuels : une œuvre qui n'est pourtant pas image (le texte barthésien ?), une non-image racontant l'impossibilité du regard, de la vision, ou leur constante régression, malgré les apparences de la société post-spectaculaire.

*Lament of the images* est, comme le titre l'indique, une lamentation. Si l'image a toujours rempli la fonction de montrer l'absence, signe d'une disparition dont elle fait le deuil, comment peut-on faire le deuil de l'image ? Et dans quelle mesure ce deuil comporte-t-il une dimension politique ?

Étant donné la distinction entre la représentation politique (qui fonctionne comme instrument d'une puissance imposée de l'extérieur) et la politique de la représentation (qui considère le pouvoir propre de l'image) [6], il semble que Jaar situe le terrain politique contemporain non pas dans le domaine du visible mais dans celui de l'invisible, ou plutôt de l'indisponible. L'invisible perd ici toute connotation transcendantale pour désigner «*de potentiellement mais jamais tout à fait visible*», une frustration constante du désir, un «*seulement, avancez s'il vous plaît, il n'y a rien à voir*». À une époque où l'image et l'information démontrent le pouvoir effectif sur le réel, il faut plus que jamais faire attention au comment on voit, et surtout au comment on ne voit pas. Les limites du visible seraient-elles également celles du réel ? *The show must go on* ; coûte que coûte. Une sorte de spectacle multimédia pour aveugles.

Vangelis Athanassopoulos est historien et critique d'art. Il a enseigné l'histoire de l'art moderne et contemporain à l'université Paris X-Nanterre et organisé l'exposition *Voitages de la structure à la Maison de la Grèce à Paris*, en 2001. Il prépare actuellement une thèse sur le journalismisme et la publicité.

(5) Vilém Flusser, *Pour une philosophie de la photographie* trad. J. Massard, Paris, Côté, 1996.

(6) Cf. Véronique Jouve, interview with Tony Godfrey, dans Victor Burgin, *Reviews*, Oakland, Backwell, 1989, p. 89. Craig Owens, pour sa part, faisait la distinction entre ce que les images disent et ce qu'elles font. Cf. C. Owens, «Representation, Appropriation, and Power», dans *Recent Perspectives, Essays*, University of California Press, 1992, pp. 88-115.



Alfredo Jaar, *Lament of the Images* (detail), 2002. Text panels, each 23 x 20"; light wall, 8 x 12'. Installation view, Documenta 11, Kassel, Germany, 2002.

## ALFREDO JAAR GALERIE LELONG

Few contemporary artists are as attuned to the power of images as Alfredo Jaar. His particular focus: those photographic representations of politically induced instances of human suffering that saturate the media and sear our consciousness with scenes that, paradoxically, can be neither truly remembered nor forgotten. Born in Chile and, since 1982, based in New York, Jaar has been consistently global in scope. Past projects have centered on the working conditions of Brazilian gold miners, the detainment of Vietnamese boat people by the Hong Kong government, and the slaughter of the Tutsi by Hutu death squads in Rwanda. Traveling to these sites, Jaar has taken photographs that, in their stark, no-nonsense style and emphasis on the human visage, recall those of Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, along with current photojournalists. But rather than extend this documentary tradition, Jaar has used his pictures to reveal journalistic photography's almost pornographic drive for a total disclosure that results not in the production of objective records but the creation of new forms of domination and dissociation.

Jaar's work of the '80s and early '90s, which served as the basis of elegant but highly theatrical installations, typically obscured their imagery. Usually set in light boxes, the pictures were placed either too high or too low on the wall to be easily seen or in such a way that they could not be gazed at directly but only in a mirrored reflection. Through this device, Jaar drew attention to photography's failure to capture or convey truth. But it also seemed,

perversely, that he was trying to protect viewers from being seduced by the very pictures he had invited us to behold. Indeed, perhaps more than that of any artist associated with identity politics, Jaar's images were prey to that classic conundrum of postmodern aesthetics: the desire both to critique representation's ideological basis and to make use of its power to persuade and inform.

Jaar's latest project, *Lament of the Images*, 2002, like a number of his works since the mid-'90s, dispenses with pictures altogether—but not out of any puritanical mistrust. Rather, Jaar's installation (which was first shown at Documenta 11) exhibits a newfound respect for the documentary image's capacity to promote and preserve historical memory. A darkened room contains three backlit text panels with glowing white letters. Two describe examples of the removal of images from the public sphere: Bill Gates's purchase and subsequent burial (for "safekeeping") of the estimated seventeen million pictures making up the Bettmann and United Press International archives; and the US Defense Department's acquisition of all available satellite images of Afghanistan during the 2001 air strikes. The third text tells a more ambiguous and ultimately more disturbing tale of absent images: There are no photographs of Nelson Mandela weeping on the day he was released from prison. Forced to break limestone under the glaring sun during his twenty-eight-year incarceration on Robben Island, Mandela suffered retinal damage that left him unable to cry.

Instead of explicitly depicting the situations they document, these texts force viewers to conjure pictures in their mind's

eye. In the gallery's second room, an enormous blank screen emanates a blinding white glare. On one hand, it alludes to the inevitable blind spots (and hence limitations) of all photographic documents. But the empty screen also serves as a visceral allegory of the fate implied by Jaar's texts: a future in which the capacity to bear witness to one's reality in the form of an image—and, by extension, to imagine a possible alternative to that reality—has been permanently withdrawn.

—Margaret Sautell





Michael Corris on  
**Alfredo Jaar's** lament  
for lost images

# White Out



Alfredo Jaar  
Skoghall Konsthall  
2000

**One evening in September 2000**, a substantial portion of the entire population of Skoghall, Sweden watched in astonishment as their public gallery, just 24 hours old, burnt to the ground.

As it happens, the story of the destruction of the Skoghall Konsthall – a project approved by the town, conceived and designed by Alfredo Jaar and built with the aid of one of the world's largest manufacturers of paper products – is as straightforward as its realisation.



At the suggestion of Jürgen Swenson, a Swedish artist living in Göteborg, the town of Skoghall commissioned Jaar to propose a work of public art. Skoghall is Swenson's birthplace and home to a large pulp mill owned and operated by Stora-Enso, a Sweden's-Finnish multinational corporation employing some 43,000 persons in more than 40 countries. Stora-Enso's productive capacity is well integrated vertically: they own and manage huge tracts of timberland, pulp mills, lumber mills and specialty paper mills. Skoghall is a company town, a small community built largely at the instigation of Stora-Enso to house the local workforce. Skoghall was conceived as a dormitory town, with no civic space for the production or presentation of culture of any sort. This void in the life of the citizens of Skoghall became the catalyst for Jaar's proposal to the town: he would design and build the new Skoghall Konsthal. But Jaar was so appalled by the lack of cultural facilities there that he refused the public money on offer and advised the council to convince Stora-Enso to fund the commission. The corporation agreed, and the construction of the Skoghall Konsthal — entirely of Stora-Enso paper and timber — was underway.

The Konsthal's inaugural exhibition, which was curated by Jaar and included the work of 15 young Swedish artists living in Klara and Göteborg, was destined to be its last. Jaar's proposal to the town stipulated that the Skoghall Konsthal should be officially opened by the mayor in the presence of the

local community and then, 24 hours later, be burnt to the ground. The townspeople protested: this is a beautiful and necessary structure that must not be destroyed. This was precisely the response Jaar desired. Thrust into the centre of the controversy, he suggested to the citizens that they might wish to look elsewhere for a target for their displeasure. In the event, a committee was formed to develop a permanent public gallery for Skoghall. This, however, was not the sole consequence of the Stora-Enso's controlled innovation: a second group of townspeople, concerned by the waste of perfectly good building materials, demanded that Jaar dismantle, rather than burn, the structure. The timber, they argued, should be recycled to construct a much-needed playground for the children of Skoghall. Again, Jaar acquiesced, pointing out that Stora-Enso consumed vast quantities of lumber all the time, and his project was no different. However, Jaar did offer to design a playground at no cost to the town on condition that the people obtain material support from Stora-Enso. One year later, Jaar received an invitation to design the playground.

As much as Jaar's work in Skoghall represents a fascinating and important contribution to the field of art in the public sphere, that is not the issue I wish to take up here. Rather, I wish to consider the inter-relationship between Jaar's *Skoghall Konsthal* and other recent projects that turn on a spectacular and dramatic act of denial. I wish to understand the meaning of the play of cultural icons in Jaar's current practice. Do images of reality truly bury

Alfredo Jaar  
*Skoghall Konsthal*  
2000

Cape Town, South Africa, February 11, 1990.

Nelson Mandela is released from prison, after 28 years of brutal treatment by the apartheid regime. The images of his release, broadcast live around the world, show a man squinting into the light as if blinded.

More than half of Mandela's sentence was spent on Robben Island, a windswept rock surrounded by the treacherous seas of the Cape of Good Hope. Only seven miles off Cape Town, the island had been used as a maximum security prison for "non-white" men since 1959. Mandela's fellow inmates there included Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, and Gwan Mbeki, the father of current South African President Thabo Mbeki. Mandela later said that Robben Island was "intended to cripple us so that we should never again have the strength and courage to pursue our ideals."

In the summer of 1964, Mandela and his fellow inmates in the isolation block were chained together and taken to a limestone quarry in the center of the island, where they were put to work breaking rocks and digging lime. The lime was used to turn the island's roads white. At the end of each day, the black men had themselves turned white with linedust. As they worked, the lime reflected the glare of the sun, blinding the prisoners. Their repeated requests for sunglasses to protect their eyes were denied.

There are no photographs that show Nelson Mandela weeping on the day he was released from prison. It is said that the blinding light from the lime had taken away his ability to cry.

Alfredo Jaar  
Context of the images  
2002 detail

history, as the Catalan poet, Vicenç Alturi contends and Jaar approvingly cites? More so perhaps than the writer's word?

False icons must be destroyed. Yet, the act of destruction must remain within the circuit of cultural exchange lest it be perceived merely as vandalism. Hence, the shift in Jaar's work to institutions of cultural exchange—museums, galleries—as ground and subject. The *Memorial Knesset* was not the first of Jaar's projects to specifically address the cultural infrastructure of a location. This issue was taken up earlier in his proposal to construct 12 micro-museums or 'culture boxes' called *Byōsho No Hana* throughout the Niigata region of Japan. The desire to heighten the tension between the political and rhetorical significance of the image or cultural icon is evident throughout Jaar's work, although it is always embedded in an investigation of the consequences of global capitalism. At first glance, *Real Pictures*, 1994, and *Lament of the Stranger*, 2002, seem to be structured around the literary device of ekphrasis, wherein an image is displaced by a text: poetry triumphs over pictures, the temporal defeats the spatial. For example, the solemn gray archival boxes of *Real Pictures*—in which are stored images

False icons must be destroyed. Yet, the act of destruction must remain within the circuit of cultural exchange lest it be perceived merely as vandalism.

of the aftermath of the civil war in Rwanda—are inscribed with a prosaic description of a scene, which might be a path through the jungle that was the site of an act of genocide. The first component of the installation—storage boxes configured into semi-linear groups and volumes dramatically lit from above—contrasts starkly to the second: a well-lit room housing an extensive collection of information on the Rwandan tragedy.

A similar grammar is put to work in *Lament of the Stranger*, installed at Documenta 11 throughout two rooms connected by a narrow, dark corridor. Only three handlit texts set side by side into one wall illuminate the first chamber. One text relates to the release from Robben Island in 1990 of Nelson Mandela, and the conditions endured by prisoners there. We read that there are no photographs that show Nelson Mandela weeping on the day he was released from prison, that "the blinding light from the lime had taken away his ability to cry." The second text details the elaborate storage arrangements made by Bill Gates for the Bettmann and United Press International photo archives he purchased in 1985. The images are now securely stored underground, but only two percent have been scanned and are currently available to reproduce. Just notes wryly that Gates buys the rights to reproduce—or bury—an estimated 66m images. Among them is a photo of Mandela in prison. The final text tells how images of the Anglo-American campaign in Afghanistan were suppressed by the US Department of Defense, thanks to their purchase of the rights of reproduction for all photographs taken by the aptly named, privately owned, Ikonos satellite. The CEO of Space Imaging Inc—the satellite owner—said, 'they are buying all the imagery that is available.' 'There is nothing left to see,' responds Jaar. Entering this room through a corridor, we enter a chamber filled with a blinding white light. Such iconoclastic gestures—made more dramatic by threatening to subject the spectator to intense discomfort—are not without precedent in recent art. In this instance, blindness does not signify absence. Nor is it the inevitable outcome of an elliptical process of abstraction, as in Art & Language's *100% Abstract*, 1968. Consider the theoretical effect predicted by Chris Burden on the perception of colour for a spectator placed inside his metal chamber filled with high-intensity halogen lamps or the result of time-lapse photographs by Hiroshi Sugimoto of film projections. The meaning of these cazzling anachronistic effects is revealed in the manner of their making: a surfeit rather than a lack of visual

information. The blanks are anything but voids and, as demonstrated by the reception of Ad Reinhardt's near black paintings, the quiddity of blankness can be an endless semantic delight.

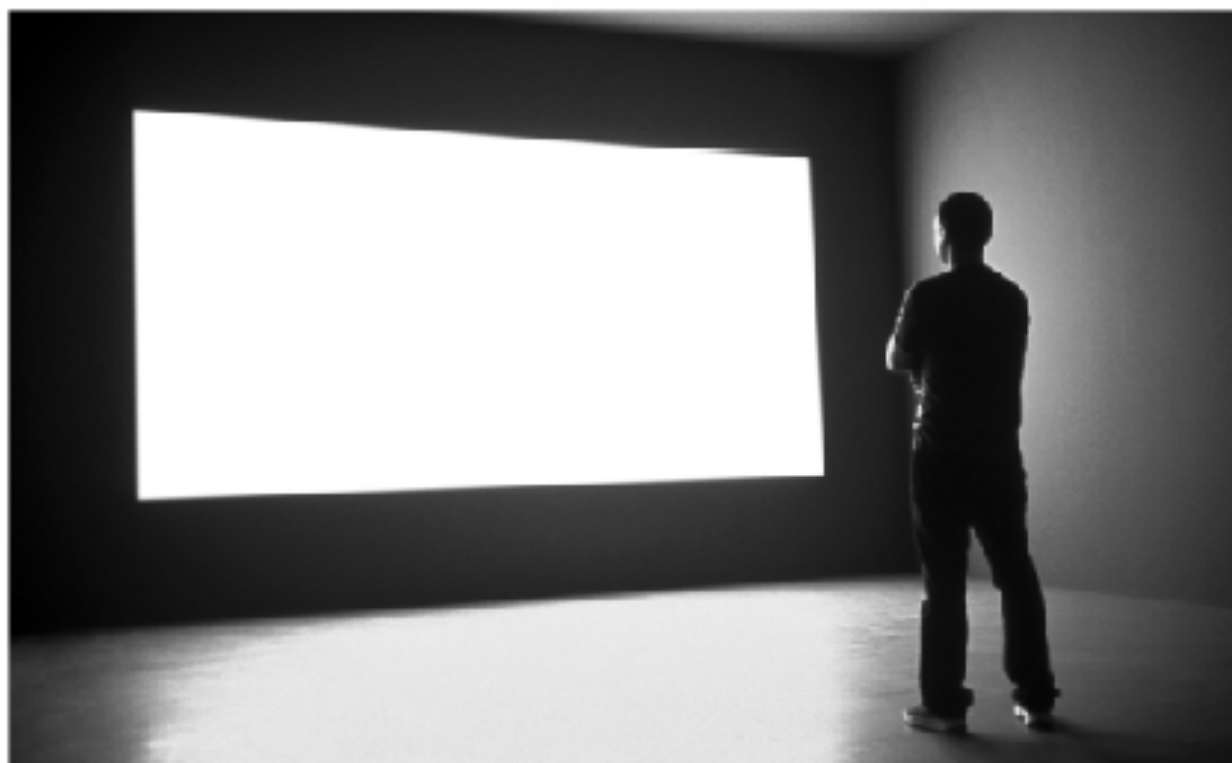
Jaar compels us to do more than contemplate a blank screen, though. The funereal display of grey archival storage boxes of *Real Pictures* enjoins us to turn away from certain images, rather than risk being fascinated by them. The white light of *Lament of the Images* prods us to consider the circumstances in which our hunger for images may be justified. The formulation of the simulated Konsthall is an obvious provocation directed at the citizens of a Swedish art town too long in the grip of corporate paternalism. As a performance it is analogous to the destruction of a false idol. False, because it was at Jaar's instigation, rather than that of the citizens of Skoghall, that the idea of a Konsthall was first raised. All these aspects – from the substitution of vivid imagery with numbing, desolate blankness to the reduction of an object of desire to ashes – leave little doubt about Jaar's attitude towards the concept of the untrustworthy image.

