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**Speaking Images of Humanity.  
»The Family of Man« Exhibition as  
an Exemplary Model of Relational  
Aesthetic and Pictorial Practice**

Je suis un être humain, et tout en que est humain  
ne peut m'être indifférent (Sénèque).<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**

Der Beitrag nutzt ein in der systematischen Kunstpädagogik entwickeltes Modell relationaler Anthropologie, um es kunstwissenschaftlich zu wenden und für die Interpretation eines Kunstwerks heranzuziehen. Dabei wird mit der Ausstellung »The Family of Man« ein Werk gewählt, dessen Intention und Struktur selbst eine Anthropologie thematisiert, die den Menschen als soziales Wesen versteht, das unabdingbar in Selbst-, Mit- und Weltbezügen lebt. Hierdurch versucht die Analyse zu zeigen, was ein relationales Verständnis von Kunst und Bildern und eine entsprechend relationale Bildpraxis bedeutet. Zugleich leistet der Text damit einen Beitrag zur kunstwissenschaftlichen Untersuchung von Struktur und Intention der »Family of Man« und klärt dazu methodologische Prämissen, die in der langen Debatte um diese legendäre Schau bislang übersehen wurden.

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary posted on »The Family of Man« exhibition at Castle Clervaux, Centre national l'audiovisuel (1994-2010), Volume I: 1994, n.pag.

This essay employs a relational anthropological model developed by systematic art education scholarship to exemplify its art historical applicability in the interpretation of a work of art. To this end the photo exhibition »The Family of Man« has been chosen, which in its intention and structure represents an anthropological study of humanity, seen as social beings inexorably embedded in relations to the reflexive self, co-existing others and a shared cosmos. The following analysis seeks to illustrate what a relational understanding of art and a corresponding relational pictorial practice means. At the same time it makes a substantial contribution to art historical scholarship on »The Family of Man« by clarifying methodological premises which have been overlooked in the decades-long debate on this legendary exhibition.

## 1. Introduction

The capacity of images to »speak« to a certain extent is based on an anthropological principle: one that understands images as a phenomenon of human culture, allowing them to transport meaning as long as humanity, as »homo pictor« (JONAS 1961), is not conceived as an egological, solipsistic subject primarily existing only for and out of its own self. Instead, pictures have invariably been directed toward transmitting information as well as offering dialogue and communication. As such they are an expression of a relational principle of anthropology whereby human beings are understood to be primordialially social, their sociality not merely occurring as a by-product of upbringing culture and society, but existing as an intrinsic characteristic of the human species, one which must be allowed to develop (cf. KAISER 1981; TOMASELLO 2010). Pictures as phenomena of communication are thus a reflection of a very basic human capacity of joint attention, of shared intentionality (cf. TOMASELLO 2006; 2014). Images point to something that is not present (cf. BRANDT 1999: 149), allowing our attention to be directed in shared imagination and understanding to that which in itself is not there. The language of images is therefore fundamentally also an expression of human sociality, since they are based on interdependent processes of understanding.

As a consequence, pictures and their interpretation are considered here within the framework of a relational model of anthropology, one that is based on a concept of humanity as existentially connected in interdependent relation between the reflexive self, co-existing others and the shared cosmos (cf. KRAUTZ 2013).<sup>2</sup> In this respect pictorial production and reception, encompassing the capacities of visual perception, imagination, depiction and communication, are also social capacities determined by relationality. The visual

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<sup>2</sup> The term »cosmos« delineates an ontological concept of world that does not only signify the totality of things, ideas or creation but essentially the dynamic principle conditioning all things and beings existing in the world. As a consequence, being in the world is a mutually shared condition, hence human existence is fundamentally co-existential.

language of imagery is therefore a relational practice, a vibrant social performance in which levels of meaning are constituted and participated in on the basis of shared culture and history. Pictures are not closed entities brought forth by an egological subject, nor are they completely appropriated subjectively. Rather they are understood as part of a social practice of communication carried out through processes of deixis and mimesis, thus are based on acts of demonstration and imitation which guide understanding (cf. SCHNEIDER 2016). As a result, communication is made possible by the development of mutually shared imagination that in a sense has been ›cooperatively established‹ (cf. SOWA 2015; see also 2013).

Recent art education research has incorporated the above into a model of relational anthropology in which the human person, existing as reflexive self and co-existing other in a shared cosmos, is endowed with faculties of perception, imagination, representation and communication that are understood as anthropological faculties of image production and reception defined by cultural and historical circumstances (cf. KRAUTZ 2013; 2015a).

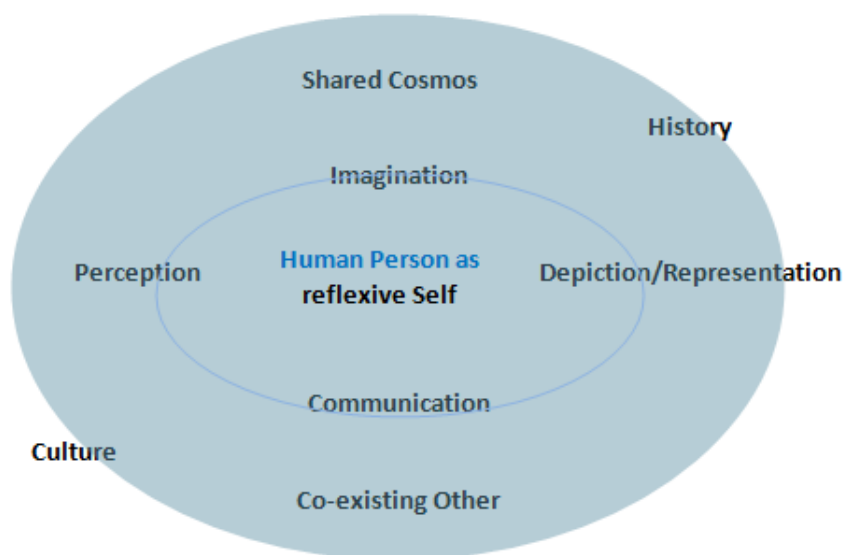


Fig. 1:  
Co-existential relational anthropology and the human faculties of image production and reception (KRAUTZ 2015b: 104)

This essay takes up the above beyond its art educational scope to outline a fundamental aesthetic model which places relationality at its very core, providing the basis for interpreting works of art. Using the example of »The Family of Man« exhibition, in its intention and structure directly reflecting the very anthropological principles discussed above,<sup>3</sup> it is argued that the photographic images in »The Family of Man« effectively and paradigmatically ex-

<sup>3</sup> The exhibition itself played an important role in the origins of this research as a basis for clarifying fundamental issues of art education (see also KRAUTZ 2004a; 2004b).

emply an understanding of art, images and humanity itself as relational, showing *ad oculos* what relational aesthetic practice actually signifies. As a consequence, this essay will contribute towards an art historical understanding of the exhibition's essential structure and intention more deeply as well as to clarifying various theoretical misconceptions that have clouded research over the past decades. Moreover, the formal art historical image analysis supplied in this essay will illustrate how the photographs are brought to »speak« through aesthetic and curatorial means, making deictic-imaginative communication possible across cultural boundaries. Consequently, the special nature of »The Family of Man« exhibition lies in the very didactic nature of its organization, which closely corresponds to the anthropological model developed here. Because of this, some fundamental questions can be raised about art's potential to acknowledge and resonate with our basic social nature in a way that underscores the role pictures play in promoting social consciousness. The »Family of Man« exhibition therefore seems to particularly reflect pictures' potential to further a sense of humanity and sociality by their ability to encourage a process of visual dialogue based on anthropological principles and one that is ethical in scope.<sup>4</sup>

For this purpose a few anthropological and systematic clarifications as well as an outline of the exhibition is needed before an exemplary analysis is placed within the context of the discourse on »The Family of Man« and its methodology is substantiated. For the analysis itself a small photo sequence of the exhibition has been chosen to provide practical exemplification of the issues raised above.

