



SELECTED BOOKS

EXCERPTS

land." *Otechestvo* is the literal word for "fatherland," but it sounds high-flown and official to Russian ears, and is used mostly in poetry. *Otchizna* is a word that suggests fatherland and motherland together, cleverly combining the root-word for "father" (*otets*) with a female ending, but is also little used. Like *otechestvo*, it has a role in the rhetoric of nationalist politics.

By contrast, *rodina* (motherland) is used by every section of the population, and its associations are far more intimate. If *otchizna* and *otechestvo* relate to the country in which one is a citizen, *rodina* is the place where one is born—a familiar place which has always been there. It is where one feels a sense of belonging, the warm hearth to which one returns. *Rodina* is

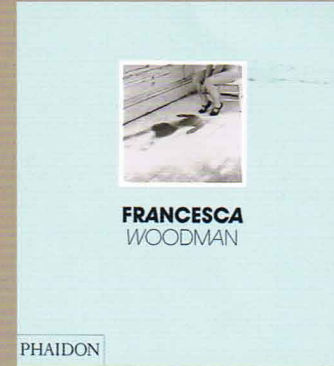
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SIMON ROBERTS: MOTHERLAND

London: Chris Boot Ltd., 2007

You might say that the Russians like to make things difficult for themselves. Or perhaps it is just that they are exacting when it comes to concepts that are particularly important to them. After all, they distinguish between two types of truth (everyday *pravda* and immortal *istina*, as defined by Vladimir Nabokov in a 1940 essay on Russian literature), and they have as many as three words denoting "native



FRANCESCA WOODMAN

London/New York: Phaidon, 2006

One of [Woodman's] most original contributions to the history of art lies in a challenge to the traditions of the self-portrait. She was, perhaps, more aware of the possibilities and problems of photography as a medium than many of her fellow artists, and certainly than is appreciated by most critics. Her self-portraiture is duplicitous: in the clarity of the photograph it offers the appearance of an apparently intelligible subject, and yet she continually creates enigmas that facilitate that subject's withdrawal from our gaze. We think we know Woodman, and she

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(Motherland continued)

identified, moreover, with the nation's soul. Mikhail Lermontov distinguished between the complicated feelings he had for the imperial might of his *otchizna* and the love he bore his *rodina* in his famous 1841 poem *Rodina*. This conflict is expressed in the first line—"I love my *otchizna*, but with a strange love!"

—from Rosamund Bartlett's introduction

(Woodman continued)

wants us to think we know her, because she is not interested in being the subject of our scrutiny. In their self-portraits artists most often grope towards new forms of relation; they ask us to relate to them as this person, not that: there is always a subject, even when it is fictional. In Woodman's self-portraits we have a thoroughgoing critique of her medium's incapacity to identify a subject truthfully.

Woodman is deliberately enigmatic. If she aspires to be enigmatic, she also uses that enigma to challenge photography's capacity to describe and place its subjects. What looks to be obvious blocks interpretation. It is perhaps not surprising that some writers see Woodman in a photograph when the subject is really a model; we are intrigued by what we see, but the image itself misleads us.

—from Chris Townsend's essay

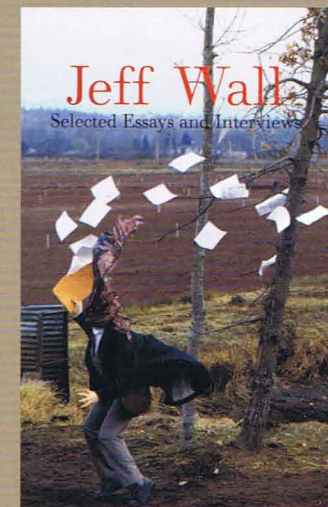
JEFF WALL: SELECTED ESSAYS AND INTERVIEWS

New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007

I was interested in the way cinema affected the criteria for judging photography. Cinematography permits, and validates, the collaboration between photographer and subject that was largely excluded in classic documen-

tary terms. That exclusion limits photography, and so my first moves were against it—working in a studio with all the technical questions that implies. I had to learn some of that technique as I went along; that process was part of transforming my relationship to photography. At the beginning it was done in the spirit of contestation, but as I've said, it was not so long before I realized I'd lost that contest and realized that nothing I was doing was "outside of photography." At that point—in the mid 1980s—I felt I'd worked myself into a position where I needed to come into a new relationship with the kind of photography I'd been questioning. As I saw more of the "new" photography in exhibitions through the '80s, I began to realize that I preferred Walker Evans or Wols to most of the newer work, and I preferred them to my own work, too. Classical photography might have been displaced from the center of attention by the newer forms, but it was not diminished in the process. It became stronger through having been confronted with alternatives, as far as I was concerned.

—Jeff Wall in conversation with Jean-François Chevrier, Paris 2001



fine-art editions of fifteen, sized 12-by-12-inches to suit contemporary tastes. Then came a solo exhibition at the Frankfurt police headquarters which caught the curatorial eye of Harald Szeemann, which included Odermatt's work in the 2001 Venice Biennale. This exposure likely brought Odermatt to the attention of Rondeau, who exhibited Odermatt's work at the Art Institute of Chicago, firmly establishing his place as a near-celebrity.

Odermatt's stardom has led to the recent publication of his second monograph, *On Duty* (Steidl, 2006). It's a collection of the same campy color photographs that were shown at the Art Institute, along with more than 160 other pictures that reinforce the notion that Odermatt's work deserves to be considered in a context far beyond its original intent. In the introduction, Urs Odermatt explains that the pictures were created by his father to recruit youth to the dwindling police force in Nidwalden Canton. Some of the pictures bring to mind *The Pink Panther's* Inspector Jacques Moulin, clearly staged pictures depicting policemen engaged in target exercises and target practice. However, many of the photographs—such as the series of melted brake lights on a car fire—suggest a broader interest.

The images are clustered into subject categories: police setting up speed traps, officers typing, speed traps, and instructional pictures made for a children's school. Interestingly, the book includes several pictures of Urs Odermatt using a medium-format Rolleiflex (Odermatt's choice) to photograph car wrecks, and setting up speed traps. The cover image portrays his former colleague Mathis holding a Rolleiflex in the air (we learn from the book that Mathis died in 2004). One wonders how these photographs might differ from Odermatt's. As it stands, the images in the book are strangely repetitive, producing a "typology," but without the methodological rigor.

If the goal of *On Duty* is to consider Odermatt as an artist, the editing is unfortunately slack. However, it does introduce the reader to the arcane world of a close-knit Swiss police officers circa 1960, then as a social portrait of the Nidwalden police force it's an intriguing and successful project. Opposite every picture are the names of the officers, their birthdates, and in some cases indications of when they died. Through the pictures we become familiar with the faces of the men with whom Odermatt spent so much time. To begin to read the book as a record of Odermatt's life and of his humanity. ♣