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Why Photography Mattered (1847) As Art More Than Ever Before

In the late 20th-century, landscape photographs that were never meant as art come to play a central role in the critique of one notion of what art is. Rosalind Krauss begins her attack on Modernism by mobilizing the indexical qualities of the photograph, holding up Timothy O’Sullivan’s 19th-century landscape photographs as the exemplar. This essay considers Krauss’s model in relation to César Aira’s contemporary revival of the 19th century landscape painter Johann Moritz Rugendas who is conceived, I argue, under the sign of the photograph. Conceptually recasting the landscape—the locus classicus for the crisis of Modernist art—through Rugendas, Aira transforms the painterly genre into an alternative neuro-aesthetically charged “procedure.” Aira’s landscape painter turned photographer serves, I contend, both as an emblem for Aira’s own relation to writing and as an artifact of Krauss’s post-Art world.

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The English translation of César Aira's *An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter* begins "WESTERN ART can boast few documentary painters of true distinction" (Aira 2006, 1), a rendering of "En Occidente hubo pocos pintores viajeros realmente buenos" (Aira 2018b, 7) that both captures its meaning — not only introducing but capitalizing the word ART — and suggests a useful interpretation of it. What Andrews sees is that the *Episode* is less an event in the life of a single painter than in the history of Western art, and what that event is, as Aira himself will present it, is the end of that history, the end of Western art. For what Aira argues in his now published colloquium talk, *On Contemporary Art*, is that not only are we, aesthetically speaking, at "at the end" (Aira 2018a, 13), but that we should begin to consider art's history by "inserting artists from the past into" the "present day" (Aira 2018a, 22). Thus, instead of seeing the landscape painter, Johann Moritz Rugendas, as an art historical figure, we should imagine him as our "Contemporary" (Aira 2018a, 22). This procedure of making the artists of the past present — as Aira would have it — will deliver not just the pleasure that comes with playing a "counterfactual game," (Aira 2018a, 22) but an aesthetic "bonus," the revelation of a "hidden reality in their art" (Aira 2018a, 23). Hence, the episode in the life of a 19th-century landscape painter — the 1847¹ accident made manifest in the lightning strike of the year 2000 — should, therefore, be understood as an episode in contemporary art, one capable of giving us a "reality" that until art's end, had been "hidden."

It's in this context — the end of art reborn as the discovery of a new "reality" — that Aira describes the "mission" of his landscape painter. Rugendas, who embarks on a time-transcendent aesthetic journey, enacts the procedure that "a hundred years later, would have fallen to a photographer: to keep a graphic record of all of the discoveries they would make and the landscapes through which they would pass" (Aira 2006, 2). What's odd about this description, of course, is that it would hardly take a hundred years for this mission to become that of the photographer, but what's made particularly acute—in transposing the figure of the landscape painter with that of the documentary photographer—is the end-of-ART question it raises. For it was precisely such a photographer — Timothy O'Sullivan — (whose 1860s² landscape

1 Aira gives two dates for Rugendas's accident — 1847 (the historical) and 1837 (the fictional) — to document his account. Indeed, as we will see, for Aira the historical and the fictional are equivalent, since for him documents and art are indistinguishable.

2 "Buttes near Green River City, Wyoming" (1867-69) Albumen-silver print

photographs were discovered and exhibited alongside benchmarks of Western painting a century later) that would become crucial to what Rosalind Krauss would call the end of Art.

While O’Sullivan’s photographs had occasionally landed on the museum walls,³ it was their inclusion in Peter Galassi’s 1981 *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography*, an exhibition establishing the medium’s “relationship to the traditional arts” (Galassi 1981, 11) and “its relationship to painting,” (Galassi 1981, 12) that secured the landscape photograph’s polemical status, one that prompted Krauss to redouble her efforts through O’Sullivan in bringing the “definitive ruptures” in that tradition to light (Krauss 1979, 44). If Galassi’s ambition was “to show that photography was not a bastard left by science on the doorstep of art, but a legitimate child of the Western pictorial tradition,” (Galassi 1981, 12) Krauss’s aim was precisely to leverage photography to discompose that tradition. For Krauss, it was because O’Sullivan was not any kind of painter and because the emergence of the photograph — something guided by causal, indexical relationships — ought not, she thought, be understood as an episode in the history of Art, that the landscape photograph could serve to displace rather than extend that tradition.

And Aira, with his landscape painter turned photographer, takes this intervention one step further upping the ante on Krauss’s framing of O’Sullivan by remaking landscape painting as landscape photography. With a lightning strike, landscape painting goes from an art dedicated to the representation of nature to an art that is itself a piece of nature, what Krauss in describing O’Sullivan’s photography calls a “natural phenomenon” (Krauss 1982, 314). Indeed, Aira’s interest is, as we’ll see, in the question of art and forces, in particular what inhuman actions

from a glass negative 10 ½ x 77/8 no.69a, 69b, and 69c were the photographs by O’Sullivan featured in Peter Galassi’s 1980 show.

3 While this wasn’t the first time Sullivan’s photographs were included in exhibitions at the MoMA, having been featured in the “Edward Steichen Photography Reinstallation,” (1979), “Artist as Adversary,” (1971), “Photographs Before Surrealism,” (1968), “Steichen Gallery Reinstallation,” (1967), “Art in a Changing World: 1884: Edward Steichen Photography Center,” (1964), “The Photographer and the American Landscape,” (1963), “Photograph From the Museum” (1958-1959), “Then and Now” (1952), “The Museum Collection of Photographs,” (1945-1946), “Art in Progress: 15th Anniversary exhibitions: Photography” (1944), “Photographs of the Civil War and the American Frontier” (1942), and “Photography” (1937), Galassi’s 1981 exhibit was the first to explicitly make the argument that these and other photographs were part of the tradition of Western art forged previously by painting.

— “lightning bolts serving as cues in a game of meteoric billiards” (Aira 2006, 33) — might do to an artist and his art. So, although Rugendas will begin in the spirit of Humboldt, in the tradition of the history of art, an accident that disfigures and neurologically impairs him — getting struck twice by lightning only seconds apart — will discharge him from that tradition and that history.