## 2. Sight Instead of Speech

That sight is occasionally superior to speech with respect to understanding the essence of humanity is illustrated in an excerpt written by the Stoic philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca in his »Moral Letters« to a fictional student Lucilius. In it Seneca outlines his concept of what is essentially a natural law ethic conceiving morality not as a positive assertion necessitating verbal instruction but rather as originating from mankind's primary sociality and thus fundamentally accessible through empathetic perception:

Nunc ecce altera quaestio, quomodo hominibus sit utendum. Quid agimus? Quae damus praecepta? [...] Quare omnia quae praestanda ac vitanda sunt dicam, cum possim breviter hanc illi formulam humani officii tradere: omne hoc quod vides, quo divina atque humana conclusa sunt, unum est; membra sumus corporis magni. Natura nos cognatos edidit, cum ex isdem et in eadem gigneret. Haec nobis amorem indidit mu-

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<sup>4</sup> The inextricable correlation between art, ethics and pedagogy is outlined in KAUSCH 2007 and its dissolution in modernism questioned.

tuum et sociabiles fecit. [...] Ille versus et in pectore et in ore sit: homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto. (SENECA, ep. 95,51–53)<sup>5</sup>

Based on this, humanity is not a verbally imparted, cognitively recognized dimension but a quality already fundamentally established in man's own social nature: It becomes evident in empathetic perception where the visible aspect of humanity ›speaks‹ itself and does not need to be verbally communicated. It is predicated on the person involved seeing herself innately as part of what is being seen, not detaching herself from the other or her world but being an engaged, viewing participant. In this sense sight is a social practice. It is relational and connects the self with co-existing others and the shared cosmos. It occurs within a social dimension based on a shared imagination of humanity as a whole (MEIER 2016).<sup>6</sup>

This thought has been traceable throughout the »two-and-a-half-thousand-year-old discourse« (WELZEL 1990: 8; see also MESSNER 1966: 35), which slowly evolved over the course of western history with regard to identifying ethical principles through natural law. This discourse has been guided by the idea that basic ethical insights into the dignity and worth of the human person have been ›written on the heart‹, as Waldstein states in reference to Paul's Letter to the Romans (2,15) (cf. WALDSTEIN 2010). These insights are discernible through the voice of conscience, which has been acknowledged as an instance of moral authority since the Enlightenment. From this the conviction emerged that ›all members of the human family‹ are endowed with inalienable rights, ultimately leading to the United Nation's *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948. The first Article of the Declaration summarizes the idea as follows: »All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.«<sup>7</sup> The moral imperative stated here is not one by imposition but rather extends from humanity's own power of reasoning and conscience, hence is a product of mankind's social nature, from its ability to achieve immediate insight through observational discernment, as Seneca stated two thousand years ago.

Recent research in the human sciences has provided substantial corroboration underpinning humanity's primordial sociality premised by the natural law tradition (cf. KRAUTZ 2015c). According to this research, *homo sapiens'* sociality is a product of their evolution, hence it is part of their very

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<sup>5</sup> »Then comes the second problem, – how to deal with men. What is our purpose? What precepts do we offer? [...] All that you behold, that which comprises both god and man, is one – we are the parts of one great body. Nature produced us related to one another, since she created us from the same source and to the same end. She engendered in us mutual affection, and made us prone to friendships. [...] Let this verse be in your heart and on your lips: I am a man; and nothing in man's lot do I deem foreign to me.« Please note the last sentence of this quotation has evidently been paraphrased by the visitor quoted at the beginning of this essay, underscoring Seneca's import.

<sup>6</sup> This essay impressively presents his empirical study of the development of moral imagination and image expression among children and youths in which the anthropological necessity to contribute to *emendatio rerum humanarum* is explained and illustrated.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

nature (cf. TOMASELLO 2010). This fact has equally been established as a primary characteristic by various fields of research, including developmental psychology, depth psychology, attachment theory research, moral psychology and pedagogy, etc. (cf. FUCHS 2013; KAISER 1981; WILSON 1994).

Appearing most relevant to this article's context is the insight provided by moral education research which has established that the development of a person's morality depends on forms of imaginative and imitative empathy (cf. PLÜSS 2010), therefore on observation, imagination and representation by means of deixis and mimesis. This shows once again that observation, imagination and artistic representation must be considered relational in principle and intrinsically based on communicating social dimensions of meaning.

### 3. Humanity as Staged Photographic Presentation

The core idea of human sociality and relationality as the basis of an ethical approach to humanity was also seized by Edward Steichen in his exhibition »The Family of Man«, first opened at the Museum of Art, New York in 1955. His point of reference, however, was the topical historical event marked by the establishment of the United Nations and its concomitant Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Steichen's presentation of 504 photographs from all over the world, taken by professional as well as amateur photographs, establishes a visual expression of humanity's fundamental potential for solidarity based on universally shared, existential experience.<sup>8</sup> By means of photo sequences arranged according to an innovative exhibition architecture, basic themes such as love, birth, childhood, religion, relationships, empathy, also injustice, war, calamity and suffering are presented as basic human experiences which could therefore also be understood across cultural borders: Based on mankind's innate sociality, these experiences are therefore

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<sup>8</sup> Steichen's approach mirrors to a great extent the »existential goals« of mankind formulated in modern Natural Law theory. Johannes Messner describes them as follows: »Wir können diese Zwecke so umschreiben; die Selbsterhaltung einschließlich der körperlichen Unversehrtheit und der gesellschaftlichen Achtung (persönliche Ehre); die Selbstvervollkommnung des Menschen in physischer und geistiger Hinsicht (Persönlichkeitsentfaltung) einschließlich der Ausbildung seiner Fähigkeiten zur Verbesserung seiner Lebensbedingungen sowie der Vorsorge für seine wirtschaftliche Wohlfahrt durch Sicherung des notwendigen Eigentums oder Einkommens; die Ausweitung der Erfahrung, des Wissens und der Aufnahmefähigkeit für die Werte des Schönen; die Fortpflanzung durch Paarung und die Erziehung der daraus entspringenden Kinder; die wohlwollende Anteilnahme an der geistigen und materiellen Wohlfahrt der Mitmenschen als gleichwertiger menschlicher Wesen; gesellschaftliche Verbindung zur Förderung des allgemeinen Nutzens, der in der Sicherung von Frieden und Ordnung sowie in der Ermöglichung des vollmenschlichen Seins für alle Glieder der Gesellschaft in verhältnismäßiger Anteilnahme an der ihr verfügbaren Güterfülle besteht; die Kenntnis und Verehrung Gottes und die endgültige Erfüllung der Bestimmung des Menschen durch die Vereinigung mit ihm« (MESSNER 1966: 42).

While the last goal mentioned by Messner is specific to Christian Natural Law theory, all other existential objectives mentioned have similarly been defined as anthropological universals in today's human ethological research, for example cf. FORSTER 2012.

equally evident to all human beings in the sense of Seneca. Taken together, the photo sequences emphasize human dignity and mankind's innate potential to establish a more peaceful and just future through the mutual recognition of fundamental rights and needs. As such it also represents a visualization of the principles formulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as its natural law basis (cf. AZOULAY 2011; KRAUTZ 2004b<sup>9</sup>).

