Initiates of the Inner Circle - fashion photography as a new mythogenetic tool

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1. Reality is a Symbolic Construct

Meaning, is a product of human sapience, the result of complex thinking processes that are not an a-priori deterministic trait of Homo sapiens, as the tradition of humanism, stretching back to the ideological powers of the Enlightenment would make it appear, but is itself merely a mechanism of psychological adaption to an analytically insurmountable experience, which is human existence itself. A process which Gregory Bateson coined as schismogenesis.

It follows that "the fact that people think at all, that they are cultural beings who do things and effect changes in their surroundings, is due to the pronounced uncertainty, the relentless unclarity of their lives" (Drummond 1996: 54). If, thinking, the primary sense making tool at our disposal is the result of the inherently incomplete, shifting, changing, continuously adapting nature of our being, the conceptual tools it generates, such as language and other artifacts, ritual forms etc. can not be absolute, on the contrary these necessarily would be processual (ibid. 30 - 55). Thus the meaning of any symbol is derived only out of its usage context, should this change, then the meanings it conveys no longer appear current, so for example "few people eating croissants will be aware that they once signified the defeat of a people whose emblem was the crescent moon" (Layton 2006: 33). Many things lose the meaning initially attached to them at the moment of their creation. As artifacts migrate into different usage patterns their meaning becomes evident only through their relational bonds with their environment and in particular with the internalized experiences of the humans they come in contact with, which they simultaneously also influence (Kienlin and Widura 2014: 34). Because symbols can only persist as long as they facilitate the exchange of information, and since information becomes meaningful only within the context of particular human experiences otherwise it is unintelligible, no matter its form, the precondition for symbolic exchange is a minimal degree of consensus between those who cohabit in a similar world-experience structure. (ibid. 2014: 33). If meaning is a byproduct of negotiated human experiences of the world at large and not a metaphysical property of words to be assigned randomly by individual human minds, then "the extent to which individual [perspectives] will overlap will vary according to the way knowledge is held and transmitted"(Layton 2014: 37). Conclusively, there are three prerequisites for the persistence of symbolic exchange and thus ultimately of culture:

"1. It must generate behavior appropriate to the environment

2. It must make sense of experience

3. It must be mutually intelligible and transmissible" (ibid)

If information pertaining to the key parameters of human experience is exchanged through symbols and this exchange is enabling the adaptation of self-consciousness, which is prerequisite for further patterning of behavior, then the logical consequence of such a generative process is its own self-preservation which necessarily entails a self-realization of conceptual boundaries. Articulating experience in a symbolic form moves human consciousness into the realm of contrasts and comparisons, which facilitates the expression of difference and its structural opposite: sameness. The conscious internalization and externalization of experience based on the scale of difference and similitude is "the groundwork for the mobilization of group identities"(Appadurai 2008: 13).

This vast cultural effloressence is in contemporary times embedded within the five core dimensions of "modernity at large" namely, ethnoscapes, mediascape, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes to which I might add Overings mythscapes as as 6th dismension, one, which as I see it straddles all the other ones drawing from them experiences, narratives, patterns and adjusts itself towards complete complementarity.

The concept of scapes according to Arjun Appadurai refers the reader to the familiarity of the geographic landscape, with the entirety of its constituent elements, such as people, villages, resources, ideas, value and so on, as well as to its distinct characteristic of being a closed of delimited area which exists at a given point in time in a fixed geographic setting. However, his use of the term scape is deconstructive, meaning that neither of the 5 mentioned scapes features any similarities with a landscape except the fact that they exist within our world, occupy geographic space but do not present any clear boundaries nor can any of them be analyzed and understood in their complexity without reference to any of the other. Thus ethnoscapes present imaginary landscapes of people who are at the same time partly on the move and deterritorialized but at the same time bound together perhaps virtually in imagined communities of ritual practice or religious belief, ethnoscapes are therefore, an image of "the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups" of a world wherein the previous stability of communities is no longer taken for granted but its opposite, the acceleration of human motion.