Jaar's public installations have become increasingly confrontational, dramatic, and overlaid with sentiment since the 90s. The demands placed on the viewer have increased apace. One way to explain this shift in Jaar's work would be to point to its subject matter, arguing that it is symptomatic of the trauma suffered by the artist during the course of his experiences in post-oral war Rwanda, Nigeria, or the refugee internment camp of Hong Kong. This would be convincing were it not for the fact that Jaar's grasp of the relationship between his practice as an artist and his political passions is far more sophisti-

Such iconoclastic gestures – made more dramatic by threatening to subject the spectator to intense discomfort – are not without precedent in recent art. In this instance, blankness does not signify absence. Nor is it the inevitable outcome of an elliptical process of abstraction, as in Art & Language's *100% Abstract*, 1968.

ated. A more credible explanation demands the consideration of Jaar's long standing interest in architecture. Not only do Jaar's recent projects owe a substantial debt to architecture, none of his more ambitious public projects can be adequately described in terms of the discourse of visual culture alone. How does Jaar's competence in architectural design support a reading of his work as an imminent critique of the artist as mediator of images of the world? Jaar is noted for his meticulously plotted installations, in which photographic and texts are typically embedded in the architectural fabric of the site or are displayed in large-scale lightboxes and configured as sculptural elements in their own right. The kind of environment favoured by Jaar is replete with an array of architectural devices and strategies, such as indirect lighting and custom-built exhibition spaces akin to cages. In any case, the literal and imaginative space available to the viewer is circumscribed. Jaar's control of the consumption of the work is not simply a rhetorical device in the service of interpretation; it acts to frame the conditions of looking and seeing, as well.

Alfredo Jaar  
*Lament of the Images*  
2002 detail





While the artist remains committed to bearing witness to the political and social costs of underdevelopment and dependency, his project is shadowed by a new anxiety about images, one which is born of the need to place himself in the frame.

It is natural that Jaar should turn towards architecture to advance his aim to make art out of information most of us would rather ignore. On the other hand, Jaar's art seems at its most ambitious and complex when it begins to lose control, produce unanticipated effects and raise doubts in the mind of the viewer. My admiration for the *Stegvall Konsthal* is precisely owing to its suave rehearsal of cheap avant-garde artifice. It is unabashedly over-the-top, almost Wagnerian, and clearly contains an element of unpredictability or risk. (In 1988 Jaar produced a free-standing light box displaying the single evocative word, *Gosartika* (network).) Yet, in the event, every one went along with this mad scheme: the Mayor, the townsfolk, Strava-Raso, and the hapless Swedish artists whose work went up in smoke. Far from contributing to the alienation of the community, the gesture became a trigger for its consolidation.

My sense, then, is that Jaar's work is no longer solely about making 'art out of information most of us would rather ignore'. I doubt that Jaar was ever innocent about the pretensions of such a project, even if *Stegvall Konsthal* and *Larsens of the Bridges* seem to have opened a Pandora's box. Jaar also seems to be saying, clearly and loudly, that we cannot simply bear witness to the world or blithely assume an 'expansive role' in society. Jaar would be the first to admit that it is a cosmopolitan privilege that enables artists to produce works of such reach and scale. Yet, that privilege, which is defined by speed and mobility and depends on the unequal distribution of wealth on a global scale, has to be examined. Jaar does so by refusing to turn away, by continuing to work with and through the

contradictions. Jaar recalls the Brazilian scenes in sketches, which indicate the vantage point of each photograph he took. The barring *Konsthall*, reminding all of *Stegvall* what it lacks, but also, literally, remaining as *ast*, which Jacques Derrida calls the 'sway, loop, more material' stuff of memory. An act of mourning for images we shall never see represented by the frozen cinema of all images. Surely, we must consider what we are doing here.

Jaar must keep this paradoxical questioning alive. My guess is that he will continue to engineer ever more extreme approaches to visual and textual interaction, continuing to court the risk of failure in the process – if only to avoid the sorry state of Sebastião Salgado. Jaar must play *conceal* as to Salgado's beautiful dots of the human condition. Jaar must have surely been aware of the gathering critic-ear around Salgado's photography when he produced the work entitled *RW Yóses Nguwen*. This work, part of a larger project that has been realised in several visual formats, puts a name to the face of the Other Iconoclasm – as 'Iconoclasm', a recent exhibition curated by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel for ZKM, Karlsruhe, makes abundantly clear – can also be interpreted to be an act of cultural exchange. It is the continuation of politics by other, less socially disruptive means. Jaar's recent work brings the paradoxical nature of iconoclasm into focus. While the artist remains committed to bearing witness to the political and social costs of underdevelopment and dependency, his project is shadowed by a new anxiety about images, one which is born of the need to place himself in the frame. The marginalised bodies of the world (exploited Brazilian miners, Southeast Asian refugees, children at risk in Nigeria, the victims of US immigration policy) must be rendered visible, along with the conditions and meaning of our encounter with them. ■

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## El dibujo de la cigüeña

XAVIER ANTICH

Adriana Cavareo, en un bellissimo libro publicado recientemente en Milán con el título de *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti*, recuerda un relato que Irak Dinesen había oído explicar cuando todavía era niño. Un hombre que vivía oculto de un pastano se despertó una noche sobresaltado a causa de un gran estruendo. Se precipitó asustado fuera de su casa y, mientras corría desorientadamente sin dirección fija, se iba cayendo una y otra vez, tropezando a cada nuevo paso que daba. Así avanzó de forma errática hasta que, al fin, encontró un pequeño manantial que fluía a través de una grieta en el suelo de lod, de la cual salían, además de un importante caudal de agua, un montón de peces. De inmediato y de forma casi febril, se puso con todas sus fuerzas a intentar tapar el agujero, de forma que no se detuvo hasta que terminó la empresa. Sólo entonces se fue a dormir. Cuando se despertó por la mañana, al lanzar una mirada al otro lado de la ventana, observó con gran sorpresa que los habitantes de sus pasos en el terreno pantanoso habían dibujado la figura de una cigüeña. En ese punto, Dinesen se preguntaba: "Cuando el dibujo de mi vida estará completo, podrá ser, o los otros podrán ver una cigüeña?". Y Adriana Cavareo añade: el recorrido de cualquier vida, se deja contemplar al final como un dibujo dotado de sentido? No un dibujo, claro está, que haya ganado desde el principio la aventura de la vida, sino aquel dibujo que sólo puede verse al final, como la huella o la traza de un devenir que, en su momento, sólo puede aparecer como sentido y desprovisto de sentido.

Sólo en el amanecer del día después puede contemplarse la figura que hemos dejado a nuestros espaldas. Pero ¿cuándo es el día después? Y, por otra parte, además de la figura que cada uno de nosotros individualmente deja detrás, ¿no habrá también una figura colectiva que deje el trazo de la vida de nuestro tiempo? Porque, como dijo Aristóteles, somos, por esencia de toda, animales políticos; animales para los cuales la sociedad no es un accidente, sino lo más propiamente constitutivo de nuestra naturaleza. La cuestión es simple: ¿cómo será la figura que nuestro tiempo dejará a sus espaldas?

Ya se ha consertido en un tópico la afirmación de que el siglo XX se acabó con la caída del muro de Berlín. Y, como todos los tópicos, esta afirmación ha acabado por consolidarse con la fuerza de las obviedades, hasta el punto de que todos hemos oído vivir, durante la última década, como una especie de prólogo o de tiempo difterido, como una especie de regalo del cual nadie tendría que dar cuenta ante la historia. Sin embargo, aquí ha pasado lo mismo que en el cine:

todo el mundo prefiere el final feliz. Y creer que el siglo acababa con el final de una pesadilla y de un fraude que consiguió embasurar a algunos de los espíritus más lúcidos de nuestro tiempo es, a todas luces, preferir los perdidos ("y fueren felices y comieron perdices") a la carroña (por utilizar la imagen emblemática del poema de Baudelaire). Sólo los más ingenuos o fijos de entre los optimistas de esta pedrera creen, armados por la pasión del momento, que el final de un siglo como el nuestro podía cerrarse con una imagen tan esperanzadora como la de Berlín: como decía Emmanuel Lévinas, lo que había pasado durante nuestro siglo era demasiado pesado como para poder ser soportado por las espaldas de una sola generación.

Abandonando el siglo en Berlín, se corría el peligro de que pasara como con los espectadores de una representación teatral que abandonan la función antes de que se acabe: el peligro de perderse el final de verdad. Y, por tanto, el peligro de que, al despertar, cuando volviéramos la mirada sobre la traza del dibujo que han dejado nuestros pasos, nos encontráramos con una figura que no se corresponde en absoluto con lo que nosotros, ingenuamente, habíamos creído. En definitiva: que no reconocáramos en la figura tormentosa del barro aquella historia que hemos maquinado, con la pretensión de embellecerla, hasta hacerla irreconocible.

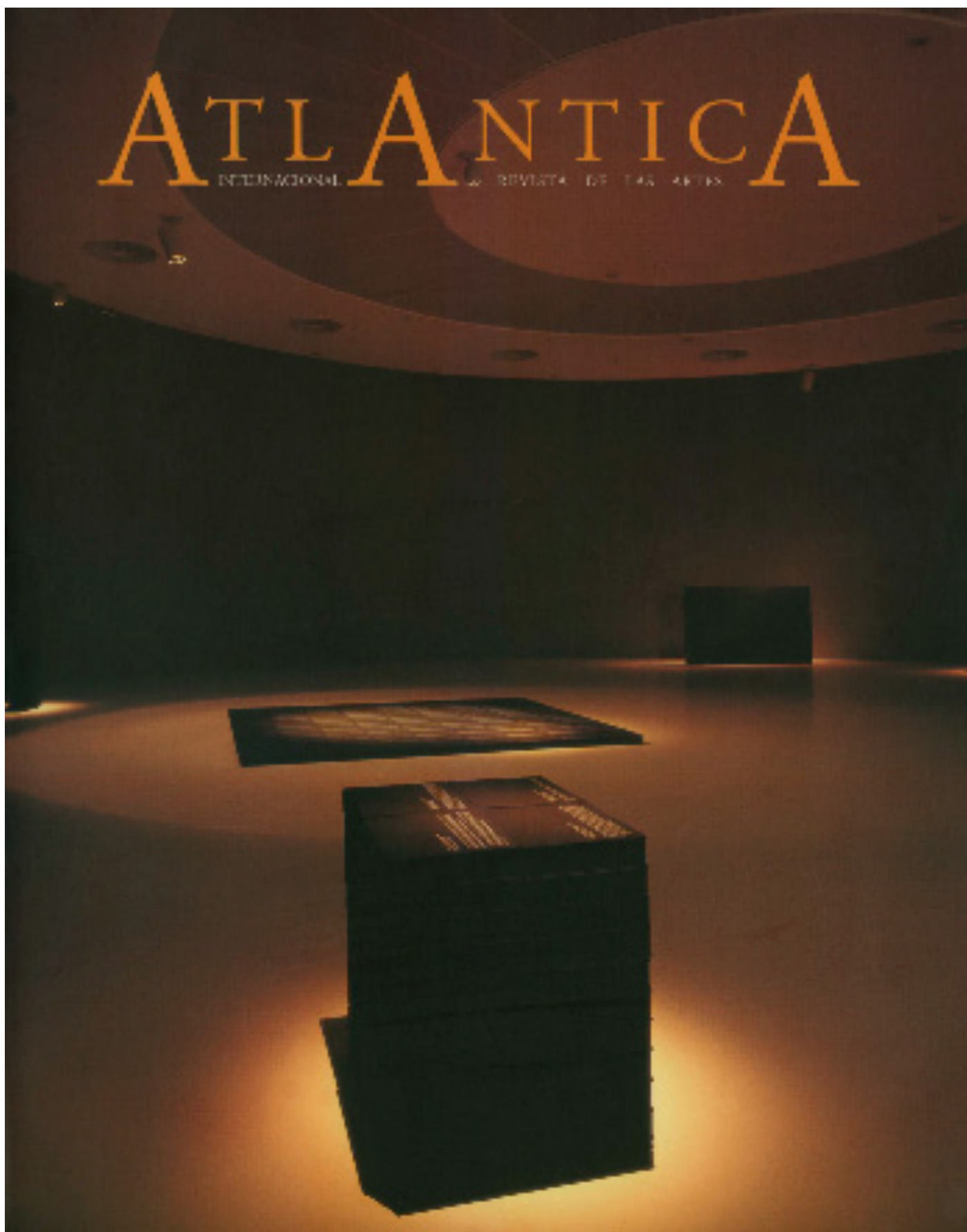
Y es que, después de Berlín, han pasado todavía muchas cosas: nos lo recuerdan los lamentos que continúan llegando de Argelia o del Kuaidín, nos lo recuerdan los muertos sin sepultura asesinados por los camiones de Pinochet. Nos lo recuerda, hace apenas unos días, el último bombardeo precoz de Clinton sobre el pueblo de Irak, mientras que en Estados Unidos, el país que inventó esa peligrosa forma de fundamentalismo que es el patriotismo ("un personaje público no tiene vida privada"), vivía una nueva modalidad de esquiador, consistente en escaudarse por los devanos sexuales de sus políticos al mismo tiempo que se asiste, con una morbosa curiosidad entremesclada de satisfacción, a la retransmisión en directo (palabras incluidas) de una guerra nocturna gratuita e innecesaria.

