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This essay examines the photography of Bernd and Hilla Becher as a novel form of bodily figuration. This could seem like an unusual angle from which to approach the Bechers' work considering the seemingly total absence of human figures in their photographic grids of industrial modernity. Their "typologies," as the call them, would seem to testify to nothing if not the effacement of the human body from the site of work. And beyond being totally bereft of bodies, the Bechers' photographs strike us for their ineluctable stillness, flatness, and pastness. And yet upon closer reading the flatness of the photographs gives way to a dimensionality, stillness gives way to motion, and the edges of the photographs begin to expand in ways that lend to these typologies a dynamic, almost corporeal quality. I argue that this occurs primarily via the interstitial space that separates the photos from one another. The in-between space of these grids thus serves as a space of movement, across which the spectator imagines bodies to be moving and looking. I understand the Bechers' practice of figuration as a way of dealing with the profound consequences of the Second World War not only on bodies, but on the terms of their representation.

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The Body's Photographic Afterlives[1]

> Cameras are built to accommodate the gaze of the human eye. But heavy industry accomplishes work, which cannot be surveyed by the human eye. Industry extends the labor process over vast distances and at the same time concentrates and joins the work of many different sites of production. A gigantic organism, at once beyond vision and of a somnambulist precision. How can one grasp this with images? Ought there not to be images that do not fit into households, nor on walls, into pockets, or illustrated books? And on no retina?
>
> Harun Farocki

> How marvelous to be able to look at what one cannot see!
>
> Jean-Luc Godard

I.

How can the human body appear where its absence is prefigured? How can it be seen where it is perpetually subjected to a visual forgetfulness, forgotten as a subject of vision? Bernd and Hilla Becher's photographs are spaces from which the human being has been subtracted. These are spaces not of the body, but of its erasure.[2]

And yet, bodies are indelibly present within the Bechers' forms, latent within their very infrastructure. This might seem like an odd claim, for one senses that the subject of this body of work is unmistakably, and overwhelmingly, the *form* of industrial modernity itself. The intended outcome of the Bechers' process, as they describe it, is that the many water towers, blast furnaces, framework houses, and pitheads that populate their images might "speak for themselves and become readable."[3] In this way, the very legibility of this subject takes the erasure of human bodies as a structuring condition, for as the Bechers explain, they “decided not to incorporate people in [their] photographs, because they would have little importance to the monumentality of the buildings.”[4] Much as Dziga Vertov once proclaimed to “temporarily exclude man as a subject for film,” so too have the Bechers set aside the body, deferring the human in view of a representational mode appropriate to the scale and form of heavy industry.

The most compelling treatment of the visible absence of bodies in the Bechers’ work is furnished by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, who views it as one instance in the broader challenge issued by conceptual photography to traditional forms of portraiture. By privileging the individual sitter, this kind of thinking goes, traditionally figurative portraiture necessarily obscures larger social and material relations, which in turn perpetuates the myth of the bourgeois subject. Such a conception of subjectivity simply does not square with, for example, the body that emerges in the wake of the Second World War, which is nothing more than a fragmented and defaced form—wandering, aimless, this is the body as a veritable receptacle of shocks. The body as agent of action gives way to a passive, absorptive mass, interminably susceptible to an infinity of *dispositifs*. Were the horrors of this war not made possible by a mode of production that merged the space of the grid with the three-dimensional space of industrialized labor to the point where the human body could be subsumed under the logic of machines? Were it to testify to the political and material realities of a world that rises from such dust, art would have to subject the human form to an equivalent decentering violence. This is why, for Buchloh, the images of pop art and conceptual photography are devoid of such bodies, and this is why the Bechers' project attests to the fact that "the *exclusion* of figures and faces is now a strategy as significant as their traditional *inclusion* had been."[5] While the Bechers disembody the medium of photography with a particular exhaustiveness, their project according to Buchloh is but a symptom of the widespread skepticism running through postwar photography regarding the possibility of occupying any position outside the purview of the many apparatuses governing subjectivity.

Buchloh's analysis confronts us once again with a familiar question, which is at base an ethical one, concerning the role of figuration in the wake of historical catastrophe. This question pertains to the figure of the human body in particular as a mediating term in the relation between aesthetics and politics. One way of getting to the heart of this matter would be to ask whether the aporias of self should dictate the fate of the human figure (or the body for that matter) *in toto*. Does a body not always announce itself as both subject *and* self? What, in the final analysis, might be obscured where the absence of bodies is taken as a hermeneutic ready-made?

While it would be impossible, and no doubt naïve, to do away with questions of historical catastrophe, representability, and the subject when considering the Bechers' work, such preoccupations can also obscure a more primary dialectical unfolding therein. This dialectic, I will argue here, consists in the co-habitation of two visual regimes: the grid and the sequence. I view the sequence as emerging precisely out of (even in spite of) the morphological labor of the typology itself, and by extension, its ostensible tendency to collapse space and difference onto the "place" of the grid. Indeed, it is crucial to acknowledge that the Bechers' forms, apropos of their status as grids, not only serve to document industrial modernity but on some level perform it, rehearsing its flattening operationalization of space and matter. And yet such a view, which fixes the labor of this corpusunder the order of the episteme, would ultimately have to come up against the bald presence in these forms of a sequential language: of temporality and movement. For content here cannot be reduced to what is visible in any one photograph, but must be understood in terms of what exists *between*photographs. By placing emphasis on the space between photographs, the Bechers' forms subvert their purported function as grids to classify, analyze, and place on display. In this way, the interstice intervenes into the epistemic workings of the typology by acting as a kind of fold, a hinge between the viewer and the work, stillness and motion, here and elsewhere. The space between images becomes a space of movement and motion, a space of bodies. The Bechers pit the sequence and the grid against one another, and amid the resulting collisions and slippages between these two visual regimes a new space opens up. It is from this space that the body (the one I ultimately want to get to here) emerges. Just as the space between photographs becomes a space of movement across which the spectator imagines bodies to be moving and looking, so too does *the space between sequence and grid* imbue those bodies with an abiding sense of non-fixity. As the product of such a montage of forms, what could a body figure? For what portrait could this body sit if not being as process? As Judith Butler attests, "To say that a life is precarious, requires not only that a life be apprehended as a life, but also that precariousness be an aspect of what is apprehended in what is living."[6] If writing is to work in spite of death and against suffering, it must be prepared to see life and name it as such even where it is most precarious—even especially there.

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Any interpretive model necessarily cuts and excludes from the outset, even when propelled by a reparative demand. Thus insofar as this project seeks to reclaim or somehow rescue the body, summoning it back into the visual field by insisting on its operability, it necessarily risks perpetuating new forms of erasure. For some readers, the fixation here on the body (especially its frequent appearance in this singular form) will appear regressive, much as if I substituted it for the word "human."[7] On one level, the body has functioned in recent decades as a "grounding" force in critical discourse, insuring writing under the seal of lived experience. At the same time, the very concept of the body would seem to endanger criticism's ability to account for the political, economic, and social machinery that condition life. Indeed, like any conceptual *idée fixe,* the body risks greatly reducing matters, of screening off the real to the point where the corporeal begins to resemble a discursive fetish object. I therefore want to clarify what I mean when I invoke the body, as I do so in an intentionally imprecise way. Indeed, one could argue that the body remains a necessary topic of criticism precisely because of its instability. "Body" can withstand, pass freely between the events of both life and death.

This translatability of the body across these registers is itself a symptom, or perhaps a cause, of the word's seeming availability to a discourse that either affirms and sustains life in all its mutability, or to one that vastly delimits it. "Body" cannot be sheltered from either of these domains.

David Harvey has commented eloquently on this ambivalent status of the body within critical discourse:

> The body that is to be the 'measure of all things' is itself a site of contestation for the very forces that create it. The body (like the person and the self) is an internal relation and therefore open and porous to the world... The body is not monadic, nor does it float freely in some ether of culture, discourses, and representations, however important these may be in materializations of the body. The study of the body has to be grounded in an understanding of real spatiotemporal relations between material practices, representations, imaginaries, institutions, social relations, and the prevailing structures of political-economic power. The body can then be viewed as a nexus through which the possibilities for emancipatory politics can be approached.

[8]

Though Harvey does not explicitly address questions of aesthetics and representation here, his claim in principle concerns both. For as “measure” the body assumes the function of hermeneutic compass, a device for navigating the world and its questions.[9] Viewed as the measure of all things, the body is simultaneously a lived vessel—a seat of perception and action—and a construct that cannot signify beyond the discursive structures that give rise to it. In fact, the body is both of these things at once, bound as it is by so many linguistic and social conditions even as it provides the very means by which those conditions in the first place come to be. Thinking bodies along either active or passive lines would be to ignore the dialectical movement taking place at the level of “body” in the first place. Here one might recall Karl Marx’s conception of labor, which, even in its most alienated form, necessarily endures as “the living, form-giving fire… the transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time.”[10] Labor in other words precedes and exceeds a given apparatus that captures it. The meaning of labor for Marx is quite in line with Harvey’s conception of the body as an “internal relation and therefore open and porous to the world.”[11] This, to begin with, is how the body is conceptualized in these pages.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, as scientific management gradually found its way into nearly every facet of industrial production, labor was radically divided along mechanical and technological registers. The body, too, was atomized in this way, emerging as a kind of limit-case of the Marxist conception of labor as “form-giving fire.” By extending the space of the Taylorist work floor into seemingly every sector of life, late capitalism has only further imperiled the capacity of bodies to intervene in the flow of commodity and its attendant exploitations. To see the body at the center of the Bechers' typologies is to make an aesthetic as well as a political claim that assumes a certain continuity between the domains of labor, visuality, and writing. To do so is to insist, in an almost willfully stubborn manner, upon the workability of the body even where it appears unworkable. It is to see the body as the measure by which the Bechers' photography comes to labor upon us even as its absence at the site of labor appears so complete. How might one reclaim the body as the very labor, the "form-giving fire" of the Bechers' forms? As I hope to demonstrate here, the body that emerges from these works is inseparable from that of the viewer, and from their idea of what bodies are and what makes them count. At the same time, my goal here is not simply to project presence upon absence via a purely subjective or phenomenological account of the Bechers' work. For presence and absence are not merely perceptual phenomena, but political and historical ones. In this way, the bodies that emerge from these images must themselves be understood historically, for coordinates of corporeal absence and presence necessarily shift over time.

