

Warren Neidich's photographic works embody contradictions which are both "internal" and "external" to photography. Technology and history (including the technology of history and the history of technology) are interwoven into counterfeit objects which masquerade as "historical," "authentic" and "natural", while holding within them the key or keys to their status as "contemporary," "artificial," and "constructed" artifacts. Neidich's intention is to collapse—or at least to identify—photography's long-standing relationship with history and to literally de-naturalize it. To accomplish this, his work brings enormous pressure to bear on the frame, and the act of framing. This is not to say that the frames and framing which Neidich dramatizes can be understood simply as the material support or surround of the images themselves—although such frames are indeed a domain of special interest and attention for him. Rather, framing takes place on many discontinuous levels at once.

Historical archives, from which Neidich draws both images and inspiration, are defined by the concepts, ideologies and prejudices which guide decisions about what belongs inside the archives, and what belongs outside: what is worth saving for history, and what may be discarded. This technology of history—a practice of ordering, choosing and deciphering documents which themselves already belong to a medium with its own limitations and conventions—is also reflected in Neidich's interest in the artifice and spectacle of history museums and "authentic" historic sites like Bethpage, New York. Here, too, "history" is re-defined and mediated through a series of curatorial choices or interests.

The framing devices which constitute the technology of history—particularly the archives and the museum—are interwoven with a second register of brackets or frames in Neidich's work, drawn from what might be called the history of technology. As the technologies of photography have changed and developed from the mid-19th century to the present, different visual idioms have successively predominated. Early photographic methods, for instance, necessitated a formality or stiffness of pose which accommodated long exposure times. At any particular moment—and contrary to the myth of photography's simple reflective relationship with truth and reality—the camera is only able to record a finite number of image conventions. Its technological limitations serve as a frame—a rigorously limiting frame—which helps to define what tropes will dominate the medium.

The frame, whether it is the literal bracketing of the object—which may encompass its material support, accompanying text, or surrounding images—or the frames which I have defined as the technology of history and the history of technology are not strictly external or marginal to a photographic image. Quite the opposite, it is this plurality of brackets and bracketing devices which actively define and shape what is internal to its practice.¹ This is the lesson which Neidich's complex and hybrid photographic objects so dramatically teach. His Time Pods, for instance, insert frame within frame within frame, in an exercise of bracketing en abîme. Each of the Pods contains one image from each of four previous series of works, which themselves take as their subject the historical, technological, and ethnic forms of bracketing which circulate within photography. The four projects include: "Recoding American History: What's

Wrong with this Picture?," a series of photos shot in history museums which each include a tell-tale anachronism (i.e. a contemporary pair of sunglasses) meant to rupture the seamless image of historical authenticity; "Pseudo-Event: The Politics of Appropriation," which places African-Americans in the roles of middle class citizens in the 19th century—roles they are seldom, if ever represented in—"Text: Pretext, Lessons in Visual Subversion," which unveils the propagandistic representation of Japanese internment camps as organized by the Associated Press archives; and "Contra Curtis: Early American Coverups," a sequence of artificially old images of Indians being massacred which Neidich photographed directly from TV reruns of "Westerns." The Time Pods introduce their own typological or iconographic form of bracketing using Neidich's previous work as raw material. Each Pod draws similar thematic images from each of the four preceding series: for instance, male or female figures engaged in analogous activities or poses. With this new level of ordering—based on pose or iconographic type—Neidich negates the historicism of the prior series and introduces the ahistorical archival practices of art history with its typical emphasis on transhistorical or universal human qualities. In a paradoxical inversion, therefore, the Time Pods are built upon an apparently timeless mode of classification cutting across specific historical moments or situations. But the intention of these works—like the series they are drawn from—is not to utilize and mask this paradox, but rather to emphasize its contradiction. The Pods

are archaeological sites which invite us to sift through the layered sedimentation of frames and framing devices whose broken terrain is often simply taken as the "reflection" of reality.

Neidich's series of tintypes "Aerial Reconnaissance Photographs, Battle of Chicamauga c. 1863" introduces yet another strategy, or position of framing. These works embody a temporal paradox: although realized in a mid-19th century technology—the tintype—their point of view presupposes a practice pioneered in World War II: aerial reconnaissance. The battle, like the tintypes is a re-enactment, and our orientation toward them is literally anachronistic. Neidich emphasizes this collapse of temporal difference by presenting alongside the photographs texts which describe recent high technology reconnaissance devices. These "Aerial Reconnaissance Photographs" make us conscious of a frame which is internal to the viewing subject, and therefore almost always invisible: the practice of reading history through current events; or, conversely, of justifying contemporary political decisions through recourse to a re-constituted history. As in all of his recent work Neidich has presented photography as an unstable practice, defined not by its reflection of some essential content "out there," but rather as the locus of a nearly infinite number of frames and framing devices whose specific configurations derive from the terrain of the social, the historical, and the technological.

¹ For a discussion of the relationship between work and frame, or what he defines as *ergon* and *perergon*, see Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).