The same criteria apply for the other scapes, each defined by an increasing flux of its constituent elements, be it people, capital, media and images that temporarily merge together to form critical spaces of agency only to disintegrate again into the apparent incoherence of a highly accelerated modern technology driven environment (Appadurai 2008: 30-40).

I will call these nodal points, these moments of intersection of two or more scapes hyper-reality, because any given outcome of such an interaction would be, due to the very nature of our mediated perception upon reality and its increasingly opaque and intransparent complexity, a construct, a fabricated reality. This should, however, not be interpreted as a negative development nor as some sort of loss of creativity or disenchantment, but it should reflect the multitude of forms of encapsulating Eliade's "Great Time", as the source of primeval definitions of ourselves and the world, within new mediums and new formats which permit substantially easier, faster and more convincing assimilation by human consciousness than many previous forms, often eliminating altogether difficult financial or material burden. Secondly these technically mediated forms remove many of the previous rigid structures one had to navigate through to reach mythic content, such as the role of an institutionalized priesthood or initiated cast who would be the sole proprietors of said knowledge. That, as I will show in the following chapters should not be interpreted as an assault on the purpose of ritual or its negation, in fact it drives ritual practice closer into to the familiar experience of the individual consuming any form of hyper-real media.

2. Understanding rituals at the convergence of myth and environement

"In a world of fast-paced globalization and market-driven economies, ritual seems awkwardly out of place, a clumsy, tradition-laden cultural activity" - Ronald Grimes (URL.1)

During the course of the last century, as the intellectual institutions consolidated and the scientific mind wrested the interpretative power over our environment and our own social realities, the trend to break with or at the very least to scrutinize all traditions, to secure the new narrative of modernity, has run its course widely unchecked, reaching a zenith in Francis Fukuyama's thesis of the "end of history"; namely in the ultimate triumph and permanent

establishment of industrialized market economy democracies as the sole *modus operandi* of the new 21st century.

Implicit to the design of the modern world would be such transformations as: the gradual shrinkage of religiosity and loss of spirituality in the face of intellectualism, less play due to the increasing regimentation of life into the service of industrial work and possibly the most important change, the compartmentalization of cultural efflorescence into a rigid system of supply and demand split between a profit oriented producing group and an uninventive, passive consumer group. From a superficial perspective or one that implicitly fosters said outcome, the current state of cultural and social transformations would indicate the 'modern moment' is at hand. Thus the head quote of this chapter would be valid in its literal form. Upon closer inspection, however, contemporaneity unfolds in the guise of an analytically insurmountable complexity of intertwining narratives which as beautifully described by Arjun Appadurai expand by feeding on the force of an imagination which is

> "no longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape [...] no longer elite pastime and no longer mere contemplation [...] (but) has become an organized field of social practices [...] a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility (Appadurai 2008:31)".

Needless, to say a researcher of the caliber of Ronald Grimes is surely aware of this uneven, rebellious and unpredictable form of modernity that is seeping through the cracks of the carefully crafted academic prototype. One in which the calculated scientific gaze, even in the heart of the early industrial powers of Western Europe, by far hasn't achieved dominance, on the contrary is challenged by old and newly budding forms of being and knowing emerging out of the newfound agency the widespread consumption of a globalized mass media naturally provokes (Appadurai 2008:7).

It is therefore, my personal interpretation that what Grimes actually meant to criticize is not the modernist, industrialist construct snuffing out ritual practice, which is simply not true, but the obtuse and rigid vantage point of formalist academic positions on the topic and their subsequent inability to recognize ritual practice within the context of current global cultural flows and the *techniques* that drive them. In other words, since science uses abstract analytical categories whose validity it needs to verify in the psychological and social processes of everyday