The Bechers' project first took shape in the mid-1950s, as extreme shifts were taking place in how the body was thought and practiced. Much of the anonymous industrial architecture that the Bechers photographed for half a century was constructed in Europe's period of mass industrialization, which began in the mid-nineteenth century and lasted until the onset of the First World War. The Bechers began photographing the industrial relics of that frenzied period well after it had slowed across the continent. In the years following the Second World War, Germany was in the midst of an "economic miracle" (*Wirtschaftswunder*), which would fundamentally change the face of labor. By the late fifties, advances in automation were felt in nearly every sector of industrial production, and increasingly the unions, as well as the workers they represented, faced the prospect of their own obsolescence. The traditional laborer of the industrial age was, not unlike the factory itself, marked for erasure. But increasingly sophisticated machines and automata were not the only newcomers to this world. By the early 1960s, Germany saw an unprecedented rise in what its predominantly white, male manufacturers would perceive as an alien workforce, as vast numbers of transient and unskilled workers flooded into Europe from countries still reeling from the war. Under the conditions of mass industrial production, bodies ran the risk of becoming mere vehicles for the movement of capital. However, in these emerging postwar labor contexts, the traditional concept and appearance of the worker was changing to such a radical extent that it seemed poised for disappearance.

Alongside these profound shifts in bodily labor, the integrity of labor itself would be called into question. It has been well demonstrated that the systemic violations of human rights that transpired in the years leading up to and during the Second World War were, to a large extent, made possible by the Third Reich's unprecedented consolidation of labor and war under the auspices of national identity. It was as if the worker, the factory, and the corpse were collapsed into a single body under the twin signs of industry and war. As the late historian, Tony Judt attests, Nazi Germany "fought the war—especially in its latter years—with significant help from the ransacked economies of its victims."[12] As Judt notes, "In September 1944 there were 7,487,000 foreigners in Germany, most of them there against their will, and they constituted 21 percent of the country's labour force."[13] This violent character of work would extend into Germany's postwar period, though to vastly different ends and on an entirely different scale. Without that precarious and decentralized labor force, the *wirtschaftswunder* could never come to be. Miracles notwithstanding, the precarious forms of labor abounding in Europe from the rise of National Socialism to the postwar economic boom cast a shadow over any residing sense of the inherent beauty and integrity of work. Labor had always been a crucial staging ground for bodies to wage their battles against discourses of power, but by the late 1960s this triumphant view of the working body necessarily came up against the innumerable catastrophes that befell bodies in the first half of the twentieth century by way of “work.”[14]

A massive swarm of itinerant and infirmed bodies appeared in Europe’s immediate postwar period as though from a fault in the earth. In his wrenching account of the Second World War and its aftermath in Germany, W.G. Sebald testifies to “a countless crowd of people… daily on the move.”[15] Despite this upsurge of bodies *in extremis,* or perhaps precisely because of it, efforts to document them either faltered or were altogether absent. In the place of witnesses, a collective amnesia presided over the German sensorium. The “carry on” mentality of the economic miracle even relied upon this labor of forgetfulness. Silence ruled the day. As Sebald writes, “that silence, that reserve, that instinctive looking away are the reasons why we know so little of what the Germans thought and observed in the five years between 1942 and 1947. The ruins where they lived were the *terra incognita* of the war.”[16] Does the Bechers' project not rest upon the same kinds of deferrals and silences that characterized this widespread amnesia? Does this corpus of photographs without bodies not pile absence upon absence, rehearsing those silences and deferrals that precluded collective mourning in Germany’s immediate postwar period? On some level, one must acknowledge that each of these photographs imparts the very image of such forgetting.

Der Spiegel, 26 June 1967, p. 20. "Naked maoists before a naked wall." Members of the Kommune 1 in 1967. Photograph by Thomas Hestenberg. Unfortunately we were not able to secure the publishing rights for this picture; see here
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There was another side to this silence: one that didn't fully manifest until two decades after the war. In the late 1960s, the body reemerged within German public discourse, albeit in a highly circumscribed form: to wit, white and predominantly male. In key instances, the ideological claims of the German New Left for sexual freedom found expression in white, naked bodies, which served as so many screens for projecting the images of Germany's recent history onto the present. The German New Leftists, whose parents had come of age in Hitler's Germany, set their own political struggles against those of the previous generation by manufacturing solidarity with the victims of the Third Reich, the body became an important instrument in these endeavors. One particularly striking example of this tendency appeared in the form of a photographic self-portrait by the West Berlin socialist collective Kommune 1, whose members (including one of the infants that lived with them) are seen naked and spread out against a white wall. Originally included in a promotional brochure distributed by the collective in 1967, the photograph was widely circulated in the mainstream media and provoked fervent reactions from both sides of the political spectrum. As Dagmar Herzog explains, the Kommune 1 photograph would eventually become "a major iconic image for the New Left, one that was routinely reprinted, usually in the spirit either of humor or nostalgia."[17] An especially unforgiving assessment of this image was supplied by Reimut Reiche, himself a former leader of the German New Left. By way of a psychoanalytic reading, Reiche regards the Kommunard's photograph in light of its function as secondary identification:

> Consciously this photo scene was meant to recreate and expose a police house search of the Kommune 1. And yet these women and men stand there as if in an aesthetically staged, unconscious identification with the victims of their parents and at the same time mock these victims by making the predetermined message of the picture one of sexual liberation. Thereby they simultaneously remain unconsciously identified with the consciously rejected perpetrator parents. "Sexuality Makes You Free" fits with this picture as well as "Work Makes You Free" fits with Auschwitz.[18]

Kommune 1's infamous photograph came to emblematize the German New Left's deployment of corporeality as a means of resisting the impositions of the state while recalling the legacy of National Socialism. Yet even as it labors under the banner of an anti-authoritarian program, in propagandizing solidarity with the victims of the holocaust, the Kommunard's photograph partakes in the violent work of substitution and erasure: trading in a heterogeneous and devastated historical corpus for a homogeneous and stable one. If the body was made present in political discourse in Germany during this period, it was apparently at the cost of bodily difference itself. Indeed, as Uli Linke notes, while "nationhood was reconfigured through the icon of the naked body, not all bodies were equally invited to represent the German nation."[19]

Also bedeviling the work of human figuration during this period were the ceaseless rehearsals of a language of racial contagion and purity reminiscent of Nazi rhetoric. Just as many of the conservative anti-immigration slogans during this time deployed such a rhetoric of purity and contagion to fan the flames of an entrenched xenophobia, even avowedly pro-immigration groups such as the Anti-Fascist League activated this language:

> Turks in! Nazis out!
> *(Turken rein. Nazis raus!)*
> Trash out! Human beings in!
> *(Mull raus! Menschen rein!)*
> Nazi dirt must be purged!
> *(Nazi Dreck muss weg!)*
> Keep your environment clean! Get rid of brown filth!
> *(Halte Deine Umwelt sauber! Schmeiss weg de braunen Dreck!)*
> Nazis out! Cut away [exterminate] the excrement!
> *(Nazis raus! Hau weg den Scheiss)*[20]

Its reliance upon a logic of purity and contagion notwithstanding, this slogan underscores a certain tension at the heart of representational politics: a tear that inevitably punctures any discourse of inclusion. The German *rein,* as Linke aptly notes, "is a historic cognate of terms denoting cut, separate, rip, slice, tear, sever… the claim to German membership always requires some form of purging: the excretion of presumed filth or the excision or amputation of contaminants."[21] So deeply ingrained within the collective imaginary of postwar Germany was this language of expulsion that it could not help but submit bodies (real or imagined) to the violence of cuttingThe Bechers would have been aware of such tactics on both sides of the political spectrum to employ corporeal imagery as a means of validating the existence of *certain* bodies at the expense of others. Thus even if the body was present in German public discourse around this time, its appearance was both highly circumscribed and conditioned on the effacement of others. The body, understood in its most open and porous sense, was utterly absent. Thus while the Bechers' grids undeniably participate in a form of cutting and exclusion, it is one that reverses the very premise of cutting as it is generally practiced vis-à-vis human figuration. Theirs is a form of editing that cuts not into discrete, individual bodies—such bodies, we know, are conspicuously absent in their photographs—but rather utilizes the interstice as a means of cutting through the visual field with the corporeal.

