



Encountering Pictures: Materiality, Conceptualist Photography, and the Subject

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The idea that artistic practice, after the massive shifts initiated by conceptual art, takes into account, and is accountable to, the material reality of human relations suggests a radical reconceptualization of art's social, cultural, economic, and political position and role. According to this reading, I consider how conceptualist photography has the capacity to contribute to such considerations to an even greater degree, by means of the visual-cognitive dynamics inherent to the photographic encounter. With its unique epistemological and ontological bearing, such an encounter has the potential to proffer a significant phenomenological intervention: one that uses both evidential and abstract-conceptual information to simultaneously promote deep reflection and propose new perceptions of the world in relation to the self. In comparatively analyzing Canadian artist Jeff Wall's primary strategies in staging photographic images, I uncover how historic and more recent theoretical and philosophical discussions and material practices in photography emerge from and import specific but variable sets of relations that effectively participate in the construction of subjectivity according to both individual and collective scales.

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