

The Way Wesely's Photographs Take Their Time.

In recent years, it has been possible to discern an attitude in the way Michael Wesely sees himself that would suggest a specific attempt on his part to implement his artistic ideas in a more concentrated and intensive manner. We are not talking about a change in strategy here, rather a considered artistic reorientation in connection with a critically self-assured revision of his overall production, which has led him to re-examine his archived works once more. This current selection of images represents Wesely's commitment to this revision; it contains largely new examples as well as some older images, occasionally reverting to spacious photographs, taking details from them, and presenting them in enlarged formats as images in their own right. There is a fresh impetus to all this. And if one might consider the still life with flowers from 2006 as the most obvious example of such a reanimation, then one might even go so far as to think that Wesely is actually wishing himself the best of luck here—luck for a relativisation of what had initially been a dominant, conceptual distance in favour of a more sensual proximity to his motifs.

Such a thorough appraisal and reappraisal of one's own artistic development invariably also touches the fundamentals of one's work that would otherwise hardly be given any more consideration, inasmuch as they are taken for granted in any case. Wesely's reorientation is not concerned with technical refinement, rather with the medium itself. One almost feels compelled here to make use of such an old-fashioned expression as »the essence of photography«, and to recall the prescient analysis volunteered by Balzac in his novel *Le Cousin Pons* of how an image comes into being. Balzac writes: »If anyone had approached Napoleon and told him that a building or a person casts an image at all times into the atmosphere, that every existing object has a spectral, intangible double which may thus become visible, the Emperor would have had him committed to Charenton.« Naturally, Balzac is referring to Daguerre, whereby it is especially appealing to him to link the spectral aspect of »the fleeting image which is forced to tarry a while by means of the light-sensitive plate« with occultism and clairvoyance. Such analogies to the materialisation of the spiritual, as they were conceived in the scientifically ambitious 19th century imagination, could easily be discarded as obsolete had they not been transferred to the technical producibility of dream worlds long before that. Nevertheless, Balzac's commentary on the genesis of photography touches upon the question of all questions, which Wesely repeatedly tries to pose in a variety of ways with each individual group of works. The question is simply: what can one see in the photographs? Or, to use his own words that succinctly define his personal, artistic position: Wesely is interested in seeing what »his camera has seen«.

Introductions of this kind are usually followed by a description of the particular circumstances upon which the art of photography necessarily depends, by details of the lenses of particularly useful cameras, the film stock and exposure time, the photographer's position and angle of vision, and so on. Nor do commentators ever tire of reiterating the view that the camera is not actually capable of doing what is traditionally imputed to a technically produced image, namely to depict reality »realistically«— the differences in analogue and digital processes notwithstanding. However, wherever media-specific explanations abound, then more often than not thematic substance flies out of the window. The distant miracle, to paraphrase Balzac's description, of buildings and people casting an image at all times into the atmosphere is bereft of the viewer, who not only admires those spectral emissaries, but also the physical bodies that discharge them.

Where is the artistic subject's affiliation with the object of his or her attention, where is the indication of his or her thematic bias and impulse, and where is its reciprocation?

Anyone developing an interest in the themes in Wesely's photographs, i.e. what they refer to and what they represent, very quickly finds him or herself in a predicament. To be sure, there are building sites, stadia, landscapes, streets, market scenes, parks, interiors, and portraits; however, it is often the title itself which indicates the image's provenance, which tells us to where we should trace it back or, indeed, which location we have been invited to visit. Sometimes, the identification of the subject depicted in this way is made all the more difficult by its indeterminate nature, to the extent that it would be more precise to speak of the »depicted entity«. The indeterminate quality—predicated in formal terms on the principle of the image's lack of focus—can be read as the rendering of the subject's movement, to which we shall return later. What appears to be indistinct turns out to be the decidedly distinct traces of specific processes captured by the camera, for example, the movement of individuals or large groups of individuals. Such traces take on the form of a delicate, diaphanous mist, a smudging of contours, like transparent gossamer made up of innumerable moments; or alternately, a concentration of the same to form a billowing fog. However, in so doing, the visible »entity« always comprises present or adopted, more or less distinguishable, figures, colours, and light signals, which have found their way into the image one after another, or simultaneously; looking back on the temporal extension, one might rephrase this and say: the ones that have remained after having superimposed themselves upon, disturbed, and finally released one another into the void.