As a consequence, Steichen's exhibition can be considered to provide, in aesthetic form, a demonstration of Seneca's moral instruction: As a work of art it evidences human commonality at humanity's most existential points of life. Seeing the photographs allows persons to experience mankind as a ›family‹ consisting of members who, without exception, are endowed with dignity and rights, rights which are not merely conceded in positive statements of law but which are based on man's own social nature, hence on the more fundamental dimension of the human condition. Because of their own nature, which they share with other human beings, persons viewing the images are responsive to the experiences the photographs transport. As a result, the images require sociality and relationality to initiate a process of mutual resonance, as pictorial language refers back to a shared pre-lingual state which becomes activated through sight.

This points to a very significant *condition of reception* which should not be ignored: Pictures in the exhibition only ›speak‹ when the beholder allows herself to be addressed on the level of human resonance. Steichen's photographic sequences require the viewer to enter the exhibition as a reflexive self, as co-existing member of a shared cosmos. This entails allowing oneself to engage in a process of emotional resonance, imaginative empathy and mimetic reference as well as identification with human commonalities visible in the images (cf. KRAUTZ 2004b; see also HORKHEIMER 1989). As a consequence, activating the viewer's sociality is the basic condition for deictic-imaginative communication: The viewer must therefore *permit* herself to be shown something as well as actively apply her powers of social imagination, without which the images do not ›speak‹ to her.

#### 4. Relational Dimensions

Precisely because of the exhibition's content as well as its dialogical form it is possible to illustrate the relational dimensions characterizing deictic-imaginative communication. These dimensions are complex and interdependent, which becomes clearly evident in the exhibition. As a result, »The Family of Man« is a paradigmatic example of a relational work of art by which the fundamental relational aspects of pictorial language, including its complexities, can be demonstrated.

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<sup>9</sup> Although Azoulay does not take direct reference to the ideas propounded here.

It must be emphasized that the concept of relational art and aesthetics propounded here does not follow the definition provided by Nicolas Bourriaud. His term ›relational« (as critics correctly note) is diffusely applied to encompass certain participatory, performative and cross-boundary works of art of the 1990s (cf. BOURRIAUD 2002). Although Bourriaud is aware that every artwork ultimately represents or creates relationships and thus can be considered relational (cf. FELDHOFF 2011: 140), Bourriaud concentrates in particular on those works using places and spaces of social gathering to initiate »temporary micro-communities« (BOURRIAUD 2001: 39) that may provide alternative impulses to counteract the ›crushing« of communities and ›commodification of social relations« in today's capitalistic societies. These works of art »highlight social methods of exchange, interactivity with the onlooker within the aesthetic experience proposed to him/her, and communication processes, in their tangible dimension as tools for linking human beings and groups to one another« (BOURRIAUD 1996). According to Bourriaud, art's function is to deliberately create specific encounters between people (see also FELDHOFF 2011: 141).

In contrast, the term ›relational« does not denote interventions in societal processes through staged, diffusely intentioned and open-ended encounters, but describes an anthropological model of intellectual and emotional relatedness pertaining to the ethical dimension of human dignity. It is therefore not important whether visitors to the exhibition actually speak to or engage with each other as in the former sense. Rather, »The Family of Man« is geared toward establishing imaginative, intellectual and emotional relations based on inner connectedness in the sense of a principally shared life. A shared life, according to Helmut Pape in his reference to the philosopher Rainer Marten, describes a sense of togetherness not based on physical proximity, but on experiencing and perceiving human presence. It is through this sense, through the perception of the presence of others as well as through being experienced and perceived by others, that identity is formed. The shared presence and perception provides purchase and hold (MARTEN 1988: 27), it connects as well as detaches in proximity and with respect:

Denn, positiv bestimmt, vollzieht sich Lebensteilung allein mittels des Erlebens der wechselseitigen, spiegelnden Gegenwart eines anderen Menschen. [...] Diese Erfahrung ist so minimal wie grundlegend. Sie ist grundlegend dafür, dass wir ein eigenes Selbst bilden und weiterformen. Denn unser Selbst wird geformt, wenn sich Menschen als Gegenüber anderer Menschen erfahren und wahrnehmend sich von anderen als wahrgenommen vorfinden.<sup>10</sup> (PAPE 2016: 12; see also MARTEN 1988 and PAPE 2013)

As a result, the relational aesthetic model exhibited by »The Family of Man« is, in contrast to Bourriaud's concept, more concretely outlined: Shared life as

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<sup>10</sup> ›Since shared life, positively determined, is fulfilled only through the experience of mutually mirroring the presence of another person. [...] This experience is as minimal as it is fundamental. It is fundamental to establishing and developing one's own sense of self. Because our self is formed when we experience ourselves in counterpart to others and find that in perceiving them, we too are being perceived.« (translation M.F.-Th./J.K.).



›the experience and perception of the presence of others‹ is conveyed and made possible here through photographic images. Being mirrored by the image on view is neither a tautological nor egologic experience because the exhibition – as will be demonstrated in the photo sequence analysis below – has been conceived to initiate an emotional educational process promoting humanity's natural sociality and morality and thus possibly impacting society on some level, which was Steichen's intention.

Hence relationality is understood here as an anthropological factum of human sociality in the sense that an interdependence of relations between the dimensions of self, others and the cosmos exists (cf. KRAUTZ 2013). This non-egologic idea of the human person conceives of human existence as »Sein-in-Beziehungen« (›existence-in-relationships‹) (FUCHS 2008: 283) in particular. A dialogical understanding of the human person as existing exclusively within a relational interplay of reflexive self, co-existing others and the shared cosmos thus also conceives of culture and history, society and politics not as sociological categories of roles and distances, but in personalist terms, as manifestations of human intellectual and emotional inter-relations and interdependencies that become culturally and historically defined and specified.

Within this context therefore, a relational aesthetic not only understands certain forms of art, but art and pictures in principle to be oriented toward dialogue and communication, toward perceptive sight and the desire to share and participate in dimensions of meaning (see also SCHNEIDER 2016). As a result, art is a fundamental reflection on the ›meaning of the visible‹ (cf. KRAUTZ 2004a), otherwise it would be meaningless as an expression of human culture. Moreover, photography in particular, as a medium of greater potential proximity to our shared reality, offers specific means of realizing the existential and relational dimensions of self, others and cosmos that correspond to the relational model propounded here (see also KRAUTZ 2014). As a consequence, the role of the original, but lonely, artist is relativized in the sense that works of art, images, exist like the artist herself in correspondence to a culture and history that is shared and stands necessarily in reference to the work created – whether negatively or positively.

Bourriaud's concept of relational aesthetics does overlap with the one outlined here marginally in that the autonomous and elevated status of the artist and her artwork is relativized. In »The Family of Man« the individual image and photographer also takes second place to the general exhibition concept, which also takes precedent over Steichen's role as curator-artist. Often criticized as de-contextualizing the autonomous photograph and negating its original authorship (cf. SCHMIDT-LINSENHOFF 2014: 94), in this context and in view of the contemporary relational aesthetic theory, Steichen's concept appears modern and up-to-date.

