



Helsinki Photomedia 2014

# PHOTOGRAPHIC POWERS



# *Photographic Powers – Helsinki Photomedia 2014*

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## Preface: What is Helsinki Photomedia?

Helsinki Photomedia is a biennial international conference of Photography Studies established in 2012. It was created to fill a void: there was no regular, international forum for photography studies, like *Crossroads* is for Cultural Studies or ECREA for Media Studies. This was surprising because there had been lots of new activity in the field of photography studies all over the world. In its current state of rapid transformation and diversification photography showed rich cultural potential, and photography research was gaining new importance. Three new referee journals were launched since 2008: *Photographies*, *Photography & Culture*, *Philosophy of Photography*. Books and articles did abound, and the general high tide of photography definitely required new thinking, new methods and new theories.

Helsinki Photomedia started in 2012 with a broad theme: *Images in Circulation*. Over 140 participants coming from 23 countries proved that there really existed a need for a new international venue for presenting and discussing photography research. The three keynote speakers of this conference were Ariella Azoulay, David Bate and Charlotte Cotton. The variety of topics covered in the first conference was impressive. Terms such as 'expanded image', 'Photography 2.0', 'digital ethos' and 'collaborative turn in contemporary photography' appeared in some papers and presentations, indicating a need for a general diagnosis of the current shift. Some raised more specific questions about current developments in photography. There were analyses of metadata, affordance, curating and self-publishing, and so on. New modes of research, such as 'artistic research', were important elements of the first conference. *Photographies* published a special issue of the conference (Vol. 6 Issue 1, 2013).

The second Helsinki Photomedia in March 2014 was run under the theme *Photographic Powers*. Again, there were around 130 participants, some for the second time. The keynote speakers were Paul Frosh, Jorge Ribalta and Joanna Zylińska.

This publication is based on the papers and presentations delivered in the 2014 conference. After a strict referee process 14 articles were selected for publishing. Meanwhile the preparations for the third Helsinki Photomedia conference in March 2016 are well underway. The theme is *Photographic Agencies and Materialities* and the keynote speakers are Geoffrey Batchen, Annika von Hausswolff and Liz Wells.

Merja Salo

Professor of Visual Communication and Photography  
Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture

Helsinki Photomedia 2014 Conference organizing team: Merja Salo (Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture), Mika Elo (University of the Arts), Janne Seppänen (University of Tampere) and Marc Goodwin (Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture).

For a Call for Papers, see: <http://helsinkiphotomedia.aalto.fi/>



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# Introduction: Photography Research Exposed to the Parergonal Phenomenon of "Photographic Powers"

MIKA ELO

This volume is a compilation of peer-reviewed articles based on papers presented at the 2nd Helsinki Photomedia conference Photographic Powers in April 2014. The selection of 14 articles reflects the multifaceted theme of the conference from different angles. The compilation also sheds light on the fact that photographic culture is currently in a state of rapid transformation and diversification – a situation comparable to the first decades after the invention of photochemical photography.

Today's post-internet condition, characterized by the heterogeneous mixture of old and new media technologies and practices, constitutes a productive challenge for photography research. A plethora of new issues related to metadata, mobile communication, social media, copyrights, online archives, surveillance technologies, and robotics transform the terrain where aesthetic, political, ethical, and epistemic dimensions of photography are investigated. In short, the interdisciplinary field of photography research is in a vivid state, as the new technological environment of photography prompts new questions and invites novel approaches.

The challenges of the contemporary situation are also quantitative in kind. The total amount of photographs taken each day has exploded beyond human grasp: hundreds of thousands of photographs are uploaded to the Internet every minute. Huge quantity combined with the short life span of images and the complex patterns of their circulation constitutes significant methodological problems for empirical photography research. New computational research methods are needed, as much as new conceptualizations.<sup>1</sup> We can truly speak of an excess of photographs. At the same time, a ubiquitous need for photographs persists.

If photography, soon after its inception in 1839, was invested in a vast variety of cultural activities and scientific endeavours building on visual representations – from domestic rituals to criminology and from geography to astronomy – it now seems that the powers of photography still haven't run dry. Even today, numerous scientific disciplines make use of photographic media in visualizing their results, in collecting data, and in envisioning new aims. According to the inherent logic of modern sciences, numerical data requires visualization.<sup>2</sup> Many kinds of images and information graphics are used to serve these requirements, to be sure, but

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<sup>1</sup> Here the discussions concerning "digital humanities" become highly relevant for photography research. See for example *Understanding Digital Humanities*, ed. David M. Berry, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Peter Galison, "Images Scatter into Data, Data Gathers into Images, in *Iconoclash. Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, eds. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002, pp. 300-

technical images owing their logic of depiction to photographic processes occupy centre stage. It is telling that even computer-generated images are often made to look like photographs in order to enhance the realistic feel. It is hard to imagine modern sciences and the so-called progress of humanity without the accuracy of spatiotemporal recording exemplified by the photographic media. Photography is a shining example of the visual culture of industrialized societies.

In fact, within this paradigm, it is almost impossible to imagine against the photographic powers operating on the level of the very conditions of imagination. Yet, today it is hard to think that the analytic processing of the photographic parameters would have been, in the first place, targeted to the human eye only. It has become obvious, in the new technological environment of photography, that photography was always already on its way beyond the visible and even beyond the human. We are now witnessing the appearance of this latent image: Photography, shining forth as a hybrid hinge between the phenomenal horizon of experience and algorithmic processes.<sup>3</sup>

Contemporary institutions, however, need to invest in all too human visibility in order to present themselves as effective, in the same way as individuals make use of images in shaping their identities. In both cases, photographs tend to be indispensable. The phenomenal aspect of photography – its status as a spatio-temporal capture – still plays the key role here. In so far as the temporal dimension of individual and collective identities is a matter of memory traces and their capture, history is essentially about mnemotechnics.<sup>4</sup> With regard to the visible reality, history needs images, especially photographs. It is not by chance that according to the modern sentiment, everything solid melts into air – unless it is photographed, made present in absence.

In terms of “photographic powers”, the phenomena outlined above are necessarily interlinked. It is not enough to note that the global photographic apparatus, i.e. the intricate constellation of technologies, practices and discourses accompanying photographic imagery, incorporates power in multiple ways, some of them clearly visible and tangible, others less obvious and hard to grasp. Furthermore, attention has to be paid to a certain structural affinity between power and photography.

Photographs are nomadic and relational images. They are scalable and can be inscribed in many kinds of material supports, which means that they carry in themselves references to something beyond their own instantiations. Something similar applies to power. Power can be restrictive or productive, personalized or impersonal, but it is always relational. With regard to visual representation, power is neither entirely inherent to specific images nor entirely reducible to the context. Rather, we might

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Andrew Fisher and Daniel Rubinstein, “Introduction: On the Verge of Photography”, in *On the Verge of Photography. Imagining Beyond Representation*, ARTicle Press, Birmingham, 2013, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light. Theses on the Photography of History*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. xviii.

consider it a parergonal phenomenon. As we all know, power relations can effectively be built up and worked against with photographic images. This means that in each individual case the borders between information, propaganda and advertising are necessarily indistinct – even if the face offered by the photograph as an image is distinct. The distinctness of an image is always dissimilarity.<sup>5</sup> The way in which a photograph cuts itself off from everything else introduces a mute interval that fosters many kinds of speech, whether banal, creative, humiliating or empowering. In any case, the photographic cut necessarily introduces basic conditions for power relations: it introduces a point of view into relational structures. Its effects can be both imaginary and symbolic. Depending on the point of view, the cut can be transformative or conservative, emancipatory or suppressive, subversive or destructive.

To sum up, power is necessarily inscribed in technologies, practices and discourses of photography in many ways. Photographic powers have their past, presence and future. They have their visible and invisible forms. If there is any common denominator to the different facets of the photographic powers, it might be found on the level of mapping, determination, delimitation, and identification; in short, on the level operations such as cutting, targeting, anchoring, and tagging. But what about them, after all, is photographic?

In the era of digital connectivity, photography is not only undergoing a rapid transformation, the mythical basis of “the photographic” is eroding as well. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the reductive identification of photography as a cultural form with a limited set of technologies cannot offer more than a metonymic model of an imagined unity of photography.<sup>6</sup> In the new technological environment of photography, the familiar questions, “Where is the photograph?” and “What is the photographic?”, have a new resonance. They are no longer questions of unity of place, medium or material inscription. Photography is distributed across various sites and material circumstances that do not accord with the principle of containment – physical place as the image of containment is irrevocably undone in the world of live broadcasting and real time events.<sup>7</sup> This implies also that materiality needs to be thought otherwise than based on the opposition of form and matter.<sup>8</sup> Even here, the parergonal powers of

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Image – the Distinct”, in *The Ground of Image*, trans. Jeff Fort, New York, Fordham University Press, 2005, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or not at all. Philosophy of contemporary art*, London, Verso, 2013, p. 123–125.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Samuel Weber, *Mass mediauras. Form, Technics, Media*, ed. Alan Cholodenko, California, Stanford University Press, 1996, p. 115–117.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Janne Seppänen, *Levoton Valokuva*, Tampere, Vastapaino, 2014.

photography force photography research beyond what we might call "ergonomics".<sup>9</sup>

The spatial ambiguity of the "distributed unity"<sup>10</sup> of photography lends credence to the idea of the photograph as an objective capture of time. If the constellation of sites and material circumstances that makes up the photographic apparatus turns out to be a historical variable then it lies close at hand to search for the ontological core of photography in its temporality. On a closer look, however, the photographic capture turns out to be a "distributive unity" as well. The computational possibilities of manipulating the photographic flow of events go well beyond the mechanical click.

At the same time as the imagined unity of photography is in crisis, a new dominant cultural form is successively taking shape: computational management of metadata. A series of compelling questions arise: What kind of effects do the algorithmic processes have on the level of the imagined unity of photography? How and on what basis are we going to imagine the unity of photography to come? What if the photographic powers lead us not only beyond any imaginable unity of "the photographic", but also beyond the very unity of imagination.

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that the etymology of the word (from Greek *ergon* 'work', *nemein* 'distribute') constitutes a link between "efficiency", i.e. the effective distribution of work, and with the conception of "work" as moulding the matter. Parergonal phenomena (*para-* 'beside', *ergon* 'work') fundamentally destabilize this link.

<sup>10</sup> I adopt the term "distributive unity" from Peter Osborne, who explicates it in relation to the Kantian idea of aesthetic unity of experience, i.e. a unity without any rational ground other than the fact of its practical continuity and contiguity. For Osborne, "distributive unity" is the "logical form of the historical unity of empirical forms"; it is a "pragmatic unity". Osborne, *Anywhere or not at all*, p. 122–123.

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PART I

ARTISTIC GESTURES OF  
PHOTOGRAPHIC POWERS



# The Power of Perspective in the Photographic Image

RICHARD WHITLOCK

## Abstract

Power is most effective when it acts unawares. Steven Lukes' three-dimensional model of power lays particular emphasis on the latent power exercised over people without them being aware of it. Women for example may accept male domination or peasants the rule of their overlords believing that it is part of the natural order of things.<sup>11</sup> Something like this happens with photography, whose perspective system is taken for granted and believed to be correct. In photographic images political power conflicts may be enacted and the viewer invited to take sides, but the perspective field on which this power-struggle takes place is not usually questioned. It none-the-less exercises power in a very direct way, positioning us in relation to the world and to each other. This essay aims to draw attention to the way perspective operates in photographic images by looking at what happens when perspective is removed. It is not so much about how photography is used as a tool in the struggle for social or political power as such but about the sort of power it wields, how it moulds our reality. It will present photographic works by the present writer, both still and moving images, in which the central perspective inherent in lens-based media, such as photography and film, is replaced by alternative, non-perspectival, representational systems.

## *Flattening space*

The perspective of the camera lens is close enough to the 'natural perspective' of the eye, for the viewer not to doubt its validity. But consider the difference between the following two photographs. The first is a snapshot with a normal photographic perspective, whereas in the second perspective has been removed, leaving only light and shade as indicators of depth. Space has been flattened, as in an architectural 'elevation', an orthogonal projection, in which distant objects are represented at the same

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<sup>11</sup> Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1974/2005.

scale as objects near at hand.<sup>12</sup> In this projection the spectator's eye is situated opposite every point on the picture plane instead of in its usual position in the middle, opposite the vanishing point.



Images 1 & 2. With perspective removed, everything comes to attention, and starts to pay us attention.

In the first picture nothing returns our gaze, nothing looks us squarely in the face. If the objects in these pictures were people, they would be avoiding our eye, in the way someone on Skype always appears to be looking askance as they cannot look directly into the camera lens and at the image of their

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<sup>12</sup> "In simple orthogonal projection, far and away the most commonly used system of representation in engineering and architectural drawing, one of the principal faces of the object to be drawn – either the top, front or side face – is normally set parallel to the picture plane." John Willats, *Art and representation: new principles in the analysis of pictures*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1997, p. 38. Orthogonal projection is sometimes called orthographic projection.

interlocutor on the screen at the same time. Things and people are held at a distance, the viewer becoming an onlooker, a subject in a world of objects.<sup>13</sup> These objects, furthermore, can be looked at and studied with impunity: they will never challenge our gaze or surprise us by looking back! Perspective generates a particular way of looking and also a particular way of thinking about the world, a *pensée de survol*, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's words – a thinking which looks on from above. Science, says Merleau-Ponty, “manipulates things and gives up living in them”.<sup>14</sup>

In the second picture the feeling is completely different. It is as if everything in it has come to attention, and has also started to pay attention to us. Here is a calm and composed world in which everything has been carefully positioned. Decisions have been made, objects that before just happened to be there have now been deliberately chosen, affirmed in their importance. The array of pigeonholes on the wall turn towards us to reveal the messages they have in them. The doorframes, the air-conditioning unit, the box on the wall, the stairs, all engage the viewer. Even the shadows on the wall incite his or her curiosity. My experience of working with photography, but without perspective, brought back the feeling of painting and drawing from life.

In 2008 I photographed the entrance hallway of the Modern Art Museum in the Palace of the Khans in Bakhchysaray in the Crimea, combining several photographs to eliminate perspective, in the manner described above. In the final print, contiguous with the wall itself, every detail – the water pipes, the plaster skirting and the doorframe, the fire-drill notice – faces the viewer head-on. The work of composition, the artist's job, has been done already by craftsmen working over time (centuries), who have added an electric cable here, or a heating-pipe there (and there is an aesthetic in the way the electric cable, for example, is discretely positioned behind the radiator). Thus, though a half-sized representation (mirror size) it offers itself to the viewer for interpretation as though it were reality, or perhaps the raw material of a reality that viewers can make something of for themselves.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For the way the viewing subject is formed by perspective see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the observer*, MIT, 1990, esp. chapter 2 ‘The camera obscura and its subject’, pp. 25-66.

<sup>14</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and mind*, trans. Carleton Dallery, in *Merleau-Ponty, The primacy of perception and other essays*, James M. Edie (ed.), Northwestern UP, Evanston, Illinois, 1964, pp. 160 and 159.

The link between scientific thought and perspective is explored in depth by Victor Stoichita, who shows how Descartes' discoveries in optics were integral to his ‘Discourse on the method’ – Victor Stoichita *The self-aware image: an insight into early modern meta-painting*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 151-7.

<sup>15</sup> This work was exhibited in the Meilahti Art Gallery in Helsinki. I recount my experience with non-perspectival still photography in ‘Perspektiivi ja valokuvan suhde todellisuuteen’ (‘Expanded view photography’) in Jan-Erik Lundström (ed.) *Valokuvallisia todellisuuksia (Photographic realities)*, 2012, LIKE Publishers, Helsinki.

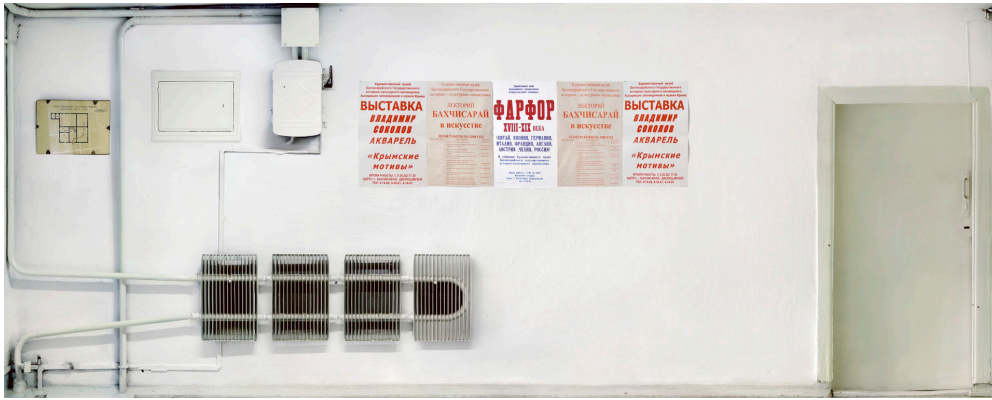


Image 3. Richard Whitlock, *Radiator Wall*, 2009. Inkjet print, 150 x 380cm

In the next pair of images, of a basement art gallery in Thessaloniki, in Greece, the second is again composed from several photographs, seamlessly reconstructed in an orthographic projection. Notice, for example, that you can see behind the pictures on the left wall and the right wall at the same time. The framed photographs on the wall of this gallery which had seemed unremarkable in the perspective of the first photograph, now attract the eye more strongly and become more telling, their perspective offering a way out of the flattened space.





Image 4. Normal photograph



Image 5. Photograph remodelled as an orthogonal projection.<sup>16</sup>

The effect is like that produced in *The Little Street* by Vermeer, where perspective indicators are suppressed except in one doorway into a courtyard, centre left, that leads the eye into a different world, a picture within a picture.

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<sup>16</sup> Photographs in gallery are by Venia Bechrakis, Zina Athanasiadou Contemporary art, Thessaloniki.



Image 6. Johannes Vermeer, *The Little Street*, 1657-58, Oil on canvas, 54,3 x 44 cm, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

*Axonometric projection*

Each perspective system brings with it a different feeling, a different character. Thanks to digitalisation, photographic space can now be remodelled in many ways so as to combine the reality effect of photography with any number of representational systems, and marry into the philosophies that lie behind these systems. Axonometric projections, for example, in which depth is indicated by parallel diagonal lines which do not converge at infinity, have a dynamic feel to them because of these strong diagonals.<sup>17</sup> This was the characteristic representational system of the Russian avant-garde and of constructivism. It is also used in computer games such as SimCity, where exciting new worlds are also envisioned.



Image 7. Gustav Klucis, *Dynamic City*, 1919, oil, sand and concrete on wood, 87x64,5 cm., State Museum of Contemporary Art – Costakis collection, Thessaloniki.

<sup>17</sup> For a rich account of the history of axonometric perspective see Massimo Scolari, *Il disegno obliquo – Una storia dell'antiprospectiva*, Marsilio, Venice, 2005.



In a 'trimetric' axonometric projection (as in SimCity) the angles formed by the sides of a single object (the marble slab in the following sequence of three images) are applied to all the other objects in the space. This lifts the viewer up into the air, like in a Chinese scroll painting. Even more than 'vanishing-point' perspective this projection creates a feeling of 'survol', a dominant overview, though in Chinese painting this is attenuated by being combined with other points of view.<sup>18</sup>

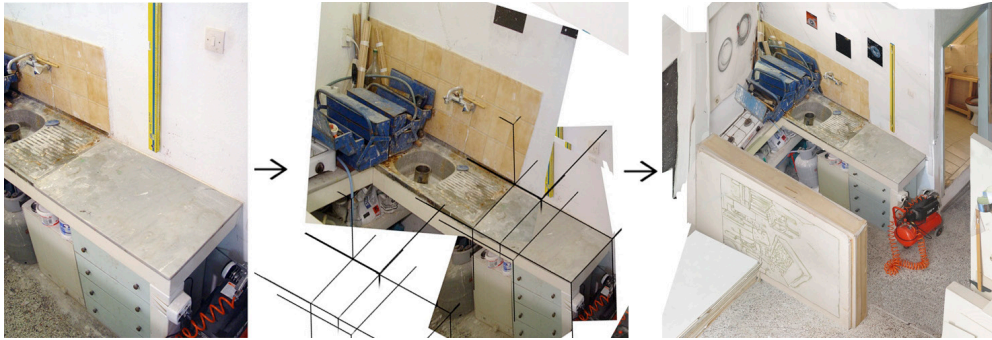


Image 8. Remaking a photograph as an axonometric projection

### Vitality

An extraordinary vitality flows into a photographic image as soon as perspective is eliminated, bearing out Pavel Florensky's impassioned attack on perspective as destructive of reality, no less. For him, "Linear perspective is a machine for annihilating reality, an infernal yawn that swallows everything wherein the vanishing-point functions".<sup>19</sup> In his 1919 essay *Reverse perspective* he writes,

(...) *There are centres of being, something in the nature of concentrates of more intense being, that submit to their own laws and each of which therefore has its own form. ...forms should be apprehended according to their own life, they should be represented through themselves, according to the way they have*

<sup>18</sup> See François Cheng, *Vide et plein: le langage pictural chinois*, Seuil, Paris, 1991, esp. pp. 65-66. See also Scolari, pp. 300-303.

<sup>19</sup> Pavel Florensky in Florensky and Larionov, *Symbolarium*, p. 112., quoted in Pavel Florensky, *Beyond vision: essays on the perception of art*, Nicoletta Misler (ed.), trans. Wendy Salmond, Reaktion Books, London, 2002 (1919) p. 93. In *Reverse Perspective* (in Misler 2002), Florensky lists Leonardo, Raphael, Michelangelo, Dürer, El Greco, Veronese, Rubens, Rembrandt and Tintoretto as artists who disregarded the rules of perspective and used reverse perspective or multiple viewpoints instead. In fact artists have backpedalled on perspective ever since its invention, and it is hard to find a painting in which perspective has not been manipulated in some way. Byzantine painters used reverse perspective (near objects larger than distant ones), but as one element of a complex representational system in which colour held pride of place over form. See Robert Byron, *The birth of western painting*, Routledge, London, 1930.



*been apprehended, and not in the foreshortenings of a perspective laid out beforehand.*<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps this vitality is due to the fact that without perspective to guide it, the eye is constantly searching for familiar terrain, for the vanishing-point it is used to, and so it must work harder than usual. And the brain, also accustomed to perspective, sends back to the eye for more information, for a re-check. You get the feeling that you are a child again, seeing everything for the first time. There is indeed something childlike about orthogonal projection. Ancient Egyptian painting is always in orthogonal projection and seems childlike to the educated 'western' eye.



Image 9. Dancers from the tomb of Nebamun, Thebes, Egypt, ca 1350 BCE, British Museum.

Unlike Ancient Greek *zographiki* (description of life), 'Egyptian art was not intended to merely imitate or reflect reality, but to replace and perpetuate

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<sup>20</sup> Florensky in Misler p. 218. (underlining in the original).

it'.<sup>21</sup> Its goal was not mere depiction, but the search for vitality, for life itself!

Reality is much what we make of it, what people make of the real. The camera may do the job for us, but it binds us to a particular relationship with the world. This can be seen, and felt, when perspective is removed. Hanneke Grootenboer, writing about anamorphosis, states that,

*(t)he influence of perspective manifests itself in the difference between conquering and being conquered. What an anamorphic look at a perspectival configuration teaches us is how we are snared within its system.*<sup>22</sup>

All images exercise power, as indeed all speech-acts,<sup>23</sup> but we feel more at ease, more light-hearted, in some of the models art proposes and more alienated in others. Already there is a feeling of freedom in the realisation that alternative ways of seeing and of representing the world are equally as valid as the perspective images produced by the camera lens.

### *Moving pictures*

The application of movement to a non-perspectival photographic image brings this vitality, this feeling of reality, onto a different plane of experience and enquiry. On a practical level the removal of perspective from a moving image presents a daunting task, as every element of every frame needs to be altered, adjusted out of its perspective framework and replaced in a new representational structure. I doubt that this has been attempted before. I hesitated to introduce movement also as I was afraid the time element would be too distracting, that movement would cancel out the effect of simply removing perspective, which had brought such satisfactory results. I found, however, that adding motion strangely reinforced the effect of removing perspective.

The moving pictures that follow, *The Street* (2012) and *The Hospital* (2009), really need to be seen as large projected images so as to stretch out

<sup>21</sup> Jimmy Dunn *An introduction to Egyptian art, 'Tour Egypt', Lubbock, Texas, 2013, [www.touregypt.net/featurestories/artoverview.htm](http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/artoverview.htm), accessed 04-04-2014*. For Plato's championing of Egyptian art over the perspective illusionism of Greek art see Sotiris Bahtzetsis 'Πλατονικός υπερμοντερνισμός – Οι πολιτικές της μίμησης και της κατασκευής', ('Platonic hypermodernism – The politics of mimesis and of construction') *Σύγχρονα θέματα* No 125, April-June 2014, pp.23-32.

<sup>22</sup> Hanneke Grootenboer, *The rhetoric of perspective*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005, p. 132. Grootenboer further shows how anamorphic paintings and murals have been bracketed out of art history as they undermine the central importance attributed to perspective in art-historical discourse.

<sup>23</sup> Roland Barthes famously speaks of the 'fascism' inherent in speech: "Language is legislation, speech is its code. We do not see the power which is in speech because we forget that all speech is a classification, and that all classifications are oppressive." Roland Barthes, *Selected writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, Fontana pocket readers, London, 1982.

the viewing angle as much as possible (see the in situ image of *The Street* below), but an idea can be formed of these works by clicking on the video stills, which will take the reader to the moving images on Vimeo.



Image 10. Richard Whitlock, [The Street](#) , HD Video, 2012.



I photographed and filmed *The Street* in Thessaloniki in Greece over a period of three years, from 2009 to 2012. Like the still images discussed above this work employs an orthogonal projection, positioning the viewer, impossibly, in many places at the same time: down at street level, peering under the cars, and at the same time looking straight over the blocks of flats at the TV aerials and the sky.



Image 11. *The Street in situ* at the Centre of Contemporary Art of Thessaloniki, 2012-13, 250 x 450 cm.

Just as our spatial perceptions are thrown into question by removing perspective from a still image, in a moving image without perspective, our experience of time is challenged. As space loses one of its dimensions time is enriched and seems to gain in dimensionality.

Making a moving image without perspective entails marrying together many separate pieces of video, which means that events occur simultaneously in the work which did not take place simultaneously in reality. Each of these pieces of video will itself have been looped and manipulated to remove perspective and to avoid breaks in continuity as well

as for reasons of aesthetic coherence. A speed can be chosen for each moving object. The clouds in *The Street*, for example, move at twice their real speed, and are merged back into themselves. Other video elements run partly in reverse, some are slowed down, others speeded up. The vehicles in the street are both static and in motion as they are still photographs that move up and down following the contours of the road but stay the same size as they recede into the distance. Everything that normally moves moves, but in its own particular way, executing its characteristic movements over and over again, as though each thing, each person, were living simultaneously in its own time, outside the linear time we are used to experiencing in perspectival space. There is the time of trees, the time of traffic, the time of clouds. We become aware of all these different times and qualities of time when they are brought together in a two-dimensional image, as if by removing one dimension from space we add extra dimensions to time.

Bergson thought that time should not be visualised in terms of space at all. His idea of *durée* is of a de-spatialised, non-linear duration which can only be apprehended through ‘intuition’,

*No image can replace the intuition of duration, but many diverse images, borrowed from very diverse orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized.*<sup>24</sup>

Slight irregularities, however, are bound to occur in space, at the borders of the video fragments, and in time, between the frames of the videos themselves, which make us conscious of and question what we are seeing. This has a ‘distancing effect’, which should, in Bergson’s analysis, block ‘spontaneous’ memory, the automatic and unconscious memory process that guides us through the day without us having to learn everything again from scratch.<sup>25</sup> But the opposite seems to occur, involuntary memories and associations appearing unbidden and forcefully from the viewer’s own life, such as appear in Proustian ‘privileged moments’. I have recorded many reactions to *The Street*. One lady was sure the balcony was her aunt’s, as the balcony railings were “exactly the same”, even though her aunt lived in a different part of town. “But what is this women doing on my aunt’s balcony?”, she exclaimed, “I don’t know her, and can’t understand how she got there!” Another woman, a professor from Thessaloniki University, thought she saw one of the ladies “coming out onto the balcony to get some potatoes or onions from a sack.” There are no sacks of potatoes or onions in

<sup>24</sup> Henri Bergson, *An introduction to metaphysics* (1903), trans T.E. Hulme (1912), Hackett Publishing Co Inc, Indianapolis, 1949, pp. 27-8.

<sup>25</sup> “...this spontaneous memory... hides away at the slightest movement of voluntary memory.” « ...ce souvenir spontané se dérobe au moindre mouvement de la mémoire volontaire ». Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire - essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1939, pp. 85-6.

the video but the professor saw what she imagined to be there. The artist Gregory Sholette saw “someone’s bright green sleeveless shirt caught by a beam of sunlight, an array of bottles sitting neatly on an otherwise cluttered balcony” – the bottles being imagined, the products of his own mind’s eye.<sup>26</sup> What appears to occur, and here the reader’s own experience of these pictures must be the judge, is a contradictory experience in which irregularities in perception of time and space hold us at a distance and make us conscious of viewing, while at the same time the flattened perspective welcomes the viewer into the picture so that he or she feels part of the scene. At all events images and associations emerge strongly, and indeed spontaneously, and the predominant feeling appears to be one of recognition, familiarity, often even of *déjà vu*.

Hanneke Grootenboer has made the point that before the invention of the moving image, people imagined that paintings really moved.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps a similar process is at work here, the mind supplying what it cannot see, but expects to see – what it thinks ought to be there. This accords with Hans Belting’s radical statement that an image is something we carry inside us,

*It is useless to direct the camera at the world: there are no images out there. We make (or have) them always and ever only within ourselves.*<sup>28</sup>

Pictures of all sorts, including digital images, are, for Belting, simply media that enable our internal images to reveal themselves (Belting p. 11). It would appear that removing perspective facilitates this process – bringing viewers easily into the picture and feeling they are looking at events from their own lives, personal experiences and memories flooding into the mental space that is created and providing fuel for their imagination.

### *Collapsing the subject-object divide*

Without perspective we get the feeling of being *at one* with the world. A ‘thing among things, man among men’, as Jean-Paul Sartre put it.<sup>29</sup> The subject-object divide created by perspective is deactivated. These are not strangers sweeping their balconies and driving their cars, but people ‘like us’. And are they not fascinating, these women, these carpets, these bedspreads billowing in the air? I watch them again and again. I did not ask

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<sup>26</sup> Gregory Sholette, interview with Richard Whitlock in [Afterimage](#), *The journal of media arts and cultural criticism*, Vol 41 No 4, inside cover spread, Feb 2014.

<sup>27</sup> In conversation with the present writer.

<sup>28</sup> Hans Belting, *An anthropology of images – picture, medium, body*, trans. Thomas Dunlap, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 2011, p. 147 & p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Intentionality: a fundamental idea of the phenomenology of Husserl’, (1939), trans. Joseph P. Fell, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 1, No 2, May 1970.

the women whether I could photograph them, as had I done so they would have probably stopped doing their normal things in a normal way. I console myself for this indiscretion with the thought that they came out onto their balconies not just to do their chores, but to look around, and to be looked at too. Have we not evolved as creatures by looking and being looked at, by attracting and being attracted? So I do not feel too much of an intruder. These women's actions are familiar, they are doing what I might be doing myself.

### *Attention and distraction*

Perspective asks us to focus, to concentrate our attention. Jonathan Crary shows how the demand for visual and mental attention from workers, consumers (and picture-gazers) alike, became more and more insistent as capitalist modes of production and consumption developed from the late 19th century onwards. He also shows, however, how the more the mind is forced to focus the more it finds itself wandering. "...the more one investigated, the more attention was shown to contain within itself the conditions for its own undoing – attentiveness was in fact continuous with states of distraction, reverie, dissociation, and trance."<sup>30</sup> It has been shown, furthermore, that the brain works just as hard when in repose, when day-dreaming or when we are looking out of the window, as when it is concentrating on some other task at hand. Its 'default mode network' comes into play, activating circuits in the brain that switch on when we stop trying to 'think', which is why the solution to a problem, or something we have been trying to remember, suddenly appears in our minds when we relax.<sup>31</sup>

So many images clamour for attention in our everyday lives that in the end we block them out. When we see a new image we prepare to defend ourselves from it. A *non-perspectival image* disarms us, *however, and invites* the mind to wander. The first of my non-perspectival 'moving pictures', *The Hospital*, articulates this play of attention and distraction. As with *The Street* it is designed to be shown not on a central screen, but on a side wall, perhaps in a corridor or foyer, so that you come across it by chance. In this picture the reflections on the surfaces of the nurses' desk in a plastic surgery clinic are the only parts of the image that move and are in perspective, while the rest of the image is still and flat. The sources of these reflections, the nurses and patients coming and going in the hospital corridor, have been digitally removed, however, so that viewers turn their heads to see who has come into the room behind them. The space they are in and the space of the picture thus begin to coincide, the viewer belonging

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<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of perception: attention, spectacle and modern culture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1999, pp. 46-7.