In view of the above, it might be admissible at this point, without necessarily thinking about what is yielded artistically, to take account of the wealth of experiences, human relationships, preferences, occurrences, interests, and observations that Wesely has to thank for his photographs. Wesely is fascinated by large construction sites and no less by demolition sites; he perceives urban complexes as manifestations of a social organism, which is by turns subject to injury, or healing; he considers the emergence of both public buildings and sites as the expression of a concerted public endeavour to the same degree that, obversely, he associates the dismantling of a structure piece by piece and hour upon hour with the disappearance of its (very own) dispensation; for example, associating the demolition of the *Palast der Republik*, in what was formerly East Berlin, with the disappearance of the GDR. Public life stimulates his attention wherever it manifests itself. He registers the flow of traffic, he joins the hustle and bustle of busy street markets, mingles with the crowds at mass events (such as the *Oktoberfest* in Munich), allows demonstrations to march by in front of him (such as the May Day rallies), or goes to a football stadium to observe the movements and rhythms that the game elicits from the pulsating throng of spectators. Wesely lives life in full cognisance of the totality of mass global communication. His travels have taken him to Brazil, South Korea, India, and the USA, yet he has sought neither the much vaunted, nostalgic *wellness* of mass tourism, nor those bespoke adventure holidays in exotic climes. What makes him into a traveller wherever he happens to be at a given moment are the feelings *per se* of being en route and »desire for the world«. And so he allows himself to be driven to the »End of the World«, namely to a beach in California by the same name, because the Pacific Ocean impedes the westerly push of the continent—a million miles away from the opposite shores of the Far East. Nevertheless, it is the aspect of a different, and yet so similar, everyday life that arrests his eye—the seemingly insignificant details, the waiting around on benches, queuing indolently in front of kiosks, entertainment, the

manifestations of conviviality, in short, the human condition of being-preoccupied-by-something-or-other and the sheer fact of events taking place. He also encounters nature as a traveller. However, he doesn't venture out into it—out into the open—nor does he penetrate it as one might penetrate the darkness of a jungle; he retains it before him at all times, at once curious about how it looks, receptive to its moods, and fascinated by the ineluctability of the horizon, the eye's wandering barrier on the border between heaven and earth. He seems to find himself in a state of happy concord with nature when experiencing it while travelling through it, borne by a river so that, whilst on the boat, he can have the feeling of the land moving past him and allowing him to view it *en passant*.

Despite active participation in life, with all its public manifestations and chance occurrences, Wesely by no means feels duty bound by any artistic genre as such. Nor does he see himself as a photojournalist producing reportage. His point of view is literally that of a photographer amidst human beings, pure and simple. It is true that he maintains an overview with his camera at all times, but he consciously avoids the somewhat aloof position of the elevated vantage point with commanding views of spectacular scenes, including the kind of stagings that Siegfried Kracauer once referred to as »the mass ornament«. He continually affirms the vividness of his motifs, and in so doing is chiefly concerned with typical features, that is to say, the characteristic element of a given situation, of an image that sticks in the mind's eye because the observer believes he or she can remember something similar, even when it is difficult to identify the image with a specific view. Wesely has constantly invoked the reference to reality in his works. He understands himself as an observer, who luckily is able to find the right images, but not as someone who uses photographs to make reality subservient. Reality always takes precedence over the image. He is fond of quoting a counter example, namely that a star such as Madonna only allows herself to be photographed with a child in order to do justice to the (implicit) mother-and-child icon. Nothing could be further from his mind than to mistake the motif for the image and vice versa. He would find it aberrant to imagine reality to be a representation of the image, just as the feedback generated by the power of the image on reality would appear suspect to him.