There are consequences of industry and war to which only flesh can provide witness. By denying this witness bodies can provide, and by doing so with such a thoroughgoing consistency, the Bechers could appear to fall on that extreme end of silence described by Sebald in his account of postwar German amnesia. Indeed, the very conceptual and formal consistency with which the Bechers repeatedly render bodies absent could even resemble a kind of traumatic compulsion. And yet, as we also know, the impulse to repeat, even to restage the moment at which lack is revealed, can be a generative one. In this way, it becomes necessary to ask how absence might give way to presence in the Bechers' configurations. For how is one to accuse the Bechers of obscuring the problem of history's missing bodies when it was precisely the "missing-ness"of bodies that demanded expression in the first place? That is, if so many of the absent bodies of the twentieth century were fundamentally lost to the machinery of war, and if what demanded expression was—in advance of any presence—the very facticity of their obliteration, how better to represent such a thing than by seeking to give it a new form, a new body?

A space such as Auschwitz would have never come to be without a vast apparatus for abstracting the human being, achieved by the Third Reich in its wide implementation of practices ranging from eugenics to phrenology, which, as is often the case with racialization, were at base *visual* discourses. Bodies were subjected to the final violence of the archive, entrusted to unforeseeable and potentially infinite modes of display.[22] Where it is stretched along the expanse of a grid, how is the body to resist? Challenging such an apparatus could only occur by cultivating the body's "form-giving fire," or as Jacques Rancière would say: through the capacity of bodies "for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience."[23] But how are bodies to intervene in the conditions of their own absence? How to stage a revolt on the part of bodies that have been irretrievably lost to history, after the fact of the event? How, in the final analysis, is one to cut into discourse an opening for bodies without cutting others out?

* * *

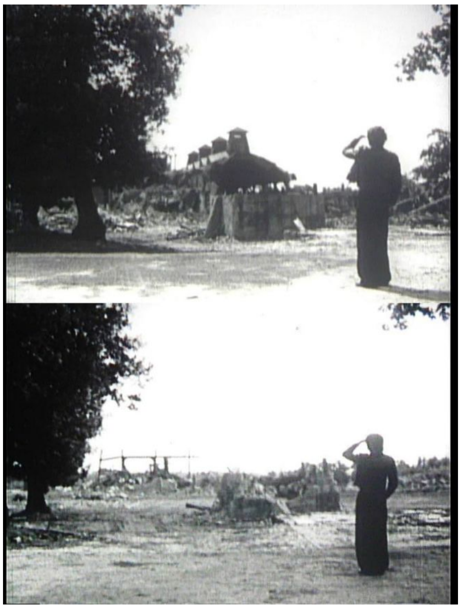
When Bernd Becher first began to document industrial architecture in the 1950s, he did so by hand. He drew each structure in painstaking detail, capturing its image as dispassionately as possible. This process proved too slow, however, for the buildings were being demolished faster than he could draw them. In turning to the medium of photography, Becher could accommodate his project to the pace of this disappearance.

In *Between Two Wars* (*Zwischen Zwei Kriegen*, 1978), the German filmmaker Harun Farocki assumes the position of a young photographer whose work bears a notable resemblance to that of the Bechers. The photographer in Farocki's film sets out to document the blast furnaces that populated the German landscape in the interwar period (1917-1933), and in a voiceover narration provides the following account of his efforts:

> I wanted to tell this story with machines which actually produced this story. But I remember spending the summer of 1976 straining my eyes for some traces of them, as one does in a place one knew as a child. Each time I heard of a works that had been demolished it seemed a little more impossible to tell this story. I need not be ashamed of this feeling. Things disappear from sight before they're understood.

In an intriguing parallel to Bernd Becher's own account, Farocki here faces the trouble not only of depicting the "vast organism" of industrial modernity, but of documenting the disappearance of its equipment. A certain melancholy prevails throughout Farocki's film, which is unsurprising given the suggestion in the above passage of a continuity between these industrial spaces and a "place one knew as a child." There is an undeniable *pathos* to these machines as they face imminent disappearance, for any disappearance is invariably attended by a sense of belatedness—of being always too late to the scene. However, as Farocki nevertheless remarks that one "need not be ashamed of this feeling," for as he insists, "Things disappear from sight before they're understood"). In this way, Farocki's photographer comes to acknowledge that belatedness is a necessary function of witness.

As Farocki speaks these words, we see him standing in the foreground surveying the site of a blast furnace, his hand shading his eyes from the obstructing rays of sunlight. This shot is followed by a cut, on the other end of which we see the man standing in the same spot and with the same posture as the previous shot, with the landscape now containing but a shell of the structure seen earlier. Here Farocki gives expression to the shock of disappearance by ways of a jump cut: a sequence of images that by definition collapses time intervals into the space between two images. Thus even as Farocki composes these shots as a means of ostensibly casting himself as the subject *mise en place* of this landscape, the true bearer of this gaze turns out to be the apparatus of production. Farocki defers to a mediating machine, embodied here in the



Still from Harun Farocki, *Between Two Wars (Zwischen Zwei Kriegen)*, 1978. Image courtesy of Harun Farocki GbR form of the sequence, to inscribe himself into the place of this disappearance. By virtue of its status as sequence, the body (Farocki's) that "persists" across these shots is no longer legible as the subjective center of this event, but is rather (like the demolished structure itself) wholly subject to the mechanical interval as time is taken up by cinema. And yet, it is to the irrationality of the cut, to the violence of the sequence that one must entrust oneself in furnishing witness to this disappearance.

Later in the film, the photographer will explain, "I've taken up photography. But *one* photo isn't enough, you need *two* photos of everything. Things are in motion so much so that two pictures are needed to at least establish the direction they are moving in." A solitary photograph cannot attest to the sheer velocity and scope of industry, for as Farocki attests, heavy industry is like a "vast organism" spanning multiple sites of production. How could a single photograph (and much less, a drawing) ever account for such a being? The camera was designed to accommodate human vision, but heavy industry is more than human: it exceeds the body's sensory capacities. How then is one to account for this organism, to enter its discourse without taking leave of human ways of seeing, without taking leave of the body?[24] The photographer adapts himself to the movement of heavy industry by way of the editing table: that is, by way of the sequence. Entrusting oneself and one's perception to the machine is necessarily to risk one's humanity. It is to entrust life to the sequence. At the same time, it offers an otherwise impossible view into the vast organism of industrial production itself, within which, like any space, life may emerge. As the film progresses, the voice of Farocki's photographer gradually stands in for his bodily presence, as it does during a sequence of shots depicting the interior of a working blast furnace. There, the body emerges yet again, though in substituted form, cut through as the photographer's descriptions are with a bodily metaphor: “The machine looks like a giant finger, stretched out from a giant fist. It runs on rails. The finger, a steel ram as thick as a man…”

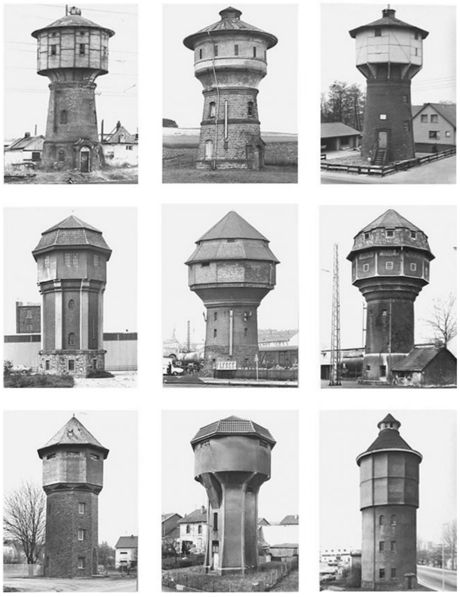
II.

The Bechers use the term “typology” to describe the grid-like formations into which they typically organize their individual photographs. Being morphological—derived from the science of forms—the typology’s fundamental aim consists in the identification, classification, and fixation of objects. In this regard it is a kind of family, a collection of different objects that collapses (even while necessarily placing on view) their many differences while emphasizing their formal resonances and shared uses. As such, to photograph in view of a typology would be to enlist the event of photographic capture in the expansion of the grid, for taking a picture of something becomes practically coincident with its ingestion by a classificatory apparatus.[25] Hilla Becher has commented at some length on this morphological aspect of their work:

> The approach begins with a description of the outer appearance of an animal or a plant, everything that can be recognized on the outside, such as size, color, and the relationship of the parts to the whole. Then the inner organs are investigated, the structure or anatomy. Finally the developmental history and questions of function are looked into, including the niche each species fills in its environment and in its own specific biotope. If you transfer this method to other areas, it is possible to investigate any kind of subject. You can say, for example, that a blast furnace built in the last century that has been continually updated and pipe systems added on has undergone stages just like an insect. In both cases it is possible to follow the development historically and compare it with similar or dissimilar forms.[26]

Animated as it is by an impulse to classify, manage, and cut into bodies, the typology's fundamental achievement consists in subjecting virtually any form of life or matter to the gaze of scientific analysis. The crucial point here is that before something (or somebody) can be incorporated into such a schematic, it must be rendered as "objectively" as possible so as to be isolated from its original context. And it is here that the Bechers are most explicitly in dialogue with, and (I will argue) ultimately working against, the photographers associated with the Neue Sachlichkeit. This so-called movement toward a "New Objectivity"—Albert Renger-Patzsch and August Sander being the best-known photographers associated with this program—sought to depict everyday objects and people with an absolute mater-of-factness; "clearly recorded, reproduced without any artistic transformation."[27] In technical terms, a photographer could achieve "objectivity" by maximizing a picture's sharpness, proximity, and depth as a means of isolating the formal and material details of a given subject.[28] A subject thus isolated is ideally poised for the archive, for maximum retrievability. August Sander's monumental social portrait *People of the Twentieth Century,* which classified its human subjects in terms of class and profession,foregrounded the inherently morphological aspirations of *Neue Sachlichkeit* visuality*.* Among Sander's portraits, no individual body is meant to be taken on its own, but always points outwards toward another in its family. Hans-Christian Adam, in reference to Karl Blossfeldt's botanical photographs, aptly speaks to a way in which this mode of representation necessarily deadens its subjects: "They do not smell, they have no colors, and they give no hint of their tactile qualities. They are reduced to geometrical forms, structures and gray tones, in other words to standardized types."[29] Typologization necessarily involves some element of mortification, for change and growth are precisely what threatens its order. Where the typological is, the taxidermic is never far away.