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Baird, *et al.* 'Inspired by distraction: mind wandering facilitates creative incubation', *Psychological Science* 23 (10), 2012, pp. 1117 –1122.

to the flat space of the picture, and the reflections to a perspectival alternative reality.



Image 12. Richard Whitlock *The Hospital*, HD video projection, 140 x 550 cm, 2009.

### Conclusion

Removing perspective removes the power that photography, the perspectival medium par excellence, has over us. With orthogonal projection this power is replaced by a different sort of power, one which obliges a creative and imaginative response. This is of course still power, but one which explodes the viewing habits established by perspective that have been reinforced for so long by photography. Realising that one power-structure can be replaced by another is already a freedom, opening up the possibility of discovering new representational systems in the future as well as offering insights into types of spatial modulation that have been going on in picture-making since the dawn of time. It enables us to see how perspective is linked with a particular type of time, a linear time which we have come to accept as 'correct' but which, like perspectival space, puts us at a distance from the world and cramps creativity. "*...in the final analysis*", *Florensky says, "there are only two experiences of the world... and two types of culture – one contemplative and creative, the other predatory and mechanical."*<sup>32</sup> Photography – paradoxically thanks to the mechanics of digitization – is now in a position to move away from the mechanical and predatory and towards the contemplative and creative.

**Richard Whitlock** has made sculptural installations in many parts of the world. Dissatisfied with photography as a means of adequately representing these works, he began making photographs and films in unusual ways, avoiding the central perspective natural to these media. This by-work became a major preoccupation, leading to non-perspectival photographic and video installations in Helsinki, Grenoble, Crimea, Taipei, Thessaloniki, Athens and New York. He lives in Greece.

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<sup>32</sup> Florensky in Misler, p. 218.



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# Gallstone in a Gallery

MAIJA TAMMI

## **Abstract**

This article examines Julia Kristeva's writings on abject and abjection, draws from psychological, philosophical and sociological research, and from writings on aesthetic disgust. This article looks into why art photographs sometimes disgust and fascinate at the same time. To this end, the article addresses two series of works: Max Aquilera-Hellweg's photographs of invasive surgeries and my own photographic series of disease-related removals. The wider context for this article is my doctoral thesis, in which I am examining representations of sickness in art photography.



Image 1. Maija Tammi, *Gallstone*, 2011.



Image 2. Maija Tammi, *Breast Cancer* (whole breast removed), 2011.

## Introduction

‘That is lasagne and that is a peanut’, a middle-aged man wearing a light brown coat comments aloud at the TR1 art gallery in Tampere, Finland. He seems delighted because of his recognition. The man is looking at two of my photographs from the series *Removals*. The series consist of gallstones, cancers and other chronic disease related removals shot at two hospitals in Finland just a few minutes after the operations. The ‘lasagne’ is a whole breast removed because of cancer and the peanut is a gallstone in a kidney bowl. The man is just about to turn to leave when he glances back once more, as if he had forgotten something. He bends slightly to read the titles of the photographs – and winces in apparent disgust. He straightens his back and looks like his best friend had just stabbed him. This article aims to discuss why the man is appalled by what he sees in the gallery. I will first shortly introduce the concept of abject and its relation to disgust.

## *Abject, Abject Art and Disgust*

The French surrealist Georges Bataille articulated the term *abject* in the 1930’s although the term was not really conceptualized before the 1980’s. Bataille, who was also a sociologist and a philosopher, wrote a short essay entitled *Abjection and Miserable Forms* in 1934. The essay commented on the polarization of class struggle in France at that time and was published in *Essays on Sociology*. In his essay Bataille writes that the *miserables*, by which he means the oppressed and the poor in the society, have become abject themselves because they have no way of avoiding contact with real abject things such as filth and rats.<sup>33</sup> For Bataille, abject becomes a synonym for the *miserables*. He defines abject things ‘as objects of the imperative act of exclusion’ and assimilates this act of exclusion to psychoanalytic explanation of anal eroticism.<sup>34</sup> For all its deliberations on the abject, Bataille’s short essay of just a few pages leaves a lot to interpretation. Almost fifty years after Bataille’s essay, Julia Kristeva developed the concept of abject to its most known form.<sup>35</sup>

A philosopher, a psychoanalyst and a sociologist Julia Kristeva examines the power to disgust in her book *Powers of horror: an essay on abjection*. Kristeva draws her concept of abject from psychoanalysis, anthropology, religion and literature whereas Bataille’s starting point for abject was social and political. Kristeva defines the abject as something excessive, secreted and contagious, something that threatens our existing body image and identity by revealing the frailty of their boundaries. For Kristeva, the abject

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<sup>33</sup> G Bataille. ‘Abjection and Miserable Forms’ in *More & Less*, S Lotringer and C Kraus (eds), MIT Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 8–13.

<sup>34</sup> Bataille, *More & Less*, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> S Lotringer ‘Les Miserables’ in *More & Less*, S Lotringer and C Kraus (eds) MIT Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 2–7.

is outside the symbolic order – it is thrown out of the cultural world, only to return to confront us. By symbolic order Kristeva does not merely mean culturally shared and established classification systems, but she also takes into account the idea that different subjective structures are possible within this system. She notes that the symbolic order is rooted in a universally shared signifying process, language, and abjection borders the ‘identity of the speaking being’.<sup>36</sup> Kristeva argues that confronting bodily fluids and defilement place her at the borders of her ‘condition as a living being’.<sup>37</sup>

The psychoanalytic side of Kristeva’s book on abject and abjection draw from the writings of Sigmund Freud and especially those of Jacques Lacan. According to Kristeva, the first time we confront abject is the moment when a child realizes that he or she is a separate being from the mother, which follows Lacan’s formulation of the mirror stage. Another aspect Kristeva borrows from Lacan is *jouissance*. She writes that ‘jouissance alone causes the abject to exist as such’.<sup>38</sup> Jouissance can be described as an ‘unconscious energy’ combining ‘displeasure with a pleasurable quality’.<sup>39</sup> Kristeva and Lacan also appear to share a similar approach to psychoanalysis and language in general. For both, Lacan and Kristeva, to understand or comprehend something is to define it and ‘this very process has already transformed the thing’.<sup>40</sup> Against this background, Kristeva defines abject as a ‘jettisoned object’ that ‘draws me towards a place where meaning collapses’.<sup>41</sup> In other words, abject calls definitions and concepts into question.

Kristeva’s book on abject inspired both artists and curators, especially in the 1990’s. At the turn of the decade, three exhibitions set the tone for abject art according to Artforum editor Michael Wilson. He states that *Just Pathetic* at Rosamund Felsen Gallery in Los Angeles, *Work in Progress? Work?* at Andrea Rosen Gallery and Vik Muniz’s *Stuttering* at Stux Gallery in New York outlined how abject art would be defined and understood.<sup>42</sup> In 1990, the Swedish curator Gertrud Sandqvist curated an exhibition entitled *Abject* at Galleri Enkehuset in Stockholm and at the Nordic Art Centre in Helsinki, Finland. Sandqvist chose only to exhibit works made by female

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<sup>36</sup> J Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, p 65–67.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Y Stavrakakis, *Psychoanalysis Theory Politics*. University Press, Edinburgh 2007, p. 181.

<sup>40</sup> B Schmitz, Homelessness or Symbolic Castration? Subjectivity, Language Acquisition and Sociality in Julia Kristeva and Jacques Lacan. *Hypatia*. Vol 20(2), 2005, p. 70.

<sup>41</sup> Kristeva, *Powers Of Horror*, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> M Wilson, Michael Wilson on Sore Winners. *Artforum* 43 no.2, October 2004, p. 117–118.

artists, as she wanted to highlight the feminist qualities of abject art. Among the artist were Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Cecilia Edelfalk and Nina Roos.<sup>43</sup>

In 1993, the Whitney Museum in New York City held the exhibition *Abject Art*. One of the pieces in the exhibition was Todd Alden's *Collector's shit* which consisted of sealed containers of art collector's faeces. Since the 1990's abject art has evolved into a term that is used to describe a broad variety of works, for example ranging from Kiki Smith's usage of menstrual blood to Cindy Sherman's photographs that combine dolls, filth and pimples.

The philosopher Carolyn Korsmeyer, who has researched aesthetics and emotion theory, offers an explanation why artists and curators have been interested in the concept of abject. She argues that disgust is a powerful way to make the viewer linger and that it can also often turn into attraction.<sup>44</sup> Artists have taken advantage of disgust, the strongest human sensation, for centuries and continue routinely to do so, according to German scholar Winfried Menninghaus.<sup>45</sup> He has traced the theoretical approach to disgust from over 250 years, from Mendelssohn, Kant, Nietzsche, Kafka, Freud, and Bataille to Kristeva. Bearing in mind Kristeva's definition of abject as something that questions the borders of self and identity, Menninghaus puts it in other words: 'It is a state of alarm and emergency, an acute crisis of self-preservation in the face of an unassimilable otherness, a convulsive struggle in which what is in question, is quite literally, whether "to be or not to be"'.<sup>46</sup> However, Menninghaus is talking about disgust not about abject. For him, abject is just another word for disgust. In practice, disgust as an emotion and abjection overlap in their meanings. Nonetheless, disgust can be seen as one side – albeit a very essential side – of abjection.

Literally 'dis-gust' means 'bad taste'.<sup>47</sup> Yet, despite how natural disgust might feel, it is not just an automatic reaction. It has been shown, for example, that repulsion towards faeces is absent in the early childhood.<sup>48</sup> We learn to be both disgusted by things and not to be disgusted by them. A surgeon is not repulsed in front of an open surgery wound and an Icelandic person is perhaps not disgusted when smelling a piece of a rotten shark. In most cultures, actually, adults eat some delicacies that are basically rotten.

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<sup>43</sup> J Steihaug, *Abject/Informe/Trauma: Discourses on the Body in American Art of the Nineties*. [http://www.forart.no/index2.php?option=com\\_iarticles&no\\_html=1&Itemid=22&task=file&id=144](http://www.forart.no/index2.php?option=com_iarticles&no_html=1&Itemid=22&task=file&id=144), p. 20, 39.

<sup>44</sup> C Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust, The Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> W Menninghaus, *Disgust. Theory and history of a strong sensation*. State University of New York Press: Albany. 2003, p. 12.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> P. Rozin and A. E. Fallon. A perspective on disgust. *Psychological Review*, 94(1).1987, pp. 23-41.

<sup>48</sup> J M Tybur, D Lieberman, R Kurzban, P DeScioli, 'Disgust: Evolved function and structure'. *Psychological Review*, Vol 120(1), Jan 2013, p. 77.

<sup>49</sup> Rozin and Fallon, *Psychological Review*, p. 38

However, it is not only filthy objects that can be abject things or that disgust us. Researchers often differentiate between material disgust and moral disgust. Whereas material disgust refers to our responses to possible disease-causing objects nearby moral disgust relates to the breaking of social norms and rules.<sup>50</sup> In recent psychological research also a third category has been introduced. Tybur *et al.* differentiate between three types of disgust: pathogen disgust, moral disgust and sexual disgust. They write that in addition to make us avoid 'contact with the disease-causing organisms [...] disgust evolved to regulate decision in the domains of mate choice and morality'.<sup>51</sup> It is not just rotten food or bodily fluids that make us wince, but also unfairness, lying and breaking of common rules. One aspect causing moral disgust is violation of the concept of purity, for example: '...a brother and sister having sex, and an avant-garde performance art piece in which performers act like nonhuman animals and urinate on stage'.<sup>52</sup> These violations of rules manifest themselves on the bodies of the spectators as various physical responses. People might for example wince their face.

Winning when disgusted has a scientific explanation. The prototypical facial expression of disgust decreases the exposed area to possible pathogens: squinting of the eyes, closing the mouth, limiting airflow through the nose.<sup>53</sup> However these same facial expressions have been detected in situations where something has been only morally disgusting, and not potentially disease causing, for example seeing an unfair game.<sup>54</sup> To the question why this happens the researchers offer an explanation that this is a way to signal to the others one's condemnation of breaking the rules.

Psychological research, although concentrating on the evolved functions of disgust, validate the discussion of the abject in a larger context and offer explanations not only for the reaction but for its functions as well: for example why the man in the gallery felt an urge to wince. In the next chapter I will concentrate on the reactions to confronting abject things.

#### *Confronting abject; a system and its borders*

Back at the gallery in Tampere the middle-aged man seems to be in a state of unease; he is as disturbed as when confronting a real wound with blood and pus. For Kristeva, the reaction to confronting abject, spurs from culture. She points out that laws and religions base their functions on prohibiting filthy, defiling elements. Defilement is jettisoned from symbolic systems and it escapes both social rationality and logical order. According to Kristeva, what makes confronting the abject so disturbing is the thought that maybe there is no 'clean self' at all.<sup>55</sup> Kristeva frames the thought in the following manner: 'It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer

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<sup>50</sup> Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust*, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Tybur et al., *Psychological Review*, p. 65.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65–76.

<sup>55</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 65.



guaranteed the integrity of ones' 'own and clean self'.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, a gallstone outside of the body is disturbing because it is external to a body that people would like to think is whole and intact. A hair is nice to touch when it still attached to someone's head. Nevertheless, the moment that hair is on someone's plate or on the floor, it becomes something disgusting. However, one should keep in mind that there are no universal things that are dirty or defiling for everyone, as Mary Douglas writes in *Purity and Danger*. She stresses: '...that there is no such thing as dirt; no single item is dirty apart from a particular system of classification in which it does not fit.'<sup>57</sup> . In other words, defilement and dirt only exist if there is a system that excludes them, which makes the system a precondition for abjection.

Korsmeyer writes that disgust is 'grounded in beliefs embedded in cultural values', but she does not want to abandon the reflex character of disgust entirely either.<sup>58</sup> She points out that disgust is not just one, and always similar, physiological reaction, but has a lot of varieties from subtle to strong.<sup>59</sup> '[I]nstances of aesthetic disgust differ in valence, in the degree and tenor of somatic arousal, in the emotions that accompany them, in their meanings, in the attitudes they ground, and in their roles in genres and works of art.', she writes.<sup>60</sup>

Artworks can produce visceral responses, as Diane Gromala argues in her book *Towards a Phenomenological of the Visceral in the Interactive Arts*. By visceral she means 'respiratory, cardiovascular, uro-genital and especially enteric (or excretory) systems'<sup>61</sup>. In Gromala's own work viewer's monitored hearth rate and breath rate affect the actual encounter with the artwork. Gromala claims that abjection is merely one small aspect of the visceral spectrum; yet it often accounts for the strongest responses. Gromala used rotting meat in her *Meat book* piece to disturb the viewers. The physical reactions of disgust can include for example wincing, slowing of the pulse, blinking and galvanic skin response.<sup>62</sup> Korsmeyer speculates that: 'Perhaps the slower pulse marks a tendency for disgust to make us pause over its object, to savor it with loathing'.<sup>63</sup>

In the hospital in Tampere, as I am getting ready to take a photograph of the removed gallstone in the corner of the room, an operating room nurse refers to me half jokingly as a "pervert". She adds that it is unnatural to value filth. Kristeva argues,

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>57</sup> M Douglas, *Purity and Danger*. Routledge: London and New York, 2002, p. xvii.

<sup>58</sup> Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust*, p. 22.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>61</sup> D Gromala, *Towards a Phenomenological Theory of the Visceral in the Interactive Arts*, Plymouth, University of Plymouth, 2005, p. 47.

<sup>62</sup> Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust*, p. 24.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

*The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts, uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them.*<sup>64</sup>

Kristeva's idea is that the abject and abjection refuse to obey cultural prohibitions or laws, and question borders as such, regardless whether the border is between life and death, inside and outside, mother and father, or nature and culture. Abject compromises the very borders of our own body and identity, which is the disturbing part. In other words, abject questions the borders that ultimately constitute us.

Confrontation with a symbolic border is emphasized in Max Aquilera-Hellweg's book *The Sacred Heart, An atlas of the body seen through invasive surgery*. The book, published in 1997, contains detailed photographs of invasive surgeries shot by a 4 x 5 inch large-format camera, which accounts for the richness of the details in each photograph. Aquilera-Hellweg writes in his book about his experiences when taking the photographs,

*I realized I was in the presence of the most intimate, most vulnerable, most inviolate thing I had ever seen. The spinal cord had never seen light, wasn't meant to see light, and at this moment was bathed in light. My first impulse, I must confess, was to spit. To defile it in some way. Bring it down to my level. I didn't of course, but I felt I was in the presence of something so precious, so amazing, so powerful, so pure. I couldn't bear the intensity: "What is it?" I asked. "What is it made of?" "It is like a sausage", the surgeon said, "with toothpaste inside."*<sup>65</sup>

Aquilera-Hellweg writes that he wanted to defile the pure. For him, the disturbing part was the spinal cord outside of its normal context and its symbolic order.

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<sup>64</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 15.

<sup>65</sup> Aquilera-Hellweg M, *The Sacred Heart. An Atlas of the body seen through invasive surgery*. Bulfinch Press, Hong Kong, 1997, p. 40.

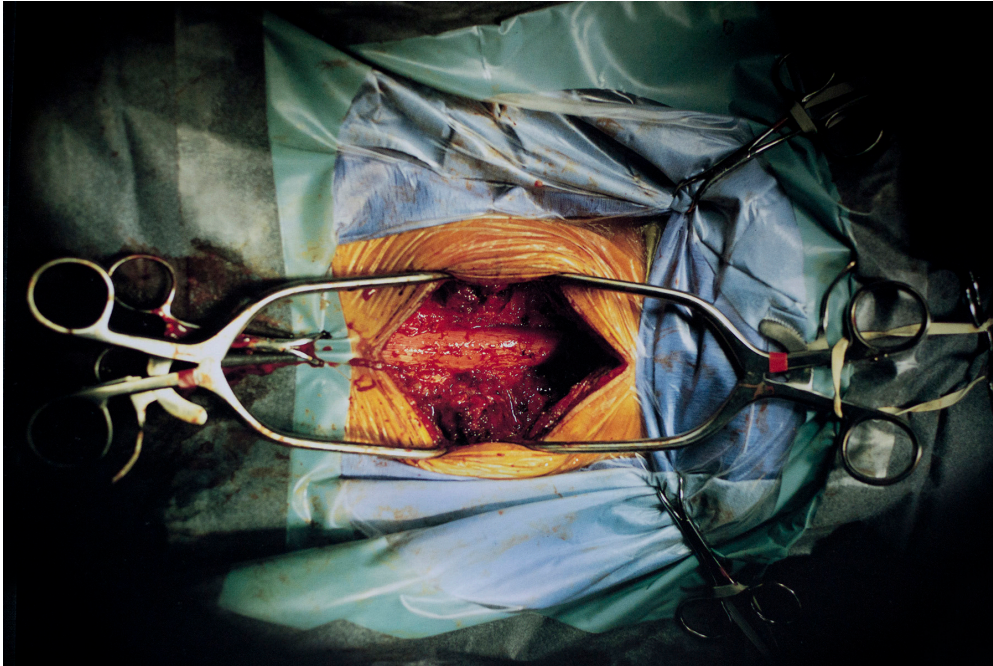


Image 3. Max Aquilera-Hellweg: Spinal cord surgery, 1997.

Aquilera-Hellweg was disturbed but fascinated by the things he saw. After eight years of working with the project, Aquilera-Hellweg enrolled to medical school to become a doctor. Why, then, did he want to share the project with other people? For he had realized early on that he could not show his photographs to just anyone. A woman had broken into tears and a photo editor had gone white. Richard Selzer writes in the prologue of Hellweg's book: 'It is not the beautiful or the sublime that is celebrated here; it is the forbidden, the truth incarnate before which even a physician's heart may quail.'<sup>66</sup>

Aquilera-Hellweg stresses that he wanted to continue his project for those people who could not bear to look at them: 'I hoped to provide a visual text by which one might become less afraid of the body, medicine, and, ultimately, less afraid of death'.<sup>67</sup> In the epilogue of the Aquilera-Hellweg's book, A.D. Coleman notes that confronting the images was for him 'a form of existential free fall'<sup>68</sup>, an experience that also Kristeva notes,

*My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – cadere, cadaver.*<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>69</sup> Kristeva, Powers of Horror, p. 3.

In such existential experiences Korsmeyer sees the very potentiality of the *aesthetic disgust*: 'It teases consciousness and the limits of tolerance, and it acquaintances us with the common determinant of organic life and eventual loss of identity.'<sup>70</sup> For her, herein lies the potential of disgust to be transformed into pleasure as it loses its aversive features. According to Korsmeyer, the possible residue, remaining from the once disgusting features deepens the experience of the encounter.<sup>71</sup>

Alan Radley, professor of social psychology, argues that the reason we turn our gaze away is that the suffering we see and imagine is actually our own.<sup>72</sup> In a similar manner, the researcher Mary O'Neill claims that what makes photographs of dead people disturbing is not the images themselves or the actual dead in them, but the emotions and feelings evoked by the images as regards the coming death of ourselves and our loved ones.<sup>73</sup> Both Radley and O'Neill rely heavily on the viewers' ability to *feel* the pain of others. O'Neill backs her claims with psychological and neuro-scientific research: seeing a tarantula move on a person's chest activates the same brain circuit as actually being touched.<sup>74</sup> In other words, when we see someone being touched we might also feel similar kind of touch instantaneously without having to first think how it might feel.

When photographs of removed breast cancer tissue or open surgery wounds might throw people off balance, and question their body image, how do they cope with the fear? The cultural historian Sander L. Gilman argues in his book *Disease and Representation: images of illness from madness to AIDS* that the Western way to cope with the fear of a disease, of collapse and dissolution, is to project in onto the world, by locating and domesticating it. He writes that once we locate our fear we become whole again: '[t]hen it is not we who totter in the brink of collapse but rather the Other. And it is an Other who has already shown his or her vulnerability by having collapsed'.<sup>75</sup> The Other becomes the saviour, and the state of the person's uneasiness and disgust seems to be determined by how close to one the Other seems to be. How familiar does the skin look? How similar does the hand appear to one's own? There is a difference between a gallstone removed at the local hospital and an open surgery wound photographed on the other side of the world, in an exotic country. The man at the TR1 gallery came from Tampere, from the same city in which the gallstone and breast cancer were photographed. Whether he had had a

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<sup>70</sup> Korsmeyer, *Savoring disgust*, p. 130.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>72</sup> A Radley, 'Portrayals of Suffering: On Looking Away, Looking at, and the Comprehension of Illness Experience', *Body & Society* 8:1, 2002, p. 5.

<sup>73</sup> M O'Neill, 'Speaking to the dead: Images of the dead in contemporary art', *Health* 15(3), p. 299.

<sup>74</sup> C Keysers, B Wicker, V Gazzola, J L Anton, L Fogassi and V Gallese, 'A touching sight: SII/PV activation during the observation and experience of touch', *Neuron* 42(2), 2004, p. 335.

<sup>75</sup> S L Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness From Madness to AIDS*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1988, p. 73.

gallstone removed a year before, or if it was his own gallstone he was looking at, remains unknown.

When considering the man's reaction at the gallery, it is noteworthy that he was disgusted only after he knew what was in the photograph (a gallstone instead of a peanut.) This brings us to the question of the photograph's inherent qualities and to the question of representation. One solution is to differentiate between *a picture* and *an image* as W.J.T Mitchell does.<sup>76</sup> Mitchell is a scholar who is devoted to the critical theory in the arts. According to him, a picture is the physical and material thing on the gallery wall, whereas an image is the visual and mental formation of the thing in question. Accordingly, as he points out, we do not need to see a physical picture to be appalled by the image of it.<sup>77</sup> He uses as an example Chris Ofili's painting *The Holy Virgin Mary*, which is partly made out of elephant dung. People were offended by the painting on the basis of its description. Korsmeyer notes in a similar manner that people can be truly disgusted 'even when we know the intentional object of disgust is a fiction'.<sup>78</sup> Although we do not need a physical picture to be able to react to an image, a picture is often the precondition for the image, for the image to become abject. Next I will concentrate on how the photograph can be abject.

### *The photograph as abject*

This chapter examines the photograph's ability to induce abjection in practice. I claim that photographs are potent in becoming abject, but there are preconditions for this to happen. Firstly, *a system* or a category is needed for abject to exist in the first place. This system can be, for example, the bodily self, divided by skin to an outside and inside, or a categorization between health and illness or the division between nature and culture. However, borders are nearly always fluid, subject to various forces of entropy.

Secondly, *a feeling of proximity* is needed for disgust to make its appearance: '(t)he thing has been there.'<sup>79</sup> The photographs' indexicality is entwined with the knowledge of how photographs are made: rays of light reflected from the thing photographed reacting to a matter (film) and 'it is this knowledge that makes it an index – not, therefore, the immediate experience of it,' Francois Brunet argues.<sup>80</sup> He wants to underline that for a

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<sup>76</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell: *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*. London: The University of Chicago Press Ltd., 2005, p. 85.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>78</sup> Korsmeyer. *Savoring Disgust*, p. 56.

<sup>79</sup> R Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Hill & Wang, New York, 1981.

<sup>80</sup> F Brunet: "A better example is a photograph": On the Exemplary Value of Photographs in C. S. Peirce's Reflection on Signs in *The Meaning of Photography*, R Kelsey, B Stimson (eds) Yale University Press, New Haven/London, 2008, p. 39.

photograph to be able to represent its subject we need to know the way it has been made. The Finnish scholar Janne Seppänen, who has researched the ontology of photographs, has stated that a photograph does not just represent something that was outside of it but that this thing outside is also present in the photograph. This paradox makes the photographic representation blurry; the viewer does not really know which one he or she is experiencing, the thing photographed or its representation.<sup>81</sup> When researchers try to explain why photographs can evoke disgust or become abject, it often comes down to what is the photograph or what does it represent. It is often either the context of the photograph or its indexicality that gets highlighted, sometimes both. For example, Alan Radley highlights that photographs of sickness are disturbing because 'we are used to reading these as if they were direct quotes from reality'<sup>82</sup> Likewise the cultural theorist Suzannah Biernoff states in her article that 'photographs of suffering somehow contain or embody their subjects; and that they therefore carry a burden of care'.<sup>83</sup> This somehow remains unexplained.

Thirdly, *an unsafe context* prevents the viewer feeling at ease. A photograph of an adult pissing on a table is easier to look at in a picture book where the human is dressed like a dog than in a newspaper. Radley argues that a mundane context makes horror appear more effectively.<sup>84</sup> Biernoff writes about blurring the lines between art and medical images in her essay *Flesh Poems* that explores Henry Tonk's drawn portraits of the facial reconstructions of badly wounded soldiers. Biernoff argues that these pictures draw attention to the ambivalent nature of the representational practises themselves.<sup>85</sup> She points out that at the very moment when photographs of suffering or the diseased are shown beyond the medical context 'they begin to ask questions of us' and 'confronts us with the limits of spectatorship, curiosity, understanding and empathy'.<sup>86</sup> A photograph of an amputated leg is perhaps not so disturbing in a medical leaflet, or in a commercial for a Halloween store than on a gallery wall. However, whether an art gallery is an unsafe context depends on what kind of a system one thinks art gallery is.

Kristeva highlights the ambiguity of abjection in her book: '[abjection] does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger'.<sup>87</sup> Danger is very present in eating a puffer fish, which Korsmeyer uses as an example. Puffer fish is a Japanese delicacy that remains highly toxic if not prepared in the right way. In the correct preparation of the fish, some of the

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<sup>81</sup> J Seppänen: *Levoton valokuva*, Vastapaino, Tampere, 2014, p. 96.

<sup>82</sup> Radley, *Body & Society*, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> S Biernoff, 'Medical Archives and Digital Culture', *Photographies*, 5:2, 2012, p. 198.

<sup>84</sup> Radley, *Works of Illness*, pp. 159–172.

<sup>85</sup> S Biernoff, 'Flesh poems: Henry Tonks and the Art of Surgery', *Visual Culture in Britain* 11.1., 2010, p. 30.

<sup>86</sup> Biernoff. *Flesf poems*. *Visual Culture in Britain*, p. 30.

<sup>87</sup> J Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 9.

neurotoxins are deliberately left in, so that the eater's lips and tongue get numb, as a sweet reminder of the possible danger and death. This danger is said to make the eating of the puffer fish even more enjoyable. Perhaps a similar hint of reality (indexicality) is what makes horrible photographs such powerful images – and even enjoyable.

In conclusion, both, the photograph of a removed gallstone and the other of a surgical cut revealing the spinal cord have qualities to disturb, qualities to become abject mainly because of their feel of proximity. With these images, the viewer may encounter the limits of his or her being. Following Kristeva's writings, what gets contested is a clear-cut identity and the intact body image, as the border between outside and inside is crossed. This article aims at instigating a conversation concerning the photograph's abilities to disgust and evoke abjection. Although this article concentrated more on the disgust side of abjection, people are fascinated at the same time – they want to look, and they might even find beauty in their own mortal decay.



Image 4. Maija Tammi, *Diabetes related amputation*, 2011.

**Maija Tammi** (b. 1985) is an artist and photographer. Tammi's photographs and sculptures converse on topics around disgust and fascination, science and aesthetic. Tammi's works have been exhibited in Finland, France, Croatia, England, Japan and the United States. She received the *Fotofinlandia Award* in 2011. This year she won PDN's *The Curator* award with her series *Milky Way*. Tammi is currently working on her practice-based doctoral thesis at Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture in Helsinki, Finland.

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# Rephotographic Powers: Revisiting Rephotography at Photomedia 2014

GARY MCLEOD – TIM HOSSLER – MIKKO ITÄLAHTI – TYRONE MARTINSSON

## **Abstract**

Recent years have seen a growing rise in the practice of rephotography: the act of revisiting an historical image and photographing it again from the same vantage point. Although recognized as an accepted visual methodology, both within scientific and cultural studies, its recent popularity appears to rest upon a shallow aesthetic comparison of the past and present. As such recent rephotography is limited conceptually while relying heavily upon a viewer's unfamiliarity with the digital manipulation techniques to produce them, rephotography's usefulness as a visual methodology is perhaps in danger of being undermined. This article and its authors aim to drag rephotography away from the spectacle of its results and propose an emphasis on what is learnt through its practical application. Following a brief survey of rephotography's development as a practice, this article summarizes four individually authored rephotography-based papers presented at the Photomedia 2014 conference in Helsinki, each addressing the conference's theme of 'photographic powers'. While questions surrounding rephotography's ontology will likely persist (such questions are beyond the remit and scope of this article) the projects discussed here will situate contemporary approaches towards rephotography as a process-oriented mode of enquiry and collectively support the notion that rephotography has the potential to contribute to knowledge beyond an illustrative comparison of the past and present.



Image 1. "Then and Now" views of Lombard street as displayed in a hotel room in Tokyo in 2014. Photograph by Gary McLeod.

## Introduction

Checking into a recent hotel room in a northern district of Tokyo, one is confronted by two framed photographs on the wall of the room hung side by side: one is of Lombard Street in San Francisco photographed in 1922; the other is a “contemporary photograph” of the same street (Image 1). The 1922 image is a black and white image depicting the street under construction with two men standing in front of a car suggesting that they are discussing the road under construction. The contemporary image shows the street without cars in colour and in seemingly late daylight. Apart from the location, there is little to suggest any connection between the two images although a caption accompanying each image gives some historical facts that may be of interest. These two images juxtaposed in a hotel room for seemingly no apparent reason point to the attractive illustrative power of rephotography and its growing popularity.

According to Mark Klett, rephotography is the act of revisiting an historical image and photographing it again from the same vantage point.<sup>88</sup> While a recognized methodology (often described as

*Repeat Photography*) within Geology,<sup>89</sup> Ecology,<sup>90</sup> Landscape conservation policy<sup>91</sup> and Sociology,<sup>92</sup> an on going online survey of rephotography projects<sup>93</sup> suggests that rephotography continues to grow both within research projects and popular culture (particularly amongst amateur enthusiasts). As rephotography is ‘a great way of extending a conversation about place over time,’<sup>94</sup> it has also been known to yield information to computer graphic engineers<sup>95</sup> and designers,<sup>96</sup> thereby

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<sup>88</sup> M Klett, M Lundgren, P L Fradkin & R Solnit, *After the Ruins, 1906 and 2006: Rephotographing the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire*, University of California Press, Berkley and Los Angeles, and London, 2006, p. 4.

<sup>89</sup> B F Molnia, ‘Repeat Photography of Alaskan Glaciers and Landscapes from Ground-Based Photo Stations and Airborne Platforms’, in *Repeat Photography: Methods and Applications in the Natural Sciences*, R H Webb, D E Boyer, & R M Turner (eds), Island Press, Washington, 2010, pp. 59-76.

<sup>90</sup> S H Bullock & R M Turner, ‘Plant Population Fluxes in the Sonoran Desert Shown by Repeat Photography’ in *Repeat Photography: Methods and Applications in the Natural Sciences*, R H Webb, D E Boyer, & R M Turner (eds), Island Press, Washington, 2010, pp. 119-132.

<sup>91</sup> T Heikkilä, *Visuaalinen Maisemaseuranta / Visual Monitoring of Finnish Landscapes*, Taideteollinen korkeakoulu, University of Art and Design, Helsinki, 2007.

<sup>92</sup> J Rieger, ‘Rephotography for Documenting Social Change’ in *The SAGE Handbook of Visual Research Methods*, E Margolis & L Pauwels (eds.), SAGE publications, London & California, 2011, pp. 132-149.