life. At one point it became impossible to recognize emerging ritual forms within modernity, as such, because the reference conceptual categories were set in synchroncity with an expected disenchantment of the world, as announced by Max Weber in 1905. What 'we seem to witness [today, however, is] quite the opposite: a highly mediated re-enchantment of the world (cf.de Kloet, Kuipers 2007: 300)' in which paradoxically perhaps the most blatantly profit oriented industry, namely the visual entertainment, films industry, is 'partly replac[ing] tradition-organized religion'(cf. ibid: 300-301) by generating content and imagery that provides solutions for, or at the very least addresses the schismogenesis prevalent in everyday life as 'the representation of undisolvable dilemmas that lie in the heart of a cultural system, a representation that makes life bearable only by disguising it's fundamental incoherence (Drummond 1996, S.3)' in a more direct and emotionally laden manner than other, perhaps more arduous paths, such as religion would allow. Thus mythic elements and ritualized practice are made manifest in unusual contexts and settings, mainly driven by the consumption of popular culture, which situates them in an analytically difficult grey zone at the edge of spirituality and capitalist consumerism, a characteristic exemplified by this current papers subject of interest: the possibility of fashion photography to function as a revivalist mnemonic device generally, and in particular in the case of "The Initiates of the Inner Circle" series, for an ancient secretive religious practice.

Ritual as a phenomenon is inextricably linked to fundamental questions as to what it means to be human and how this human experience can be best negotiated between the exerting forces of individuality or the psyche and society or the environment through the strategic deployment of agency, be it personal or collective.

In the following passages, I shall further examine this primordial and ahistoric phenomenon by explaining its analytic and conceptual reciprocity with myths and thus demonstrating that a truthful reading of ritual is impossible to achieve outside of such greater hyper-textual reference points. I will then give an overview of the constituent elements of ritual and reflect in short on the importance of the work of major ritual theoreticians towards crafting an encompassing and robust conceptual framework for ritual analysis.

2.1 Conceptual reciprocity of myth and ritual

„The things a man has heard and seen are threads of life, and if he pull them carefully from the confused distaff of memory, any who will can weave them into whatever garments of belief please them best." (Yeats 1893 [orig.] /2003, S.4)

The intricate relationship of people with their environment has been a centerpiece of our collective attention since time immemorial. In the attempt to explain the mysteries of our existence and give reasonable answers to the often complete randomness of the cycle of life and death much of humanity has developed through the course of time complex systems of knowledge that encode distinct sets of favorable practices, their symbolic, linguistic and spiritual value by extracting their properties from the now, from the lived history, and embedding them via narratives into what Mircea Eliade, calles the Great Time, which is both timeless as well as endlessly repeating (cf.Mader 2008:88). Enshrined in these systems of belief are notions about the nature of Good and Evil, ethics and morality, life and death, but also key elements of individual and collective identity, such as heritage, histories and very predominantly the relation to ones forebears. Furthermore, many such narratives also encode the practices of their very own renewal and reiteration throughout the generations. It is therefore analytically distinguishable between two layers of meaning, the one ahistoric and pertains in part to the realm of the supernatural, of that which is beyond the confines of "our reality", the other bound to the praxis, pertaining to the lived experience as its expressive form, historic and adaptive yet drawing upon the same source within Great Time as the previous one. These two symbolic and collective referential systems I am addressing are myth and ritual (cf. Kapferer 2008: 507-509; Mader 2008, S.13-16; Wikipedia: Myth and Ritual URL:3).

Early scholarly debates concerning the topic have focused on explaining the genesis of both practices in a simplistic "the chicken or the egg" race to prove the primacy of either one concept over the other. Whether ritual practice is a natural progression of myths as a form of theatrical enactment or embodiment of certain virtues, characteristics or values, or whether myths where created as a necessary tool to add legitimacy and sanctify certain modes of practice and the societal hierarchies these enabled is in my opinion irrelevant, the most important and interesting questions pertain to how these create imaginaries according to which our environment is categorized and even more importantly what types of practices both individual and collective