Fortunadamente, de vez en cuando, como extraños destellos de lucidez, nos llegan algunos fogonazos de resistencia frente a la anestesia. Destellos que, ante el masoicó del *apsis*, nos sugieren que apaguemos el televisor. Destellos que, como en una rápida fusión, nos hacen cobrar conciencia, en medio de la noche, de la figura que nuestro paso van dibujando. Como los llamaba Hanna Arendt, ojos acostumbrados a la oscuridad que nos permiten ver un poco más claro.

Es lo que estos días nos ha ofrecido un artista tan estimulante como el chileno Alfredo Jaar, que ha publicado en ACTAR, en dos volúmenes, la crónica de 10 años de trabajos (*En el ojo* [En el ojo] y los materiales de su última investigación (*Itiguar lo luz*: *Proyecto Awaide* [1994-1995]). Jaar es un fotógrafo que ha hecho de su medio de expresión un espacio crítico, consciente de que fotografiar la barbarie no es sino una forma de complicidad con ella. Ningún testimonio es, de por sí, denuncia. No basta con mirar para ver y, del mismo modo, no basta con poner en circulación imágenes, por sí mismas que sean, para impregnar las crueldades del mundo. Por eso, Jaar, es preciso utilizar la imagen para mostrar aquello que la propia imagen oculta. Así sucede con esa obra suya que consiste en un enorme tablero lino a basear de varios centenares de dispositivos que repiten, incansablemente, los ojos del niño Gutene Emérica: los mismos ojos que han visto matasar a casi toda su familia y a buena parte de su pueblo. Unos ojos que son más elocuentes, por su silencio, que la representación fotográfica de lo que han visto: porque lo que han visto es irrepresentable. Por pudor y por decencia. Pero, sobre todo, porque la única forma de mantener intacta la verdad es renunciando a prostrarse en su forma visible. Mirar sus ojos es acercarse a su dolor, sentirlo como si fuera nuestro. Lo mismo sucede en esa otra intervención en Berlín, sobre el templo griego de Pargamos, donde Jaar dejó inscritas, con letra de molde, los nombres de las ciudades alemanas donde se habían producido los ataques más virulentos contra los inmigrantes: la mirada hacia el pasado, habitualmente edulcorada, aparece así desdibujada por el resalto del presente más inmediato y más odioso. Y es que nada de nuestro presente es inmediato ni transparente: todo aparece emborronado con los mismos lodos que el caminar errático del personaje del cuento de Dinesen.

A punto de saltar hacia el último año del siglo, todavía no sabemos si la imagen que acabaremos dejando a nuestras espaldas será una cigüeña o un monstruo. Si que podemos intuir, sin embargo, a estos altísimos de la historia, que el dibujo que resultará no será nada tranquilizador, sino más bien inquietante y perturbador, como una especie de sombra molista con la que deberemos convivir, cuando menos, cuando se abran las puertas del nuevo calendario. ¿Falta año nuevo?

Xavier Antich es filósofo.







Sin embargo, la fotografía no tardó en revelarse inadecuada para dar cuenta de la terrible situación de Ruanda. La proliferación de imágenes en nuestra sociedad mediática ha llegado a neutralizar la capacidad de la fotografía para transmitir *afecto*. En su busca por un medio de representación más adecuado para los sucesos de Ruanda, Jaar encontró al fin la solución propuesta en *Real Pictures*: enterrar las fotografías en monumentos sombríos y sepulcrales que adquieren la apariencia de estructuras minimalistas. Paradójicamente, las fotografías de Ruanda estarían presentes en la instalación final, pero invisibles, inaccesibles para el espectador.

En un principio esta estrategia puede parecer extraña ¿cómo llega el artista al improbable matrimonio de fotografía y minimalismo, prácticas éstas con historias tan distintas y en apariencia irreconciliables? ¿Por qué se presenta la escultura minimalista como un medio más eficaz que la fotografía para comunicar la urgencia del genocidio de Ruanda? En las páginas siguientes me gustaría señalar que una muestra como *Real Pictures*, que alienta la síntesis entre la fotografía y las técnicas minimalistas, no sólo se compromete con los debates más acuciantes del siglo xx (el referido a la política de la representación) sino que ofrece una solución inédita al imperativo ético de eludir la magnitud de los acontecimientos históricos.

Es significativo que Alfredo Jaar recurriese en primera instancia a la fotografía para denunciar el genocidio de Ruanda. Desde su invención, hace ya un siglo, los críticos han considerado la fotografía como el vehículo más adecuado para la representación de la realidad. En *Pequeña historia de la fotografía* (1931), Walter Benjamin celebra la capacidad de la nueva

tecnología para captar detalles de la realidad —a los que se refiere como el inconsciente óptico—, que por naturaleza el ojo humano no es capaz de captar. Mediante procesos como la ampliación y la velocidad de obturación lenta, la fotografía nos permite ver y comprender mejor el mundo que nos rodea. «Gracias a la fotografías», concluye Benjamin, «hemos descubierto la existencia de este inconsciente óptico, del mismo modo en que gracias al psicoanálisis hemos descubierto la existencia del inconsciente instintivo». [1]

Más recientemente, Roland Barthes llevó esta afirmación aún más lejos al concluir que, para la mayoría de la gente, una fotografía no sólo representa el mundo, es el mundo. «Una fotografía es siempre invisible», escribe Barthes, «lo que vemos es otra cosa» [2]; «una fotografía es literalmente una emanación de lo referencial». [3] La fotografía no es sólo el medio más eficaz de representar los elementos visuales de la realidad; es también el vehículo más poderoso para transmitir emociones y *afectos*. Barthes nos dice que sus fotografías favoritas son aquellas que mejor transmiten la intensidad afectiva que él llama *placenter*. Estas fotografías contienen un elemento que traspasa al espectador, produciendo en él una experiencia intensa y dolorosa. «El *placenter* de una fotografía», escribe, «es ese accidente que me inquieta (pero también me duele, me conmueve)». [4] Ante estas fotografías, Barthes se ve literalmente atado por las emociones que producen: se siente traspasado, penetrado, herido por la imagen.

Dada la fuerza de las imágenes fotográficas para captar los más insignificantes detalles de la realidad y para producir intensas emociones en el espectador, no es casi sorprendente afirmar que la fotografía es el medio más eficaz para representar sucesos traumáticos, como el genocidio de Ruanda. La fotografía puede ofrecer una minuciosa representación de la matanza que libere en el espectador la violenta carga afectiva asociada al *pentrama*.

Sin embargo, incluso el propio Barthes reconoce que la fotografía no siempre consigue este noble ideal de la representación. El *placenter*, admite Barthes, es una experiencia sumamente subjetiva, que depende no tanto de las características reales de la fotografía como de las asociaciones y recuerdos que se producen en la mente del espectador. Con frecuencia, una fotografía que desata intensas emociones en un espectador

puede no producir efecto alguno en otros. Siguiendo esta lógica, Barthes dice a sus lectores que no mostrará su imagen más preciosa – una fotografía de su madre de niña, en el Jardín d’Hivier– porque la complicada carga afectiva que a él lo traspassa – una sublime síntesis de amor filial y de melancolía – se perderá inevitablemente en otros espectadores.

Al hecho de que la carga afectiva de la fotografía es altamente subjetiva e incommunicable, se surca el que la experiencia del *ponctuar* resulte cada vez más difícil de alcanzar en nuestra sociedad. «La sociedad», escribe Barthes, «quiere domesticar a la fotografía, atenuar la locura que sigue amenazando con explotar en la cara e quien la mire». [5] ¿Y cómo domestica el mundo moderno esta locura, este intensidad inherente a la fotografía? La proliferación de imágenes en la televisión, en los periódicos, en las revistas, en las vallas publicitarias y otros medios de comunicación de masas, el abuso de la reproducción fotográfica, hacen que la experiencia del *ponctuar* se torne casi imposible. Las fotografías ya no se contemplan o se experimentan, simplemente se consumen: «Lo que caracteriza a las llamadas sociedades avanzadas», afirma Barthes, «es que consumen imágenes [...] y nosotros las traducimos en nuestra conciencia ordinaria evitando la impresión de hastio, como si la imagen universalizada produjera un mundo que carece de diferencia (indiferente)» [6].

Irónicamente, la tendencia a domesticar la fotografía, denunciada por Barthes en 1980, ya había sido reconocida por Siegfried Kracauer en la década de 1930. Menos optimista que Walter Benjamin, Kracauer no veía la fotografía como un medio cuyo atención al detalle pudiera revelar un «inconsciente óptico» invisible para el ojo humano, sino como una técnica basada en la acumulación de detalles inútiles. La fotografía, en su opinión, sigue exactamente la misma lógica que los académicos positivistas, convencidos de que la historia podía escribirse como una amplia suma de información sin bruto acerca de un asunto o una época. Para Kracauer, la fotografía era el último invento de un sistema capitalista que veneraba la acumulación irreflexiva de capital, de datos o de imágenes. «Desde la perspectiva de la mortuoria», escribió, «la fotografía es un botiburrillo parcialmente formado por basuras». [7]

En la raíz de la crítica de Kracauer está la firme convicción de que la abundancia de detalles visuales contenidos en las fotografías estimulaba cierta clase de pereza intelectual. Cuando miramos una imagen, decía, no tenemos necesidad de

ejercitar el intelecto, porque se nos presenta una cantidad de información visual que no deja el menor espacio para la imaginación. Nos sumimos inevitablemente en una pasividad que nos distrae de la «conciencia» necesaria para llevar una existencia comprometida y activa en el mundo. «Ninguna época», escribió Kracauer, «ha estado tan bien informada acerca de sí misma, si estar informado significa disponer de una imagen de objetos que se parecen en sentido fotográfico [...] El credeo de este contingente de imágenes es tan poderoso que amenaza con destruir la conciencia potencial de aspectos cruciales. [...] Ningún periodo se ha conocido menos a sí mismo. [...] En manos de la clase dirigente, la invención de las revistas ilustradas es uno de los medios más poderosos para convocar una huelga contra el entendimiento.» [8]

A juicio de Kracauer, la fotografía no es un medio eficaz para comunicar la importancia de un suceso – como el genocidio de Ruanda – porque no llega a penetrar bajo la superficie. Una fotografía no es más que un cúmulo de detalles superficiales, de apariencias incapaces de aumentar nuestra comprensión del suceso en cuestión, puesto que no revelan nada de su contexto histórico o cultural. Por su naturaleza superficial, la fotografía sólo puede ser irrepetitiva con su propia materia: «La avalancha de fotos», concluye Kracauer, «denota indiferencia hacia el significado de las cosas.» [9]

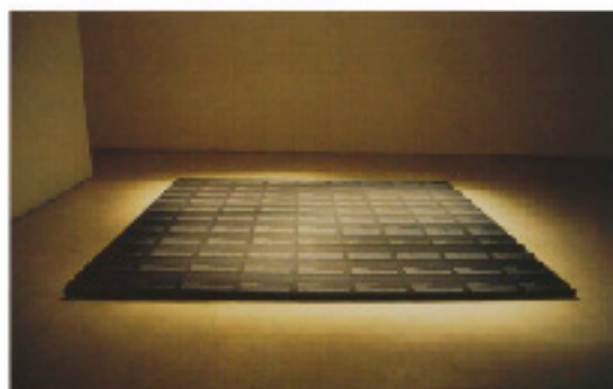
Al final, Barthes y Kracauer llegan a conclusiones similares: la imagen fotográfica no es fiable como medio para representar sucesos significativos. Barthes se niega a mostrar a sus lectores la fotografía de su madre en el Jardín d’Hivier con el argumento de que la imagen carecería de *ponctuar* para sus lectores, ya



que no concuerda a su mal. Kracauer, por su parte, culpaba al propio medio fotográfico y sostenía que una imagen jamás puede ofrecer una representación válida de una persona, al ser un cúmulo de detalles en bruto y carentes de vida: «En una fotografía la historia de la persona queda enterrada como bajo una capa de nieve». [10]

Las ideas de Kracauer y Barthes iluminaron la negación de la imagen fotográfica esmitida en *Real Pictures*. Esta instalación oculta las fotografías por la misma razón por la que Barthes oculta a sus lectores su más preciado retrato: para espantarlos, no familiarizándolos con la magnitud del genocidio, las fotos de cadáveres y ideas arrastradas no serían más que una inútil acumulación de detalles. Como otros tantos miles de imágenes de desastres que a diario aparecen en los periódicos y en la televisión, estas fotografías dejaban al lector frío, indiferente. No comunicarían *pasividad* alguna, no traspasarían al espectador con el horror de la muerte. «Siempre he sentido», escribe Jaar, «que pudimos un auténtico bombardeo de imágenes desde los medios de comunicación: un bombardeo que nos ha dejado completamente anestesiados. Se nos transmite la sensación de estar presentes y de vivir la información que se nos facilita, pero en cuanto apagamos el televisor o apartamos el periódico, no queda más que una inevitable sensación de ausencia, de distancia». [11] «Las imágenes», según ha dicho Jaar, citando al escritor catalán Vicenç Altés, «poseen una religión avanzada: entierran la historia».

¿Cómo entonces representar los acontecimientos significativos si la fotografía resulta inadecuada, tiene que haber otras técnicas capaces de ofrecer una representación eficaz de las matanzas de Ruanda. En su ensayo, Kracauer apuntaba una posible alternativa: a principal desventaja de la fotografía radica en su literalidad, en el exceso de detalles que estimula la pasividad intelectual. Si, por otro lado, hubiera una forma de representación menos minuciosa, que dejase mayor espacio para la imaginación del espectador, éste sería el medio más eficaz. Distanciándose del *literalismo* de la fotografía, Kracauer defendía cierta forma de *abstracción*: «A medida que la conciencia cobra mayor conocimiento de sí misma», escribió Kracauer, «el significado de la imagen se torna más abstracto e inmaterial». Los conceptos abstractos sirven para despertar la conciencia. [12]. Al encontrarse con una abstracción, concu-



va Kracauer, la mente humana se ve obligada a ejercitar sus facultades intelectuales a interpretar, discernir y criticar.

Pese a la jocosidad que observamos en la argumentación de Kracauer, es difícil imaginar en qué medida la abstracción artística puede *representar* un acontecimiento histórico. Por definición, el arte abstracto —especialmente la pintura modernista, tal como es teorizada por Clement Greenberg y Michael Fried— se estructura sobre la base de una estricta prohibición de cualquier referencia, de cualquier indicación —histórica, política o cultural— situada fuera de la propia obra de arte. Si siguiéramos la argumentación de Kracauer y abandonáramos la cruda literalidad de la fotografía en favor de una abstracción más iluminadora, ¿a dónde nos llevaría esta opción?