The accident makes Rugendas, like the photograph, coextensive with the forces and the “natural growth” (Aira 2006, 6) he is tasked with capturing, reduced to the mere material of its incidental unfolding. Through its “pure action,” (Aira 2006, 32) the lightning strike — both the instrument and embodiment of causal forces — transfers its properties to Rugendas. No longer an artist but reborn as a meteoric outgrowth, the painter begins to “feel himself being pulled, stretching (the electricity had made him elastic), almost levitating, like a satellite in thrall to a dangerous star” (Aira 2006, 35). And while the violent “concatenation” and totalizing “action” (Aira 2006, 32) of the lightning certainly injures Rugendas — reducing him to “a bloody bundle” (Aira 2006, 35) with “a swollen, bloody mass,” in place of a “face” (Aira 2006, 36) — what’s crucial for Aira is the painter’s metamorphosis, the displacement of his actions with “nonhuman forces” (Aira 2006, 37). Indeed, Aira’s emphasis on Rugendas’s transformation rather than the gravity of his injuries suggests that despite the severity of the accident, it’s not the loss of his physical well-being but the “exceptional alterations” to the painter’s “atomic and molecular structure” (Aira 2006, 34) that will come to matter. Certainly, the morphine treatment he receives as consequence only furthers this transformation and its effects as the artist’s intention gives way to a “perception, enveloped with the Edenic light” of “a morphine landscape” (Aira 2006, 42). And as Aira points out, the “amorphous” (Aira 2006, 42) feelings induced by his chemical state point not only to a “curious verbal coincidence: amorphous, morphine,” (Aira 2006, 42) but to the way the force of the drug reduplicates the metamorphosis already inscribed in the painter’s body.

After the accident, therefore, Rugendas’s landscape paintings will no longer function as representations that “apprehend the world” (Aira 2006, 5) but as a world recorded in Rugendas. Where landscape painting and the artist’s invocation of its traditions prompt a looking back by way of art’s history, lightning and the processes of natural phenomena channeled as sensation incite a severing from the very notion of the artist and his painting from the meaning of that history. Aira’s lightning strike — synecdoche for art’s condition — is no longer just a visible phenomenon the painter looks at or merely feels, but a charge that registers

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in the materiality of his body: a “perception” made “abnormally acute” (Aira 2006, 32). Rugendas’s lightning strike — which “bypassed his senses and went straight into his nervous system” (Aira 2006, 32) — recasts the artist not according to the logic of composition but in terms of causal forces. Thus, here in Aira’s *Episode* Rugendas’s paintings are no longer composed of forms but conscripted by force, a “procedure [...] operating through him” (Aira 2006, 88).

Hence Rugendas’s post-accident paintings come into being not as attempts at painterly composition but as a response to stimuli triggered in him by the lightning. Rugendas, who “represented the meeting of science and art on equal terms, but not the confusion” of the two (Aira 2006, 13), himself becomes the site of their synthesis: “*Mutatis mutandis*, the same thing happens with a painter and the visible world. It was happening to Rugendas. What the world was saying was the world” (Aira 2006, 78). Rugendas’s body, like a lightning rod, absorbs the charge that incites his metamorphosis from a painter who makes pictorial art, a landscape that he captures, into a painter literally made part of the landscape, one that happens through him. Indeed, for Rugendas and for art after the end of art this is precisely the problem, that art and life have converged. So, while Aira’s depiction of Rugendas begins as we’d expect, with a landscape painter who sets out to document Latin America, the lightning transforms him into a conduit whose art — a composition of impressions turned records of triggered responses — is transmitted through him.

It’s precisely for this reason that Aira’s traveling artist approximates a living camera. After the accident Rugendas traverses the landscape with a mantilla covered face, the purpose of which is not to hide the damage, but “to filter the light” (Aira 2006, 60). The nerve damage and the efforts to mitigate it — “opium in a bromide solution” (Aira 2006, 51) — make the mantilla a necessity in modulating Rugenda’s reaction to stimuli, since “[D]irect sunlight tormented his poor addled head and his shattered nervous system. His pinpoint pupils could not contract any further” (Aira 2006, 60). Rugendas’s condition, then, set in motion by the nerve damage and the narcotics “accumulating in his brain” (Aira 2006, 42) turns his eyes into apertures consistent with the shutter speed of landscape photography: “In the depths of that mantled night the pinpricks of his pupils woke him to the bright day’s panorama. And powdered poppy extract, a concentrated form of the analgesic, provided sleep enough for ten reawakenings per second” (Aira 2006, 64). Indeed, Aira only amplifies this condition at the end of the episode when Rugendas registers “the touch” (Aira 2006, 83) of a bat “brushing gently aga-

inst his forehead, at “barely a hundredth of a second,” (Aira 2006, 84) as if the shutter speed or exposure time necessary to register movement were in some way made internal to him. In effect, the images that Rugendas generates are not merely pictures of the landscape but painted landscapes with the character of photographs, records of his “attacks of vertigo and cerebral short-circuiting” (Aira 2006, 54); in other words, a “procedure [...] operating through him” (Aira 2006, 88). So, while initially “[T]he bulk of the work” he performs consists in “preliminary: sketches, notes jottings” whose “exploitation [...] in paintings and engravings was reserved for a later stage,” (Aira 2006, 11) post-accident Rugendas produces images with the automaticity of a photograph, “one sheet to the next, like a lightning bolt striking the field” (Aira 2006, 86). Rugendas executes his post-accident landscapes, therefore, not in the tradition of art but, like a photograph, as a “transfer or trace.” (Krauss 1977b, 59).

Indeed, it was the notion of the index, something that “arises as the physical manifestation of a cause” (Krauss 1977b, 59) that guided the newly central role of the photograph in conversations about what art was in the late 70s (a role whose centrality would be noted and extended in, for example, the title of Michael Fried’s 2008 book, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*.) And, as we’ve seen, it’s not just any photograph, but the landscape photograph that was held up as the exemplar. Indeed, it’s through a critique of art (after the end of art) mobilized in questions raised by landscape photography that works like O’Sullivan’s *Tufa Domes* (1868), would, by the early 1980s, come to occupy the central axis of the art-critical debate and the Modern – Post-modern divide.