The various levels or dimensions of relationality reflected by »The Family of Man« exhibition's pictorial language can therefore be summarized as follows:

- First, the exhibition assumes *human sociality* as the prerequisite and condition for reception and appropriate interpretation: Only those who understand themselves as fundamentally social human beings and hence effectively approach the images with a sense of ›shared life‹ are able to comprehend the photographs' meaning. Without identification and empathy understanding the photographs becomes impossible.
- Steichen subsequently creates a highly *complex formal system of image relations*, thus establishing relationships between individual photographs.<sup>11</sup> These image correlations are underscored by a spatial installation concept. The photographs therefore not only correlate on a two-dimensional but also three-dimensional plane. Spatial references are created by variables of perspective depending on the viewer's position as well as by unconventional hanging techniques, thereby creating the possibility of a complex web of meaning.
- In this regard, *an intensive spatial interaction between viewer and the images* is promoted that, while structurally organized through Steichen's composition, only produces levels of meaning through a personal process of perception, contemplation and participation.<sup>12</sup> The fact that this process does actually take place and the manner in which it takes place can be reconstructed in reactions and comments by exhibition visitors which have shown little variance since the show's first opening in 1955 (Centre national de l'audiovisuel, 1994-2010; Office of Public Affairs, 1955; United States Embassy in Mexico, 1955). They show that while relations created between images and viewers vary according to individual and cultural perspective, the anthropological core the images impart continues to be understood and acknowledged independent from these.
- Hence, although every photograph as well as the exhibition itself is embedded within a *cultural and historical context* in which it was created and understood, and while it is also the product of an author with specific intentions, these contexts take second place to that which mutually binds them, hence to a non-historical, trans-cultural dimension. Moreover, the exhibition's own historicity and cultural context is further relativized by its reference to a more fundamental dimension of

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. on the narrative character of image relationships in principle KRAUTZ 2004a, ch. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Recently Kerstin Schmidt argued the exhibition's spatial concept to be relational (Conference from 19-20 June 2015 in Castle Clervaux titled »The Family of Man in the 21st Century: Reassessing an Epochal Exhibition«). However, Schmidt's conclusion of a »relational humanism« differs from the photo-sequence analysis provided here in that, in contrast to Schmidt, it is argued that not the space is responsible for creating relations but rather Steichen's spatial orchestration is reflective of an anthropological relationality and thus promotes its visibility in a specific manner. Schmidt's argument may lead to the same conclusion – based on the theory of place – however, does not effectively acknowledge the anthropological basis Steichen himself premised and endeavored to illustrate.

anthropological commonalities which, rather than being non-historical, in actuality extend far beyond cultural variations of historical time: These commonalities are not just hundreds or thousands of years old but are rather a product of more than two million years of human evolution (see also TOMASELLO 2006; 2010; 2014).

## 5. Errors of Discourse and Methodological Conclusions

It is astonishing that the exhibition's evident relational dimension has been misjudged by the academic critique in principle from the very beginning. A decisive factor in this was Roland Barthes' polemical short essay published in 1956<sup>13</sup> in which he condemned the exhibition lock, stock and barrel for representing a bourgeois myth. His main point of criticism refers to the exhibition constructing a static human nature and promoting a sentimental a-historical myth maintaining the anti-emancipatory status quo. For Barthes, not a universal nature but history, history that mankind constructs itself, determines the condition of humanity. Barthes' premise consequentially negates the anthropological basis outlined above and turns against a two-and-a-half-thousand year-old philosophical tradition, against an acknowledged historical achievement in the form of the Declaration of Human Rights, as well as against recent research in the human sciences<sup>14</sup> – and in particular against what the exhibition itself makes evident.<sup>15</sup> Barthes' critique provided an interpretation which has been perpetuated in variation for over fifty years and which not only has refused to acknowledge Steichen's intent but also has ignored the pictorial sequences themselves (cf. BACK/SCHMIDT-LINSENHOFF 2004). Only recently tentative attempts have been made to think beyond Barthes' apodictic opinion.<sup>16</sup>

Not only has this misconception stemmed from as yet un-reflected historical-materialist assumptions, but since Barthes' critics have also obviously continued to refuse to fulfill the most basic condition of reception established above: i.e. viewing and reflecting on the images in the sense of ›shared life‹, or as a social being and fellow human; to allow for emotional resonance and a contemplation of one's individual life and what it means to be human. Attempting to create an inner detachment before entering the exhibition, where proximity and identification are necessary conditions, makes

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<sup>13</sup> Originally published in 1956 in *Les lettres nouvelles* as »La grande famille des Hommes«. For the english version cf. BARTHES 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Which at that time were also in part public knowledge.

<sup>15</sup> In this respect it is significant that doubts have been raised whether Barthes even visited the exhibition, cf. GUITTARD 2006: 130.

<sup>16</sup> International Conference »The Family of Man in the 21st Century: Reassessing an Epochal Exhibition« in Castle Clervaux from 19-20 June 2015.

it impossible to understand what the images represent.<sup>17</sup> In this regard Barthes' critique and those that follow him are essentially based on a methodologically inadequate approach which also evinces not only a deficient conception of art and images but also of the idea of humanity Steichen attempted to portray. Critical reflection of the exhibition without emotional resonance and participation deprives objectivity its basis.

What is implied here is that—in particular a ›critical‹, apostrophizing—scholarly approach must detach itself from the object of examination. Taking one's self out of the equation, however—as the instance where emotional and intellectual resonance takes place—truncates the very instrument of understanding. Art historical hermeneutics has recognized this in the past as a significant methodological problem: »Durch Ausschaltung des Subjekts kommt man nicht zur Sache, sondern zu einer schlechten Objektivität« (BÄTSCHMANN 2001: 114).<sup>18</sup> It is precisely this flawed objectivity, one that overlooks the nature of the images, which is reflected in the decades-long discourse on »The Family of Man«.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, hermeneutics as a theory of understanding is capable of differentiating between *subjectivity* (as avoidable bias and arbitrariness) and *objectivity* (as the appropriateness of the gained insight with respect to its object), in contrast to the purely scientific concept of *universal validity* in the sense of a statement's objectified applicability at all times, which obviously cannot be achieved here and is not even worth achieving in this context (cf. DANNER 1998: 54f.). The education sciences, as primarily dealing with human understanding, has also pointed to the cynicism involved when a refusal to become involved in the pedagogic situation is made: »Die Sicht vom Außenstandpunkt [...] ist eine fiktive und oft zynische. Wir nehmen teil am Leben; es ist uns nicht fremd. Auch wenn wir beobachten, erleben wir keine Metaperspektive, sondern erreichen höchstens einen höheren Reflexionshorizont« (FAULSTICH 2013: 207).<sup>20</sup> Just as the three steps of experience, interpretation and understanding can be perceived as a fundamental pattern of learning

<sup>17</sup> This inner detachment – forced objectivity in a sense – was often created by reading Barthes' text, which was considered seminal, *before* going to the exhibition. As a result, visitors, already inoculated and theoretically informed, entered the exhibition space and, maintaining respective emotional detachment from the images, came necessarily to this conclusion (cf. for a particularly outstanding example, cultural anthropologist ANTWEILER 2007: 224f.).

<sup>18</sup> ›Eliminating the subject does not lead you to the object, but only to flawed objectivity‹ (translation M.F.-Th./J.K.).

<sup>19</sup> This position does not deny the validity and significance of critically examining the role the exhibition played in the context of US propaganda after WWII. It is, however, an essential position in evaluating the impact this propaganda may have had: Were Steichen's show just a demonstration of ›the American way of life‹ it would be inconceivable to understand why so many were willing to visit the exhibition in Hiroshima as victims – and witnesses – of that exceedingly destructive form of US imperialism. Obviously, the exhibit transmitted an overriding humane message which did not fulfill an imperial claim. This message may have appropriated by the US for a time to establish its image as sole defenders of ›peace‹ and ›human rights‹, yet a detailed analysis would illustrate how this effect may not be substantiated in the exhibition.

<sup>20</sup> ›The view from outside [...] is a fictitious and often cynical one. We take part in life; this is not something foreign to us. Even while observing we do not experience a meta-perspective but attain at most a higher horizon for reflection‹ (translation M.F.-Th./J.K.).