Según la lógica de Kracauer, *Real Pictures* abandona la literalidad de la imagen fotográfica en favor de una peculiar clase de abstracción: el aspecto de la escultura minimalista. Cabe preguntarse ¿por qué el minimalismo? ¿No es acaso la escultura minimalista aún menos adecuada que la fotografía a la hora de representar la magnitud de los sucesos de Ruanda? A fin de cuentas, la abstracción minimalista pertenece al mismo orden que la pintura modernista: pese a las lecturas que ingeniosamente intentan dotar a este movimiento de un compromiso político radical, del cual siempre ha carecido. [13] es más que evidente que el minimalismo —tal como se ha propuesto la prohibición modernista de cualquier referencia. Por radicales que afirmasen ser, los cubos de Serra y los «objetos específicos» de Judd siempre pertenecerían —como la pintura modernista— alejados de los acontecimientos históricos que marcaron la década de 1960.

¿Por qué, entonces, *Real Pictures* presenta el aspecto de la abstracción minimalista? Pese a su rechazo a comprometerse

con los acontecimientos históricos, el minimalismo supuso un avance artístico que incluso Kracauer habría aplaudido: su empleo de las formas monumentales y los materiales industriales desplazó el énfasis de la experiencia estética del objeto al espectador. Las obras de Donald Judd, Richard Serra o Carl Andre no pueden verse pasivamente, como la lírica o la imagen fotográfica despreciada por Kracauer. Las estructuras minimalistas se enfrentan agresivamente con el espectador, obligándolo no sólo a ejercitar su intelecto, sino también a poner en movimiento su cuerpo en torno a las esculturas.

En *Notes on Sculpture* (1966), Robert Morris explica cómo aborda el minimalismo este activo compromiso espacial con el objeto. Morris afirma que cuando miramos los objetos externos nuestra percepción toma siempre como referencia la escala humana, «és evidente, y sin embargo importantes», escribe, «creptar en el hecho de que las cosas más pequeñas nos muestran las cosas de un modo distinto a como vemos las cosas más grandes». Por lo general, los objetos pequeños no suscitan nuestro interés, nuestra superioridad física nos empuja de inmediato a dominarlos, y los percibimos meramente de un modo que Morris define como próximo, íntimo y desprovisto de espacio. Los objetos pequeños carecen de espacio porque nos limitamos a asimilarlos «sujetándolos con la mano o abalanzándonos sobre ellos»—el espacio ocupado por nuestro cuerpo. Y concluye Morris: «El espacio no existe para los objetos íntimos». [14]

Por el contrario, la percepción de objetos cuyo tamaño se asemeja o supera el de la figura humana es una operación compleja que Morris identifica con «la pública»: «Lo público», explica Morris, «está proporcionalmente vinculado con el aumento de tamaño en relación con uno mismo». Cuando nos acercamos a un objeto grande debemos negociar entre nuestro

espacio y el espacio del objeto. A medida que nos movemos alrededor del objeto, la relación entre los dos espacios se modifica: cuando estamos muy cerca del objeto nos encontramos encerrados en su espacio; cuando estamos lejos, nuestro propio espacio corporal parece dominar al objeto. Ante todo, esta cualidad pública garantiza que se establezca un compromiso constante entre el observador y el objeto, una negociación constante del espacio corporal. «Es precisamente esta distancia entre objeto y sujeto», concluye Morris, «lo que posibilita una situación más amplia, dado que la participación física es necesaria». [15]

Raaf Picavet plantea así el principal logro del minimalismo—la movilización del espectador y su compromiso corporal y de percepción con el objeto [16]— como antídoto contra el letargo intelectual que tanto Kracauer como Barthes asociaban con la proliferación de imágenes en nuestras sociedades. Los monumentos de Raaf Picavet exigen que el espectador pase a participar activamente en la obra: debe cruzar la galería, caminar alrededor de estructuras sencillas y sentirse abrumado por el aura escultural proyectada por estas formas. La experiencia es equiparable al asombro que altera nuestra conducta cuando entramos en una catedral o en un monumento: todo el mundo pasea en silencio, despacio, con las manos entrelazadas. Al igual que en los actos rituales, no puede haber espectadores, sólo participantes en este acto colectivo de experiencia de la obra.

Además de movilizar al espectador y garantizar su compromiso, Raaf Picavet satisface las exigencias de Kracauer al sustituir la imagen fotográfica lírica por una imagen afectiva: enterrada en el archivo, la fotografía no puede verse. En su lugar encontramos un texto que no sólo describe la imagen sino que revela aspectos cruciales imposibles de ser representados por la fotografía. Veamos el siguiente ejemplo:

*Campo de Refugiados de Eshuho  
30 kilómetros al sur de Bukuru (Zaire),  
Frontero Zaire-Ruanda  
Sábado, 27 de agosto, 1994*

*Certas Namazema de 88 años abandonó su casa en Kuluha (Ruanda) y recorrió 166 kilómetros a pie hasta este campamento. El pelo blanco de la mujer se funde con el cielo pálido.*





La fresca mañana la obliga a cubrirse con un chal azul de estampa geométrica. Su blusa blanca cubre por la mitad el cuello, adornado con un collar de ámbos. Su mirada es resignada, cansada, y revela el peso de la superexposición.

Caritas es una heroína atrapada entre las acciones de su propio pueblo y el miedo a la venganza de quienes han sido víctimas de éstas. A lo largo de su vida ha visto a muchos niños colarse en otros países. Ahora, en un dramático giro de la situación, también ella se ha convertido en refugiada.

El texto transmite numerosos detalles que jamás podrían ser captados por la literalidad del proceso fotográfico: es la fecha y el lugar donde se usó la fotografía, la identidad de Caritas Namazaru, el tema fotografiado y, sobre todo, el contexto histórico —el desplazamiento producido por la guerra civil— lo que confiere significado a la imagen. Al igual que la estructura minimalista que la contiene, el texto exige del espectador movilización y compromiso intenso, esta vez mediante un proceso mental, y no corporal. El espectador debe cruzar el texto, reunir los múltiples detalles que proporciona para formar una imagen mental de la escena invisible.

Hasta el momento hemos visto cómo *Real Pictures* supera las limitaciones de la fotografía mediante el uso de estrategias minimalistas e imágenes abstractas. Pero también, y en un alarde de brillantes, vence las deficiencias del minimalismo incorporando a los monumentales elementos fotográficos. El minimalismo, como hemos visto, perpetúa la producción referencial modernista, divorciándose de este modo de la historia. *Real Pictures* propone una magnífica solución formal mediante la cual las estructuras minimalistas se ven obligadas a sustraer el peso de la historia. Cada monumento incorpora literalmente el referente histórico —la fotografía— a su forma. En virtud de este proceso, la estructura minimalista se convierte en un archivo en uso, en un depósito de información detallada sobre el genocidio de Ruanda. Esta estrategia, en virtud de la cual un recurso meramente formal pasa a convertirse en un índice de sucesos históricos, recuerda a la transformación de pinturas monocromas en documento histórico realizada por On Kawara (especialmente las tres lienzos casi monocromáticos titulados *One Thing 1965 Viet-Nam 1965*).

*Real Pictures* es por tanto resultado de la búsqueda de un medio capaz de representar adecuadamente la realidad de las matanzas de Ruanda, de una forma artística capaz de trans-



mitir la intensidad afectiva del suceso sin caer en el sensacionalismo que caracteriza el consumo de imágenes en nuestra sociedad. Su magnífica síntesis de estrategias fotográficas y minimalistas subsume las deficiencias de estas dos formas artísticas, integrando el compromiso activo del espectador producido por el minimalismo con la referencialidad histórica que caracteriza a la fotografía. Los monumentos de *Real Pictures* con memoria no sólo el genocidio de Ruanda sino también el deterioramiento de la imagen visual y el triunfo de la abstracción sobre la literalidad. Privada de sus funciones espectaculares y relegada al anonimato, la fotografía se convierte en un documento al servicio de la historia.

#### NOTAS

- [1] Walter Benjamin, *A Small History of Photography*, en *One Way Street*, NLB, London, 1978, pág. 213.
- [2] Robert Rauschenberg, *Camera Lucida*, Peter, Straus and Giroux, Nueva York, 1981, pág. 4.
- [3] *Ibid.*, pág. 80.
- [4] *Ibid.*, pág. 77.
- [5] *Ibid.*, pág. 117.
- [6] *Ibid.*, pág. 118.
- [7] Siegfried Kracauer, «Photography» en *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1995, pág. 51.
- [8] *Ibid.*, pág. 58.
- [9] *Ibid.*, pág. 58.
- [10] *Ibid.*, pág. 51.
- [11] Alfredo Jaar, «The Limits of Representations», *Dura* 1-2, núm. 2-4, BNU, pág. 25.
- [12] Kracauer, pág. 60.
- [13] Véase, por ejemplo, la lectura extremadamente defensiva y pasiva del minimalismo como un movimiento artístico definitivamente inventada presentada por Hal Foster en «The Crisis of Minimalism», *The System of Art*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1996.
- [14] Robert Rauschenberg, «Notes on Sculpture», en *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1955, págs. 230-231.
- [15] *Ibid.*, págs. 230-231.
- [16] Este compromiso se ha relacionado a menudo con la fenomenología de la percepción. Resulta interesante que en la compleja relación que existe entre el espectador y la estructura minimalista, en ausencia de la dicción y el punto de vista son impuestos al objeto, sólo habiéndose a significados del objeto, como los sentidos que influyen en nuestro lenguaje en base de sentido siempre dados. «Richard Serra, A Translation», *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Postwar Myths*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1986, pág. 262.

*Real Pictures* (1995). *Disby Et, like a cathedral, the exhibition space houses a series of dark monuments that evoke the familiar shapes of minimalist sculpture. A large, flat square lies across the floor, mimics the remains of a Civil War's obelisk; in an adjacent room, a voluminous cube recreates the monolithic qualities of Richard Serra's objects in a corner; a pyramidal shape evokes certain works by Robert Morris. But these structures are not made of iron or steel, they are assembled out of hundreds of black archival boxes, seemed as if they were bricks. Each box contains a single photograph, over a half inch, valenced on the surface, describing the inconceivable image. "In the photograph," reads one of the texts, "there are too many bodies to count. They are in a particularly grotesque manner of decomposition, where the flesh is still visible, but it is blurred, obscured, and resting."*

On April 6, 1994, the plane carrying Juvénal Habyarimana, the Rwandan president, was shot down near Kigali. The African nation immediately plunged into one of the most cruel civil wars of our century: in less than two months, over a million Rwandans were killed, two million were forced into exile, another two million were displaced within Rwanda. Frustrated by the international community's refusal to acknowledge the magnitude of the genocide, Alfredo Jaar visited the Rwandan refugee camps in the summer of 1995. At first, he turned to photography as the most effective medium for telling the world about the tragedy; over the course of a few weeks, he took over three thousand photographs of the most horrific scenes of death and mass destruction.

Very soon, however, photography

ALFREDO JAAR  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
DETHRONED  
\*\*\*  
HUBÉN GALLU

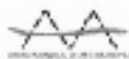
proved to be an entirely inadequate medium for conveying the plight of Rwanda. The proliferation of images in our spectacular society has somehow neutralized the photograph's capacity to transmit affect. Searching for a more effective medium for representing the Rwandan events, Jaar eventually arrived at the solution proposed by *Real Pictures*: leaving the photographs inside smaller, tomb-like monuments that mimic the appearance of minimalist structures. Paradoxically, the photographs of Rwanda would be present in the final installation, but they would remain invisible, inaccessible to viewers.

Initially, this strategy might seem strange: how did the artist arrive at this unlikely marriage between photography and minimalism, two practices with such distinct and apparently irreconcilable histories? Why is minimalist sculpture presented as a more effective medium than photography for conveying the urgency of the Rwandan genocide? In the pages that follow, I would like to suggest that in articulating a synthesis of photography and minimalist techniques, *Real Pictures* not only engages with some of the most important debates of the twentieth century about the politics of



representation, but also offers an unprecedented solution to the critical impotence of conveying the magnitude of historical events.

It is significant that Alfredo Jaar first turned to photography as a medium to represent the urgency of the Rwandan





**PHOTOS:** Alfredo Jaar, *First Pictures*, 1998. Photo Archive, Texas. Clark Line, *Silk-screened text, Olfactum et Prunus, Variata et Americana*. Courtesy Gallery Lelong, New York.

genocide. Since its invention over a century ago, critics have seen photography as the most effective vehicle for representing reality. In "A Short History of Photography" (1931), Walter Benjamin celebrates the new technology's

ability to capture details of reality – he refers to these as "the optical unconscious" – that are usually invisible to the naked eye. Through processes like slow motion and enlargement, photography allows us to see and

understand more of the world around us. "It is through photography," Benjamin concludes, "that we first discover the existence of the optical unconscious, just as we discover the irrational mind through psychoanalysis." [1]

Closer to our time, Roland Barthes took this assertion even further, concluding that for most people, photography does not only represent the world, it is the world. "A photograph is always invisible," Barthes writes, "it is not *of* that we see" [2] – "a photograph is literally an emanation of the referent." [3] Photography is not only the most effective medium for representing the visual elements of reality, but it is also the most potent vehicle for transmitting emotions and *effets*. Barthes tells us that his favorite photographs are those that most successfully transmit the affective intensity which he calls *plaisance*. These photographs contain an element that pierces the viewer, producing a powerful – and painful – experience in him. "A photograph's *plaisance*," he writes, "is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)." [4] Looking at these photos, Barthes is literally *entrafé* by the emotion that they produce – he is pierced, pricked, bruised by the image.