This intervention guided by Krauss’s pair of essays — “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America” (1977) and “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America. Part 2” (1977) — deploys photography’s inherent indexical quality as a way to attack the tradition of art in more general terms, while sharply targeting what for critics like Fried was already a much-defeated Modernism. Krauss borrows the index from American philosopher and logician Charles Sanders Peirce who theorized it alongside the icon and the symbol as part of his triadic semiotic model, the index constituting the most basic relationship between the object and the sign. While symbols refer and icons resemble, an index is defined by a cause-and-effect relationship — where there’s smoke there’s fire. The indexical, Peirce explains, “signifies its object solely by virtue of being really connected to it” (Peirce 1933, 3.361). Hence smoke, indexically and physically speaking, signifies fire in a way that a painting of

fire, Goya's *Fire at Night* (1793), never could. For Peirce, then, paintings like *Fire at Night* (1793) or Rugendas's *Equestrian Portrait of a Pehuenche Chief* (1837) are icons because they hinge on likeness — they look like what they're of. Where the portrait carries a relation to the thing it's of, the photograph, in indexical terms, bears a kind of evidence of its existence, a causal relationship or "a physical imprint" (Krauss 1977a, 75) of "*having-been-there*" (Barthes qtd Krauss 1977b, 65). And although a photograph can be an icon insofar as it looks like what it's of, it's necessarily indexical because, like "a physical imprint," that likeness is caused by what it's of.

It's this notion of causality that constitutes the photograph's central attraction for Krauss, a record of the world that could make the artist's painterly relation to her subject obsolete. And it's this same quality that motivates Krauss to declare photography not only a "sub- or pre-symbolic," medium free of Modernist art's epistemological burden, but one that in "ceding the language of art back to the imposition of things" becomes a model of possibility for an alternative (Krauss 1977a, 75). Krauss sees the photograph as "an uncoded event" (Krauss, 1977b, 60) tantamount to "a kind of trauma of signification," (Krauss 1977a, 78) in other words, a trauma for one notion of art (Modernist) but an opportunity for another (Postmodern).⁴ Hence Krauss's notion of the photograph and its aesthetic technological intervention — the click of the button — not only does away with the artist and the masterpiece but becomes the nail in the coffin to any lingering Modernist art since doing away with the obstacle of representation offers the infinite possibility of "the filling of the 'empty' indexical sign with [...] presence," and by extension our experience (Krauss 1977a, 80).

The outcome of Krauss's commitment to the photograph's indexicality becomes clear in her article, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View" (1982), a critical rejoinder to Peter Galassi's MoMA show, *Before Photography* (1981), on display one year earlier. Galassi's exhibit featured 18th-century landscape paintings alongside otherwise forgotten or unknown photographers of the 19th-century showcasing, as we've seen, the discovery of would-be artist and civil war era photographer Timothy O'Sullivan. Here, with O'Sullivan's *Tufa Domes* (1867) as the exemplar, Krauss ups her attempt to mobilize photography as a refusal of autonomous art, in the effort to correct the artworld's impulse to aestheticize what, she argues, belongs to "the discourse of geology,"

⁴ In fact, as Krauss lays out in "Part 2," photography is "the operative model for abstraction."

an “empirical” (Krauss 1982, 311) and “topographical” (Krauss 1982, 313) “geographic order” (Krauss 1982, 315). Though Galassi sought to elevate O’Sullivan’s photographs to art in his 20th-century exhibit, by putting them next to their painterly counterparts, they weren’t meant to be seen only as landscapes, Krauss argues, but to be experienced as “stereoscopic views” (Krauss, 1982, 314); in other words, they were comparable to documentary landscape views rather than painted ones. Indeed, the “*view*,” whose character is phenomenological rather than logical or epistemological, Krauss contends, “rises up to confront the viewer, seemingly without the mediation of an individual recorder or artist, leaving ‘authorship’ of the views to their publishers, rather than to the operators” (Krauss, 1982, 314). What Krauss wants to emphasize here is that the attempt to make photographers authors (and by extension, artists) is misdirected, since “authorship is [...] a function of publication,” a matter of copyright — “©Keystone Views” (Krauss 1982, 314). Hence, it’s not only the photograph’s indexicality, but the production of the photos themselves, according to Krauss, that marks them as documents.

Indeed, for Aira it’s not the “documentary status” (Krauss 1977b, 59) of landscape paintings he seeks to critique, since it’s precisely their failure as documents he calls into question, but rather, like Krauss, it’s the very notion of the artist and the tradition of art that he seeks to evacuate. So, in addition to his paintings, it’s the artist himself who is rendered radically indexical here. After the lightning strike, Rugendas goes from “the order” of the artist, in which he depicts his impressions of the “natural world,” to “the order” of the indexical, in which “the order of the natural world [...] imprints itself” in him (Krauss 1977b, 59). This transfer of force not only inscribes itself on the painter’s face, as we have seen, but transforms his cells into “universal plasma” (Aira 2006, 39), the “sensation of having electrified blood” (Aira 2006, 33). Here Aira’s play on blood as “plasma,” a state of matter associated with lightning, extends indexicality to the cellular, molecular level, what Krauss calls a “Brownian motion of the self” (Krauss 1977b, 59). And while it contributes little to the description of the accident, it calls attention to Aira’s “fantasy of total self-presence,” (Krauss 1977b, 58)⁵ turning the artist into what Krauss describes as “a literal manifestation

5 Rugenda’s “Electrified blood” is reminiscent of the example of indexicality Krauss draws on in her second essay on the index in which Deborah Hay’s dance performance amounts to delivering a standing monologue, and in which she explains to the audience that the dance they’re witnessing is “the movement of every cell in her body (59).

of presence,” something that works “like a weather vane’s registration of the wind (Krauss 1977b, 59). What’s significant here, as in Krauss’s example, is the insistence on indexical relationships “out of reach of [...] the convention that might provide a code” (Krauss 1977b, 59). And for Aira the index isn’t just tied to a visible physical trace but to the invisible traces of physics guiding Rugendas, a transfer of force that renders him more object than subject and more “Puppet” (Aira 2006, 34) than painter. The post-accident landscapes, then, are no longer acts of painterly virtuosity meant to fulfill the genre’s conventions or an artist’s vision but rather the manifestation of “uncoded” relationships set in motion by the lightning: mere presence. So, while Aira’s *Episode* opens with “a genre painter” whose “genre was the physiognomy of nature” (Aira 2006, 5) — a landscape painter who paints the face of the world — the lightning remodels him as an articulation of that world, an artist whose work could no longer be understood as a representation of the landscape but, like any other phenomena, as “the physical manifestation of a cause” (Krauss 1977b, 59).