In view of the sheer amount of reality, in the very condition of its vividness, that Wesely is at pains to capture and reproduce, it follows that any biographically-based monograph must commence with the phrase: »in the beginning was the camera.« He grew up with this apparatus, and the magic of capturing those Balzacian »fleeting images« in a dark cage, where they are further pinned down by chemicals before finally emerging as photographs, must have fascinated him from the very start, to such an extent that he is still obsessed with it to this day. A comprehensive collection of home-made cameras is evidence that Wesely has meticulously explored and made use of the elementary functions of the camera. His comparatively primitive optical equipment, which is not so far removed from that of its inventors, would—as it was soon to become apparent—have some extraordinary consequences.

The first decisive step was taken when, having finished his studies, Wesely turned the contact sheets of 12,000 photographs into the object of a conceptual »synopsis«, because he couldn't quite decide which of the experimental, pictorial modalities should become the one to pursue further. Thus, he went out into the world with nothing other than his camera and an unprejudiced eye for the world's infinite array of possibilities—»with nothing« meaning simply without a preconceived thematic angle or a particular way of looking, in the sense of a »school«. He was

fundamentally sceptical about salient doctrines and conventions within photography. There was nothing more questionable to him than Cartier-Bresson's well-established, conventionally dogmatic »decisive moment« in photography, and nothing incensed him more than the blatancy of the minutely detailed, uniformly precise, supposedly realistic rendition that necessarily turned the viewer, as he maintained, into a voyeur. As if to prove that he would succeed in liberating himself radically from traditional ideas, he defined his starting point in purely experimental terms. He experimented with the functional changes of the camera obscura by means of aperture size and exposure time and thus induced a level of conceptuality into his photography, which in turn had an effect that could scarcely have been predicted.

Examples from this foundation phase include the conceptual objects in the series »Camera Controversa« from Salzburg in 1990, the striped pictures of the »Palazzi di Roma«, which were taken using a slit-shaped aperture, or indeed the long time-lapse exposures from »Reisebilder« (Travel Photographs). Wesely's »Camera Controversa« should be understood as a box into which one can look from the rear (where the photo-sensitive plate would normally be situated in the camera obscura) and see distorted images of the respective, individual urban motifs on the surrounding, chemically coated plates. In art historical terms, the process may well be reminiscent of anamorphosis, although Wesely clearly cannot install a lens in the mind of the observer to rectify the distortion, that is to say, provide an in-focus image. In the »Roman Palaces« series, the slit-shaped aperture brings about a registering of the motif in the form of vertical, parallel, uneven, coloured stripes, i.e. of images that suggest something abstract and therefore differ enormously from the usual appearance one might expect, given their respective titles. At the same time, the use of the operational concept guarantees the reality content of the striped photographs. Nevertheless, anyone with local knowledge can, as Wesely readily stresses, recognise the palace in question by virtue of characteristic colour tonalities, despite the patent level of »abstraction«.

The photographs on the topic of »travel time« are similarly imbued with conceptual reality. The time-lapse exposure of a particular railway platform matches the scheduled duration of a journey from the station of departure to a distant destination; moreover, it professes to capture everything that takes place on the platform during the elapsed period. What is meant here is not the course of the journey itself, rather the presentation of the journey as a metaphor for a period of time, which can be measured and conceptually anticipated. The anticipation may well be motivated, in concrete terms, by the desire to travel without necessarily being able to travel, for example, when an individual is denied the right to leave a country.

The camera sits out the period of time duly elapsing whilst the station backdrop—replete with all the vague traces of activity taking place there—provides visible proof of the reality of the imagined period of time.