<sup>93</sup> R Martínez & G McLeod, *RePhotography: a survey of projects rethinking photography*, 2014, viewed on 14 December 2014, <<http://rephotography.ning.com/>>

<sup>94</sup> Klett, Lundgren, Fradkin & Solnit, p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> S Bae, A Agarwala, & F Durand, ‘Computational Re-Photography’, in *ACM Transactions on Graphics*, 29(3), June, 2010, viewed on 25 May 2014, <<http://people.csail.mit.edu/soonmin/rephoto/rephoto.pdf>>

indicating growth across disciplines and fields. Yet there is a growing rise of a type of rephotography that places much emphasis on the resulting visual comparison between the past and the present. Although visually persuasive, this comparative form of rephotography, often described as ‘then and now,’ is conceptually minimal and limited in scope for visual studies. The effort spent through engaging with the original photograph, identifying the same location, and making aesthetic decisions in situ with regards to the vantage point and what to include and exclude, is lost on the viewer for whom the comparison represents a simple passing of time and its effects. Although such a comparison can provide haunting memories and trigger strong feelings of nostalgia, these are triggered from a safe distance (e.g. through a screen, in a book, on a wall in a gallery) and appear regularly (particularly online). Consequently, rephotography’s power to engage the public visually is diluted by its ubiquity.

This paper situates rephotography within practice-oriented research. Such research inquiries typically target the unknown with a particular method but without knowledge of eventual outcomes or how they will develop.<sup>97</sup> Rephotography projects are a good example of this because the process is allowed to guide discovery.<sup>98</sup> The emphasis of rephotography, as intended by Klett, is on the journey made and not the arrival. Yet describing a journey is not easy. For Bruno Latour, if a researcher studying scientists is to follow and contest the work of a scientist, they must go inside the laboratories in which they construct their facts, no matter how difficult the journey. Similarly, the rephotographer must also go inside the “laboratory” of the original photographer: they must revisit where and how their “facts” (the photographs) are constructed and trace the extraordinary means which made them possible. In doing so, they can confirm, contest or contribute to an ongoing accumulation of knowledge.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, there is a need for practitioners of rephotography to focus less on presenting and discussing the results of illustrative comparisons (e.g. memory and loss) and focus more on presenting and discussing the process of carrying out rephotography. As current discussions around non-representative theory<sup>100</sup> and so-called object-oriented ontology, practice theory<sup>101</sup> and modern

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<sup>96</sup> G Mura & G McLeod, ‘The User’s Point of View: Borrowing a rephotographic approach towards using user-generated images in experience driven design.’ in IASDR (International Association of Societies of Design Research) 5th International Congress: Consilience and Innovation in Design, Tokyo, Japan, 26-30 August 2013, Tokyo.

<sup>97</sup> M Mäkelä and T O’Riley, *The Art of Research: Process, Results and Contribution*, Aalto University, Helsinki, 2012, p. 11.

<sup>98</sup> M Klett, B Wolfe & R Solnit, *Yosemite in Time: Ice Ages, Tree Clocks, Ghost Rivers*, Trinity University Press, San Antonio, Texas, 2008, p. xii.

<sup>99</sup> B Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society*, Harvard University Press, USA, 1987, p. 220.

<sup>100</sup> D Cosgrove, *Geography and vision: Seeing, imagining and representing the world*, I.B. Tauris, New York, 2008.

<sup>101</sup> P Järvensivu, ‘Tools for Fixing Human–Nature Relations’, in *Mustarinda 2012: Art and Ecological Transition*, 2012, pp.11–15.

physics<sup>102</sup> all suggest, it is impossible for a researcher to remain an “outsider” and refrain from somehow affecting – or constructing – the object(s) of the study. Therefore, such power should also be used responsibly.

Amongst papers presented at the Photomedia conference in Helsinki in March 2014, a number of authors placed an emphasis on photographers revisiting history either through images, exploring memory, or objects. Although not all strictly definable as rephotography projects, it is interesting to note that in an era of image-saturation, photographers and researchers are looking to build upon the knowledge produced by photographers before them whether known or unknown. From the conference, this article brings together four projects that, through practice-oriented inquiries, discuss rephotography in relation to the conference theme of ‘photographic powers’. These projects are examples of rephotography’s growing use, but they are also examples of how discussions of rephotography can shift away from a comparison of its illustrative results (the combination of images past and present), and towards dialogues teased out *through* the rephotographic act. But before introducing these projects, it would be helpful to provide a small overview of the practice of rephotography, its historical precedents and its development as a sub-genre of photography.

### *The ‘re’ in ‘rephotography’*

Taken in its broadest sense, the first rephotograph could arguably be the one that followed the first photograph. As scientists developing a means to fix the image from the camera obscura, it would be logical to assume that the recognized early pioneers of Daguerre, Niépce and Talbot could have repeated particular views in order to assess and quantify failures or successes. Furthermore, with time likely required in between experiments, it seems fair to speculate that the repetition of views could also have impacted upon their experiments or later photographs.

The earliest acknowledged form of rephotography was in the scientific application of photogrammetry. Webb, Turner and Boyer note how Sebastian Finsterwalder, a Bavarian Mathematician, set up camera positions in view of glaciers and returned to such camera stations a year later in order to evidence the recession of glaciers in the Tyrolean Alps.<sup>103</sup> ‘Repeat photography’, as it is regarded within scientific circles, is an

<sup>102</sup> See, T Kallio-Tamminen, *Kvanttilainen todellisuus: fysiikka ja filosofia maailmankuvan muovaajina*, Gaudeamus, Helsinki, 2008. Or: M Pelttari, ‘Maailma on yksi’, (Interview with Arto Annala) in *Yliopisto*, 4/2014, 2014, pp 34–37.

<sup>103</sup> R H Webb, D E Boyer, & R M Turner, ‘Introduction: A Brief History of Repeat Photography’ in *Repeat Photography: Methods and Applications in the Natural Sciences*, R H Webb, D E Boyer, & R M Turner (eds), Island Press, Washington, 2010, pp. 3-11.

accepted method of gathering visual information, but one where the emphasis is on the future, enabling future researchers to find the same location and gather further accurate data.

The earliest example of rephotography within cultural and humanities contexts is the *Rephotographic Survey Project* conducted during the 1970s.<sup>104</sup> Through rephotographing pictures of the American West taken by William Henry Jackson, Timothy O'Sullivan, K.K. Hillers and others, the RSP not only pointed to a permanence within the geological landscape of the American west, but it also visually stated how urbanization was making a strong footing within those territories. Unlike repeat photography, the RSP was concerned with sharing a comparison of the past and present. Moreover, the RSP was a watershed giving photographers the validation and confidence to revisit and rephotograph other photographers' image.<sup>105</sup>

Since the RSP, there have been numerous rephotography projects. However, it is on the level of amateur photography that its popularity has gathered steam, of which two styles have emerged amongst the photo sharing website Flickr. The first style can be traced back to a series of "souvenir" photographs by Michael Hughes first created in the late 90s.<sup>106</sup> When visiting tourist locations and famous landmarks, Hughes would hold up a typical souvenir in front of the landmark and take a photograph of him holding it. In these photographs, Hughes aligns the souvenir perfectly with the landmark leading to the impression that one is replacing the other. When Jason E Powell, a contributor to Flickr saw these images, he began to post images in a similar style, which depicted the hand holding a historical photograph in front of its contemporary location. What followed was a Flickr group titled *Looking into the past* whereby many Flickr members would contribute their own versions based on this style.<sup>107</sup> The second style begins with a series of images by photographer Sergey Larenkov, whose rephotographs of the second-world-war were originally posted to the website "Retronauts" and then reported in Wired in 2010.<sup>108</sup> Larenkov's approach was to take a photograph from the same position and location depicted in images taken during the second-world-war, overlay them, and

<sup>104</sup> M Klett, E Manchester, & J Verburg, *Second View: the Rephotographic Survey Project*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1984.

<sup>105</sup> For example, in 1997 Douglas Levere began rephotographing Berenice Abbott's photographs of New York taken during the 1930s. Levere noted that in a culture so obsessed with originality, rephotographing the work of someone else was a risky prospect for business, although Levere overcame this doubt upon learning of the RSP. See: D Levere, B Yochelson, & P Goldberge, *New York Changing: Revisiting Berenice Abbott's New York*. Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2005.

<sup>106</sup> M Hughes, 'Souvenirs,' Hughes-Photography, 2014, viewed on 26 May 2014, <[http://www.hughes-photography.eu/?page\\_id=138](http://www.hughes-photography.eu/?page_id=138)>

<sup>107</sup> J Powell, 'Looking into the Past,' Flickr, 2009, viewed on 26 May 2014, <<https://www.flickr.com/groups/lookingintothepast/>>

<sup>108</sup> C Sorrel, 'Gallery of Rephotography Shows WWII in Today's Cities,' Wired.com Gadget Lab, 30 July, viewed on 25 May 2014, <<http://www.wired.com/gadgetlab/2010/07/gallery-of-rephotography-shows-wwii-in-todays-cities/>>



mask out certain areas of the images. As with Hughes' style, members of Flickr contributed images similar to the style of Larenkov, often with mixed levels of skill. The historian Jo Hedwig Teeuwisse and a handful of photographers (including Adam Surrey and Sergey Larenkov) have since created the project *Ghosts of History* where works can be viewed and purchased from their website.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, the creation of mobile device applications such as *Timera*<sup>110</sup> and *Street Museum*,<sup>111</sup> have also perpetuated this style.

If the styles adopted from Hughes and Larenkov's work gained the attention of visually literate enthusiasts and put rephotography firmly into the public imagination, two other projects: *Young Me, Now Me* by Ze Frank<sup>112</sup> and *Dear Photograph* by Taylor Jones,<sup>113</sup> benefitted from the same public's attention. Both projects asked participants to find an old photograph from their family history and photograph a contemporary version of it. The *Young Me, Now Me* project employed a 'then and now' approach submitting the images side by side; the *Dear Photograph* project employed a variation of Hughes' approach using a hand to hold the old photograph and obscure the contemporary scene with the past. Such examples suggest that rephotography is a hauntography, a social practice for remembering and thus will always propagate a shared visual aesthetic.<sup>114</sup>

Away from these popular styles, rephotography is being critically explored as a visual methodology. In returning to rephotography with the *Third View, Second Sights* project in 2004, Mark Klett and a new team rephotographed their rephotographs from the RSP. While doing so, they gathered not only photographs, but also other visual data (interview, videos, sound recordings) of their experiences. Through subsequent projects, Klett and frequent collaborator Byron Wolfe have been exploring the boundaries of rephotography, often producing playful images that suggest time is non-linear. For Klett, such experiences have led him to conclude that photography is a way of having a conversation about a place over time.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, when Byron Wolfe attempted to rephotograph images of Panama taken by Edward Muybridge, he found the same images repeated in multiple albums, but with differences (e.g. mountains had been

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<sup>109</sup> Ghosts of History, 2014, viewed on 26 May 2014, <<http://www.ghostsofhistory.co.uk>>

<sup>110</sup> Timera, 2014, viewed on 26 May 2014, <<http://www.timera.com>>

<sup>111</sup> Museum of London, Street Museum, 2014, viewed on 26 May 2014 <<http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/Resources/app/you-are-here-app/home.html>>

<sup>112</sup> Z E Frank, *Young Me, Now Me*, 2009, viewed on 26 May 2014, <<http://www.zefrank.com/youngmenowme/>>

<sup>113</sup> T Jones, *Dear Photograph*, 2010, viewed on 26 May 2014, <<http://dearphotograph.com>>

<sup>114</sup> J Kalin, 'Remembering with Rephotography: A Social Practice for the Inventions of Memories,' in *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 20, 2013, pp. 168-179.

<sup>115</sup> Klett, Lundgren, Fradkin & Solnit, p. 5.

added to the scenery).<sup>116</sup> Such differences may not be instantly apparent, but to a rephotographer reliant upon topography for identifying vantage points, such manipulations make rephotography an almost impossible task. Rather than celebrate the beauty of a scene or its timelessness, Wolfe's enquiry suggests that rephotography can reveal new information through doubt, much like a tool of forensic science to confirm, validate or disprove.

The growing diversity of rephotography projects within academia in recent years suggests an interdisciplinary tool that will continue to evolve and adapt in new forms. However, the plethora of 'then and now' images could detract from the audience's engagement with such projects and thus its effectiveness. Currently, the Wikipedia entry for rephotography makes little differentiation between rephotography and repeat photography, suggesting that further clarification and definition is needed.<sup>117</sup> Therefore for the benefit of future researchers, it may be useful here to redraw Klett's earlier definition as follows: rephotography is the act of revisiting a past image and photographing it again from the same (or similar) vantage point through a variation and/or development of prior methods in order to explore and communicate unrealized information about a place, people, culture, an object or time. Furthermore, rephotography could also be a means of temporarily taking ownership of an inquiry, experiencing it through the medium of photography, and subsequently reframing it for an audience. *Unlike the more rigorous approach of repeat photography, rephotography is an exploratory, process-oriented form of visual communication.*

The remainder of this article presents rephotography-based projects as described by each of the four authors. Firstly, Tyrone Martinsson discusses rephotography in relation to dramatic change upon the landscape of Arctic Svalbaard. Through rephotographing this area of immense beauty, Martinsson addresses shifting cultural views of how the wilderness areas have been visualized over time. Secondly, Gary McLeod reconsiders images and associated catalogued data in museums. Through periodically rephotographing pictures of Japan taken during the voyage of HMS *Challenger* (1872-1876), McLeod proposes that errors in photographic catalogues can be rectified and generalized information can be made more specific. Thirdly, Mikko Itälahti discusses rephotography in the study of human-nature relationships. Based on rephotography of a Finnish Railways' Public Relations photograph from 1916, Itälahti points us towards inquiring linkages between changing visual cultures and materialities of landscape. Lastly, Tim Hossler discusses the project *Average Places* created in collaboration with photographer Silvia Ros. Working to reunite memorable events and the places where they occurred, the project employs the souvenir genre of postcards as a means of visual and experiential

<sup>116</sup> B Wolfe, 'Eadweard Muybridge (aka Eduardo Santiago Muybridge) in Latin America', byronwolfe.com, 2010, viewed on 25 May 2014, <<http://www.byronwolfe.com/muybridge/>>

<sup>117</sup> Wikipedia, Rephotography, 2014, viewed on December 14 2014, <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rephotography>>

engagement with history and place. As practitioners, each of the authors approach their projects from different directions, but each uses rephotography as a means to explore their subject. In doing so, they move beyond simple aesthetic comparisons of ‘then and now’.

*“Magdalenefjorden, Svalbard” – Tyrone Martinsson*

In July summer 2012, fieldwork was carried out in Northwest Spitsbergen National Park based upon historical glacier images from Arctic Svalbard that attempted to create a visual narrative of relations to that land from its discovery in 1596 to the present day. One of the main areas chosen for the work was Magdalenefjorden, not only one of Svalbard’s most well known northern fjords, but also certainly one of the most visited throughout history.

In 1807 Captain Broke of HMS *Shannon* made the first detailed mapping of the fjord that described glaciers and the surrounding mountains. David Buchan’s expedition in 1818 revised Broke’s map while doing additional charting in the area around the fjord where expedition member William Beechey made a series of drawings; this being the first artistic documentation of the landscape around the fjord, describing the glaciers and the fjord’s character. The detailed, precise writing style was also repeated (Image 2).<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> It is interesting to note the difference in how the landscape is documented by Beechey and subsequent artists working in the area (e.g. A.E.F. Mayer, painter on the La Recherche Expedition in 1839). Beechey came to Magdalenefjorden twenty years before photography, and he seems to have tried to achieve as closely a visual description of the scenery as possible while, in contrast to both the predecessors and successors rendering the landscape of the area, avoiding dramatic aesthetic corrections of the depicted views. See, W Beechey, *A Voyage of Discovery towards the North Pole, Performed in His Majesty’s Ships Dorothea and Trent, Under the Command of Captain David Buchan, 1818*, London, 1843.



Image 2. History of Buchanbreen, Magdalenefjorden. The panorama on the top by William Beechey, 1818. Images in the 2nd row from the top (From left): A.E.F. Mayer, 1839; Gerard von Yhlen, 1861. Images in the 2nd row from the bottom (from left): Axel Enwall, 1872; Henri de Bourbon with Fleur de Lys, photographer unknown, 1891. Images in the bottom (from left): Tyrone Martinson, 2012; Tyrone Martinson, 2011.

In 1861 the Swedish artist Gerhard von Yhlen visited the fjord as a member of the Otto Torell scientific expedition to Spitsbergen accompanied by the young medical student Axel Goes' and a camera. Torell's expedition is an example of an era of transition where traditional visual techniques of drawing and painting crossover with the instrumental recording of cameras and glass plates. Gerhard von Yhlens' pictures from the expedition are characteristic of his time and transform the landscape into a drama, but

these are difficult to use for more accurate comparisons of the changing landscape because of the dramatic effects of the artist's interpretation of the views. Unfortunately, Axel Goes' original negatives and copies of his photographs are missing. What does exist is a foldout lithographic panorama<sup>119</sup> whereby the photographer's camera position is easier to find in the field, and the image's accuracy provides a good reference point for how the landscape looked 150 years ago (Image 3).

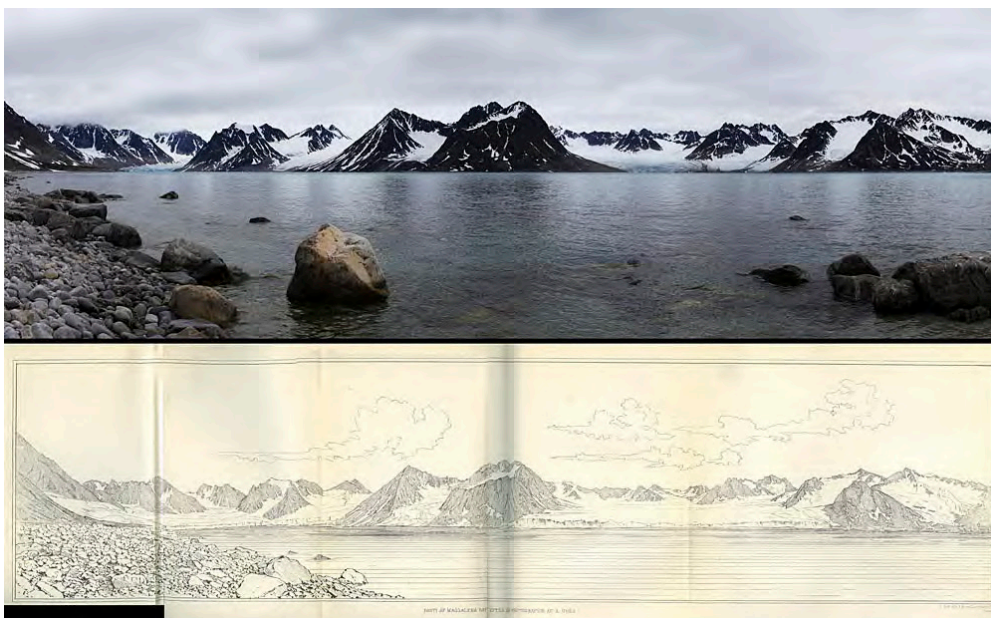


Image 3. Top: panorama view of the south coast of Magdalenefjorden from north coast camera position N 79° 34'59" E10° 56'54". Bottom: 1861 panorama made after photographs by Axel Goes.

The next Swedish photographer to visit the area was the medical doctor Axel Enwall, part of Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld's wintering expedition from 1872 to 1873.<sup>120</sup> Enwall photographed four of the glaciers in Magdalenefjorden. He visited Gravneset and photographed *Waggonwaybreen*, *Buchanbreen*, *Gullybreen* and the "hanging glacier". The latter was considered the most famous glacier in the area with Beechey describing it as the most spectacular in the fjord while entering it also as a landmark for safe navigation and anchorage into Trinityhamna. In postcards from 1905 to 1938, one can see the glacier, and then remaining parts, slowly disappear sometime towards the end of the 1950s and early 1960s. Today there is nothing that indicates where the glacier once lay (Image 4).

<sup>119</sup> This lithographic panorama was stated in the print to be made after his photographs and published in the 1865 book about the expedition. See, K Chydenius, *Svenska Expeditionen till Spetsbergen år 1861 under ledning av Otto Torell*, Stockholm, 1865.

<sup>120</sup> See, F R Kjellman, *Svenska Polar-Expeditionen år 1872-1873 under ledning av A. E. Nordenskiöld*, Stockholm, 1875.



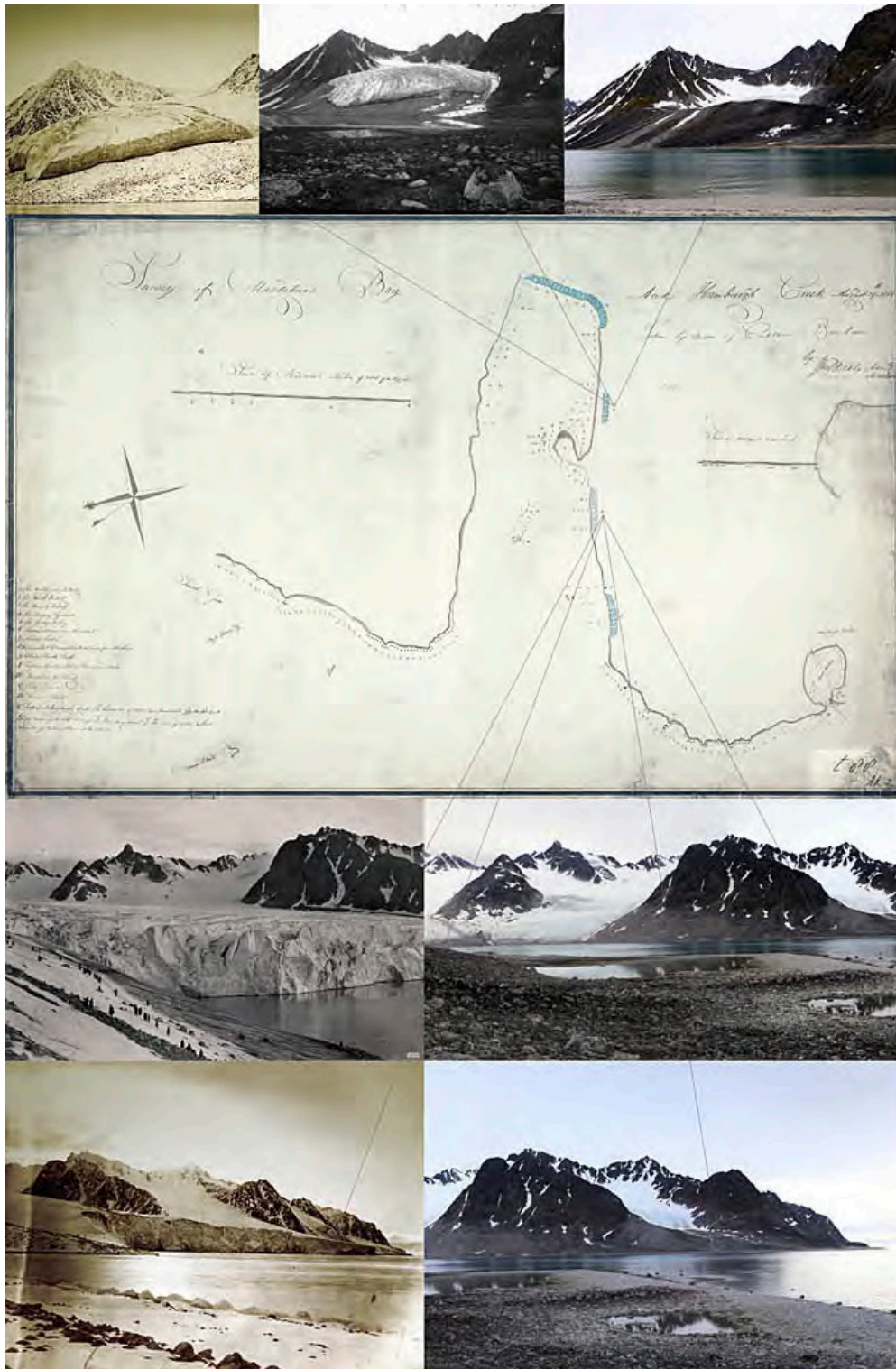


Image 4. Magdalenefjorden, map by David Buchan, 1818. On the top, images of "the Hanging Glacier" (from left): Axel Enwall, 1872; Nils Strindberg, 1896; Tyrone Martinson, 2012. Images in the 2nd row from bottom (from left): Carl Müller & Sohn, ca. 1937; Tyrone Martinsson, 2012. Images in the bottom (from left): Axel Enwall, 1872; Tyrone Martinsson, 2012.



Image 5. View east towards Waggonwaybreen across Trinityhamna. Camera position: N 79° 33'32" E 11° 1' 16". The glacier to the left is Miethebreen and the one to the right is Brokebreen. Clearly visible trimlines show previous position of glaciers. From top to bottom: Axel Goes, 1861; Axel Enwall, 1872; Henri de Bourbon with Fleur de Lys, photographer unknown, 1891; Erling J. Nødtvedt, 1960; Tyrone Martinsson, 2012.



Also visible on Goes' panorama is the powerful front of *Gullybreen*. Since Enwall photographed its spread along the south side of the fjord's hillsides, *Gullybreen* has been a popular tourist destination with a now well-trodden path where one can get close to the glacier. However, this glacier retreats fast. The map from 1818 shows a large glacier front where current maps show a new bay where the glacier once was. In Enwall's images the entire south side of the fjord west of Gravneset appears to be an ice-covered coast. The number of glaciers from *Waggonwaybreen* and out across the south coast can be seen partly in Goes panorama. Still in the 1960s, the bottom glacier is relatively large but has since lost touch with *Brokebreen* and *Miethebreen* and thus much of its volume. Today, the trim lines (the scar in the hillsides left behind by the glacier when it retreats) are very clear. *Waggonwaybreen* is however disappearing from view from Gravneset. In the hundred years since 1872, the glacier lost its front out in the fjord, and in forty years since then, the view is no longer comparable when you stand in the position where Enwall and other photographers took their images (Image 5).

Unfortunately, only one photograph of *Waggonwaybreen* from Enwall still exists: where the expedition ship lies anchored in *Trinityhamna* between the glacier and Gravneset. The glacier went far out into the fjord and joined together with *Miethebreen* and *Brokebreen*; a large ice wall in the bottom of the fjord that must have been a quite spectacular experience because one could stay quite close in front of it (Image 6).



Image 6. View across Trinityhamna towards Miethebreen. Camera position: N 79° 33'32" E 11° 1' 16". Image on the top: Nordsyssel, Erling J. Nødtvedt, 1960. Image below: Tyrone Martinsson, MS Nordstjernens last visit to Magdalenefjorden on her final summer in Svalbard in 2012.

Great changes in glacier distribution initiated the work of trying to create an overall narrative of the northwest corner of Svalbard: a story based on visual documents and descriptions of the area from the Dutch discoverers onwards. Photography is a direct method of communicating changing patterns in nature and our surrounding communities. The field-based methodology of rephotography applied in this work supports the understanding of changes over time and offers continuous monitoring of chosen sites. In terms of variables, such as global warming, weather and climate effects, photography can work as a tool for comparative studies where photographs show change over time. Moreover it can present clear evidence of change when combined with more hard data from natural science, which can be used to address policy makers and the public. This has previously been used in communicating environmental issues and arguing for protection and regulating acts targeting human devastating behaviour in our relation to nature. Photography was born in the bloom of modernity and expansive industrialism and functions as a witness to the progress of mankind in the Anthropocene. Photography is always in dialogue with history and memory. Rephotography enhances and expands this dialogue and puts photography's capacity to bear witness into practice. The practice of rephotography thus enables (often) sleeping archives to come to life in a process where visual data merge through the act of travel, locating previous photographers' vantage points and comparing their viewpoints with the present on location in geographical space, and communicates the result in a type of visual comparative analysis. Rephotographing such historical visual materials can draw out a line of development in each site, revealing the evolution of the differences and indicating a future to come: Spitsbergen – still with pointed hills but without the previous beauty of glacier fronts in the sea between the hilltops of mountainous coastlines. Hence, rephotography becomes a practice of looking back towards the future.

*“Tippex-ing History” – Gary McLeod*

In the Murray Library of the Natural History Museum, a collection of photographs are held that were taken during the voyage of HMS *Challenger*, a British research ship that voyaged around the world between 1872 and 1876. Although there have been studies which have focused on this little known visual archive,<sup>121</sup> attention is mostly paid toward the voyage's contributions to the fields of oceanography and marine biology. From the moment the photographs were captured, accuracy regarding

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<sup>121</sup> See, R Codling, 'HMS Challenger in the Antarctic: pictures and photographs from 1874', in *Landscape Research*, Vol. 22(2), 1997, pp.191-208; or E Brunton, *The Challenger Expedition 1872-1876, A Visual Index*, Second Edition, Natural History Museum, London, 2004; or G McLeod, *Photographic Collection of Gary McLeod: a photography project of English teachers in Japan*, call number: MSS MCL, Anthropology Library, Natural History Museum, London, 2009.

descriptions of the photographs' content was vital. However, having three photographers all told, the photographers' logbook listing the titles of the photographs eventually became a confusing handwritten document with erasures and corrections. Furthermore, upon completion of the voyage, the chief scientist Charles Wyville Thomson endured a saga regarding preparing the photographs for printing in the scientific report.<sup>122</sup> As such, the original glass plates were labeled with the wrong information. To complicate matters further, some of the original glass plates were also damaged as a result of the museum's storage facilities becoming flooded in 1966.<sup>123</sup> But in view of all this, Eileen Brunton, a researcher at the Natural History Museum, attempted to catalogue the *Challenger* images in 1994, and again in 2004 following the discovery of more photograph albums, which included corrections and attempts to correlate 'new' photographs with those that had been lost. To aid future study, Brunton included additional images found in former crewmembers' personal photograph albums and listed them as "unofficial".<sup>124</sup>

In 2002, the Natural History Museum completed steps to digitize part of their collection with the formation of a picture library.<sup>125</sup> The photographs from HMS *Challenger* were digitized as part of the second edition of Brunton's Visual Index and made available online to view or purchase. Information accompanying the images was limited to a caption matching that in the visual index in addition to a short description. In 2006, I came across the *Challenger*'s images while searching for old maps of Japan. Immediately, the images caught my attention, prompting further inquiry and research into their use, as well as the contemporary equivalent of the views. Aided by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and encouraged by the Natural History Museum, six months were spent researching, identifying and revisiting the locations. Through rephotographing them, I was not only privy to extraordinary change within the Japanese landscape, but also to what remained the same. Over the course of eight years, the locations have been revisited three or four times, each revisit enabling further knowledge to be uncovered about each site. As a consequence of this ongoing periodic rephotography, information within Brunton's visual index can be confirmed, but it is also apparent that there are inaccuracies and that these can be amended.

The first example of such inaccuracies came to light while attempting to rephotograph an image that was originally listed as missing but catalogued in the original logbook as "waterfall tea house" (Image 7). Brunton had identified the image from other photograph albums belonging to relatives of the ship's crew. However, these albums presented different titles: one was "kinkakuyi" (palace of gold); another was "Japanese teahouse". Upon

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<sup>122</sup> Brunton, p. 17.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>125</sup> The Natural History Museum, Annual Report 2002|03, London, viewed on 25 May 2014, p. 25, <<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/resources-rx/files/annual-review-2002-2003-102213.pdf>>

showing the image to people in Japan, it was instantly recognizable as *Kinkakuji* or “The Golden Pavilion”. In visiting the contemporary site (now a popular tourist destination) and obtaining permission to photograph, it became clear that there was no waterfall within the premises, nor was it a teahouse. Although the site was that in the image added by Brunton, it did not match that of the caption logged by the original photographer suggesting the need for further enquiry.



Image 7. Originally described as "waterfall tea house" in the official logbook, rephotography showed that the image included in the catalogue did not match the caption. Copyright: The Natural History Museum, 2014, used with permission.



Image 8. An "unofficial" image from the voyage showing a teahouse near a waterfall that was included elsewhere in the catalogue. Copyright: The Natural History Museum, 2014, used with permission.

Among the unofficial images was a photograph of Japanese standing under a roof (Figure 8). Upon closer inspection of this image, there appeared to be a close-up view of a waterfall to the left of the frame that was similar to that in another image. Furthermore, the roof in the image matched the structure seen in the bottom right of the waterfall image. From this evidence, it was therefore safe to conclude that the caption describing the missing image was in fact describing not *Kinkakuji* but another image amongst the unofficial images.

Other instances within the archive proved more puzzling. For example, Brunton had an image of temple placed under the caption of "Moon Temple, Kobe" in accordance with the original photographers' logbook (Image 9). Through attempting to revisit the contemporary site of the temple known locally as *Tenjōji*, it became clear that the original site had been razed to the ground by a fire approximately 30 years prior. What remained were the markings of building foundations that were signposted (with inset historical photographs) to indicate each building's use (Image 10). Unfortunately, a steep slope behind the current position suggests that the topography could not support the larger structure seen behind the building at the front of the image. This realization suggested that the image could have been mis-sourced from Brunton's "unofficial images" but it is currently impossible to prove or disprove either way. Although rephotography could not clarify the accuracy of the logbook information in this case, it could place the image under further scrutiny, perhaps for other researchers to investigate at a later point in time.