To hammer the point home, Aira turns “the founding father of the art of pictorial presentation of the physiognomy of nature” (Aira 2006, 6) into someone whose own physiognomy has been destroyed by nature: “Rugendas’s face had been seriously damaged. [...] One blow and it was broken forever like a porcelain vase” (Aira 2006, 40-41). In fact, Aira goes out of his way to emphasize the singularity of the damage: “The only thing that had changed was Rugendas’s face” (Aira 2006, 44). The painter, treating nature as if it were a person and making a portrait of its face, is here transformed into someone whose own face is nothing but the consequence — a “physical imprint,” to use Krauss’s Peircean description of the photograph — of natural forces. It’s not just his face that’s destroyed but the very idea of physiognomy, of the artist and the work of art. What we get instead is the cause and effect of photographic indexicality, the intervention of forces “recorded indelibly” as “sensations impinging on the raw, pink flesh of his head” (Aira 2006, 38). Indeed, as the lightning extends to his brain, reconnecting “the nerve ending [...] more or less at random, to a node in the frontal lobe” (Aira 2006, 39), Rugendas himself becomes nothing but a record of sensations, his body reduced to forces and his face to a literal topography. It’s no accident that the artist’s loss of expression to the constant “paroxysm” (Aira 2006, 79) of “ghastly nervous tics,” (Aira 2006, 58), is rivaled only by the loss of his identifying features, the “distinctive aquiline form of his Augsburg nose” rendered “unrecognizable” under the mass of “swollen, bloody” flesh and “bone” (Aira 2006, 36). Displacing the biographical

for the biological and the model of the painting for the photograph, Aira activates the portrait only to expose its death, “ceding the language of art back to” what Krauss calls, “the imposition of things.”

Positioning Rugendas’s art as an indexical procedure, as Aira does, not only attempts to sever the painter from the tradition of landscape but to render the traces of the landscapes he produces “visually and conceptually [...] free from any specific locale” (Krauss 1977b, 63). Just as for Krauss “the absoluteness” of the photograph’s “physical genesis” — “a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface” — has the potential “to short-circuit or disallow those processes of schematization or symbolic intervention that operate within the graphic representations of most paintings,” (Krauss 1977a, 203) so too for Aira does the “pure action” of the lightning bolt’s “nonhuman forces” — “a physical imprint transferred by” the lightning strike into Rugenda’s damaged body — become a way to bypass the “symbolic intervention” of the European landscape painter or any notion of painterly representation.⁶ Thus, a landscape painter conceived under the sign of the photograph not only dispatches with the question of art in relation to place, what it means to make Western art or a national Argentine literature, but questions about the internal conflict raised in producing that art and that literature — its competing aesthetic and documentary aims. Krauss’s argument made discursive in Aira’s story of the South American excursion by German painter, Johann Moritz Rugendas, one of the “few documentary painters of true distinction” (the designation itself already posing a kind of problem) puts an end to the question of whether Rugendas’s work belongs to an empirical order, meant to document South America, or an aesthetic one, a painter meant to represent it. In fact, what we can see is that after the accident, Rugendas loses the capacity to do either.

Of course, the concern of any typical 19th century “documentary painter” (Aira 2006, 4) isn’t the end of art, but the “science of landscape,” (Aira 2006, 5) collapsing the vistas of Brazil into commercially successful handheld books like *Picturesque Voyage Through Brazil*,⁷ or enlisting them to pattern “wallpaper” or “to decorate Sèvres china” (Aira 2006,

6 In fact, we see this issue come up in Rugendas’s use of the mantilla to cover his face after the accident. While this use of the mantilla seems odd or out of place, it’s actually a practice typical of Pehuenche men, a group indigenous to the Andes, a point that’s emphasized when his host in delivering the mantilla calls herself “Madame pehuenche” (Aira 2006, 59). And so, both in becoming a conduit and covering his face with the mantilla, a chain of events set in motion by the accident, Aira marks Rugendas’s figurative indigenoussness as literal.

12). These views transported to Europe, small enough to hold in the hands of Frenchmen or to line parlor walls, are meant to recreate the experience of having been there. Prior to his episode, like most any landscape painter, looking for views and finding a way to reproduce them comprises Rugendas's primary concern. And while reproducing astonishing views of the landscape is what's required of the landscape painter, it's through the illusion of a painting, applying Humboldt's model of forms in representing that landscape that he endeavors to do so. Thus 19th century European landscape painters who attempted to "apprehend the world in its totality," in situ did so "in conformity with a long tradition," one that through "vision," (Aira 2006, 5) and "a personal myth of Argentina" (Aira 2006, 21) represented Latin America through European models and forms.

But what we get in Aira's *Episode* is not — as we would in the 19th-century landscape painting — a vision of Latin America or the experience of having been there, but a "mysterious emptiness" (Aira 2006, 5) devoid of meaning. And for Aira, it's precisely this "mysterious emptiness" — not just a problem for the landscape painter, but a problem for art — that will call the act of documenting and art's ontology into question. How do you document emptiness and endlessness? How can you capture nothing but views?

Here Aira calls up a view perpetually in medias res, not a perspective that "registers" the "singularity" of a "focal point, as one moment in a complex representation" (Krauss 1982, 315) — a "dramatic insistence on the perspectively organized depth" — (Krauss 1982, 314) but rather one "which could greatly exceed the dimensions of" any "picture" (Aira 2006, 42-43). To be sure, the landscape Aira calls up in his *Episode* isn't one that's "perspectively organized" but one phenomenologically suspended in the middle of things. And so, what Rugendas and his assistant Krause⁷ encounter is not a view, but something more like its decomposition, a "changeless world" (Aira 2006, 13) whose unending sameness flattens their senses as they struggle toward an "impossible midpoint" (Aira 2006, 24). With nothing to look at, the painters' perception melds

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7 The landscape painter and artist Robert Krause accompanies Rugendas the landscape painter here in *Un episodio*, modeling itself on the actual events. After meeting Rugendas in Chile, Krause befriended Rugendas and headed off to Argentina with him in 1837. During this trip Rugendas was severely injured in a fall from a horse that Krause documented in his diaries. In fact, Krause has since been discovered as a writer and whose journal closely resembles or the title of the novel, *Intimate diary of the German landscaper*. But, of course, Aira's reference points to another Krauss, Rosalind.

into a kind of singularity. Movement becomes reduced to a feeling of circularity and stasis, and as they attempt to advance temporal and spatial distinctions melt away. In other words, the more they move forward, the more the infinite emptiness of the pampas encircles them, making “each day [...] larger and more distant” (Aira 2006, 9). Here the unceasing landscape doesn’t function as a metaphor for Argentina’s futurity, as it does in, let’s say, the country’s earliest national literary tradition,⁸ but as infinitude imagined as the end of art, an assault on the view that renders any painterly dispositions obsolete.