The cited examples no longer feature in Wesely's current retrospective appraisal of his earlier creative phases. Instead, he has recourse today to some of the other photographs from the nineteen nineties, which he took at art seminars and in art publishers' offices. Wesely set up his camera in places where people study art, where art is talked about, and where art is *de facto* organised. There is a kind of challenge residing in this simple fact, which is characteristic of the

radicality of Wesely's attitude. For in a similar way to the »travel photographs«, the motif itself—in this case art, or whatever one might take art to be—eludes direct scrutiny. The camera can only take in what there is to see when people are allegedly preoccupied with the pursuit of art. With his apparently »unarty« form of photography, Wesely is not only indirectly invoking something akin to the ideality of art; but as a participating observer, he is also simultaneously confronting his own work, with its inherent claim to be art. He puts up for discussion the paradoxical visuality of time-lapse photography in the context of art. On the one hand, time-lapse photography is supposed to allow its subject to remain visible, but on the other, it entails the necessary abandonment of an equally clear and momentary view in favour of a more diffuse registration of events, over what might be an extremely extended period of time. Exactly how radical this challenge is becomes clear, when as a viewer, one finds oneself facing the question of the actual content of the photographs, inasmuch as the photograph coheres in any shape or form to the idea one might associate with the motif. Viewed in this way, time-lapse photography appears to be an artistic strategy aimed at rendering something visible that under normal circumstances eludes visibility.

The photograph »Abendakt« (Evening Life Study) covers a two hour life drawing class at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts. All fixed objects, in so far as they were not repositioned during the session, are clearly visible: the model's podium, the adjacent radiators, stools, drawing boards, an easel. The only residual traces of the life model and the students are merely schematic, hinting at their temporary presence, whereby the suggestion of students sitting in the foreground gives the viewer a position of proximity. The photograph further suggests a process, the thematic determination of which once again eludes depiction. It is not possible to see how one learns life drawing; objectively speaking, it is possible at best to register the series of movements involved whilst one is learning. Over and above this, the scene can be construed as a performance of a tradition, in which the life model represents living nature in the context of the art school. Wesely reacts to this art historical paradigm by encountering it with the concept of a temporary photographic acknowledgement of the living. In this sense, »Abendakt« can be regarded as an almost self-referential icon of Wesely's camera art.

The series »Bilder und Wörter« (Images and Words) functions in a similar manner. As the titles indicate, the photographs were taken during two, approximately thirty-minute lectures held at the Munich Academy. It is neither possible to see the speaker, nor would it ever be possible to render visible the words being spoken; the camera has merely registered the behaviour of the audience during the lecture. One might speak of a behaviourist study, provided that whatever one was looking for would be stated somehow. However, as this is clearly not the case, it remains open as to whether the internal participation on the part of the audience in the lecture being delivered can ever make it to the surface of the image.

In the truest senses of the word, the photographs of Helmut Friedel's and Kasper König's offices are both more overt and yet, at the same time, enigmatic. The camera was positioned with an open shutter for a whole year in front of the directors' desks in order to capture what was unfolding there. However, the resulting, glassily transparent, overall impression would be relatively meaningless to the viewer were it not for the title which helped both to localise the image and to charge it thematically. What is being documented here is a certain industriousness

serving the purpose of the dissemination of art. Although the physical presence of those concerned has only left a delicate trace behind, the images are brimful of the hustle and bustle of human activity. The furniture is repeatedly repositioned, books are picked up and then put down for a while, papers are rolled up or discarded onto the floor, and order is structured and restructured once more. The feeling of »this is how it was« is indelibly stamped on the images, and yet the receiving subject cannot emulate or recreate the camera's receptive acumen. What once was, has now fallen silent, whereas the clarity of those things that are still visible, recreates the relatively static dispensation of objects, which are self-evidently not utilised in the absence of their users. Each one of the black and white motifs presented here is identified as a detail in the respective title, as a section, one might add, of an older image originally conceived as a stereo photograph. By means of accentuations of this sort, Wesely is clearly linking an attempt at concentration with a specific image, which, although it is contained within the larger stereo image itself, could nevertheless be equally viewed on its own merits and thus come to the fore more intensively. Incidentally, the reduction of the overall view would indicate he is by no means a specialist for registering the look of interiors. Alongside these older photographs, several of his newer images are derived from the enlargements of details, among them a good number that only caught Wesely's attention when developing the films. This accentuation and bringing closer of selected sections serves to underline the transition mentioned at the outset, from a distanced, conceptual approach to a more sensual one.