Given the photographic image's powers to capture the most minute details

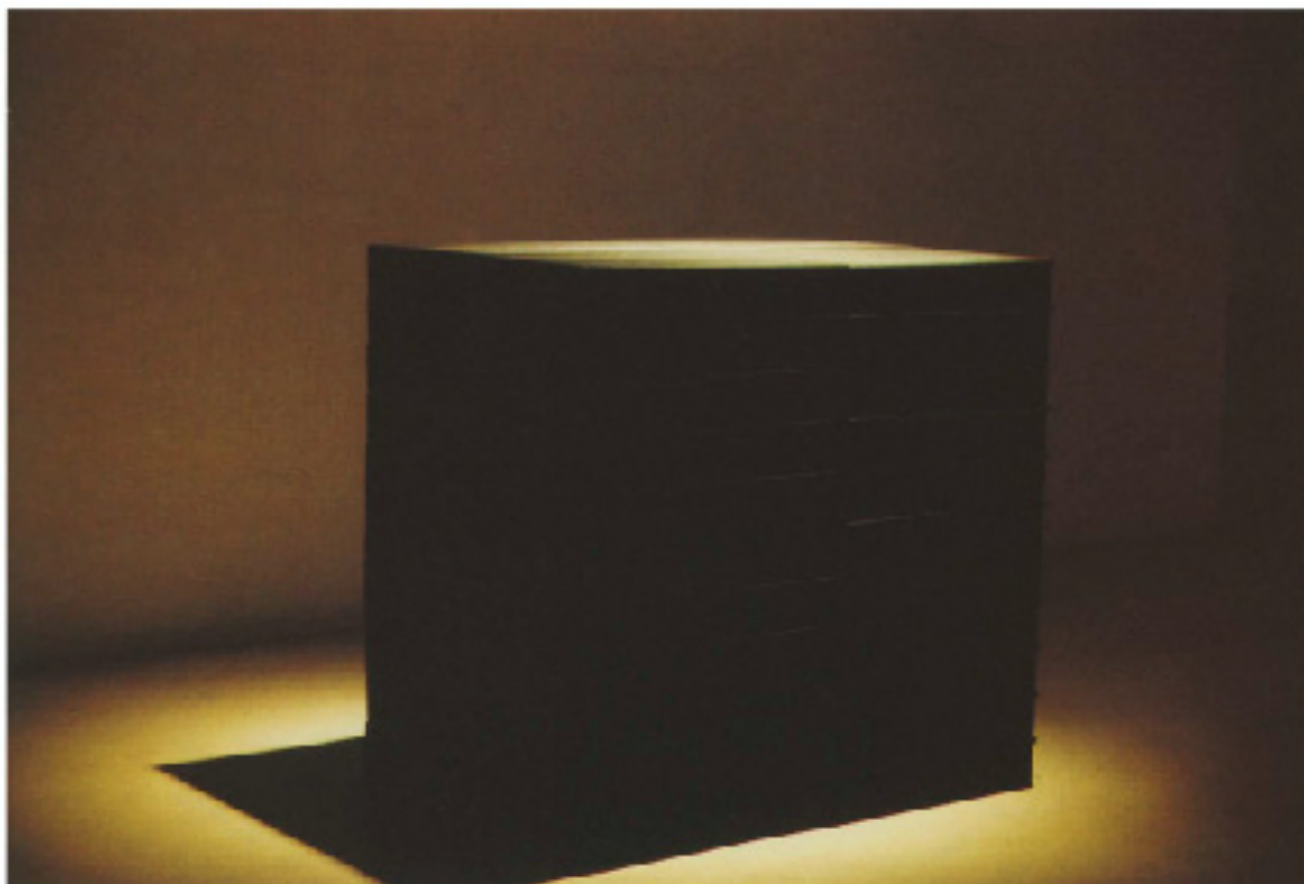
of reality, and to produce powerful emotions in the viewer, one would then be tempted to conclude that photography is the most effective medium to represent traumatic events, such as the Rwandan genocide. A photograph, it seems, could produce an elaborate visual representation of the massacre which would also unleash in the viewer the violent affective charge associated with the *plaisance*.

Even Barthes, however, acknowledges that photography does not always achieve this noble representational ideal. The *plaisance*, Barthes concedes, is a highly subjective experience, one which depends less on the photograph's actual traits than on the associations and memories produced in the viewer's mind. Often a photograph that unleashes powerful emotions in one viewer has absolutely no effect on a different person. Following this logic, Barthes tells his readers that he will not show his most prized image – a photograph of his mother as a little girl at the Jardin d'Hyver – because the complex affective charge that pierces him – a sublime synthesis of filial love and melancholy – will be inevitably lost in other viewers.

Not only is a photograph's affective charge highly subjective and incommunicable, but the experience of the *plaisance* is becoming increasingly difficult in our society. "Society," Barthes writes, "is concerned with taming the Photograph with competing detourisms which keep threatening to explode in the face of whoever looks at it." [5] And how is this madness, this intensity inherent to photography tamed by the modern world? The proliferation of images in television, newspapers, magazines, billboards and other forms of mass media have abused photographic reproduction to the point where the experience of the *plaisance* is almost impossible. Photographs are no longer contemplated or experienced, but merely *consumed*. "What characterizes the so-called advanced societies," concludes Barthes, "is that they consume images [...] something we translate as ordinary consciousness by the avowal of an impression of neutralized boredom, as if the universalized image were producing a world that is without difference (indifferent)." [6]

Ironically, the tendency towards the taming of the photograph that Barthes denounced in 1980 had already been acknowledged by Siegfried Kracauer in the 1920s. Less optimistic than Walter Benjamin, Kracauer did not see photography as a medium whose focus on detail could reveal an "optical unconscious" invisible to the naked eye, but merely as a technique based on the accumulation of useless detail. Photography, he argues, follows the exact same logic as the positivist scholars who believed that history could be written by gathering as much "raw" information as possible about a subject or a period. For





Kracauer, photography was the latest invention of a capitalist system that worshipped thoughtless accumulation – of capital, of data, of images. “From the perspective of memory,” he writes, “photography appears as a jumble that consists partly of garbage.” [7]

At the root of Kracauer’s critique was a firm conviction that the abundance of visual detail contained in photographs hindered a type of intellect and laxness. When looking at an image, he claimed, we have no need to exercise our intellect, since we are presented with an accumulation of visual information that leaves nothing to our imagination. We are helplessly plunged into a passivity that distances us from the “awareness” and “consciousness” required for an engaged, active existence in the world. “Never before,” wrote Kracauer, “has an age

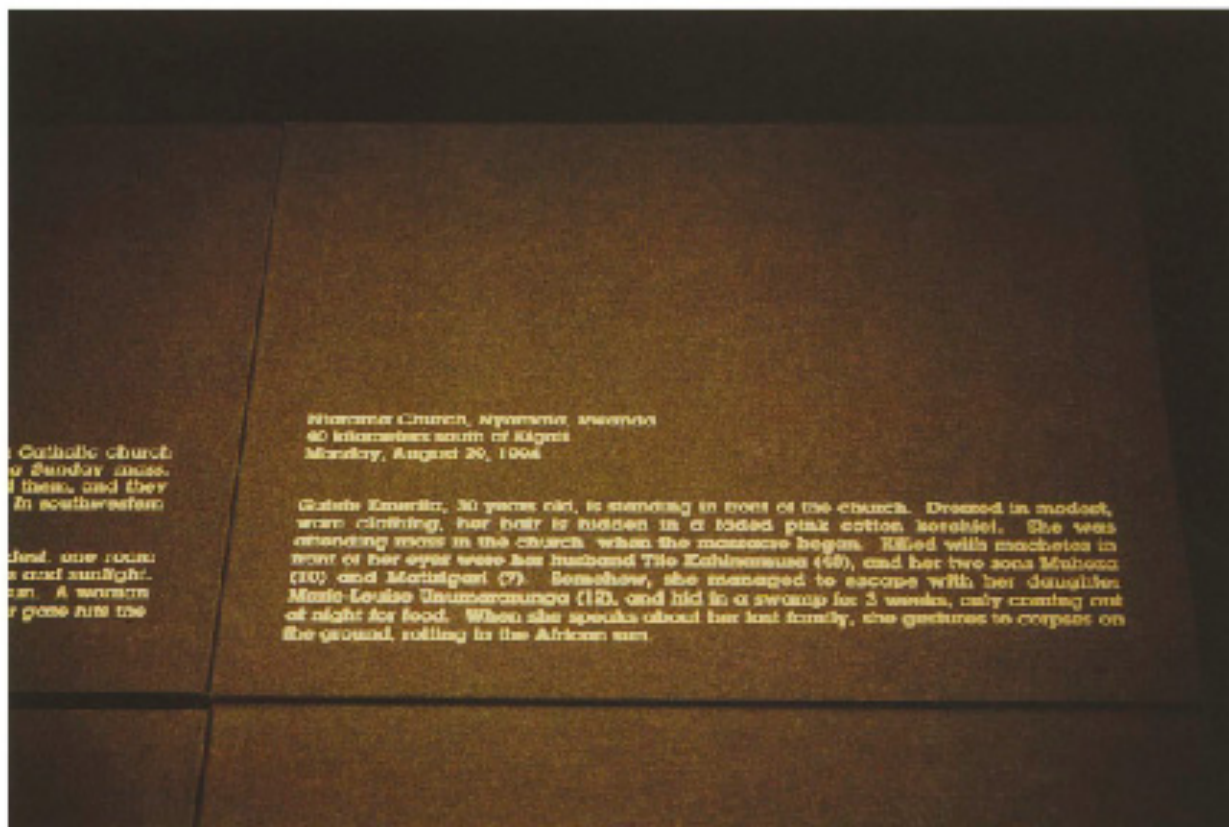
been so infatuated about itself, if being informed means having an image of objects that resemble them in a photographic sense [...] The assault of this mass of images is so powerful that it threatens to destroy the potentially existing awareness of crucial traits. [...] Never before has a period known so little about itself. [...] In the hands of the ruling society, the invention of illustrated magazines is one of the most powerful means of organizing a strike against understanding.” [8]

In Kracauer’s view, photography is not an effective medium to communicate the importance of an event – like the Rwandan genocide – because it can never penetrate the surface. A photograph is simply an accumulation of superficial details, of appearances that cannot increase our understanding of the event

since they reveal nothing about historical or cultural context. Because of its superficial nature, photography can only be disrespectful towards its subject matter. “The blizzard of photos,” Kracauer concludes, “betrays an indifference toward what the things mean.” [9]

4

In the end, Barthes and Kracauer arrive at similar conclusions: the photographic image cannot be trusted as an effective medium to represent significant events. Barthes refuses to show his readers the photograph of his mother at the Jardin d’Hiver; he claims that the image would lack a *poignance* for his readers, since they never knew his mother. Kracauer would blame the photographic medium itself and argue that an image can never adequately represent a person because it is lifeless,



unrefined accumulation of detail – “In a photograph,” he wrote, “a person’s history is buried as if under a layer of snow.” [10]

Kracauer’s and Barthes’ ideas shed light on the refusal of the photographic image staged by *Real Pictures*. This installation hides the photographs for the same reason that Barthes withholds his most prized portrait from his readers: for viewers unacquainted with the magnitude of the genocide, photos of corpses and rural villages would merely be read as empty accumulations of detail. Like the thousands of other images of disaster seen every day in newspapers and television, they would leave the viewer cold, indifferent. They would communicate no pain, they would not pierce the viewer with the honor of death. “I have always felt,” writes Jaar, “that we suffer

from a bombardment of images produced by the media – a bombardment that has completely anesthetized us. We are given a sense of being present and living the information we are provided with, but once the television is switched off, or the newspaper put away, we are left with an inescapable sense of absence and distance.” [11] “Images,” Jaar has said, quoting Camille, writer Vincent Auzanó, “have an advanced religion: they bury history.”

But how are significant events to be represented? If photography proves to be an inadequate medium, there must surely be other techniques that can produce an effective representation of the Rwandan massacre. In his essay, Kracauer had pointed to one alternative: the main disadvantage of photography, he

concluded, was its literalness, its excessive representation of detail that led to a type of intellectual passivity. If, on the other hand, there could be a form of representation that showed less minutiae and left more to the viewer’s imagination, it would prove to be a more effective medium. Distancing himself from photography’s representational literalness, Kracauer argued for a type of abstraction: “As consciousness becomes more and more aware of itself,” he wrote, “the meaning of the image becomes increasingly abstract and immaterial.” Abstract concepts serve to awaken “consciousness.” [12] When faced with an abstraction, Kracauer concludes, the human mind is led to an exercise its intellectual power – it is forced to interpret, to discern and to create.

Despite Kracauer’s passionate

argument, it is difficult to imagine how artistic abstraction could serve to represent a historical event. By definition, abstract art – especially Modernist painting, as theorized by Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried – is structured by the strictest prohibition against referentiality, against indexing anything – history, politics, even other cultural forms – that lies outside the artwork itself. If we were to follow Kraemer's argument, and abandon the crude literalness of photography in favor of a more enlightening abstraction, where would this choice take us?

Following Kraemer's logic, *Real Pictures* challenges the literalness of the photographic image in favor of a peculiar type of abstraction: the "look" of minimalist sculpture. Why minimalism?, we might ask. Does not minimalist sculpture seem even less adequate than photography when faced with the challenge of representing the weight of the Rwandan events? After all, minimalist abstraction is of the same order as that of modernist painting: despite readings that actively attempt to invest this movement with a radical political engagement which it always lacked, [13] it is sufficiently evident that minimalism merely perpetuated the modernist prohibition against referentiality. As radical as Serra's crucifix and Judd's "specific objects" claimed to be, they remained – like modernist painting – aloof to the historical events that marked the 1960s.

Why, then, would *Real Pictures* mimic the look of minimalist abstraction? Despite its refusal to engage with historical events, minimalism achieved a crucial artistic breakthrough which even

Kraemer would have applauded: its use of monumental shapes and industrial materials shifted the emphasis of aesthetic experience from the object to the viewer. The works of Donald Judd, Richard Serra, or Carl Andre cannot be contemplated passively, like the literal photographic image despised by Kraemer. Minimalist structures aggressively confront the viewer and force him to include his own body – as he walks near, around, or under them – in the aesthetic experience. Minimalist abstraction jolts the viewer out of his passivity, forcing him to not only to deploy his intellect, but also to mobilize his body around the sculptures.

In "Notes on Sculpture," (1966) Robert Morris explains how minimalism brings about this active spatial engagement with the object. Morris claims that when we look at external objects, our perception always takes the human scale as a point of reference. "It is obvious, yet important," he writes, "to take note of the fact that things smaller than ourselves are seen differently from things larger." In general, small objects are not very interesting, and physical superiority immediately moves us to dominate them, and we merely perceive them in a mode that Morris defines as closed, intimate, and spaceless. Small objects are "spaceless" because we merely assimilate them – by holding them in our hand, or towering above them – into the space occupied by our body. "Space," Morris concludes, "does not exist for intimate objects." [14]

In contrast, the perception of objects whose size approaches or surpasses that of the human figure is a complex operation which Morris associates with *publicness*: "The quality of publicness,"

Morris explains, "is attached in proportion as the size increases in relation to oneself." Upon approaching a large object, we must negotiate between our space and the object's space. As we move around the object, the relationship between the two spaces changes: up close we find ourselves enclosed by its space, while from far away our own bodily space appears to dominate the object. Above all, this public quality ensures that there will be a constant engagement between the viewer and the object, a constant negotiation of bodily space. "It is just this distance between object and subject," Morris concludes, "that creates a more extended situation, for physical participation becomes necessary." [15]

*Real Pictures* thus posits the crucial achievement of minimalism – the mobilization of the viewer and his perceptual and bodily engagement with the object [16] – as an antidote to the intellectual lethargy that both Kraemer and Barthes associated with the proliferation of images in our societies. The monuments of *Real Pictures* demand that the viewer become an active participant in the work: he must traverse the gallery, walk around the slender structures, feel overwhelmed by the dark work cast by these shapes. As when entering a cathedral or a memorial, visitors are filled by a certain awe that alters their demeanor: everyone remains silent, hands clasped together, walking slowly around the monuments. As in ritual actions, there can be no spectators, only participants in this collective act of experiencing the work.