What they encounter is an endless situation, not Krauss’s “stereoscopic” experience of a photographic landscape, but a view they inhabit, a landscape made nothing but experience. While O’Sullivan’s photographs served as a kind of crucible for the problem of the artwork and its relation to landscape, it was Tony Smith’s prophetic insight on the New Jersey Turnpike in 1951 (not by coincidence around a hundred years after Rugendas’s episode) that had (in retrospect) already conceived of both the landscape’s role in the end of Modernist art and the beginning of an alternative model grounded in the experience:

[T]he road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn’t be called a work of art [...] It seemed that there had been a reality there that had not had any expression in art. The experience of the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that’s the end of art. Most painting looks pretty pictorial after that. There’s no way you can frame it. You just have to experience it. Later I discovered some abandoned airstrips in Europe — abandoned works, Surrealist landscapes, something that had nothing to do with any function, created worlds without tradition. Artificial landscapes without cultural precedents began to dawn on me (Smith 1968, 384).

8 Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s *Facundo* (1845), one of the earliest Romantic *criollo* accounts of the landscape, inaugurates a national literary vision of the landscape in what Ricardo Piglia calls “the first page of Argentine literature” (Piglia 1994, 131). This national vision links Argentina’s historical and literary beginnings to “the physiognomy of the soil” (Sarmiento 1996, 1) imagining the “pampa” as a metaphor for Argentina’s “infinite” potential (Sarmiento 1996, 1). [my translation].

Smith's terms would come to constitute the mantra for a new kind of art taking hold in the decades to follow, and as we've seen with Krauss, not an art to behold but a situation to experience. Envisioned as "something vast," these "artificial landscapes," themselves functionless, "created worlds without tradition," could rise to a "scale and monumentality" in sync with the limitlessness of our experience,⁹ and against the expanse of such a landscape, pictorial art would register more like what Aira calls "trinkets," (Aira 2013) or as Smith puts it "the art of postage stamps" (Smith 1968, 384).

The landscape Aira furnishes, then, is not, like Humboldt's, a pictorial vision of the land "you can frame," or reproduce in handheld books like the *Picturesque Voyage Through Brazil*,¹⁰ but rather like Smith's, one the painters "just have to experience." The "sheer optics of superimposed heights and depths" (Aira 2006, 9) induced by the "infinite orography" (16) and "the radical flatness" (Aira 2006, 27) of "expanses resonant with emptiness" (Aira 2006, 28) incite not only visual interference in the painters but a kind of epistemological blindness. Thus, in the face of nothing but views, mountains and plains that take on the character of Tony Smith's highway, Rugendas and Krause can only submit passively to their experience. The interminable view registers not pictorially but conversely as sensation in the body "on their faces, in their arms, their shoulders, their hair, and heels [...] throughout their nervous system" (Aira 2006, 16). The "scale and monumentality" Rugendas encounters can't be captured "through vision" but as the relentless reflex of "pure optics,"¹⁰ (Aira 2001, 9) not exactly like seeing something but sensing it. So, while these landscapes as "pictures were worthless" (Aira 2006, 10) making poor use of the "physiognomic types" (Aira 2006, 5) Humboldt envisions for a genre meant to capture "an aesthetic understanding of the world" (Aira 2006, 5) they are precursors for a new kind of art, direct impressions of the painters' sensations.

In producing nothing but views Aira displaces pictorial art, the "totality of vision," with post-art, the totality of experience. Pictorial visions of clouds arranged above the horizon of a blue sky revert to the indistinguishable totalizing effect of natural forces: clouds, "so low they almost land [...] the slightest breeze would whisk them away [...] others from bewildering corridors [...] seemed to give the sky access to the center of the earth" (Aira 2001,9). As the painters move through the

In producing nothing but views Aira displaces pictorial art, the "totality of vision," with post-art, the totality of experience.

9 Indeed, by the late seventies, the tendency toward, what Rosalind Krauss in her 1979 essay calls the "expanded field," testifies to the scale that an art placed in the realm of both landscape and sculpture could demand.

10 This is my translation of the original "pura óptica."

atmospheric instability, indexical conditions of the lightning, they are assaulted by flashes of appearance and disappearance, “magical rotations” and “dreamlike visions”¹¹ (Aira 2001, 13) overwhelming their senses and rendering their “physiognomic” principles useless. These clouds are not the pictorial visions we might imagine in a landscape, a way to envision Argentina, but rather here they act as traces that obscure the view. Turning the landscape from picture to presence, Aira literalizes the “journey towards the truly unknown” (Aira 2006, 24) as if in each step the painters move from an epistemological vision of the world toward an infinite, “sub- or pre-symbolic” experience of a phenomenological horizon. The painters don’t just experience a highway like Smith’s, a “landscape” that’s “not socially recognized,” but one that’s not recognizable as a landscape. In entering its all-encompassing terrain, they begin to submit to what the post-accident Rugendas would fully surrender: a “phenomenal revelation of the world” (Aira 2006, 51).

“How” then, as Aira posits, “could these panoramas be made plausible?”¹² (Aira 2001, 17). These unremitting views, which exceed the “mind’s eye” (Aira 2006, 16) and impede any pictorial register, amount instead to what Rugendas calls “[A] series of studies in vertigo” (Aira 2006, 15). While these paintings fail to document the view, they succeed as phenomenological imprints. In escalating Smith’s “artificial landscape” and Krauss’s “stereoscopic views,” Aira delivers a landscape that displaces painting’s views with records of sensation.

And what we can begin to see is that for Aira traveling forward means traveling in reverse, moving away from a history of art toward “*An Episode*” in the history of sense. Aira’s artificial landscape conjures an emptiness hostile to painting’s forms (8) and to the painter’s “capacities” (Aira 2006, 12), a lifeless “terrifying void,” (Aira 2006, 29) and a “universe of rock” (Aira 2006, 17) with “[N]ot a bird to be seen in the sky” nor “guinea pigs or rheas or hares or ants” to be seen “on the ground” (Aira 2006, 17). In fact, not only does Aira’s landscape not project forward, it points backwards to “other geological eras, perhaps even before the inconceivable beginning of the universe” (Aira 2006, 24). With a move that calls up Krauss’s indexical “sub- or pre-symbolic” epistemological refusal, Aira’s *Episode* renders the pampas geologically inert, a post-extinction, post-art event offering only a trace of former

11 This is my translation of the original “mágicas alternancias,” “visiones de ensueño,” “producía un rumor que sonaba lejos, ecos del sistema,” “en los umbrales de la audición.”