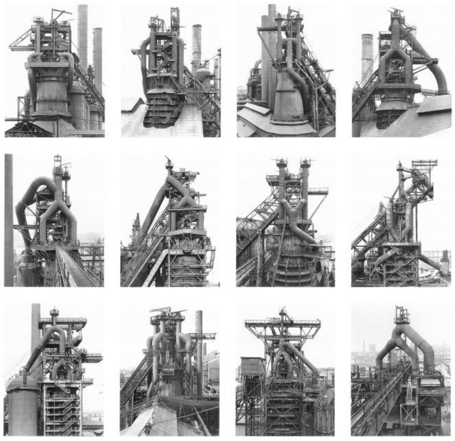
The word “taxidermy” derives from the Greek *taxis* (arrangement) and *derma* (skin). *Taxis*, as Bernhard Siegert notes, “refers to an order of things in which each and every object is located in a fixed place where it can be found.”[30] For the ancient Greek philosopher Xeonophon, who first conceptualized *taxis* as an “economy” of retrievable objects, human beings exceed *taxis* because they are not things. “When you are searching for a person,” Xenophon insisted, “you often fail to find him, though he may be searching for you himself.”[31] For the human being, the philosopher suggests, “no place of meeting has been fixed.”[32] While Xenophon’s public would have surely found it heartening, taken into the present, this notion of the fundamental non-fixity of human beings would have to come up against the fact that modernity’s triumph, as Siegert points out, consists precisely in “the invention of a *taxis* technique capable of also turning humans into retrievable objects.”[33] The enabling technique for this was the lattice or grid, whose ontological effect Siegert equates with “the modern concept of place and being-in-one’s-place based on the media-theoretical distinction between data and addresses. In other words, it presupposes *the ability to write absence*, that is, to deal equally efficiently with both occupied and empty spaces.”[34] Modernity as a discourse of power aims at the total colonization of space and the bodies that occupy it, and does so by merging the two-dimensional space of the grid with the three-dimensional space of bodies.[35]



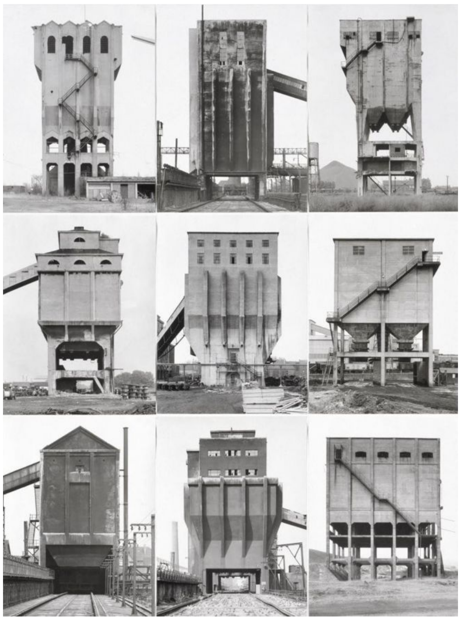
Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Water Towers*, 2010. © Estate Bernd & Hilla Becher

The grid is commonly understood as a disciplinary form.[36] In this regard, it has a dual function, for just as a grid provides the "discipline" for cutting into the world and minimizing contingency, once it has mastered three-dimensional space the grid itself becomes the regime. And while the typology and the grid are not strictly equivalent, they do share a language. As disciplinary forms, both seek to "*inscribe absence,*" as Siegert puts it, by collapsing difference onto a single plane. Both seek to master a multiplicity of things by rendering them locatable, retrievable, knowable. This retrievability of objects becomes coextensive with the grid's aspiration to spatial mastery. For example, multiple ferns located in disparate spaces are brought into the *place* of the grid or typology—"over there" and "elsewhere" are brought *here*. The grid, as Seigert remarks pithily, "is a medium that operationalizes deixis."[37] The Bechers' forms are clearly legible along these lines. But this legibility of their forms as disciplinary space is, I argue, intentional on the Bechers' part. That is, despite the taxidermic function that necessarily attends any one of the Bechers' typologies, the industrial structures almost invariably come to life. Take the following *Water Towers* typology as an example. Any one of these nine photographs confronts us with an overwhelming absence of bodies. And yet, does such a statement not already carve out an initial path towards turning absence into presence? Does it not manufacture a desire to look further into the photograph—to step in, excavating each image for even the faintest trace of life or hint of movement? A ladder, a worker's garden, a fence: these already announce bodies, whether by admitting or denying their entry. With each new finding, we uncover a secret constellation of objects that both validates this work of detection and threatens to wreck it. This bodying forth, as we will see, is not merely a function of interpretation, but inheres within the very structure of the Bechers' forms.

Take, for example, the seemingly insubstantial fact of the bridges, walkways, ladders, and stairs that abound in *Blast Furnaces* or *Coal Bunkers*. To focus on these passages is to pursue bodies, tracking their movement within and across the spaces separating each photograph. Why, however, should we focus on these objects, particularly when they are so often relegated to the margins of the Bechers' images? The Bechers place their subjects almost perfectly at the center of the photograph; each architectural structure is contained within its frame like a precious artifact. But despite this effort to contain these objects within the frame, it is impossible not to crop and cut to some degree. Because each structure is embedded within a larger system, the elements that tend to get cut off by the edges of the image are precisely those bridges, walkways, ladders, stairs, and roads that provide passage between architectural structures and photographic spaces alike. As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari might put it, these are "lines of flight," or "asignifying ruptures" that work "against the oversignifying breaks separating structures or cutting across a single structure."[38]

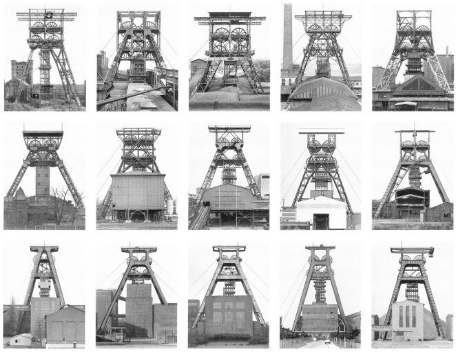


Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Blast Furnaces*, 1970-1989. © Estate Bernd & Hilla Becher



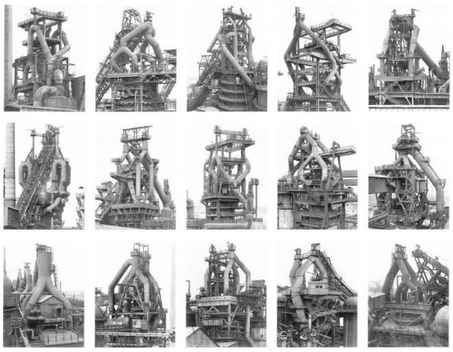
Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Coal Bunkers*, 1974. © Estate Bernd & Hilla Becher

By announcing the incompleteness of the frame, these lines of flight thwart any attempt to view these individual objects as hermetically contained and retrievable in full. Moreover, because the Bechers' photographs are almost invariably seen with others in a typology rather than alone, each photograph *a priori* announces itself as fragment. These physical passages thus serve as lines of flight from the individuating frame, and in so doing thematize the relation of each photograph to the whole. In this way, we might say that the architectural passage works concomitantly with what I will designate here as the *choreographic* function of the Bechers' forms—their staging of an imaginary and unfixable movement of bodies: a movement that comes to preside over their organizational framework as such. This choreographic function is especially significant in light of the original intention of these passages to manage the movement of workers in, around, and among individual structures. However, once these spaces and the passages between them are repurposed within the Bechers' framework, disciplinary space gives way to a kind of ceaseless, unresolved bodily movement. Even if the bodies that originally traversed these spaces are nowhere to be seen, the viewer is compelled to imagine and trace their movement as it is displaced onto the Bechers' grid.By projecting the image of invisible bodies moving through space, the typology works to reveal and ultimately subvert the imposition of the grid onto the space of work. Perhaps it is this kind of labor, this retroactive subversion of disciplinary space, which once compelled Bernd Becher to remark upon the importance of humor in the couple's work: "Humor is a very important factor for us, a certain subversiveness or recalcitrance of the people who have to come to practical terms with instructions issued from farther up and then give free reign to their fantasy."[39]



Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Winding Towers*, 1965-1996. © Estate Bernd & Hilla Becher

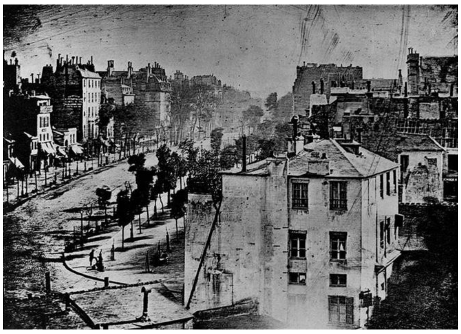
Here it is worth pausing in order to emphasize a crucial distinction between the term *typology*—a term I have invoked, *pace* the artists themselves, in reference to these forms—and the *sequence*, which first appeared in my discussion of Farocki's film. The impulse of the typology, understood as a kind of grid, can be aligned with a will to spatial mastery. As so many grids, the Bechers' typologies to some degree imitate the very structures they depict, for the space of capitalist production operationalizes deixis for maximum efficiency. But whereas the typology, as grid, aims at spatial mastery, the sequence takes *time*, and by extension *movement*, as its subject. Already, in the above analysis, we can begin to see how both of these forms (the grid and the sequence) are at work in the Bechers' work. It could therefore be said that the Bechers, in pitting the grid and the sequence against one another, stage a tension between the taxidermic and the choreographic. By suggesting an untraceable movement across photographs, the Bechers' forms betray an instability at the heart of the grid. And what is brought to the foreground here, more than any sense of spatiotemporal unity or legibility, is the body in its absolute porousness and openness.



Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Blast Furnaces*, 1963-1995. © Estate Bernd & Hilla Becher

Just as the Bechers' framing and grouping strategies suggest these spaces (both those depicted by the photographs and those of the photographic configurations) as being occupied and traversed by bodies, so too do the industrial structures themselves come to resemble so many bodies. Notice how the beams supporting the frame of a winding tower appear as gargantuan, dangling legs, or how the wheels framed within the headgear look like eyes peering back through the flatness. In one piece devoted to blast furnaces, we are reminded more of bodily exchanges and couplings. The piping seems to straddle the furnace body proper, or to be grasping it like some massive hand. At the very least, it should be emphasized that this biomorphic animation is itself a function of the sequential, choreographic function of the Bechers' photographic arrangements. In a given blast furnace typology, for instance, corporeality is evoked not through the cooling ducts individually, but rather through the complex arrangements of those structures across photographs, as if each image were but one phase in a phantasmagoric sequence of grabbing, surrounding, mounting, and coupling. The corporeality of these structures is therefore as much a function of sequencing as it is of how a given architectural type looks. At the level of the individual photograph, the structures appear static and lifeless, but it is only at the level of the sequence that each blast furnace comes to life, constituting itself as a body precisely to the extent that it is cut in and by others.

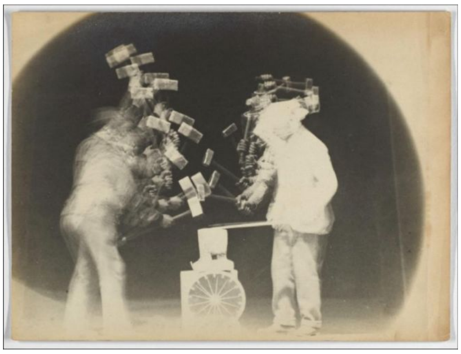
In approaching a shoot, the Bechers' aim is always to present their subject as objectively as possible, and they do this by adhering to a number of strict codes they have devised over the years to maximize formal consistency among their many photographs.[40] For instance, the Bechers employ large format cameras and only work under overcast skies as a means of minimizing extraneous details such as clouds and shadows. As a result of this, exposure time tends to be quite long, taking anywhere between ten seconds and a minute. And as Bernd Becher has pointed out, it is this necessarily long exposure time—itself a function of the purported objectivity of this representational mode—that "explains the absence of people in our pictures."[41] Thus whereas the typological function of their works recalls the *Neue Sachlichkeit* photographers' employment of scientific forms, the Bechers' use of large format photography hearkens back to early photographic technology: namely, to the effects of long exposure in the genre of portraiture.



Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, *Boulevard du Temple, Paris*, 1838. Daguerreotype. Source: Trivium Art History

Here, we could recall Louis Daguerre's well known 1839 photograph of the Boulevard du Temple in Paris. Because early photographic technology required a significant amount of time for light to expose the image, anything moving within the frame would either translate as a blurry mass or would be altogether invisible. This is why the only body we see in Daguerre's image is that of the man receiving a shoe shine. This well-known and seemingly innocuous fact about early photographic technology would have actually had important consequences for questions surrounding labor and its representation at the time. How, in other words, to represent working bodies—ones that moved incessantly, unable to afford a moment of repose—when stillness is the rule? Perhaps appropriately, here it is not the working body so much as the body being-worked-on that appears most prominently. Rather than a concrete form of labor (i.e., shoe shining), what emerges as the subject of photography in this instance is its abstraction. A man with newly-shined boots is the first human to be captured by a photograph, poised already, and in advance of convention, in the attire appropriate to a "proper" photographic subject. The nascent medium of photography could not yet capture the shoeshine nor his labor except as a blurry, indistinct mass. While other bodies were certainly present on the Boulevard du Temple when this photograph was taken, their effacement is but a secondary effect of Daguerre's picture. The crime at the center of this scene lies in the shoeshine figure's abstraction and absorption within the commodity. For this image, the shoe shiner is eclipsed by the shoe (newly imbued with the "shine" of a proper fetish object) and, by extension, the man bearing it. (In this sense, it is perhaps not insignificant that both the photograph and the shiny shoe are both media that traffic in light.) Is photography not seen in the clear light of day when one acknowledges that, in its earliest moments, this medium forestalled the scientific management of work by consigning the worker, in their bodily specificity and concrete historicity, to a ghost world: there where the worker manifests as the very image of latency, poised for disappearance into the commodity?

A similar and perhaps more poignant example of this photographic abstraction laboring bodies comes nearly half a century later, in one of Charles Fremont's uses of Etienne-Jules Marey's chronophotographic method, which captured on a fixed plate "all the successive poses occurring during a complete cycle of the striking of a hammer."[42] Again, what is conspicuous here is not the worker or even the


Etienne-Jules Marey (Photographer: Charles Fremont), *Chronophotograph*, 1894. Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

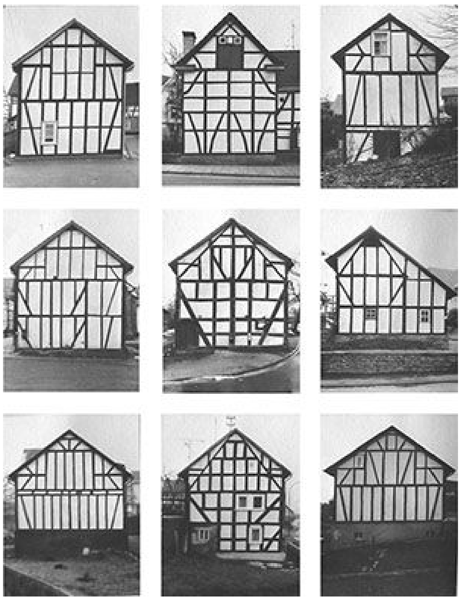
work, but the hammer, the tool—that little detachable appendage of industrial labor.[43] The goal of photography in this instance is to give expression to the tool as the central element of work. The movement of the hammer, seen in a certain legible sequence, is the *sequence* that speaks work. The body is the leftover stuff, the material that gets blurred out by this irrational march of time. Any mutual extension, any hybridizing of human and machine (and attendant decentering of the former) that could arise out of an encounter with a hammer is now foreclosed in the primacy of the photographic apparatus, which abstracts the human being altogether. With his chronophographic method, Marey sought to render the body wholly reducible to the sequence, having sought, as Anson Rabinbach notes, "to decipher the language of duration within the space of the body as well as to map the body in space."[44]

Even if Marey's project is to be understood as an exploration of the body's potentiality, the fact remains that it did so through the framework of scientific management to fundamentally delimit the body's horizon. Different though they may be, in Marey's chronophotographic experiments and Eadweard Muybridge's studies of locomotion the *sequence* is contiguous with industrial modernity itself. Once there subsumed, the body is infinitely divisible, fully available to any manner of fragmentation and display. The Bechers' work forces us into a renewed engagement with the historical implication of photography in modernity's regimentation of time and space. The instances where a coal bunker appears in a given typology could appear analogous to the individual articulations of the hammer and hand in Fremont's image. In both cases, the paradigm of "work" is made legible through a process that either abstracts or totally effaces the body and its labor. The rules to which the Bechers adhere in letting the structures "speak for themselves" issue a host of prohibitions on the body's expression. It is this withdrawal, this absence of bodies that allows these structures to manifest.

In this way, the body is not only absent within each of the Bechers' frames but is the very absence inscribed in that interstitial space within and across frames. This notion, even if it is not finally accurate, is one that must be admitted in any analysis of these forms.

