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# *Modern History:* Newspapers, Photography, Pictures

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Abstract of the Thesis

***Modern History:*** **Newspapers, Photography, Pictures**

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This thesis focuses on *Modern History,* a series of works completed between 1977 and 1979 (with one addition in each 1991 and 2003) by contemporary artist Sarah Charlesworth (born 1947). Consisting of appropriated newspaper front pages from which all text has been removed, *Modern History* subverts the print media as well as photography. In turn, this study attempts to examine the importance of both media for Sarah Charlesworth and elucidates the novel ways in which she used them in relation to historical practices and contemporary theoretical discourses.

*Modern History* is examined within the context of the history of photography, newspaper appropriation, as well as Conceptual art, which Sarah Charlesworth practiced prior to beginning her series. Her work is also aligned with the ideas of the contemporaneously-emerging Pictures generation, showing the ways in which *Modern History* bridged the gap between Photo-Conceptualism and the new modes of artistic production.

The title of Sarah Charlesworth's series demands a parallel to be drawn between her work and history painting. *Modern History* exemplifies a continuation of past practices, but also marks a definite break. With the appropriation of newspapers and the excision of text, Charlesworth's series can be seen as moving past Modernism, past Conceptualism, and while fully exploring the ideas of Pictures artists, *Modern History* offers a view of how ideologies are created in Post-Modern society.

This paper illustrates the transition from the artistic use of photographs as objective modalities of information to their use as pictures- a term that acquires a new meaning in the hands of the Pictures generation. Charlesworth's systematic insistence on the separation of text and image, in combination with the serial presentation of her work, adds a level of complexity that goes beyond the practices of her Pictures colleagues. *Modern History* explores not only the problematic relationship between text and image, but also controversies inherent in photography itself. Both subjects are explored by critic and philosopher Roland Barthes; the former in his 1961 essay *The Photographic Message,* and, the latter in his book *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* published in 1981 - two years after Sarah Charlesworth's series was completed.

Accordingly*,* while exploring some of the issues raised by Sarah Charlesworth's first mature series, her work is also posited as the nexus for some of the most significant past as well as contemporary artistic ideas as well as a harbinger of the theoretical discourses of the 1980's. This study shows the ways in which *Modern History* asserts the medium of photography, the practice

of appropriation, and the making of pictures as integral parts of the Post-Modern paradigm.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Modern History*, a series consisting of appropriated newspaper front pages, was created between the years 1977 and 1979 by contemporary artist Sarah Charlesworth.[1] Born in 1947, Charlesworth grew up as part of the first American generation that was fully immersed in a consumer society of which television, radio, and newspapers were an integral part. *Modern History* engages with the issues inherent in consumer culture, addressing the ways in which information is presented, as well as shaped, by the mass media. The series consists of to-scale black and white copies of international newspaper front pages, where all text (except for the newspaper mastheads) has been removed while all images have been left intact.

*Modern History* begins with the replication of the front pages of the *Herald Tribune* for two months during 1977. In 1978 Charlesworth added sections that reflected international newspaper coverage of the kidnapping and assassination of Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro. The five additions that followed in 1979, include the media coverage of the assassination of American ABC correspondent Bill Stewart in Nicaragua, the total solar eclipse, the confrontation between the National Guard of Nicaragua and the Sandinistas in the fight to overthrow the dictatorship of Nicaraguan President Somoza, and the March 1979 political debates between Scotland and Wales, which precipitated a change of Government.

[1] Two additions to *Modern History* were made in 1991 and 2003. For the purpose of this paper these later works will not be discussed.

At a first glance, Sarah Charlesworth appears to be objective in her approach to the daily news; however, a closer examination reveals that her work addresses a variety of complicated issues regarding images, text, photography, the news, history, the mass media, politics, and gender. Consequently, Charlesworth's work lends itself to various readings: art historical, political, institutional, feminist, all of which will be addressed in this paper.

The discussion of *Modern History* begins with a historical overview of newspaper appropriation by a variety of artists throughout the 20th century. This outline offers a summary of the historical developments and use of the medium, and highlights the various ways in which newspapers were subverted and used to address a variety of social and political issues. This discussion further allows for an evaluation of the modes in which the artistic appropriation of the mass media led to the developments of the 1950's and 1960's and the subsequent shift towards Post-Modernism.

Conceptual art was instrumental in elucidating some of the key elements of the new artistic paradigm. While dematerializing the object of art, Conceptual artists elevated the status of language and engaged in a continued use of photography. Both text and image were employed in the service of the idea of art. Accordingly, photographs were used as objective modalities of information that would catalogue the nature and existence of a work of art.

During her studies at Barnard College Sarah Charlesworth became familiar with the ideas of Conceptual art. After a brief collaboration with Joseph Kosuth as a co-editor of the Conceptual journal *The Fox,* Charlesworth created

*Modern History.* While engaging with the ideas of sequencing, appropriation, and the use of language and photography, *Modern History* marks Charlesworth's departure from Conceptualism and move toward Pictures art.

The subtle transition between Conceptual and Pictures art can be found in the particular ways in which photography was used by the two groups of artists. While the former saw photography as a signifier of an artistic idea, the latter used the medium in its capacity to create pictures. More specifically, appropriated visual material became a tool for the investigation of the specific roles that images play in contemporary society. Many Pictures artists attempted to show the mechanism through which images create and perpetuate ideas through their domination of the transpersonal realm of the mass media.

By divorcing newspaper images from text, Sarah Charlesworth's series declares the power and ubiquitous nature of pictures in *Modern History.* To remove the newspaper text is to remove the images' context, which in turn demands that the viewer examine the images in relation to the remaining structures in the work- the newspaper as well as to each other. The investigation of these relationships uncovers the ways in which pictures acquire authority within contemporary society, highlighting some of the particular ways in which pictures are used for the creation and perpetuation of ideologies.

The use of visual images as propaganda can be traced back to the genre of history painting, which *Modern History* not only evokes, but also offers an updated, Post-Modern version of. While illustrating that images of women are still excluded from the news, Sarah Charlesworth's use of photography, a medium

inferior to painting, declares that women-artists are capable and active participants in contemporary art, history and society.

Sarah Charlesworth's declaration of independence from the male-dominated artistic practices of Modernism, Conceptualism, as well as her transcendence of the practices of Pictures artists are all marked by her decision to move past the associations between visual images and text, and to concentrate on the mechanisms of operation of pictures. In order to highlight some of the problems inherent in visual images, her work is examined in light of Roland Barthes' writings.

In *The Photographic Message* written in 1961 Barthes explores the various aspects of the "parasitic" relationship of image and writing within the frame of the newspaper. The essay is instrumental in providing a theoretical framework of the discussion of Charlesworth's choice to appropriate newspaper front pages. In his 1981 book *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* the French philosopher elaborates on the findings of his early writings, and engages in an in-depth discussion of the problems inherent within photography in general. Sarah Charlesworth was familiar with Barthes' theories; I contend that *Modern History,* created after *The Photographic Message* but prior to the publishing of *Camera Lucida,* can be aligned with Barthes' findings.

*Modern History* is further examined within the theoretical discourses of the late 1970's and early 1980's, and in particular within Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulacrum,* Craig Owens' *The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism,* and Douglas Crimp's 1977 and 1979 essays *Pictures.* Crimp

was the first critic to acknowledge the significance of the work created by the Pictures group, which acquired its name after the publication of Crimp's 1977 essay. In 1979 the critic wrote a revision of his article, in which he elucidated his position with regards to Pictures art, situating their work within the Post-Modern realm. Created between 1977 and 1979, Sarah Charlesworth's *Modern History* illustrates some of the ideas of the Pictures group as well as the predominant modes of Post-Modernism- appropriation, photography, pictures.

## CHAPTER 1
## Appropriation of Newspapers and Photography: A Brief History.

For her series *Modern History,* Sarah Charleswroth appropriates the newspaper as the vehicle for the transmission her ideas; however, she was not the first artist to do so. This chapter traces the history of newspaper appropriation by artists throughout the 20th century, highlighting the major paradigms for its use. Photography as an integral part of the mass media will also be discussed in order to show its growing importance and the ensuing rivalry with painting- the Modernist guard of fine art, which would be resolved in the Post-Modern work of the late 1970's and early 1980's.

While newspapers were a crucial artistic source for 20th century artists it is interesting to investigate how and why they became important. Their appropriation could be attributed to the Modernist preoccupation with the new; however, history reveals that the medium was chosen for reasons other than novelty. A quote by Picasso points to a different direction: "If a piece of newspaper can be a bottle that gives us something to think about in connection with both newspapers and bottles."[2]

It was the critical potential of the medium that first attracted the Cubists to its appropriation; Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque not only used newspaper clippings to make collage, but also included references to a particular newspaper by incorporating the letters JOU in their work, which could refer to the French

[2] Quoted in Françoise Gilot and Carlton Lake, *Life with Picasso* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 77.

word “jouer” (to play) or to a then-popular newspaper, *Le Journal*.[3] It was this ability of the medium to raise questions about art, the mass media, as well as reality that attracted early 20th century artists to the use of newspapers.

Furthermore, the Cubist use of newspapers introduced the real into the work of art by replacing Renaissance illusionism with the concrete and current.[4] Such gestures of appropriation raised questions about reality itself; newspapers were not only valued as a source of information, but also as a means of constructing other objects, such as the case with Picasso’s *Violin (1913)*, in which the newspaper serves a dual function: it constitutes both the object as well as the background. The text of the newspaper, while still legible, vanishes into the overall service of the image. Following in these footsteps, in the late 1970’s Sarah Charlesworth completely removes the text from the newspaper while leaving the images intact, a gesture that suggests the supremacy of pictures as the vehicle of the real, as well as of history in the Post-Modern world.

Concurrently with the Cubist artists in France, the Italian Futurists also appropriated newspapers, albeit to a different end: they subverted the medium in service of the dissemination of their ideas. *“The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism”* by Filippo Tommasso Marinetti was published in the Parisian daily newspaper, *Le Figaro,* on 20 February 1909.[5] As Richard Humphreys explains “publishing manifestos was a feature of Futurism, and the Futurists wrote them

[3] John Richardson, *A Life Of Picasso, The Cubist Rebel, 1907-1916 (*New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 225.
[4] Picasso both painted newspapers and included actual clippings; the latter were often cut into the shape of objects.
[5] Richard Humphreys, “Futurism: May the Force Be with You,” in *Futurist Manifestos* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2001), 221.

on many topics, including painting, architecture, religion, clothing and cooking." In fact, they published their manifestos in a variety of newspapers throughout Europe: *Lacebra*, a Florentine magazine, *Gazzetta Ferrarese*, a newspaper in Ferrara, *The Daily Mail*, a London newspaper, *Noi*, a newspaper in Rome.[6] For the Futurists, who were responding to the poor socio-political situation in Italy in the early 20th c. and were concurrently critical of all depositories of traditional knowledge, such as libraries and museums, newspapers, as the ever-changing medium that is mechanically produced and replicated, served as the perfect vehicle for the dissemination of their ideas.[7]

Apart from appropriating newspapers as a vehicle of information, the Futurists also directly used the printing press as an element in their art. However, unlike the Cubist appropriations of the medium as a tool for investigation into the nature of art and reality, the Futurists banked on the political potential of the newspaper. Carlo Carrà used newspapers as a reference in his *Manifestazione Interventista* (1914), in which the assembly of scraps of paper and letters refer to a number of disparate events and objects, some with overt political connotations.[8]

Similar to Italian Futurism, Dada partially emerged as a reaction against the socio-political situation in Europe, yet it engaged in an anti-art aesthetic, which, in combination with the growing fascination with the mechanical, opened the door for appropriation, and likewise engaged in the production of manifestos

[6] Umbro Apollonio, ed., *Futurist Manifestos* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2001).
[7] Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardner's Art Through the Ages: A Global History*, vol.2 (Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2009), 926.
[8] "Peggy Guggenheim Collection: Carlo Carra," The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

and periodicals. The work of the Dada movement varied from country to country; however, the most significant art came out of Germany, where Dada had a very pronounced political slant. This is particularly evident in the pieces that employed the newly-developed practice of photo-montage, which involved the appropriation of images from a variety of sources and their incorporation into a single work of art.[9] The images used for photo-montage were usually taken from the mass media, such as magazines, newspapers, advertisements, and then reassembled to create entirely new meanings. As Barbara Haskell notes, photo-montage is important not only because it exemplified the early stages of newspaper appropriation, but because it further contributed to the liberation of photography from the confines of painting.[10]

During the early decades of the 20th century, photography was beginning to gain prominence on the artistic scene; the invention of photo-montage as well as the practices of newspaper appropriation contributed to the growing importance of the medium. Russian Constructivist artists were among those who took up newspapers and photography in their art; however, unlike their German counterparts, the Russian artists used photo-montage only as a transitional device, for it presented an "unlimited source for a new *iconicity* of representation," which also satisfied the need for a "*documentary* representation in order to reach the new mass audience."[11] In accordance with the attempt of

[9] As Benjamin Buchloh notes, while it is debatable as to who was the first artist to introduce photo-montage, by 1919 the technique was widespread and commonly used in commercial photography as well as advertising. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," *Ocboter, Vol. 30* (Autumn, 1984), 96.
[10] Barbara Haskell, *The American Century: Art and Culture 1900-1950* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1999), 126.
[11] Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," *October, Vol. 30* (Autumn 1984), 98.