(cf. FAULSTICH 2013: 68), they can also be applied here as the fundamental pattern for reading images adequately. An objectified stance must be acquired through reflection and is not attained through the scholar's mere emotional detachment from the object of examination. Similar to a learning situation, when dealing with images in a scholarly context the subject and object are vitally intertwined so that each insight carries the stamp of the one whose insight it is (cf. DANNER 1988: 23).<sup>21</sup>

In short: Eliminating one's own sociality as a condition of reception necessarily leads to flawed conclusions in all fields of scholarship dealing with the human person, carrying further negative consequences. Interestingly enough, popular reception of »The Family of Man« has from the very beginning never suffered from the same issues of detachment of modern scholarship: People visited, and have continued to visit<sup>22</sup> the exhibition in the spirit of ›shared life‹ and thus have intuitively understood the essence of Steichen's core intention. In this regard, visitor reactions as well as those by children and youths are highly relevant to scholarship on the exhibition (see also KRAUTZ 2004; 2008). And these have been consistently similar since 1955. One example is provided by a boy scout in a letter written to Edward Steichen in 1956 on the catalogue to the exhibition:

It was a very good idea to make this book about everyone in the world. It makes me feel like I live in one big neighborhood where I know everybody or in one big family, like you said, the family of man. Man means women and children, too, as well as men; it means all people everywhere.<sup>23</sup>

In another example, one sixth-grade student summarized an art class project he participated in on »The Family of Man« in 2007 where students were asked to create their own photographs for an exhibition:

The most important thing for me was for people to see themselves as well and not only others in the pictures. I would explain ›The Family of Man‹ like this: It's an exhibition that connects people, that shows that all people are equal and that these are not just pictures. The photos in my group should connect people too and not just be pictures, but speak to them so they know how people think in situations like that. (KRAUTZ/OTT 2008: 13, translation M.F.-Th./J.K.)<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The original reads »in jede Erkenntnis der Erkennende mit eingeht«. ›Each insight carries the stamp of the one whose insight it is‹ (translation M.F.-Th./J.K.).

<sup>22</sup> »The Family of Man« has been permanently installed and open to the public at Castle Clervaux, Luxembourg since 1994.

<sup>23</sup> With thanks to Eric Sandeen, Wyoming, for bringing our attention to this letter which he discovered in the course of his own research on »The Family of Man«.

<sup>24</sup> The original reads: »Das Wichtigste für mich war, dass die Leute auch sich und nicht nur andere Leute in den Bildern sehen. Ich würde ›Family of Man‹ so erklären: Es ist eine Ausstellung, die Menschen verbinden soll, die zeigen soll, dass alle Menschen gleich sind und dass es nicht nur Bilder sind. Die Fotos meiner Gruppe sollen die Menschen auch verbinden und nicht nur Bilder sein, sondern zu ihnen reden, dass sie wissen, wie Leute in solchen Situationen denken.«

## 6. Exemplary Analysis: The Relational Language of Images

In the following, a less complex sequence from »The Family of Man« exhibition has been chosen to exemplify the relational pictorial model discussed above.<sup>25</sup> Although addressing a small sequence, the following will nevertheless provide a concise description, analysis and interpretation of the images to illustrate how dimensions of relationality are visibly constructed and the kind of reactions these are intended to create.

The photo sequence selected for this analysis actually contradicts the anti-emancipatory character the exhibition has often been accused of. Diffusely titled »Rebels«, this section addresses humanity's desire for autonomy, its intrinsic struggle for freedom, and the forces defying the attainment of these goals, be they specifically political, economic or general in nature. The sequence is divided into two parts (see fig. 3 and 4), each of which will initially be analyzed separately and subsequently brought together in a final comprehensive context. The photographs in this sequence are examined as a *hyperimage*<sup>26</sup> in which the images form a complete unit, the formal composition of which generates dimensions of meaning under which individual photographs are subsumed.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Due to historical as well as methodical considerations, the analysis is based on the original installation at the Museum of Modern Art of 1955 since this most clearly reflects Steichen's exhibition concept. Steichen created the exhibition with a specific architectural plan in mind at MoMA, which the succeeding global venues tried to adapt to the best of their abilities but naturally were not able to replicate it in detail.

<sup>26</sup> Thürlemann (2013) examines the Western art historical tradition of collating otherwise autonomous pictures in complex units to transport a particular intention or meaning. According to Thürlemann »ein hyperimage [besteht] aus autonomen Bildern, die in einem kreativen Prozess zu einem neuen Bildgefüge zusammengestellt werden und so einen Sinn generieren, der nicht als bloße Addition verstanden werden kann. Die hyperimages sind wie die Bilder (images), aus denen sie zusammengesetzt sind, selbst Bedeutungsträger eigener Geltung und können, wie ihre Bausteine, als Sinngefüge analysiert und auf die Regeln ihrer Zusammenstellung hin befragt werden« (THÜRLEMAN 2013: 8).

<sup>27</sup> On the photo-theoretical principles of this form of visual narrative cf. KRAUTZ 2004a, ch. 4, 6.3.



Fig. 2:  
Rebels, Part 1, Photo Rolf Petersen, © 2015. Digital image,  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence



Fig. 3:  
Rebels, Part 2, Photo Rolf Petersen, © 2015. Digital image,  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence

In the first part of this sequence Steichen presents six photographs<sup>28</sup> equal in height and placed in a horizontal line that ends abruptly at the corner of an intersecting wall to the right (fig. 3). The first photograph on the left is of a small child who, stuck between a chair and table leg, is struggling to crawl out of her predicament. Obviously, the toddler's strong exploratory desire is being overwhelmingly obstructed: she cries. A similar motif is portrayed in the photograph following it; in this case the child's condition seems to be of a more existential nature. Evidently disadvantaged, she looks skeptically out from behind a wooden barricade as well, fixating the viewer who seems to be looking in from outside. Here the child carries an air of despair and resignation not found in the former. Where before the obstacle in question represents an everyday object of normal life, the wooden barricade in the second image becomes symbolic of a plight not caused by any fault of the child herself. Further to the right another wooden beam is repeated in the third photograph, this time intertwined with barbed wire, keeping Korean women imprisoned behind its menacing structure. Their dramatic gestures are indicative of protest, their faces show desperation. Since it is unclear what has caused their protest, whether social, political or other reasons are involved, it is their great need that stands out foremost. In the subsequent photograph two German police officers are trying to push back a crowd of people attempting to get hold of British care packages. Surging forward, the crowd is being forcefully held back by the barrier of intertwined arms the policemen have formed. Directly beneath the photo a small plaque has been placed carrying a quotation from the Bhagavad-Gita: »the mind is restless, turbulent, strong and unyielding [...] as difficult to subdue as the wind«. The next picture on the right depicts a group of Chinese standing in line, their bodies so closely crushed together that many have stretched their arms out to withstand the immense pressure from behind, fiercely determined to hold on to their position in line, despite the threat of becoming fatally crushed. The situation these people are confronted with seems dire and existential enough to court serious bodily harm.

All images presented are marked by conditions of unrest, worry and desperation where the individuals depicted are caught in some form of conflict or another. Only the last photograph in this sequence appears to lack this element. On closer look however, the row of passengers sitting and waiting in what appears to be a station concourse, their baggage piled in front of them, seem to be frozen in position, also caught within a crosspiece network of light and shadow thrown upon them by light streaming through a barred window on the opposite wall. Evidently a photograph of immigrants<sup>29</sup>, the image captures the ambivalence of an uncertain future, their resignation in the face of

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<sup>28</sup> From left to right: Wayne Miller, USA; Marion Palfi, USA; Michael Rougier, Korea; Ralph Crane, Deutschland; Henri Cartier-Bresson, Shanghai (China); Carmel Vitullo, USA.

<sup>29</sup> The baggage have been labeled with NCWC (National Catholic Welfare Conference) stickers, the social Catholic organization also engaged in helping immigrants relocate to the United States (cf. PETIT 2008). This identifies the people in this photograph as immigrants.



the economic, social or political conflict that forced them to leave their homes, as well as the hope that propels them towards a new destination.