they enable through their inherent social character. Both of these phenomena have and continue to be strongly tied in with the study of religion and in particular with the dichotomous pair sacred vs profane as this distinction in the Durkheimian tradition was considered to be the primordial dynamic of social order. Within such a social paradigm the sacred, is excised from daily routines, and is imbued via often complicated narratives with mythic attributes, often being associated with the realm of Gods. These features turn the sacred into the supernatural, which for ordinary humans, naturally becomes inaccessible and requires attunement by enacting invariable sets of actions under guidance from an initiated higher ranking person which often generate heightened emotionality (URL:5). The exact pattern of agency within ritual is itself often considered to be of sacred, or supernatural origin and the more skillfully embedded into complex webs of narratives, the further back in time they can be "placed", the more potency they have. Hereby the referential loop between myths and ritual practice becomes the most evident and is best described by Joanna Overing in her accurate statement that "myths come alive through the performance of them" (Mader 2008:90)

The function of ritual in the community is that of providing the proper rules for action in the realm of the profane as well as supplying a bridge for passing into the realm of the sacred - thus ritual is a mechanism that facilitates as described by van Gennep and Victor Turner change within societal structures by introducing and facilitating liminal moments. Limininlity however, doesn't necessarily imply a relationship between the sacred and the profane, but covers a wide array of daily experiences which require people to transition through social hierarchies. The importance of such rites of passage rests primarily in their capacity to bring emotions grounded within the experiencing body in a dialectical relation with abstract meaning - a relation which both feeds on the prescribed narrative as its source of legitimacy, but at the same time, with each new repetition is reinforcing the commitment of participants (cf Kapferer 2008: 512).

Myths and rituals often bind together numerous cultural elements in their practice, thus proving the ideal starting point for uncovering webs of significance and ideology. As suited to such complex and multifaceted concepts, there is no consensus on a single definition encompassing all of their numerous aspects and implications be it in the domain of spiritual experience or social organization.

As anthropologists our prime object of study is the unraveling of world views, we are tasked with explaining the "Lebenswelt" the structural, functional and semiotic mechanisms that lie at the heart of societies. The analysis of ritual as both an ontologic process as well as an embodied communicative practice that stretches the span of time and territory, thus facilitating a whole array of fundamental human and social practices such as revitalization, liminality and integration, mourning, sacrifice and degradation is vital.

 Having established a general overview of the function and purpose of ritual as well as its communicative and symbolic properties derived from myths or other similar narratives, I wish to look at some key characteristic that can be considered to define and set apart ritual from other activities.

 Rituals denote relatively elaborate, dramatic, planned sets of activities that consolidate various forms of cultural expression into one event, which is carried out through social interactions, usually for the benefit of an audience and has both practical and expressive consequences (cf ibid).

> "I take the term 'ritual' to denote the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers." (Rappaport 1999: 24)

Taking a closer look at the elements contained within this definition, one observes that ritual per se is an entirely social activity – having as prerequisite a congregation of people, whose performance, be it direct, and either active or passive, - functions as the expressive form for the substance or the message of the ritual.

Nonetheless, not all performance is ritual, since ritual adheres to strict formal rules, which preordain the process and the outcome of such activities. The meaning of ritual becomes apparent only due to its special form, otherwise it would not be perceived differently than any other formal event in the cycle of public and private life. Consequently, rituals often impose very strict guidelines towards acceptable behavior and attempt to create an intense sense of immediacy and expectation, which aims to generate the main prerequisite for them successfully accomplishing their goals, and a heightened and strong emotionality (cf.Eriksen 2001: 216).

Furthermore, repetitiousness and the possibility of reenacting ritual in almost identical ways is a characteristic that sets it apart from most mundane activities in two ways: first, the

formal proceedings within ritual have proven to be effective in achieving desired outcomes; consequently, they are enshrined in memory and preserved as such for future occasions – hence the relative invariance in ritual structure and flow. Furthermore, rituals are enabled by a select group of initiates, persons with high esteem and knowledge within the group, who function as guides in the ritual process, and who enable the transfer of information from themselves to others. Consequently, rituals also bear a significant communicative role within society. Rituals convey ideas, symbols and, at times, their very own sequential structure – as a socially accepted form of communion (cf. Rappaport 1999: 50f).