Constructivism to make a new representational system for a new society, Russian artists addressed issues of representation as well as distribution by capitalizing on the iconic functions of the mass media photograph.[12]

The artistic practices of Europe began to spread to the United States with the infamous Armory Show, which opened in New York on February 17, 1913 and was broadly covered by the media. The advent of European artists on the American art scene further reinforced the view of technology as something worthy of praise. Such ideas resonated with one particular individual, American photographer Alfred Stieglitz who "desired… to lead a crusade…for the acceptance of photography as High (Salon) Art."[13]

Stieglitz owned gallery *291* in New York and in 1915 began to publish a magazine with the same name.[14] The journal was to serve a dual function: it was used to promote the gallery as well as avant-garde art and in particular photography. The publication was influential not only for its contents but also because it became a work of art par excellence. Two editions of *291* were published: standard and deluxe; both were made in a folio format, with the latter being printed on Japanese Vellum.[15] As a result, the magazine headed the ranks of the avant-garde, as "In design and content, there was no periodical in America more advanced than *291*."[16] While turning a mass media publication into a work of art, Alfred Stieglitz's photographic work was also instrumental in defining the

[12] Ibid., 103.
[13] A.D. Coleman, "The Directorial Mode," *Artforum* (September 1976), 55.
[14] Richard Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography* (New York: Little, Brown, 1995), 350–384.
[15] Ibid.
[16] William Innes Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1977),194.

parameters of traditional fine art photography, which, despite its growing importance, remained within the paradigm of painting. In the photography defined by Stieglitz "the subject is transformed into a picture," it is guided by the rules of aesthetics in that the images are not only composed, cropped, and arranged, but are also precious, in sync with the ideas of Modernism.[17]

The versatility of the medium as well as its association with photographic images ensured the continued use of newspapers by artists in the 1950's, and played a major role in the shift from Modern to Post-Modern artistic practices. Starting in the 1950's the ideas of iconicity and reproducibility, inherent to newspapers and photography, became the main preoccupation of artists and critics alike. As a result, the focus of art shifted from the artistic production of images to the artistic "recognition and re-presentation of the aesthetic values and pleasures of every day life," achieved through the appropriation of pictures.[18] Three names stand out from the period of changing paradigms and link the early appropriations of newspapers and photography and *Modern History* - Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol.

Jasper Johns' contribution to shifting modes of artistic creation involved the appropriation of a popular image and a national symbol- the flag, as well as a more traditional use of newspapers, as seen in the application of paper scraps to a canvas while using paint and wax as glue. Throughout his famous *Flag* paintings, the artist capitulated on the symbolic associations of the medium- newspaper scraps are visible as well as buried under layers of wax; they are

[17] Robert C. Morgan, *Conceptual Art: An American Perspective* (North Carolina: McFarland&Company, Inc., 1994), 51.
[18] David Joselit, *American Art Since 1945* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 58.

anonymous yet prominent, for they make up the fabric of the picture, the painting, the object, the national symbol. This fusion of mass media fragments for the formation of a single composition of a familiar sign of national significance called forth ideas associated with iconicity, and was marked by "a centripetal logic in which discordant meanings were concentrated into a single holistic form," the fabric of which happened to be the newspaper.[19] Likewise, in *Modern History,* Charlesworth explores the total integration of the printed media into the social and political fabric of the late 1970's, in the attempt to show the ways in which local as well as global ideologies are shaped by the mass media.

Working concurrently with Johns, Robert Rauschenberg introduced a new venue for the integration of appropriated mass media materials in art through the newly-developed technique of photo-silkscreening. The artist first used the new method in his *XXXIV Drawings for Dante's "Inferno"* (1958-60), for which he soaked mass media photographs in solvents and transferred them onto the paper by rubbing the images with sharp tools.[20] The result of this technique was the merging of the unique artistic gesture, as left by the drawing-like marks from the transfer method, with the appropriated, mass produced images. More importantly, photo-silkscreening marked the end of collage and pasting; starting with Rauschenberg, tabloid pictures were "appropriated as ready-made images and mechanically transferred onto the surface."[21]

[19] David Joselit, *American Art Since 1945* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 61.
[20] Ibid., 60.
[21] Lisa Phillips, *The American Century: Art and Culture 1950-2000* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1999), 119.

The implication of Rauschenberg's work for the development of Post-Modernism is crucial. The pictures he made heralded the full autonomy images would gain in the next decades. Consequently, in the early 1980's critics such as Douglas Crimp would see Rauschenberg's art as marking the beginning of the shift away from Modernist art practices. [22] This shift would be fully realized in the late 1970's when works such as *Modern History* definitively announced photography's liberation from the constraints of Modernism and established it, along with appropriation, as the guideposts of contemporary artistic practices.

The work of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns also precipitated a shift from the realm of the personal, a hallmark of Modernist art, to the transpersonal arena of mass media, in the recognition and subversion of the power of visual icons. In the 1960's Pop artist Andy Warhol fully embraced popular cultural icons, which, while perpetuated by the mass media, also provided an infinite source for his art. The significance of Andy Warhol's visual appropriations is multidimensional. First and foremost, his work illustrates the fact that all visual images are a viable source for art, and so is the practice of appropriation. The realization that pictures can not only be produced by artists, but they can also be borrowed and used to refocus the attention of the audience from the means of their production to the meanings that they generate and the place in society they hold would become the main focus of the Pictures group.

Even though Andy Warhol was a self-proclaimed celebrity who fully embraced consumer culture, his appropriations of socially created symbols, ranging from Coca-Cola to Marilyn Monroe, expose both the glamorous as well

[22] Douglas Crimp,"On the Museum's Ruins," *October,* Vol.13 (Summer 1980), 43-5.

as the tragic aspects of the media-saturated society. For his *Death and Disaster* Series created during the 1960's, Andy Warhol repeatedly silk-screened a single appropriated photograph of a human tragedy on a toned canvas. These works illustrate the numbing effect of the replica, endlessly reproduced by the mass media to a point where all meaning vanishes from the image and the viewer is left unscathed. As Warhol himself said "When you see a gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn't really have any effect."[23]

The manner in which Warhol chose to present the photographic images in his series further emphasizes the idea of distancing. The pictures he appropriated appear as if carelessly placed on the canvas, sometimes overlapping, sometimes with gaps in between, an arrangement which belittles the tragic events depicted. As a result, the viewer is lured to neglect the content of the images in the effort to decode the aesthetic logic according to which they are arranged. The potential failure to emotionally relate to the scenes represented in Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series is part of the "disaster" of modern mass media bombarded society; the numbing effect extends to the level of emotions, where people become detached from reality to a point where compassion is replaced by spectacle. By the 1980's the spectacle of the replica would come to completely usurp reality, to a point where, as *Modern History* exposes, truth has become unattainable. Andy Warhol's series further exemplify the privatization of the public sphere; as a result "events are not experienced through direct

[23] Quoted in David Joselit, *American Art Since 1945,* 69.

participation but rather via the 'official eye' of the news reporter who is him or herself the avatar of a large corporation."[24]

As part of the attempt to escape institutionalization as well as the dominant modernist aesthetics, by the early 1960's the art object had also begun to dematerialize in the work of Conceptual artists who turned to language and photography as tools for providing evidence or directions for the reconstruction of the immaterial object of art. As a result, language was elevated to the status of art, while photography, although a visual element, came to be used as a structure that did not necessarily connote a visual idea; rather, the photograph became "a signifier, an image-referent."[25] These ideas are at work in Douglas Huebler's *Variable Piece No.20* (1971) in which the artist had himself photographed playing basketball in 30 second intervals. The images appear random and conduct no information about the progress of the game; rather, they focus on the artists' body, creating a visual catalog of his gestures and bodily positions at even intervals of time.

By the time Conceptual artists appropriated the medium in the mid-1960's all aspects of photography had been demystified; it had begun to separate itself from the constraints of Modernist aesthetics, as photographs were used as objective vehicles for the transmission of information, rather than for their formal elements.[26] In fact, Douglas Huebler is seen as one of the first to acknowledge the objective qualities of the camera after the ideas of 1920's Bauhaus teacher

[24] Joselit, 72.
[25] Robert C. Morgan, *Conceptual Art: An American Perspective*, 58.
[26] Ibid., 55.

Laszlo Moholy-Nagy.[27] Huebler's work was instrumental in the liberation of photography from formal aesthetics that had guided the medium since Alfred Stieglitz formulated the Modernist photographic paradigm in the early years of the century.[28] By 1976 photographs were seen as "simply…a device to complete the idea."[29]

Moreover, the mass media proved to be a suitable site for the presentation of the dematerialized Conceptual works. Many artists chose to present their art within the mass media context. Dan Graham's *Schema* (1966) took popular magazines for inspiration: the piece provided a textual template that could serve as a guide for the interpretation of popular magazines. Furthermore, the artist chose a popular publication- *Arts Magazine*- as the means for distributing his series *Homes for America* (1966). Alternatively, for the presentation of her series *The Mythic Being;I/You (Her)* (1974) Adrian Piper chose to purchase advertising space in the weekly New York newspaper *The Village Voice*.[30]

Apart from using the mass media as a means of distribution, a reference, and as a site for their art, many artists from that period also worked with notions of sequencing. Douglas Huebler's photographic juxtapositions in particular "set the stage for 'content-filling'," enabling the viewer to play an active role in the re-construction of the work of art.[31] The work of art was no longer the privileged and unique Modernist art object. Under the emerging Post-Modern paradigm the

[27] Moholy-Nagy indirectly declared the independence of photography from painting, in his attempt to demystify the camera and present it as a tool that could be used to objectively record that which the eye can not perceive.
[28] Robert C Morgan, 59.
[29] Ed Ruscha, taped interview in 1976, cited in Robert C. Morgan, *Conceptual Art: An American Perspective*, 68.
[30] Frazer Ward, "Adrian Piper," *Frieze Magazine* (Issue 45, March- April 1999).
[31] Robert C. Morgan, 76.

concept of art was changing; it continued to engage with some of the same materials- newspapers and photographs- but they were used and perceived in novel ways. More importantly, these media were explored in relation to other structures, or in relation to each other. Consequently, meaning could be derived from the content of the work, from the particular modes of its presentation, as well as from the viewer's personal input.

The work of Conceptual artists exemplified the shift of focus towards the exploration of the context within which images are presented and the ways in which certain readings are evoked. Additionally, by the late 1960's appropriation had become a major artistic practice. The borrowing of pictures presented artists with endless opportunities. John Baldessari, for example, advocated the use of *any* visual material; Jack Goldstein, one of the five artists featured in the seminal 1977 exhibition *Pictures* recalls: "John would have magazines on the floor open to the ads, to the news photos. He was saying, here, all of this stuff you can use in your art. I don't ever remember any other instructor who ever treated art that way…he plopped the materials on the floor and there they were, pictures you could use."[32]

By the end of the 1970's many artists were exploring the possibilities opened up by appropriation. For her series *After Walker Evans* (1981) Sherrie Levine re-photographed catalogue images of Evans' works and exhibited them as her own. Levine was a member of the Pictures generation, a term used to broadly characterize a group of artists who worked during the time period

[32] Jack Goldstein, quoted in Douglas Eklund, and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York N.Y.). *The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984* (New York, New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2009), 40.

between the mid-1970's and mid-1980's. The significance of the group was first acknowledged by critic Douglas Crimp in an essay written for the 1977 exhibition *Pictures.* Initially ambiguous about the exact parameters of their innovations, Crimp's essay was nonetheless instrumental in providing a name for the group and in bringing critical attention to their practices.

The Pictures artists worked in a variety of media- video, photography, performance- and used appropriated materials as a means of exploring the ways in which visual images operate in relation to various social, political, and sexist ideologies. Having been born and raised in a consumer society, pictures were the logical medium of choice for these artists. Critic Douglas Eklund elaborates further, stating that pictures offered the only meaningful venue left for artists to explore, who had witnessed their predecessors' work with language, nature, and even with the dematerliazed object of art.[33] Consequently, the Pictures artists "chose to return to representation, addressing the rhetorical, social, and psychological functions of the image across all media."[34]

In the hands of these artists the word "picture" gained a large spectrum of meanings. No longer was the term was simply referring to visual images; rather, it came to describe situations, conditions, issues of temporality and presence, ideologies, creations, signifying structures. The word "pictures", as used by the Pictures generation, can be seen in terms of a "snapshot"- an instantaneous,

[33] Douglas Eklund, "The Pictures Generation" In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–.
[34] Douglas Eklund, and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York N.Y.). *The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984*. (New York, New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2009)

candid photograph that not only captures an essence, but also reveals details that may not be visible in a staged photograph.