Image 9. Supposedly an image of “Moon Temple, Kobe”, the geography of the location suggested that it may not be “Moon Temple, Kobe”. Copyright: The Natural History Museum 2014, used with permission.



Image 10. Signposts at the remains of the “Moon Temple” showing historical images as reference. Photograph by Gary McLeod.



A third instance came to light when attempting to rephotograph one of Brunton's "unofficial images": an image of *Shittenjōji* temple in Osaka. Although Brunton had retrieved this and other images from the crews' personal photograph albums, the question of where they were acquired remained. It is known that the crewmembers of HMS *Challenger* were allowed to purchase prints of the official pictures for one shilling each.<sup>126</sup> They also obtained them from other sources, the most notable example being an image of Emperor Meiji that was a copy of an official photograph popular in Japan at the time. Therefore, it could be speculated that the unofficial images depicting Japan were similarly copies of existing prints or even actual prints purchased from one of the photograph studios in Yokohama. While searching other photographic archives in Japan, the exact same image of *Shittenjōji* was found in the collection of the Nagasaki University Library, which attributed the image to Roger Stillfried.<sup>127</sup> When visiting the contemporary site of *Shittenjōji* (still a practicing temple), the experience of rephotography felt different to that of the waterfall or the moon temple: as the image was taken by another photographer prior to *Challenger's* visit to Japan, it felt more appropriate to acquire an existing contemporary image of the temple than to rephotograph it; an experience akin to purchasing a postcard. Although crewmembers' accounts suggest that the temple in the photograph was *Shittenjōji*, attempting to rephotograph the contemporary site revealed a possible broader understanding of photography within the *Challenger* expedition: one that favored obtaining the image and its referent by any means more than the act of creating a visual document.

It should be noted that when Brunton catalogued the *Challenger* images, she hoped that later researchers with more information might be able to fill the gaps from collections as yet untraced, and perhaps reposition some images in the series where her subjective judgement might be incorrect.<sup>128</sup> Through examining it as part of a larger ongoing study of the cultural significance of *Challenger's* photographs, each rephotographic act revealed similarities and differences that were experienced as much as they were visually recorded, producing first-person feedback that made it possible to enter into a dialogue with related information in Brunton's index. The effect was to enter into a conversation about a place over time,<sup>129</sup> not as a passive viewer of a set of 'then and now' images, but as an active participant looking to learn. This echoes both a cognitive approach to learning where understanding requires a restructuring of what is already known in order to

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<sup>126</sup> Brunton, p.15.

<sup>127</sup> Although it should be noted that there is debate over whether Stillfried actually took the picture. See: Nagasaki University Library, 'The five-story pagoda and Kondo, Shitennoji Temple,' Metadata database of Japanese old Photographs in Bunkamatsu-Meiji Period, 2006, viewed on 26 May 2014, <<http://oldphoto.lb.nagasaki-u.ac.jp/unive/target.php?id=1241>>

<sup>128</sup> Brunton, p. 8.

<sup>129</sup> See, Klett, Lundgren, Fradkin & Solnit, p. 5.

connect with new knowledge<sup>130</sup> and Latour's ongoing accumulation of knowledge whereby historical, technological, and sociological circumstances allow researchers to build upon existing knowledge.<sup>131</sup> The result is a stable position from where the accuracy of Brunton's efforts are confirmed, or amended. Such findings discussed here not only have ramifications for the accuracy of visual information gathered during the Challenger expedition, but they also raise concerns about the accuracy of visual information within other archives. Through active engagement in situ, rephotography has a cultural application beyond a simple aesthetic comparison.

*"Rephotographing the Halikko Railway Bridge" – Mikko Itälahti*

Railways and photography have parallel and overlapping histories. It has been said that railways, through industrialization and democratization of travel,<sup>132</sup> greatly advocated the commonplace comprehension of land as predominantly visual image: the transformation from land to landscape. Viewing this transformation as gradual rather than sudden, I suggest that visual changes of railway-influenced cultural landscape may be read as aesthetical traces of certain socio-cultural developments, which took place during the industrial machine age in Finland (i.e. aesthetical footprints<sup>133</sup>). However, the most comprehensive and holistic understanding of landscape is necessarily sensual and aesthetic.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> See, J Biggs and C Tang, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student does* (Society for Research into Higher Education), Third Edition, Open University Press, 2007, p. 93.

<sup>131</sup> Latour, p. 220.

<sup>132</sup> See, W Schivelbusch, *Junamatkan historia* [The Railway Journey], Vastapaino, Tampere, 1977/1996.

<sup>133</sup> O Naukkarinen, 'Aesthetic Footprint', in *Aesthetic Pathways* 2, 2011, 1, p 89-111.

<sup>134</sup> See, T Eskola, *Sininen Altai - J.G. Granö Siperian valokuvaajana 1902–1916*. [Blue Altai – J.G. Granö as a photographer in Siberia] Musta Taide, Helsinki, 2002. Or see, T Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*, Open Humanities Press, 2013.

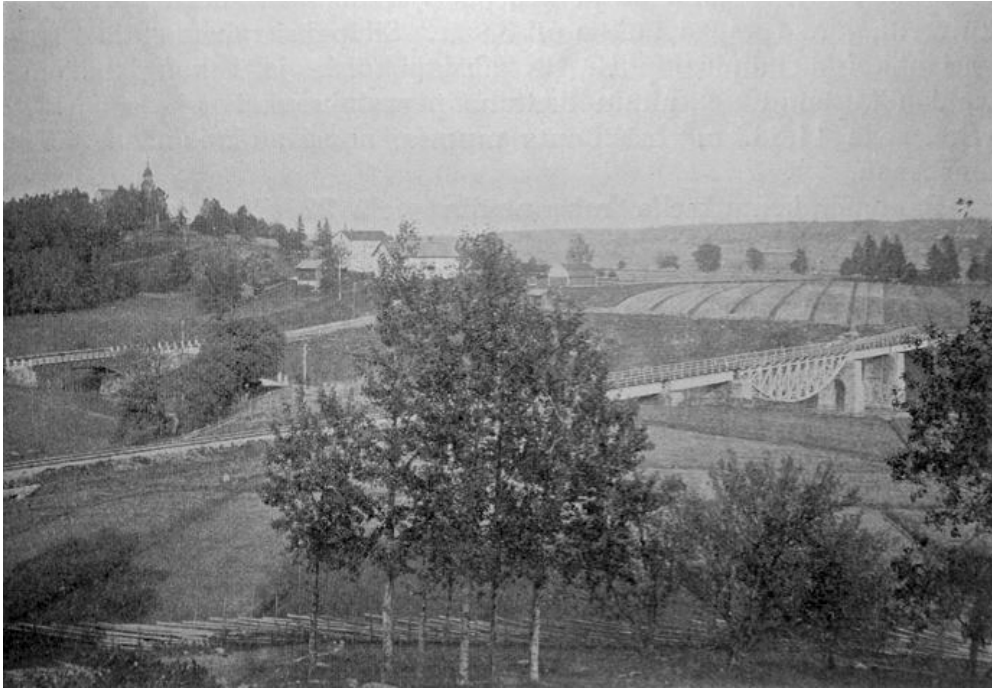


Image 11. The Halikko railway bridge in 1912.

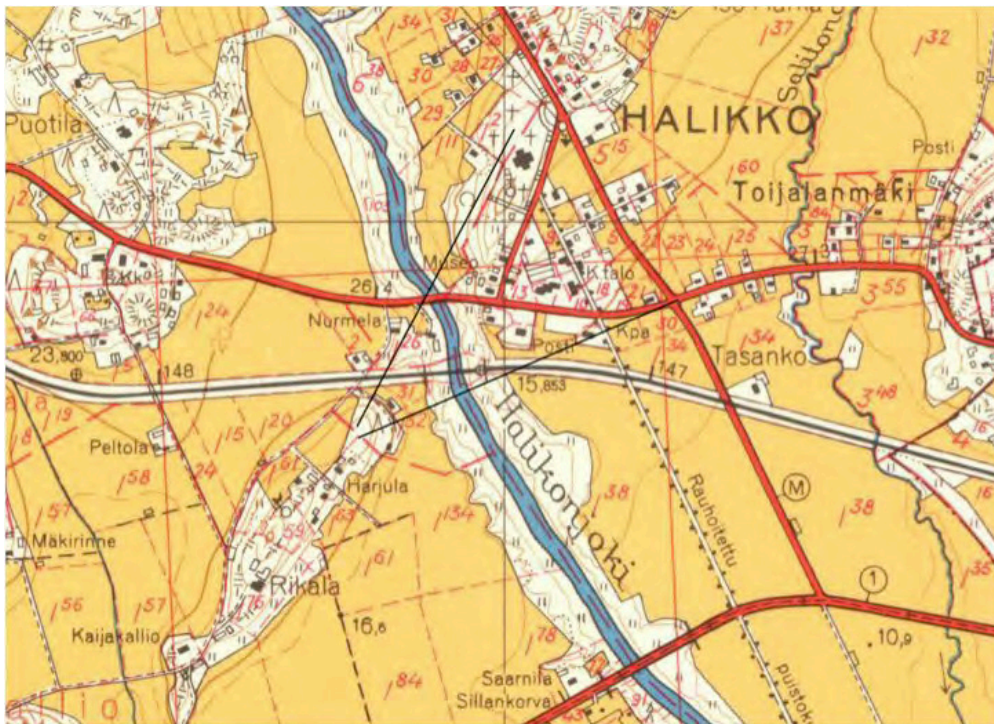


Image 12. Topographical map dated 1964 that still depicts the landscape relatively unchanged.

In March 2014, I rephotographed an image depicting the Halikko railway bridge in south-western Finland (Image 11). The image, made by a (so-far) unknown photographer was published in the 50-year (1862–1912) anniversary report of the Finnish State Railways in 1916. Rephotography

began by locating the viewpoint on a topographical map<sup>135</sup> (Image 12). The image was clearly made directly south of the bridge, on top of the steep western bank of the Halikonjoki river. While looking for the exact original viewpoint in the field, I came to a corner which pushed a bit further out over the riverbank and immediately appeared to be a suitable location for the heavy large format camera the original photographer probably used. It was immediately clear that the view of the bridge from the original tripod position is today completely obscured by vegetation overgrowth. However, the river and the railway bridge still peeked through the foliage here and there, indicating that the exact original viewpoint had been found and that the original frame could be replicated.

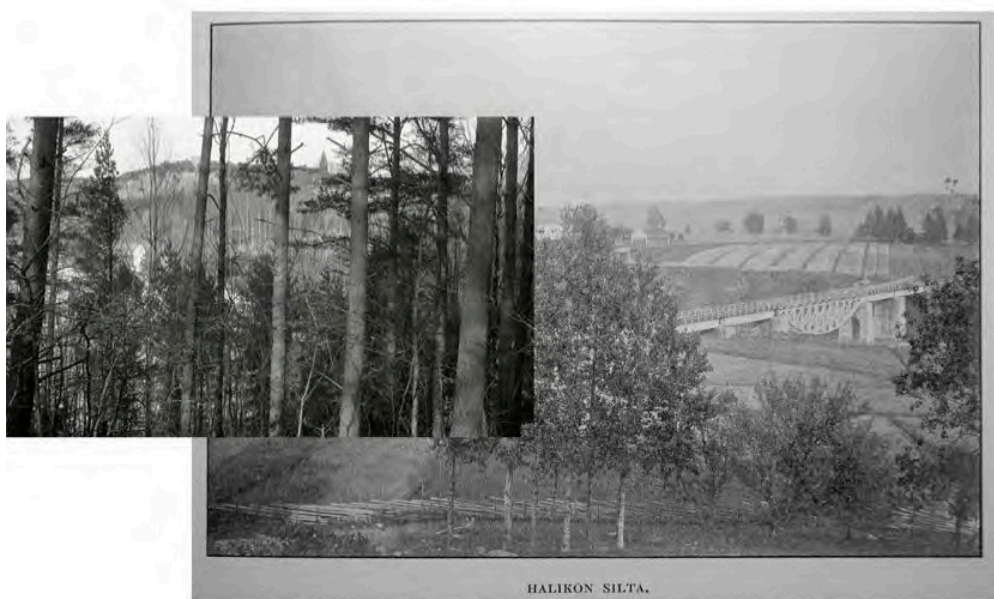


Image 13. A mashup of the original view and the contextualizing view.

Working with the aesthetics afforded by monochromatic film,<sup>136</sup> continuities could be maintained between the original and contemporary images in terms of both content and method. The result, however, does not speak for romantic timelessness. The first impression of landscape change here, as attested by Image 13, was (somewhat unexpectedly) a sense of increased wildness: the almost sublime might of the hemi-boreal grove vegetation, nurtured by the fertile clay soil of the riverbank slope. One can imagine that during the summer with leaves on the trees, the narrow belt of

<sup>135</sup> Although dated in 1964, the map still depicts a recognizable landscape. See, Finnish topographical map (Peruskartta 1:20000), sheet 202108, 1964, viewed on 25 May 2014, <vanhatpaineutuskartat.maanmittauslaitos.fi>

<sup>136</sup> Equipment used for this trial phase included Ilford FP4 Plus 135 monochromatic film in a 1950's Leica If camera, with matching Leitz Elmar 5cm /f 1:3.5 lens and Leitz #2 yellow filter. Although the aesthetics of a printed original photograph could be emulated in 35mm format quite well, the original photographs are most likely made in large format like 9x12 or 13x18 cm.



the dense riverbank forest (today a nature reserve) must appear totally opaque and impenetrable. However, a question of how to deal with the situation arises: the aspect of surprise inherent to the practice of rephotography, the fact that the camera position is predetermined enables *crazy* realism in the vein of Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*; set in dialogue with the original image, it is as if the agency of time itself speaks through the somewhat abstract but visually appealing outcome (Image 13). On the other hand, given the objectives of my research, I considered the visual information concerning the current status of the actual bridge structure so important that it justified adjusting the viewpoint accordingly. In Image 14 the viewpoint is shifted approximately seven metres downslope, inside the riverbank forest. If just one rephotograph had to suffice, this frame seemed a good compromise, as it succeeded in communicating both the transformed sense of place around the viewpoint, as well as visual information concerning the bridge. However, architectural comparison would still require a more unobstructed view to the bridge, which today is only possible from the bottom of the valley, near the water's edge, some 15-20 metres below the original viewpoint (Image 15).



Image 14. Another image of the bridge that focuses on the bridge itself rather than the relation between the bridge and the landscape

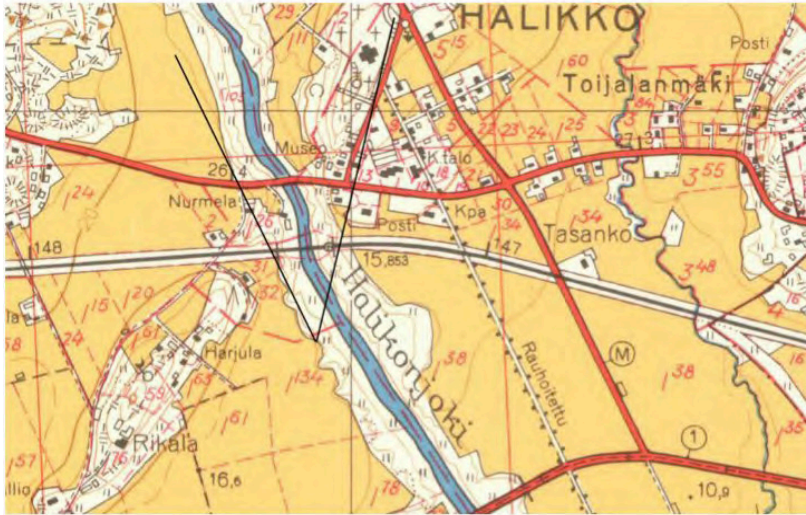


Image 15. Map depicting the original photographer's vantagepoint.



Image 16. A contemporary view of Image 14 obscured by vegetation.



Image 17. A clear view of the bridge today is only possible from the bottom of the valley.

Comparing images 11 and 15, surprisingly, both bridges in the original view appear to have been preserved, but neither retains their original use. The old railway bridge was retired as a part of modernization project of the line in 1980's-1990's, which aimed for speeding up the Helsinki-Turku connection. In this location a minor curve straightening was carried out for the sake of improved speed allowance, leading a new bridge to be built alongside and not in place of the old one. The old railway bridge (like the old road bridge in the background) was then preserved as a "museum bridge", although is now totally fenced off from the public. In the image, the old railway bridge is still recognizable by the original stone pillars.<sup>137</sup>

The brutal functionality of the new bridge architecture (Image 17) seems to speak for neglect of any aesthetical considerations. It is clearly not intended to be a regional landmark to be contemplated. We do not of course know whether the old bridge was intended to be one, either. But the relative rarity of such impressive structures at the time, dependent on the huge amount of skilful craftsmanship required, as well as perhaps purely sensory qualities (various materials and surfaces, rhythm of steel trusses), clearly assigned it somewhat special status in comparison with the new bridge. This is alleviated by the very existence and publication of the original image, as well as its preservation as a museum bridge after its active use. The minimal aesthetics of the new bridge, in comparison, seems to point towards the diminishing symbolic value of the railway; railway bridges are no longer seen by their designers (or the organization who commissioned the project) as grand symbols of "progress" towards a brighter future.

This discussion of rephotography supports a general hypothesis that the unique material culture once surrounding railways has radically eroded.<sup>138</sup> The new bridge, in its colossal brutalism however mixes in with the overgrown, perhaps even uncanny, atmosphere of the surrounding landscape. With the accompanying process of agricultural transformation (ending of free-grazing), the tracksides have emerged as micro-peripheries characterized by thickets and undergrowth, occasional decaying buildings and sometimes traces of outlaw activities. The new images speak for a general sense of cultural "absence". However, on the level of individual, singular experience, the current landscape's increased sense of almost haunting desertedness and wildness, is not without aesthetic interest. In recent discussions relating to environmental aesthetics, there is something of a broad consensus that a needed aesthetic attitude is one in which the (ecological) understanding and enjoyment (experience) feed on one

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<sup>137</sup> The arched steel span was destroyed in the 20th century wars, but later repaired with a newer style steel span.

<sup>138</sup> Although it would be unfair to draw any far-reaching conclusions on landscape attitudes of Finnish Railways' organizational culture based on just one example, this perhaps echoes what the researcher of economic culture, Paavo Järvensivu calls as a general trait typical to post-modern or neoliberal organizations: alienation from genuine tangible objects and material cultures. See, P Järvensivu, 'Tools for Fixing Human-Nature Relations', in Mustarinda 2012: Art and Ecological Transition, 2012, pp.11–15.



another. The aesthetic is thus also cognitive and ethical.<sup>139</sup> Yuriko Saito's "green aesthetics"<sup>140</sup> emphasizes a humble and modest attitude that seeks to value aesthetical "underdogs", at least to the side, if not in favor, of the pursuit for "exceptional beauty". Perhaps this "democratization of beauty" is especially efficiently fostered through photography.

For John Urry, photography is seen as a form of mobility.<sup>141</sup> Photography's perspective to the landscape is that of an existential outsider, which historically parallels the train window. But according to Antti Salminen, photographic dislocations also parallel the dislocations of experience caused by the oil age, which lead us to forget about distances, and how our experience is connected to technological systems or resources (e.g. materials, energy, etc.).<sup>142</sup> However, according to Salminen, this is where photography's critical power resides: it can draw attention to these sites of dislocation and literally illuminate their significance. Rephotography therefore has potential in revealing the material subconscious of an increasingly oil-blinded society.

### *"Average Places Postcards" – Tim Hossler*

The United States is a young country with a short history that commemorates anything believed to be of the slightest significance. Many small towns throughout America have *souvenirized* some aspect of their history to be 'their claim to fame'. Within the state of Kansas a tourist can go to Kinsley to visit Midway USA (the equal distance point between New York City and San Francisco), to Cawker City to visit the world's largest ball of twine, and to Meade to visit the Dalton Gang Hideout (19th century outlaws). For places of more cultural importance, the U.S. National Parks Service has designated over 2,300 historic sites across America as 'valuable', sites that range from Mount Rushmore to the wagon ruts of the Santa Fe Trail. A standard bronze plaque designates these places as

<sup>139</sup> See, for example, Y-F Tuan, *Topophilia*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1974; Y-F Tuan, *Passing strange and wonderful – aesthetics, nature and culture*. Kodansha America, New York, 1995; Y Sepänmaa, 'Ympäristöestetiikan uusi aalto'. In *Alligaattorin hymy – Ympäristöestetiikan uusi aalto*. Y Sepänmaa (ed.) Gummerus, Jyväskylä, 1994, pp. 1–12; Y Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, 2007; W Welsch, 'The return of beauty?' In *Filozofski vestnik* 2007, 2, pp. 15–25; or, O Naukkarinen, 'Aesthetic Footprint', in *Aesthetic Pathways* 2, 2011, 1, pp 89–111.

<sup>140</sup> Saito, pp. 77–96.

<sup>141</sup> J Urry, *Mobilities, Polity*, Cambridge, 2007

<sup>142</sup> The Finnish society and its way of life has been thoroughly industrialized only since 1950's–1960's, thanks largely to the extensive input of ancient energy, "black light" in the form of oil. For a thorough discussion on the various implications between oil and culture, for example its connections with post-modern western understanding of subject and individuality, see, A Salminen & T Vadén, *Energia ja kokemus [Energy and experience]*, Niin & Näin, Tampere, 2013.

noteworthy, setting the sites apart from the surrounding landscape and guiding the viewer to understand the importance of these places.

In his book, *On This Site: Landscape in Memoriam*, photographer Joel Sternfeld presented fifty sites of historic tragedies across America. Although some sites have bronze plaques and others do not, the photographs are all images of unremarkable and boring places with no visual sign of importance. The caption therefore distinguishes whether these images are historic places or simply beautifully photographed locations. In a later review of the book Jonathon Keats wrote,

*In most of the pictures, nothing unusual is happening. One shows a Los Angeles street. Another depicts an Ohio parking lot... The places look innocuous, almost anonymous, until you learn that the roadside is the spot where Rodney King was pulled over and beaten by police officers in 1991, the parking lot is the pavement where five Kent State students were slain by National Guardsmen in 1970... In other words, these pictures expose what can no longer be perceived. Their subject is what is missing.*<sup>143</sup>

The *Average Places* postcard series was inspired by a strong interest in popular culture history. Originating as a graduate research project at Cranbrook Academy of Art, *Average Places* has developed into an ongoing multi-city production with architectural photographer Silvia Ros. The objective of this work has been to use the souvenir genre of picture postcards to examine seemingly ordinary locations within cities where something historic has occurred. As a common object, the power and popularity of the postcard (and the publicity of the project) work to expose the hidden history of these cities and reveal to its citizens their own cultural heritage. A curated selection of significant sites within each city combine to create a unique storyline.

In 2013, the project set out to explore some of the forgotten historic events that have shaped Miami, Florida. The Miami series of postcards commemorates an average American metropolis with an event filled history: civil rights clashes, Cold War politics, sports, music and drug trade escapades; few of which are recognized in anyway. (Images 18-23) These postcards work to unearth historic instances of national and world notoriety that have transcended the location where the events occurred. Furthermore, they memorialize a specific place while retaining the place's average state, and the location is revealed only to the viewer who scrutinizes the cards through image, address and caption. Sites include: where Franklin D. Roosevelt was almost assassinated, where Christo and Jeanne-Claude surrounded islands in pink floating fabric, where Robert Frank

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<sup>143</sup> J Keats, 'Do Not Trust This Joel Sternfeld Photograph', Forbes Magazine Online, 2012, viewed on 14 December 2014 <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/jonathonkeats/2012/09/06/do-not-trust-this-joel-sternfeld-photograph/>>

photographed 'Lonely Elevator Girl' and where Miami Vice's Sonny Crockett lived on a boat with his pet alligator 'Elvis'. A city's iconic buildings and monuments typically become the subjects of postcards, but for these sites, it is their story that is memorable. These selected locations are places of events that have had varying degrees of influence on the city's culture, but nonetheless have become a part of its psyche. These sites were average places before the events and are average places now. The event briefly transformed the place for a moment in time; chance connecting the place with the historic event.



Image 18. Postcard number 001, Where Franklin D. Roosevelt was almost assassinated.



Image 19. Postcard number 002, Where Amelia Earhart started her ill-fated attempt to fly around the world.



Image 20. Postcard number 003, Where Christo and Jeanne-Claude surrounded islands in pink floating fabric.

Like Sternfeld's *On This Site*, the *Average Places* postcards use text (as captions) to explain the hidden history not seen in the photography. In both projects, the viewer is forced to trust that the information they have been given is correct. However, the *Average Places* postcards are different from Sternfeld's project in the delivery of the information: in Sternfeld's book (and in his exhibitions of the project) the photographs are presented in a traditional fine art manner, whereas *Average Places* presents the images in a deliberate and familiar way—the postcard. The photographer and collector Walker Evans lovingly described postcards as “folk documents”.<sup>144</sup> The *Average Places* postcards commemorate and help to reunite the seemingly common places with the story of their event. They *are* average: inexpensive and collectable souvenirs purchased to remember an experience or place.

In Jean-Luc Godard's 1963 film *Les Carabiniers*, two hapless soldiers fight for the promise of riches only to return home with a suitcase of postcards. Instead of fighting for real treasure the mercenaries collect paper ephemera to serve as avatars of the objects and places they covet. In her critique of the film, Susan Sontag wrote, “Godard's gag vividly parodies the equivocal magic of the photographic image”,<sup>145</sup> further using the film to support her concept that “to collect photographs is to collect the world”.<sup>146</sup> The photographs of revisited sites seen in *Average Places* create a physical connection to historic events: a more intimate understanding of history, showing that significance is all around, even in the ordinary. It does this by not seeking to visually compare the contemporary scene with an image from the past; rather the comparison is with the viewer's cultural memory. The postcards encourage the viewer to explore their memory about a place over time by giving a contemporary image to events that have lost their context or place in the retelling or memory of the event itself. Through the

<sup>144</sup> J. Rosenheim, Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard, Steidl, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2009, p. 109.

<sup>145</sup> S. Sontag, *On Photography*, Picador, New York, 2001, p. 3.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

interaction with these places as observed on the postcards, the viewer becomes responsible for qualifying the story and its memory, and in turn, an average place is elevated. In this way, the postcards become collectable souvenirs, albeit shared ones.



Image 21. Postcard number 004, Where Robert Frank photographed 'Lonely Elevator Girl'.

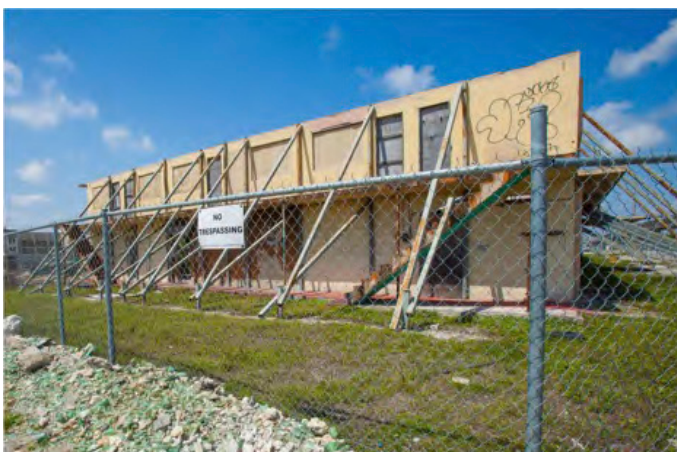


Image 22. Postcard number 005, Where Malcolm X, Cassius Clay and Martin Luther King Jr. stayed while visiting Miami.





Image 23. Postcard number 006, Where Barry Gibb was inspired (by the sound his car made crossing the bridge) to write 'Jive Talkin'.

### *Conclusion*

Rephotography is a growing approach to photography with a role to play in our understanding of images as visual information. Unlike its scientific equivalent 'repeat photography', which is a means of both visually recording changing data and preserving opportunities to gather equally accurate data in the future to support long-term environmental studies, rephotography is a means of exploring relationships with the past. However, this exploration is threatened by popular attempts to present historical scenes with their contemporary equivalents to form 'then and now' images that serve only to illustrate change from a safe distance. This paper concurs that rephotography is a powerful visual tool (particularly for ecological and human geographical interests), but central to its developments beyond an illustrative aesthetic style is a practice-oriented engagement with history.

Writing about the photographs of Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe in Yosemite National Park, Rebecca Solnit noted that the project enabled them to develop their photographic practice by "letting the process guide discovery."<sup>147</sup> They were both aware that they were participating in history as well as looking at it, and that it would lead them in unexpected directions. Rephotography through practice is a means of claiming temporary ownership of (and responsibility for) the subject matter and engaging others in that process. As evidenced by the examples discussed above, such an approach to rephotography enables contribution to accumulated knowledge within their respective areas of study: Martinsson's visits to Svalbaard are interwoven with the expeditions before him and contribute a narrative of its representation and condition; McLeod's revisiting of the Challenger images raises concerns about the accuracy of accumulated knowledge and suggests a need for others to engage with what is 'known' from archives; working with the aesthetical footprint, Itälähti is (bravely) engaging with the 'sense of place' that dominates the

<sup>147</sup> Klett, Wolfe & Solnit, p. xii.

rephotographic experience; and Hossler, like a knowledgeable tour-guide, shifts the responsibility of remembering onto others with seemingly-forgotten moments of their own history.

Each of the projects discussed here share an emphasis not on methodology *per se*, but on the process within which that methodology evolves over time and the ‘discovery’ of knowledge through dialogues with others: previous explorers (Martinsson), researchers and local inhabitants (McLeod), geographical obstacles (Itälahti), and memories (Hossler); dialogues which are all generated through reflection-in-practice. Contrary to digitally produced visual comparisons of the past and present that litter popular understandings of rephotographic practice; rephotography is not a quick illustrative form of engagement. Rather it is a visual means of taking responsibility, embarking upon and persevering with a visual journey that can make contributions to knowledge, yet does not require a clear map. What remains is for others (photographers in particular) to continue taking up that challenge.

**Tim Hossler**, *The University of Kansas*

As the former in-house art director for photographer Annie Leibovitz, Tim helped Ms. Leibovitz create her most memorable images, books and exhibitions of the late 90’s through the early 2000’s. Tim holds a degree in Architecture from Kansas State University, 1993, and a MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art, 2005. He has held the positions of Director of Design at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) and Art Director of The Wolfsonian-Florida International University in Miami Beach. He currently teaches photography theory and visual communications at the University of Kansas. His academic research focuses on working with photographers, artists and cultural institutions to produce experimental forms of visual narratives. Recently he worked with British fashion photographer Tim Walker and art director Ruth Ansel to create Walker’s book and exhibition *Story Teller*.

**Mikko Itälahti**, *Aalto University School of Art and Design*

Mikko is a human geographer, a photographer and a researcher of environmental aesthetics and photography. He received his M.Sc. in cultural geography from the University of Helsinki, 2012. Currently, he is a doctoral student of photography at the Aalto University School of Arts, Design & Architecture, Helsinki, Finland, where he is working on his doctoral research on Finnish Railways’ PR photography and the changing aesthetics of railway landscape from 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. His broader interests include photography as a method in the humanistic studies on



sensory environment, the cultural histories of mobilities and landscape, the boundary crossings between art and science, and cultural action discussing the potentials and prospects for more ecological futures.

**Gary McLeod**, *London College of Communication, University of the Arts London*

With a background in Fine Arts, Digital Arts and Digital Photography, Gary is a practicing visual artist working with photography as well as a practice-led researcher with a focus on 'rephotography' and 'post-photography' as approaches beneficial to visual research. Notable for his work with photographs from the Challenger expedition (1872-1876), he has delivered lectures and photographic workshops at venues and institutions in the UK, India, Finland, Portugal, Taiwan, Turkey, New Zealand, and Japan. Nearing completion of his PhD in History, Theory and Cultural Studies, from April 2015, he will be based at Tokyo University of the Arts, Japan where he will be undertaking a collaborative rephotography project.

**Tyrone Martinsson**, *University of Gothenburg*

Tyrone's research and current work is on the history of photography and its use today in relation to environmental and landscape photography. His particular interest is in how photographic images can be used in human/environment relationships – and how our view of nature and landscape changes over time. The point of departure for his research is the connection photographic history has to the development of modernity. During the last few years he has performed research in the Arctic using rephotographic methods for cross-disciplinary studies that address climate, environment and historical descriptions of the polar landscape.

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# The Photographic Book as Power-Play

JONATHAN DAY

## Abstract

This essay examines the influence of the democratisation of technology on the perceived and preferred locations of photography, proposing a new bifurcation that parallels and replaces the gallery/archive duality. This echoes – across 50 years – the motivations of High Modernist photographic book makers revealing thereby the enduringly central significance of the book in photography. This significance is examined through an analysis of Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1959) and its relationship to two contemporary books that respond to Frank with a 50 years-on pictorial exegesis.



