

Taiyo Onorato & Nico Krebs

21.3 – 11.5.14

Adding, Adding, Adding



Untitled (stills from 16 mm film), 2014

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Let's start at the beginning. Let's start with one and one, that makes two, usually. Two is the outset of difference, as well as the first instance of repetition. Any form of construction, any establishment of relationship, any definition of space starts with a distinction, with two joint parameters. The potential within the harmonious form of repetition and the disruptive force of difference marks the importance of the pair-form in the history of image-making. Across its meanings in mathematics, philosophy, and spiritualism, the figure 'two' seems to be an appropriate approach to one of contemporary photography's most independent practices, Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs.

From 2003 onwards, they have been developing and pushing forward a common interest in construction. Since the beginning of their collaboration, only more explicitly in photographic works such as *Building Berlin* and the film *Blockbuster*, the two have been known for building images in a very direct sense.

From the very beginning, Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs have been manifesting a radical use of the materiality of the image-making itself. Over the years, their curiosity in playing with elementary conventions of photography seems to have increased as much as they have been pushing their limits, deserting the repetition of their own images by all means, just as those of the photographer's pantheon.

Today, with a discreet expansion towards the moving image, their practice is more autonomous and experimental than ever. As filmmakers, they show the choreography in its entire process, not only in its most distinct instant. For the exhibition, they present new

installations and films in this trajectory. It is the exposition of form-giving, of possibilities and impossibilities of the production of images, of the constraints and the magic of seeing, an accurately set up laboratory of wit.

There is an image from Allan Sekula's 1980 work *School is a Factory*, the last photograph of the sequence. The black and white photograph shows a modernist building in the right background. From the left foreground, two hands are reaching into the picture, one equipped with a hammer, the other one with a chisel. Connected only by means of perspective, the chisel is set precisely onto the facade, ambiguously between the building's destruction and the final touch of the production of its naturalist-style stone facade. Albeit skipping the elaborate cultural criticism that accompanies Sekula's image, we find the exact same figure-ground confusion at play in Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs' film *Blockbuster*. They have only been developing the idea for an entire 16mm black and white film shot in the environment of East Berlin's social housing projects. Here, a man, standing on a ladder in the foreground, is persistently beating the outlines of the buildings that are far away in the background.

The provenance and intention that both Sekula and Onorato & Krebs led to the formal configuration of the image might be similar: a focus on a random, yet emblematic urban environment. Both are looking for a concrete place where institutional, economical, and ideological interests intersect more or less prominently, trying to overcome the 'aesthetic inaccessibility' (Sekula) of the city, of society and politics. Both Sekula and Onorato & Krebs are concerned with history and a specific environment. Sekula with California's typical 'industrial park', Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs with the enormous empty lots of a post-war, post-socialist city between stagnancy and development. With the simple, drastic move of integrating themselves with the city, the artists are in control: with quite ephemeral means, they perform a role of absolute command over perspective.

Against the inaccessibility of the image, Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs are out to produce the material for a vision of a non-hermetic, non-commodified communal realm. Most of the seemingly untapped urban lots that the images show, in *Blockbuster* and in *Constructions*, have long disappeared. Where the two photographers were taking their pictures, wondering what was going to happen, reality had quickly been filled up with signs imposing 'You are here!' The formerly undefined space is still accessible, but solely in a mode of shopping and consumption. The presence of real accessibility remains active in the images.

In fact, the formal construction of relating two distinct layers within one single image appears as a key figure in their practice. The entire hoax on the two-dimensional rendering of space in photography is structured by this doubling. Unlike many other photographers who have been dealing with the pair-form, they apply this within one single image, not a doubling of images or objects.

The decisive effect on the image is the same: the spatialization of the medium, the break-up of singularity and identity. Rather than realism, they exhibit the formal assembly of two realities within one picture. It is from here that it all reflects back on our day-to-day media consumption, where, by the wonders of suspense, part of its mechanisms might become visible.