The overall compositional structure of the sequence also reflects the same conflicting dynamic evident in each individual image. An impression of movement for instance is created by the placement of the sequence slightly off center on the wall, making the images appear to shift toward the right in synchronization with our reading behavior. This movement is, however, also abruptly obstructed by the intersecting wall, forming a decisive barrier to the visual flow (fig. 5). Compositional elements connecting the images further reinforce this flow: The line formed by the angle of wall in the background of the first image is continued in the second by the floor line behind the child sadly observing us. In turn, the diagonal formed by the restraining wooden slat in this image's lower right corner is taken up in the next picture by a Korean woman's hand at its outer left edge. In like manner, the arm cropped at the right edge of this same photograph is visually extended by an arm pressing onto the back of one of the policemen in the next image. Further, across this central picture's surface an undulating line can be drawn along the policemen's shoulders before it flattens out in the arm of the last policeman to the right, pointing to the horizontal press of bodies in the next photograph, its linearity repeated in the last image by the seated passengers illuminated within the grid of shadow and light. Where compositionally this image brings this sequence to a halt at the intersection of walls, on a content level its representation of waiting passengers also underscores the sense of arrested movement.

Seen as a whole, the spacing between the photographs creates a sense of vertical, as opposed to horizontal movement, which is particularly reiterated in the tighter spaced light patterning of the last image of this sequence. The strong interplay of light and dark evident in the photographs further reinforces the sequence's rhythmic formal structure and contributes to the dynamic of the visual experience: In the first four pictures the main motifs alternate in contrasting poles of light and dark (i.e. the image of the toddler is light, the sad child's face in the next is dark, the Korean women are dressed in light dresses, the policemen are presented in dark uniform, etc.), while in the remaining photographs this interplay of light and dark is more fractured just as the light patterning in the last image is a more fractured reflection of the sequence's vertical rhythm.

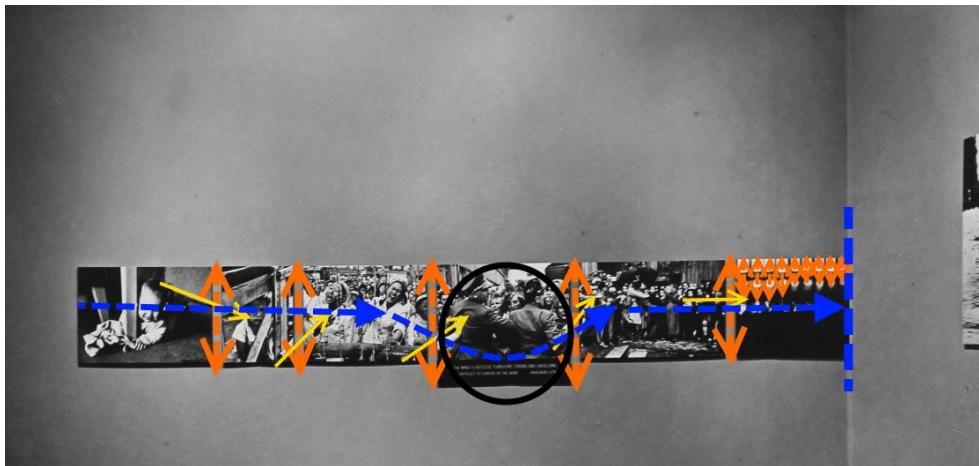


Fig. 4:  
Compositional structure, part one of »Rebels«, Photo: Rolf Petersen, © 2015. Digital image  
(Detail), The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence

Additional structural aspects supplement the idea of opposing dynamics: As already mentioned, the visual progression from left to right comes to an abrupt stop at an intersecting exhibition wall. Moreover, the placement of a dark-colored quotation plaque under the central image in the series provides this photograph with greater optical emphasis, further restraining the flow of movement toward the right. A closer view additionally reveals that there is a shift in the figure-ground relationship in this particular photograph. In comparison to the images on either side where the action is primarily situated on the central or posterior image planes, here the figures almost completely take up the front and central space to press further outward. As a result, the intense pressure exerted by the crowd, which the police are struggling to withstand, is emphasized on a compositional level: The sequence's linearity thrusts out toward the viewer, stretching it away from its intended rightward movement.

Because of the visual emphasis given to this image, the viewer's attention also lingers on the quotation directly below it. As a result, the viewer automatically feels encouraged to reflect on possible correlations between the photographs and text, and to interpret the sequence as a comprehensive unit. For instance, because of the various degrees of distress, disharmony or conflict, and confinement reflected in all of the photographs in this section, the quotation here may be interpreted to express a genuinely human desire as well as evident dissonant and unresolved struggle to be free and to attain economic as well as existential security.<sup>30</sup>

The last picture of waiting immigrants thus brings part one to an end almost as a punctuation mark would a sentence. Due to its position and content, it also forms an important contextual bridge between this first section of

<sup>30</sup> See also footnote 22 and the existential purposes – »existentielle Zwecke« – formulated by Messner.

»Rebels« and the next (see fig. 4). Although it may seem to lack the agitation or dissonance evident in the others, tension is particularly generated here by the fact that the passengers are stuck—at least for the time being—in an ambivalent situation, reinforcing the idea of a suspended journey. Yet, since the passengers depicted are sitting in the dark, illuminated only by light streaming through an opposite window and capturing them within a starkly contrasting latticework, a sense of drama is created, providing a strong symbolic moment: The light patterning takes on the appearance of a string of shining windows, the kind a train would produce as it passes through the dark night, creating a specter of hope that the ambivalence and unresolved conflicts represented by the preceding images will, at one as yet undefined point in the future, be overcome.

Tentatively fortified with the idea of hope, viewers are visually guided to the next image group on the adjoining wall, comprising the last three photographs of the »Rebel« sequence<sup>31</sup> (fig. 6). This in turn opens a three-dimensional space encompassing the viewer. The pronounced gap between the first and second parts of this sequence functions as a reception-aesthetical prompt to connect both sections and »fill in the blank« by inserting contextual relevance between them (see also SCHNEIDER 2016). The most obvious characteristic of the three photographs in this second section is that, besides being varied in size, they are arranged in the form of an inverted triangle. The tip of this triangle is defined by the smallest image, in landscape format, of a street car in Indonesia bearing the words »All people are created equal« in bold letters across its front.<sup>32</sup> The street car is packed with people, in front a few are trying to board while to the left another person has found a perch hold at the window. Despite the crowded conditions in the car, the atmosphere—in stark contrast to the images in the former group—is peaceful and harmonious.

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<sup>31</sup> From left to right: unknown photographer, Germany; Homer Page, South Africa; John Florea, Indonesia.

<sup>32</sup> For a detailed view see »The Family of Man« exhibition catalogue.