12 This is my translation of the original “¿Cómo hacer verosímiles esos panoramas?”

life. Here the landscape — a “planet’s peeling crust [that] seemed to be made of dried amber” (Aira 2006, 29) — assumes a cosmic geologic temporal and spatial scale, a lifeless “selenite ocean”¹³ (Aira 2001, 30) so desiccated that the “earth crumbled at a touch” (Aira 2006, 28). Thus, in Aira the “artificial landscape” functions along the lines of what Krauss (in O’Sullivan) calls a “geological” order, (Krauss 1982, 312) a landscape reduced to a record of “pure silica” (Aira 2006, 29) indexing some former unsignifying world emptied of life and meaning. Here in the transparent “selenite” emptiness of the infinite “silica” pampa it’s not the blank canvas Aira produces, but a phenomenological world infinitely suspended, a trace as such arrested in medias res.

On one hand, such a maneuver seems to divorce Aira from Humboldt, freeing him from the multitiered baggage of the European views and nationalist *criollo* accounts that reduced Latin America to its physiognomy. But on the other, in his commitment to a model grounded in experience, Aira reproduces that logic, committing to what Jorge Luis Borges in his poem “Sarmiento” prophetically calls “long vision.”¹⁴ In other words, it’s in privileging an aesthetics of phenomenology over art’s epistemology, I argue, that links something like Humboldt’s tropical romanticism (Latin America seen through the eyes of Europe) and later Latin American romanticism¹⁵ (the privileging of national ties to the land) to Aira’s moment (the crisis of autonomous art). If in one sense *An Episode* seems to return to landscape painting’s origins, it’s not to reaffirm them as a kind of beginning but, like Aira’s landscape painter, to reduce them to traces, “[A] ruse against Orphic disobedience” (Aira 2006, 24) to “obliterate all that lies behind” (Aira 2006, 25). Mobilizing the Argentine landscape as the critique of art, Aira attempts to revise the physiognomically inflected vision inherited from Humboldt by embracing the critique and dissolution of (Modernist) art cultivated in Smith and Krauss once again through the question of the landscape. And to do this, Aira must transform his painter from a traveling artist who traverses a landscape into a series of processes “operating through him” (Aira 2006, 88).

13 This is my translation of the original “océano selénita.”

14 Borges, in his poem “Sarmiento,” projects the writer and politician as the receptacle of a kind of “long vision,” the “crystal that withholds at once three faces,” as Borges puts it, “of time which is after before now/ Sarmiento, the dreamer keeps on dreaming us” (Borges 2016, 208).

15 In the case of Argentina, it’s Sarmiento’s *Facundo*, as Madan contends, that shifts Humboldt’s vision of “writing the earth” to the *criollo* project of “writing the nation” (Madan 2011, 260).

The landscape, then, for Aira is a kind of alternative model to the pictorial, one that seeks to overcome the history of the artwork, and by extension the picture of Latin America inherited from the painterly traditions inspired by Humboldt. The landscape “without cultural precedents” that Aira strives for in *An Episode* is, like Smith’s, completely artificial. And this is what it means for Rugendas’s landscapes to become more “strange” and more “interesting”¹⁶ (Aira 2001, 28), to approach the condition of Smith’s “Surrealist landscapes [...] that had nothing to do with function.” But unlike the New Jersey Turnpike or the many physical structures that would come to fulfill Smith’s aesthetic epiphany, an art “you just have to experience,” the landscape forged in Rugendas’s perpetually altered state — art as a “psychic activity” (Aira 2006, 86) — is something that exceeds our external experience. What constitutes the landscape recorded by Rugendas is not just a response to the infinitude of the pampas and the Andes but the “infinite plasticity” (Aira 2006, 48) of the mind. Rendered a kind of record of sensation as such, Rugendas’s paintings no longer adhere to the logic of art or composition but submit completely to sense: a landscape where “medium could become life itself” (Aira 2006, 43).¹⁷ And what we get with Rugendas is not a man reduced to a camera, but a man, who through the lightning is reduced to responding, not distinct from the world but made one with its materiality. Aira, in imagining the “stereoscopic view” as a kind of infinite regress, calls up a landscape not that we understand, see, or merely experience, but one whose “infinite plasticity” happens through us. Here it’s not only the “infinite plasticity” of art but an art rendered according to the “plasticity” of sensation, an artwork emanating in concert with our response. And while perhaps such a condition might point to a kind of evolution in our sensing abilities (one that like the mantis shrimp or future digitophiles far exceeds our own), it says little about art or our understanding of it. Aira, raising the stakes on Smith’s artificial landscape and Krauss’s notion of the photograph, imagines an art that coincides not with our ideas or even strictly our experience but an art that coincides with the artificial landscape made internal, one in sync with the cognitive plasticity of our brain, thought in itself arrested in perpetua.

So, while on the surface *An Episode* seems to possess the characteristics of most conventional novels, things we might arguably describe as

16 This is my translation of the original “extraño” and “interesante.”

17 Indeed, this is the whole theoretical point Deleuze seeks to map out in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*.

Aira, raising the stakes on Smith’s artificial landscape and Krauss’s notion of the photograph, imagines an art that coincides not with our ideas or even strictly our experience but an art that coincides with the artificial landscape made internal, one in sync with the cognitive plasticity of our brain, thought in itself arrested in perpetua.

setting, character, plot, description, or even dialogue, what the text reveals is that these seemingly literary elements made causal function more like plane, figure, and motion. In other words, these aren't elements composed in the service of producing a text beholden to meaning but indices of the procedures populating an artificial situation. Aira's characters are never the real people they seem to represent, and in fact, they're not even characters. They are ready-mades borrowed wholesale from history, from literature, from art, from anywhere — actors in situations. These situations are from top to bottom artificial, an “imposition of things” cut and pasted, embellished, or rearranged.

What we get then is not a portrait of Rugendas or the problems of 19th century Argentina, but a writing that extends beyond what's merely suggested in its pages, something more like Smith's “artificial landscape.” Rugendas, himself more an index in a situation than a character in a plot, supplies Aira with a web of speculative directions: his paintings, his life, his connection to Humboldt, his visit to Latin America, his accident. And everything that touches the painter and his experiences produces a similar effect of expansiveness in *An Episode*: “Everything,” as Aira emphatically puts it, is “documentation!” (Aira 2006, 51). Humboldt, Rugendas, the Pehuenche, the Andes and the pampas contribute to this indexical landscape — real but free from history or any determined meaning — that expands out uncontained and unbound. This is what it means for Aira to produce the “episode” (Aira 2006, 1) of a traveling artist, the history of art rendered episodes of sense. Through Rugendas, Aira not only points out the artificiality of the cultural diegesis, he turns it into an art of experience, a new history of sensation. And in doing so he raises profound questions about what it means to write in and about Latin America, and what a writing that renders the world a ready-made can come to mean for art.