In fact, many of the Pictures artists used the medium of photography to make "pictures." For his *American Soldier (1977)* Robert Longo appropriated a film still, isolated the figure of a man getting shot, and created a large-scale metal and color enamel relief. The resulting work, he says, is not "a picture *of* something…. That guy- that moment- happens every time you look at him."[35] In her *Untitled Film Stills*, a series began in 1977 Cindy Sherman photographed herself as the main protagonist in a variety of staged scenarios. Subverting the idea of a self-portrait while also appropriating cinematic techniques, the artist created neither an image of herself, nor a film. Rather, Sherman constructed a "picture" of how social identities are both created and perpetuated by visual images.

. What further distinguished the work of the Pictures group was the fact that these artists were interested not in *what*, but *how* visual images signify. Troy Brauntuch combined text and image in his *Golden Distance* (1976) in order to illustrate "the picture's withdrawal from signification….the caption….seems only to reinforce the inaccessibility of the photograph itself."[36] Also working with image and text, Barbara Kruger's photomontages from the late 70's and early 80's further explored the power of pictures while also revealing their capacity to acquire meanings from their relationship to text.

[35] Robert Longo commenting on his work. Audio Guide New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–.
[36] Douglas Crimp, *Pictures,* Exhibition catalogue (New York: Artists Space, 1977), unpaginated.

There is little doubt that the members of the diverse group of the Pictures generation were working with ideas previously explored by their predecessors. [37] They borrowed Minimalism's endless progressions and objectivity; Pop art's embrace of the visual materials of consumer culture, and Conceptual art's notions of sequencing, juxtaposition, and most importantly, the idea of the image as a signifier. Consequently, the transition between Photo-Conceptualism and Pictures art is particularly subtle; both groups worked with pictures and text; both also engaged with the ideas associated with the liberation of the image from signification. However, while Conceptual artists worked with photographs, Pictures artists worked with pictures. For critic Douglas Crimp the distinction is significant, for it marks a definite break with Modernism.[38]

Sarah Charlesworth was among the first members of the group to begin to explore the workings of pictures. The artist was acquainted with Douglas Huebler and Joseph Kosuth; however, as early as 1975 she started to move away from Conceptualism and began to work on *Modern History* in 1977, the majority of which she completed over the course of the next two years. It was not until 1979 that Douglas Crimp was able to articulate the significance of Pictures art. The fact that Charlesworth's series was created between 1977 and 1979, in combination with the particular ways in which the artist appropriated newspapers and photography, allows for her series to be seen in light of the transition

[37] In the 2009 exhibition "The Pictures Generation- 1973-1984," curator Douglas Eklund included the following artists: John Baldessari, Ericka Beckman, Dara Birnbaum, Barbara Bloom, Eric Bogosian, Glenn Branca, Troy Brauntuch, James Casebere, Sarah Charlesworth, Rhys Chatham, Charles Clough, Nancy Dwyer, Jack Goldstein, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Thomas Lawson, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, Allan McCollum, Paul McMahon, MICA-TV (Carole Ann Klonarides & Michael Owen), Matt Mullican, Richard Prince, David Salle, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons, Michael Smith, James Welling, and Michael Zwack. Ibid.
[38] Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October,* Vol. 8 (Spring, 1979), 87.

between Conceptual and Pictures art as well as the theoretical debates of Post-Modernism.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Modern History:* Pictures and Photographs

*Modern History* begins in 1977. Over the course of two months, September and November, Sarah Charlesworth appropriated the *International Herald Tribune*, producing two sets of twenty six black and white to-scale copies of the front pages of the newspaper. The artist altered the publication by leaving all images intact and excising all text except for the masthead; as a result, pictures stand alone within the frame of the daily newspaper, demanding that the news be read pictorially, rather than textually (Figure 1 and Figure 2.) The minor manipulation of the newspaper deceivingly renders *Modern History* straightforward and yet, the act of text removal unveils a plethora of problematic issues that beckon to be considered within the critical and artistic context of 1977.

During the month of September 1977, concurrently with the first addition to *Modern History,* an exhibition titled *Pictures* opened at Artists Space, a gallery whose objective was to present "the most important emerging art…that has not had extensive public exposure."[39] Sarah Charlesworth's work was not featured in *Pictures.* However, the essay accompanying the exhibition critically acknowledges the beginning of a crucial time in art when pictures had acquired a new autonomy in the hands of an emerging group of artists known as the Pictures Generation.[40]

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[39] Helene Winer, acknowledgements in *Pictures,* Exhibition catalogue (New York: Artists Space, 1977), unpaginated.

[40] Douglas Eklund, a curator of a recent exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, suggests that the group of artists known as The Pictures generation acquired their name after the influential essay accompanying the 1977 exhibition *Pictures* at Artists Space.

In his essay in the catalog for *Pictures,* curator Douglas Crimp speaks of the problematic nature of visual images in the late 1970's, which the Pictures artists attempted to tackle. Their work, he explains, points out the fact that "we only experience reality through the pictures we make of it,"[41] a statement which, in combination with the title of both the essay and the exhibition, directs the critical attention in the late 1970's towards pictures. Once serving an interpretative function, Crimp contends, images have come to completely usurp reality through their ubiquitous presence in newspapers and the mass media, which, in turn, has transformed them into a "signifying structure of its own accord."[42]

Crimp sees this new awareness of the power of pictures as having precipitated a significant change in art in the late 1970's; a change that was seen in recent work that was marked by a renewed interest in "making pictures of recognizable things."[43] The critic historically situates the new trend as having emerged from Conceptual art and in particular from the transposition of artistic focus from something absent to something present. As a result, a new sensibility arose, one in which "representation [was] freed from the tyranny of the represented."[44]

The concern of the Pictures artists with the exploration of the signifying structures of pictures was partially precipitated by the intellectual milieu in which they were immersed at the time. The 1960's had witnessed a proliferation of

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[41] Douglas Crimp, *Pictures,* Exhibition catalogue (New York: Artists Space, 1977), unpaginated.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Douglas Crimp, *Pictures,* 1977.

college education, which resulted in large amounts of professionally trained artists working in the 1970's.[45] Schools advocated an interdisciplinary approach, as many members of the faculty were practicing Conceptual artists, while others preferred painting.[46] Students of that period were also engaging with the work of Post-Structuralist philosophers such as Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, and Jacques Derrida, whose works had by that time been translated into English and fully integrated into the American university curricula.[47] Apart from advocating a multi-disciplinary approach, these philosophers explored the ways in which reality is constructed through visual signs and representations, and called for the active participation on part of the audience. As a result, many artists working in the late 1970's were "image-driven, media-oriented," often working intra-media.[48]

What pictures artists understood is that representation achieves its signification not through relationships to reality, but rather through relationships to other representations. As a result, in contemporary society illusionism has come to be closely related to the real; in fact, illusionism *is* the real itself, and as such it is only able to relate to itself through pictures. For Douglas Crimp, this realization was exemplary of the final dissolution of the boundary between real and illusory that began with Minimal and Conceptual art, and culminated in the work of the Pictures group.[49]

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[45] Douglas Eklund notes that many of the Pictures artists came out of CalArts, where John Baldessari and Duglas Huebler taught.
46 Douglas Eklund, and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York N.Y.). The *Pictures Generation, 1974-1984* (New York, New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2009), 22.
[47] Kate Linker, *"The Critical Legacy of Poststructuralism,"* in Lisa Phillips, *The American Century: Art and Culture 1950-2000* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1999), 286-7.
[48] Ibid., 81.
[49] Douglas Crimp, *Pictures,* 1977.

What distinguished their work from that of its predecessors was the fact that while Photo-Conceptualist artists saw the photographic image as an objective referent, Pictures artists realized that images are an empty signifier. Jean Baudrillard, a Post-Structuralist philosopher whose work had become available in the United States, wrote extensively on the issue of image signification and the relationship between image and reality. In his 1981 *Simulacra and Simulacrum*, Baudrillard refers to visual images as "murderers of the real," in support of his theory that in the present age reality has been replaced by a set of references without referents, resulting in a hyperreality. The usurpation of the real has been so complete that people are no longer able to distinguish between the real and the simulacrum.[50]

The culprits for this were pictures. Baudrillard investigates their ascension to power by tracing their historical development from a pure reflection of reality to the current situation where the image is entirely divorced from it, being pure simulacrum. Baudrillard concludes: "the transition from signs which dissimulate something to signs which dissimulate that there is nothing, marks the decisive turning point. The first implies a theology of truth... The second inaugurates an age of simulacra and stimulation."[51]

One of the ways in which pictures perpetuate the model of hyperreality is through the mass media, which present us with an implosion of meaning. They use "order, signal, message" in the attempt to convey information, yet the message remains unintelligible, for the images have no referents, they are empty

[50] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation,* trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: University of Michgan Press, 1994).
[51] Ibid.

signifiers and thus convey no information to the viewer. Baurdillard further contends that newspapers often present information that has a scandal effect, which produces an "ideological blanket" concealing the fact that reality is no longer possible, that there is no longer any difference between fact and denunciation.[52]

It is in this artistic and theoretical context that Sarah Charlesworth's *Modern History* should be investigated. Her series, already fully mature in 1977, can be seen as the linchpin between Photo-Conceptualism and the emerging work of the Pictures artists. Charlesworth was directly influenced by Conceptual art; she studied at Barnard College where she encountered the work of Douglas Huebler at the time when he was moving away from sculpture and towards the use photography. In addition, Charlesworth worked closely with Joseph Kosuth, as a co-editor of the British Conceptual journal *The Fox*.[53] It is namely during her collaboration with Conceptual artists that her artistic ideas began to crystallize. In her seminal essay *Declaration of Dependence*, published in 1975 in *The Fox,* she clearly elucidates her stance with regards to Modern and Post-Modern art, which in turn exemplifies her break with Photo-Conceptualism and the move toward Pictures art.

In *Declaration of Dependence,* Charlesworth contends that Modern art and culture are involved, on one hand, in a tautological system in which one produces, informs, and perpetuates the other, while on the other hand both are controlled from outside, by the economic interests of institutions. For

[52] Ibid.
[53] Douglas Eklund, 144.

Charlesworth, the problem is perpetuated by Modernism's self-referentiality, not only in its artistic practices, but also in the creation of its values. Modernism judges itself against itself: "when discussing art work we refer to the function or meaning of that work not so much in relation to a larger sphere of social praxis, but rather within the isolated and abstracted province of 'art'."[54]

Consequently, for Charlesworth, in 1975 art was still operating within the Modernist aesthetics; nonetheless, change was necessary. She appeals to artists to abandon the self-referentiality of Modernism and adopt a multidisciplinary approach to art-making. She is fully aware of the fact that it is not possible to completely escape the system of economic control, yet, she calls for the creation of art with the cognizance that it too plays a role in shaping culture: "The issue then becomes not so much a question of how we can achieve a 'value-free' or 'objective' model or theory of art practice as it is a question of what values and conditions of learning we in fact promote and provide through our practice of art."[55]

In her avid critique of the predominant artistic practices, Charlesworth accuses Modernism of the creation of an ideological blanket, comparing its workings to Disneyland. In his discussion of how simulacra obfuscate the real, Jean Baudrillard also compared the current social situation to Disneyland.[56] It is an ironic coincidence that The California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) was

[54] Sarah Charlesworth, "Declaration of Dependence" *The Fox,* Vol.12, No. 2 (1975), 4.
[55] Ibid.,3.
[56] In *Siumation and Simulacra* Baudrillard discusses Disneyland as the perfect example of an ideological blanket, in that it creates a fantasy world in comparison to which the real appears truthful, while at the same time simulacrum is the model: "Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America, which is Disneyland."

established in 1961 by Walt Disney as an interdisciplinary school from which many Feminist artists emerged, and was the place where Douglas Huebler and John Baldessari taught.[57] It is the place that perpetuated the Post-Modernist view of pictures as social constructs and tools for shaping reality, tools that would come to be liberated from their signification and would consequently escape the praxis of Modernism.

While acknowledging its merits, Charlesworth sees Conceptual art as operating within the reach of the Modernist ideological blanket: "'Art as idea' was once a good idea, but art as idea as art product, alas, moves in the world of commodity-products and hardly the realm of 'idea'…..this is the ultimate consumership: Ideas become the property of the inventor, and as such are no further use to the community once claimed."[58]

What Sarah Charlewsorth calls for is a change in the artistic paradigm; what *Modern History* illustrates is a way in which the transition could be achieved, while still using some of the tools of the old model, newspapers and photography. The ideas espoused in *Declaration of Dependence* find their practical application in her series. Art, according to Charlesworth, should move beyond the privileging of the art object, which she illustrates through the appropriation of newspapers, common and ever-changing. Art should also move beyond itself as a single point of reference, which she achieves in the appropriation of photographic images, which had already begun to move beyond Modernist aesthetics in the 1960's and by 1977 were beginning to operate as pictures. Charlesworth also appeals to

[57] Lisa Phillips, *The American Century: Art and Culture 1950-2000* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1999), 275-8.
[58] Charlesworth, "Declaration of Dependence," 5.

artists to participate in the writing of new history by raising awareness to "the experience of being acted upon" by an external power."[59]

The Minimalist-like sequences of *Modern History,* showing the front pages of international newspapers, deprived of text, expose some of the ways in which pictures are able to produce and perpetuate certain ideologies. The newspaper pages are unified both by the never changing masthead of the newspaper and the similar format of presentation of photographs: in most cases, there are at least three images on each page, with one always situated at the top; the images depict snapshots of events or people, white males in particular.