* * *

The photograph, as Thierry de Duve has suggested, tends to read either as a *picture* or *event*: that is, "as natural evidence and live witness (picture) of a vanished past, or as an abrupt artifact (event), a devilish device designed to capture life but unable to convey it."[45] While the snapshot "steals life"—aspiring to represent natural movement while only producing a "petrified analogue of it"—the time exposure "deals with an imaginary life that is autonomous, discontinuous, and reversible, because this life has no location other than the surface of the photograph."[46] Photography thus stages a dialectic between the instant and the event, and these two tendencies are both present at least to some extent in any given photograph, for as de Duve attests, a photograph may be read " *as if* it were instantaneous (a snapshot)" or "*as if* it were a time exposure."[47] Notwithstanding this mutability of the photograph's spatial and temporal registers at the level of reception, each of these tendencies speaks to photography's commutationof life. Whether it is read as snapshot or time exposure, every photograph appears only where the human being has withdrawn. With de Duve, one could say that the body disappears through these two modes of iteration at work within the Bechers' forms. At the same time, however, one must acknowledge that the body's labor can never be determined entirely by the way it is made present, absent, or generally instrumentalized by a given visual regime. As we will see, the Bechers (re)animate this labor precisely by staging a tension between the two forms through which photography has historically inscribed the body as absence: the sequence and the grid, aligned respectively with the snapshot and the time exposure.



Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Framework Houses* , 2011. © Estate Bernd & Hilla Becher

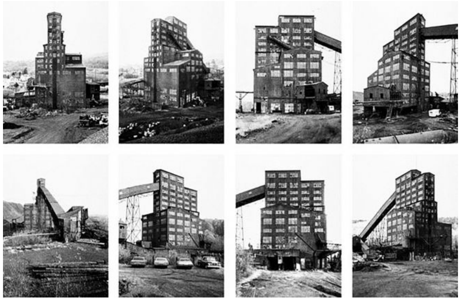
Consider the 9-piece arrangement entitled *Framework houses*. Each image shows one side of a single house, and in a typical fashion, the Bechers photographed each side to appear highly flat: as if it were snatched from three-dimensional space and commuted to the two-dimensional plane of the photograph. This is achieved in large part by the extreme frontality of perspective, which makes the structures almost appear as cut-outs.[48] And yet it is precisely this pronounced flatness that solicits the viewer's body. For each image, by virtue of its indexicality, insists that these houses are in fact objects in three-dimensional space. What emerges is a tension between the quality of these structures as façades and their reality as three-dimensional objects in space. Encountering each incomplete perspective becomes an occasion for perceiving it in its totality. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty reminds us, both fragment and totality are equally real in perception, for perception "is given as the infinite sum of an indefinite series of perspectival views in each of which the object is given but in none of which it is given exhaustively."[49] Even as I recognize these as flat photographs depicting incomplete views of the flat sides of buildings, I already perceive each in its totality. In this sense, I feel compelled to lean sideways when encountering each image, as if I could fill in the gaps in appearance—to touch, grasp, and perceive these structures "in the flesh." I thus gain access as a body by virtue of the same photographic conventions that seek to prohibit my entry as such. It is therefore precisely because the Bechers' photographs suppress "subjective" qualities—and the resulting sense that these houses and spaces are façades, are flat, are dead—that I am compelled to revise and revive these structures and the spaces they inhabit.As a mortification of inhabited space, this pronounced flatness becomes, to tweak Roland Barthes' famous construction, grounds for "flat Life."[50]

Just as flatness opens up into dimensionality, it gives rise to a sense of movement and motion as well. Susanne Lange provides a telling description of the Bechers' process in this regard:

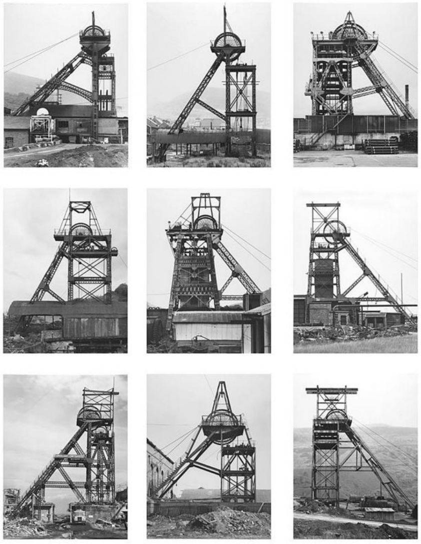
> Depending on the type of structure and the local conditions, [the Bechers] produce sets of three, four, six, or eight different views of the same object. When later arranging the sequence of a series, as if the individual shots were linked to form a film, the motif remains tangible as a three-dimensional body, even though it has been transposed into the two-dimensional medium of photography. While three views capture the basic coordinates of an object—the front (frontal), the side (in profile or frontally), and a shot of one corner and two sides (perspective)—the maximum number of eight angles results from systematically walking around an object and recording it every 45 degrees.[51]

Regardless of whether they take as few as three pictures of a given structure or as many as eight, this sequential aspect of the Bechers' practice betrays a sense of movement and space latent withineach of their photographs. Put another way, there is a choreographic dimension to the way the Bechers approach their subjects.[52] Indeed, I want to argue that this is true on some level of the typological form itself. Here, we might recall my characterization the typology fundamental alignment to the grid. Because it collapses disparate objects, and by extension disparate spaces into *its* place, the grid can be understood fundamentally as a form of spatial mastery. And yet, as the Bechers employ the form, the typology necessarily supports the misreading of each photograph contained therein as depicting merely one perspective of a unitary structure figured throughout the grid. A typology of houses, then, would seem to comprise multiple perspectives of the same house, thereby suggesting a unitary, ideal "House" by collapsing its multiple forms into a single group. By extension, the typology purports to collapse space as well, since the viewer comes to experience a given typology at once as a "three-dimensional body"—consisting of photographs taken of many sides/angles of the same structure—and as a series of two-dimensional, flat, incomplete perspectives of multiple structures. To clarify this point, let us examine one of the Bechers' more unusual pieces which, despite its exceptional character, illustrates a fundamental way in which the grid and the sequence work against one another across their body of work.

The piece in questiondepicts a single structure: a preparation plant facility in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Following this typology as a sequence—from top-to-bottom, left-to-right—once can perceive a continuous movement tracing a circle around the exterior of the plant. The final photograph on the bottom right of this sequence feeds back into the first photograph on the top left, and the loop begins again. This movement at the level of sequence also suggests a body circumambulating the plant in space: both at the level of the space depicted by the photographs and that within which the photographs are grouped. As sight fastens itself to this invisible, extra-photographic body encircling the plant, the activity of the viewer in tracing the relationships



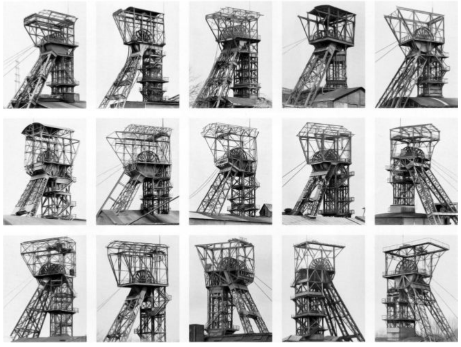
Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Preparation Plant, Harry E. Colliery Coal Breaker, Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania*, 1974. © Estate Bernd & Hilla Becher among photographs comes to resemble that of walking. But just as this imaginary bodily movement acts as a means of suturing these pictures together and the viewer within the sequence, it does not finally resolve the spaces between them, nor does it fix the trajectory of this movement. For even as such a reading relies upon the misapprehension of this work as sequence rather than grid—of *hodos* rather than *taxis*—any final sense of stable, linear movement would be subverted by the ineradicably typological function of the work. This body moving through space, encircling, dancing around this structure cannot be fixed, for a grid is inherently nonlinear. The sequence thus introduces movement into the grid, while the grid introduces space into the sequence. What initially appears as a potentially infinite circle around this figure of industrial modernity, like the ceaseless tick of a workday clock, gives way to a movement in which perspective and bodily orientation are rendered radically variable and open.[53] At last one would have to acknowledge that it is not just a single body encircling this structure, but multiple and variously positioned bodies.


Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Winding Towers*, 1966-1997. © Estate Bernd & Hilla Becher

While *Preparation Plant* is an exceptional case in the Bechers' *oeuvre*, the tension it enacts between grid and sequence is by no means unique to it. For instance, each structure in *Winding Towers* was photographed to make it appear flat, as well as to convey the sense that it is of the same type, and of the same space, as others in the typology. This contributes to the sense that each of these "incomplete" perspectives amounts, finally, to a full, complete perspective—a complete Tower irreducible to any one structure. At the same time, however, this consolidating tendency is subverted by the discontinuous way in which each structure sits within and cuts through its frame.

That discontinuity enacts a tension between movement and stasis across this piece, while the perspectival shifts convey the sense of bodies moving and viewing from various positions in space. Any morphological continuity at work here is thus set against the sheer accumulation of perspectives, of the multiplicity of bodies and bodily positions. And it is finally impossible to apprehend any of this without projecting one's own body onto the grid, without imagining many bodies moving and sensing within and across the spaces of the photographs.