Image 1. Jonathan Day, 2014, image in response to Robert Frank's "U.S. 285, New Mexico", 1955, *The Americans* #36, collection of Mark Kelman, New York, <http://tinyurl.com/kt67m>

## *Introduction*

There have until very recently been two dominant photographic 'destinations', two places prioritised as the 'homes' of photography. These sites offer discipline specific *gravitas* and are acknowledged aspirational *loci*. They are the gallery and the archive. This has always been a problem. Galleries, by their nature, tend to favour insiders, networkers, social(ite) artists. This is a near insurmountable difficulty for the many practitioners who are 'outsiders' - the individualists and the socially inept. The *mélange* of talent, ambition, fashion and connection that surround aspirant and emerging artists so often results in gallery sponsored talks characterised by complex, verbose and disorganised chatter accompanying works of limited interest - images of the most intense grayness. They have, though, been successfully 'spun' by the society of the establishment as valuable and innovative. The focus on the gallery, then, is potentially exclusive.

The other principal photographic 'destination' has until recently been the archive. This presents us with a different scenario. The archive, after all, has history and hindsight on its side. Even the most misanthropic of artists might be forgiven, in time, for their social *faux pas* (deliberate or otherwise) and integrated into the desperate bonhomie of the canon. This forgiveness is not necessarily, though, available to the living artist, whose reputation has not yet been established. The archive too, then, for the living photographer, has often been cocooned in a hermetically woven network of nepotism, repelling all those whose faces do not fit, whose waists do not bow. Galleries and archives exist in a plethora of environments, both inspiring and tawdry, but they come together, significantly, in the museum.



Image 2. Jonathan Day, 2014, image in response to Robert Frank's "Rooming House—Bunker Hill, Los Angeles", *The Americans* #20, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/265015>

Given these mechanisms of control, I have often wondered what place is there for the individualist, the *outré*, the outsider? Clearly the extensive contemporary discussion around online platforms has revolutionised our understanding of photographic destinations. In its great variety – between semi professional showcase platforms such as Flickr, through social media sharing ostensibly for fun, to personally tailored and curtailed sharing sites such as Snapchat, photography has been radicalised by these technological developments. One thing is sure: across all social media platforms, the internet has a propensity/predilection for anonymising and disguising authorship. By the third or fourth iteration of an image file, authorship is occluded. This is in itself hugely interesting, but for now let's restrict ourselves and assume that we still have an interest in the notion of acknowledged authorship, of images attached to a name, emerging out of the notion of a personality. If the gallery and archive are dangerously exclusive, while the internet is a mass of neo-anonymous output, structured and re-structured constantly by algorithmic operations, then where now does the power of the author/artist lie? It seems to me that such a place has existed since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and continues now equally as vital and important. It is not without problems of its own, certainly, but it offers the possibility of true independence, a position from which to comment, to be individual, to say what you really want to say. It is the photographic book.

As well as facilitating the explosion of the web, recent technologies have also remarkably democratised the means of production. Photographers can

now produce books with a greater ease than ever before and costs, though still considerable, are within their reach.



Image 3. Jonathan Day, 2014, image in response to Robert Frank's "Santa Fe–New Mexico", 1955, *The Americans* #42, collection of Barbara and Eugene Schwarz, <http://tinyurl.com/qhp4bb8>

In the last year or so two books have appeared that evidence this new access to print, while at the same time echoing photo-book motivations that have resonated down the years. One is self published: Mishka Henner's *Less Americans*. The other is published by the University of Chicago Press, my own *Postcards from the Road*. What links them and what is most interesting in our discussion of Photographic Power is their subject matter – they both respond particularly to Robert Frank's photographic book *The Americans*, published in 1959. Frank was intimately familiar with galleries and archives but in an action that he called "*mefiance*"<sup>148</sup> turned away from them, taking (along with many other Beat era artists) a socially radical position. Frank's book in many respects represents a critique of the gallery and exhibition.<sup>149</sup> His book has influenced many photographers<sup>150</sup>, and its creation and intention exactly mirror the motivations of Henner, myself and the current exciting slew of book creating photographers. By examining the creation of Frank's work in some detail we can shine a spotlight forward

<sup>148</sup> Maloney, T. *U. S. Camera Annual*, New York, U. S. Camera Publishing Corp., 1958.

<sup>149</sup> Day, T. *Robert Frank's The Americans: the Art of Documentary Photography*, Bristol/Chicago, Intellect/University of Chicago Press, 2011.

<sup>150</sup> Geffer, P. *After Frank*, New York, Aperture, 2009.

onto the putative and emerging dialectic at the heart of the current revival of the photographic book.

### *Robert Frank and the Americans*

In 1955, Swiss photographer and émigré Robert Frank embarked on a journey across America, capturing thousands of photographs of a rapidly changing society. The resulting photo-book, *The Americans*, represents a fascinating moment in both photography and America's emerging understanding of itself. The book has been widely commented upon and is lauded for its radical approach to the imaging of a civilisation and its synthesis of previously estranged modes of photographic practice – ‘reportage’, the ‘documentary’ and the ‘artistic’.<sup>151</sup> One area that has been largely overlooked, however, is Frank's erudition and its role in the creation of his photographs. A common fallacy found in assessments of his work is the idea that his images are ‘accidental’: Ulrich Keller, for example, called *The American's* an “impatient sequence of irreverent photographs” and “a catalogue of irritations”.<sup>152</sup> The extent to which Frank's images directly relate to pre-existing photographs denies this. His study is evident in the visual commentaries he creates, which demonstrate in particular his sophisticated interrogation of photographic hierarchies, most notably the relationship between the photographic ‘exhibit’ and the ‘advertisement’ as iterations – the gallery and that which is beyond it.

I've talked of ‘outsiders’ so it's important to note that Robert Frank in the years before *The Americans* was fully integrated in to the American photographic scene. It would be a great mistake for us to think otherwise. His position as a migrant, although hugely significant for his output, was not at all unusual in New York at that time. He worked for Alexei Brodovitch at *Bazaar*, had shown at well-known galleries and was featured in a variety of publications. His master work was itself funded by the Guggenheim Foundation and his receipt of this vaunted Scholarship placed him amongst America's most noted photographers.<sup>153</sup> Frank's commentary and challenge to the exhibit grew out of a deep familiarity with the exhibition of photographs. He was a close associate of Edward Steichen, then curator of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. *The Americans* was inspired in many ways by *The Family of Man* exhibition which Steichen curated at MoMA in 1955, and with which Frank helped. Frank, though, had

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<sup>151</sup> See, e.g., Greenough, S. *Looking In*, Washington, National Gallery of Art/Steidl, 2009, p. 205; Downes, B. et al, “An Off-beat View of the U.S.A.: Popular Photography's Editors Comment on a Controversial New Book”, *Popular Photography* 46, no 5, New York, Popular Photography, 1960, pp. 104–106; Day, T. *Robert Frank's The Americans: the Art of Documentary Photography*, Bristol/Chicago, Intellect/University of Chicago Press, 2011, pp. 33, 72–73.

<sup>152</sup> Keller, U. *The Highway as Habitat, A Roy Stryker Documentation, 1943–1955*, Santa Barbara, CA, University of California, 1986, p.23.

<sup>153</sup> Day, 2011, p. 34.

sickened of the photographic scene of which he was a part and wanted desperately to move on. He wrote,

*I sense that my ideas, my mind and my eye are not creating the picture but that the editors' minds and eyes will finally determine which of my pictures will be reproduced... I have a genuine distrust and mefiance toward all group activities. Mass production of uninspired photography without thought becomes anonymous merchandise. The air becomes infected with the smell of photography.*<sup>154</sup>

He was looking for more, for something uncertain, unquantified, unquantifiable perhaps - the thing of which Jack Kerouac said "Somewhere along the line I knew there'd be girls, visions, everything. Somewhere along the line the pearl would be handed to me."<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Frank quoted in Maloney, p. 115.

<sup>155</sup> Kerouac, J. *On the Road*, London, Penguin, 1972, p. 11.





Image 4 Jonathan Day, 2014, image in response to Robert Frank's "U.S. 30 between Ogallala and North Platte, Nebraska" 1956, *The Americans* #30, collection of Susan and Peter MacGill <http://tinyurl.com/nl85co9>

The change in Frank's practice was also influenced by the burgeoning art scene in New York and by the painters amongst whom he lived. Painter Alfred Leslie was his next-door neighbour and Willem de Kooning was just across the yard. Frank has spoken about watching de Kooning through his window late at night and being impressed by how hard he had to work to create his paintings.<sup>156</sup> According to Philip Brookman, de Kooning encouraged Frank, sharing the latter's belief that photography might be an art form equal to painting.<sup>157</sup> Frank was cross pollinating his own temperament with the world in which he found himself, approaching ideas and a vision that would later come to be associated with the Beat writers and artists. In the freedom and passion of those around him, and in his own

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<sup>156</sup> Johnson, W. (ed.). *The Pictures are a Necessity: Robert Frank in Rochester*, NY November 1988, New York, Rochester Film and Photo Consortium and International Museum of Photography, 1989, p. 35.

<sup>157</sup> Livingston, J. *The New York School Photographs 1936–1963*, New York, Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1992, p. 360.

deep seated inclinations, he found the impetus to move from the centre out towards the liminal, towards the vanguard.

Frank spent two years taking the pictures that would become *The Americans*. Once they were in the can, however, he seemed a little perplexed as to what to do with them. The reaction from his peers and even some of his friends was generally negative, his former teacher Gotthard Schuh saying he was dismayed and frightened by the images.<sup>158</sup> A small selection appeared in the *US Camera Annual* of 1958, with a defence written by Frank's mentor Walker Evans. Frank's friend and advocate Robert Delpire offered to publish them in France, but this volume was part of a series of anthropologically focussed tomes, carrying accompanying texts describing American life. This was deeply unsatisfactory for Frank: he wanted more. Frank had a critical meeting with Jack Kerouac at a party given for the author by his fiend Lucien Carr.<sup>159</sup> Kerouac's improvisational prose was deeply attractive to Frank, embodying the rhythms of American street speech and being steeped in jazz, the racially integrated music of the American city. Frank's movement out from the centre of the photographic world into new territory reached its apogee with his selection of Grove Press as his publisher. This was a small house associated with poetry and Beat writers. Publishing with small, independent houses was a Beat tradition, perhaps the most famous instance being Allan Ginsberg's controversial *Howl*, published by The City Lights Bookshop in San Francisco and successfully defended by them against an attempt to ban it as pornographic. Books, for the Beats, were associated with liberty, enlightenment and revolution in a way that galleries were not. Frank was following suit, lining his photographs up with the most socially radical literature. Individuality, then, and a desire for something other, something away from the mainstream, something belonging neither to the world of Steichen or Evans led Frank to his small publisher.

Frank's journey out towards the edge resulted in one other attack on the gallery. In 1950s America, 'Old World' European 'High' society was being deeply interrogated. It was dogged by war and inequality, was morally bankrupt, class ridden and clearly intent on self-destruction. It seemed to many that salvation might be found in the lives, culture and ideas of working people. Frank, too, was deeply interested in exploring the visually ephemeral and vernacular in his search for "Where God is".<sup>160</sup> Frank found and celebrated the alternative galleries of the streets: billboards, hoardings and popular magazines. He seems to me to have had a particular interest in the photographic output of the Standard Oil Company's Picture File, a group headed by Roy Stryker, who had famously directed the Farm Security Administration's Photo Section. The group documented the work of the Oil

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<sup>158</sup> Schuh, G. 'Robert Frank', *Camera*, August, New York, US Camera Publishing Corp, 1957, pp. 339–340.

<sup>159</sup> Johnson, p. 42.

<sup>160</sup> Frank, R. Robert Frank, London, Thames and Hudson/Centre National de la Photographie, 1991, after plate 63.

Company, from exploration through extraction, refining and retailing. Their images were made freely available to magazines, newspapers, galleries, schools and universities. The irony and strangeness of this shadow gallery, these commercial images forming the content of another kind of exhibition was not lost on Frank. The Standard Oil Picture File ripped the museum open and spread it willy-nilly across streets, markets, billboards and educational institutions. Images, in some cases by the same photographers who featured in the *Family of Man*, were reproduced *en masse*, printed and distributed free to any one who asked for them.

Frank's photographs interrogate and criticise these Standard Oil originals, at the same time as he pays them homage. In *The Americans* Frank refers as easily and frequently to these images as he does to Renaissance painting or Reformation engraving.<sup>161</sup> He successfully challenges the gallery as an institution and the hierarchical understanding of images. He plays with his source material, absorbing, commenting, juxtaposing and satirizing works from across the range of cultural output. The exhibit and the advertisement co-exist in *The Americans*: Frank subverts the Marxist understanding<sup>162</sup> of class predicated culture and takes the images of humanity as his source material.



Image 5. Jonathan Day, 2014, image in response to Robert Frank's "Los Angeles" 1955, *The Americans* #61, collection of Susan and Peter MacGill <http://tinyurl.com/l2jngot>

<sup>161</sup> Day, 2011, pp. 81, 114, 170–172, 185.

<sup>162</sup> See, e.g., Aronowitz, S. *Crisis In Historical Materialism: Class, Politics, and Culture in Marxist Theory*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1990.

*The Americans and the Family of Man Exhibition*

Robert Frank's association with Edward Steichen has already been mentioned. Steichen mounted the highly influential *The Family of Man* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1955, the year in which Frank began his *Americans* journey. Frank assisted Steichen with its preparation, and several of his photographs were included. *The Americans* follows many of the exhibition's themes and echoes many of its images, but in a manner clearly out of sympathy with *The Family of Man*'s intention. *The Americans* comments upon, contends with and subverts Steichen's chosen images.

In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue, Steichen wrote,

*I believe The Family of Man exhibition is the most ambitious and challenging project photography has ever attempted. It was conceived as a mirror of the universal elements and emotions in the everydayness of life – as a mirror of the essential oneness of mankind throughout the world. The Family of Man has been created in a passionate spirit of devoted love and faith in man.*<sup>163</sup>

For Frank, *The Family of Man* signally failed as a “mirror of the universal elements and emotions” because of its sentimentality and its refusal to squarely face the truth. Frank described it in this way,

*Steichen liked me a lot and he was very good to me. I just didn't agree with his sentimentality about photographs any more. I was aware that I was living in a different world – that the world wasn't as good as that – that it was a myth that the sky was blue and that all photographs were beautiful.*<sup>164</sup>

Steichen's motivations cannot be ascribed to ignorance or inexperience: he was deeply sophisticated and aware. It was something else that drove him, something that Frank would also lock horns with. The American Dream at its most facile depends on the perfectibility of the human race. In many ways, this is also the central hope of Modernism. *The Family of Man* orders its photographs in a world as it ought to have been and not as it was. Steichen's “passionate spirit of devoted love” finds form in a faith that one day ugliness and injustice will be banished. The implication is that if we ignore evil and darkness, or at most tacitly acknowledge them, then perhaps they will go away. To look at these things seems to be felt, in some way, as encouraging them. With God and the American Way, surely, the show argues, the dream can come to pass.

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<sup>163</sup> Steichen, E. *The Family of Man*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1955, p. 3.

<sup>164</sup> Frank, quoted in Johnson, p. 37.

It would be wrong to see Frank as just a nihilistic *enfant terrible*, ripping up his former mentor Steichen's positive take on humanity and culture. Frank wrote,

*I have often been accused of deliberately twisting subject matter to my point of view ... Opinion often consists of a kind of criticism. But criticism can come out of love.*<sup>165</sup>

His critique, he claims, was from a perspective of love. This, though, is a love that, unlike Steichen's, acknowledges the importance of honesty.

Frank's close knowledge of *The Family of Man* left him uniquely equipped to respond to it. *The Americans'* photographs often closely reflect particular images from Steichen's show. For reasons of brevity, we cannot investigate these responses in detail here. Suffice to say that Frank sought the sometimes prosaic, sometimes challenging reality behind the exhibition's toothy smile. Frank in *The Americans* was looking for the honest truth of his subjects, in so far as photography could deliver them. Steichen said his show wished to "mirror ... the universal elements and emotions in the everydayness of life" and to be a "mirror of the essential oneness of mankind throughout the world".<sup>166</sup> While Frank's work to a considerable degree achieves the former, it cannot achieve the latter if that oneness does not in fact exist. Photography cannot wish it into being. As Frank said, "The world wasn't as good as that."<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Frank, quoted in Maloney, p. 115.

<sup>166</sup> Steichen, p. 3.

<sup>167</sup> Frank, quoted in Johnson, p.37.





Image 6. Jonathan Day, 2014, image in response to Robert Frank's "Men's Room, Railway Station–Memphis, Tennessee", 1955, *The Americans* #52, Private collection <http://tinyurl.com/m9dv72z>

### *The Americans* and the promotional images of the Standard Oil Company

A number of the images in *The Americans* bear a marked resemblance to images in the Standard Oil of New Jersey archive, now housed in the University of Louisville, Kentucky. The extent to which this referencing was conscious cannot, I suspect, be established now: Frank has talked in recent years of the poverty of his memory.<sup>168</sup> The visual evidence is, though, intriguing and compelling.

A key image for this consideration is a photograph called *U.S. 90, en route to Del Rio, Texas* (1955, *The Americans* #83, Hamilton's Gallery, London). This is *The Americans*' final image and serves as a signature and a revelation of the author to his readers. The photograph pictures a woman and child asleep in the passenger seat of a car. The black automobile is pulled up at the side of the road, its nearside headlight lit. The peaceful sleeping faces inside are almost a Madonna and Child. The nearness of the car to the viewer and the eye-level angle suggest intimacy. The subjects' occupation of the passenger seat suggests that this is Frank's family. A sidelong view of the same car, taken in 1956 but not included in *The Americans*, confirms this. It is titled *Andrea, Pablo, Mary, Texas* (1955).<sup>169</sup> The names are those of Frank's family, and the passengers are identifiably the same as those in *U.S. 90, en route to Del Rio, Texas*. In this portrait of his family, Frank turns his camera onto his own life, identifying himself

<sup>168</sup> See, e.g., Greenough, 2009.

<sup>169</sup> Frank, R. *The Lines of My Hand*, New York, Pantheon, 1989.



with all those others he had pictured, placing himself into the world he had recorded. He is another driver on another road driving around wild America. The car is the conduit of his journey, his book is the views from its window. The image is also a resolution. Frank has been chasing the pearl, looking for where God is. At the end of his journey this is his conclusion - there is no ephemeral bright destination, no Oz at the end of his yellow brick road. After two years driving he knows Del Rio will be another Main Street, another diner. The journey's end is this realization. There is only now, only this moment, washed up on some dusty roadside. All that remains is those we love, who share our journey, at the dawning of a new day.

For all its multi-layered meaning, there is yet more to *U.S. 90*. It also comments on a classic Standard Oil advertising image. Sol Libsohn's *Charles Kitchen, Anchor Motor Freight Company trucker, driving at night on U.S. Highway 22; May, 1945* (Standard Oil Archive, University of Louisville) was part of a project called *Truck Story*, on which he worked from March until May of 1945. Libsohn and Roy Stryker, Standard Oil's Picture File Director, together produced a script detailing a routine two-day journey by two truckers collecting parts for warplanes. The story was published in *The Lamp*, Standard Oil's expensively produced corporate magazine, with *Charles Kitchen* as its lead image. The magazine was circulated to politicians, stockholders, publishers and the like.



Image 7. Jonathan Day, 2014, image in response to Robert Frank's "Covered Car-Long Beach, California", 1956, *The Americans* #34, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York <http://tinyurl.com/l4yy9oa>

*U.S. 90, en route to Del Rio, Texas* follows the composition of Libsohn's image closely. The line of both vehicles is approximately a fifth of the way in from the edge. The position of the windscreens and the view through them of people inside, are very similar. Most significant of all are the lit

headlamps, occupying about the same position in each picture. Notably, Frank has reversed the Standard Oil composition, literally mirroring it, as his photograph mirrors, distorts and comments on its meaning.

If the American Dream presses the road and the notion of journey into service as signifiers of a better life waiting just around the corner, then images such as Charles Kitchen identify the pursuers of this dream as heroes rather than victims. Advertising is here mythologizing the worker. It is the aesthetic humanization of industry, the justification of hours of toil by the conferral of heroic status. *Charles Kitchen* is an image, full of machismo and power. The photograph's low viewpoint emphasizes the truck's size; its lines are rectilinear and powerful. The glowing, eyelike headlamp sits above and to the side of the toothy radiator grill, grinning against the black bonnet. Charles' face is determined, lit dramatically from the side. His grip on the steering wheel is certain. Libsohn wrote, "His hands were big on the wheel. They seemed hardly to try when he turned the wheel".<sup>170</sup> He is depicted as the master of this monster, controlling its huge power, driving through the night with his war-bound cargo, intent on his mission. He is imaged to represent not only of the nobility of labour and of Standard Oil, but of America, intent on the defeat of the enemies of the 'free world'.

In contrast, Frank's image is taken from head height. This emphasises normality, facilitating an easy identification with the photograph's everydayness. The car is small and personal; its curves are feminine and humble. Frank's Madonna-like wife and child sleep easily. The car stands motionless at the side of a desert road in dim light. There is no urgency, no work to do, nowhere to go that can't wait. The only imperatives are personal. The only mission is the journey, the only cargo his family. Here, Frank has entirely subverted the notion of the highway as the conduit for affairs of state. Charles Kitchen is a cog in the wheel of the Dream, aiding the American pursuit of 'manifest destiny', in this case by helping to win a war. He is a part of the industrial process; both he and the road are its servants. Frank's road is a private place, somewhere to watch his family sleep, somewhere that is as close as this wild-at-heart world comes to home. The road is the conduit of his personal journey, perhaps even of his dreams. He denies its role in the formulas of advertising men, and through it questions the orthodoxy of the American Dream. The road is revealed as an aspect of the wide world through which it runs, a world bigger than society's strictures, a strange, mysterious and wonderful place. Frank's photograph is an image of living, his existence and journey described by a family and a car, their travel through time and space described by the road and the desert.

Charles Kitchen is personally unimportant. He stands for faceless millions in his photograph. Another driver would have done just as well, without Libsohn even having to change the story. Charles is a representative member of society, his individuality serving the whole. Frank's photograph reveals an individual following his own obscure purposes.

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<sup>170</sup> Libsohn, quoted in Keller, p. 204.





Image 8. Jonathan Day, 2014, image in response to Robert Frank's "Salt Lake City, Utah", 1956, *The Americans* #54, Philadelphia Museum of Art <http://tinyurl.com/o8m9p59>

In *The Americans* Frank appears to respond to images from the Standard Oil Picture File on many occasions. There were plenty of opportunities for Frank to see images from Standard Oil's File as they were exploited extensively. The Civil Affairs Division of the US Army, for example, used them to illustrate 'the American Way of Life to People Overseas'.<sup>171</sup> They featured in *Life*, *Look* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, among other magazines and newspapers. In 1949 alone, 667 Standard Oil File pictures were carried by the press. Textbooks and encyclopaedias also used the photographs. Another popular means of dissemination was panel-mounted display sequences. The Picture File produced 264 differently themed arrangements of photographs. In 1949 around 10,000 of these were needed to satisfy demand.<sup>172</sup> Many galleries also featured Standard Oil's images. Harvard University and the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia both hosted an exhibition called *The Architecture of Oil*. The Museum of Modern Art in New York featured the work of four Standard Oil photographers in its *In and Out of Focus: A Survey of Today's Photography* exhibition (Museum of Modern Art exhibition number 373, 6 April–11 July 1948). Steichen's *Family of Man* show included an image from the file, which showed children dancing in a circle outside a school in Peru, sited beneath an oil derrick. This again reveals the extent to which these images were known.

*Trolley – New Orleans* (1955, *The Americans* #18, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) is another of Frank's photographs which echoes Standard Oil's imagery. In 1947, Esther Bubley took a series of photographs illustrating a cross-country bus journey. This would appear two years later, in volume 31 of *The Lamp*, as 'Via Bus', and in *Photo Memo*, a smaller, specialized magazine advertising the Picture File's latest photographs, under the title 'By Bus'. Bubley photographed *Greyhound Bus Terminal, N.Y.C. Loaded bus ready to depart* (Standard Oil Archive, University of Louisville) in July of that year. Three side windows of a Greyhound fill the top half of the image. These are illuminated, the interior warm and busy against the darker tone of the bus's side. The affluent white passengers are furred and hatted: some smile, some are glum. Crisp, white-covered seats leave no doubt that every effort has been made to ensure their comfort. A legend painted along the coach reads 'Coast to Coast'. These travellers are, after all, the descendants of the pioneers; they also journey the wide land.

Frank's image is entirely other. Five windows similarly occupy the top half of the photograph, but the passengers thus framed are very different to Bubley's. White faces occupy the windows to the left. The first is evanescent behind the glass. The second passenger stares with unveiled suspicion and distaste at the photographer and, through him, by implication at the viewer. Black hair and a dark coat frame her disdain, an expression as evil as the witch in MGM's hugely popular 1939 version of *The Wizard of Oz*. Behind

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<sup>171</sup> Stryker, R. (1946), transcript of lectures at the Design Institute, Chicago, August, held in the Roy Stryker Papers, Photographic Archives, Ekstrom Library, University of Louisville.

<sup>172</sup> Keller, p. 47.

her, a white boy and his sister have a caged look, the boy clinging to the bar-like window frame. His hair, suit and bowtie define him as middle class and middle management in embryo. This boy stands in stark contrast to the dearly loved dream of adventurous and anarchic American boyhood, described in *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* (Mark Twain, 1876 and 1884). This is boyhood at its most suppressed, exactly 'the look of sadness'<sup>173</sup> that Frank sought. The matronly perpetrator of this bondage broods protectively in the shadows.

To the right, towards the back of the bus, sit two black people. They have no option but to sit there; the photograph was taken before the US Congress ruled that segregated buses were unconstitutional, on 20 December 1956. The black man is powerfully built. He echoes the white boy's position, yet his open-shirted body language speaks an appeal. He appears to be in supplication. The white boy looks trapped, but at the same time holds himself with a confidence entirely lacking from the muscular adult behind. Not all of these colour-classified and restricted passengers seem uneasy with their demarcation. The black lady at extreme right seems to be staring unconcernedly out of shot.

Frank's image is uncomfortable. It examines racism in America without overtly representing it. The photograph's tension exists in the unequal appearance and body language of its subjects. Its message is heightened enormously by its position, following *Fourth of July – Jay, New York* (1954, *The Americans* #17, private collection, New York), a photograph of white families comfortably celebrating Independence Day beneath the Red, White and Blue supposed signifier of the equality of all men. Perhaps most significantly of all, the tension lies in the hindsight-equipped eye of the viewer. We are all, I suspect, looking for the unassuming Rosa Parks, quietly and unwittingly starting a revolution by refusing to give up her seat.

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<sup>173</sup> Frank, quoted in Maloney, p. 115.



Image 9. Jonathan Day, 2014, image in response to Robert Frank's "Crosses on Scene of Highway Accident—U.S. 91, Idaho", 1956, *The Americans* #49, private collection <http://tinyurl.com/phlna9t>

Frank, then, has taken Bubley's representative American image and rewritten it. His observation of the faces in *Trolley Bus* reveals the reality of an America far more complex and divided than Standard Oil would dare depict.

Frank's deconstruction of the work of Standard Oil, conscious or otherwise, is not limited to particular responses to individual images. The Picture File was a major contributor to the developing iconography of America, and notably of the American diner. Jovial Americans consuming quantities of food are frequently represented and celebrated. This is not surprising. By advertising its ability to feed its population (occasionally to the point of obesity), America contrasts itself starkly with the shortages and rationing experienced throughout Europe.

The American diner represented in Standard Oil's promotional photographs is a microcosm of the land of plenty, peopled by well-fed, fertile women and well-fed, hard-working men who coexist in a happy and harmonious society. Smiling waitresses happily serve customers who are happy to be served. Sol Libsohn's *Truck Story*, which we have already mentioned, exemplifies this. *Group of truckers in Eagle Grill, Akron, Ohio; May 1945* (Standard Oil Archive, University of Louisville) pictures Charles Henry and his associates drinking beer and coffee beneath a neon eagle. They sit in front of a door marked 'men'. A buxom young waitress serves them the latest in what appears to be a long line of drinks. She is smiling winningly at them, perhaps sharing a joke. The message is clear. This is the place for the men who serve the eagle. Happiness and fulfilment, materially and socially, follow as a natural consequence of working for the nation.



There is even an intimation of sexual promise. It may be limited to flirting, but for these crabbed drivers that pleasure may be a not-inconsiderable one. The young waitress certainly accepts them and appears to enjoy her role and their company. Uncle Sam and his aquiline familiar are looking after their own.

There is no doubt that many of these suggestions of a land of plenty and a happy society in which everyone, especially the stranger, is welcomed, were reasonably accurate and ingenuous. Frank had, after all, contributed to this visual strophe with a 'happy diner' picture of his own, one of his contributions to *The Family of Man*. He recorded several jovial young women laughing and eating beneath a huge 'Hamburger' sign in New York. Although their hairstyles and clothes are almost too similar, revealing a worrying degree of social conformity, there is little else that is critical, and Frank's image sits comfortably amongst a number of depictions of people eating, drawn from cultures across the planet. Interestingly, he took a companion photograph at the same time, called *NYC, 14<sup>th</sup> Street, White Tower Hamburgers* (1948, Museum of Modern Art, New York). This shows the same women looking out of their window with caution and a little aggression. It is not surprising that Steichen chose the image he did.

In *The Americans*, however, Frank's reactions to the figurations of the diner in the images of Standard Oil and others is typically considered and sophisticated. The nearest he ever comes to bonhomie is in *En route from New York to Washington, Club Car* (1954, *The Americans* #8, Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts). The train's dining car is lit with fluorescent light. Half of the photograph is occupied by the backs of two tweed-jacketed men. They are hunched conspiratorially, blocking us out. The camera is at chair level, looking up, a viewpoint that heightens the sense of exclusion. Between the jackets is a bald man's head. He listens to the left-hand jacket, ignoring the camera utterly. Our isolation in this transient, stark environment is complete. The jovial inclusivity of the *Eagle Grill* is entirely absent here.



Image 10. Jonathan Day, 2014, image in response to Robert Frank's "U.S. 285, New Mexico", 1955, *The Americans* #36, collection of Mark Kelman, New York <http://tinyurl.com/p3hub97>

Frank continues his examination of Americans eating in *Cafeteria – San Francisco* (1956, *The Americans* #68, private collection). This echoes another image from Standard Oil's *Truckers Story*, Libsohn's *Charles Henry eating steak at Martin's restaurant, Darlington, Pa.; March 1945* (Standard Oil Archive, University of Louisville). Charles sits squeezed into a suit, shirt and tie. His clothes look as though they will burst at any moment, as he resolutely cuts into a plate-sized steak, lips parted in anticipation. His hands are corpulent, wearing a large, square ring. The dark tones of the photograph suggest warmth and safety.

Frank's photograph follows Libsohn's composition quite closely. *San Francisco* pictures a man sitting in about the same position as Charles, also eating steak. His table is squalid, though, covered in the remains of other people's meals. The man's clothes are not as smart as Charles', although neither are they threadbare. The room doesn't have the protective darkness of 'Martin's Diner'; it is well lit. The back of a hat and coated man suggests a busy and impersonal place. Perhaps the most defining characteristic of Frank's picture is the expression on its subject's face. It is exactly that "look of sadness"<sup>174</sup> of which Frank wrote. He may be eating steak, his clothes may be reasonable but this is a despondent image of a man for whom no amount of cafeteria food will bring joy or inclusion. He takes little delight in the meal; his mind on other things. He is an individual who sits in this American institution untouched by its mythology; its disorder and sense of alienation emphasize his absorption in his own experiences.

<sup>174</sup> Frank, quoted in Maloney, p. 115.

*Drug store – Detroit* (1955, *The Americans* #69, collection of Susan and Peter MacGill) further comments on the bonhomie of images like Esther Bubley's *Greyhound Bus depot, Scranton, Pa. Bus passengers eating lunch at the terminal lunch counter; September 1947* (Standard Oil Archive, University of Louisville), another of her *Bus Story* photographs. Bubley's photograph looks over a busy but tidy counter. Steel cups with protruding straws suggest milkshakes. A man at extreme right ladles soup into himself. The eye height viewpoint suggests normality and comfort. The viewer sees the room as it would be if one was there. The lighting is also comfortable, neither too bright nor too dim. A woman's face is at the exact centre of the composition. She is smiling, engaged in intercourse of some kind with someone out of shot to the right. Her manicured hand holds her straw in readiness. The pleasure of consumption is delayed momentarily for the pleasure of fun with her companions. Another woman to her right watches her with satisfaction; she has an approving and friendly audience. Both wear light, clean blouses. Their hair is neat and attractive. An older man to the left is shirt-and-tie dignified. He doesn't hassle them, content with his lunch; he is turned instead towards a larger female, perhaps his wife. The image is of order. Everything is very proper, yet fun. No one is tired, no one is sweating. This is diner Utopia again.