During the two-month period Charlesworth appropriated for *Modern History, September* and *November 1977* women are hardly ever depicted. Generally, the space of the newspaper should be androgynous, yet, as Charlesworth reveals, it appears to be dominated by men. The artist appropriates photography and without directly manipulating the images (she erased all text but left all photographs intact) she exposes the subtle ways in which ideas are conveyed by pictures. The scarce representation of women is characteristic of the entire series, suggesting the exclusion of women from social and political life as well as history. Likewise, "Charlesworth's work proposes that the relationship of a woman to pictorial space is necessarily different to that of the men who have traditionally been in charge of it."[60]

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[59] Charlesworth, "Unwriting", n.p. quoted in Deborah Esch, *In the Event: Reading Journalism, Reading Theory*, ed. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 2.
[60] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, *Beyond Piety: Critical Essays on the Visual Arts*, 1986-1993 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 194.

In fact, many Feminist artists had appropriated photography, a medium considered to be secondary in importance to painting and sculpture, as the vehicle for exposing social injustices. After the initial wave of Feminism in the 1960's a second phase occurred in the 1970's, characterized by a shift towards a more inquisitive approach to photography and popular imagery.[61] Female artists working during this later period were not as adamant about the exposure of social problems but rather sought to reveal the mechanisms of how ideas are imbedded and conveyed through visual images. Some of the members of the Pictures group, such as Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger worked with these ideas.

Sarah Charlesworth's *Modern History* can also be aligned with second wave Feminism in that it exposes the lack of female representation in a popular social medium, which in turn effects the exclusion of women from the larger spheres of culture, politics, and history. In addition, the appropriation of photography and newspapers can also be seen as an attempt to make room for women in society; photography, as the inferior medium, became the medium of choice of many female artists who sought to create art outside the sphere of male-dominated painting.

The title of Charlesworth's series calls upon painting directly, in its reference to history painting which, predominantly created by men, occupied the top of the hierarchy of genres since the 17th century. The beginnings of history painting can be traced back to the 15th century and in particular to the attempts

[61] Douglas Eklund, *The Pictures Generation*, 1974-1984 (New York, New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2009), 144.

on behalf of Renaissance artists to elevate the status of the visual arts beyond associations with manual craftsmanship. As part of the agenda to prove art's merits as an activity that requires technical as well as intellectual skills, many Renaissance men wrote treatises on art as well as architecture. Leonardo da Vinci and Leon Battista Alberti were among the many who wrote extensively on the merits of painting.

In Book II of his *Della Pittura* (*On Painting*), Alberti elaborates on the term *istoria,* which, according to him, serves to describe the most valuable type of work produced during the 15th century. A painting with *istoria* "will be so agreeably and pleasantly attractive that it will capture the eye of whatever …. person is looking at it and will move his soul." Throughout Books II and III Alberti discusses at length the various attributes of a good -*istoria*- painting, among which are the inclusion of a multitude of figures presenting different gestures and a range of emotional states, as well as a story which would, in the best case, be derived from ancient literature. [62] Even though the term *istoria* as the author uses it is different from the Latin *historia*, or history, the type of painting Alberti advocates is essentially history painting, which, in its emotional, allegorical, historical, and technical complexity represented the highest type of art a (male) painter could produce during the 15th century.

The hierarchy of genres as it is known today was created in France during the 17th century as a classification that was closely associated with power and politics and the male-dominated realm of academic art. The Royal Academy of

[62] Leon Battisa Alberti, *On Painting,* John R. Spencer, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956).

Painting and Sculpture was established by Louis XIV in 1648.[63] In 1667 André Félibien, the official court historian of the King, began to promote a hierarchy in the genres of art as a way as to secure the status of the Academy as the primary producer of high quality art. Félibien wrote:

> He who paints landscapes perfectly is above the painter who only paints fruit, flours, and seashells. He who paints living animals is more estimable that that painter who only paints things that are lifeless…he who makes himself the imitator of God in painting the human figure is much more estimable than all the others… A painter who paints only portraits has not achieved the heights perfection and cannot pretend to those honors that the most erudite receive. For that one must move form one figure to the representation of several together; one must depict history and fable and represent great deeds like historians, or charming subjects like poets; and climbing ever higher, one must in allegorical compositions show how to cover under the veil of fable the virtues of great men, and the most exalted mysteries. We call a painter great who can perform such tasks well.[64]

The model established by Félibien eventually found its application in the Académie des Beaux Arts.[65] Established in 1803 as the heir to the Royal Academy of Painting, the Académie exemplified the consolidation of artistic production into a single academic body that would become responsible for the creation and promotion of state controlled high art.[66] The hierarchy served to separate history form genre painting on the basis of doctrinal as well as aesthetic criteria: “the Academy sought to associate its authority as a royal institution with

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[63] Académie Des Beaux-Arts “Historical Background”.
[64] André Félibien, “Conférences de l”Académie Royale de Peinture et de la Sculpture Pendant L’Année 1667,”quoted in Paul Duro, “Imitation and Authority: the Creation of the Academic Canon in French art, 1648-1870,” in Partisan Canons, edited by Anna Brzyski (Duke Universtiy Press, 2007), 96.
[65] Paul Duro, “Imitation and Authority: the Creation of the Academic Canon in French art, 1648-1870,” in Partisan Canons, edited by Anna Brzyski (Duke Universtiy Press, 2007).
[66] The the Académie des Beaux Arts was established after the merger of Royal Academy of Paitning, Royal Academy of Sculpture, and the Royal Academy of Architecture. Académie Des Beaux-Arts. “Historical Background”

its self-ratifying ability to pronounce the legitimacy of the [artistic] canon, thereby welding into an indissoluble whole the question of aesthetic preference and institutional power."[67]

History painting was put in the service of reproducing the standard which was upheld by the Academy; as such it represented and perpetuated the ideas, values, theories, and knowledge of the royal institution in the form of a "visual ideology."[68] By associating itself with royalty, the state, and education, "the Academy could control not only the discourse on art but also the way its visual ideology was communicated to the next generation, thereby bringing together canon formation and canon maintenance under the same, unified, pedagogical enterprise."[69]

The close association between high academic art and the interests of the state became particularly pronounced starting in 1777, when the King began to personally appoint heads of the Academy, replacing the old standard which relied on internal collegial appointments. Consequently, history painting became the expression of both the national art and the power of the monarch. From this point forward, the ideas of the Enlightenment were directly linked to French politics and particularly to the need for an authoritarian state.[70]

The establishment of the Academy had yet another outcome- the emergence of the modern public sphere. The Salons, which were launched as

[67] Paul Duro, "Imitation and Authority: the Creation of the Academic Canon in French art, 1648-1870", 97.
[68] Ibid., 98.
[69] Ibid., 99.
[70] Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteen-Century Paris* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 191.

regular events by the Academy in the mid 18th century, provided, for the first time in history, free and open displays of art to the large public in a secular setting. These events attracted large audiences, and provoked discussions and criticism, which was often reflected by the media.[71] Once the Salons had been established as regular events, the production of art periodicals ensued. These publications accompanied the Salon and offered articles and reviews on current artists and architects, much to the same effect of contemporary art magazines. In addition to the official guide, catalogue, and periodical from the Salons, a number of illegal critical reviews and pamphlets were also produced and sold on the streets. This gave rise to a new public sphere that emerged directly out of the Salon, a sphere that was directed by the Academy and, by extension, the state. [72]

The formation of the modern public art space also marked the beginning of the decline of history painting and the Academy, as it eventually led to the emergence of artists who reacted against the ideological, idealistic, and historical associations of history painting. The decline of history painting came from none else but from one of the most prominent practitioners of the genre- Jacques Louis David. Initially associated with the Radical Left, David came to create art in service of Napoleon I.

Instigating a coup in 1799, general Napoleon Bonaparte intended to reform the French state and expand its power. Proclaiming himself Emperor in 1804, Napoleon commissioned a large number of works that would glorify his deeds and promote his qualities as a leader of the French state. Napoleon

[71] Ibid., 3.
[72] Ibid., 6.

understood the power of art as a tool for propaganda and strategically used the Salon for the promotions of his ideas. Jacques Louis David was selected as the First Painter to the Emperor, and was commissioned to create a large history painting commemorating Napoleon's ascension to power, which would be prominently displayed at the Salon.[73]

*The Coronation of Napoleon in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame* (1805-7) reflects the actual event, however not truthfully. The Emperor carefully orchestrated the contents of the work, which depicts him placing the crown on the head of his wife, Joséphine. Pope Pius VII, who would traditionally be executing the coronation, sits at the side. The discrepancy between the title of the work and the scene represented arises from the fact that in actuality Napoleon disrespected the Pope by crowning himself during the actual ceremony. In order to prevent the rage of the Papacy, the official painting portrays the coronation of his wife. Nonetheless, the association of the Emperor with supreme authority is evident; he is depicted as the main protagonist in the pregnant moment, when, right after having received authority as an Emperor he immediately enacts his power and crowns his wife Empress of France.[74] It was David who began to taint history painting with the introduction of contemporary (genre painting) events in the contents of his works, something that would bring about the demise of the most privileged type of art.

In its realistic depictions of carefully chosen events, during the 19th c history painting came to be used as a tool that would reflect upon that which was

[73] Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, *Nineteenth-Century European Art* (Prentice Hall: New Jersey, 2006), 111-122.
[74] Ibid.

considered important at that time, that which was worthy of making the ranks of history, as well as a means to convey political messages to the audience. History painting as a genre served multiple purposes: it was a historical documentation, a reflection of that which was important, as well as a means for disseminating messages, much to the effect of newspapers.

*Modern History* suggests a reference to the 19th c. artistic genre; however, it offers an updated version of history painting. If throughout history the creation of high art and history painting in particular was the privilege of male artists, Sarah Charlesowrth's *Modern History* offers a new modality for artistic creation, one that also includes women. The series suggests the fact that in contemporary times the male-dominated medium of painting, initially tainted by lower genres of art, had come to be entirely displaced by one of them- photography, which became the new documentary tool of history as well as the creative tool of female artists.

Furthermore, if history painting precipitated the emergence of the modern public sphere, which was in turn linked to the press, *Modern History* can be seen as the herald of the post-modern public sphere. Much like a 19th century history painting, the series reflects that which is significant while the appropriated medium of the newspaper conveys certain political messages. Unlike history painting, *Modern History* does not strive to promote ideologies; rather, it subverts the appropriated media of photography and the press in order to explore the ways in which ideologies are created.

The parallel between history painting and *Modern History* further becomes evident when the series is examined through the lens of Craig Owens' 1980 essay *The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Post-Modernism*. The author traces the history of allegory, proposing that it has been revived by Post-Modern artists and has come to be the common denominator under which their work can be placed. In his discussion of the history of the critical suppression of allegory, Owens refers to 19th c. history painting:

> From the Revolution on, [allegory] had been enlisted in the service of historicism to produce image upon image of the present *in terms* of the classical past. This relationship was expressed not only superficially, in details of costume and physiognomy, but also structurally, through a radical condensation of narrative into a single, emblematic instant…. it dominated artistic practice during the first half of the nineteenth century. [75]

It was this association of allegory with history painting that ultimately prepared for allegory's demise; as a result, allegory is considered to be outdated by many contemporary critics. Nonetheless, Owens contends that allegory was never truly extinct but had rather been obscured and pushed to the side by the Modern paradigm, only to reassert itself again in contemporary art, especially in art marked by appropriation: "Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them… in his hands the image becomes something other."[76] This description of allegory, even though formulated in 1980, outlines the agenda of the Pictures artists, who sought to free pictures from the ideological constraints imposed by culture and give the

[75] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October,* Vol. 12 (Spring, 1980), 76.
[76] Ibid., 69.

audience a carte blanche vis-à-vis their interpretation and expose the mechanisms of their signification.

Elaborating further on the issue of allegory, Owens suggests that its paradigm is the palimpsest.[77] A palimpsest is a piece of writing from which text has been erased in order to make room for other writing. Examined through this lens, *Modern History* could also be seen as a palimpsest; Charlesworth erased the writing from a newspaper in order to make room for other information. In the case of her series the information is not added back to the work as text, but is rather suggested in the process of text removal and the resulting emphasis on pictures. The photographs in the newspapers seem unrelated; yet, when presented in a sequence they inevitably suggest a narrative. As a result, despite the lack of text, the artist was able to transform a visual encounter into a pseudo-textual one; the images that remain within the frame of the newspaper not only beg to be interpreted, but also become the only part of the news that could be read.