Ritual as any other practice isn't closed off in a semiotic vacuum, but exists and draws upon the contexts it emerged from and is embedded into. These external factor impact the dynamics of ritual in 3 different categories: form, framing and design.
The framing of ritual is to a high degree determined by the actors and their commitment to the rite and more importantly to its symbolic meaning. Therefore the context shapes ritual indirectly through the emotional, cognitive and spiritual needs and predilections of its performers.

Ritual form implies the performance of ritual actions and their necessary prerequisites such as a script detailing the proper sequence of acts, describing the purpose of the ritual and constructing its histories. Traditionally scripts include oral tradition, religious books, decrees and so on, more recently however, photography and the internet have become increasingly potent purveyors of modes of being and knowing. Geography and the physical environment play a key role in delimiting ritual form by bounding it to prescribed areas with prescribed resource. This comes to view best in the context of sacrificial rituals which range from the individual, embedded into the economy of the household, to multi- and transnational pilgrimage actively shaping the politics and economies of nations. The historic context arises thus as a natural sequence, considering that each place is intrinsically the bearer of its historic narrative, which often plays vital role in the interpretation of ritual agency and its ultimate efficiency. The longer the historic continuity and the less variables it generates the higher the acceptance and satisfaction level of the ritual community.
Needless to say other elements pertaining to the design of a ritual and its performative elements such as gender, aesthetic preference, mediated ritual and its technological appliances are also important factors that shape the experience and the reception of ritual as a meaningful act and

their growing importance in our contemporary world cannot be overstated (Kapferer 2008: 509-517; Langer, Snoek 2013: 190f).

These constitutive elements of ritual practice and their fluid negotiated meaning within the general societal context as well as their interactions within the practice of a ritual itself are what Bruce Kapferer describes the dynamics of ritual. Their importance lies therein that they configure a blueprint for ritual analysis and interpretation.

3. Clothing - a symbolic device for carrying cultural categories

"Clothing makes culture material in diverse and illuminating ways" (McCracken 1986: 109)

One of the key symbolic means of giving form to the conceptual categories of existence that emerge from the human mind's interaction with the environment and perhaps also the most resilient one is clothing.

Why does clothing bear such a significance as a means of communication and categorization? This is perhaps due to the centrality of clothing to identity forging processes that individuals undergo in their journey of socialization.

Continuing Lee Drummond's line of thought, that thinking is an emergent process facilitated by the very incompleteness of human existence, the first cornerstone that each human must first reach within their semiotic path of self iteration is what I call a coming to terms with their body. Looking at infants the first years are spent getting acquainted with the many bodily functions, their scope and limits. Understanding one's body-mind framework and even more importantly integrating it within a social framework of operation nevertheless is a lifetime work.

The body itself, comprises an entire array of aesthetically describable qualities such as color, texture, shape, odor and dimension, categories which as the individual ages change and shift, making the task of formulating a cohesively integrative representation pattern that should balance the individual's inner psychological workings with the responses from his peers not merely a solitary endeavor but a very social and public one. Therefore, any aesthetic response the body may generate also carries messages of social and psychological significance which are fully outside of the control of the individual (cf. Bubolz Eicher; Roach 1979: 7ff). Consequentially, the premise of any disposition of identity rests at the juncture between

"socialistic adaptation to society and individual departure from its demands" (Simmel 1957: 542), which offers a modicum of explanation as to why personal adornment is characteristic of all societies, while forms of protective clothing are not.