In addition to mobilizing the viewer and assuring his engagement, *Real*

*Pictura* fulfills Krauss's call by replacing the *Essai*'s photographic image with an abstract one: buried inside the archival box, the photograph can never be seen. In its place, we find a text that not only describes the image, but reveals crucial elements that cannot be represented by the photograph. Consider the full writing example:

*Carolina Refugee Camp  
30 kilometers south of Bukuru, Lower  
Zaire - Rwanda Border  
Saturday, August 27, 1994  
Caritas Nazareno, 85 years old, God  
her love in Kibula, Rwanda, and  
walked 385 kilometers to reach this  
camp. Her white hair disappears against  
the pale sky. Because of the early  
morning temperatures, she is covered in a  
blue shawl with geometric print. Her  
white blouse cuts across her neck,  
adorned with a string of amber beads.  
Her gaze is resigned, weary, and carries  
the weight of her survival.*

*Caritas is a Hutu caught between the  
inhumans of her own people and the fear of  
retribution from those who have been  
victimized. In her life, she has witnessed  
how many Tutsis had to seek exile in  
other countries. At the late age, in a  
desperate moment, she too has become a  
refugee.*

The text conveys numerous details which could never be captured by the literalness of the photographic process: the date and location, where it was shot, the identity of Caritas Nazareno, the photographed subject, and above all the historical context – the displacement (caused by the civil war – that makes the image significant. Like the minimalist structure that contains it, the text demands from the viewer an intense engagement and multilinear, though

this time through a mental – and not bodily – process. The viewer must traverse the text, assembling the multiple details it provides in order to arrive at a mental image of the invisible scene.

So far we have seen how *Real Pictures* surpasses the limitations of photography through its use of minimalist strategies and abstract images. In a brilliant move, however, *Real Pictures* also transcends the shortcomings of minimalism by incorporating photographic elements into the monuments. Minimalism, as we had seen, perpetuated the modernist prohibition against referentiality, and thus remained divorced from history. *Real Pictures* proposes a superb formal solution by which minimalist structures are forced to bear the weight of history. Each monument literally incorporates the historical referent – the photograph – into its form. Through this process, the minimalist structure becomes a functioning archive, a repository of factual information about the Rwandan genocide. This strategy by which a purely formal device is forced to become an index of historical events recalls On Kawara's transformation of monochrome painting into a historical document (especially the three quasi-monochromatic canvases titled *One Thing* 1965 *Two-Now*, 1967)

*Real Pictures* is thus the result of a quest for a medium that could integrally represent the enormity of the Rwandan genocide, for an artistic form that could transmit the affective intensity of the event without falling prey to the sensationalism that characterizes the consumption of images in our society. Its magnificent synthesis of photographic

and minimalist strategies transcends the shortcomings of these two artistic forms by imagining the active engagement of the viewer produced by minimalism with the historical referentiality that characterizes photography. The monuments of *Real Pictures* commemorate not only the Rwandan genocide, but also the deplacement of the visual image and the triumph of abstraction over literalness. Stripped of its spectacular functions and relegated to the archival box, the photograph becomes a document at the service of history.

- [1] Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography," in *One Way Street* (London: NLB, 1973), p. 243.
- [2] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), p. 6.
- [3] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- [4] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- [5] *Ibid.*, p. 117.
- [6] *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- [7] Siegfried Krauss, "Photography," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 51.
- [8] *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- [9] *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- [10] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- [11] Alfredo Jaar, "The Limits of Representation," *Yves* 1/2, no. 3/4 (1997), p. 59.
- [12] Krauss, p. 60.
- [13] See, for example, the extremely defensive and pointed reading of minimalism as a politically subversive artistic movement presented by Hal Foster in "The Crisis of Minimalism," *The Revue of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).
- [14] Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 230-231.
- [15] *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231.
- [16] This suggestion has a direct lineage related to the phenomenology of perception. Ewald Kraus claims that in the complex relation between viewer and minimalist structure, "ever the distance and the viewpoint are not added to the object, but inherent in the object's meaning, like the sounds that infuse our language with an always already given ground of sense." Richard Serra, "A Transducer," *The Originality of the Actual-Given and Other Metastatic Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), p. 263.



# BARCELONA

## L'àngel justicier

ENTREVISTA

Alfred Jaar, el periodista català més famós del món, ens explica el seu treball i la seva vida a Barcelona. Jaar, de 65 anys, és un home curt i amb una veu profunda que emplenava la sala de la seva oficina a l'edifici de la seva editorial, l'El Trencatall.

La seva obra més recent, "El Trencatall", és una recopilació de les seves columnes i articles, que ha estat traduïda a més de 20 llengües i ha venut més de 100.000 exemplars.

### BCN BOULEVARD

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## REVIEWS



CRITIQUE

ALFREDO JAAR  
WITH JIM OI  
CONTEMPORARY  
PHOTOGRAPHY

Half a century after the end of the Holocaust, Alfredo Jaar presented *Five of Picturas*, a project that speaks of a more recent genocide—the massacre of close to two million Tutsi in Rwanda. To his credit, Jaar raises the question of how such an “event” can be re-created, while carefully reminding us how unlikely it is that the work “Picturas” will ever achieve anything like the resonance of *Shoah*.

In *Five of Picturas*, Jaar sifted through the thousands of photographs he took during his journey through Rwanda, Zaire, and Uganda in the summer of 1994. He visited the massive refugee camps in Zaire near the Rwandan border—survivors of the West’s delay in responding to the genocide of an African people—where his photographs of those who escaped the Hutu and Tutsi victim revolution of 1994.

From these photographs, Jaar culled hundreds of images and printed them; all of these were included in his installation, where one was visible. Each of the eight-hundred-and-fifty-nine prints the artist selected was backed in a separate wooden box. The boxes were arranged together in a series of rooms. In each of four rooms, nine hundred and ninety boxes, which contained in rows. A description of the image within each frame was printed in the exterior in vertical, clinical language. Occasionally, these were related details as an “anonymous” as the kind of tree visible in the background, to a list of the steps of time of the forest, and the location of the birds.

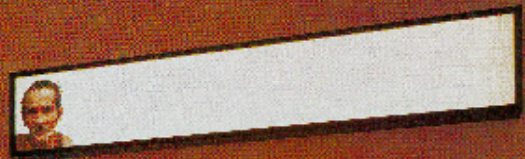
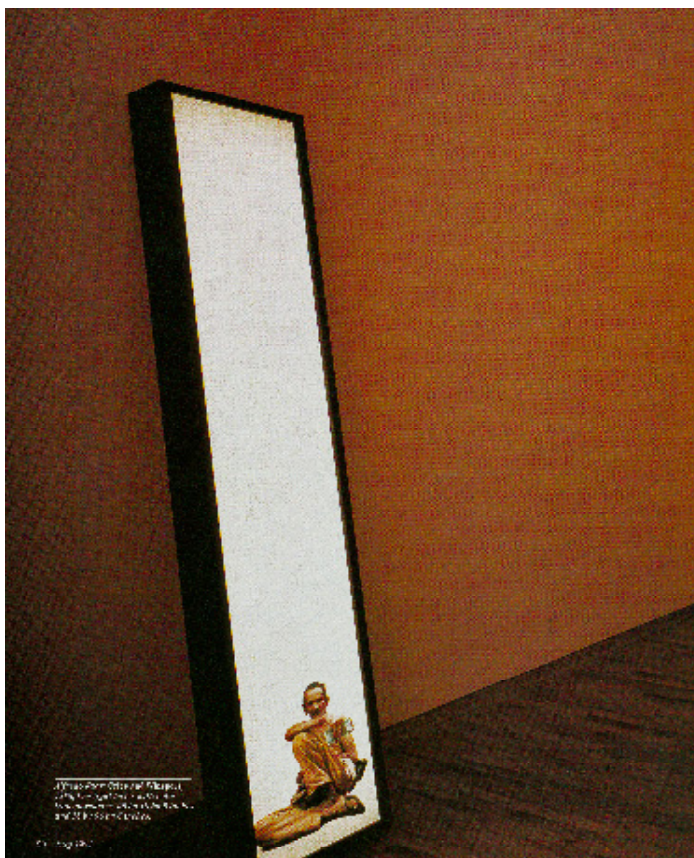
Jaar’s decision to tag each photo, both at the installation itself and original in a database, is a choice to simulate a museum library, well stocked with information about the history of Rwanda and the Tutsi massacre, arranged on shelves on the wall, while a grid of boxes covered the walls of the gallery, having together a more dramatic effect.

The question Jaar’s project raises is whether art can help to re-engage the meaning of meaningfulness of life on earth. His insistence on language, rather than even reaffirming the Holocaust as a tragedy, Alamy’s assertion that “the age have an identical religion. They are always.” Our individual culture is all too familiar with the ways in which the consumption of visual representations is so full of self with engagement. The powerful knowledge of images and their cultures seems no moral imperative. We can see this in the representation of a woman in Africa, a Native American, or a Rwandan child starving to death, or the image of such a state.

Jaar knows this, but for how long response makes that is the one George Seagram’s collection of the 1950s. Magnum photo agency’s code—among the first war correspondents to enter Israel in 1945—found the photographs he took in boxes and didn’t open them again for 47 years. For a time since, Jaar has been asking us how to think about them that have remained more likely to be a way to see their origins, politics, and communication. Whether it is the “social camp” of the so-called third world, or the near-invisibility and explanation of non-Western subjects in our midst, or our accident, Jaar has always touched the problem, and through images. Much of this work has been argued, has been conceptually sustained by the same

epitaphicities between the ways in which an individual’s self-image develops and how a work of art can present itself. For this project, Jaar pulls back to increase his strategy: the result is a significant transition of work that challenges a number of commonly held opinions about Jaar, art, and politics. Its importance rests simultaneously on what it is not and on what it includes.

—Michael Corne



## Images of Inclusion

Reaffirming the plight of the 12.6 million people with mental illness, Alfredo Jaar's subtle installations explore how and where we live. BY RICHARD VINE

BY RICHARD VINE

Alfredo Jaar's 1992 installation, *Portrait of an American*, is a powerful statement on the plight of the mentally ill.

On the left, a tall, narrow, white-framed artwork leans against a dark wall. The artwork depicts a small, seated figure in a golden, textured environment. The background is a dark, textured wall. In the bottom left corner, there is a small caption: "Alfredo Jaar's 1992 installation, *Portrait of an American*, is a powerful statement on the plight of the mentally ill." The artist's name, "Alfredo Jaar," is printed in the bottom left corner of the page.

On the right, a horizontal, white-framed artwork is mounted on a dark wall. The artwork depicts a small, seated figure in a golden, textured environment, similar to the one in the left image. The background is a dark, textured wall. In the bottom right corner, there is a small caption: "Alfredo Jaar's 1992 installation, *Portrait of an American*, is a powerful statement on the plight of the mentally ill." The artist's name, "Alfredo Jaar," is printed in the bottom right corner of the page.



Alfredo Jaar, *The Unborn*, 1993, made from a collection of black and white photographs of children who died of AIDS in Africa. The work is displayed in the gallery at the Art Museum, 1000 University Avenue, New York, NY, 10003. (Photo: Jeff Pinsky, © Alfredo Jaar)



**Jaar's viewers must stoop and stretch, peer behind and lean over—a physical reminder that our "reality" is a result of vantage point and bodily stress.**

cally between the First World and the Third. Jaar, who studied both documentary filmmaking and architecture in Santiago, designed an installation which—with its slant walls and cunning spatial intervals, its dramatic cropping and often cinematic scale—established a host of visual echoes among the 10 multivalent pieces. The artist professes a distrust of rigid First World/Third World terminology and prefers to view development as variously distributed across the globe. Thus, playing against the "backwardness" of his images, he typically deploys "advanced" (and relatively impulsive) devices of classic modernism like the grid, the cube and pleated flatness in an effort to turn art-as-art nostalgia back on itself. The socially charged material connects on both the anarchy of First World technology and the vacuity of pure formalism, while the slyishness of format (which crosses expectations for elite only to mockingly frustrate them) critiques the rule exploitation upon which our privilege, artistic and otherwise, shamefully rests.

Jaar's view of the affluent West and its counter-realm of impoverished secret sharers was made clear as soon as visitors passed the New Museum's initial inward-sloping wall and, literally cornered, turned to confront the first two works. The 8-1/2-foot mirrored surface of *Hi Zaan* (1991)—its title meaning "Oh, God," the last words uttered by Mahatma Gandhi—was inscribed with Gandhi's formulations (seemingly by way of the Kruger-Holzer school of telegraphic prose) of the seven social sins, offered here as a veritable mantra against First World self-satisfaction:

- Politics without principles
- Wealth without toil
- Pleasure without conscience
- Knowledge without virtue
- Commerce without morality
- Science without humanity
- Abricakra without sacrifice

Odd, then, that this litany of Western vices (in effect scripted upon the viewer's live image) was juxtaposed with the 12-by-18-foot slide projection *Opening New Doors* (1991), in which the ironic titular phrase is sequentially superimposed in seven languages over a dramatic perspective-emphasizing image of a Hong Kong detention camp, its high walls forbiddingly topped with barbed wire—just the kind of facility used to keep the Vietnamese boat people of the nearby *Unwritten (Hanoi)*, 1990, from entering the British crown colony, that bastion of decidedly non-Gandhian commercial frenzy. No money-equals-well-pleas will explain away the ambivalence evoked by Jaar's assembling of his works into such dialectical groupings, where the abuses of the capitalist system are set against the self-evident failure of its alternatives, where the force of the desire to be admitted as full-fledged participants in the democratic enterprise is virtually palpable. For Jaar, immigration is the prime issue of the '90s. The ebb of his installation, frozen stop-action-style in partially fallen positions, suggested not a revolutionary urge to annihilate but a plea for unrestricted access to the domains of liberality and wealth. His images unsparingly criticize vestigial colonialism without ever lapsing into paeans to a classless Nirvana—almost as though a subliminal economic pragmatism were keeping check upon his potentially radical allegiance to the world's marginalized Others.

Jaar shows his greatest strength when he addresses his signature motif: the flesh and the social determinants that condition it—a preoccupation well summed up in the Pancautian title of nine *Chachrome*



Lagos, 2002, 1991. Light-box display with color transparencies. 64 by 127 by 7 inches overall.

prints, *The Body Is the Map* (1991). Arranged in a gridlike pattern around the central image of a man's sun-cracked neck, eight identical close-ups of eloquent skin cracks are variously positioned within white fields in a mildly satiric exercise in minimalist distribution. Sun damage, poverty, age—by such coordinates is the corporeal self insistently blanketed, even within a conceptual void (suggested by the pictures' blank surround and the museum's pristine space) that would otherwise ignore or negate human content. The odd placement of images throughout the exhibition—higher or lower than is customary, half hidden behind the bulk of light boxes, off center within their frames—as well as the literal refiguration of those stark volumes associated with Morris and Judd, is an exceptionally informed way of making modernism (and its frailer supporters) do penance for a once-unquestioned doctrine of impersonality. Viewers are no longer permitted just to grasp a work cerebrally and be on their way with a transcendental frisson. Instead, they must now stoop and stretch, peer behind and lean over to obtain glimpses of meaningfully freighted scenes—a physical engagement that reminds us to what extent our perceived reality depends upon our vantage point and the demands placed daily on our minds and carcasses.

In *Cries and Whispers* (1988), an aging man, bare-torsoed, bespectacled, slightly dazed, sits clutching a leather bag and a fistful of currency. As he peers evenly out at us from the collapsed posture of the dispossessed, a halo of white extends far above him in one light box, far in the left of his face in another. It is a setup which, in a commercial context, would lead us to expect a leggy model in a black miniskirt, provocatively hawking a designer product and aura. Structurally, Jaar has insinuated a sly reminder of the relationship between oppression and swank. Attracted by compositional equipoise, we are thrown psychologically off balance—never allowed to forget the crumpled majority whose labor is the base for all affluent-minority indulgences. The encounter jolts us, as would that of looking up at the metopes of the Parthenon and discovering, among the Lapiths and Centaurs, the wizened portrait of an Athenian slave.