Aira's writing, itself an end-of-art refusal in favor of a situational practice, commits to what in “The New Writing” he terms: “the procedure” (Aira 2013). So rather than turning to the model of the novel or the artwork more generally, Aira directs the practice of writing against the artwork and against medium: “What do we need works for? Who wants another novel, another painting, another symphony?” (Aira 2013). What we get in Aira's *Episode* then is not Greenberg and Fried's commitment to medium specificity, in Fried's terms, an artwork that succeeds by and through its commitment to composition or the particularity of its medium — a painting that succeeds as a painting or a novel that succeeds as a novel — but a text that sidesteps those matters in toto. Moving beyond the masterpiece, an art he sees reduced to the status of

What we get in Aira's *Episode* then is not Greenberg and Fried's commitment to medium specificity, in Fried's terms, an artwork that succeeds by and through its commitment to composition or the particularity of its medium — a painting that succeeds as a painting or a novel that succeeds as a novel — but a text that sidesteps those matters in toto.

“trinkets,” Aira embraces, just as Krauss does with photography, “the procedure to make works, without the work” — “works” without the art and by extension, without the artist (Aira 2013).

Neither post Boom nor strictly Postmodern, Aira imagines himself as part of a post-art post-medium vanguard where innovation is coextensive with the situation. Writing at each sitting, Aira pieces together his experiences, each in itself a kind of document of the event. Here, Aira, his own “pintor viajero”¹⁸ produces his texts in situ at cafes: “At around ten in the morning I go to a nearby café with a notebook and a pen [...] I write for a while, never more than an hour, and I never end up with more than a page. Back at home I type it up and then print it. That’s it” (Aira 2024). In each of these episodes Aira advances his project to “make works, without the work,” and like his landscape painter turned photographer, discovers “the work as a documentary appendix that serves only to deduce the process from which it emerged” (Aira 2013). In patterning “the work as a documentary appendix” of his own procedure, striving to divorce “making works” from the “work” and as such the act from meaning, Aira calls up a writing not that he does but that happens through him. And this is what it means to imagine the landscape painter as a photographer, not an artist that makes works, but one, that like the camera, channels a causal, indexical procedure.

In writing and forgetting, Aira abandons the work of the novel and the work of art, and like Rugendas, his 19th-century post-accident counterpart, conjures art as a kind of automaticity, an accumulation beholden more to an architecture of aleatory causal forces than to composition. The chain of events set off by the lightning strike in Rugendas consecrates a model of art guided by causal forces of “pure action,” — not a poesis, an art he makes, but a kind of autopoiesis, a self-producing art that happens. This is what it means to turn the painter — or in Aira’s own case, the writer — into a conduit. Each time he writes he’s struck by lightning — automatic writing. Quilting together these episodes, Aira produces a kind of writing beyond the limits of the novel: the redescription of writing as a photograph. In his attempt to extend what Krauss mobilizes in photography, the anti-art and anti-medium, Aira explores the possibilities of “the other side” of “art,” (Aira 2006, 5) what Modernists like Fried rejected and what Postmodernists, in their response to Modernism (in succumbing to the exhaustion of form and the bankruptcy of language) failed to sustain. The painter turned photographer

18 Here I refer to Aira’s original Spanish title which uses “pintor viajero” or traveling painter instead of “Landscape painter.”

in *An Episode*, then, is a kind of emblem for Aira's own relation to writing, a novelist that operates with the automaticity of the photograph: not an art that responds to a tradition of art or the aftermath of Modernism, the Postmodern, but one that reacts to the aftereffects of its death and the death of meaning, art as a "phenomenal revelation of the world."

But here it's not as a renewal of art but a kind of transformation, something that pairs art with a manifest destiny of an ever-expanding, unchartable sensation, an art that not only depends on presence and the beholder's relation to it, but one that happens through us. (Indeed, the success of *An Episode* depends on its ability to court the reader, in other words, to produce a text that relies on a kind of readerly gestalt where gaps exist.) The historical facts that Aira seemingly calls on are not facts but traces. Just as his characters are merely figures, *An Episode* is not a text but a situation he inherits. In fact, like many of the other biographical or historical scraps Aira calls on, the novel registers here only as a trace. Hence, it's through what we might call a literature of "sensation," a kind of blind call and response to his own writings (meant to invoke the same response in his readers) — the escalation of the situation — that Aira comes to chart the phenomenological revelations of a new kind of aesthetic terrain.

So just as Krauss would in the landscape photographer find a way to tear through the tradition of art disposing with its history, Aira, in the landscape painter turned photographer — the transformation of the artist who makes art into an instrument whose art happens through him — would discover "the other side of his art," (Aira 2006, 5) the "hidden reality" lying beyond that history. For Aira the landscape paintings produced by Rugendas "*mutatis mutandis*" might just as easily have been photographed by O'Sullivan, and it's in this "game of repetitions and permutations" (Aira 2018a, 43) called up as a kind of equivalence between the two that he imagines the "hidden reality in their art" might be discovered. Approaching art as the apprehension of a new "reality" Aira addresses it not in the context of its own history but as part of a spontaneous self-generating history — what Modernist art critic Michael Fried would register as the "almost the *natural* history — of sensibility" — in which the "repetitions and permutations" of the landscape painter and the landscape photographer like the landscape itself surface only as "part of the universal pattern of echoes" (Aira 2006, 10). Aira equips his 19th-century landscape painter with the "quandaries" (Aira 2018a, 17) of the contemporary envisioning landscape painting and the landscape photography not as distinct moments arising consecutively in and informing art's history, but rather as episodes permanently in medias

res perpetually arranging and rearranging themselves outside of that history — much the way Fried, in adverse terms, would describe literalist art's "*position*" and Krauss, in more favorable terms, redescribing literalist art as indexical art, would characterize its "situation."

The "other side" of "art" that connects Smith, Krauss, and Aira is not an "expression" of art, but something more like a theoretical position. For Fried:

From its inception, literalist art has amounted to something more than an episode in the history of taste. It belongs rather to the history — almost the natural history — of sensibility; and it is not an isolated episode but the expression of a general and pervasive condition. Its seriousness is vouched for by the fact that it is in relation both to modernist painting and modernist sculpture that literalist art defines or locates the position it aspires to occupy. (This, I suggest, is what makes what it declares something that deserves to be called a *position*.) (Fried 1998, 148-9).