Frank leads us quietly to the side of this staged idealization and directs us to a view on to other, mostly unself-conscious diners in his *Drug store – Detroit*. Nothing is really amiss with the diner: it isn't dirty or squalid. The harsh contrast with Bubley's *Scranton* lies in the faces of its customers. None of them are smiling; they look bored, dissolute and uncomfortable. Two of them look with suspicion at Frank as he photographs them. It is the kind of suspicion that might erupt into disapproval, even threat. One baseball-capped customer covers his mouth protectively with his hand. He stares into space, oblivious of his companions. The sloping diner counter leads the eye across and down to a black-haired man at far right. The man hunches over his milkshake in a primal gesture of protection, like a predator over its kill. He has an aggressive look, the kind that demands space, demands that it is not disturbed. None of the customers is engaged in any interaction with the others. There is no community here, only a group of disparate and dissociated individuals, who nonetheless sit closely together in a temporary truce, regimented before the counter. Frank's composition expresses this tension. Bubley used a frontal composition, which suggests space, while Frank shoots obliquely along the counter from its corner, foreshortening its sweep and compressing the space occupied by each of the diners, revealing and heightening their mutual isolation. This claustrophobia is heightened as their personal and pictorial space is further invaded by huge cardboard glasses of Orange Whip (at 10 c. each, King Size 15 c.). Other assorted signs hang from the ceiling.

Frank's *Ranch Market – Hollywood* (1956, *The Americans* #14, collection of Danielle and David Ganek) is another assault on American gastric *bonhomie*. In the photograph, a counter assistant glowers, staring out of

shot, ignoring Frank and his camera. Her eyes are coldly half-closed, her lipsticked mouth pursed. Above her hang several signs. They proclaim the lack of filler in the market's burgers and their range of products and prices. The central sign is a maniacal Santa Claus with an alcoholic's red cheeks, proclaiming 'Merry Christmas' in a Gothic script. The lines of the ceiling and shelving converge slightly towards the left. This subtle view, neither fully sidelong nor fully frontal, revealing only the head of the waitress, is unfamiliar and uncomfortable. Is she irritated by a customer, perhaps, or bored by the tedium of countless burgers and shakes? She has no Christmas spirit, merely standing behind her counter, defying the drudgery, defying the customers. She certainly has no smile for the men of the eagle. There is no suggestion of flirtatious willingness, no happy cafe society welcoming every passing driver. The demented Santa and this dour waitress stand against Libsohn's eagle and *ingénue* in Frank's unflattering revelation. It is not the whole truth, but it is an important part of it, part that needs acknowledgement. Frank here figures that part of the inconvenient truth which Standard Oil and others chose to ignore.

Robert Frank in *The Americans* embraces and responds to images whose creation and exploitation were unapologetically commercial. Significantly, he treats the 'gallery of the streets' with the same level of seriousness as he treats images from so-called 'High' art sources, whether these be photographs found on the celebrated walls of MoMA, or paintings from the European tradition. Frank allows the images of Standard Oil to teach him and inform his photographs, while at the same time seeking to see beyond the polemic, to the actuality of the world before him. He examines the smile of Uncle Sam, pictured on the faces and landscape of America and finds 'what is invisible to others – the look of hope or the look of sadness'.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Frank, quoted in Maloney, p 115.



Image 11. Jonathan Day, 2014, image in response to Robert Frank's "Yale Commencement—New Haven Green, New Haven, Connecticut", 1956, *The Americans* #21, private collection, <http://tinyurl.com/nf8enkv>

## Conclusion

Robert Frank moved from a position at the core of American photography to a place from which he challenged, undermined and questioned it. His friendship with Edward Steichen and his assistance with the *Family of Man* exhibition left him uniquely able to critique it, his deep insider knowledge informing his devastatingly critical responses. His disappointment with the *Family of Man* opened up for him questions around the adequacy of curation and the dominance of the gallery/museum in the dissemination of photographic art. His desire for excitement and the truth of the common people, an excitement which may seem tired and naive in our post-socialist world, led him to imaginatively rip the gallery apart. His wild ride around America found its enduring form not in a show, a museum, a gallery or an archive, but in a book. By subverting accepted image hierarchies and denying the conventional wisdom of the photographic establishment, Frank created an influential cultural artefact, much more than simply a series of photographs. *The Americans* is no souvenir catalogue, no record of an event. The book is the event.

Recent books are following in this iconoclastic tradition in a wide variety of ways. My own work has been made in direct defiance of Frank's gallery, who warned me against making it. The irony is clear - as so often happens in the journey of created works, the initially *avant-garde* has been absorbed by and become the establishment. No amount of reactionary revisionism can, though, disguise the radical and inspiring nature of Frank's original gesture.

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# Imagining Migration in Europe: Surveillance and Other Visibilities

LOUISE WOLTERS

## Abstract

The article highlights issues of surveillance, photography and power in a discussion of how mobility and visibility are negotiated at the Southern borders of Europe. It offers examples of the current fortification of EU's border system, including various 'smart surveillance' technologies, which are applied by agencies such as Frontex mainly to effectively detect, document, identify and locate immigrants from the global South. It is argued that the logic of EU's surveillance complex can be described in terms of a specific photographic visuality, which unites two concepts of the indexical: The strictly referential indexicality of the 'situational picture' as the real-time monitoring of a clearly defined space, and the performative indexicality of the 'affective alert'. The article further proposes concepts for a counter-visibility through artist Marco Poloni's photographic constellation *Displacement Island* (2006) – a complex portrait of the Italian island Lampedusa as a centre of migration. By combining the referential, the affective and the associative qualities of photography, Poloni's work mimics, criticizes and counter-balances the surveillance system's 'situational picture' as well as the aim to 'manage' the borders and the individuals crossing them. Finally, it is noted how monitoring can potentially function as societal inclusion and legal protection; as a means of recognizing otherwise invisible migrant experiences.

## Introduction

Power is predominantly exercised through surveillance (as discipline, control and bio-power). Since its invention, photography has been a surveillance medium par excellence. It has been and still is a means of recording, tracking and visualizing in the state apparatus, as well as in a wide range of sciences like criminology, anthropology and medicine. This explains why photo historians, visual theorists, artists and activists have investigated and challenged the surveillance practices facilitated and performed through photography long before the more recent endeavors of

surveillance studies as an academic field.<sup>176</sup> As a relatively young discipline, surveillance studies is still largely dominated by the social and political sciences, although visual and media studies, as well as art theory, are increasingly contributing with analyses of visibility and power. These are not only linked to specific lens-based surveillance practices, but also to the processes of visualisation, location and identification behind, for example, biometric technologies and profiling politics. We are currently witnessing the emergence of interdisciplinary visual surveillance studies that draw on art history and photo theory, as well as media studies, critical theory and the political and social sciences, and which understand surveillant regimes as complex relations of visibilities and power.<sup>177</sup>

Surveillance studies have long been dominated by the voices, themes and issues of North American academia and culture. However, a growing group of scholars and artists are also addressing some of the issues specific to surveillance in a European context. What kinds of control, for example, effectuate the (northern) European welfare state? How is the US-initiated war on terror and subsequent incidents of mass surveillance affecting Europe? What are the policies, practices and problems of EU border management? This article explores the latter and its relation to irregular migration as visualised through technocratic surveillance on the one hand, and photography-based art on the other. In the first part of the article I outline some of the current European border systems and their methods of detection, documentation, identification and location. The second part of the article presents counter-visibility as a theme and critical documentary approach in Marco Poloni's photo series *Displacement Island* from 2006. The Italian island of Lampedusa serves as a common point of reference and metaphor in both the pro-surveillance authorities' visual rhetoric and in the counter-surveillance work by artists like Poloni, who consider how immigrants are deprived of agency in their own visibility.

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<sup>176</sup> A particularly valuable reader in and contribution to these debates is the anthology and exhibition catalogue *CTRL [SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother* published in 2002, which offers a compilation of key texts, works and projects related to the broader theme of art and surveillance. Levin, T. Y., Frohne, U., and Weibel, P. (eds.), *CTRL [SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*, Cambridge & London, MIT Press, 2002.

<sup>177</sup> These theoretical insights draw on the established tradition in cultural criticism of problematizing various notions of the gaze; the visibility complex, transparency aesthetics or visibility regimes, all of which are not only linked to visual perception, but also to symbolic exercises of power through scrutiny, normalization and control. See, for example, Mirzoeff, N. 'The Right to Look', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 3 (Spring 2011), pp. 473–496; Lyon, D. '9/11, Synopticism and Scopophilia: Watching and Being Watched', in Haggerty, K. and Ericson R. (eds.), *The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2006, pp. 35–54; Weibel, P. 'Pleasure and the Panoptic Principle', in Levin, Frohne and Weibel (op. cit); Kember, S. 'Gender Estimation in Face Recognition Technology: How Smart Algorithms Learn to Discriminate,' *Media Fields Journal*, no. 7, 2013 and Brighenti, A. M. 'Democracy and its Visibilities' in Haggerty, K. D. and Samatas, M. (eds.), *Surveillance and Democracy*, NY, Routledge, 2010 and Lyon, pp. 35–54.

The mobility of undocumented migrant bodies is a highly sensitive and relevant issue in the context of surveillance practices, as it reflects how negotiations of (in)visibility in relation to border crossing are substantially different than for privileged EU citizens.<sup>178</sup> For these privileged citizens, state monitoring or registration largely functions as a practical necessity facilitating welfare benefits and general assistance in everyday life, whereas surveillance is less often perceived as an invasion of privacy. The majority of critical surveillance discourse seems to stem from a privileged position where basic human rights are already secured, the only potential exception being the right to privacy, which is periodically challenged by the dissemination and public disclosure of digital photography and data-registration. Given that surveillance has historically been most invasive and dangerous for various minority or marginalized groups, questions of how non-European migrants are being detected, tracked and identified deserves more critical attention from the field of what we could call ‘visual surveillance studies’.

Our globalised, digitalised society does not guarantee freedom of movement and information for everybody on equal terms.<sup>179</sup> In Europe, the free movement of ‘desirable’ EU citizens (business people or tourists) happens at the expense of other subjects that are slowed down or stopped if they are perceived as what H. Hintjens calls ‘unwanted humanity’.<sup>180</sup> Through ‘smart’ surveillance (see below), EU’s frontiers become invisible and easily permeable for some, but heavily guarded for others.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, these frontiers extend the lines of the geographical border not only beyond the European Union, but also deeply within the individual countries. Issues of visibility, identification and anonymity are thus changing in contemporary European surveillance society. I will argue that these digitalised practices make us unaware of scrutinizing surveillance. The fact that surveillance regimes are to a large extent invisible (or unnoticeable) represents a democratic problem and potential threat to human rights. This non-transparency not only applies to surveillance agents or technologies, but also to the (both affective and political) power structures behind them

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<sup>178</sup> For a discussion of the terms commonly used in relation to migration (irregular, illegal and undocumented) see, for example, Triandafyllidou, A. (ed.), *Irregular Migration in Europe: Myths and Realities*, Ashgate, 2010, p. 2. In this article I use the term ‘irregular’ when the focus is on immigrants entering Europe, and the term ‘undocumented’ to describe migrants in Europe without the necessary papers.

<sup>179</sup> See, for example, Lyon, D. and Bauman, Z. *Liquid Surveillance*, Polity, Cambridge, 2013; Adey, P. “‘Divided We Move’: The Dromologies of Airport Security and Surveillance” in *Surveillance and Security: Technological Politics and Power in Everyday Life*, Monahan, T. (ed.), London & New York, Routledge, 2006; Lyon, D. (ed.); *Surveillance as Social Sorting: Privacy, Risk, and Digital Discrimination*, London & New York, Routledge, 2003.

<sup>180</sup> Hintjens, H. ‘Screening in or out? Selective Non-surveillance of Unwanted Humanity in EU Cities’, *Surveillance & Society*, vol. 11 (1/2), 2013.

<sup>181</sup> On the difference between border and frontier in this context see Bigo, D. ‘Frontier Controls in European Union: Who is in Control?’ in *Controlling Frontiers* (op. cit.), p. 52.

(such as shifting criteria for profiling). Furthermore, the seemingly efficient and transparent visualization processes of photographic surveillance help to legitimate the pre-emptive power exercised through mainly affective reasoning.

Photography and other images in our visual culture play a performative role in the negative reception of irregular immigration and the alleged need for extensive European border management. But an activist and humanist representation of migrant experiences can offer a counter-visibility, which understands the effects of the surveillant viewing and sorting of vulnerable individuals. 'Surveillance art' today reflects and challenges increasingly invisible and omnipresent surveillance and the fact that it is targeted at vulnerable groups like undocumented immigrants.

### *Guarding Fortress Europe*

Since the 1980s, immigration has primarily been conceived of as a problem in European political discourse.<sup>182</sup> Correspondingly, immigration policies have become increasingly restrictive, a tendency deeply embedded in the history of the EU and linked to its ideals of internal mobility and free movement (for business and work forces). Physically, the abolition of internal borders between the Schengen member states led to the reinforcement of now shared external borders. This was heavily reliant on increasing co-operation on border security and 'migration management', with major investments in smart surveillance during recent years.<sup>183</sup> "The use of 'smart' surveillance technologies considerably increases the reliability and efficiency of border control measures, as these technologies enable proactive responses to security incidents and threats as they happen."<sup>184</sup> Smart surveillance programs include collecting and sharing travellers' data (large databases), applying new technologies to verify identity more effectively (biometric information), and using new technology at the borders, such as sense-and-detect technologies or tracking systems. The key strategies for managing migration are sorting, identification and location, and the link between migration and identification are increasingly digitalised through the use of biometric tools. These include SIS (the Schengen Information System, planned in 1990) and SIS II (implemented in 2013), Eurodac (European Dactylographic System, established 2003) and VIS (Visa

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<sup>182</sup> Bigo, D. and Guild, E. (eds.), *Controlling Frontiers: Free Movement into and within Europe*, Ashgate, 2005.

<sup>183</sup> For a historical outline see Kenk, V. S. et al, 'Smart Surveillance Technologies in Border Control', *European Journal of Law and Technology*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2013. Web access: <http://ejlt.org/article/view/230/378>

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, n.p.



Information System, conceptualised in 2002 and introduced in 2011).<sup>185</sup> The application of these programs “introduced an unprecedented level of surveillance of the movements of TCNs [Third Country Nationals] in general, and irregular migrants in particular.”<sup>186</sup> One of the alarming side effects of the interlinking of data is that it opens up for discriminatory ‘function creeps’, which Third Country Nationals are particularly vulnerable to. In other words, the protection of data can be ignored if security interests are involved, and for groups like asylum seekers different rules apply, including their biometrical data being stored for longer periods.<sup>187</sup> Surveillance scholars like Irma van der Ploeg are alarmed by the ‘informatization’ of the ‘machine-readable’ body, which turns sorting and identification into an ethically dubious technological system. Based on an analysis of the many technologically enabled categories used in classifying the migrants can now be sorted according to, she shows how surveillance technologies are not only tracing, tracking and documenting, but also actively producing the classification and thus the identity-category of the migrant.<sup>188</sup>

The increasing use of digitalised smart surveillance has not, however, rendered more conventional lens-based surveillance obsolete. Apart from border control and surveillance techniques already in use (biometrics etc.), the EU funds the development of surveillance technology, including camera technologies, such as thermal camera systems and handheld ‘flexible cameras’ that can be used to look into larger containers, boxed goods and other containers on vehicles that are otherwise hard to access. The activities and agents (politicians, security professionals, etc.) involved in controlling the EU’s borders are multiple and non-transparent.<sup>189</sup> One key manager in the whole complex of surveillance technologies, practices and operations at EU borders is the agency Frontex.<sup>190</sup> Since 2005, Frontex has cooperated with the authorities of member states like national police or border police to promote a ‘pan-European model of integrated border security’ through

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<sup>185</sup> For an overview of SIS, Eurodac and VIS see the European Commission Home Affairs: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/index_en.html). For more thorough descriptions see, for example, Kenk et al (op.cit.); Broeders, D. and Engbersen, G. ‘Illegal Migration: Identification Policies and Immigrants’ Counterstrategies’: [http://www.academia.edu/4326814/The\\_Fight\\_Against\\_Illegal\\_Migration/Identification\\_Policies\\_and\\_Immigrants\\_Counterstrategies](http://www.academia.edu/4326814/The_Fight_Against_Illegal_Migration/Identification_Policies_and_Immigrants_Counterstrategies), p. 1603; Triandafyllidou, pp. 33–35. See also Bigo and Guild.

<sup>186</sup> Triandafyllidou, p. 35.

<sup>187</sup> Ploeg, L. V. D. and Sprenkels, I. ‘Migration and the Machine-Readable Body’, *Migration and the New Technological Borders of Europe*, Dijkstra, H. and Meijer, A. (eds.) London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 82.

<sup>188</sup> Ploeg and Sprenkels, p. 89.

<sup>189</sup> Bigo, D. ‘Frontier Controls in the European Union: Who is in Control?’, Bigo and Guild, p. 50.

<sup>190</sup> The European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union was established in 2005 as a decentralized EU regulatory agency with financial, administrative and legal autonomy.

surveillance, checks, risk analysis and exchange of information, as well as through increased co-operation between border guards, customs and the police in non-EU states. In pursuit of this goal, Frontex covers several operational areas, including joint operations at sea, on land and in the air.<sup>191</sup> Furthermore, Frontex “assists member states to jointly return illegally staying third country nationals to their countries of origin in the most efficient manner [...]”.<sup>192</sup> Frontex collects and analyses intelligence on the on-going situation at external borders, including satellite imagery. In 2013 the implementation of a new surveillance network called Eurosur made this surveillance increasingly systematized and fine-meshed.<sup>193</sup> Eurosur increases Frontex’s power through an even more advanced sharing of information between member states. ‘One of the key elements of Eurosur is that borders are divided into sections and classified by “impact level” or the degree of risk associated with that section in terms of irregular migration, smuggling of goods and other cross-border crime.’<sup>194</sup> To ensure efficiency, each member creates a National Coordination Centre, which consists of respective border-control authorities and associated services. The centre is then responsible for compiling all relevant data, analysing and interpreting it, deciding what to share and with whom, and creating a coherent ‘national situational picture’. This happens through a complex of CCTV footage, satellite imagery, ship reporting systems and (hitherto manned) surveillance planes, maps, graphics, etc. By collating these national situational pictures, Frontex is then able to create a dense pan-European surveillance network called the European Situational Picture. Frontex’s press information presents the European Situational Picture as an accurate and constantly updated monitoring of all external borders ‘as near to real time as possible’. The accompanying press photos all signal total oversight and efficiency through applied state-of-the-art multimedial surveillance technology: Employees are stationed in front of banks of monitors and computer screens relaying CCTV-footage, satellite imagery and aerial photography along with geodesic maps and other kinds of data.<sup>195</sup> Corresponding to van der Ploeg’s description of ‘machine-readable bodies’ we might term the bodies produced by these technologies ‘machine-detectable bodies’.

The surveillance technology itself becomes a performative sign of the threat of irregular migration. Anything or anyone caught on camera is potentially suspect and linked to illegalized activity. The technology thus

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<sup>191</sup> The agency’s press pack 2011 presents an overview of sea border joint operations coordinated by Frontex between 2006 and 2010.

<sup>192</sup> [http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Media\\_centre/Frontex\\_Press\\_Pack.pdf](http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Media_centre/Frontex_Press_Pack.pdf). Unless otherwise stated, the following quotes Frontex are from Frontex’s official press pack.

<sup>193</sup> Eurosur was launched in December 2013 with 19 Schengen countries at southern and eastern borders, and the remaining 11 to establish coordination centres for border surveillance.

<sup>194</sup> <http://frontex.europa.eu/feature-stories/eurosur-goes-live-Z8ZM4f>

<sup>195</sup> See the press photos representing Eurosur on Frontex’ website: <http://frontex.europa.eu/photo/eurosur-LD3NF7>

performatively produces criminalized bodies. In sections of the EU parliament's official presentations of Frontex and Eurosur, an apparently humanitarian perspective on immigration rhetorically tones down the link between security and migration and its underlying military associations. This is evident in the references to the many human catastrophes seen in the Mediterranean and the Strait of Gibraltar during recent years, and it is noted that: "Only by having a pan-European border surveillance system can we prevent the Mediterranean from becoming a graveyard for refugees trying to cross it".<sup>196</sup> Numerous critics have, however, argued that the most likely effect of border fortification and the intensified surveillance of migrants is that irregular immigrants are forced even further underground, becoming increasingly dependent on (often criminal) intermediaries and "making human smuggling even more of a "growth industry" than it already is."<sup>197</sup> C. Heller and C. Jones argue that although the EU claims that Eurosur will help save lives at sea, it is unclear whether the system can actually detect the smaller vessels used by migrants.<sup>198</sup> Furthermore, "there is no obligation under the Eurosur legislation to ensure that member states or Frontex initiate search and rescue operations should their plethora of surveillance tools locate a vessel in distress." The authors refer to several cases demonstrating that detection, or any other form of knowledge of distress at sea, is no guarantee that migrants will be rescued.<sup>199</sup> Other analyses come to similar conclusions: Even if drones, satellites and high-resolution cameras can be used to detect migrant vessels at sea, for example, they cannot guarantee help in such situations.<sup>200</sup> It could thus be argued that Eurosur is more focused on preventing people from entering EU territory than on saving lives – that the primary goal of Frontex and Eurosur is the management of undocumented migrants through a fortification of the EU's borders. In the EU commission's infographics, Eurosur is presented as a "a multipurpose system to prevent cross-border crime and irregular migration and to contribute to protecting migrants' lives at the external borders."<sup>201</sup> The accompanying illustration shows a vessel with migrants in distress being detected by an Italian naval plane operating for Frontex and being rescued by the Italian coast guard. Eurosur helps coordinate the rescue. In cases of 'high impact', other Schengen

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<sup>196</sup> European Parliament/News, 'EU border surveillance: MEPs approve Eurosur operating rules'. Web access: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20131007IPR21624/html/EU-border-surveillance-MEPs-approve-Eurosur-operating-rules>

<sup>197</sup> Broeders, Engbersen, p. 1605.

<sup>198</sup> Though not officially launched before December 2013, Eurosur actually was actually up and running when a vessel with 500 immigrants sank near Lampedusa in October 2013.

<sup>199</sup> Heller, C. and Jones, C. 'Eurosur: Saving Lives or Reinforcing Deadly Borders?', *Statewatch Journal*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2014, pp.9-12.

<sup>200</sup> See Kenk et al.

<sup>201</sup> See for instance the European Commission's infographics on Eurosur: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/e-library/docs/infographics/eurosur/eurosur\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/e-library/docs/infographics/eurosur/eurosur_en.pdf)

member states will assist, and here the infographic shows how Sweden sends assistance to Lampedusa. The implication is that the prevention of such tragedies is dependent on a total 'situational picture' of Lampedusa and the Mediterranean to detect migrants through a complex of surveillance strategies.



Image 1. Marco Poloni, from the constellation *Displacement Island*, 2006.

### *Lampedusa: Imagining the Border-Crossing Subject.*

Lampedusa is a key point in Europe's southern border structure, since it is visited and crossed by two large mobility groups: tourists and immigrants. Marco Poloni's *Displacement Island*, created in the years immediately after Frontex was implemented, highlights how these two groups approach the island differently, and how their presence produces diverging visibilities. The piece consists of a series of sixty-nine photographs, and has also been published as a book. The following discussion is based on the project in its book form.<sup>202</sup>

*Displacement Island* employs a range of photographic imagery to reflect the different groups of people whose paths cross on Lampedusa: First and foremost tourists and undocumented (most often illegalized) immigrants, but also local fishermen and representatives of the Italian authorities. In Poloni's work, additional figures from recent history, as well as cinema and mythology, also enter the constellation, which accentuates Lampedusa as a heterotopic place where political and symbolic views on migration are in play. The images revolve around sea, boats and beaches,

<sup>202</sup> Poloni, M. *Displacement Island*, Baden, Kodoji Press, 2013.

*For the tourist, as for the migrant, the beach is a promised land. For the former, it is a site of illusory oblivion, a break from his productive social existence. Attracted by the exceptional transparency of the waters, the tourist produces an alternate economy that supplements the island's modest fishing trade. For the latter, the beach is the final destination of an often deadly journey on a fortune boat from the coast of North Africa to Italy. The migrant's arrival should be the materialisation of a dream: an economically better life within the European Union.*<sup>203</sup>

The book's opening image is an underwater 'selfie' of what could be a tourist in swimming trunks diving or snorkelling for leisure (Image 1). His face is blurred by colour distortion with a red patch covering the centre of the image, indicating something hidden, unsettling or perhaps dangerous. The following sea images seem idyllic, but they also embody ambiguity: Bodies swimming in the shallow water are viewed from above and a child faces the camera looking playfully through an inflatable lifebelt. The following aerial photo of the deep blue sea forms a link to gradually more ambiguous black and white imagery of an astronaut in space and of a small boat approaching the shore seen from the vantage point of the cliff above. A larger image on a double spread of a darker sea under darkening clouds then creates a less welcoming if not threatening atmosphere. The subsequent images are taken on land, and here the viewer is suddenly confronted by a confined area in the landscape, where small, blue fishing boats are stacked (Image 2). These boats, appearing again in another picture later in the book, all have Arabic names – the confiscated boats used to carry immigrants to the promised land of Europe. The visual narrative continues with a slightly manipulated satellite image of Lampedusa as an unreceptive blue patch, which is followed by an image of a beach with scattered clothing and other washed-up items (Image 3–4). The metonymic and metaphorical connection between these images is a recurrent visual strategy throughout Poloni's piece, highlighting the sea as a complex frontier zone where various groups intersect with different outcomes. This is also underlined by the different boats and other means of transportation present throughout the book: The small, blue confiscated boats are later juxtaposed with fishing trawlers, boats belonging to coastal guards, and other larger vessels, planes and helicopters. Furthermore, some images show the Centre for Identification and Expulsion, a camp next to the airport where undocumented migrants are typically placed and registered until they are – most frequently – transferred or returned to a non-EU country. The building is fenced in and heavily guarded, marking the limits of global mobility (Image 5).

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.





Image 2. Marco Poloni, from the constellation *Displacement Island*, 2006.

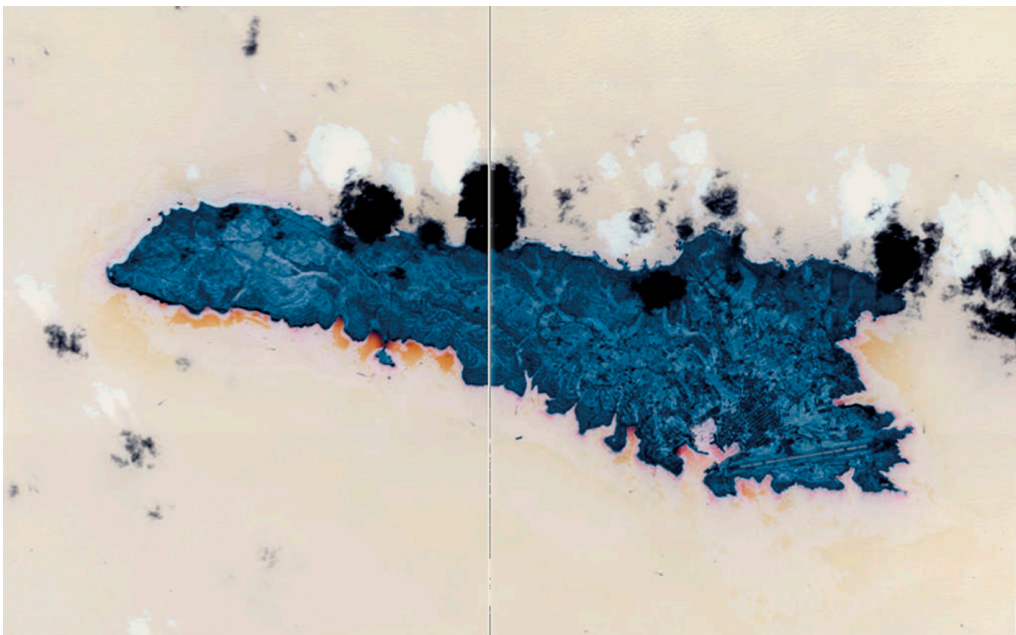


Image 3. Marco Poloni, from the constellation *Displacement Island*, 2006.





Image 4. Marco Poloni, from the constellation *Displacement Island*, 2006.



Image 5. Marco Poloni, from the constellation *Displacement Island*, 2006.

At the Centre for Identification and Expulsion, migrants usually have their papers checked and are then registered biometrically. Apart from biometrical registration, other kinds of surveillance imagery from aerial photographs to navigation monitors and satellites are included in *Displacement Island*, underlining methods of observation, mapping and tracking as conditions for all life on the island – for tourists, fishermen,

immigrants and border police.<sup>204</sup> Lampedusa can be said to be surrounded by a web of visual representations, including the everyday practice of tourist photography in both private snapshots and the commercial representations of advertising and postcards. Tourists pose for the camera; for them photographic visibility is desirable and marks 'We were here' as a fond future memory. Whereas Displacement Island holds numerous pictures of tourists and fishermen, there are no direct depictions of refugees or immigrants. We only encounter what could be traces of irregular immigrants, like washed-up clothing, an empty pack of Arabic cigarettes, or the many stacked boats.

Voluntary and involuntary migration is further visualized in the piece through mythological and literary figures such as Ulysses and Robinson Crusoe, embodied in characters from avant-garde cinema. The figure of Ulysses (Image 6) is from Jean-Luc Godard's film *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*, 1963) and stills from Luis Buñuel's *Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1954) show both Friday and Crusoe himself. These images appear together with photos of present-day fishermen, tourists, and the confiscated boats of immigrants. Further film stills referencing the reception of the migrant include a hand measuring a print in the sand from Gordon Douglas' *Them!* (1954), a B movie about the invasion of a desert town by gigantic, mutated ants. The implied parallel to the anti-immigration rhetoric of extreme right-wing parties in Europe reflects Poloni's own critical position on the politics activated by this rhetoric. The artist is visually present in the work through his inclusion of personal snapshots from the island and its waters, including the first, opening image (Image 1). He thus embodies a position that visualises his own privileged role, not only as observer and author, but also as tourist. The piece does not claim to identify and categorize different groups of people present on Lampedusa, but rather strives to illuminate the complex representational levels of current migration politics and practices in Europe. Archival imagery shows Lampedusa as a former military outpost, which underlines the concrete and symbolic site of the border as frontier.

As mentioned in the discussion of Frontex and Eurosur, images of Lampedusa and the Mediterranean are recurring references in the political argumentation for fortifying EU's borders, which include the images of tragic wrecks and drownings as reported in the media. Joerg Bader argues in his essay on *Displacement Island* that we are "witnessing a contemporary war of images". He stresses in the same vein: "In the basin lying between Lampedusa and the southern shores of the Mediterranean, a

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<sup>204</sup> The presence of the local fishermen refers to the fact that since 2009 Italian legislation has prohibited any active help to immigrants in distress at sea, since the immigrants are considered illegal and thus criminalized. See: Bader, J. 'Drifting Towards the Vertical Beach: About Marco Poloni's Work *Displacement Island*'. Inserted supplement to Poloni 2013 (op. cit.). Accessible at: [http://www.theanalogueislandbureau.net/pdf/joerg\\_bader\\_drifting\\_towards\\_the\\_vertical\\_beach\\_about\\_marco\\_poloni\\_s\\_work\\_displacement\\_island\\_2013.pdf](http://www.theanalogueislandbureau.net/pdf/joerg_bader_drifting_towards_the_vertical_beach_about_marco_poloni_s_work_displacement_island_2013.pdf)

fair number of producers of images are operating: coastguards and police forces, press agencies, government observers, NGOs and of course journalists from daily papers and European television."<sup>205</sup>



Image 6. A still-image from Jean-Luc Godard's film *Le Mepris* (*Contempt*, 1963) used in Marco Poloni's photo book *Displacement Island*, 2013.

Bader further reminds us how press and TV imagery are often accompanied by images from other news stories showing famine, disease and war in Africa, creating a link between stereotypical images of overcrowded, derelict vessels and those of the distress of peoples on the 'dark continent'. This reinforces the stereotype of migrants as starving hordes coming to take work from working classes of Europe. The argumentation behind more aggressive immigration policies, intensified border management, and scrutinizing surveillance systems seem to rely more on affective imagery than on accurate numbers, differentiated categories of migrants, and impartial research.<sup>206</sup> The affective images or signs of the migrant other accumulate into virtual fears of immigration parallel to what Brian Massumi has termed "the political ontology of threat". As he notes: "If we feel a threat, there was a threat. Threat is affectively self-causing. [...] The felt reality of threat legitimates pre-emptive action, once and for all [...] The affective reality of threat is contagious."<sup>207</sup> In a similar logic, through (visual) rhetoric, irregular or undocumented migrants are affectively imagined as illegal and thus criminal immigrants. In the words of surveillance scholar Didier Bigo, the immigrant becomes "the core of an (in)security continuum where he is associated with the unemployed, the thief, the smuggler and the criminal – an image used and developed by political parties of the (far) right but also by major media programs."<sup>208</sup>

<sup>205</sup> Bader, p. 6–7.

<sup>206</sup> See: Triandafyllidou, p.1 ff. and Bigo and Guild.

<sup>207</sup> Massumi, B. 'The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat' in Bryant, A. and Pollock, G. (eds), *Digital and Other Virtualities: Renegotiating the Image*, London & New York, I.B. Tauris, 2010, pp, 81, 84.