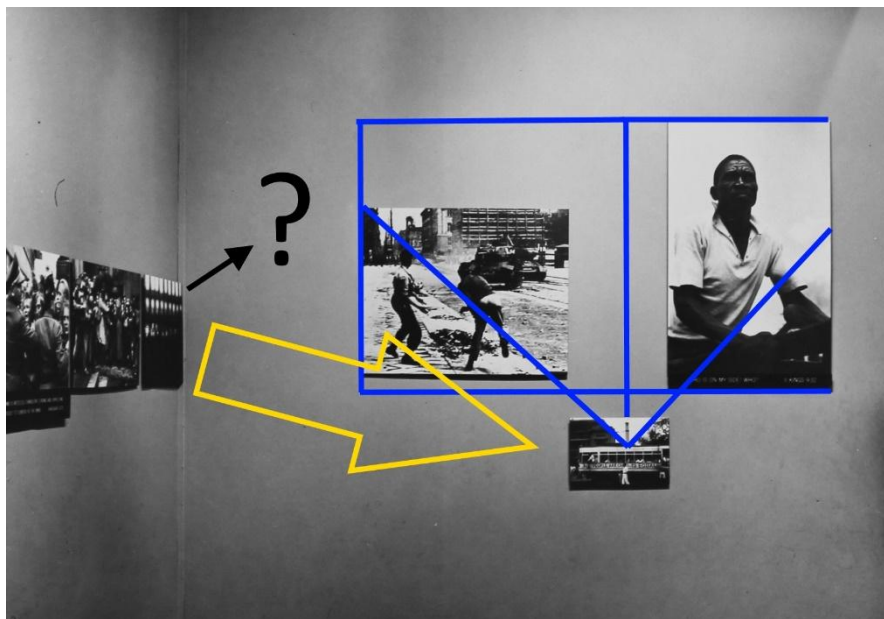


Fig. 5:  
Compositional structure, part two of »Rebels«  
Photo: Rolf Petersen, © 2015. Digital image (Detail),  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence

This particular photograph makes a direct visual reference to the first section of this sequence: it not only mirrors its horizontal form, but as the depiction of a street car it corresponds to the idea of a continued journey intimated in the last photograph and, in the concrete form of its windows, repeats the pattern of light illuminating the waiting passengers and offering the specter of hope of a better future. The bold lettering proclaiming equality on the street car's exterior may consequentially be understood to signify a key concept for negotiating the conflictual nature of attaining freedom and existential security portrayed by the last group of images: Steichen establishes the idea here that the precept of human equality represents the vehicle through which mankind's existential struggles toward securing life and liberty may be resolved peacefully.

Extensively smaller than the other photographs in this group, this image seems to particularly symbolize the fragility and fleetingness of equality as a principle, particularly since the two larger ones above it appear to dominate the composition in comparison. Yet, in its representation of a fundamental human right, this tiny image proves to be the indubitable fulcrum around which the entire »Rebel« sequence revolves, on the contextual as well as visual level: Behind the street car with its bold statement that »all people are created equal« a tower points upward, in its vertical extension compositionally dividing the two images above into a golden ratio. Directly below the tower and in front of the street car a man and a child stand together. In immediate juxtaposition to the car's statement, these two figures are representative of its universal message in concrete terms: Human equality represents equality between individuals, reinforcing the idea that this principle excludes no one.

At the point where the street car and tower meet, two diagonal lines can be drawn upward in a V-form into the images above, further transmitting the idea of human equality into the context of these photographs. In the photograph to the left, for instance, two young men throw stones at a tank bearing down on them, the ruins of a city in the background. In the one next to it a black South African resolutely looks outward to a distant goal. Under this photograph a quotation from the bible asks: »Who is on my side? Who?« (Book of Kings 9:53). The photographs refer to acts of resistance against tyranny and racism. The first deals with the uprising of 17 June 1953 in East Germany in which civilians fought for their right to freedom from Russian occupation. The second makes reference to South Africa's black population in their fight for equality under a repressive apartheid regime. Taken within the context of the photograph below, the overarching meaning connecting these images becomes evident: Human equality is the very principle upon which humanity's right to freedom rests. The golden ratio formed by this group's compositional structure not only serves to underscore the sacredness of humanity's right to liberty based on equality, but also makes the sacred demand explicit that violations of human equality and freedom are countered by solidarity and compassion: »Who is on my side? Who?«

The above analysis, albeit of a small exhibition detail, exemplifies the general complexity of the photographic narrative developed by Steichen in »The Family of Man« to address fundamental issues of human existence. The sequence's title »Rebels« is misleading in that, rather than being a superficial depiction of resistance, adversity or repression, the photographs reflect the depth and intensity of philosophical contemplation (cf. STEICHEN 1963, ch. 13) on those same existential problems.<sup>33</sup> Visual contemplation through the language of imagery, facilitated by a process of viewing, imagining, reflecting on and bringing images into a cohesive context, allows viewers to develop their *sensus communis*: Being actively perceiving, empathizing and reflecting individuals they become party to a shared *conditio humana*, both on an intellectual as well as emotional level. In the first part of the »Rebel« sequence, for instance, it was possible to identify a universal, albeit also unresolvedly conflictual human desire for freedom as well as drive to secure the material needs of existence. In connection with, and in response to, these photographs, the second part of the sequence allowed the idea of human equality as a vehicle for resolving mankind's conflicts in attaining autonomy to emerge. Simultaneously, this principle was also presented as the *conditio sine qua non* for the right to freedom that, in the face of tyranny and repression, explicitly demands our solidarity and resistance. The above demonstrates Steichen's attempt with »The Family of Man« exhibition to show the potential for establishing a peaceful future made evident on the basis of a mutual respect for and recognition of fundamental human rights (cf. STEICHEN

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<sup>33</sup> In a related context, Hariman and Lucaites (2007) have opened a discourse on the role of photography as public art in negotiating the issues of a democratic society.

1963, ch. 13). The detail analyzed here therefore also clearly demonstrates Steichen's intrinsically democratic (cf. TURNER 2012) approach, founded on the respect for human dignity and desire for peace evident throughout the entire exhibition.

Although many of the photographs' respective geographic, historical and political backgrounds have been reconstructed and identified, they are not actually necessary for understanding their general meaning, which is accessible without these contexts. As a consequence, the critique Steichen's project received for de-contextualizing and de-historicizing the photographs turns out to be the ultimate concept behind the exhibition as well as its actual strength, providing the very instrument with which it successfully visualizes a transcendent idea.<sup>34</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

### 7.1 Misunderstood Photography

The following can be concluded with regard to the reception and research on »The Family of Man« to date:

- Scholarly critique of the exhibition has taken too little notice of the pictorial sequences, their interplay of formal characteristics and compositional qualities, much less undertaken a methodical and detailed image oriented interpretation of the exhibition. As a result, it has to a large extent been unable to grasp the exhibition's artistic complexity, thus essentially misunderstanding the exhibition's intention.
- Barthes' polemical argument, Steichen's exhibition propounds a »myth of the human ›condition‹« that »places nature at the bottom of history« (BARTHES 2012: 197) is correct in so far as the exhibition allows this very human condition to be experienced – not as a ›myth‹ but as a tangible experience of ›shared life‹. The exhibition was successful precisely because the anthropological premise upon which it is built was obviously a valid one and still is today. Contrary to Barthes' conjecture, the exhibition does not surreptitiously »reintro-

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<sup>34</sup> Steichen depended on an approach to viewing images that goes beyond culture and history and is in contrast rooted in anthropology, an approach David Freedberg identifies as crucial to the »power of images«: »a basic level of reaction that cuts across historical, social, and other contextual boundaries. It is precisely this level—which pertains to our psychological, biological, and neurological status as members of the same species—that our cognition of images is allied with that of all men and women« (FREEDBERG 1989: 22f.). Jörg Fingerhut (2012) has, in reference to Freedberg's remarks, summarized the research results from the fields of cognitive science and neurobiology supporting the thesis of the kind of enactive image conception argued here. Further research on »The Family of Man« should profit from such an understanding of images as developed in the fields of art history, philosophy and cognitive psychology.

duce God« (BARTHES 2012: 197) but rather speaks directly to the humanity of human beings.