Aira transposes Rugendas with a photographer not as a way to displace painting for photography but to dislodge an epistemological view of art for a phenomenological one, and as such the history of art for the "almost natural history — of sensibility." Imaging the history of art as a position—by "inserting artists from the past into" the "present day"—approaches art not through its own logic and its own history but instead stages itself as a kind of "infinite plasticity," the evolution of our sense reception and recognition, in and through a kind of "natural history." (Much like Heidegger would do in "The Ontology of the Work of Art" in erasing the distinction between art and philosophy, erasing the divide between art and sensibility turns art into an "episode," in other words, an event.)

But, of course, even in the mind, the interior landscape and perception of the self is something we experience; neurologically speaking; it's sense. For the post-accident Rugendas, actions are severed from meaning, and as such from his ability to mean. And really, as Aira presents it, the only way to do this is to reduce intentional action to causality, in other words, to "pure action," something Aira discovers in the lightning. While we can understand uncertainty as the imperfect, sense always in medias res, meaning exists only as completion, composed in and of the act (a revelation whose components are always entailed in it): not "presence" but what Fried calls "a continuous perpetual present" (Fried 1998, 167). This "[P]resentness" as "grace" Fried refers to isn't one that arises in submitting passively to the forces of a natural god and the forces of

sensibility, for Kant the mind and for Aira its “infinite plasticity,” but to art, the logic of its structure and composition (Fried 1998, 168). It’s not the rivalry of two theoretical positions, “an episode in the history of taste” that’s at stake in the crisis of Modernist art, but rather its ability to mean and its ability to matter — an intention already united with that interiority. For Fried, an artist like Caro is exemplary not only because his work means something, but precisely because it embodies “meaningfulness *as such*” (Fried 1998, 119) — that “*at every moment the work*” through its syntax (or internal relations) is “*itself is wholly manifest*” (Fried 1998, 167). By contrast for Krauss and for Aira, unseating the logic of those relations in favor of sense means likewise striving to jettison the question of meaningfulness. This is why for Aira in particular Deleuze is so central. Like Aira, the philosopher doesn’t imagine painting according to a logic of composition — an artwork whose “presentness” (Fried 1998, 168) demands our interpretation — but rather according to the “logic of sensation,” a “presence” that acts “directly on the nervous system” (Deleuze 2003, 44). For Deleuze and for Aira the whole point of sensation is that it refuses understanding, like the post-accident Rugendās who “could not understand,” “nor did he want to” (Aira 2006, 35). And it’s in this way that for Aira post-accident becomes the condition of post-Art. Put another way, for Deleuze and for Aira “the logic of sensation” is precisely not the logic of Modernism, an art whose evaluation was no longer exterior to it but ontologically and historically by necessity made internal to it. Indeed, it’s not something like Kantian taste but the alignment of evaluative and normative claims embodied in art that displayed a kind of meaningfulness as such, as in Caro, a demand made by art, that matters for Fried. In fact, Deleuze’s “logic of sensation” looks a lot more like taste, a biologized or psychologized gestalt, a response we all share. And while it’s true that creating an art that collectivizes our response might in some way seem to undermine our private feelings about it, it nonetheless depends on a kind of automatic invocation that undermines any epistemological claim art might make. The point of the model of a photograph is not that it makes us experience the unified collective sensation of one view, something like gestalt, but rather that in producing a kind of view that exceeds viewing, it finds a way to overcome the problem of the view altogether.

The crisis of Modernist art is not an “episode in the history of taste,” but instead an ontological crisis about what art is. For painting, it’s not the paint — its merely material qualities — nor even its illusionism that’s at the center of why it matters, but rather that a painting is in one way or another a picture of something. And this is how photography’s

The crisis of Modernist art is not an “episode in the history of taste,” but instead an ontological crisis about what art is.

indexicality could come to matter for Fried, since part of photography's attraction is its literalness, the "ontological guarantee" that it was not intended by the photographer (Fried 2005, 553). The photograph requires a referent, so it is undoubtedly a picture of something; in other words, there's "no photograph without something or someone," as Barthes puts it, "the referent adheres" (Barthes 2010, 6). That same observation, expanded by Fried, would become crucial for art's ability to matter. Even while the photograph is subsumed by a "pure deictic language" (Barthes 2010, 5), there's the possibility for the artist to mobilize that language (something Stein had long discovered). It's the frame that revives art's capacity to be a picture, both on account of and despite its indexicality, the guarantee that its logic could extend to every part of it including its frame. The photograph, something literal, could mark its relation to the world through its frame — the mark that it wasn't only an index of the world but also the intention of the artist. Structurally speaking, the frame guarantees the photograph's separateness from the world and its "meaningfulness *as such*." And it's the photograph's ability to reinstate that possibility, betraying "presence" by displacing it with "presentness" that allows it to succeed as art. While for Barthes, like Krauss and Aira, the question of art and meaning is always personal and experiential (a condition and a position) for Fried the question of art can only ever be historical and ontological (history and meaning). For Fried and for Modernism there is only one side to art — the picture. The other side is (just) the infinite horizon of the world.

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Tytuł: Dlaczego fotografia znaczyła (w 1847) jako sztuka więcej niż kiedykolwiek wcześniej?

Abstrakt: Pod koniec XX wieku fotografie krajobrazowe, które nigdy nie miały mieć charakteru artystycznego, zaczęły odgrywać centralną rolę w krytyce pewnego pojęcia sztuki. Rosalind Krauss rozpoczyna swój atak na modernizm od przywołania indeksalnych cech fotografii, stawiając za wzór dziewiętnastowieczne fotografie krajobrazowe Timothy'ego O'Sullivan. Niniejszy esej rozważa model Krauss w odniesieniu do tego, w jaki sposób Césara Aira przedstawia XIX-wiecznego malarza pejzażystę Johanna Moritza Rugendasa – stawiając, jak sądzę, w centrum problem fotografii. Konceptualnie przekształcając pejzaż – *locus classicus* kryzysu sztuki modernistycznej - za pośrednictwem postaci Rugendasa, Aira przekształca gatunek malarski w alternatywną, nacechowaną neuroestetycznie „procedurę”. Malarz-pejzażysta Aira staje się fotografem i służy, jak sądzę, zarówno za symbol własnego stosunku Airy do pisania, jak i za artefakt postartystycznego świata Krauss.

Słowa kluczowe: pejzaż, krajobraz, fotografia, César Aira, Rosalind Krauss, modernizm