The need towards classification and indication of a person's status within a human collective appear ubiquitous while protection towards the elements and other adverse environmental conditions are very circumstantial and limited, thus "there are regions where one would expect to find protective garments, for example the freezing regions of Tierra del Fuego, but where such items are absent." (Schwarz 1979: 25)

Clothing therefore is a symbol that indicates a person's sex, age, occupation, position in a social or spiritual hierarchy but also functions as a tool to conceal or reject such categories. Thus personal adornment can both symbolically tie a community together, as much as its rejection can signify unequal distribution of power, oppression, fragmentation and/or the breakdown of customary patterns of organizing action as well as the failure of ritual to effect order. Whatever, the implications such choices may have, the central dimensionality shaping any symbolic statement made through clothing remains fixed on the axis of representing distance. Be it social distance or temporal distance, clothing always positions the wearer in a relational dynamic to his peers.

4. The purpose of the artist

"Even the most superior mind and the most powerful imagination must found itself on facts, which must be recognized for what they are. The imagination will often reshape them in a way which the prosaic mind cannot understand; but this recreation will be based on facts, not on formulas or illusions."

"These facts must be perceived by the sense, or felt; not learnt."

- Kenneth Clark summarizing the ideas of John Ruskin

I take for granted that my readership is familiar with the paradigm shift in art which has occurred over roughly the last century - from realism with recurring classical themes to the abstract, modern art, with its reactionary stance of subversion and alienation from the world at large as well as a thirst for critique of the established orders - engendered a break with form, aesthetics and all interfaces art previously had to reach its audience. In short the modernist revolution relieved art of its millennial intrinsic scope of transfiguring a multifaceted and often grim existence into idyllic forms, into archetypal models that draw potency through their capacity for transcendence and redemption and thus achieve timeless appeal. Throughout the ages art aimed to infuse the incorruptible properties of classical, theoretic and unadulterated beauty into lived experience marred by the mundane, the petty, the ugly and the chaotic and thus redeem it. Art was medicine for the soul and the artist, applying in his work fundamental ideas of beauty passed down from the most ancient of traditions and combining them through the mastery of his craft to effect sublimity, was the healer (cf. Scruton 2009 URL 5).

Art is a great mirror for society. It really shows what's happening in the world around us. Thought provoking artwork makes us think about our purpose in life and more importantly it teaches the valuable lesson of aesthetic immutability - which, in itself is a testimony for the human capacity of nobility. This is why

"the posture of aesthetic distance promise[s] an alternative route to the meaning of the world. For the Romantics, the work of art was the result of a unique and irreplaceable experience, containing a revelation, distilled through individual effort and artistic genius" (cf. Scruton 2009 URL 6)

This arduous task of maintaining the aesthetic tradition, however, proved less attractive than the cheap ways of pouring scorn on it, which the modernists deployed and exacerbated to the point where modern theory based art dominates the art world. Needless to say this development is counter intuitive and counter productive at the same time.

At this point I wish to elaborate shortly on the essence of conceptual art, considering that this project at hand strives to be a conceptual piece which relies on photography as its medium of distribution.

In conceptual art Sol Lewitt, one of the pioneering figures remains a leading point of reference, even though I do not agree with some of his statements, I will rely on his theoretical groundwork.

He states that in this branch of art "the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is perfunctory affair" (Lewitt 1967)

In this case, Lewitt argues that the outcome of the process, is irrelevant to the conceptual work that was put into it by the artist. In other words, if nobody understands or likes the finite work does not represent the value of the work, but the process of getting there does. That conflicts utterly with my previously described scope and function of art and is in my opinion an insincere gesture, a fraudulent attempt at hoodwinking or manipulating the reactions of the viewer by presenting him a work but withholding the key to unlocking its meaning. This trap of conceptual art is tied again with the modernist turn towards theoretical art rather than perceptual. Lewitt argues for an incompatibility of uniting conception and perception in the artwork, by ignoring the effects of the latter, for him what a viewer perceives is irrelevant. I consider that to be a completely wrong approach, especially concerning visual works of art. If a picture can't communicate its message to a viewer on an instinctual level first, the most brilliant of ideas can rest behind it, it is a failure. Another problem that is prevalent in conceptual art is the assumption that other art practices are not engaging with their subject matter intellectually, that they are somehow "art created out of the gut" which is simply wrong.