A further claim can be made that in this context *Modern History* was an early precursor to the revival of allegory, bringing to life Owens theory of Post-Modernism three years before his essay was published. Likewise, the title *Modern History* becomes even more appropriate for the series; if it was indeed history painting that, according to Owens, caused the demise of allegory, in its updated version *Modern History* brings back allegory under the new artistic model that would come to predominate the artistic production of the next decade.

[77] Ibid., 69.

While *Modern History* transcends the limits of history painting as a framed object created by a male artist with the intention to produce a certain meaning, the series remains anchored within the frame of the newspaper. Sarah Charlesworth acknowledged the fact that in the mid 1970's artists were only beginning to be aware of the scope of the system that controls art: "while being critical of the presumptive and reductionist aspects of formalist tradition we exist as its inevitable heir."[78] Accordingly, the photographs that she appropriates exist within the system of the newspaper; they have been liberated from direct signification by the removal of text and captions, yet they are presented within the ever-present frame of the mass media.

The issue of framing is central to the *Modern History* series. Critic Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe proposes that the way in which Sarah Charlesworth chose to present the daily pages of the newspaper adds a level of complexity to her series. Discussing some of her later laminated works, he suggests that the laminate, which in the case of *Modern History* is replaced by glass-paned frames, brings up the question of transparency. The glass of the frame serves several functions: it is the thing that both distances the viewer from the work and unites the images with the frame and that which is beyond it; the glass also proposes "a field of action for a viewer who is constructed even as he or she is excluded."[79]

The issue of framing was also discussed by a philosopher contemporary to Sarah Charlesworth: Jacques Derrida, who, in the summer of 1979 published an essay on the subject of the Parergon as discussed in Emanuel Kant's *Critique*

[78] Charlesworth, "Declaration of Dependence," 6.
[79] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, *Beyond Piety: Critical Essays on the Visual Arts, 1986-1993* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 201.

*of Judgement.*[80] Derrida exposes the ways in which the Parergon, or the frame, is an essential but problematic entity, namely because it partakes both in that which it frames as well as in that which remains outside of it. Consequently, the frame serves as the bridge between a work of art and the outside world. At the same time, it is not static and it changes as it shapes the objects, while at the same time it is shaped by it: "The frame warps as it works….like wood. It splits, breaks down, breaks up, at the same time it cooperates in the production of the product, it exceeds it and deducts itself. It never simply exposes itself."[81]

In the case of *Modern History,* there are in fact two frames. On one hand, there is the physical frame surrounding the work of art, the blackness of which serves to emphasize the see-through quality of the glass panes behind which Charlesworth's reproductions are placed.[82] This frame implies the ideas of transparency and brings forth the notion that while some parts are visible, others may remain hidden. It also evokes the notion of confinement, which can be reviewed in terms of past practices, as reflected in Charlesworth's choice of media- newspapers and photography were widely used by Modernist artists. However, just as in the case of history painting, the possibility of escape comes from within. In *Modern History*, the seriality and temporality of the newspaper transcend the finite and permanent nature of history painting allowing for the possibility for the endless expansion of Charlesworth's series.

The ambiguity inherent in the physical frame is also reinforced by the context of the newspaper, or the second frame within which the photographic

[80] The essay was translated by Craig Owens.
[81] Jacques Derrida and Craig Owens, "The Parergon," *October,* Vol. 9 (Summer 1979), 35.
[82] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, 195.

images are presented. Newspapers are surrounded by an aura of immediacy and exigency, in that they represent the news which is only current for a given day. At the same time the multiplicity of media covering the news daily, as well as the short-lived nature of the newspaper, which will be replaced with another issue the following day, has the effect of distancing the audience from the events represented. Caught in the sea of information, the viewer not only fails to relate to the news but is also unable to see it in perspective: "One of the dangerous effects of the chronological order in which newspapers appear is the numbing of the sense of what history, and what the present could be."[83]

With its lack of textual news *Modern History* calls upon the audience to become aware of this anesthetizing effect of the mass media, while at the same time it exposes the ways in which newspapers are able to achieve such effects in contemporary society. The visual tool of newspapers - photography is presented as autonomous from text. The act of separation of text and image is symbolic of the emancipation of visual images from inherent meanings, and promotes the leading artistic ideas at the time, namely that pictures can only be read in relation to other pictures or objects. In *Modern History,* the photographic images demand to be read in relation to the only other elements present in the series- the frame of the newspaper within they are presented.

Sarah Charlesworth's use of text and image to reveal ideas and concepts, in combination with her emphasis on photography in general and on photography in its capacity as pictures, allows for *Modern History* to be seen as a bridge

[83] Werner Hamacher, "Journals, Politics," quoted in *In the Event: Reading Journalism, Reading Theory*, Edited by Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 70.

between Conceptual and Pictures art. The series highlights the problematic nature of visual images in contemporary society which, as Baudrillard contested, have come to usurp reality to a point where they have come to mediate our understanding of it. Nonetheless, when framed within the context of the newspaper, pictures become a useful tool in the attempt to expose the mechanisms of culture and society. Consequently, a critical examination into the way pictures operate would raise a kind of new awareness of how both culture and history are constructed. This could in turn allow for a change in the dominant paradigm to occur, something that Sarah Charlesworth was hoping to achieve.

In his 1977 essay *Pictures,* Douglas Crimp explicitly situates the work of emerging Pictures artists he discusses within the realm of Modernism. In 1979 he published a second essay with the same title in the journal *October.* In the first paragraph he describes the work of the five artists participating in the *Pictures* exhibition at Artists Space in 1977 as Post-Modern, stating that the issues engaged by these artists have precipitated a definite change in art. What is important about their work, he explains, is the radical new approach to medium; these artists used appropriated material to show that ”underneath each picture there is always another picture.”[84]

The shift that occurred in the critical stance of Douglas Crimp over the course of two years is exemplary of the changes that art was undergoing during the two-year span from 1977 to 1979. His early essay was instrumental in giving

[84] Douglas Crimp, “Pictures,” October, Vol. 8 (Spring 1979), 87.

voice to the newly-emerged Pictures artists.[85] By the time he republished the later version in *October* exhibitions had began to appear on both sides of the Atlantic that dealt with image-based art. During the 1980's appropriation became the leading mode of creation, and numerous debates ensued regarding the integration of photography into the realm Post-modern art. [86]

Howard Singerman suggests that in the discrepancies between the 1977 and 1979 versions of Owens' essay "one can situate…the first construction of the discourse of the 1980's," which revolved around the rivalry between the re-emerging painting and Pictures art. [87] *Modern History* was created in this critical period between 1977 and 1979; as such, the series not only successfully bridges previous and emerging artistic practices, but it also illustrates some of the concerns that would come to preoccupy critics in the early 1980's.

[85] Holland Cotter, "At the Met, Baby Boomers Leap Onstage." The New York Times, April 23, 2009.
[86] Kate Fowle, *The Pictures Generation: 1974–84*. Frieze, Vol. 124 (June-August 2009).
[87] Howard Singerman, "Pictures and Positions in the 1980's," *in A Companion to Contemporary Art Since 1945* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 88.

## CHAPTER 3

### "The Press Photograph is a Message"

Rooted in Photo-Conceptualism while working with the ideas of the Pictures artists, Sarah Charlesworth's *Modern History* not only bridged the two artistic trends but was also instrumental in asserting the significance of photography in the Post-Modern world.[88] While during the 1970's many of Charlesworth's colleagues were experimenting with appropriation and photography (Richard Prince and Barbara Kruger, to name just two) in her essay discussing American art of that period Rosalind Krauss notes that "an overt use of captioning is nearly always to be found in that portion of contemporary art which employs photography directly."[89] What distinguishes Sarah Charlesworth's series from other works of that period is the fact that she divorces the photographic image from text, nonetheless leaving the frame of the newspaper intact. Her simple act of excision raises a variety of questions regarding the news, history, and in particular about the changing status and problematic nature of photography.

Sarah Charlesworth uses photographs in their capacity as "messages without a code" in order to bring to light the ways in which our perception of the

[88] Douglas Eklund notes that the Pictures generation was one of the most important moments in the gradual integration of photography in mainstream art. Douglas Eklund, and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York N.Y.). *The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984* (New York, New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2009), 8.

[89] Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America, Part 2," *Octobe*r, Vol. 4 (Autumn, 1977), 66.

world is mediated and shaped by pictures and the mass media. [90] The appropriation of photography presented within the frame of the newspaper comes to reflect "both the heightened politicization of the culture at large and the kind of semiotic analysis that had been pioneered by Roland Bathes in France and was increasingly studied in translation in America."[91]

Sarah Charlesworth was familiar with Barthes' ideas, for she wrote a favorable review of his book *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* in the April 1982 issue of *Artforum*, noting that Barthes' work offers valuable insights on the issue of photography, from a different perspective of the then-contemporary theories.[92] Before we turn our attention to *Camera Lucida,* it is interesting to examine one of Barthes' earlier essays- *The Photographic Message* (1961), in which the author investigates a particular question regarding photography: namely the way in which photographs presented within the frame of the newspaper convey messages to the audience. A brief summary of his findings will expose issues pertaining to both photography and the mass media, and will provide an important platform for the investigation of his book *Camera Lucida* as well as Charlesworth's *Modern History*.

Roland Barthes begins his essay with the following paragraph:

> The press photograph is a message. Considered overall this message is formed by a source of emission, a channel of transmission and a point of reception. The source of emission is the staff of the newspaper, the group of technicians certain of whom take the photo, some of who choose, compose and treat it, while

[90] The expression "message without a code" was formulated by Roland Barthes in his 1961 essay "The Photographic Message," in *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977).
[91] Eklund, 145.
[92] Sarah Charlesworth, "Books: Sarah Charlesworth on Camera Lucida," *Artforum,* Vol. XX, No. 8 (April, 1982), 72-74.

> others, finally give it a title, a caption and a commentary. The point of reception is the public which reads the paper. As for the channel of transmission, it is the newspaper itself, or more, precisely, a complex of concurrent messages with the photograph as centre and surrounds constituted by the text, the title, the caption, the lay-out and, in a more abstract but no less 'informative' way, by the very name of the paper (this name represents a knowledge that can heavily orientate the reading of the message strictly speaking: a photograph can change its meaning as it passes from the very conservative *L'Aurore* to the communist *L'Humanité.*[93]

What Barthes is quick to note, and what *Modern History* shows, is the fact that the newspaper photograph *is* a message; it is also an autonomous object which does not lend itself to the same criticism as text. Yet, when presented within the context of the newspaper, the photograph is engaged in a direct relationship with text in the form of titles, captions, articles. As a result, Barthes sees the news as being carried by two separate structures, linguistic and visual, which, despite the common message that they convey, remain separate, and consequently necessitate separate modes of analysis. Barthes concentrates on the photographic message, for, he says, much has been said about language, but not enough about photography.

The photograph, in being analogous to reality, has no inherent meaning and the photographic message is a "message without a code."[94] However, when presented within the context of the newspaper and in conjunction with text the photograph gains a connoted message based on culture and history. This gives rise to the photographic paradox, which "can be seen as the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code …the other with a code; structurally, the

[93] Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 15.
[94] Ibid., 17.

paradox is clearly not the collusion of a denoted message and a connoted message… it is that here the connoted (or coded) message develops on the basis of a message *without a code.*"[95]

Barthes sees the relationship between text and image as highly problematic. In the past, he explains, images have been used to illustrate a text, providing a visual summary of the writing. In the current times text has come to be used to direct the reading of images, adding what he calls "a parasitic message" to pictures. This is particularly evident within the frame of the newspaper, where the text not only provides a context for the images, but also directs a certain interpretation consistent with the ideology of the publication within which the image is presented.

This aspect of the photographic message is particularly evident in what is considered to be the most significant of Sarah Charlesworth's series, the 1978 additions to *Modern History,* which reflect the highly controversial events associated with the kidnapping and murder of two-time Italian Prime Minister and leader of Democrazia Cristiana, Aldo Moro. He proposed an alliance between the Christian Democratic and the Italian Socialist Parties, which was met with great hostility and as a result, on March 16, 1978 Moro was kidnapped at gunpoint by members of The Red Brigades, a group of left-wing extremists. Moro was on his way to a Parliament meeting where a vote on his proposal was about to be cast when five of his twelve police bodyguards were killed and Moro himself was kidnapped and taken into captivity.[96] Members of the Red Brigades demanded

[95] Ibid., 15-19.
[96] BBC. "On This Day- 1950-2005: 1978: Aldo Moro Snatched at Gunpoint," March 16, 1978.

that thirteen communist prisoners be released in return for the leader, but despite numerous pleas by Moro's family, supporters, and even Pope Paul VI, the Italian Government refused to comply. As a result, after fifty-five days in captivity, Moro was killed on May 9 and his body was left in the trunk of a car on a road halfway between the offices of Democrazia Cristiana and the Italian Socialist Party, in a final condemnation of his proposed half-way politics.[97]

The Aldo Moro case resonated throughout the world and was covered by the mass media worldwide. For *Modern History,* Sarah Charlesworth chose to reproduce particular moments of the Moro case. The first addition *April 20, 1978*, consists of twenty-four black and white photographs of newspaper front pages and traces the false verbal announcement released by the Red Brigades the previous day, stating that Aldo Moro has been assassinated. The series continues the next day, on *April 21, 1978,* and includes copies of the front pages of forty-five international newspapers, some of which show a photo of the still-alive Moro which was released to the press by the Red Brigades on April 20. The photograph pictures Aldo Moro, facing the camera holding the April 20th issue of the newspaper *La Repubblica*. The addition of *Osservatore Romano, March 17-May 10, 1978* addresses the duration of the Aldo Moro scandal as represented by the newspaper of the Vatican in twenty-seven black and white reproductions; *April 19, 20, 21, 1978* shows the development of the Aldo Moro case in the course of three days as presented in three different newspapers.

