

**BMW AktienGesellschaft (AG) at Munich: R&D centre, car assembly plant. Production paused. Industrial time suspended.**

**Edgar Martins 0:00.00: photography, time exposure, tableaux, XL: remote intensity, photographic time extended, the space of time.**

Interiors. Sealed. Filled with permanent light. Machine light. A light that cannot escape. A light that abolishes time. A black box if not a black hole. Realms of production lulled by a camera into apparent immobility and silence; yet a graphical perspective projects lines of light - though not 'lines of flight' - that speed towards an unseen vanishing point out on the roads of the world. The laboratory converges with the workshop. Dispassionate colour. Immaculate engineering. A material Platonism aspiring to the condition of human absence.

*Factory* is cognate with *Fiction*, feigning *and* making. Fiction manufactures *Metaphor* and metaphor is transportation. Martins' spaces recall the enclosed imaginary universes of movie spaceships; the assembly lines like launch pads, slipways designed to propel craft into the encompassing outside. To this layperson they also recall images of CERN's Large Hadron Collider – again speed, time, simulation and the production of matter and energy.

In a more conceptual vein we might think of Hiroshi Sugimoto's movie theatres series in which the photograph abolishes both the time and the image of the cinema as Sugimoto opened his shutter before the screen for the duration of the film, resulting in a perfectly blank, bleached out rectangle within the proscenium arch. The erasure of the ostensible subject of the photograph – the film on the screen - shifts the viewer towards Hiroshi's actual goal, a meditation on photography's relationship with time (see Green in Green and Lowry (2006): 9-11). In Martins' *0:00.00* the use of time exposures does more than resist the temporal flow. The images were achieved either by using breaks in production or arranging for halts to be made. The time, the global time of production, was adjourned: a momentary interference at the core of modernity. Using long exposures of up to forty-five minutes, the time normally expended in production is transmuted into one of the photograph's constituting substances. Industrial time becomes aesthetic space. Industrial manufacturing becomes aesthetic production: the making of a single compacted element, that is, a time-dense image of both visual power and conceptual resonance.

Actualities. Economies. Descriptions. Depictions. Industry and Photography:  
Discontinuous and Interdependent modes of production and knowledge.

*0:00.00* is as much the picturing of a condition as it is of spaces, a reviewing of the 'horizon of possibilities'. It intersects with the best work in the tradition of Industrial Photography and like that *0:00.00* is far more than a study of industrial forms and structures. This claim can be raised to greater visibility by seeing Martins' work in the raked light of the work of some other photographers of industrial structures and landscapes.

Industrial Photography has been especially strong in countries where engineering is given its due respect, above all in Germany and the United States. From the early twentieth century attendant aesthetics developed in both countries in which the architectonics of industrial structures and machine produced objects and tools were visualised abstracted from their application as things-in-themselves. For the most part they were also separated from those whose labour produced them. In the USA, it manifested as the 'Precisionist Style', in the work of Charles Sheeler among others. In early twentieth century Germany, the comparable tendencies of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and *Neu Optik* or *Ingenieur Ästhetick* (engineer aesthetic) appeared and were famously present in the imageries of Albert Renger-Patzsch and Max Baur. Such perspectives re-appear post-war in the work and ideas of Adolf Lazi and Otto Steinert. Steinert's concept of '*subjektive fotografie*' is a shaping presence in Peter Keetman's 1953 photographs of the Volkswagen Factory at Wolfsburg. Keetman's hyper-focused celebrations of finely worked metal and machine parts, of the processing of raw material into precise, elegant and functional forms, and his visual intensification of the serial patterns and rhythms of mass produced components and finished vehicles, echo the work of his predecessors, Renger-Patzsch and Baur.

As F.C. Gundlach has noted, industrial photography typically attempts to resolve the terms 'technology' and 'art', once equally integral to the Greek word *techne* but over time split into estranged contraries (Gundlach in *Kunstmuseum, Wolfsburg* (2003): 153-4). Its aim has been to develop an appropriate visual culture for modernity that can encompass both documentation and aesthetic amplification. Industrial production, primary energy generation and transportation are seen as modernity's affiliated bases and core compulsions. Each has been expressed

photographically in equivalent graphic forms, such as the dynamic diagonal, the power-ascribing low angle, the domination of the frame by the mass, weight and overwhelming dimensions of industrial structures. One thinks of Charles Sheeler's 1927 *Crossed-Conveyors* at Ford's River Rouge Plant, the urfactory for automobile production and model for the Wolfsburg Volkswagenwerk. Another example would be Renger-Patzsch's *Intersecting Braces of a Truss Bridge* of 1928. Where such imagery magnifies the sheer materiality of industrial power, others additionally focus on the process of transformation, a turn especially pronounced in the depiction of automobile production. In 2013 a Volkswagen publicist referred to Peter Keetman's depictions of gleaming formations of new VWs as, 'lichtspuren auf Metall' ('light trails on metal'). ([http://autogramm.volkswagen.de/07-08\\_13/panorama/index.html](http://autogramm.volkswagen.de/07-08_13/panorama/index.html)).