For me everything humans create is the result of conceptual thinking. The idea leads to the style, the style generates the form, the form births the emotion. Art is nothing but the architecture of thought made manifest in form. I reject the aberrant notion that conceptual art is different or epistemologicaly separate and therefore morally and intellectually superior. All art is a reflection of/on reality, the crux of the matter is whether it is a sincere one. This brings me to my point about the relevance and potency of conceptual art.

Sol Lewitt states that "all the steps in the process are of importance. The idea itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product.", exactly this is the exceptional strength of a sincere conceptual work, the fact that the idea and process of its maturation/realization are playing a vital role in the analysis of the finite work. Conceptual art

done wrong in my opinion is when the idea trumps over the final work, meaning the artist fails to communicate it to his audience properly or does so deliberately.

This is why this current project has such a long expose and introduction which sets the framing for the final pictures, because the reader has to understand the context which inspired the creation of said pictures.

This is where sincerity comes to play! In my opinion good conceptual work is done only when the idea and the final works are put in balance to each other and the creator isn't shy of presenting the entire process of creation openly to his audience.

It is my strong belief that the role of the artist today in the context of a sprawling information age and its deluge of sensory stimuli, more so than in any other time before, is closer to that of the philosopher in ages past. It is the duty of the artist to help perception navigate the streams of information deliberately cluttering human perception and provide aid in deciphering the increasingly hard to reach and diffuse reality from its mediated representation. In other words, namely the words of Hellwein, a contemporary conceptual Austrian artists whose bold works are an inspiration, art and the artist have a role of reacting to their times.

In order to achieve this the artist must stop hiding behind vague works or the arbitrary infusion of meaning by cohorts of art critics with dubious intentions, and should step forward to represent his ideas, his vision, his "Weltanschauung" openly and directly. The modernist conspiracy of relying on a cohort of art critics and impresarios to 'spin' or 'doctor' meaning into art works which otherwise suffer from very grave impediments in clarity and sincerity must end if art has any chance of breaking out of its anachronistic hermetic bind.

5. The power of the photographic image

"An Image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" - Ezra Pound

I started this project with a bold statement, namely that photography was the embodiment of modernist ferment in its early stages when it was still driven by the desire to explore and create rather than the later decadence of deconstruction and alienation.

That is, however, not to say that the emergence and introduction of this new medium didn't have alienating effect, on the contrary, it is due to photography that the arts underwent their first modernist crises which lead the rupture with all the old traditions and the emergence of the art 'ISMS' DadaISM, SurrealISM, CubeISM, ExpressionISM with their deeply entrenched subjectivities. The reasoning that lead to said transformations can be reconstructed when one understands the effect photography had on the visual arts at the time. Realist painting of the 19th century especially its neoclassicist school were shattered by the advent of this powerful new tool. The clash went so far that in 1862" Ingres, together with such prominent artists as Flandrin, Fleury and Puvis de Chavannes declared war on the new medium" a confrontation which Delacroix is said to have rebutted with his famous line: "Which of them [the realist painters] would be capable of such perfection of line and such delicacy of modeling?" (Koetzle 2005: 29)

Unwilling to accept a truce, the Academie rebutted the early photographers as merely technicians because they considered there is no special value to be attached to the appearance of the "hand of the craftsman"--much less to the *false* pretense of craftsmanship in items that are in fact a product of the machine. In other words the art establishment wouldn't recognize the merit of the individual photographer in creating a picture because for them operating a device wouldn't involve craftsmanship and skill. The subsequent "photography is not art" debates that ensued, although long time resolved do provide a good argument for my analysis.

It is my strong belief that photography posed a threat to the painters because it challenge their monopoly not so much on representation but on conceptualizing and insofar as many established painters were also of higher social standing, the risk of having a medium which would allow the liberalization of the act of reframing the world, of revolutionizing perception of allowing a destabilization of the status quo. To understand why that is so we have to understand how images, the cultural products of photography that range beyond the materiality of the picture, work.

