

Portrait EN Photography ↗



→ Action Auto-Portrait (1981), Fotoclub Diddeleng Archive.

Presence. Display. Distance. Subject.

"Few things are more suggestive of absence than empty chairs," writes Geoff Dyer, author of *The Ongoing Moment: A Book about Photographs*. There is melancholy associated with an object most used and least noticed - an object in perpetual anticipation of someone's arrival. Yet while it is a symbol of absence, an empty chair also hints at the people it awaits, an invitation to be present.

In 1981, this very chair accommodated many participants in the Action Auto-Portrait, organised by the local photo club in Dudelange. Passersby at a street fair were invited to sit down and photograph themselves. They were free to choose their unique photographic moment. This resulted in a collection of the most heart-warming, funny and human shots.

Temporary History Lab

Become Part of History!

As historians at the Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C2DH), we are interested in your memories of the heyday of the iron and steel industry, your recollections of your work, leisure time and everyday living conditions, and also your perception of how Esch-sur-Alzette and the surrounding region has changed from World War II to today. We want to hear from all generations, young and old alike, regardless of origin, gender or occupation. Get actively involved in our research work: tell us your life and family stories! Bring us your photos and documents of all sorts so that we can digitise them in our history lab! Let us talk about the past, present and future - and your very personal history in this town and region. We are looking forward to seeing you in our temporary history lab!

Over the final three days of the history lab we will show a selection of photos from our self-portrait event (26-27 September) in Annexe22. During this time, you can also collect a print of your photo.

Opening times:

Temporary History Lab
Wed-Sun: 10.00-17.00
Video installation
Wed-Sun: 17.00-22.00

REMIX Team (Sekretariat):

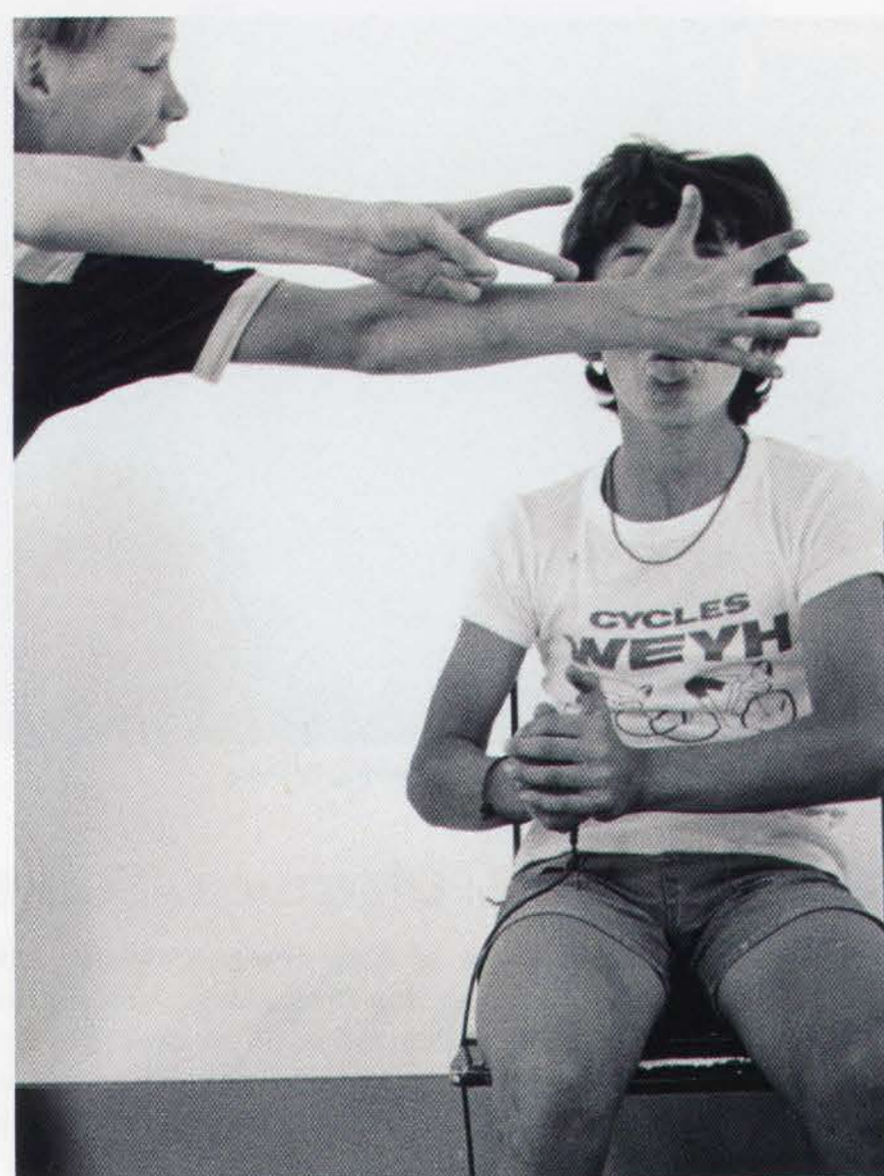
Audrey Sapet, Tel. (+352) 46 66 44 9809,
Email: audrey.sapet@uni.lu



