

“Maybe the zone is a very complex system of tolls... I have no idea what goes on here in the absence of man. ... The zone is exactly how we created it ourselves, like the state of our spirits... but what is happening, that does not depend on the zone, that depends on us.”*
(Andrei Tarkovsky, *Stalker*, 1979)

Is it true that everything we see, everything that presents itself to us is also looking at us? – Since becoming a viable technology in the nineteenth century photographic images have long been regarded as a form of souvenir, often in terms of the difference between *studium* and *punctum* as defined by Roland Barthes. According to Barthes, that which appears in a photograph has been there (*il a été là*): the photograph itself thus becomes a dialectical image between the past and the present, with the melancholy of a constitutive “afterwardsness” as the sign of an irrevocably lost event, as neon letters in a Black Box, and—in the most extreme case—as the shadow image of a super-human flash of lightning.

Even if we still describe Tschersich’s praxis and occupation in terms of the Greek *photo-graphhein*, any “light-image” theories of photography fail to take account of the ontological status of his pictures. No subject will have dreamt of these pictures or will—at the sight of them—have experienced a life-changing “shock.” If anything, these pictures—with their constructive pictoriality, their semantic *actio per distans*—aim to neutralize that experience.

In many places architectural thinking has given way to a particular kind of consumption, its forms seemingly rendered invisible, yet at the same time visibly a constituent part of building and living: supermarkets, gaming halls, erotic outlets, sports facilities, and housing schemes are all manifestations of this new type of architecture. The surfaces of this quotidian world—roads, squares, façades—could no longer be described as having been deliberately designed. An “anti-form,” arising from the emphasis on the purely logistic functions of buildings and road connections, is reflected in contemporary living and work spaces and replaces the urban architectures designed for people whose lives were meant to be *happier* in the

Aristotelian sense. Even Walter Benjamin still felt that the “order” of profane life could only be achieved on the basis of this idea of happiness. *peripher* possibly already presents us with open-air views of a deserted, abandoned Earth. At any rate, it is bereft of human beings. These dehumanized images also conjure up the idea of a second nature, only now no world will come to light on its surface; on the contrary—as a condition of its non-existence in practical terms—an imaginary space will turn inwards and ultimately prove unprofanable. What we see, what no longer regards or touches us, are pictures that reveal *nothing* any more, that—instead—sublimate the radical simplicity of the imaginary: perhaps as pictures of a sacred simplicity.

Mostly there are streets and forecourts; it is often cloudy and it may be windy. An undefined “gaze” alights on a vertical axis that cuts off the horizontal field in the form of a façade or a wall. The unhappy impact of these pictures—although it is barely open to moral condemnation—lies in these built-up zones and in passages rendered unusable. What remains is the artificial disposition as such—structured by various topological elements that seem not so much to have been planned as to have arisen from the entropy of that planning. All these elements can be classified using the precise terminology of transport studies or civil and electrical engineering: still water, skid marks, drifting and braking tracks, high, low, and rounded curbstones, bus-stop curbs, diverse paving stones potentially interspersed with plant growth, road markings for parking bays and parking lots, pylons against the sky and all manner of cables—no birds, but almost always clouds as the last, absolute metaphor of an emptiness that has become form.

Unlike Dan Graham’s *Homes for America* or Bernd and Hilla Becher’s *Anonymous Sculptures* it is not possible to project any serial typologies into *peripher*. This disinterest in all aspects of seriality suggests that this is not *allegorical* architectural photography but rather an attempt to document a very different “urban landscape.” In many ways in the early modern era town and country, i.e. architecture and nature, soon emerged as complementary concepts

by which the sentient individual created a reflection of the self. Is this mirror of nature broken in Tschersich's "urban landscapes"? Where, in these urban constructs, could an ecologically-minded individual be located? If anything the urban construct wastes away the possibility of culture, which once made nature cultivatable. In other words, what we see here is the return of a second order wasteland: an *asphalt desert* that can never be made to green over again.

From Debord and Pasolini to the "walks" instigated by Stalker, the post-Situationist collective, many have searched for an *optical unconscious* in the periphery. The representational, moral hegemony of cities could only temporarily cast off its "guilt" by creating an external, guilt-free zone in the periphery and shielding it from the inner zone. The most extreme form of these demarcation zones were ultimately the ghetto or the borgata. However, at times "guilt-free" sub-urban, sub-altern, or sub-proletarian forms of life came to haunt the hegemonial center. Yet the impression of un-profanability in Tschersich's pictures appears to suggest that the dialectics of inside and outside, of center and periphery, has come to an end and that the absence of human will makes itself felt in a neutralized zone—at least *in the visible*.

Toni Hildebrandt

* Andrei Tarkovsky, *Stalker* (1979), quoted in *Stalker*, "Through The Actual Territories," *Territories. Islands, Camps and other States of Utopia*, edited by Anselm Franke (Berlin: KW, Institute for Contemporary Art / Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2003), pp. 238–41, here p. 238.