In another, slightly different *Winding Towers* typology, we find a similar interplay between sequence and grid, the choreographic and the taxidermic, which again emerges through the variation in perspective across photographs. In the top row, each photograph figures its object in essentially the same manner. But this continuity falters in the eighth photograph, where the angle appears to abruptly shift. The sequence again shifts back at the eleventh frame, and shifts yet again on the fourteenth frame, until continuity seems to give way to unresolved movement. This stop-motion-like unfolding has several important effects. First, it rescues these structures from the morphological premise of the typology in the first place. That is, whereas the typology is most effective when its formal mechanisms are invisible—that is, when attention is diverted from any sense of it as a sequence—then this falters in the slippage between perspectives. This variability also has the important effect of setting the structures themselves into motion. In this case, rather than conveying the sense of a single body moving through space, this movement is discursive and multidirectional from the outset. The space between images becomes a staging ground for movement on the part of the structures themselves, as well as that of bodies moving among and around them. It is therefore not enough to say that the biomorphic character of the industrial architecture acts as a substitute in the Bechers' work for the lost bodies of industry and the war, for here the structures themselves spring into motion. They are reanimated, and in this movement work against the instrumental logic underlying both sequence and grid. The seemingly static quality of these structures, and the deadening, taxidermic impulse of the typology itself, falter amid this movement, just as any sense of continuous, hodological space is necessarily upset by the very accumulation of perspectives and objects.



Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Winding Towers (Fördertürme)*, 2006. © Estate Bernd & Hilla Becher

The Bechers call up the body as the limit-case of both the sequence and the grid, invoking corporeality precisely in order to cut into the deadening and dying world of industrial capitalism with life, rather than the other way around. Under National Socialism, the body of the worker was made to conform to the shape of beautiful industry, and subsumed by the logic of machinery. The worker was, as Rabinbach attests, "an ornament of technically preconceived and constructed environments... subordinated to the tempo of machines."[54] It is precisely this kind of body that Bernd and Hilla Becher had to acknowledge in taking up the subject of industrial modernity. Around the turn of the century, photography became the handmaiden of the industrialist fantasy of a worker without fatigue, and with assistance from the sequence and the grid would support modernity's project of compressing time and space.[55] This new space and time would be the body's very limits. By the time the Bechers began photographing, the last great era of industrialization was a quickly fading memory, and the body discourse which initially manifested in the scientific management of labor extended well into other sectors of life. For the Bechers, it was not a question of placing the working and workable body on display, but of coming to terms with the body's unworkability. Though it risks simplifying matters, the notion that industrial modernity was to blame for the catastrophically absent bodies of the twentieth century—those of the camps as well as the factories and plants—is an idea that I believe the Bechers felt they had to address. Where else to seek out those absent bodies if not in that "abyss that opened up before us," as Hannah Arendt phrased it?[56]

In pitting the sequence against the grid, choreography against typology, the Bechers' forms work against photography's many instrumentalizations of the body. These bodies, these figures, cannot be cut in any one way, but emerge as it were in the space between representational modes. Insofar as the Bechers' project can be understood as one of human figuration, it does so in order to preserve the body's horizon of meaning and appearance, its openness and potentiality. Rather than subjecting bodies to the sheer violence of the grid or sequence, movement or stasis, the body operates in the Bechers' work as the measure of such categories. This is their labor. They give photography back to bodies.

[1] This work has benefited immensely from conversations Rachel Haidu, Joel Burges, and David Fresko over the years. I am also grateful to the reviewer whose rigorous and insightful feedback greatly enriched this article, as well as the editorial team of *View* —particularly Magda Szcześniak and Krzysztof Pijarski—for their guidance and feedback throughout the publication process. Finally, I wish to thank Max Becher for his support of this project, and for so generously illuminating his parents' work.

[2] Here I am performing the standard reading of the Bechers' photographs as being "devoid of humanity." See, for example, Donald Kuspit's reading: "It is worth noting that the domestic frame structures the Bechers also photograph have been stripped of all signs of human life in the process of being brought to artistic life. They, too, are ghostly ruins. In fact, there are no human beings in the Bechers' world. It is a ghost town ruled

by Death." Donald Kuspit, "Bernd and Hilla Becher," *Artforum* vol. 28, April 1990, 170. In one of the more compelling accounts of the Bechers' work, Blake Stimson characterizes the absence of bodies in their photographs as a function of their very *comportment*: "It is an archive not of bodies but of machines, however, not of the formal, physiognomic variations of deviance but of industriousness, not of those discarded by modernity but of that modernity has shed of itself. The delight offered by their art—in its machinic rhythms and repetitions, in the play of form across the registers of its objectivity and systematicity—is therefore realized only against the revolutionary promise of the modern industry it depicts." Blake Stimson, *The Pivot of the World: Photography and its Nation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 160.

3 Hilla Becher, interview by Angela Grauerholz and Anne Ramsden, "Photographing Industrial Architecture: An Interview with Bernd and Hilla Becher," *Parachute* 22 (Spring 1981): 15. As the Bechers also attest, "an encyclopedic approach" informs their practice as a whole. See: Bernd and Hilla Becher interviewed in Ulf Erdmann Ziegler, "The Bechers' Industrial Lexicon," *Art in America* (June 2002): 98. Cited in Stimson, *The Pivot of the World,* 146.

4 Bernd and Hilla Becher quoted in Gianfranco Maraniello, *Bernd and Hilla Becher at Museo Morandi* (Bologna: Schirmer/Mosel, 2009), 10.

5 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Residual Resemblance: Three Notes on the End of Portraiture," in *Face-off: the Portrait in Recent Art,* ed. Melissa E Feldman (Philadelphia, PA: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania), 11.

6 Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009), 13.

7 My thinking here is indebted to the writing of Judith Butler, who has argued convincingly for the validity and necessity of such categories as "the body" and "the human." Bulter's book *Frames of War* provides a more recent, and especially compelling example of her thinking on this matter: "How does one object to human suffering without perpetuating a form of anthropocentrism that has so readily been used for destructive purposes? Do I need to make plain in what I consider the human to consist? I propose that we consider the way 'the human' works as a differential norm: Let us think of the human as a value and a morphology that may be allocated and retracted, aggrandized, personified, degraded and disavowed, elevated and affirmed. The norm continues to produce the nearly impossible paradox of a human who is no human, or of the human who effaces the human as it is otherwise known. Wherever there is the human, there is the inhuman; when we now proclaim as human some group of beings who have previously not been considered to be, in fact, human, we admit that the claim to 'humanness' is a shifting prerogative. Some humans take their humanness

for granted, while others struggle to gain access to it. The term 'human' is constantly doubled, exposing the ideality and coercive character of the norm: some humans qualify as human; some humans do not. When I use the term in the second of these clauses, I do nothing more than assert a discursive life for a human who does not embody the norm that determines what and who will count as a human life." Butler, *Frames of War*, 76.

8 David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 130.

9 Harvey writes, "For the ancient Greeks, for example, 'measure' went far beyond the idea of 'comparison with an external standard'. It was regarded as 'a form of insight into the essence of everything' perceived through the senses and the mind. Such insight into inner meanings and proportionalities was considered fundamental in achieving clarity of perception of the overall realities of the world and, hence, to living a harmonious and well-ordered life. Our modern views… have lost this subtlety and become relatively gross and mechanical, although some of our residual terminology (as in the notion of 'measure' in music and art) indicates the broader meaning… The thesis I want to pursue here is that the *manner* of this return to 'the body as the measure of all things' is crucial to determining how values and meanings are to be constructed and understood." Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 97-98.

10 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 361.

11 Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 130.

12 Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 14. As Judt goes on, "Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Bohemia-Moravia and, especially, France made significant involuntary contributions to the German war effort. Their mines, factories, farms and railways were directed to servicing German requirements and their populations were obliged to work at German war production: at first in their own countries, later on in Germany itself…" Judt, *Postwar*, 16.

13 Judt, *Postwar*, 14.

14 "Mass death and genocide," as Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer contend, make the twentieth-century German history "a story of absence and disappearance, of lives not lived, of lives threatened and endangered, and of lives haunted by death long after the threat to survival was gone." Konrad Hugo Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 353.

15 W.G. Sebald, *A Natural History of Destruction*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Random

House, 2003),34.

16 Sebald, *A Natural History of Destruction,* 34

17 Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 180-181. Among other things, Herzog's study furnishes an extensive, insightful, and generous reading of the famous Kommune 1 photograph.

18 Reimut Reiche, *Sexuality and Class Struggle,* trans. Susan Bennett (New York: Praeger, 1971), 50-51, 67. Cited in Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*, 181. Tony Judt takes a similar position to that of Reiche when he suggests that the employment of nudity in the Kommunard's photograph "was explicitly designed to recall pictures of helpless, naked concentration camp bodies. Look, it said: first came Hitler's victims, now the rebelliously unclothed bodies of Maoist revolutionaries. If Germans can look at the truth about *our* bodies, they will be able to face other truths as well." Judt, *Postwar,* 419

19 Uli Linke, "Archives of Violence," in *Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide,* ed. Alexander Laban Hinton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 243.

20 The Anti-Fascist League quoted in Linke "Archives of Violence," 252.

21 Linke, "Archives of Violence," 253. Emphasis mine.

22 See: Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* vol. 39 (Oct. 1986): 3-64.

23 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy,* trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). 35.

24 See: Dziga Vertov, "WE: Variant of a Manifesto," in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov,* trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 7.