Presence.

In the history of photography, the human being has become increasingly present, in a very real sense. It was not just control over the release button that turned everyone into photographers; the production and subsequent exhibition of the self-portraits turned people into primary stakeholders of the image and face of Southern Luxembourg.

In 1982, these photographs of "ordinary lives" were exhibited at the villa of the former ARBED Director. This house, now a public gallery known as *Nei Liicht*, has become a place that shines a light on people's presence and meaning in everyday life. Exhibitions by invited photographers expressed the same message: the human being was now the center of attention, the focus of the camera.



Action Auto-portrait

→ Action Auto-Portrait (1981), Fotoclub Diddeleng Archive.

Distance.



→ Sprocket and large cog, order Z 3973, weight 5,300kg, J. P. Karen (ca. 1950), Institute Emile Metz, CNA Collection.

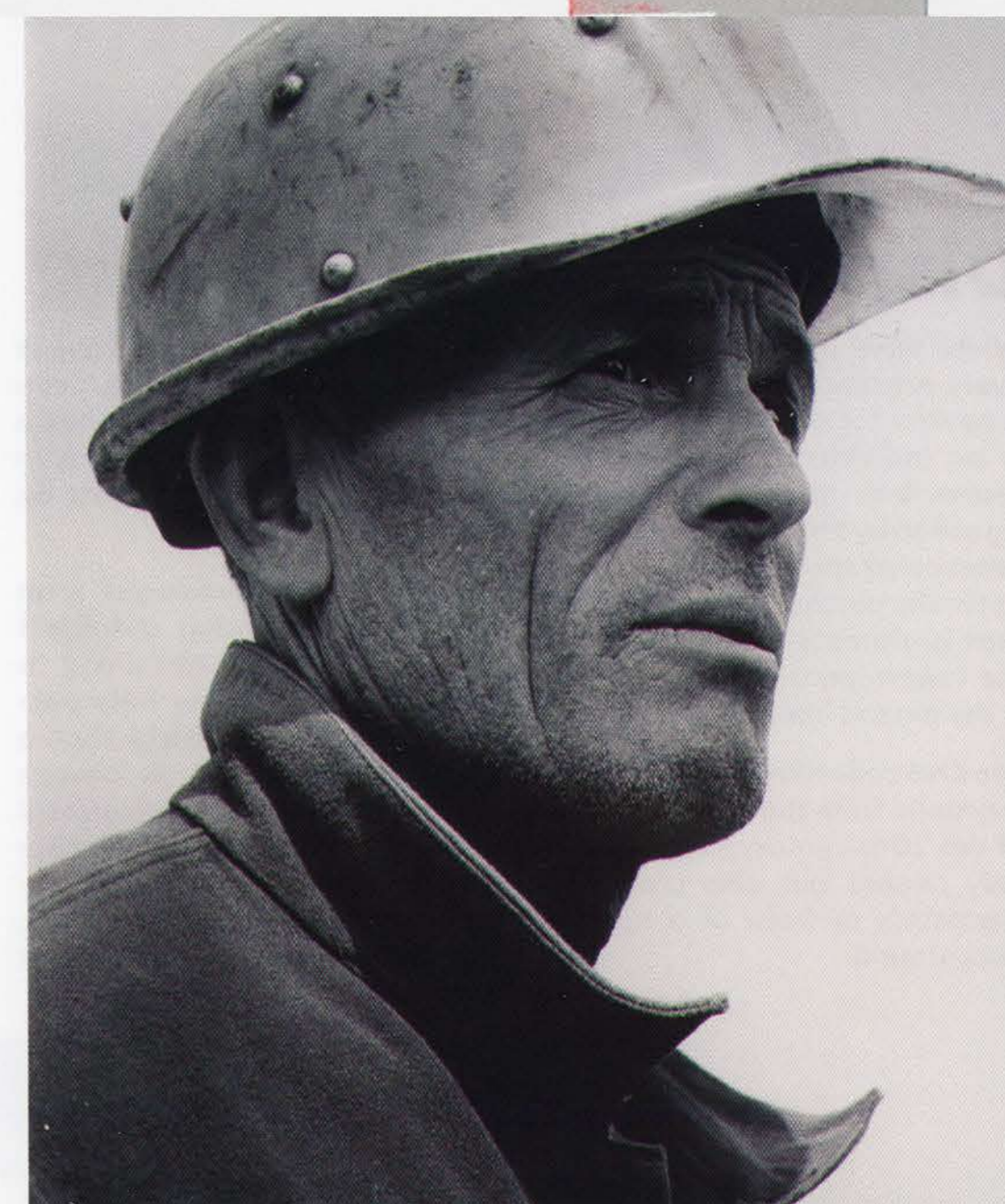
Photography, specifically portrait photography, does various things to its subjects. The photographer's gaze is selective, creative and transforming. Early photographs of ARBED workers often show individual men as an integral part of industrial complexes, either standing next to or operating large-scale machinery and thus embedded into the setting. Such depictions reinforced the vision of man as the measure of machine.

After the First World War, the distance between photographers and their subjects was gradually reduced. Photographers started studying workers from a closer perspective. The camera looked differently at the subject, unearthing the human element among massive steel constructions. A worker was no longer exclusively defined by his industrial setting.