This subversive procedure is well-established in the work of such peers as Dennis Adams and Krzysztof Wodiczko, both of whom tend toward a more hortatory mode of address, and Christian Boltanski, who seduces with a more obvious pathos. Jaar's formal parodies are, upon first view, relatively equivocal. Their just-the-facts coyness recalls art/fashion photographer Irving Penn's shots of celebrities jammed into corners and his later black-and-white studies of "exotic" social groups, from New Guinea roadmen to West Coast bikers. In isolated takes, facial expression and personal attributes must carry the full burden of interpretation. We tend, naturally enough in the absence of other clues, to equate sitters with their visage, pose and material

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Lagos, 2002, 2001, *Light-box diptych with color transparencies*, 65 by 127 by 7 inches overall.

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Partial view of The Pergamon Project: The Greek Temple of Athena, 1987, showing reconstruction of the original temple in front of the Pergamon Museum, Berlin.

subject seemed to be photographed looking at the photographer and suggested the accompanying text should read "We are the future." Will Lago really be a contemporary magazine within 10 years? Is the rationality of Lago's "But just a form of parodying the delicate and historical availability of No nation. The historical availability suggested here, with Lago following here upon Tillye in the implied conversation, may have a program "in your dreams" already, but the work nevertheless begins, as the analysis and analysis of its agents and the number of its historical red call, a collective appreciation for the excellence of wealth, organization and public will necessary to achieve cultural harmony.

**J**warigan, partially deployed that equation in an interview earlier this year at the Pergamon Museum in the former East Berlin—an institution Neo-Classical in its architecture, filled with Hellenistic sculpture and mosaics, and only recently liberated from one of the shrines of Marxist regimes. The Pergamon Project: The Rebuilding of Antiquity (1987), titled in homage to the book by Peter Weiss, was the first work by a contemporary artist to appear in this august venue. On the steps of the temple altar to Zeus, Jaar positioned near-true copies of selected forms as if to show a grand "ritual" have lately suffered again. (Sadly, many of these copies are from Turkey, a slight step off the over-protected structure which the Turkish government is fighting to rebuild.) The most likely—Eaton, Hansen, Rodin & Praxiteles, etc.—served as an unacknowledged backdrop of a cosmopolitan culture, perhaps not only from the Neoplatonist but also from the very notion of "superior culture" embodied by the late-classic surroundings. Where the figure from the statue

traces, are arranged three rows of black-and-white photo drawings of some of the statue's most violent passages (its tyrannical seizure and murder of its hapless victim over a Syrian man in 1511 BC.) Interspersed with studies of a classical "88" helmet and crowning boots. By such these collaging devices Jaar seeks to relate the more classical and classical scenes and initially produced on the political evolution of warfare, class and barbarism. Yet he never falls irretrievably into the lake with the traditional reaction of some of his contemporaries who subscribe to the common notion that social self-critique is only from myth, idealization and that underdeveloped cultures are, ipso facto, ethically pure. No, with Jaar's particularist and misappropriation of heroic forms (whether by the left or right), he does reflect—and never allows his reader to lose sight of—the loss of the Western heritage to modernism upon whose personal habits, which, through its clear identification of human equality, long he dilly dally needs to come popular.

This is not a mere partiality with Jaar's two-year installation currently on display at the Museum of Modern Art as part of the massive survey "Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century." Filling the ground-floor Project's space, *Ateneon* (1987), titled after the Athenian temple, is the fullest expression, to say at a time, of Jaar's self-orienting vein in Jaar's work—an irreverent and of the very process of being produced, and of the political dynamic it half-reveals and half-creates. The first room is a fully appointed pharmacy, complete with dominating trees, light tables, dip-lens for drying prints, an ology; and the red light bulb of darkness, (and, not a particularly, continued on page 177

## Images of Inclusion

*continued from page 95*

bordello) tradition. Here viewers are encouraged to peruse myriad shots of contemporary Latin American life (on his field trips, Jaar typically shoots 1,000 slides) and to consider the countless options for treatment of those images via cropping, enlargement, juxtaposition, sequencing, deletion, physical and chemical alteration of negatives—all the tricks by which a skilled technician can tailor photographic "reality." The hero of Antonioni's film, we recall, is a fashion photographer and ultra-hip lothario whose business, and pleasure, is the creative manipulation of appearances. Yet one day an intractable bit of reality—what may or may not be evidence of murder—enters his frame (of mind) and will not be excised. Ultimately, through a series of tighter and tighter blowups, the ghostly image comes to dominate his studio, his thinking and his life. Jaar has chosen his title knowing full well that this modern parable originated as a story by the Argentinean writer Julio Cortázar, in which the protagonist is . . . a Chilean photographer.

Like many acts of confession, *Blowup* entails a general warning. Assuming the viewer's complicity in a global economic system which regards the poor as natural resources, it reminds us that even when the destitute are representationally "saved" and enhanced by photography, they are recognized only at the cost of becoming objects before the eyes of the prosperous. But the day may come—for the conscientious it *must* come—when the faces of those too-familiar hordes begin to disclose the lineaments of incontrovertible demand. One climactic moment occurs in a photographic sequence that depicts, from behind, the wrenching efforts of a legless street beggar. Our view (looking down, looking in) is metaphorically North to South, First World to Third, and thus mildly anguished but unthreatened—until the stunning moment when the beggar's head flips back against the pavement and his face, inverted,

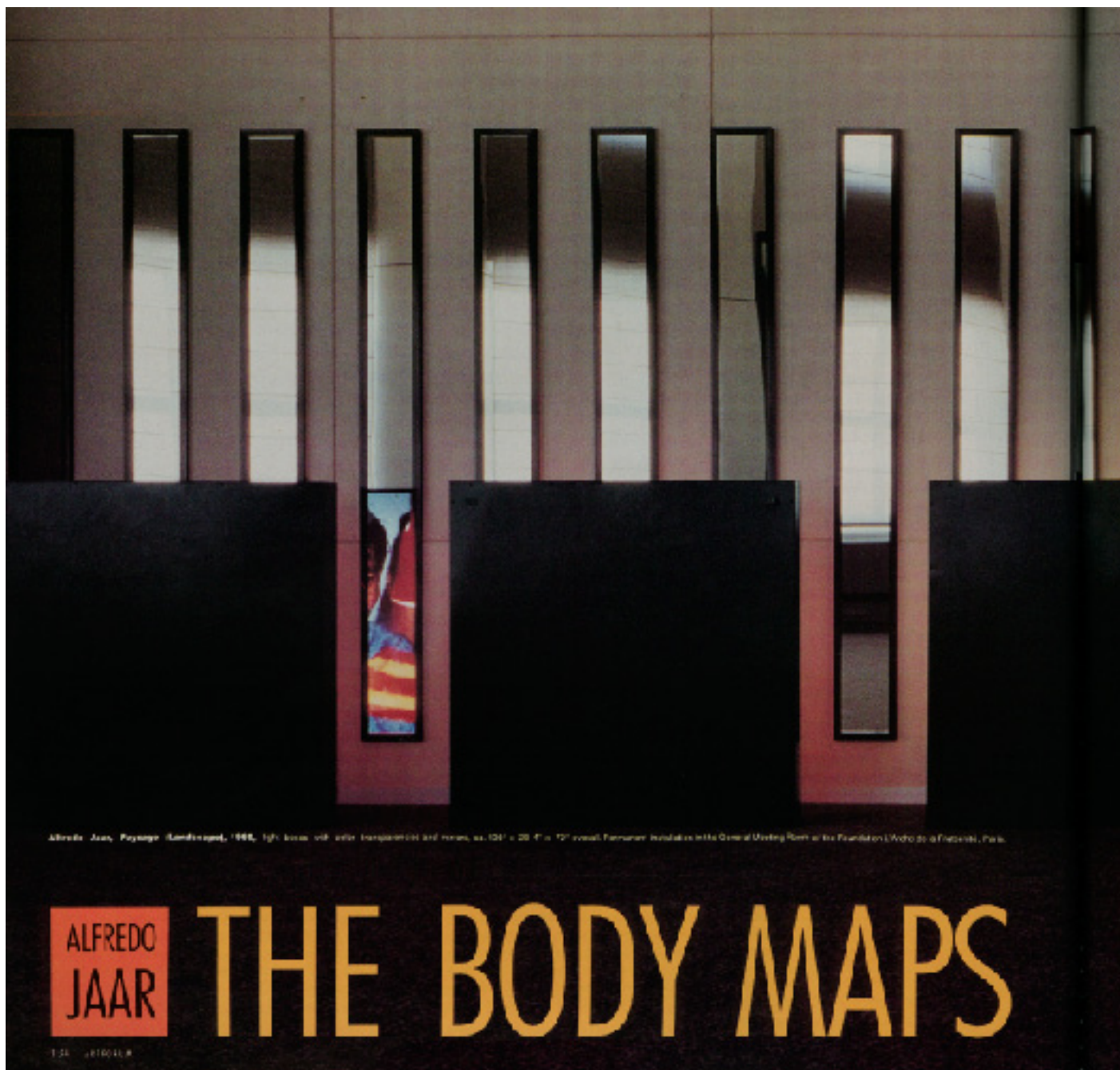
**No stereotypes of cultivated victimhood, Jaar's subjects move us by virtue of their refusal to be inferior to ourselves, to be abject.**

recapitulates the silent, gape-mouthed scream of a pre-Columbian vessel pictured nearby. *Blowup* holds many such admonitory surprises. When we step into the second innocuous-seeming room, we encounter a camera on a tripod, two strobes with their modeling lights set on low illumination and two mirrored walls that create an infinite regression: a studioli-like space where we might customarily come to pose. Suddenly, a timer kicks in and the strobes flare to 1,200 watts—showing us, for one retina-searing moment, our unprepared selves in a merciless new light.

From its most subtle insinuations to its most dramatic assaults, Jaar's characteristic method, a symbolic reversal of First World colonial intrusions, has an almost surgical precision. Using the local anesthetic of attractiveness and tact, he inserts images of the disenfranchised into our space, our pictorial conventions and our troubled conscience. His tastefulness, in Wittgenstein's sense of sheer ethical clarity, is a form of respect. By eschewing self-righteousness and crude presentation, Jaar implies an analogue between the formal dignity of his art and the moral dignity of its subjects. His works may forgo stridency, but they always forcefully remind us of the prime political fact of our time—that when the abused cry out for justice, they are first of all demanding power. □

*Blowup is currently on view as part of "Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century" at the Museum of Modern Art, New York [through Sept. 7]. One-person exhibitions of works by Alfredo Jaar can be seen at Tramway, Glasgow, Scotland [through Aug. 8], Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen, Germany [through Sept. 12] and the Center for the Fine Arts, Miami [Oct. 2, 1993-Jan. 9, 1994].*









Alfredo Jaar, *Le Géographie de nos États, à l'échelle de nos consciences* + *map of the world*, 1988. Light boxes with black and white transparencies. 50" x 50" x 50" (total, including the Grand Louvre, the Brooklyn Museum Collection of the First Museum of Art, Paris).

On the floor are two world maps. "These are the light blue conventional projection of the world. I remember that I got this particular map as a centerfold in a *New York Geographic* magazine. To its left was another global map conceived by German geographer Arno Peters in 1974. Although Peters' map neither adds nor deletes countries or continents, it presents a radical re-presentation of the world's space flattened to a two-dimensional surface. The concept of cartography established by Gerard Mercator over 400 years ago faithfully follows a grid of longitudinal and latitudinal lines. According to his projections, land masses further away from the equator seem larger than statistics might indicate, and third world countries, generally close to the equator, seem far smaller. Peters' schema restores a proportional equality to each country and continent. Peters claims that all land masses have been placed at their exact geographic coordinates. They are precisely proportioned and shaped, and represent their actual area. Every country and con-

tinent is presented in its true location and at its correct size. Both maps are products of the science of cartography; both are based on calculation, measurement, and the rules of representation. Yet such is the divergence between them—the, frankly, the graph: "in it" I learned as a child, and whose language I can still visualize in my mind's eye, appears problematic and highly questionable. What Peters has accomplished with his revision of the world is to throw into doubt the traditional Euclidean notion of mapping. Doing this, it suggests the ideological subtext of all forms of measurement.

It was Alfredo Jaar who first showed me Arno Peters' map, well before he began to use the provocative image in his own installations. Cartography is both an intellectual and a personal matter for him. Jaar is an inveterate traveler—the graphic representations of the world in his experience of it have shaped his philosophy. He is *desapollado* and *desorientado* both but he belongs nowhere. Born in 1956 in Santiago, Chile, Jaar moved

with his family to Fort-de-France, Martinique, where he was seven. Ten years later he arrived in Santiago, where he received a degree in architecture at the University of Chile. This degree was awarded by extensive studies in film. As an artist living in Chile, Jaar addressed both local and global political issues in projects that involve landscape, the streets, and occasionally the art galleries. In 1980, he moved to New York; it may not feel like home, but it is where he most often resides.

Jaar's work in the early and mid '80s used photographs, light boxes, and numerous one-to-one, full-or two-dimensional views for the viewer. Images were often placed near the ceiling or just off the floor. Sometimes they could not be approached directly but only in reflection or from overhead, deliberately uncomfortable positions. The photographs were radically cropped into encircling close-up bodies seen from the waist down, seemed to be incomplete—or dismembered. Like Peters' map, Jaar's observation of people in often degrading situations showed that the photographic image and the limitation of the chosen framing device were also a form of measurement—a subjective way of representing the world, representing what is productive of the "objective" profession of photojournalism. For Jaar is profoundly aware that the human body, perhaps even more than the world map, is under constant surveillance, subject to measurement, analysis, and classification.

In *The Manufacture of Man*, Stephen Jay Gould explores the idea of eugenics as a scientific discipline that has been studied and classified the human form in order to legitimize oppressive ideas—and political agendas. The shabby, now disused strategies of eugenics and phrenology were based on the 18th century's absolute faith in empiricism. One Samuel George Morton, for example, a Philadelphia-based physician, who used great skulls for his exhaustive studies of the volume of the human brain. At the time of his death, in 1851, he had amassed over 1,000 human skulls. Morton's "scientific" procedures were employed to prove his preconceived thesis that races and ethnic groups could be rationally and inevitably ranked. The accrued data satisfied white society's proposition that black men and women were inferior to whites. The objectivity of scientific method was used to substantiate the absolute subjectivity of prejudice and bias.

Gould is interested in, among other things, the social context of science. His research has illuminated the ways that scientific (that is, "objective") data have been adjusted to support socio-scientific predisposition. It is no surprise to discover, but important to remember, that research is neither neutral nor a pure pursuit; the analysis of the human body and the strategies of cartography have been guided by ideological intentions. The human body—like an area of the world—is both the symbol and the vessel

of social progress; the study and documentation of both are, therefore, always inflammatory affairs. Merzior's 1989 projection was both a practical use (philosophical delineation of the world—from the Pompeian ruins to the point of view) and a social revision—and social control. Their "truth" need not be ours.