<sup>208</sup> Bigo, p. 84.



Eurosur and smart surveillance systems can be said to improve the possibilities for pre-emptive action. Eurosur satisfies what Bigo sees as the governmental aim to gather prospective knowledge through observation at a distance, including profiling strategies attempting to monitor the future.<sup>209</sup> This parallels the ‘double conditional’ of the political ontology of threat in Massumi’s analysis.<sup>210</sup> Based on affective imagery and rhetoric, EU policy makers and surveillant agents argue that intensified surveillance systems and border control are needed in order to manage irregular migration, even though research shows that ‘unauthorized entries represent only a small part of the irregular migration picture.’<sup>211</sup> Furthermore, politicians focus on irregular immigrants arriving in boats from Africa, even though they actually represent a very small number compared to immigrants arriving by plane, for example, something partly due to the recurrent media images.<sup>212</sup> Agencies and political programmes like Frontex and Eurosur use representations of immigrants as an undifferentiated mass, which then needs to be visualized, categorized and registered in a surveillance complex. The argumentation is self-fulfilling: The mere existence of all the surveillance technologies demonstrates the need for those very same systems. The sociologist Andrea Brighenti applies the term ‘de-subjectification’ (a strategy in institutional control) to describe the surveillance assemblage as a visibility regime: “The de-subjectified individual, though, is only part of a wider picture. Space can be controlled dividually, for instance, through boundary policing. But whenever some redrawing of boundaries takes place, other technologies will eventually intervene, leading to re-subjectification and re-individualization.”<sup>213</sup> The processes of re-individualization are particularly sensitive for undocumented migrants, both in regard to keeping under the radar and in the face of the potential need for help. During the whole migratory process, negotiations for or against visibility are crucial. Approaching the border as an irregular migrant, for example in small boats in the Mediterranean, invisibility might be the only chance of a future, but it might also prevent assistance in a life-threatening emergency.

### *Invisible Immigrants*

In *Displacement Island* Marco Poloni applies different forms of photography to point to and to counter the complex of visibility zones and surveillance aimed at fixating, identifying and ‘machine-reading’ irregular immigrants. The paradoxical logic of EU’s surveillance complex can be described in terms of a specific photographic visuality which is working

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 88–89.

<sup>210</sup> Massumi, p. 81 ff.

<sup>211</sup> Triandafyllidou, p. 8

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 16 ff. and p. 19 on discourses in Italy and Spain as examples.

<sup>213</sup> Brighenti, pp. 63–64.

with two concepts of the indexical: The strictly referential indexicality of the 'situational picture' as the real-time monitoring of a clearly defined space, and the performative indexicality of the 'affective alert' – Massumi's term for the semiotics of threat. Following Peirce's well-known theory of the index as a sign, which is imperative or exclamatory but which in itself asserts nothing, Massumi concludes: "To understand the political ontology of threat requires returning thought to this affective twilight zone of indexical experience. In that bustling zone of indistinction, the world becomingly includes so much more than perception reveals."<sup>214</sup> In complex zones of visibility, a double indexicality-deprives them of the agency to take control of their own visibility. This double indexicality is parallel to David Green and Joanna Lowry's Peirce-inspired definition of the photographic reality effect: "These two forms of indexicality, the one existing as a physical trace of an event, the other as performative gesture that points towards it, both invoke a relationship to the real that seems to be specific to the photographic image."<sup>215</sup> Poloni's critical documentary strategy looks at the power of the double indexicality of photography seen from an embodied perspective – 'from below'. He appropriates both visual registration and surveillance imagery without actually showing the migrant body. The mimicry of monitoring practices is an important strategy in contemporary counter-surveillance art.<sup>216</sup> Poloni mimics the conveyance of affective, virtual threat, but it is the potential danger facing the undocumented immigrant that is invoked, not the EU-asserted fear of immigration. On one spread of the book, a drawing of a bow is linked to the sea navigation monitor from a fishing trawler, where small skull symbols indicate protruding rocks (Images 6–8). Another series of images combine a cross on a grave with a waiting Italian plane (Images 9–12).<sup>217</sup> All these photographs can be seen as flashes of the threats facing the unprotected individual. *Displacement Island* conveys the presence of the unwanted migrants, not only through traces such as cigarette packs, but also in recurring images of the Centre for Identification and Expulsion. As in other detention institutions for refugees, asylum seekers and other immigrants, photography is prohibited in the centre, which like others of its kind is constantly criticised by human rights observers. In other words, this part of the migratory experience is kept as far as possible from public view by the authorities. But Poloni does photograph the location, thus looking back at

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<sup>214</sup> Massumi, p. 91.

<sup>215</sup> Green, D. and Lowry, J. 'From Presence to the Performative: Rethinking Photographic Indexicality', in D Green (ed.), *Where is the Photograph?*, Photoworks, 2003, p. 48.

<sup>216</sup> See for instance Wolthers, L. 'Mobile Monitoring: Self-tracking in Counter-surveillance Art', in Dahlgren, A., Petersson, D. and Vestberg, N. L. (eds.). *Representational Machines. Photography and the Production of Space*, Aarhus University Press 2013.

<sup>217</sup> As Poloni explains the unnamed graves at the cemetery of Lampedusa: 'In 2006, when I worked there, sometimes drowned immigrants could not be identified, and were put in a grave with a number.' E-mail correspondence with author, August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

power, i.e., at the site where the machine-readable surveillance process of identification begins.

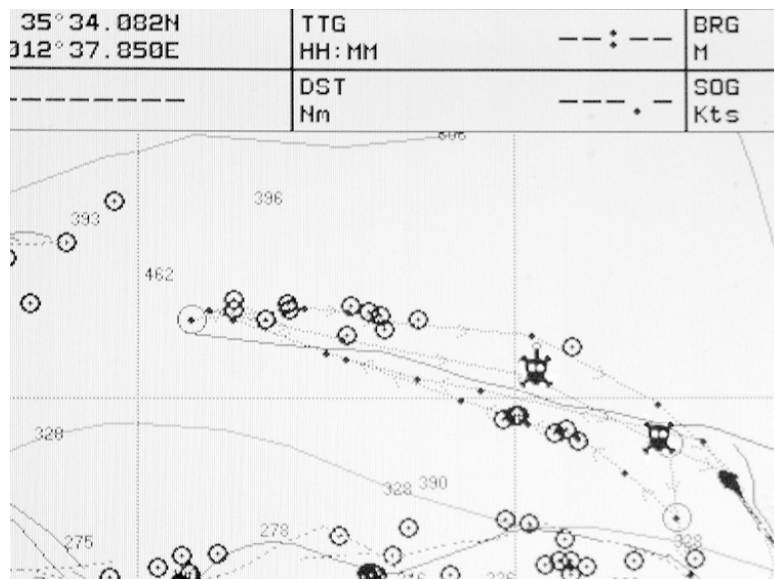


Image 7. Marco Poloni, from the constellation *Displacement Island*, 2006.



Image 8. Marco Poloni, from the constellation *Displacement Island*, 2006.

Whereas the EU's constantly expanding surveillance technology seeks to create a detailed overview in order to detect, localise, identify and sort migrant bodies, Poloni uses the photographic medium to create another kind of 'situational picture'. His strategy is not the kind of documentary exposure that we can encounter in journalist or activist photography, but rather the construction of a visual narrative of displacement. Art historian Tom Holert argues that Poloni uses metonymic displacement as a pictorial language, and that the visual drifting or wandering also refers to the



migrant's constant movement between (in)visibility zones. In this sense, displacement can also be a potential form of avoidance or sliding beyond the reach of the scrutinizing gaze, while at the same time insisting on looking back at the scrutinizing authorities.<sup>218</sup> As Holert notes: "The supposedly aimless drift of photographic selection and documentation seems to be contradicted by the supposedly targeted movements of migration and tourism. On the other hand, the acts of travelling and documenting, moving and visualising, complement one another. The morphology of mobility that emerges here is, at the same time, a cartography of emotion, underpinned by similarities and associations, by the remembered and the familiar."<sup>219</sup> Refraining in this way from the technocratic real-time referentiality, *Displacement Island* functions as an embodied photographic reflection of the multifaceted complex of surveillance surrounding migrants at EU borders. Combining the referential, the affective and the associative qualities of photography, Poloni's *Displacement Island* mimics, criticizes and counter-balances the surveillance system's 'situational picture' as well as the aim to 'manage' the borders and the individuals crossing them.



Images 9–12 (from above left). Marco Poloni, from the constellation *Displacement Island*, 2006.

<sup>218</sup> Poloni himself explains: 'I took my cue from the word "displacement" in the strict Freudian psychoanalytic sense, i.e. the displacement of the image of a trauma into an image that is more sustainable for consciousness.' E-mail correspondence with the author, 27 August 2014.

<sup>219</sup> Holert, T. 'From the Archives of Invisibility', in Poloni (op. cit), p. 3. Web access:

[http://www.theanalogueislandbureau.net/pdf/tom\\_holert\\_from\\_the\\_archives\\_of\\_invisibility\\_marco\\_poloni\\_s\\_displacement\\_island\\_and\\_the\\_visuality\\_of\\_the\\_border\\_regime\\_2013.pdf](http://www.theanalogueislandbureau.net/pdf/tom_holert_from_the_archives_of_invisibility_marco_poloni_s_displacement_island_and_the_visuality_of_the_border_regime_2013.pdf)

Holert further points to the metonymic strategy in cinematography, which Poloni also makes use of in other works, such as *Shadowing the Invisible Man* – Script for a short film (2001). In this photo series, the fictional narrative follows a migrant crossing one of Europe's southern borders, constantly in motion while forced to avoid visibility. During the whole visual script for a (never to be realized) film, the migrant is never seen. Instead, the shots include his own POV and evoke his constant alertness and anxiety. His every move is documented so his story is told - he is 'seen', without being involuntarily visualized. Poloni is an artist who has consistently dealt with questions of visual representation, the gaze and visibility machines on the one hand, and concerns about marginalised and surveilled subjects on the other.<sup>220</sup> His works convey a humanitarian perspective on migration in Europe by employing all the nuances in the spectrum of photographic language, from cinematography to satellite imagery. The EU-political, border-managing use of both the objective and affective side of photography is problematized through appropriation and mimicry, and *Displacement Island* and *Shadowing the Invisible Man* insist on an alternative, visual position 'from below'. Oscillating between visibility/identification/documentation and camouflage/anonymity/invisibility, both works point to the scrutinizing gaze of the surveillance complex as well as to the need for gaps, uncertainties and 'fog'. Here I am referring to the 'foggy social structures' that can help migrants stay out of sight in order to "frustrate government policies that aim to identify and control them".<sup>221</sup> In this context it should be stressed that undocumented migrants not only experience exclusion through – or by means of – surveillance, registration, and control, but also from documentation and registration. This corresponds to what the social scientist Helen Hintjens has termed 'selective non-surveillance' and 'punitive screening out', where unwanted humans are denied even the most basic rights through a deliberate non-collection of data. She argues that punitive surveillance should be replaced by an 'enabling' kind of surveillance.<sup>222</sup> Her analysis is focussed on the screening out or de-selection of failed asylum seekers, but the conclusions are valid for other groups of irregular migrants too. Most of all, Hintjens reminds us that surveillance is not per se nor necessarily a negative power, and that "internal surveillance must be redefined as a public good".<sup>223</sup> For surveillance to function as an inclusion into societal care and human rights, we might add, the individuals must be granted agency over their own visibility and representation. Similarly, while artworks like Poloni's oppose the tendency to render bodies detectable and readable by machines, they also indicate that 'shadowing' otherwise invisible migrants is a means of acknowledging their experiences.

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<sup>220</sup> For an overview of works until 2004 see Poloni, M. *Never Mind the Gap*, Nürnberg, Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg, 2004.

<sup>221</sup> Broeders and Engbersen, pp. 1593-1594. Examples of foggy social structures that the state instruments of surveillance and identification have difficulty penetrating could be informal (illegal) markets of housing, work, NGOs etc.

<sup>222</sup> Hintjens, H. 'Screening in or out? Selective Non-surveillance of Unwanted Humanity in EU Cities', *Surveillance & Society*, vol. 11 (1/2), 2013, p. 88.

<sup>223</sup> Hintjens, p. 103.

## Conclusion

Arguably, the governmental power of photography in today's surveillance society lies in its double indexical features: The situational monitoring and the affective alert. This is particularly problematic (in terms of profiling, discrimination and potential violation of human rights) for irregular migrants. As long as they are 'undocumented', unseen or anonymous, they are conceived as a virtual threat, and in EU-political discourse they are illegalised in order to argue for further security measurements, i.e. Frontex and Eurosur. In the technocratic surveillance complex "the controls are de-localized, dispersed, fragmented, transnational and done by networks of security professionals beyond the national frontiers".<sup>224</sup> Similarly, the techno-bureaucratic visualization strategy itself, which seeks to identify, localize and control, can be seen as the dehumanizing exercise of power. EU's surveillance practices are criticised by social sciences, surveillance scholars and human rights activists, who all point to the need for counter-visualities and towards an enabling, humanitarian surveillance or registering.

Using multiple viewpoints, technologies and visualizations, contemporary surveillance art represents the multi-medial surveillance complex surrounding migrants in Europe and their controlled visualisation in the press, in border-management and in the social system. Photography based works like those by Poloni challenge the conventional strategies of visualisation by creating their own 'situational picture' of migration. Poloni applies various forms of photography to point to the complex of visibility zones seen from below - from an embodied perspective. By also making himself visible in several images, possibly as a stand-in for all of us privileged Europeans, the artist insists on an awareness of our own role in the current surveillance complex. We may not feel the extended border control on our own bodies, but this does not mean that we are not part of the surveillance politics or indeed share responsibility for the intensified monitoring of migrants as well as the increasing fortification of EU borders. Thus, activist and artistic practices can contribute to the visualisation of otherwise invisible surveillance technologies and agents, which produce criminalised migrant bodies. Works like Poloni's call for an empowering reclamation of all human beings' agency over their own visibility.

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<sup>224</sup> Bigo, p. 90.

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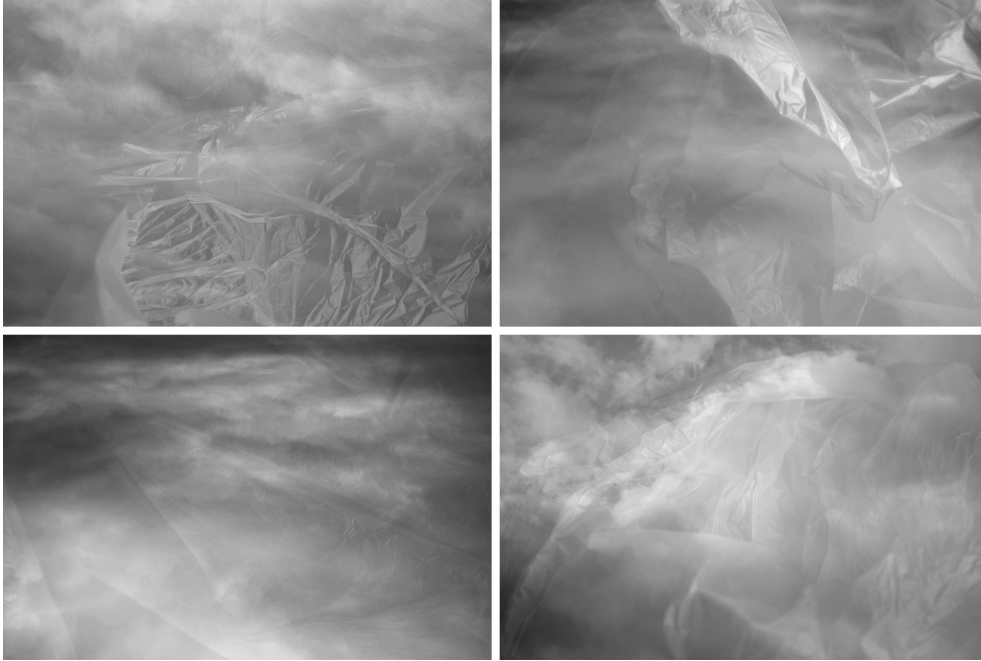


# The Creative Power of Nonhuman Photography

JOANNA ZYLINSKA

## Abstract

Living in the media-saturated society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has become tantamount to being photographed on a constant basis. Our identity is constituted and confirmed by the ongoing flow of photo streams on our mobile phones, tablets and social media platforms such as Facebook and Tumblr, not to mention the thousands of security cameras invisibly registering our image when we pass through city centres, shopping malls and airports. This photographic process is largely automatized: it is subject to the logic and vision of the machine. Even the supposed human-centric decisions with regard to *what* to photograph and *how* to do it are often *reactions* to events quickly unfolding in front of the photographer's eyes, or *responses* to pre-established visual categories: landscape, portraiture, play, war. This chapter argues that human-driven photography – involving an act of conscious looking through a viewfinder or at an LCD screen – is only one small part of what takes place in the field of photography, even though it is often made to stand in for photography *as such*. Yet, rather than contribute to recent jeremiads about photography – what with it being seen as supposedly dying in the digital era because it is no longer authentic or material enough, or imploding due to its excessiveness and banality as evidenced on Instagram and in the much maligned selfie phenomenon – it also suggests that it is precisely through focusing on its nonhuman aspect that *we can find life in photography*.



Images 1–4 (from above left). Joanna Zylińska, from the series *Topia daedala*, 2014.

This article offers a philosophical exposition of the concept of ‘nonhuman photography’. What is meant by nonhuman photography here is not *just* photos taken by agents that are not human, such as CCTV cameras, body scanners, space satellites or Google Street View, although some of these examples will be referenced throughout the piece. Yet the principal aim of this article is to suggest that there is more to photography than meets the (human) eye and that *all photography is to some extent nonhuman*. With this, no doubt still somewhat cryptic, proposition in mind, let us take a small detour from philosophising to look at a photographic project which introduces the key ideas behind this article.

Called *Topia daedala* (Images 1–4), this series of twelve black and white photographs<sup>225</sup> arises out of an ongoing exploration on my part of various forms of manufactured landscape. Taken from two vantage points on both sides of a window, the composite images that make up the series interweave human and nonhuman creativity by overlaying the outer world of cloud formation with the inner space of sculptural arrangement. Remediating the tradition of the sublime as embraced by J.M.W. Turner’s landscape paintings and Ansel Adams’ national park photographs, the series foregrounds the inherent manufacturedness of what counts as ‘landscape’ and of the conventions of its visual representation. Through this, *Topia daedala* performs a micro-sublime for the Anthropocene era, a period in which the human has become identified as a geological agent whose impact on the geo- and biosphere has been irreversible. It also raises questions on the role of plastic – as both construction material and debris – in the age of petrochemical urgency.

*Topia daedala* is not meant to serve as a direct illustration of the concept of nonhuman photography this article engages with. However, it does introduce us to a wider problematic of human-nonhuman relations, raising at the same time the politico-ethical question about our human responsibility in the world in which the agency of the majority of actants – such as wind, rain or earthquake – goes beyond that of human decision or will, even if it may be influenced by human action. The question of human responsibility in the universe which is quintessentially entangled, on both a cellular and cosmic level (with us all being ‘made of starstuff’),<sup>226</sup> is an important one. Even if we cannot be entirely sure what this fragile human ‘we’ actually stands for, the responsibility to face, and give an account of, the unfoldings of this world – which is made up of human and nonhuman entities and relations – *belongs to us humans in a singular way*. Philosophy, in particular ethics, has typically been a way of addressing the

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<sup>225</sup> This series was developed as a visual track for my book, *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene*.

<sup>226</sup> This is a famous line by physicist Carl Sagan from his documentary TV series, *Cosmos*.

problem of responsibility.<sup>227</sup> But written linear argument is only one mode of enquiry through which this problem can be approached. Alongside philosophical writing, over the recent years I have been attempting to experiment with other, less verbal, modes of addressing ethical and political issues: those enabled by art, and, more specifically, photography. These experiments have been driven by one overarching question: is it possible to *practice philosophy as a form of art*, while also *engaging in art-making and photography as ways of philosophising*? The reason photography may lend itself to this kind of cross-modal experimentation is because of its ontological, or world-making (rather than *just* representational), capabilities. We can turn here for support to literary critic Walter Benn Michaels, who, while upholding ‘the impossibility (and the undesirability) of simply denying the indexicality of the photograph’,<sup>228</sup> also argues that ‘It is precisely because there are ways in which photographs *are not* just representations that photography and the theory of photography have been so important’.<sup>229</sup> My proposition about photography’s ontological capabilities entails a stronger claim than the one made by Michael Fried in the Conclusion to his book, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, in which photography as practiced by representatives of what Fried calls ‘the anti-theatrical tradition’ such as Jeff Wall, Thomas Struth or Berndt and Hilda Becher is positioned as ‘an ontological medium’, because it ‘makes a positive contribution’ to ontological thought via its engagement with issues such as absorption and worldhood.<sup>230</sup> While for Fried photography just *makes philosophy better*, my claim in this article is that *photography makes philosophy*, full stop – and also, more importantly, that *photography makes worldhood*, rather than just commenting on it.

It may seem at this point that what was meant to be an account of nonhuman photography is revealing itself to be quite strongly attached to the concept of the human – as philosopher, photographer or art critic. This is true, because there is nothing more humanist than any unexamined singular gesture of trying to ‘move on beyond the human’. My ambition here, as in my other work, is therefore to explore the possibility of continuing to work with the concept of the human *in the light the*

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<sup>227</sup> In my books *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene* (Open Humanities Press, Ann Arbor, 2014), *Bioethics in the Age of New Media* (MIT Press, Cambridge, 2009) and *The Ethics of Cultural Studies* (Continuum, London and New York, 2005) I explored this question of responsibility by taking some steps towards outlining a non-prescriptive, non-moralistic, content-free ethics.

<sup>228</sup> W B Michaels, ‘Photographs and Fossils’, in *Photography Theory*, J Elkin (ed.), Routledge, New York and London, 2007, p. 447.

<sup>229</sup> Michaels, p. 445.

<sup>230</sup> M Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2008, p. 347.

*posthumanist critique*,<sup>231</sup> taking the latter seriously as both an injunction and a set of possibilities. The reasons for this proposed retention of the human have nothing to do with any kind of residual humanism or species nostalgia. Instead, they spring from the recognition of a *strategic* role of the concept of the human in any kind of artistic, creative, political or ethical project worth its salt, while also remaining aware of the fact that in many works of recent posthumanist theory the human has been successfully exposed as nothing more than a fantasy of unity and selfhood. This fantasy has been premised on the exclusion of the human's dependency, both material and conceptual, on other beings and non-living entities. Seen as too Eurocentric and masculinist by postcolonial and feminist theory, the human has also been revealed by various sciences to be just an arbitrary cut off point in the line of species continuity on the basis of characteristics shared across the species barrier: communication, emotions or tool use. This (non- or posthumanist) human this article retains as the anchor point of its enquiry is thus premised on the realisation that we are in (philosophical) trouble as soon as we start speaking about the human, but it also shows a certain intransigence that makes (some of) us hang on to the vestiges of the concept that has structured our thinking, philosophy and art for many centuries. So, onto a posthumanist theory of nonhuman photography, as articulated by a human, all too human, philosopher-photographer...

#### *Towards nonhuman photography (and all the way back)*

By way of contextualising our discussion of nonhuman photography, I want to look at two important texts in photography theory in which the relationship between human and nonhuman agents, technologies and practices has been addressed explicitly: a 2008 essay by John Tagg titled 'Mindless Photography' and a 2009 book by Fred Ritchin titled *After Photography*. Tagg's essay is a commentary on the supposed withering of the critical paradigm in both photographic practice and its interpretation, a paradigm articulated by Victor Burgin in his 1984 seminal text *Thinking Photography* and subsequently adopted by many scholars and students of photography. In his article Tagg references two then recent phenomena which, in his view, had radically altered the relationship between photography and the human: the CCTV system introduced in 2003 to

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<sup>231</sup> Although the tradition of posthumanist critique in the humanities extends as far back as at least the work of Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud, and includes writings by authors such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Donna Haraway, some of the recent key texts that critically expound the concept of posthumanism include: N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1999; Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, University of Minnesota Press, 2009; Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Polity, Cambridge, 2013; and Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013.

monitor the implementation of congestion charge in central London and the visual rendering of data captured by a radio telescope, in June 2005, of solar dust cloud radiation in the Taurus Molecular Cloud, with the data representing an event that 'took place in 1585, or thereabouts'.<sup>232</sup> While in the 1970s and early 1980s 'photography was framed as a site of human meanings that called the human into place', the more recent developments cited by Tagg are said to have undermined 'this confident assumption'.<sup>233</sup> Tagg seems disturbed by the fact that, in the London traffic surveillance system, the relationship between the embodied human subject and the technical apparatus has been irrevocably broken, with the technological circuit which consists of 'cameras, records, files and computers'<sup>234</sup> doing away with visual presentation, 'communication, psychic investment, a subject, or even a bodily organ'<sup>235</sup> – until the visual data concerning the car with a given number plate that has missed the congestion charge payment reaches the court. Tagg is similarly troubled by the severance of the relationship between photography and human sensation, between stimulus and response, in space photography. He goes so far as to suggest that in those new technological developments

*photography loses its function as a representation of the ego and the eye and even as a pleasure machine built to excite the body. In place of those figures, photography is encountered as an utterly dead thing; mindless in a much blunter sense than imagined [by Burgin] twenty-five years ago... [It is] driving towards a systemic disembodiment that, accelerating in the technologies of cybernetics and informatics, has sought to prepare what has been hailed as the 'postbiological' or 'posthuman' body for its insertions into a new machinic enslavement.*<sup>236</sup>

Photography which is unable to provide stimulation and pleasure for the human is then immediately linked by Tagg with mindlessness, emptiness and, ultimately, death. It may seem that, with this articulation, Tagg is engaging in a belated attempt to rescue photography from its long-standing association with mortality established by canonical texts such as Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, and to retrospectively postulate *the possibility of photography acting as a life-giving force*. However, this no doubt radical possibility, briefly hinted at in the above cited passage, is immediately withdrawn. Photography does not deliver life to the human any more and, for Tagg, it is only the human that can be both life's subject and its arbiter. This is of course a familiar philosophical gesture, first enacted by Aristotle,

<sup>232</sup> J Tagg, 'Mindless Photography', in *Photography: Theoretical Snapshots*, J J Long, A Noble and E Welch (eds), Routledge, London and New York, 2008, p. 21.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.



whereby technology is reduced to a mere tool for human existence, survival or improvement and is then assessed on the basis of how well it performs this function (rather than being understood as a dynamic network of forces the way Michel Foucault and Bernard Stiegler respectively suggest, or as an ‘intrinsic correlation of functions’<sup>237</sup> between the human and the apparatus the way Vilém Flusser apprehends it). Conceived in these instrumental terms, as the human’s opponent and enemy – and not part of the originary techno-logic that brings forth the human in the world, and the world itself as a space occupied by human and nonhuman entities – photography must inevitably fail.

It would be unfair not to mention the political motivation that underpins Tagg’s argument. His concern with ‘machinic enslavement’ is driven by what he sees as the deprivation of the human subject of both corporeal integrity and political subjectivity as a result of the encroachment of those new photoimaging technologies, in which ‘there is nothing to be seen’, on our lives.<sup>238</sup> This concern no doubt becomes even more pressing in the era of global networked surveillance enacted by the likes of the NSA, GCHQ, Facebook and Google. Yet to blame photography for the immoral and inhumane actions of its users is to misidentify the enemy, while also weakening the power of a political critique developed in its ambit. In his essay Tagg takes some significant steps towards analysing the changes occurring to photographic practice at the beginning of the twenty-first century but then recoils in horror from the brink of his own analysis. What could have served as a stepping stone towards developing both a radical posthumanist photography theory *and* a radical posthumanist political analysis ends up retreating into a place of melancholia for the human of yesteryear, one who was supposedly in control of both his personal body and the body politic but who can now only tilt at windmills – which are turning into drones in front of his very eyes.

If only Tagg had allowed himself to hear the exhortation from another photography theory radical, Fred Ritchin! Admittedly, Ritchin’s work is not free from a sense of melancholia espoused by Tagg: in *After Photography* Ritchin clearly reveals how he misses the time when people believed in images and when images could be used to solve conflict and serve justice. Yet, even though his book opens up with a rather dispiriting account of the changes occurring to the photographic medium and its representationalist ambitions, it ends with an affirmation of *life in photography*. Dazzled by the horizon of scale opened by telescoping and physics in a similar way Tagg was, Ritchin nevertheless admits that ‘in the digital-quantum world, it might be just possible ... to use an emerging post-photography to delineate, document, and explore the posthuman. To dance with ambiguity. To

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<sup>237</sup> Cited from a letter written by Flusser in S Zielinski, [... *After the Media*], Univocal, Minneapolis, 2013, p. 114. Zielinski explains that, for Flusser, ‘the apparatus does what the human wants it to do, and the human can only want what the apparatus is able to do’, p. 114.

<sup>238</sup> Tagg, p. 24.

introduce humility to the observer, as well as a sense of belonging. To say yes, and simultaneously, no'.<sup>239</sup>

*(Always) nonhuman photography*

It is precisely in this critical-philosophical spirit, of saying yes and, simultaneously, no, that my opening proposition that *all photography is to some extent nonhuman* should be read. While I am aware of, and concerned with, ways in which the nonhuman aspect of photography can produce inhumane practices, I also want to suggest that it is precisely in its nonhuman aspect that photography's creative, or world-making, side can be identified. Therefore, rather than contribute to recent jeremiads about photography, what with it being seen as supposedly dying in the digital era because it is no longer authentic or material enough, or imploding due to its excessiveness and banality as evidenced on Instagram and in the much maligned selfie phenomenon, I want to argue in what follows that it is precisely through focusing on its nonhuman aspect that we can find life in photography. This line of argument is partly indebted to the work of Flusser, who, in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* writes: 'The photographic apparatus lies in wait for photography; it sharpens its teeth in readiness. This readiness to spring into action on the part of apparatuses, their similarity to wild animals, is something to grasp hold of in the attempt to define the term etymologically'.<sup>240</sup> Flusser builds here on the Latin origins of the term 'apparatus', which derives from *apparare*, 'make ready for' (as a combination of the prefix *ad-*, 'toward', and *parare*, 'make ready'). This leads him to read photography as facilitated by, or even proto-inscribed in, the nexus of image-capture devices, various chemical and electronic components and processes, as well as sight- and technology-equipped humans.

Flusser's proposition challenges the humanist narrative of invention as an outcome of singular human genius: it recognises the significance of the technological set-up in the emergence of various human practices. This is not to say that these practices function *outside* the human but rather that the concepts of self-contained human intentionality and sovereign human agency may be too limited to describe the emergence of specific technological processes at a particular moment in time. Flusser's idea seems to be (unwittingly) reflected in Geoffrey Batchen's proposition outlined in *Burning with Desire* that photography was invented – seemingly repeatedly, by Nicéphore Niépce, Louis Daguerre, Hyppolyte Bayard and William Fox Talbot, among others – due to the fact that in the early nineteenth century there already existed a desire for it. This desire

<sup>239</sup> F Ritchin, *After Photography*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 2009, p. 183.

<sup>240</sup> V Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, Reaktion Books, London, 2000, pp. 21-22.

manifested itself in the proliferation of the discourses and ideas about the possibility of capturing images and fixing them, and of the technologies – ‘the camera obscura and the chemistry necessary to reproduce’<sup>241</sup> the images taken with it – that would facilitate such a development. We could therefore perhaps go so far as to say that the photographic apparatus, which for Batchen contains but also exceeds a discrete human component, was awaiting the very invention of photography.

The above discussed ideas on the photographic apparatus will eventually point me not just towards rethinking the photographic medium but also towards a possibility (one that has been withheld by Tagg) of a posthumanist political analysis. For now, taking inspiration from Flusser, I want to suggest that human-driven photography – where an act of conscious looking through a viewfinder or, more frequently nowadays, at an LCD screen held at arm’s level – is only one small part of what goes on in the field of photography, even though it is often made to stand in for photography *as such*. The execution of human agency in photographic practice, be it professional or amateur, ostensibly manifests itself in decisions about the subject matter (the ‘what’) and about ways of capturing this subject matter with a digital or analogue apparatus (the ‘how’). Yet in amateur, snapshot-type photography these supposed human-centric decisions are often affective reactions to events quickly unfolding in front of the photographer’s eyes. Such reactions happen too quickly, or we could even say *automatically*, for any conscious processes of decision-making to be involved – bar that original decision to actually have, bring and use a camera, rather than not. This automatism in photography also manifests itself in the fact that these kinds of ‘snap’ reactions are usually rechanneled through a whole database of standardised, pre-programmed, pre-existing image-frames, whose significance we are already familiar with and which we are trying to recreate in a unique way, under the umbrella of so-called individual experience: ‘toddler running towards mother’; ‘girl blowing a candle on a birthday cake’; ‘couple posing in front of the Taj Mahal’. It is in this sense that, as Flusser has it, ‘weddings conform to a photographic program’.<sup>242</sup>

Similar representationalist ambitions accompany many professional photographic activities, including those undertaken by photojournalists who aim to show us, objectively and without judging, what war, poverty and ‘the pain of others’, to borrow Susan Sontag’s phrase,<sup>243</sup> are ‘really’ like, or those performed by photographic artists. Even prior to any moment of making a picture actually occur, fine art photographers tend to remain invested in the modernist idea of an artist as a human agent with a

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<sup>241</sup> G Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999, p. 25.