- In fact, the exhibition itself makes a significant artistic argumentation for and visual contribution to the extended philosophical discussion on natural law: Steichen makes Seneca's thoughts at the beginning of this essay visually evident that ethics is grounded in a shared *conditio humana* and on a developed, as well as continuously to be developed, *sensus communis*, i.e. on ›social interest‹ (cf. KAISER 1981) which can be accessed and experienced through empathetic perception.
- Popular reception, from a methodological point of view, has from the time of the exhibition's first opening in 1955 evidently responded far more accurately to the show's original intent than deconstructive critique, which has refused to satisfy the show's most basic condition of reception, i.e. to approach the photographic narration in the sense of ›shared life‹. Dorothea Lange, the photographer whose legendary ›Migrant Mother‹ is included in the show, also demanded that this empathetic and affirmative approach be taken to the familiar world, especially as a photographer: »In this unwillingness to accept a familiar world photography puts invention to a destructive work« (LANGE/DIXON 1952: 75). Photographers should therefore try »to take the view of man« in which case »the photographer must himself become a familiarity, He cannot enter the world as a man from Mars. He must, instead, become a member of the family« (LANGE/DIXON 1952: 76). »So [...] we in our work we can speak more than of our subjects – we can speak with them« (LANGE/DIXON 1952: 78). Similarly, in order to understand ›The Family of Man‹ the viewer must allow herself to resonate with what is familiar and consider herself to be a part of the ›human family‹.
- The implicitly or explicitly perpetuated fundamental suspicion of photography, beginning with Barthes, among others, of photography's claim to absolute reality while being in effect open to infinite ambiguity and thus manipulation, can be deliberated outside of the aporia of illusionary representation and the manipulative potential it carries: The exhibition demonstrates how the issue of ethics of photography cannot be solved through a discussion of its medial character. It can only be a matter of the photographer's ethics, or of the one dealing with photography, hence it cannot involve an ›ethics of the media‹ but rather an ethics based on personalist accountability (cf. KRAUTZ 2004a: 193; 2014a: 766f). As a consequence, because of photography's very proximity to our visible reality, it can carry an affirmative power that, rather than creating detachment from the world, can verify our existence in the world by not only offering the security of ›shared life‹, to paraphrase Rainer Marten once again: It also reinforces the original act (›Urakt‹) of affirmation, the affirmation of life (cf. MARTEN 1988: 28). In this sense photography carries an ontological significance, since, to

quote John Berger from his important work on the theory of photography, »the look of the world is the widest possible confirmation of the *thereness* of the world, and thus the look of the world continually proposes and confirms our relation to that thereness, which nourishes our sense of Being« (BERGER/MOHR 1995: 87f.). Understood as a relational, personalist practice, photography carries existential importance as a confirmation of being-in-the-world. It corresponds to the human »ontological right« to meaning (KRAUTZ 2004a: 134f.). In this regard, »The Family of Man« provides an outstanding example of photography's existential potential for meaning.

## **7.2 Relational Pictorial Practice: Sociality, Imagination, Narration**

The above therefore provides clarification on what »relational aesthetic practice« may entail and also points to the potential it carries for art education: A deictic organization of images, or in this case of entire image sequences and spatial compositions, must facilitate the recipient's mimetic activity. When the viewer enters into mimetic dialogue with the images' *deixis*, these »speak« through taking imaginative and imitative reference, even before verbalization. Understanding therefore can only occur through inner involvement. Mimesis is practically established through empathetic perception, imagination and reflection. Hence, understanding calls for imaginative as well as imitative empathy in order for a mutually shared perception to occur.

In this regard, the frustration evident in the image of a toddler struggling against the obstacle hindering its movement can only be comprehended through empathy and one's own bodily experience: The image content must almost be felt on a very physical level of personal experience in order to adequately understand the child's emotional turmoil between frustration and obstinacy in the face of the hindrance the world has placed before her. Only then can the viewer proceed to and actually understand the phenomena portrayed, in connection with the other photographs, as a socio-political statement.

A relational aesthetic practice is particularly facilitated by the kind of narrative pictorial forms and sequences theorized by John Berger in his deliberations on photography: Berger uses the term »radial« to describe the complex message generated by the arrangement of individual photographs: »The aim must be to construct a context for a photograph, to construct it with words, to construct it with other photographs, to construct it by its place in an ongoing text of photographs and images« (BERGER 1980: 60). In this manner narration does not develop in a linear manner but as an interplay of contexts from other photographs—and in the case of »The Family of Man« also in connection with quotations from world literature—an associative field is established based on fundamental patterns of human existence. Radial alignment is principally possible for every photograph, independent of its quality



»so that it may be seen in terms which are simultaneously personal, political, economic, dramatic, everyday and historic« (BERGER 1980: 53). The analysis provided above is a paradigmatic example for reading images on various possible levels of meaning. Berger argues further that in this manner personal, political and historical spheres become connected »an instant photographed can only acquire meaning insofar as the viewer can read into it a duration extending beyond itself. When we find a photograph meaningful, we are lending it a past and a future« (BERGER/MOHR 1995: 89). The story of the »family of man« is developed in a process similar to memory, constituted from the context of personal, political and historical meaning. In this manner, so Berger, the photograph's vibrant context of experience is restored through reflection: »The world they reveal, frozen, becomes tractable. The information they contain becomes permeated by feeling. Appearances become the language of a lived life« (BERGER/MOHR 1995: 289). As a consequence, the exhibition becomes an analogous experience to lived life—which is what is precisely reflected in the visitor reactions. Lived life is, however, shared life, therefore a relational practice.

Perception, imagination and aesthetic-pictorial representation itself are thus to be understood as a relational and social practice of reception as well as production. Pictorial language is not a »language of pictures« but an imaginative activity taking place in the between space of »inter-subjects« engaged in shared imagination (cf. SOWA 2013: 243; 2015). Pictorial practice with respect to reception involves therefore an inner activity of establishing vital relationships to the images. Pictorial practice is a shared, participatory and life-referring way of dealing with images.

As a consequence, the participation in and discernment of meaning become evident as social and relational categories. Meaning does not occur within the subject but is constituted within the human person as a social being in resonance with co-existing others, with the lives they live, with their experience, and with the world at large. In active resonance humanity reveals itself as a fundamental state of interconnectedness to others in a shared cosmos: »omne hoc quod vides unum est«.

### 7.3 Art and Responsibility

The example given in this essay ultimately also shows the significance of the model of relational anthropology developed by art education scholarship for art historical interpretation as well as for formulating an ethics for artists.<sup>35</sup>

As a rule, art education argues its didactic principles from the basis of art. Here this is reversed: The necessarily normatively substantiated field of art pedagogy offers perspectives on artistic practice beyond modernist posits of autonomy or postmodernist dictates of deconstruction to question the eth-

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. for photography KRAUTZ 2014a.

ical significance of art (cf. KAUSCH 2007). The model outlined here is to be understood as a proposal, not as an obligation. Art is autonomous (cf. KRAUTZ 2010).

But because the unresolved existential issues of humanity portrayed in »The Family of Man« have not yet been adequately addressed in the 60 years since it first opened, in fact may have even seemed to get worse, the exhibition and its creator pose the inveterate question of art's responsibility in time of war, injustice, totalitarian control of people on many levels in many areas of the world. Art's liberalist postulate of autonomy appears stale in the light of these existential issues and in comparison to the kind of art Steichen created with his exhibition project. The question of art's responsibility continues to be an issue (cf. RAUTERBERG 2015) and has been the object of serious consideration by contemporary artists in the sense of the relational model presented here (cf. KRAUTZ 2014b).

This, too, has been recognized as an urgent issue more clearly by the average visitor to »The Family of Man« than by some professionals in the art system: »In light of what is happening in the world today, perhaps [...] The Family of Man needs to be promoted once again to remind us all of who we are and what we all can be«.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Statement recorded in the Visitors' Book to »The Family of Man« exhibition in Castle Clervaux, Centre national de l'audiovisuel (1994-2010), Vol. VIII: 1995, n. pag.

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