Jaar is preoccupied by the dilemma of the "outsider"—the perception and measurement of the domain by the dominant. His work is, in fact, a cartography of the human body as a site of preconception, as the subject of manipulation. Its geography includes the human face and body as well as the connecting spaces and edges of institutions: a space that allows him to examine the philosophical dilemmas of the other—in society and self—a site, especially if it is a site that has aided progress at the expense of a sound intellectual, moral understanding of ethnicity. Jaar's position is informed by his own circumstances as a current resident/participant in a ruling culture who has lived much of his life in third-world cities. He resides both inside and outside—as an observer

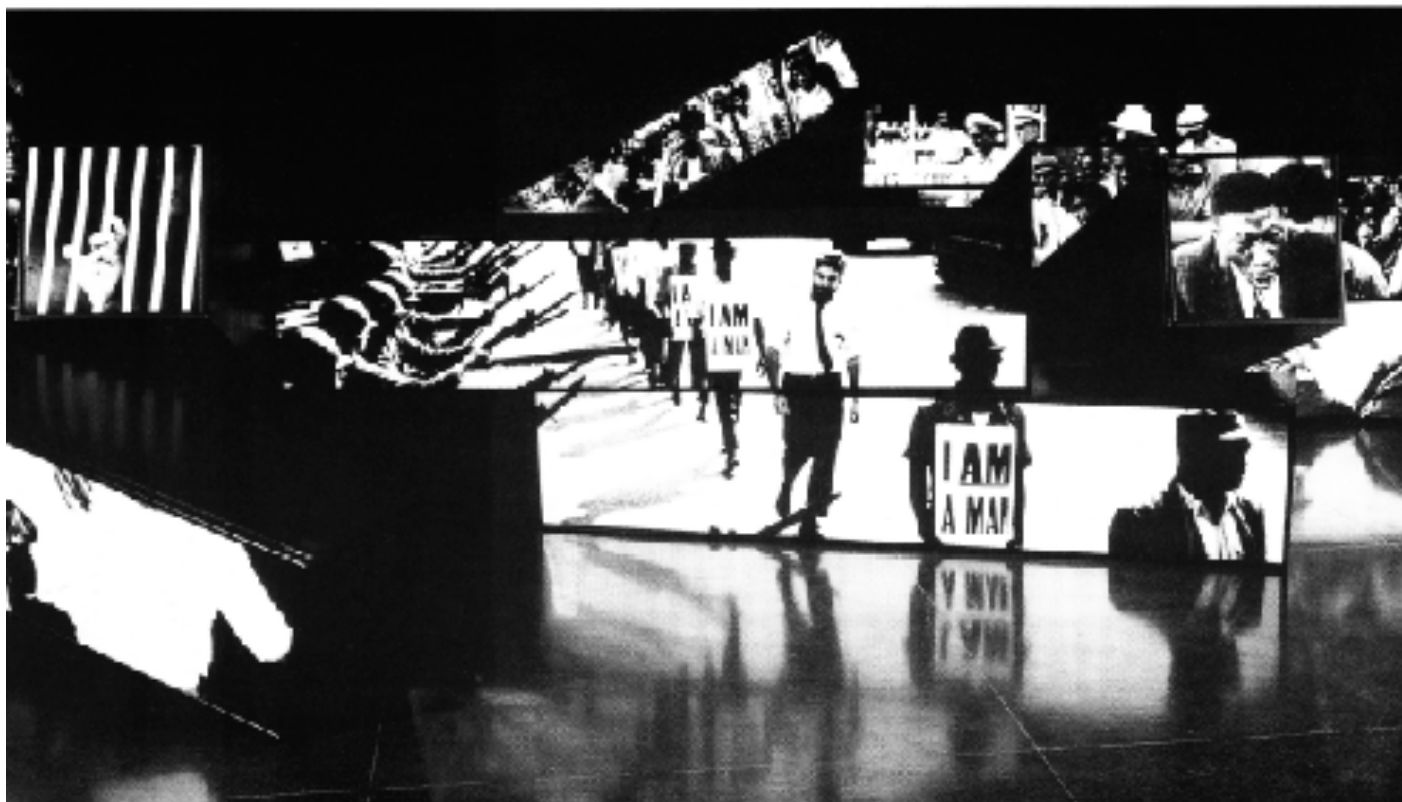
of the other and as one himself.

Mapping and measurement establish one's place in the world—being "here" rather than "there." In *The Conquest of America*, Tzvetan Todorov takes the route through the uninvited narrative of discovery of the American continent by white, European explorers in order to examine the relationship of self to other, as well as various typologies of ethnicity. Is it, he asks, possible to acquire a full understanding of the self without determining who we are? Does not identification relinquish the reflective skill of those who are perceived as radically different? Clearly, these are questions of psychology and linguistics, as well as institutional identification. The paradox of the concept of the other has been a strong stimulus to progress in dominant cultures as the experience of underdevelopment and social deprivation in these dominated. For the other is condemned to the margins of perception and acceptance; and the under the margin between oneself and the other the better. Here the marginality of the other is not a circumstantial or formalized in the edge—outside or by design—as well as the blurred

boundary of space that physically segregates. The other is the opposition; whether perceived as inferior or actual, the other is profoundly, irrevocably different.

Jaar's work deals, with aggression, intelligence, and views of the world that propagate this perverse dialectical condition. The conventional "looking" becomes both metaphor for and operations of the mechanisms of thinking, in order to illuminate the hierarchy of power predicated on oppression. To accomplish this without sentimentalism, without justification in another form of exploitation, is an almost impossible task. Jaar's work marks and, in its own way, negates the corollary of his position as a third observer/artist: it is ironic that the artist explicitly engages.

In 1989 Jaar completed his major project involving his first monumental installation in Paris. It is all on photographic transparencies of human faces and figures in tight boxes which are either free-standing or embedded in the wall. Some images he took; he's found in the files of United Press; many are found in other photographic archives and some are by Jaar, taken during the course





Albert Elward portrait taken at center by Alfredo Jaar's *The Dawns*, 1988, installation in "The Photography in America" exhibit 1989, National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C., 1989. *De la noche a la noche* Jaar, *Le desobediente en vert*, *Chambre à Paris* Jaar, *Le jour* (detail), 1989.

of its peripatetic light: Brazil, Nigeria, and other parts of the world. Whether the images have the urgent, formulaic qualities of news photos or the more personal, direct gaze of Jaar's own eyes, they all possess a grainy tangibility. The cropping and composition of images, their frayed far edges on not-to-extend-to-the-edge-of-the-frame, and the irregularity of their installation all suggest a significant formal component through which Jaar seeks to effect—and subvert—how we feel, think, and see.

Early in 1989, Jaar was commissioned to do a permanent project in a new urban, now-one-level building in La Défense, in the edge of Paris. The so-called Académie de la Francophonie is a place where scholars, researchers, and students study international relations, situations of oppression, and the dream of global peace. The institution is serving for the Nigerian, which is entitled *Paysage* (Landscape), was the top-floor offices of the International Foundation for Human Rights, in a shockingly banal lounge where visiting dignitaries meet for formal receptions. On one wall of the triangular-shaped room, Jaar installed a long, line of tall, thin mirrors in narrow, black frames. There are small spaces between the mirrors, but they appear externally like the pieces of a film over the bars of a jail cell. Placed several feet back from and facing the reflective wall of mirrors is a line of five rectangular black light boxes. Each holds a color transparency of a black or brown face in an unrepresentative of the world. The faces are simultaneously fierce, frightened, dignified, enigmatic—and unknown. Nevertheless, they stand as symbols of the "human situation of a Third World," in one, a small miniature child partially hides his face from the intrusive, scary camera lens.

Jaar has created a volatile corridor or space between the mirrors mounted on the wall and the perfect procedure of light boxes. It does not encourage us to enter, and viewers are not allowed behind the mirrors. They cannot get into a position to see the interactions directly; so, but we only appreciate the images as reflected in the parallel lines of mirrors. The angle of perception, and the movement of each viewer's body through the room,

create a strange parade d'index with the cropped, distorted images encountered in the mirrors' white glare. No face is the same in itself, and for several different people, all shorter than one unassailable fragment. The small openings of white wall offer only black moments and the regular rhythm of interrupted, interrupted vision. When *Paysage* is approached from an acute angle, the mirrors reflect all of the transparencies as well as translucent partitions of the surrounding room, whose side wall of windows looks out on the panorama of Paris. The impoverished, grained reality of the faces in the photographs is conjured, not without irony, with the reality of a wealthy institution whose purpose is to study the appropriate humanistic failures. These deliberate contradictions of Jaar's installation—like the prescribed variability of all standards of measurement—address the questionable authority of the institution; the selected images make concrete the statistical, abstract analysis of research and intellectual scholarship.

*Paysage* works as the measure of "man, woman, and child. The position of the formal elements suggests a strict system of calibration. The absolute order of the setting promises a level of control and certainty—the clean context of empiricism. But the seeming certitude of the installation—the arch and not-in-life-as-it-is actual yardstick—gives an arbitrary, unreliable method of measurement. Such regularity can produce no logical or meaningful data. Instead, it creates this grating, material corollary whose rotating, restlessness cannot find a metric in itself. All well-being and functioning is ultimately co-opted the expressionless face of the pocket instrument—the faces in the photographs. Like Peter's projection, this is measuring without ability to be seen, to four directions. All is distortion, but it is not necessarily wrong. The disorienting perceptual experience causes a productive mistrust of vision based on ancient optical traditions, on camera definitions. The viewer becomes less sure of *Jaar*.

If *Paysage* uses the order of the installation to challenge the potentially corrupt or malignance of measurement, *The Five Most Doves*, inspired by James Baldwin's 1958 novel, used color to explore the nature of racial violence in the United States, and its connection to the horrendous diseases still remaining between "us" and "them." Installed last summer in the space of the Brooklyn Museum's grand lobby, *The Five Most Doves* was composed of a series of long, coffin-shaped light boxes whose ends flung against a wall with a floor laid painted a deep, flat-black. These light boxes held backlit black and white transparencies of violent confrontations between black citizens and white law-enforcement persons, which Jaar had obtained from UPI and *Bermann Newsphotos*.

Each projection in these episodes from the history

of the civil rights movement was calibrated for emotional impact: a man in a line of march, wearing a placard that says "I AM A MAN," is arrested at the neck; a dramatic framing foot is composed in a series of images stacked one atop the other. In every case, the position of the viewer was crucial to the apprehension of the part and the whole. Walking through the field of boxes, the viewer was forced to look through one thirty-small projection framed in one collage of images. Here, the systematic modulations—no matter how meticulously proportioned—frustrated conclusiveness or closure. How could one get one's bearings, or measure the magnitude of the events depicted, when the formal elements positively militated against it? Distance, objectivity, became an impossibility. What was safe "past" remained uncomfortably, almost physically, "present."

Jaar sought other ways to disorient his audience in another installation, entitled *The Booth*, which made manifest the incommunicability of camp by Shirdin at the National Museum of American Art, in Washington, D.C., last summer; the project was largely informed and inspired by the National Portrait Gallery, which is adjacent to it. For this work, the artist built a large black cube, on three sides of which he placed enormous photographic responses of individuals he had chosen internalizing his beliefs to non-Western cultures. The large, backlit portraits glowed, the estranged, strained, but eager faces confronting the stranger's camera—and now the viewer. The fourth wall of the cube was cut in half vertically to create an open doorway. A photo review of Peter's map marked the entrance into a pure white interior. It was both a welcome mat and a warning.

Once inside, viewers could press against one wall in order to have their photographs taken by a technician operating a Polaroid camera, an experience not unlike having your picture taken in a photo booth at Washington's. After a moment's wait, the viewer was presented with the photograph. But it was a man-painted man. The familiar face of self was encircled by a halo of faces—the ones pictured on the inside of the booth. This surrounding fringe was both human evidence of suffering, of struggle, of the ineluctable perpetuation of violence in order to maintain the centrality of these self. Making the viewer complicit in the process of distancing, Jaar enacted a startling betrayal of individual identity and complacency.

Peter's world map is a bold challenge to the conventions of Western cartography, but the novelty of its delineation is not a man's map; it is when seen as white outline on black surface. As used by Jaar in *The Booth*, the neglected lines of coastal edges and national boundaries suggest that Peter's method of measuring the world is very much about seeing equalizing the world in a jarring new way. There is a graphic sense of evenness,

balance, into dependence, and the vulnerability of proximity. Countries are dominated—they seem closer with all that that implies. The glazes of the other seem more substantial and not nearly so far away.

Jaar has also used this provocative image to lead viewers into a near, Las May in Paris, as part of the exhibition "Magiciens de la terre" (Magicians of the earth) at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle of La Villette, he built *La Géographie par un daford, a few la guesse* (Geography — war, in Jaar's translation). Here, viewers enter a black landscape of space. The dark structure was a led by a photographic negative of the Peters world map. The cautious route within took people through a sequence of spaces and images that document—through Jaar's reserved gaze—the dumping of toxic materials in Koko, a small Nigerian village near Lagos. For Jaar, such dumpsites of various PCBs, solid industrial and pharmaceutical residues, asbestos fiber, and analcime are just "the modern" ver-

sion of the slave trade.<sup>1</sup> And, like it, lucrative for the countries and individuals involved: even some of the victims—adults and children suffering from inflamed eyes, running sores, and cancer—have found the acceptance of the world's garbage a nice work taking for the money received. But the debate goes beyond the plight of the individual: the barrels and containers of lethal stuff deteriorate, rot, and the contents have infected the land and water table with speeding thoroughness.

Without resorting to the shock tactics of photo-journalism, Jaar quietly led the viewer into a first visual confrontation with a life-prosodic image of people picking through a dump of refuse and dangerous chemicals. On the other side of this interior chamber was a freestanding light box holding a photo negative of Peter's reflection of the African continent. Its reflection across served the space an antithesis of the young man, entering in the foreground of the photograph, standing as the outline of a distorted heart, a fortuitous visual conjunc-

tion that the artist himself did not plan.

Courtesy requires violence; seeing requires a vision. Jaar's work helps us to clear and measure a course; his work places the viewer in a situation where the systems of substantiation fall under intensive review. He does not allow us to forget that, as Todorov writes, "at the same time that it was leading to eliminate the strangeness of the normal other, Western civilization found an interior other."<sup>2</sup> Without the centrality of personalization, Jaar discovers the commonness and location of ideology in the lines, colors, surfaces, and proportions of the human body. His measured remarks—like the Peters map—sabotage an idea of orderliness founded on tradition. He places the other firmly in to world—and in ourselves. □

Translated by Elizabeth Sussman for Artforum.

1. See also Jaar, "The Abolition of Man," *Artforum*, 1981, p. 111.  
2. See also Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, New York: Harper & Row, 1987, p. 15.  
3. See also Todorov, "The Strangeness of the Normal Other," in *Imaginaire*, September 1989, p. 3.  
4. See also Todorov, *Imaginaire*, New York: Harper & Row, 1989, p. 111. Todorov's work for *Imaginaire*, p. 111.