This raises the question not so much of how photography shows its object, but more of how it *transforms* it and in so doing *thinks* it, or thinks *through* it. In such images, objects – in this instance, cars – have become luminous, radiant, made of light, indicating some kind of transfiguration, even sacralisation. There is a suggestion here that alchemy still inhabits industrial production, as if the conversion of inert ore into an automobile is some modern *chrysopoeia*, a transmutation of base matter into a form or substance of a higher, even metaphysical, value. Metal transubstantiates into light, that is, into luxuriousness, into a material signifier and instrument of plenitude. Through mobility, through speed, the car overcomes the material weight of its own origins, dematerialises into a dream of radical autonomy. "The automobile is another bit of freedom", declared the President of the German Automotive Industry Association (cited in Urry (2007):121).

Beyond the optically amazed scrutinisation of machinery and milled surfaces, the apotheosis of the industrial process, the fetishisation of the product and occlusion of the relations of production, more recent industrial photography has offered cooler, perhaps more sceptical visions. There are, of course, the Becher's remote typologies of industrial corpses, or the ubiquitous melancholy genre of the industrial ruin. But many photographers, notably in Germany, continue to engage with the newer industrial conditions and landscapes. The work of Andreas Gursky and Henrik Spohler reveal the denatured abstractions and unnervingly infinite seriality of mass production and distribution. There are the tangled complexities of factory components in Timm Rautert's work. The austere anonymity or invisibility of command and production processes feature in the work of Frank Breuer, Jörg Glascher or Martin Richter (see essays by Gundlach and Broecker, in *Kunstmuseum*,

Wolfsburg 2003). In its dispassionate visual clarity, apparent ethical remoteness and lack of human figures, Martins' work displays affinities with such photographic practice. This is not humanist photography, but the human *is* present, if only as a question of absence. After all, what we see are human artefacts and apparatuses. I want to develop this a little further by reflecting on the way that Martins presents the factory as a kind of theatre stage viewed from someway back in an imaginary auditorium or spectatorium.

This theme has appeared in analogous work. Henrik Spohler's 1993 study of electricity generating plants, *Transformationen*, is sub-titled, '*Schauplätze der Energie*' or, '*Theatres of Energy*'. Candida Höfer, like Gursky a student of the Bechers, produced a series of large images of empty Renaissance theatre interiors that are visually organized in ways comparable to Martins' BMW photographs. Her 2006 show at Seattle's Frye Museum was titled, '*Theatres of Absence*'. Beyond its primary reference to dramatic art, yet retaining its dramatic connotations, the term 'theatre' can signify specialized spaces/contexts where activities are presented, displayed, that is, *performed* to be seen. We have theatres of operation and operating theatres. Photography is itself often a kind of dramatic art; its spaces are spaces of performance or display. Barthes regarded the medium as, a 'close to theatre', with its origins lying in the 'panorama' (Barthes 1982: 31). In the Renaissance humanity staged itself, re-invented itself, was produced in the theatre. The theatre was a cultural machine for doing so. Where, in our phase of modernity, is the condition of humanity being produced? Certainly in great part it comes into being on the stage of industrial production. A *Theatrum Mundi* of our time is the factory and, given the centrality of mobility to the contemporary self, the car factory might be regarded along with the data processing centre, as its most significant embodiment. Martins' performative spaces are stages awaiting the resumption of their operations. They are the conditions or the arrangements that will determine what the actors do when they reappear. Perhaps it is the spaces and the mechanisms that now are the true actors in the theatre of production increasingly independent of human agency. The global space-time unity of production and distribution that Capital has installed is momentarily disaggregated by this work so as to open up a place in order to see, to reflect, and to see again. As in much of Martins' work a strangeness is present within the visually dramatic and seemingly immediate rendering of the real. Deleuze speaks of art moving from the real to the virtual which is 'actualized' not through resemblance but by means of the rules of, 'difference, divergence and of creation', so as to produce self conscious viewing (Deleuze (1988): 97).

*0:00.00* offers a set of reflections on the powerful industrial presence that is BMW. At the same time it does so by means of a troubled and troubling aesthetic practice. It is a practice that, while acknowledging the beauty of the industrial sublime, resists absorption by the corporate power that it expresses, and reconfirms the place of autonomous creativity in the production of contemporary humanity.

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