Images are more than the representation of a certain frame or perspective of reality, that is the picture, images are in fact the sensitive bundles of emotion that are bound through experience or the acquisition of knowledge to a certain conceptual category which they define. Therefore images suggest myths, stories they give meaning and sense to the environment we inhabit so that we may form analytical categories which help classifying the world around us. Images are

therefore our tools of making sense of the world, which is why they posses tremendous power(cf Flusser 1989 passim). Each image encapsulates within itself a long list of knowledge about a particular aspect of the world stretching back generations and is therefore an accumulation of socially constructed meaning and its associated emotional reaction. Images define our social existence by reinforcing core definitions of the self in relation to society, culture and history (Steichen 1960: 136f).

This is one of the reasons why, as Edward Steichen accurately notes, photography has emerged as the dominating means of communication during the last century (cf Harper 2002: passim). Consider this power of images it is clear why the 19th century saw an embittered struggle for dominance in the visual arts, the liberating potential of photography due to its easy applicability consisted, as explained by a pioneer theoretician of new media, Moholy-Nagy, of the "transformation of human perception" to pure vision without the interference of the mind was a genuine threat to the old guard (cf.Moholy-Nadgy 2008:90).

However, photography itself exactly because of its fast and easy applicability soon grew into a routine and vapid form of expression thus falling itself pray to the modernist trap. With five billion photographs printed each year in the laboratories of Germany alone, the world is faced with a deluge of information flooding our perception. Add film and the internet to the mix and an escape from the supremacy of the moment, from the totalitarian grip of the rollercoaster ride of advertising that keeps our attention bound in its faux extasy seems impossible. Yet as media scientist Norbert Boltz argues photography is paradoxically the key to the problem. Apparently the current endless torrent of data has revitalized the power of art photography "to take root in our memory and engender something akin to a memory" (Koetzle 2005:7). A conclusion that I wholeheartedly and optimistically share. Photography, although a product and a factor of the modernist cataclysm, has the innate property to force the viewer to decelerate, to engage the subject matter with all his senses if he should ever unravel the deep and hidden layers of "the large quite image" reflecting his world in ways that elicit deeply rooted emotional and intellectual credos but at the same time challenging their validity. It is therefore, that photography manages to redeem the modernist condition by showing that, as John Ruskin brilliantly phrased

"art is not a matter of taste, but involves the whole man. Whether in making or perceiving a work or art, we bring to bear on it feeling, intellect, morals, knowledge, memory and every other human capacity, all focused in a flash on a single point." (Clark 1964)

6. Initiates of the Inner Circle -

The dark, steamy, damp and low lit background should not only reference the mythic decent of the Goddess Demeter into Hade's shadowy realm of undeath, but equally so the descent of the initiates into the occult vaults of the underground temple Telesterion on the foothills of ancient Athens.

The initiation ritual of the Mysteries remains in the firm grasp of history's amnesia, according to legend, the visions of the Holy Night that the participants experienced were life changing. In the modern context of a world wrought with increased loss of identity and by distrust of our fellows, a belief in the transmigration of souls - reincarnation - seems to be much needed, to remind us that we are indeed all one. Chimeric aspects of the One primal essence, such is my belief was the central vision of the Mysteries and this provided people with a sense of peace.

Equally so, my photographic series should be interpreted as a three act story, concerning the descent, the ritual joining of opposites and the realization of higher consciousness.

The figures, Male and Female, thus perform a seemingly erotic, but also highly combative ritual dance, which explores the stages of expression of form:

the initial attraction of opposites,

the display of and resistance to dominance

and ultimately the introversion into liberating self-consciousness. This ultimate triumphant act, the liberation from the worldly self is represented symbolically by the abandonment of garb and glitter, indicators of thanatos.

Such a photographic recontextualization enables ordinary commodities to become potent ritual objects.

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