Out of their attraction to building and the respective subversion of seeing and perception, Onorato & Krebs' dialogue results in a rigorous relationship to presentation. In the case of *Blockbuster*, the 'materiality of building' added to the film in the installation is a proto-industrial sound machine working in the actual space. Remote and related to the moving images like a movie pianist, a pneumatically driven drum machine is invisibly connected to the projector. An arrangement of different sorts of hammers is pounding on surfaces of different materials such as steel, stone, wood and glass. Even if the machine is not directly related to the film within the set-up of the space, the hammering is in precise synchronization with the images, in which the man on the ladder is treating the social housing – or the air right next to him – with

sledgehammers and a heavy steel tube.

The bold and insistent claim of plausibility extends physically into the space. The configuration of such image-spaces in the exhibitions, realized with sculpture, film, mirrors, or camera-obscura-based installations, comes as another dimension of extending a field of vision, physical and in real time. What they seem to have in mind here may recall the installations of artist Dan Graham: works aimed at questioning the common place where people meet, experience each others' projections, or just become aware of the light and the present moment.

In their installations, films and pictures, the dialogue of 'two' constantly challenges the understanding of what an image can be and can't be. Just as the two themselves constantly challenge and correct each others' perspective, together they attest conclusive, valid proof of reality. The things they build could hardly be built by one single person alone. Most of the images couldn't be photographed by one single photographer. Faced with the question whether photography can be anything else than a mechanical fact or a reflection of capitalist social relations, the two seem to be playing with the idea of a respiritualization of photographic representation. Only this spiritualization is constantly undermined by their radical materialism and their great sense of humor.

"As soon as you have two, you have the space in between", artist Roni Horn once said in an interview. The space in between, the implementation of implicit distance, functions as a non-static element that directs attention from the two layers of content to their situation and circumstance. With difference, everything opens up. With its unmediated layers, the double-coded image requests a tracing of how it itself is constructed, a tracing of the history of its own production. It asks for being put together again and again. What we see between the display and encryption of such traces is the truth of a contradiction. How is it possible?



Blockbuster (stills from 16mm film), 2012

The spatialization that is put into effect with the constant call for re-composition means a diffusion of the dialogue into the factual environment of the work, wherever we may see it. The question of form comes as a structural byproduct of the double. Is it this, or is it that, where am I? In the moment of asking this question, the single image presents itself not as a finished product but as a mere possibility. Two can also say 'Both are possible, simultaneously'. Plus, two can express a promise of 'Both, and ...'. Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs turn these thoughts upside down, compress them, and multiply them towards infinity, all mirrored within their subtle use of the photographic process and of analogue image-making.



Marzahn 1, 2009

Print
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Foam is supported by the BankGiro Loterij, De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek, Delta Lloyd, Gemeente Amsterdam and the VandenEnde Foundation

Taiyo Onorato & Nico Krebs (Switzerland b. 1979) have been working together on a variety of projects on the cutting edge of photography, sculpture and installation since 2003. Their work provides intelligent and often ironic commentary on the history of photography, the nature of photos, how cameras operate and the role of the photographer. Few subjects remain untouched in their complex, yet highly accessible work, in which reality collides with fiction while humour converges with seriousness. In 2012, rising stars Onorato & Krebs presented their work in Foam for the first time.

In 2013, the annual Foam Paul Huf Award was awarded to the Swiss duo. The international jury was deeply impressed: "In their work we see a playfulness and depth that touches upon the very DNA of photography. As illusionists intent on pushing against the boundaries of the medium, Onorato & Krebs skillfully engage their audiences and convey some of the magic that lies at the core of photographic image-making." Foam is proud to present *Adding, Adding, Adding* as part of the award. In this exhibition brand work and films are presented that are built on the play between illusion and reality in urban spaces. Exclusively for Foam, a site-specific installation is set up in the garden.

Benedikt Reichenbach received his MA in philosophy and history with a work about the motif of the ban on images in the writings of Theodor W. Adorno. Since 2007, he has been working as a graphic designer and editor in Berlin and New York. With Walther König, he recently published *Harun Farocki Diagrams. Images from Ten Films* (Köln 2014).

Cover Image
Untitled (stills from 16mm film), 2014

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courtesy RaebervonStenglin,
Zürich & Peter Lav Gallery,
Copenhagen

This exhibition is made possible
by JTI and the Swiss Arts Council
Pro Helvetia.

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