Wesely is now working more intensely than ever before on the mediality of the photographic image. He travels to the very edge of the visible in order to highlight what there is to see, precisely in the very moment it eludes us. He would like to know the liminal properties of the invisible, what messages the metering of time sends out and how resilient the photo-sensitive receptor might be. Could it be possible then that he might have inadvertently plunged into Balzac's visionary nether world of those omnipresent, »fleeting images«?

The blurred appearance of the image plays a decisive role in this context. The word »blurred« or the phrase »out of focus« imply that the viewer can envisage an image that is actually in focus and not blurred, because he believes he knows what the depicted object looks like. In so doing, he is reliant upon the static nature of the object, which confirms his supposition that photography fixes its object as reliably as he does. Deviations from the conventional norm are traced back to the possibility that either the camera or the depicted object might have inadvertently moved. However, if the eye, intent on fixing the object from an out-of-focus image, immediately infers the condition of the thing depicted, then the impression of something spectral, something altogether ghostly emerges. Someone like Balzac was intent on seeing phantoms in daguerreotypes, inasmuch as haptic qualities had been lost to photography to an even greater extent than to painting at that time. The staged absence of focus now appears all the more ready to offer a hint of something »inconceivable«, in the truest sense of the word. To counter this somewhat naïve way of seeing, one might immediately argue that Wesely allows the viewer to look through specific temporal windows, duly informing him beforehand about the cause of the images' blurred appearance. It should be added that we have long since learned to recognise particular examples of out-of-focus imagery—determined by extended or repeated exposure—as the visual residues of temporally-determined processes. Anyone able to muster the necessary degree of attention can perceive something akin to the substance of the depicted image's actual duration in the gradations, as they gradually move out of focus from initial clarity. Twenty

minutes have elapsed and a flower is still in razor-sharp focus, whereas less can be seen of people at the table the more they move around, or change their posture, or their relative positions. Wesely has extended the remit of photography like no other in terms of such—occasionally extreme—possibilities. It is always possible to see the sequence of events, or indeed concurrent events, provided that the results haven't been exposed beyond all recognition, or have been absorbed into the background to a great extent, for occasionally time clusters emerge in the case of particularly long time-lapse images that can scarcely be unravelled despite the attendant information.

We might be able to get ourselves neatly off the hook here by arguing that the privilege of art resides in its duty to present us with puzzles. However, when one also tries to get to the bottom of the blurriness, one necessarily encounters problems, already voiced by Mark Gisbourne in a notable essay regarding the aspect of ontology in photography. Gisbourne ponders the relation between the virtual image with its mass of information and the »fundamental structural units of the nervous system«, the infinite number of the recipient's »neurons«. He writes in this context about a »literal embodiment or doubling of the perception of time, which is [brought before] our eyes«. It is easily possible to recognise in this formulation the paradox, practised by Wesely, of the static appearance of moving entities, which conversely resides in the ontological discrepancy between time and object, that is to say, between function and substance. As soon as one makes use of this idea and switches from the time track to that of the object world, the visual phenomenon of blurred focus takes on pronounced semantic significance. In this way, a lack of visibility also means a lack of figurativeness, be it that the object has lost its contours due to movement, or that it could only be seen for a short time. Even in a blurred state, a residue of the »sender« is still apparent, so to speak. Thus, something that has long since vanished still appears to be present. What we experience in Michael Wesely's photographs is the presence of the absent in terms of its absence, or put differently, the transitory visibility on the long since invisible.

