

EPIDERMIC REFLECTIONS

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1 *Untitled (Suburbia)*, 1993–96, Cibachrome, 4 parts in 1 frame, 163 x 243 cm



2 *Untitled (Total)*, 1995, Cibachrome, 215 x 218 cm

Paradoxically, readily accessible high-tech equipment makes it easier for a photographer to fail than to succeed. This facilitating of the task of taking good quality images generates an engulfing abundance of visuals to compete against, which consumes potential subjects before they are even depicted. Anesthetized against the originality of new visions, we float in déjà-vu boredom: how many billions of snapshots have been taken by now, and how many more will be amassed in the future? So many that even our own persona has lost specificity, entering by default into the sightseeing frames of unknown tourists' holiday pictures. In days gone by, a *natural selection* of images was determined by the difficulty of reaching amazing places with heavy and expensive equipment; a sense of necessity was therefore embedded in the act of photographing, which accordingly distilled the outcome. Now that beautiful pictures are a direct consequence of mass tourism-cum-sophisticated technology for which no special skill is required, and ubiquitous media images possess a seductive technical perfection, the aesthetic quality of a photograph no longer seems to be a prerogative for making art. There has to be something more. However, what that *more* is constitutes the existential dilemma that insinuates itself into the contemporary photographer's mind and undermines the creative instinct: Is it still possible to take interesting pictures? Can art still be made by means of a beautiful photograph? To find a new angle in a culture saturated by images is far from simple.

Thomas Florschuetz has deliberately made ugly pictures as well as beautiful ones. He has depicted strange, even repugnant body parts (*Körperstücke*; figs. 1, 2) that

underscore human transience and the mental-physical duality, and he has composed them in grotesque polyptychs that convey both rhythm and caesura, motion and immobility. He has omitted the luster of physical attractiveness and opted for an epistemologically inquisitive viewpoint that solicits feelings of magnanimous humanity, as in the classical *pietàs*—qualities that could not lie further from the sense of inadequacy with which fashion photography confronts us. The lens of his camera has explored the oddity of his own flesh in order to address the human condition, so intimately connected with suffering and decay, and has represented surfaces as cognitive means for scrutinizing content. *Skin* in *Körperstücke* is a membrane—like the lens of the camera, the film, and the photographic paper—which Florschuetz attempts to trespass. And in a way, with the series *Plexus (Curtain*; fig. 3), which optically bears resemblance to X-ray images of hands, he succeeds, only to yield at the impermeable bone structure which impedes deeper investigation.

Multiple Entry (fig. 4) is a series of works depicting double windows opened to different degrees. But optically it is about the perpendicular intersection of lines on the window-frames and the juxtaposition of glass panes, overlapping with the surface of the photograph and the geometry of its perimeter. *Multiple Entry* responds to a formalist aesthetic, yet raises epistemological questions. The game of mirrors and transparencies, interposed by the opacity of shadows, tricks the eye through the membrane of the picture plane which gives it the illusion of multiple dimensions. However, the *trompe-l'oeil* also reminds us that the picture plane is the first and principal transition in a sequence of artful