These additions to *Modern History* illustrate Barthes' ideas regarding the ways in which the press photograph acquires a meaning from the particularity of

[97] A&E Television Networks."This Day In History: May 9, 1978: Aldo Moro Found Dead."

the newspaper frame within which it is presented. Sarah Charleswoth highlights the ways in which the same news is read differently at political, local, as well as visual levels, based solely on the ways in which images are staged in the print media. Additionally, the various presentations of the news on the international scene serve to further reveal the ways in which photographs, in their capacity as "messages without a code" acquire meanings through the institution of the newspaper.

This is apparent in the addition from *April 21, 1978,* the day after the single photograph of the captive Aldo Moro was released to the media (Figure 3). A closer look at the forty-five Italian and international newspaper front pages from that day reveals how the same news is presented in different ways, in accord with the ideologies of each newspaper, subtly directing the audience to a specific reading of a single photograph illustrating the same news.

All Italian newspapers Charlesworth chooses to appropriate on April 21 show the picture of Moro. However, while the front pages of the general-interest, widely-spread Italian newspapers such as *Il Messaggero* (Figure 4) and *La Repubblica* (Figure 5) contain only the large photograph of Moro, more politically-inclined publications, such as left-wing *L'Unità* (Figure 6) and right-wing *Il Tempo* (Figure 7) show a smaller version of the Moro photograph in close proximity with other images, which point the reading of Moro's picture in different directions.

On the international scene the size and presentation of the Aldo Moro image varies, while in some cases, such as in the Serbian *Политика* (Figure 8) the image is not shown at all. Many newspapers further manipulated the

photograph released by the Red Brigades, by cropping it, enlarging it, or by placing it in different locations on the front page; sometimes at the center, other times at the bottom. What such manipulations show are the ways in which the same news changes as a result of the aesthetic manipulation of visual material, revealing the high degree to which our knowledge of the world is defined by aesthetic conventions, and evidenced by the fact that the simple arrangement and size of images directs a different reading of the same news.

*Modern History* further points to the ways in which the cropping and placement of visual material suggests certain political agendas. This is particularly evident in the manipulation and placement of the single image of Moro in international newspapers. In politically-powerful Germany and France (Figure 9) the image is shown in a way similar to the general-interest Italian newspapers, thus attesting to the great level of interest regarding the Aldo Moro case. In smaller, less politically-powerful countries, the case of Aldo Moro is shown as having a lesser importance in the course of daily news. In the more independent Great Britain, the small picture of Aldo Moro is shown directly underneath a large photograph of Queen Elizabeth II holding baby Peter Phillips (Figure 10), whose birth is given a greater visual prominence than the abduction of the Italian Prime Minister.

The kidnapping of Aldo Moro resonated throughout the world, alas to different degrees. In fact, the proposed half-way policy of the Italian politician was met with militant hostility; his suggestion to include the Italian Communist Party in the Italian Government raised the ire of Italy and Europe, as well as the

international superpowers, among which was the United States.[98] In the spirit of the Cold War, there was a widespread fear that allowing a communist party to participate in the government of a NATO member would not only compromise the integrity of the Alliance, but would also leak sensitive information to the USSR.[99] In this context, it is interesting to note that in the United States, the image of Aldo Moro was shown in the media, yet it was cropped and always presented in conjunction with other photographs, to the effect that such presentation takes away from the importance of the event, relegating it to the ranks of minor news (Figure 11 and Figure 12).

It is a seemingly unrelated fact that during 1978, the year Aldo Moro events unfolded, *Modern History* was shown throughout Europe, yet only the very first addition to the series, *International Herald Tribune, September, 1977* was shown in the United States at a small exhibition at C Space.[100] An investigation into the specificity of Sarah Charlesworth's medium of choice sheds some light on this discrepancy, and further reveals the highly-politicized nature of the "messages without a code" presented within the frame of the newspaper.

The *International Herald Tribune* first started out in Paris at the end of the 19th century and was distributed throughout Europe. After its merger with *The New York Tribune* in 1959 it was also sold in the United States for a short time. In order to keep the newspaper alive, owner John Hay Whitney sold part of his ownership to the American *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* in 1967. While during the early 1970's the reader base of the publication was primarily

[98] Malcolm Moore "US Envoy Admits Role in Aldo Moro Killing," *The Telegraph.* March 11, 2008.
[99] Phillip William, "Sporchi Trucchi," *Guardian.* January 14 2008.
[100] Douglas Eklund, 148.

American, by the end of the decade the popularity of the paper was growing abroad and waning in the U.S., to the effect that by the 1980's the number of non-American readers had outnumbered their American counterparts.[101]

This seemingly trivial detail gains significant importance when considered in conjunction with the fact that the only part of *Modern History that* was shown to the American public between 1977 and 1979 was the one that represented a newspaper which had lost its reader base in the country. This fact in combination with the low-key presentation of the Aldo Moro case by the American media reveals the great deal of subjectivity which marks the presentation of information to the American public.

The United States was in fact involved in the Aldo Moro case. Author Steve Pieczenik claims that President Jimmy Carter dispatched him to Italy on the day that Moro was kidnapped.[102] Roy Pemberton, an American Navy officer stationed in Naples at the time the Moro case was taking place recalls the frenzy that had taken over the Italian society after the kidnapping of Moro, in the midst of which NATO officers urged people to remain calm.[103] A similar approach can be seen in the presentation of the event in the American print media: it was shown, yet its importance was subdued. Further reinforcing this policy is the fact that the additions to *Modern History* that reflect the international coverage of the Moro case were not exhibited in the United States at the time.[104]

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[101] The New York Times Media Group, "A Short History of the International Herald Tribune."
[102] Malcolm Moore "US Envoy Admits Role in Aldo Moro Killing," *The Telegraph.* March 11, 2008.
[103] BBC. "On This Day- 1950-2005: 1978: Aldo Moro Snatched at Gunpoint," March 16, 1978.
[104] This is not to say that the only reason why certain parts of *Modern History* were not shown in the United States was political; rather, what I am trying to suggest is that it may have been politically expedient at that time to under-emphasize the events associated with Aldo Moro, an approach that was emphasized in the daily press.

The subsequent additions to *Modern History* dealing with the Aldo Moro case reveal further discrepancies. *L'Osservatore Romano, March 17- May 10, 1978* traces the entirety of the case through the eyes of the Vatican. For the duration of the period appropriated by Charlesworth, *Osservatore Romano*, the newspaper of the Holy See, does not show pictures directly related to the abduction and assassination of Aldo Moro; rather, it shows pictures of the Pope mostly engaged in the gesture of benediction, with his hand raised towards an implied audience (Figure 13). The Pope was in fact directly involved in the case of Aldo Moro, for he pleaded with the Italian Government to comply with the demands of the Red Brigades, alas to no avail. Yet the Moro story told is entirely different as seen from the lens of the Papacy, which promotes its benefactions more than the gruesome nature of the events associated with the abduction and assassination of the Italian Christian Democratic leader.

The particularity of the newspaper frame is not the only factor that imposes different readings to the same "message without a code." In *April 19, 20, 21, 1978* Charlesworth, while working with some of the ideas of her Conceptual predecessors as well as her colleagues the Pictures artists, reveals the way in which pictures gain a "parasitic message" from their juxtaposition to other pictures. The front page of *La Repubblica* shows only text (Figure 14); the title, written in large, bold font immediately attracts the attention to the question "Moro Assassinato?" ("Was Moro Assassinated?") - a reaction to the false announcement made by the Red Brigades the previous day. The following print shows the front page of *Il Messaggero* which contains only the large image of

Moro that was released to the media (Figure 15) This image, in combination with the previous newspaper, yields a visual answer to the question posed in *La Repubblica*, rendering the claims of Moro's death false. Finally, *Tribune de Geneve*, presented to the right of the other two images, shows the picture of Moro and a photograph of the front page of *La Repubblica* (Figure 16). Above Moro's photograph, a line of text reads "Moro è vivo!" ("Moro is alive!").

The choice on part of the artist to present three front pages from different newspapers each covering one of three consecutive days reveals several important points regarding the mass media. It proves that all information presented within newspapers is partial as well as incomplete. It also illustrates the ways in which juxtaposed images are capable of evoking a story of their own, not only within a single newspaper, but also across the printed media. With regards to *Modern History,*, the serial juxtaposition of images reinforces the idea that the series tells a story that reaches beyond the context of the appropriated images. Rather, Sarah Charlesworth creates a picture of what *Modern History* is.

Her decision to leave the text intact in *La Repubblica* appears to be incongruous with her approach to the series as a whole; however, when investigated trough the lens of Barthes' essay it illustrates the problematic relation between the two messages, one with and one without a code, contained within the context of the newspaper. The artist demonstrates the ways in which the two data structures are capable of not only carrying the same message, but can also relate to one another when placed in a sequence. The incomplete information that they provide renders them useless in revealing the true news,

and further confirms the parasitic bond between text and image inherent in the contemporary mass media.

The relationship between text and image is key to Charlesoworth's series, and is further addressed by Roland Barthes in his 1981 book *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* which Charlesworth reviewed the following year. In his book Barthes offers an in-depth discussion the problematic nature of photography in general, which he sees as "an *uncertain* art."[105] Building on the ideas exposed in his earlier essay *The Photographic Message,* he maintains the claim that photographs are inherently "messages without a code," yet he further elaborates on the nature of visual images and the ways in which they relate to and differ from language. "The photograph is a pure contingency and can be nothing else (it is always *something* that is represented) - contrary to the text which, by the sudden action of a single word, can shift a sentence from description to reflection."[106]

A significant finding of *Camera Lucida* is the realization that the photographic paradox the author spoke of in 1961 is in effect a double one. On one hand, as Barthes states in his earlier essay, it arises from the superimposition of meaning (via text) on "messages without a code" (photographs). On the other hand, as he explains in *Camera Lucida*, photographs are in essence accidental, in that they could not have a fixed meaning, considering that the objects and events they portray are not inherently laden with meaning either, and therefore can not be seen as "signs."

[105] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 18.
[106] Ibid., 28

Nonetheless, photographs are inevitably attached to specific objects or events to the extent that the two become almost identical. As a result, while the nature of text allows for the creation of an infinite array of meanings, which can be abstract or affixed to a specific object, in the case of photographs, the relationship between meaning and object is problematic: “It is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself.”[107] In light of this, the “message without a code” that Barthes spoke of in 1961 is no longer seen as such.

The fact that photographs can not be separated from their referents results in their false interpretation as signs. In particular, they become signs when the audience adds meanings to them based on their preferences and previous knowledge. Consequently, people become the only “reference for every photograph.”[108] This renders “photographs dangerous,” Barthes says, because they are filled with myths and endowed to serve particular functions in society, namely “to inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause, to signify, to provoke desire.” [109] At the same time, photographs are in essence nothing but accidental recording of something that has been.

Moreover, a photograph does not reflect the essence of that which it represents, rather, it only records its existence with certainty. That which we see in photographs is likeness, not truth. To illustrate his point Barthes compares photography to *camera lucida*- both produce a translation of a two-dimensional object on a flat surface; both authenticate the physical presence of an object, yet neither attests to its essence, meaning, significance.

[107] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* 5.
[108] Ibid.,84.
[109] Ibid., 28.

Furthermore, it is only after being layered over the already problematic relationship between photographs and objects that the message connoted by text emerges. Language and photography, Barthes shows, are two radically different structures: "Language is, by nature, fictional…the photograph…is authentication itself… Every photograph is a certificate of presence…no writing can give me this certainly. It is the misfortune of language not to be able to authenticate itself."[110] This further elucidates the reasons why the relationship resulting from the superimposition of a message with a code onto one without a code is especially problematic. While photographs are objective only in essence, in reality, they are perceived subjectively, rendering the name "messages without a code" a misnomer.