When time is stopped, the figurative is subject to the control of duration or the passage of time. It doesn't take much for us to imagine that objects forfeit their very substance in effect when exposed to other temporal circumstances. They remain objects only for as long as we are prepared to continue to treat them as such. Conversely, in certain circumstances we doubt their consistency if they only make a brief appearance. In this case it seems as though we have been deceived or presented with a falsehood. When we abandon a binding temporal frame of reference, which we do along with all objects when we are asleep, we duly give free rein to their protean manifestations in dreams. However, the camera doesn't sleep. Nor does Wesely photograph dreams, even if some of his photographs have wonderfully dreamlike qualities. The simultaneity of the sequential or intrinsically non-simultaneous granted him is due to a technical transmission manoeuvre that allows him to let reality present itself in whatever temporal condition it desires. When Balzac speaks of fleeting images that are forced to abide on the photosensitive plate, Wesely for his part does not simply summon up entities by virtue of their factual, momentary representation, but captures their sojourn, their transformation, their movement or their disappearance. In consequence, he is less concerned with creating the impression that things are what they seem, rather he lets them unfold instead. He is ultimately fascinated by this very unfolding, this happening.

Admittedly, we are used to following sequences of events as they unfold with the means of narration, and in this way Wesely's visual openness for events as they unfold relies upon narrative supplement. A decisive role is played here by what Marcel Broodthaers might have called the difference between the static and the animated image. As Wesely does not film the action, merely storing what is taking place at that moment in time, in order to superimpose once more what has been stored with the ongoing storage of yet more images, or indeed to forget about it altogether, it is not possible for the viewer to comprehend the action directly. Whatever is missing from the image in terms of movement has to be balanced out through the imagination. Precisely because a great number of details are lost and the temporal windows admit such a lot of blurring, a good deal of what is happening in front of the camera cannot be easily distinguished, despite the fact that the images contain a latent surplus value of an imaginative, narrational nature. Motivated by the vividness inherent in what is unfolding, they are able—as Gisbourne has described—to evoke imaginings in the mind of the viewer as well as to unleash projections that transcend the image's own terms of reference. And a motif's aesthetically communicative quality stands itself in good stead particularly when the images relate thematically to people and reproduce human activity. The obverse is also true when a person is portrayed. Whoever is being portrayed by Wesely over a specific number of minutes can actually contribute to his or her pictorial presence by keeping still.

However, despite all the interest in interpreting motifs, we should not forget that the images—often sweepingly referred to as a kind of compliment courtesy of aesthetics—also speak for themselves. Not every mark, not each individual trace needs to be deciphered and recognised as a message from the »originator« or as a reflex of an impulse. Why shouldn't the forms and play of colours appeal to us for their own sakes, and for what reason should the depicted activity or events insist on being processed narratively for them to be intelligible? Whatever the answer might be, we rely upon light. Semiotically speaking, light is blind to the visibility of what is happening, and Wesely guides the light in such a way that allows the images to emerge, which he then hopes to wrest from reality. Wesely records what ever his camera is pointing at, but he is able to steer away from the kind of images we are accustomed to by means of unusual and extremely elongated exposure times. As suggested at the outset, this technically produced deviation is predicated upon a correlative deviation in the conditioning of our perception. In so doing Wesely, not only uses light in order to illustrate the elapsed time of the occurrence, which would normally escape our attention, he also implicitly makes it thematically significant. He takes light for what it is in the same way that one might take a word at its word. Light is always there and it is capable of both clarifying or obscuring the images it has sought out as the case may be, or even obliterating them altogether, according to the intensity or time apportioned by the photographer.

The titles of the photographs with their details of time and place gradually provide an index, which in turn effectively catalogues Wesely's activity. They can be read as a reference to the section of reality depicted so that we can indentify each image with a thematic cause or reason; furthermore, they indicate where we would be if we were able to accept the invitation in the image and understand its genesis. Nevertheless, this realistic reference reveals itself as an indication of *modus operandi* of a seemingly unreal vividness. Wesely dispenses with the notoriety of photographic realism by suspending the images—sometimes to a considerable

degree—from any semblance of recognisability or the constraints of unambiguity. He places the images in a continuous state of readiness, invites accidents, penetrates the mundanity of the superficial, chips away at the self-assured view and counters the conventional obduracy of representation with the blur of the vaguely supposed entity or action. In short, he casts doubt upon images of reality with the aid of the reality in his images.