→ Philippe Matsas, Esch, op der Goar (1986), © Philippe Matsas Collection.

In photographs, workers acquired private lives beyond their workplaces. They were shown in both work and leisure contexts, in the routines and rituals of everyday life, playing cards, spending time with their children or waiting to get on the train. The photographer's camera entered private lives, also including those of women and children, and pointed at everyday objects and practices, thereby giving them attention and value.



→ Marcel Schroeder, Mineur (1963), Fonds Histoire de l'Industrie, CNA Collection.

Subject.

The photographer's close attention to people's everyday lives encouraged self-observation and reflexivity. Are we really the way the photographer sees us? Self-portraits are all the more interesting, since the person being photographed is also the photographer.

Self-portraits using analogue photography do not offer networked images that can be instantly shared on social platforms. But both selfies and self-portraits go out into the world and have public lives of their own. They appear in different formats and are remediated, reinterpreted and reproduced.

With the analogue camera, the moment of becoming one's own observer lies in the future. It is not the immediate gaze at the mobile phone, the recent tendency to see the world by looking at ourselves first. Rather it is about observing from the much more physically and mentally distant vantage point of the self-portraitist.

The self-portrait, therefore, gives the photographer more distance, more space for autobiographical reflection. **You are the photographer, but you are also your own subject:** it is the most curious combination of proximity and distance.