25 Blake Stimson points out, "there is an important difference between the Bechers' deployment of the typology and its traditional uses in biology, zoology, and botany, the cumulative effect of the typological method as it is applied in the Bechers' life project does not provide greater knowledge of the processes or history of their subject. Instead, the use of rhythm and repetition endows the buildings they photograph with the 'anonymity' or abstract form they seek (by divorcing meaning from original purpose and everyday social function) rather than with scientific specificity and, in turn, allows us to read them ahistorically and extrasocially and appreciate them as autonomous aesthetic objects or 'sculpture.'" Blake Stimson, *The Pivot of the World,* 149.

26 Susanne Lange, *Bernd and Hilla Becher: Life and Work* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 200. As Lange writes, "In biology, for example, comparative morphology provides the basis for researching the diversity of species, which is then studied in terms of analogies and convergences to identify the type of a species… The procedure of typological classification rests on exact observation and collecting, labeling, and grouping species, objects, or information in order to arrive at conclusions about an overarching pattern or a construction plan characterizing a group." Lange, *Bernd and Hilla Becher*, 51

27 Walther Petry, "Bindung an die Dinge," *Das Kunstblatt* 13, no. 8 (1929): 246-250. Cited in Sergiusz Michalski, *New Objectivity: Painting, Graphic Art and Photography in Weimar Germany 1919-1933* (Cologne: Taschen, 2003), 182.

28 Michalski, *New Objectivity,* 182

29 Hans-Christian Adam, *Karl Blossfeldt 1865-1932* (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen, 1999), 17.

30 Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real,* trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 97. Also see: Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October* 9 (Summer, 1979): 50-64.

31 Xenophon, *Memorabilia. Oeconomicus. Symposium. Apology.*, trans. E. C. Marchant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), 439, cited in Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques,* 97.

32 Xenophon, *Memorabilia. Oeconomicus. Symposium. Apology*,97.

33 Siegert, *Cultural Techniques,* 97.

34 Siegert, *Cultural Techniques,* 97-98. Emphasis mine.

35 "As a cultural technique, the grid has a triple function. First, it is an imaging technology that by means of a given algorithm enables us to project a three-dimensional world onto a two- dimensional plane. That is, it is a type of representation that posits an antecedent geometrical space in which objects are located and that submits the representation of objects to a theory of subjective vision. Second, the grid is a general diagrammatic procedure that uses specific addresses to store data that can be implemented in the real as well as in the symbolic (grids may be two- or three-dimensional, or 2D/3D hybrids). Third, the grid serves to constitute a world of objects imagined by a subject. To speak with Heidegger, it is a *Gestell* or 'enframing' aimed at the availability and controllability of whatever is thus conceived; it addresses and symbolically manipulates things that have been transformed into data." Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*

, 98.

36 Here I am thinking of Michel Foucault's famous discussion of disciplinary space from *Discipline and Punish*. "Disciplinary space tends to be divided into as many sections as there are bodies or elements to be distributed. One must eliminate the effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable and dangerous coagulation; it was a tactic of anti-desertion, anti-vagabondage, anti-concentration. Its aim was to *establish presences and absences*, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct, of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits. It was a procedure, therefore, aimed at knowing, mastering and using. Discipline organizes an analytical space." Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 143. Emphasis mine.

37 "[The grid] allows us to link deictic procedures with chains of symbolic operations that have effects in the real." Siegert, *Cultural Techniques,* 98.

38 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 1987), 10.

39 Bernd Becher quoted in Lange, *Bernd and Hilla Becher*, 191. This is where I take issue with Thierry de Duve's identification of the "admirable reserve" on display in the Bechers's work. De Duve suggests that the Bechers' typologies are "devoid of style," which sets their work apart in his mind from the "post-modern aesthetic of appropriation." See: Thierry de Duve, *Bernd and Hilla Becher: Basic Forms* (New York: te Neues Publishing Company, 1993), 9.

40 First, the Bechers photograph in black and white, which is itself a means of minimizing detail and dimension. They also shoot each structure head-on and frontally, and at a height that keeps lines straight and minimizes angularity. Finally, by photographing in soft light conditions with large format cameras, the Bechers are able to minimize contrast and shadows as well as depth of field. This narrows the distance between foreground and background, further contributing to this overall flattening effect. There are some exceptions to these rules in the Bechers' body of work, but they are few.

41 Lange, *Bernd and Hilla Becher,* 189.

42 Etienne-Jules Marey quoted in Rabinbach, *The Human Motor,* 116.

43 Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 116.

44 Rabinbach, *The Human Motor,* 94-95. As Marey declared, “All movement is the product of two factors: time and space; to know the movement of a body is to know the series of positions which it occupies in space during a series of successive instants." Marey quoted in Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 94.

45 Thierry de Duve, “Time Exposure and Snapshot: The Photograph as Paradox,” *October* 5 (Summer, 1978), 113. In a similar vein, Rudolf Arnheim provides a compelling account of the paradoxical function of the time exposure and snapshot. Arnheim’s well-known discussion focuses on the issue of exposure time and how early photographs cast a sense of timelessness over everything they captured. *What they captured seemed to transcend time, especially because of the fact that the medium effaced movement. It was more like painting in this sense, since subjects had to be still for a long time in order to be captured, whereas any motion seemed to occur outside of time and outside of the particular, idiosyncratic motions of bodies.* “Hence,” Arnheim writes, “the enviable timelessness of the early photographs. A sort of otherworldly wisdom was symbolized by the fact that any momentary motion vanished automatically from those metallic plates... Whatever the style and purpose of art, its goal had always been the representation of the lasting character of things and actions. Even when depicting motion, it was the abiding nature of that motion which the artist portrayed.” See: Rudolf Arneim, “On the Nature of Photography,” *Critical Inquiry* 1, no. 1. (Sep., 1974), 150.

46 De Duve, “Time Exposure and Snapshot,” 114-116.

47 De Duve, “Time Exposure and Snapshot,” 118. Emphasis mine.

48 It is interesting in this sense to note that Bernd Becher originally intended to construct collages from the individual industrial structures he photographed. He would photograph individual portions of industrial landscapes, and then physically cut those individual photographs and paste them together. When brought together on a single plane, the result would be a kind of fragmentary panorama. Becher abandoned this process early on, however, after encountering the work of another artist employing a similar process.

49 Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes: “It is not accidental for the object to be given to me in a ‘deformed’ way, from the place which I occupy. That is the price of its being ‘real’. The perceptual synthesis thus must be accomplished by the one who can at once delimit certain perspectival aspects in the object, the only ones actually given, and at the same time go beyond them. This subject, which takes up a point of view, is my body insofar as it is a perceptual and practical field, insofar as my gestures have a certain scope and

circumscribe as my domain the whole group of objects familiar to me. Perception is here understood as a reference to a whole which can be grasped, in principle, only through certain of its parts or aspects. Because of this, the object that one perceives must not be thought of as an ideal unity in the possession of the intellect, like a geometrical notion, for example; it is rather a totality open to a horizon of an indefinite number of perspectival views which blend with one another according to a given style, which defines the object in question… Thus there is a paradox of immanence and transcendence in perception. Immanence, because the perceived object would not be able to be foreign to the one who perceives; transcendence, because it always involves a beyond of what is actually given. And these two elements of perception are not, properly speaking, contradictory. For if we reflect on this notion of perspective, if we reproduce the perceptual experience in our thought, we see that the kind of evidence proper to the perceived, the appearance of 'something', requires both this presence and this absence." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 16-17.

50 "Contemporary with the withdrawal of rites," writes Barthes, "photography may correspond to the intrusion, in our modern society, of an asymbolic Death, outside of religion, outside of ritual, a kind of abrupt dive into literal Death. Life / Death: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print. With the photograph, we enter into flat Death." See: Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 92.

51 Lange, *Bernd and Hilla Becher*, 44-45.

52 As the artists' son, Max Becher, has noted, "[Bernd and Hilla Becher] did speak of the objects as having personalities, their photos as portraits, and the typologies as *choreographies and dances*." Max Becher, email correspondence with author, March 1, 2017. Emphasis mine.

53 An intriguing parallel to my reading here can be found in Yve-Alain Bois' discussion of El Lissitzky's Prouns. In an essay from 1988, Bois characterizes Lissitzky's Prouns as pointing out the "radical reversibility" of a work's position in space and in relation to our bodies. Bois writes that the artist "wanted to destroy the spectator's certainty and the usual viewing position: facing the painting, facing the horizon. This position is clearly anthropomorphic. It is linked to our standing on the ground, to our submission to the law of gravity; it is the plastic manifestation of the rationalist philosophy of conscience (the bourgeois philosophy of the subject which Lissitzky associates with monocular perspective)… In order to conceive the painting as an abstract model, we must cut all connection with phenomenal space, with the space of the world which is oriented

around and from the pole of our bodies... In his Prouns, Lissitzky wanted to invent a space in which orientation is deliberately abolished: the viewer should no longer have a base of operations, but must be made continually to choose the coordinates of his or her visual field, which thereby becomes variable." See: Yve-Alain Bois, "El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility," *Art in America* (Spring, 1988), 174.

54 Anson Rabinbach, "The Aesthetics of Production in the Third Reich," *Journal of Contemporary History* 11 (1976), 68.

55 Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 11.

56 Hannah Arendt to Karl Jaspers, August 17, 1946, in *Hannah Arendt Karl Jaspers Correspondence 1926-1969*, ed. Lotte Kohler (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 54.