By divorcing text and image, Charlesworth exposes the parasitic relationship between the two data structures and focuses on the problems inherent in the medium of photography itself. *Modern History* illustrates the ways in which, according to Barthes, pictures can be "dangerous" for contemporary society:

> One of the marks of our world is perhaps this reversal: we live according to generalized image-repertoire. Consider the United States, where everything is transformed into images: only images exist and are produced and consumed……such a reversal necessarily raises the ethical question: not that the image is immoral, irreligious, or diabolic … but because, when generalized, it completely de-realizes the human world of conflicts and desires, under cover of illustrating it.[111]

[110] *Camera Lucida,* 85-7.
[111] Ibid.,118.

It is within the emphasis on the shift from text to image that part of the significance of *Modern History* resides. Within Charlesworth's personal artistic context, the series marks the transition from writing for the Conceptual journal *The Fox* to the excision of text and emphasis on visual material, in particular on photography. On the larger artistic scene, the series marks the transition from Photo-Conceptual art to the ideas of the Pictures artists. *Modern History* also illustrates some of the ways in which Barthes' theories offer an in-depth perspective into the issue of photography, which largely discussed in the critical discourses of the 1980's.

At the end of the 1970's the status of photography was still uncertain as critics were debating the question of whether or not it was a medium equal to painting. In 1977 Barbara Rose claimed that photography is a "minor art because of its intrinsic inability to transcend reality."[112] During the same year Rosalind Krauss saw photography as an independent and significant medium, in its capacity to not only act as a "shifter" and gain meaning from the context within which it is presented, but also that as such it had come to inform the models for abstract painting during that period.[113] Mediated by Crimp's 1977 and 1979 essays in which he praised the newly-emerging Pictures art, by the early 1980's it had become clear that the status of photography had definitively shifted from that of a minor medium to one that was equal to (and even surpassed) the traditionally-superior painting.

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[112] Quoted in Lisa Phillips, "Sarah Charlesworth: Rites of Passage," in *Sarah Charlesworth: A Retrospective* (San Diego: Santa Fe, 1998), 40.
[113] Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America, Part 2," *October,* Vol.4, (Autumn 1977), 59.

The ascension of photography was reflected in the critical debates of the early 1980's. In his essay *On the Museum's Ruins* Douglas Crimp points out that in the 1960's "photography began to conspire with painting in its own destruction."[114] The ensuing "pressure to paint"[115] in the early 1980's was linked to conservative politics; the proponents of painting embraced a dismissal of the idea of historical progress, emphasizing a post-historical view of the painterly work created in the 1980's.[116] In light of this, the relationship between *Modern History* and history painting, as well as the debates of the early 1980's is even more evident; in particular, the title of Charlesworth's series could be seen as an anticipatory response to painting's revival. If the proponents of painting sought to negate the medium's relation to history, *Modern History* asserts the paradigm of contemporary history- appropriation and photography.

The particular way in which Sarah Charlesworth uses photography differentiated her work from that of other artists working at the time, for many still engaged in the practice of taking photographs, rather than making them.[117] Critics such as Owens and Crimp became proponents of appropriation.[118] In fact, part of the changing paradigm that Douglas Crimp perceived in 1977 was associated with the novel use of the medium. As he noted later on "Photography may have been *invented* in 1839, but it was only *discovered* in the 1970's."[119]

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[114] Ibid., 56.
[115] "The Pressure to Paint" was the name of an exhibition at the Marlborough gallery from June 4 - July 9, 1982 in New York.
[116] Howard Singerman, "Pictures and Positions in the 1980's," in *A Companion to Contemporary Art Since 1945* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).
[117] Lisa Phillips, 45.
[118] Howard Singerman, "Pictures and Positions in the 1980's"
[119] Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting," *October,* Vol. 16, Art World Follies (Spring 1981), 75.

The influence of the ideas developed by Sarah Charlesworth and some of her Pictures colleagues in the 1970's had a profound impact on the critical debates and artistic practices of the 1980's.[120] Dan Cameron points out that this group of women artists "pioneered the development of an American postmodern Avant-garde aesthetic."[121] Part of the significance of Sarah Charlesworth's work is associated with the assertion of photography as the medium of Post-Modernism, the tool for making history, as the replacement of Modern painting, and the instrument of politics.

In 1979 Charlesworth made several more additions to *Modern History* all but one of which were politically-motivated. [122] *The Guerilla, June 4, 5, 1979* follows the confrontation between the National Guard of Nicaragua and the Sandinistas in the fight to overthrow the dictatorship of Nicaraguan President Somoza. The twenty-seven black and white prints of *Movie-Television-News-History, June 21, 1979* reflect the footage of the death of *ABC* correspondent Bill Stewart and his interpreter in Nicaragua, as recorded by *ABC* sound- and camera-men Jim Cefalo and Jack Clark. That same day the footage of the assassination was shown on public television across the United States, evoking negative reactions from the officials in Washington.[123] *United We Stand/A nation Divided* reflects the political split in Scotland as represented in two local newspapers. *Reading Persian* reflects the overthrow of the Iranian monarchy.

[120] Lisa Phillips, "Sarah Charlesworth: Rites of Passage," 47.
[121] Dan Cameron, "Post-Feminism," *Flash Art,* (February/March, 1987), 80-3.
[122] *Modern History: The Arc of Total Eclipse*
[123] Time, Inc. "Press: A Murder In Managua," *TIME Magazine.* July 2, 1979.

Charlesworth's preference for the appropriation of particular parts of the news that relate to a variety of political upheavals attests to the significance of such events to the writing of history in general. With his 1960's *Death and Disaster* series Andy Warhol highlighted the ways in which the public becomes immune to the representation of suffering as the result of the constant bombardment with visual imagery. By adding the title *Modern History* to such cataclysmic events, Sarah Charlesworth reveals how history is also shaped by such "disasters."

Once more, Barthes' writings are useful in highlighting the significance of such images. According to the author, the only instance in which a photograph can exist within the frame of the newspaper and not be tainted with connoted messages is when it shows an image of a disaster. There is nothing to say about such pictures, Barthes contends, for they speak for themselves and they speak directly, without the use of culturally-imposed codes.[124]

Sarah Charlesworth's *Modern History* illustrates that, while by the late 1970's no photograph was safe from institutional manipulations or artistic appropriations. It had become possible to subvert the medium in service of revealing the ways in which ideologies are created and perpetuated through pictures. In the "press photograph we may hope to find, in their very subtlety, the forms our society uses to ensure its peace of mind and to grasp thereby the magnitude, the detours and the underlying function of that activity."[125]

[124] Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message"
[125] Ibid., 27-31.

Newspapers and photography thus prove to be the ideal media for Sarah Charlesworth's first mature series. Clearly stipulating her intentions in *Declaration of Dependence,* the artist uses the ideas of Conceptual as well as Pictures art in the attempt to depict as well as create a modern history. While seemingly inert within the dynamic frame of the newspaper, the press photograph comes to serve the functions of language: social, political, artistic, and historical. As a language that lends itself to countless exploitations, photography is used by institutions for the manipulation of the public views regarding politics, history, and gender. It is also subverted by a female artist, who, while working with Modern materials, is able put them to new use in the attempt to create a more complete picture of *Modern History*.

## CONCLUSION

Sarah Charlesworth was among the generation of artists who came of age during the 1960's – a time marked by an influx of ideas in an already politically-charged social environment. As a student at Barnard College, she was exposed to left-wing politics as well as Feminist ideas.[126] With *Modern History,* her first mature series, Charlesworth takes a clear artistic stance, moving away from Conceptual art and aligning her work with the ideas of Pictures artists and second-wave Feminism. *Modern History* can also be seen as illustrating the artist's personal position with regards to art as exposed in her 1975 essay *Declaration of Dependence.* In this context, Charlesworth's appropriation of newspapers and photography, as the media of the contemporary, lends itself to a variety of readings.

*Modern History* asserts pictures, multi-faceted entities that have the power to both reflect and construct reality and hence affect people, as the modus operandi of contemporary society. Sarah Charlesworth appropriates newspapers, as one of the major apparatus used by institutions for the creation of political as "pictures." By removing text from the print media but leaving the mastheads intact, she allows for the audience to become aware of the subtle ways in which local, political, cultural, historical, and gender-related ideas are created and perpetuated. Consequently, *Modern History* can be related to Jean Baudrillard's theory of the simulacra, which states that truth has become unattainable in a

[126] Lisa Phillips, "Sarah Charlesworth: Rites of Passage," 40.

reality that operates at the level of simulacrum. The culprits for this are pictures, "murderers of the real."[127]

Sarah Charlesworth's appropriation of photography, a medium inherent in newspapers, serves to illustrate the realization by Pictures artists that "underneath each picture there is always another picture,"[128] and allows for a further investigation into the workings of contemporary reality. Charlesworth's use of photography within the frame of the newspaper can be investigated from a variety of angles. The series dispels the possibility that photographs can operate as objective vehicles of information in the print media. In this context, Roland Barthes' ideas of the photographic message offer a platform for the discussion of Sarah Charlesworth's series. *Modern History* investigates in depth the reasons why the French philosopher saw the co-existence of text, "messages with a code" and photographs, "messages without a code," within the frame of the newspaper as problematic. *Modern History* also illustrates the problems inherent within photography not only when surveyed from the lens of Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, but also within the historical, artistic, social and political context of contemporary society.

The history of photography and newspaper appropriation sheds light on Sarah Charlesworth's reasoning as to her choice of medium. The popularity of newspaper appropriation grew fast given its critical potential, currency, and its ability to be used as a source of reference, a vehicle for the dissemination of information, as well as a modality for the questioning of art and reality. Sarah

[127] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation,* trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: University of Michgan Press, 1994).
[128] Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October*, Vol. 8 (Spring 1979), 87.

Charlesworth's choice to appropriate newspapers in general and news related to controversial political events in particular is informed by history, for it explores the full range of critical possibilities of the medium. In the attempt to show what constitutes *Modern History* and point out one of the ways in which it is created the artist hopes to raise awareness of the biased nature of reality and eventually create an alternative history.

Sarah Charlesworth's awareness of past artistic developments is further evident in the reference to the 19th century male dominated genre of history painting in the title of her series. In *Modern History*, the medium of painting, often used to fulfill political agendas, has been replaced with appropriated newspapers and photography. The latter is significant not only when viewed within the context of Modernism and its insistence on medium-specificity, but also in consideration with Charlesworth's gender; the inclusion of photography in *Modern History* also suggests the need to include women in art and politics, as well as history.

Consequently, *Modern History* becomes a visual statement of Charlesworth's essay *Declaration of Dependence,* written for the Conceptual journal *The Fox*. The series illustrates her departure from Conceptual art and her desire to create work with the consciousness that change is necessary. By removing the text from the newspapers Charlesworth shows how images signify; by revealing that which endows them with meaning she also exposes the ideological guideposts of contemporary times and by placing an emphasis on the significance of visual images, Sarah Charlesworth attempts to make more nuanced picture of our *Modern History.*

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

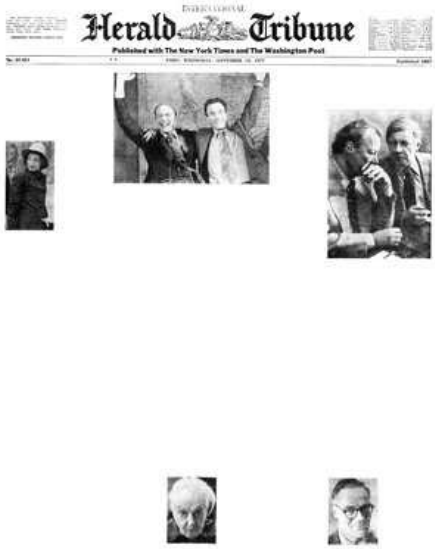



**Figure 1.**

Sarah Charlesworth, *Herald Tribune, September, 1977* (Detail from *Modern History*), one of twenty-six black-and-white prints,1977. Reproduced same size as original newspapers, 16" x 23", Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Switzerland, Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover Vancouver Art Gallery, British Columbia.