Wesely has differentiated his original operational concept to such an extent and enhanced it with various expressive possibilities that his images often surprise us with certain qualities reminiscent of painting. This not to say that he would have absolutely sought such comparative scope, nor indeed would he have welcomed it. Photography cannot deny the technical aspect of its depictive mediativity, but this doesn't preclude a comparison with salient forerunners from the world of painting that have long since imprinted themselves upon us. It behoves us here to think about the romantic legacy of the open horizon, for example, the moods and the expansive vistas in the works of Caspar David Friedrich or indeed, Turner. Phenomena such as the contingency of a particular section or the impressionistically general embedding of detail in landscapes or street milieu, as well as the futuristic equivalent for urban dynamics in the form of simultaneous penetration of different (visual) aspects are also implied here. It should also be remembered in this instance that the kind of painting called to mind here has the emergence of photography to thank for some of its specific perspectives.

Wesely has himself compared his tendency to obliterate parts of a photographically accurate depiction with Gerhard Richter's photo paintings, perhaps without thinking about the fact that Richter initially used trivial photographic templates in order to decode their by no means nugatory triviality by means of painting. That aside, a methodological comparison with Richter's abstract painting readily suggests itself. In the same way the Richter composes an abstract painting layer upon layer, so too does Wesely's camera gradually capture the events unfolding in front of the lens. And yet Wesely seems to be more impressed with Francis Bacon than with Richter. He is fond of quoting one of the interviews with David Sylvester, in which Bacon describes how he reacts to the continued presence of photographs whilst he is painting a portrait. Bacon doesn't use them as an aid, but radically reinvents the image of the person concerned to such an extent that he absorbs whilst painting and introduces its tonal unity and texture into the materiality of the paint, with the result that he is able to realise a far superior version of the face than that of the photograph. For Bacon, this version is so manifestly concrete that the photographic template seems unreal to him. However, what might be identified as the *gestus* of painting in Bacon's work is clearly the *gestus* of time for Wesely. Wesely cannot withdraw from the dictates of representation by smearing them away in tonal texture; he stays within the bounds of photography, but nevertheless subjects the image to the flight of time. As a consequence, his photographs, quite by contrast to Bacon's painting, are inclined towards a degree of technically determined abstraction. In this way a relatively underdeterminate thematic resonational field with its own unique aesthetic import emerges between the nameable and more or less recognisable motifs. Conversely, this underdetermination—thematically speaking and when calibrated against what is supposed to be determined—generally stands for the passage of time, or figuratively speaking, for the transitory *per se*.

Wesely begins the current selection of his images with photographs with a minute-long exposure times in his exhibition »Open Shutter« in the Museum Of Modern Art New York. We as viewers looking at his photographs mingle with the other visitors, who move freely around and then come to a stop in front one of the exhibits along with other observers. This intentionally confusing description, which doesn't expressly differentiate between us and the exhibition visitors, does indeed make definite sense. It means that we the viewers are viewing the way they (the depicted viewers) view one of Wesely's photographs, whilst we are doing precisely the same thing by viewing his MoMA photograph. In other words: as soon as we switch from the depicted process to our own behaviour, we can view ourselves in the act of viewing. And at the same time we recognise that it is not just the others, who, as Balzac avers, »cast an image at all times into the atmosphere«, but so do we in exactly the same way. With his visual reflexion of observation, Wesely almost invokes thus that very »atmosphere of the spiritual world« once borrowed by Balzac from the spirit of the time, a world comprising »imaginings«, that is to say »real and active beings, who produce »impressions in the sense of the word«, that have an »effect«, and »live out their lives as shadows of things«.

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The reference to Mark Gisbourne relates to his text »The Hidden Visible: Transformation and Obliteration in the Photography of Michael Wesely«, Eugen Blume, Mark Gisbourne, *Michael Wesely. The Invention of the Invisible*, (Salzburg: Fotohof, 2005).