

Boyd Webb: On staging.

For European Photography: A Reflexion.

Introduction: For magical thought the world is a stage: things relate to each other. For historical thought it is an event: things follow from each other. For thought as it is about to emerge this cannot go on any longer: things must be stopped and be made to relate again to each other. In order that there be a world, one must stage it. But a staged world is not the same as is a stage world: within the world as a stage things relate to each other as they do, and in a staged world they relate as he who stages the world wants them to relate. Boyd Webb is a stager. His scenes are of interest not for the things they show, but for the relations they establish between them. His photos are images of improbable relations. The more a context is improbable, the more it informs. Webb's are photos of informations.

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An example can show this: Trophy 1985 (Atlantis Museum, Teneriffa). A naked man hovers weightless within astronomical space as he projects with the gesture of Michelangelo's creator several paper globusses (such as may be bought at a stationer's) against a simulated heavenly body wherein those globusses sink as if in a swamp. What is so funny about that? Several things, namely: One may see how ridiculous man is if he assumes the posture of a creator. How ridiculous Michelangelo is when he represents the creator in human shape. How ridiculous it is to project simulations of Earth (cheap paper globusses) into the cosmos. How ridiculous the idea is to simulate knowledge concerning the Earth in paper balls. And therefore: how ridiculous Newton's idea is to simulate the cosmic order in such cheap things as are equations. And there are numerous other aspects of the photo which make us laugh, and they may all be reduced to this common denominator: Boyd Webb stages a caricature of the act of the creation of the world such as it has been sanctified by tradition.

But what is it that Webb is making fun of? Not of God, of creative man, of Michelangelo, of Newton? If he did so, his picture would not be comic, but dead earnest, would it not? What he is making fun of are relational contexts. Why should a naked man not relate to astronomical space as he does in the photo? Or the planet Earth like the paper globusses? It is merely a question of how you stage the cosmos, and there is no reason why it should be staged the same way as was done by God or by Newton. Webb proposes, with a laughter, to stage it differently.

It would be a mistake to believe that one laughs because the picture is a comic simulation of a true cosmic relational context. On the contrary: one laughs because the picture shows how ridiculous it is to assume a true cosmic context. One laughs because the picture shows, in its comic way, what one knows already in earnest: all the scenes in which magicians believe, and all the events in which historians believe have been staged. Within the scenes things have been brought into relations, and in the events into causal chains. But magicians and

historians "forget" that it is ourselves (people like Boyd Webb) who did that staging. The picture wants to remind them of it.

This is why the picture is not a simulation, not a metaphor, but a conclusive proof of the fact that all the pictures we make of the world and of ourselves are nothing but simulations and metaphors (staged scenes). Be those pictures "artistic" ones or "scientific" ones. This is why this picture (and all the other pictures by Webb) should be looked at as being a sort of meta-pictures: they do not show staged scenes, but staging. And thus they close a loop: from the stage, passing through events and staging back to the stage. Nothing is more laughable than a loop is: it has no beginning nor end, because it begins wherever it ends. Thus Webb is Godlike (sicut Deus): he is the Alpha and the Omega. And we are all like him. This is to laugh oneself to death, and in fact we may end up doing so.