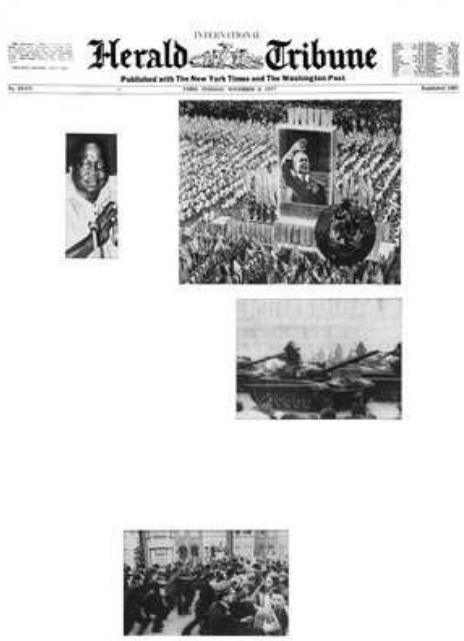
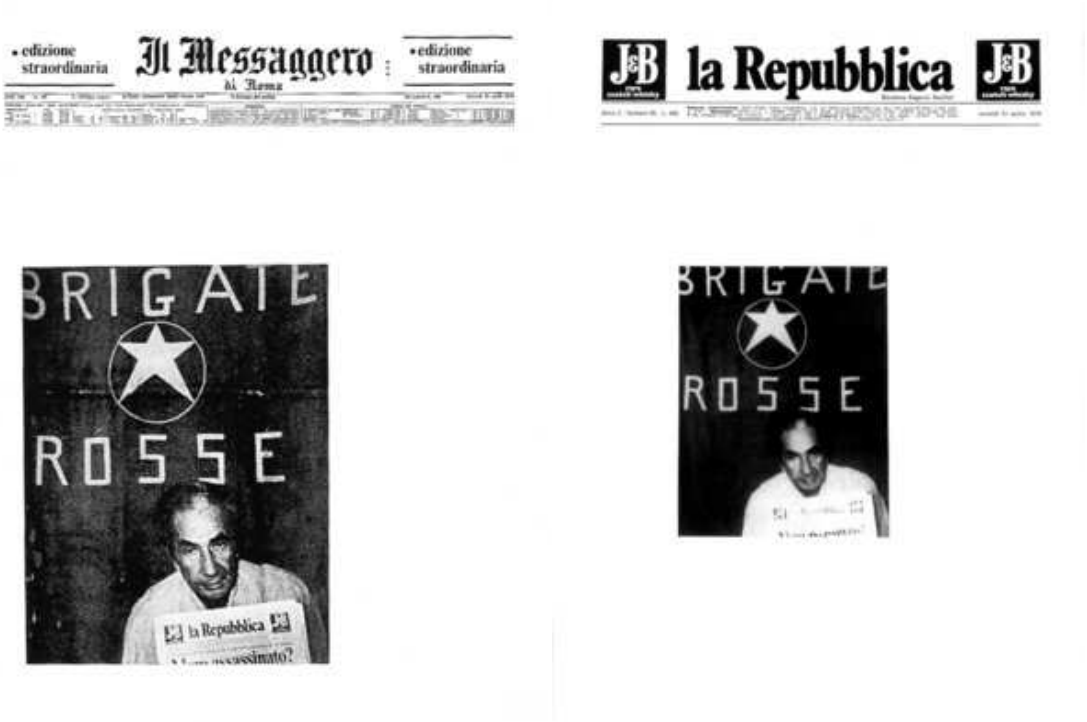



**Figure 2**

Sarah Charlesworth, *Herald Tribune, November, 1977* (Detail from *Modern History*), one of twenty-six black-and-white prints, 1977, 16"x 23", Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York.

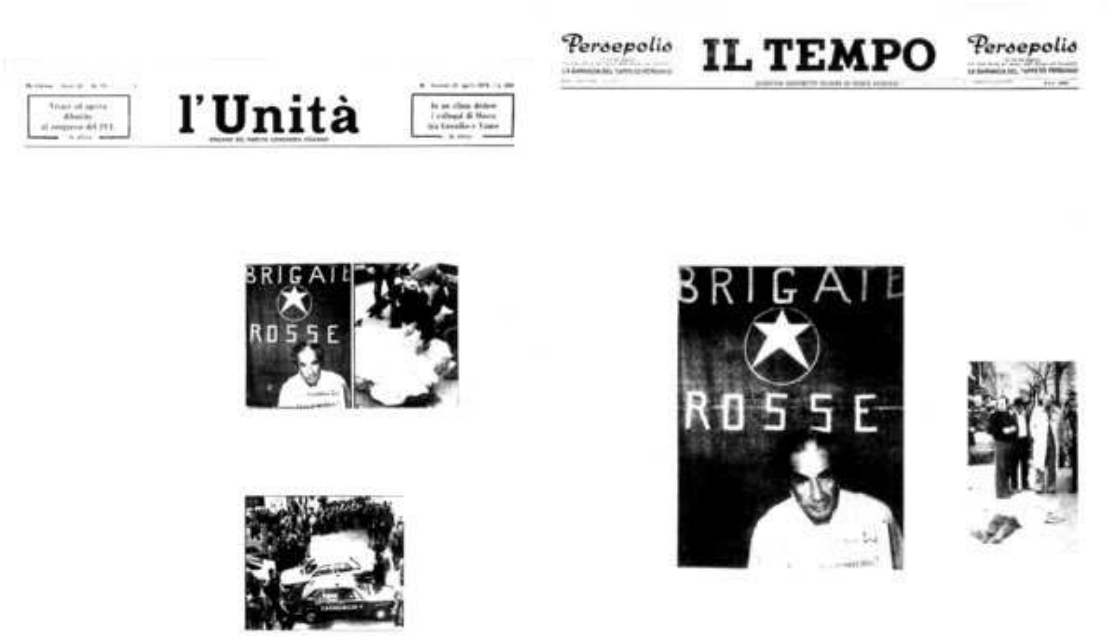

**Figure 3**

A picture of Aldo Moro released to the mass media by his captors, the Red Brigades, no copyright pending.



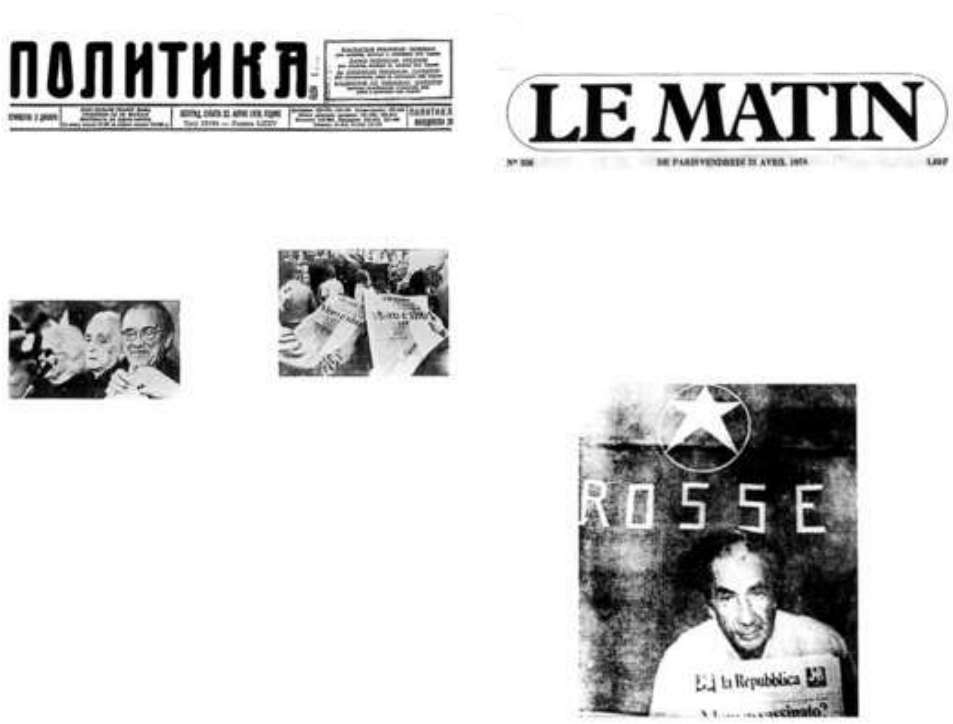

**Figures 4 and 5**

Sarah Charlesworth, *April 21, 1978* (Details from *Modern History*), two of forty-five black-and-white prints, 1978, approximately 16"x 22" each, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Holland, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN.




**Figures 6 and 7**

Sarah Charlesworth, *April 21, 1978* (Details from *Modern History*), two of forty-five black-and-white prints, 1978, approximately 16"x 22" each, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Holland, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN.

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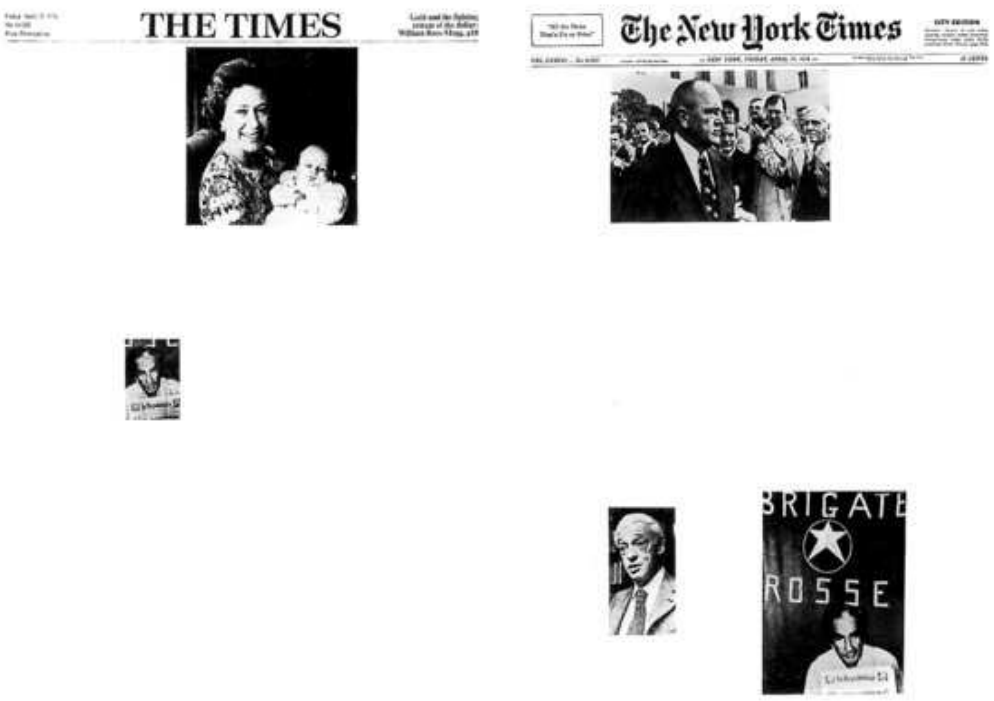
**Figures 8 and 9**

Sarah Charlesworth, *April 21, 1978* (Details from *Modern History*), two of forty-five black-and-white prints, 1978, approximately 16"x 22" each, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Holland, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN.




**Figures 10 and 11**

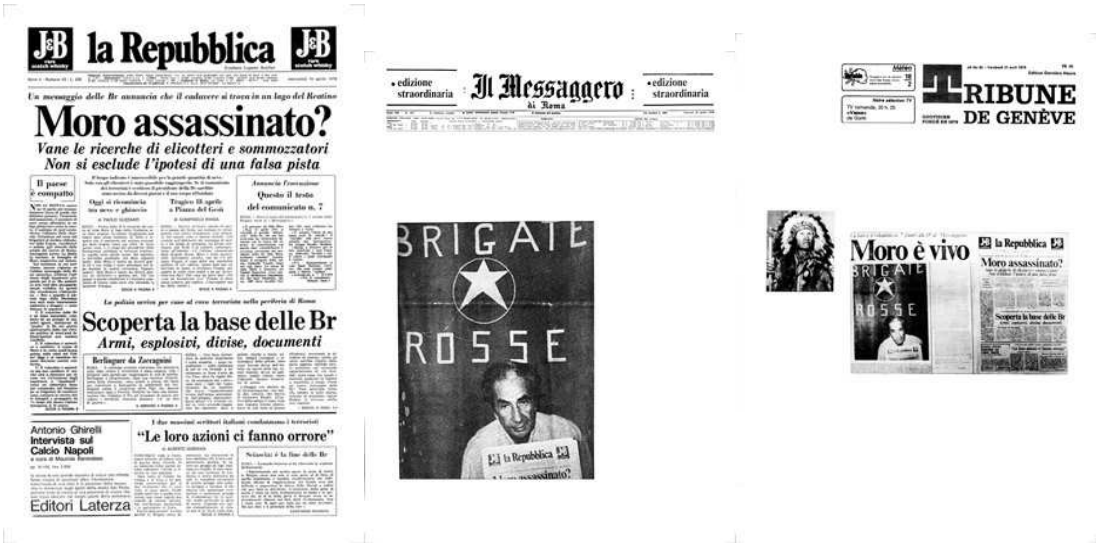
Sarah Charlesworth, *April 21, 1978* (Details from *Modern History*), two of forty-five black-and-white prints, 1978, approximately 16"x 22" each, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Holland, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN.


**Figure 12**

Sarah Charlesworth, *April 21, 1978* (Detail from *Modern History*), one of forty-five black-and-white prints, 1978, approximately 16"x 22" each, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Holland, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN.


**Figure 13**

Sarah Charlesworth, *Osservatore Romano, March 17- May 10, 1978* (Detail from *Modern History*), one of twenty-seven black-and-white prints, 1978. Reproduced same size as original newspapers, 16 1/2"x 23 1/2".




**Figures 14, 15, and 16**

Sarah Charlesworth, *April 19, 20, 21, 1978* (Details from *Modern History*). Three black-and-white prints, 1978. Reproduced same size as original newspapers varying sizes, approximately 16"x 22" each.