<sup>242</sup> V Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2001, p. 56.

<sup>243</sup> See S Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Picador, New York, 2003.

particular vocation, one whose aesthetic and conceptual gestures are aimed at capturing something unique, or at least capturing it uniquely, with an image-making device. And thus we get works of formal portraiture; images of different types of vegetation or geological formations that are made to constitute 'landscapes'; still-life projects of aestheticised domesticity, including close-ups of kitchen utensils, fraying carpets or light traces on a wall; and, last but not least, all those works that can be gathered into that rag-bag called 'conceptual photography'.<sup>244</sup> In this way, images inscribe themselves in a cybernetic loop of familiarity, with minor variations to style, colour and the (re)presented object made to stand for creativity, originality or even 'genius'.

### *The automated image*

Through the decisions of artists and amateurs about their practice, photography becomes an act of *making something significant*, even if not necessarily *making it signify something* in any straightforward way. It is a practice of focusing on what is in its very nature multifocal, of literally casting light on what would have otherwise remained obscure, of carving a fragment from the flow of life and turning it into a splinter of what, post-factum, becomes known as 'reality'. Traditionally, this moment of selection – referred to as 'decisive' by followers of the documentary tradition in photography – was associated with the pressing of the button to open the camera's shutter. However, with the introduction of the Lytro camera on to the market in 2012, the temporality of this seemingly unique and transient photographic moment has been stretched into both the past and the future. Lytro captures the entire light field rather than a single plane of light, thus allowing the photographer to change and readjust the focus on a computer in postproduction. Interestingly, Lytro is advertised as 'The only camera that captures life in living pictures' – a poetic formulation which is underpinned by the ongoing industry claim to 'absolute novelty', but which merely exacerbates and visualises the inherent instability of *all* photographic practice and *all* photographic objects. Lytro is thus just one more element in the long-term humanist narrative about 'man's dominion over the earth', a narrative that drives the progressive automatising of many of our everyday devices, including cameras, cars and refrigerators.

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<sup>244</sup> There are of course many ways of systematising art photography, with additional categories and subcategories – such as 'abstraction', 'architecture' or 'nude' – being frequently listed. The quick typology proposed here does not aim to be comprehensive or scholarly: rather, my aim is to highlight the traditional categories frequently used by professional fine art photography exhibition and competitions, as well as amateur artist photo hosting sites. The last category, 'conceptual photography', is perhaps the most open and the most contentious. I am using the term here in the expanded sense it has gained on many art photography websites. To cite from one of them, Fotoblur ([www.fotoblur.com](http://www.fotoblur.com)), conceptual photography is a 'genre of photography in which the artist makes a photograph of a concept or idea'.

Giving us an illusion of control over technology by making cameras smaller and domestic equipment more user-friendly, the technoscientific industry actually exacerbates the gap between technology and the human by relieving us from the responsibility of getting to know and engage with the increasingly software-driven 'black boxes'.



Image 5. An example from Véronique Ducharme's series *Encounters* consisting of images taken by automatic hunting cameras.

In the light of the dominance of the humanist paradigm in photography, a paradigm that is premised on the supposed human control of both the practice of image-making and the equipment, it is important to ask what gets elided in such conceptualisations. Of course, I am not the only one who is asking this question: the problem of nonhuman agency in photography has been explored by other theorists, artists and curators. *One recent photography event that brought many of these ideas to the fore was Drone: The Automated Image, a series of shows taking place under the umbrella of the photography biennale Le Mois de la Photo in Montreal, curated by Paul Wombell, in 2013.*<sup>245</sup> The uniqueness of this 13<sup>th</sup> edition of the Montreal biennale lay not so much in highlighting the machinic aspect of photographic and video practice, as this aspect had already been mobilised in the early days of photography – for example, in the works of Alexander Rodchenko or László Moholy-Nagy. *Drone: The Automated*

<sup>245</sup> This article arises out of a catalogue essay I wrote for this exhibition: J Zylinska, 'All the World's a Camera: Notes on Nonhuman Photography', in *Drone: The Automated Image*, Paul Wombell (ed.), Kerber, Bielefeld, 2013.

*Image* (which was concerned with much more than just drones) took one step further on this road towards not just nonhuman but also posthumanist photography by actually departing from the human-centric visualisation process. In many of the works shown, the very act and process of capture were relegated to a computer, a camera mounted atop a moving vehicle, a robot or a dog. To mention just one example, Canadian artist Véronique Ducharme presented a photography-based installation called *Encounters*, consisting of images taken by automatic hunting cameras (Image 5). As the artist herself explains,

*Over the course of one year, automatic cameras, installed in various parts of the Quebec landscape, recorded images from the forest. The images included animals, sunrise, wind and other actants susceptible of triggering the shutter of the cameras. These digital images, including the ‘mistakes’ of the cameras (i.e., blacked-out or overexposed images) were then transferred onto slide film in order to be projected in the gallery space using slide projectors. Accompanied by its rhythmic mechanical click, each machine has been programmed to sporadically and unpredictably project the images around the space, leaving the viewer entangled within the dialogue created by the machines and the images.*<sup>246</sup>

Ducharme’s project offers a thought-provoking intervention into the debate about (human) intentionality in photography theory, whereby the former is seen as a condition and a guarantee of the medium being considered a form of art.<sup>247</sup> Photographic agency is distributed here amongst a network of participants, which includes not just nonhuman but also inanimate actors – even if ‘the beholder’ of the installation is still envisaged to be a human gallery-goer.

Ducharme’s work has similarities with another project which foregrounds and remediates nonhuman photographic agency without reneging on its human dimension: *Stolen Images* by British photographer Juliet Ferguson (Image 6), published in the London independent photography magazine *Flip* in 2012 and online in *Photomediations Machine* in 2013. Accessing CCTV cameras using appropriate search terms via Google as part of her journalism job, Ferguson was able ‘to see through the all-seeing eyes of the CCTV camera places’<sup>248</sup> what she would not have access to in the real world – without leaving her sofa. The process led her to reflect ‘on what it means to take a photograph’ and to pose the following questions: ‘The majority of

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<sup>246</sup> V Ducharme, *Encounters*, 15.02.2014, *Photomediations Machine*, <http://photomediationsmachine.net/2014/02/15/encounters/>

<sup>247</sup> For the exposition of this argument, developed in response to the work of Michael Fried on the work of Thomas Demand, see Michaels, pp. 443–44.

<sup>248</sup> J Ferguson, *Stolen Images*, 29.04.2013, *Photomediations Machine*, <http://photomediationsmachine.net/2013/04/29/stolen-images>



the cameras I used I could pan, zoom and focus. Is this any less photography than someone using a fully automatic camera and taking a picture from a designated panorama point at a beauty spot? Does photography demand a presence or are photographs taken using appropriated cameras controlled from another country in another time zone just as valid as “created” images?’.<sup>249</sup> Ferguson has revealed that, in the process, she began ‘to see a certain beauty in the images as they became removed from their original intention of surveillance. Instead, they offered a unique perspective on the ebb and flow of a day, from a vantage point and rigidity that ordinary photography doesn’t offer’.<sup>250</sup>

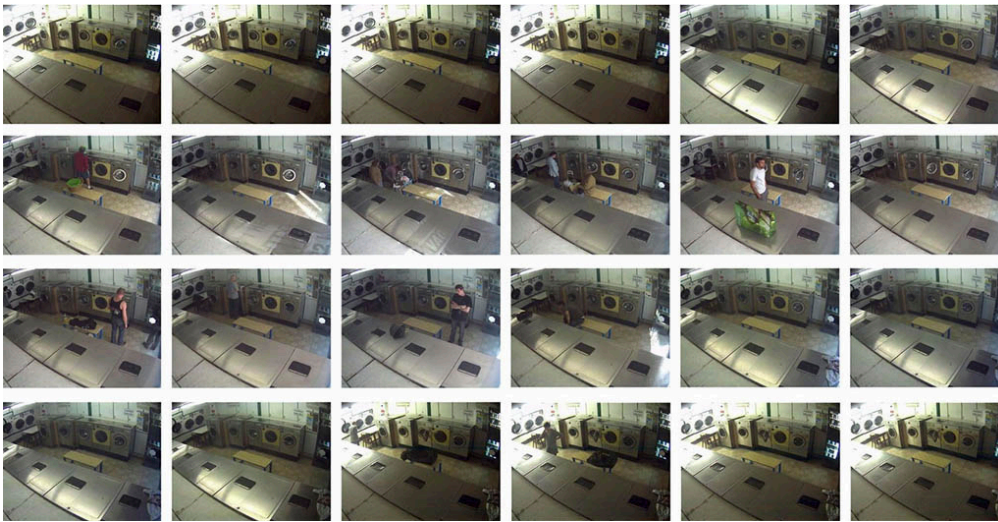


Image 6. An example from Juliet Ferguson's series *Stolen Images* created with CCTV cameras.

### *The photographic condition*

These two projects discussed above demonstrate that art practice is merely part of a wider *photographic condition*, with things photographing themselves, without always being brought back to the human spectrum of vision as the ultimate channel of perception and of things perceived. Naturally, humans form part of this photographic continuum – as artists, photojournalists, festival organisers, computer programmers, engineers, printers, Instagram users, and, last but not least, spectators. However, what the examples just presented make explicit is that we are all part of that photographic flow of things being incessantly photographed, and of trying to make interventions from within the midst of it. In this way, Ducharme's and Ferguson's projects fall into a category that we might term ‘insignificant photography’ – not in the sense that they are mindless (as Tagg would perhaps have it), irrelevant and of no consequence, but rather

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

in the sense of allowing us to see things that have been captured almost incidentally and in passing, with the thematic ‘what’ not being the key impulse behind the execution of the images. It is worth emphasising that this idea of insignificant photography has not just come to the fore with the development of networked digital technologies but was actually present in the early discourse of photography, even if the latter tended to confine photography’s nonhuman aspect to the fairly conservative idea of ‘objective observation’. Steve Edwards explains that

*Throughout its history, the camera has repeatedly been seen as an objective machine that captures information without any interference from the artist. ... in the early years of photography this was an often repeated theme: it was assumed that the sun made the picture, or the camera did, or even that the object in question depicted itself (Talbot spoke of his country pile, Lacock Abbey, as the first building ‘that was ever yet known to have drawn its own picture’).*<sup>251</sup>

The separation between the mechanism of photography as ‘objective observation’ and the human-centric notion of the ‘intentionality’ of the photographer has been used as a disciplinary device in art history: as signalled before, the elevation of photography to the status of art has been premised upon it.<sup>252</sup> It is this separation that the work of many contemporary photographers such as Ducharme and Ferguson troubles to a significant extent.

So what is meant by this notion of *photographic condition*, and does the postulation of its existence stand up to philosophical and experiential scrutiny? To explore these questions, let us start from a very simple proposition: *there is life in photography*. If living in the so-called media age has become tantamount to being photographed on a permanent basis, with our identity constituted and verified by the ongoing development of our photo galleries and photo streams on mobile phones, tablets and social media platforms such as Facebook, Tumblr and Pinterest, not to mention the thousands of security cameras quietly and often invisibly registering our image when we pass through city centres, shopping malls and airports, then, contrary to its more typical Barthesian association with the passage of time and death, photography can be understood more productively as a life-making process. As Sarah Kember and I argue in *Life after New Media*, it is ‘precisely in its efforts to arrest duration, to capture or still the flow of life – beyond singular photographs’ success or failure at representing *this* or *that* referent – that photography’s vital forces are activated’.<sup>253</sup> Photography

<sup>251</sup> S Edwards, *Photography: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006, p. 19.

<sup>252</sup> Fried’s *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* espouses this point of view.

<sup>253</sup> S Kember and J Zylinska, *Life After New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2012, p. 72.

lends itself to being understood in a critical vitalist framework due to its positioning in a network of dynamic relations between present and past, movement and stasis, flow and cut. In making cuts into duration, in stabilising the temporal flow into entities, photography is inherently involved with time. Significantly, for vitalist philosophers such as Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze, time, duration and movement stand precisely for life itself. As Bergson provocatively asks, 'But is it not obvious that the photograph, if photograph there be, is already taken, already developed in the very heart of things and at all the points of space?'.<sup>254</sup> Photography's proximity to life is therefore revealed in its temporal aspect, which is enacted in photography's dual ontology, whereby it can be seen as both object and practice, as both snapshot and all the other virtual snapshots that could have potentially been there, and, last but not least, as both being something here and now and as something always unfolding into something else. It is also in this dual ontology that the nonhuman side of photography comes to the fore, enacted as it is through agents as diverse as CCTV, aerial camera systems, satellites, endoscopy equipment and webcams as well as camera and mobile-phone-sporting humans. It is perhaps worth making a quick reservation here that, to acknowledge the life-making aspect of photography is not necessarily to condone the politically suspicious yet increasingly widespread technologies of ubiquitous surveillance, control and loss of privacy enabled by various kinds of cameras. However, much has already been written about the latter, with little acknowledgement so far of the vital potentiality of photography – which, in an ontological sense, *does not have to be* agent of control, even if it often is. There is therefore a danger of moralising photography in academic and public discourses before its potential has been truly explored. The foregrounding of the inherently creative power of photography as a practice is part of the philosophical argument of this article, although issues of politics never disappear from its agenda.

### *Photography and life*

The on-off activity of the photographic process, which carves life into fragments while simultaneously reconnecting them to the imagistic flow, may allow us to conclude not only that there is life in photography, but also that life itself is photographic. Interestingly, Claire Colebrook explains this process of creative becoming in and of life by drawing on the very concept of image production, or 'imaging'. She writes: 'All life, according to Bergson and to Deleuze after him, can be considered as a form of perception or "imaging" where there is not one being that apprehends or represents another being, but two vectors of creativity where one potential for differentiation encounters another and from that potential forms a

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<sup>254</sup> H Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, George Allen & Unwinn Ltd., London, 1911, p. 31.

relatively stable tendency or manner'.<sup>255</sup> This idea has its root in Bergson's Matter and Memory, where our experience of the world, which is always a way of sensing the world, comes in the form of images. We should mention here that, on the whole, Bergson is somewhat hesitant about the role played by images in cognition: in Creative Evolution he dismisses them as mere 'snapshots' of perception, post-factum reductions of duration and time to a sequence of the latter's frozen slices.<sup>256</sup> It may therefore seem strange to be revisiting the work of a philosopher who only used the concept of photography negatively, to outline a 'better', i.e. more intuitive and more fluid, mode of perception and cognition, in an attempt to say something new about photography. However, my argument here, as in my previous work,<sup>257</sup> is that Bergson's error is first and foremost media-specific and not philosophical per se: namely, he misunderstands photography's inherently creative and dynamic power by reducing it to a sequence of already fossilised artefacts, with the mind fragmenting the world into a sequence of 'snapshots'. This is why I want to suggest that, its mystical underpinnings aside, we can mobilise Bergson's philosophical writings on duration understood as a manifestation of *élan vital* to rethink photography as a quintessential practice of life. Indeed, photography is one possible (and historically specific) enactment of the creative practice of imaging, with the cuts into duration it makes always remaining connected to the flow of time. If we accept the fact that cutting – be it with our visual or conceptual apparatus – is inevitable to the processes of making sense of the world, then we can see any outcomes of the photographic cut, i.e. photographs and other products of the image-making process, as temporary stabilisations of the flow of duration that still bear a trace of life – rather than as frozen and ultimately deadly mementoes of the past. It is important to point out that, in order to recognise any kind of process as a process, we need to see it against the concept of a temporary stabilisation, interruption or cut into this process. A photograph is one possible form such stabilisations take, and a rather ubiquitous one at that. It is precisely because of its ubiquity and its increasingly intuitive technological apparatus that it serves as a

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<sup>255</sup> C Colebrook, *Deleuze and the Meaning of Life*, Continuum, London and New York, 2010, p. 11.

<sup>256</sup> Bemoaning our suppression of intuition – which can offer us a more accurate and less fragmented picture of the world – Bergson highlights our overreliance on the intellect in the cognitive process: "*Instead of attaching ourselves to the inner becoming of things, we place ourselves outside them in order to recompose their becoming artificially. We take snapshots, as it were, of the passing reality, and, as these are characteristic of the reality, we have only to string them on a becoming, abstract, uniform and invisible, situated at the back of the apparatus of knowledge, in order to imitate what there is that is characteristic in this becoming itself. Perception, intellection, language so proceed in general. Whether we would think becoming, or express it, or even perceive it, we hardly do anything else than set going a kind of cinematograph inside us.*" [H Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, Random House, The Modern Library, New York, 1944 (first published in 1911), p. 362.]

<sup>257</sup> This section develops some of the ideas discussed in chapter 3 of Kember and Zylinska, *Life After New Media*.

perfect illustration of Bergson's ideas – or rather, of my own 'differentiated reading' of Bergson. Bergson himself foregrounds this mutually constitutive relationship between process and stoppage when he says that 'Things are constituted by the instantaneous cut which the understanding practices, at a given moment, on a flux of this kind, and what is mysterious when we compare the cuts together becomes clear when we relate them to the flux'.<sup>258</sup> This supposition allows us to posit photography as an ultimately salutary and creative force in managing the duration of the world by the human as a species with limited cognitive and sensory capacity.

The notion of the creative role of the imaging process in life has also recently made its manifestation in the work of radical biologists, such as Lynn Margulis. As she puts it in a book co-authored with her son Dorian Sagan, 'All living beings, not just animals, but plants and microorganisms, perceive. To survive, an organic being must perceive – it must seek, or at least recognize, food and avoid environmental danger'.<sup>259</sup> This act of perception, which involves the seeking out and recognition of something else, involves the making of an image of that something else (food, predator, sexual partner), one that needs to be at least temporarily fixed in order for the required proximity – for consumption or sex – to be accomplished. We could perhaps therefore suggest that imaging is a form of proto-photography, planting the seed of the combined human-machinic 'desire' explored by Batchen that came to its own in the early nineteenth century. After Bergson, images (which are not yet photographs) stand for 'a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing – an existence placed half-way between the "thing" and the "representation"'.<sup>260</sup> It is precisely through images that novelty comes into the world, which is why images should not be reduced to mere representations but should rather be understood as creations, 'some of which are philosophical, some artistic, some scientific'.<sup>261</sup> To put this another way, the creative impulse of life takes it beyond representation as a form of picturing what already exists: instead, life is a creation of images in the most radical sense, a way of temporarily stabilising matter into forms. Photographic practice as we conventionally know it, with all the automatism it entails, is just one instantiation of this creative process of life.

If all life is indeed photographic, the notion of the photographic apparatus that embraces yet also goes beyond the human becomes fundamental to our understanding of what we have called the photographic condition. To speak of the photographic apparatus is of course not just to argue for a straightforward replacement of the human vision with a machinic one, but rather to recognise the mutual intertwining and co-constitution of the

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<sup>258</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 272.

<sup>259</sup> L Margulis and D Sagan, *What Is Life?*, University of California, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000, p. 27.

<sup>260</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. vii.

<sup>261</sup> Colebrook, *Deleuze*, p. 23.

organic and the machinic, the technical and the discursive, in the production of vision, and hence of the world. In her work on the use of apparatuses in physics experiments, the philosopher and quantum physicist Karen Barad argues that such devices are not just 'passive observing instruments; on the contrary, they are productive of (and part of) phenomena'.<sup>262</sup> We could easily apply this argument to photography, where the camera as a viewing device, the photographic frame both in the viewfinder and as the circumference of a photographic print, the enlarger, the computer, the printer, the photographer (who, in many instances, such as surveillance or speed cameras, is replaced by the camera-eye), and, last but not least, the discourses about photography and vision that produce them as objects for us humans are all active agents in the constitution of a photograph. In other words, they are all part of what we understand by photography.

### *Becoming a camera*

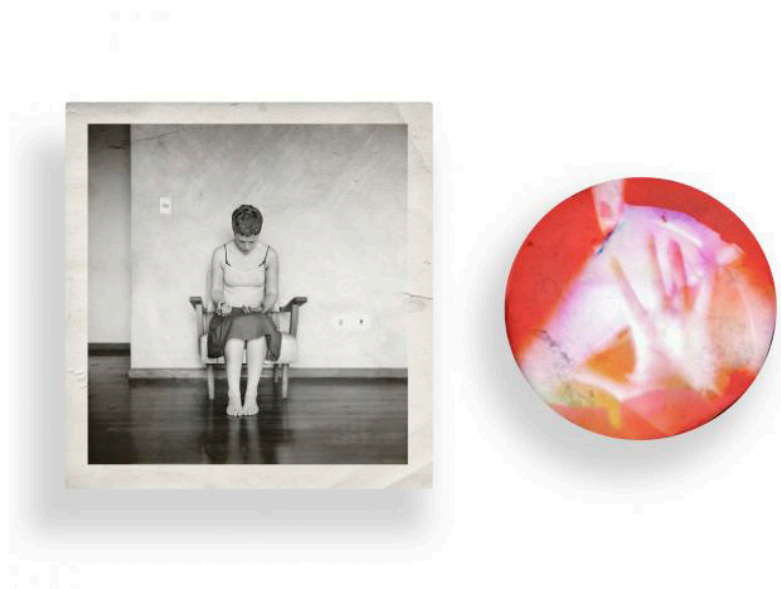


Image 7. An example from Lindsay Seers's series *It Has To Be This Way*, 2009.

As signalled earlier, it is not just philosophy that help us envisage this nonhuman, machinic dimension of photography: photographic, and, more broadly, artistic practice is even better predisposed to enact it (rather than just provide an argument *about* it). A series of works by British artist Lindsay Seers is a case in point. Exhibited, among other places, at Matt's Gallery in London as *It Has To Be This Way* in 2009, and accompanied by an aptly titled book, *Human Camera*, Seers' ongoing project consists of a

<sup>262</sup> K Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*,: Duke University Press, Durham, 2007, p. 142.



number of seemingly autobiographic films. These are full of bizarre yet just-about-believable adventures occurring to their heroine, all verified by a body of 'experts' – from doctors and critics through to family members – that appear in the films but also leave behind 'evidence' in the form of numerous written accounts, photographs and documentary records. In one of the films, a young girl, positioned as 'Lindsay Seers', is living her life unable to make a distinction between herself and the world, or between the world and its representations. The girl is gifted with exceptional memory so, like a camera that is permanently switched on, she records and remembers practically everything. 'It is as if I was in a kaleidoscope, a bead in the mesmerising and constantly shifting pattern. Everything was in flux, every single moment and every single object rewritten at every turn', as 'Lindsay Seers' recalls in a short piece called 'Becoming Something' included in *Human Camera*.<sup>263</sup> This terrifyingly magnificent gift is lost once the girl sees a photograph of herself. She then spends her adult life clothed in a black sack, photographing things obsessively. In this way, she is literally trying to 'become a camera' by making photographs on light-sensitive paper inserted into her mouth, with the images produced 'bathed in the red light' of her body (Image 7). This ambition is later replaced by an attempt to 'become a projector' by creating things ex nihilo through the emanation of light. Some of Seers' films presented in the show are screened in a black hut modelled on Thomas Edison's *Black Maria*, his New Jersey film studio that was used for projection as well as photography. With this, Seers invites us not just to witness her process of becoming a camera but also to enter a giant camera ourselves, to literally step into the world of imaging, to re-connect us to the technicity of our own being.

Although Bergson's argument about life as a form of imaging is posited as transhistorical, we can add a particular inflection to it by returning to Flusser, and, in particular, his study of the relation between the human and the technical apparatus. For Flusser, that relation changed significantly after the Industrial Revolution, a state of events in which 'photographers are inside their apparatus and bound up with it... It is a new kind of function in which human beings and apparatus merge into a unity'.<sup>264</sup> Consequently, human beings now 'function as a function of apparatuses',<sup>265</sup> limited as they are to the execution of the camera's programme from the range of seemingly infinite possibilities which are nevertheless determined by the machine's algorithm. Arguably, humans themselves are enactors of such a programme, a sequence of possibilities enabled by various couplings of adenine, cytosine, guanine and thymine, arranged into a double helix of life. To state this is not to postulate some kind of uncritical technological or biological determinism that would remove from 'us' any possibility of action – as artists, photographers, critics, or spectators – and any responsibility for the actions we are to take. It is merely to acknowledge our kinship with

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<sup>263</sup> L Seers, *Human Camera*, Article Press, Birmingham, 2007, p. 36.

<sup>264</sup> Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy*, p. 27.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

other living beings across the evolutionary spectrum, with our lives remaining subject to biochemical reactions that we cannot always understand, control or overcome (from blushing through to ageing and dying). Just as ‘the imagination of the camera is greater than that of every single photographer and that of all photographers put together’,<sup>266</sup> the imagination of ‘the programme called life’ in which we all participate (and which is an outcome of multiple processes running across various scale of the universe) far exceeds our human imagination. Such a recognition of our entanglement as sentient and discursive beings in complex biological and technical networks is necessary if we are to become involved, seriously and responsibly, in any kind of photography, philosophy or other critical or everyday activity in which we aim to exercise ‘free will’.

### *Re-forming the world*

By reconnecting us to the technical apparatus, by letting us explore our machinic kinship, artists such as the appropriately named Seers and the other image-makers discussed in this article are all engaged (even if they are not always up-front about it or perhaps even entirely aware of it) in exploring the fundamental problem that many philosophers of technology who take science seriously have been grappling with: given that ‘there is no place for human freedom within the area of automated, programmed and programming apparatuses’, how can we ‘show a way in which it is nevertheless possible to open up a space for freedom’?<sup>267</sup> Such an undertaking is very much needed, according to Flusser, ‘because it is the only form of revolution open to us’.<sup>268</sup> Flusser points to ‘envisioners’, that is ‘people who try to turn an automatic apparatus against its own condition of being automatic’,<sup>269</sup> as those who will be able to undertake the task of standing ‘against the world’, by pointing ‘at it with their fingertips to inform it’.<sup>270</sup> In this perspective, codification and visualisation are seen as radical interventions into the world, and ways of re-*forming* it, rather than as ways of dehumanising it the way Tagg seemed to suggest.

Any prudent and effective way of envisaging and picturing a transformation of our relation to the universe must thus be conducted not in terms of a human struggle against the machine but rather in terms of our mutual co-constitution, as a recognition of our shared kinship. This recognition of the photographic condition that encompasses yet goes beyond the human, and of the photographic apparatus that extends well beyond our eyes and beyond the devices supposedly under our control, should prompt us human philosophers, photographers and spectators to

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., pp. 81-82.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., p. 82; see also Flusser, *Into the Universe*, p. 63.

<sup>269</sup> Flusser, *Into the Universe*, p. 19.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

mobilise the ongoing creative impulse of life, where the whole world is a camera, and put it to creative rather than conservative uses. The conceptual expansion of processes of image-making beyond the human can also allow us to work towards escaping what Colebrook calls the ‘privatization of the eye in late capitalism’,<sup>271</sup> where what starts out as a defence of our right to look often ends up as a defence of our right to look at the small screen. In challenging the self-possessive individualism of the human eye, photography that seriously and consciously engages with its own expansive ontological condition and its nonhuman genealogy may therefore be seen as a truly revolutionary practice. Indeed, the concept and practice of nonhuman photography reconnects us to other beings and processes across the universe: including those of the Taurus Molecular Cloud. It serves as a reminder that the short moment in natural history when the human species has folded ‘the world around its own, increasingly myopic, point of view’,<sup>272</sup> and that has allowed it to become ‘seduced, spellbound, distracted and captivated by inanity’,<sup>273</sup> should not obscure the wider horizon of our openness to the world, our relationality with it through originary perception. Nonhuman photography can therefore serve as both a response to ‘man’s tendency to reify himself’<sup>274</sup> and an opening towards a radical posthumanist political analysis. It can do this by highlighting that there is more than just one point of view and that, by tearing the eye from the body and embracing the distributed machinic vision, it may be possible to see the drone as a more than just a killing machine – although of course there are no guarantees.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Colebrook, *Deleuze*, p. 17.

<sup>272</sup> C Colebrook, *Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction, Vol. 1*, Open Humanities Press, Ann Arbor, 2014, p. 22.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>275</sup> For a playful, tactical media-style exploration of what a drone would do in times of peace see IOCOSE’s project, *Drone Selfies*, 2014, <http://photomediationsmachine.net/2014/08/06/drone-selfies/>.

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# The Power of Obscurity: Trevor Paglen's Geo-Visual Imagination

FRANK MÖLLER

## Abstract

In this chapter I discuss Trevor Paglen's *Limit Telephotography* series in terms of visibility, obscurity and stimulation. Paglen's work on remote military installations in the American West, paradoxically, makes these installations visible without liberating them from obscurity; it exposes them without making them intelligible. Although Paglen's work does not give viewers assurance, it stimulates them all the same to look behind the photographs in search of that which cannot be seen in the picture. I argue that Paglen's approach – photographic representation decoupled from seemingly straightforward knowledge-production; construction and simultaneous deconstruction of photographically generated knowledge; photography connecting with one another visibility and obscurity – is a compelling visual strategy with which to photograph those ingredients of modern warfare that photojournalism tends to miss. And it is compelling because it appeals to the revelatory potentialities of photography while at the same time utilizing the power of obscurity. It is compelling also because it builds upon the long tradition of landscape photography in the American West. Paglen's West is a landscape seemingly devoid of people. At the same time, however, his photographs are ultimately *about* people; they cannot be accused of providing legitimacy for the activities of the state in these remote areas.

## Introduction

In this essay I will discuss Trevor Paglen's *Limit Telephotography* series – photographs of remote military installations in the American West – in light of visibility, obscurity and stimulation. This is not an altogether new approach; Leonardo da Vinci already argued a long time ago that the mind is stimulated to new inventions by obscure things. This approach, however, is disregarded in certain photographic and especially photojournalistic practices and discourses by emphasizing photography's revelatory potentialities: its ability to make visible what could otherwise not be seen and, by doing so, to make publicly known what could otherwise not be known. To this end, most photojournalistic discourses demand a photographer's proximity to 'action'. The task of the photojournalist is to disclose by being close to, not far away from, 'action' and the task of photojournalism is to divulge, not to obscure. Obscure photography, on the



other hand, utilizes both photography's revelatory potentialities and the power of obscurity.

Paglen reveals but simultaneously obscures that which he depicts, and 'action' is not really the right word for that which he depicts. His photographs are connected with photojournalism in that they are dedicated to one of its major themes – war and security – but they transcend photojournalism with regard to the form of representation chosen by the photographer. The very nature of that which he depicts – military installations, testing grounds and infrastructure in remote areas – makes it insusceptible for traditional photojournalistic approaches. Due to its importance in connection with modern warfare, however, it demands photographic representation – a demand Paglen responds to in a manner more conventional photojournalists would not and could not: Paglen's photography of technological and infrastructural developments in modern warfare and security policy, paradoxically, makes these developments visible without liberating them from obscurity; it exposes them without making them intelligible. It does not give viewers assurance but, I want to suggest, it stimulates them all the same to look behind the photographs in search of that which cannot be seen in the picture.

In the following I will argue that Paglen's approach – photographic representation decoupled from seemingly straightforward knowledge-production; construction and simultaneous deconstruction of photographically generated knowledge; photography connecting with one another visibility and obscurity – is a compelling visual strategy with which to photograph those ingredients of modern warfare (including preparations for warfare) that photojournalism tends to miss. Photography inspired by the photojournalistic tradition in search of 'great' shots close to 'action' is still capable of producing important and stimulating images. However, many trends in recent security policy cannot be captured photographically by such an approach because 'action' in any conventional sense is absent, thus making 'great' shots impossible. The issue here is not one of ranking photographic approaches; rather, it is one of inviting photojournalism to take advantage of all the possibilities that photography has to offer instead of operating within the rather narrow confines of traditional photojournalism. However, Paglen also builds on the photographic tradition of the American West. Landscape photography has often been criticized as depicting landscapes as spaces without people, seemingly empty space to be occupied, colonized and 'developed' by the nation-state. Can it perhaps be argued that Paglen's photography without people helps legitimize the taking possession and the abuse of seemingly empty space by the national security-state thus ultimately confirming what he wishes to criticize?

*Photography and obscurity*

Camouflage – understood as ‘systematic dissimulation for the purposes of concealment from photographic detection’<sup>276</sup> – has been a part of warfare since the inception of photography. From very early on, photographers have made visible both that which the human eye cannot see and that which the authorities did not want the human eye to see. Nowadays, covert campaigns, ‘secret wars’ and invisibility characterize warfare and security policies as never before,<sup>277</sup> necessitating suitable forms of photographic representation. The question thus is: what kinds of images represent adequately developments in warfare and security policy characterized by systematic camouflage, concealment and invisibility? In other words, in what ways can photography visualize the digitization of warfare including its invisible components? Should these components be visually represented in the first place? Many photographers, insisting on photography’s duty to reveal and believing in the power of the visible, would answer this question in the affirmative: Simon Norfolk references photographically ‘submarine warfare, space weapons, electronic warfare and electronic eavesdropping’ while James Bridle visualizes the lethal use of drones; Edgar Martins, in his series *Approaches*, photographs runways which may or may not be part of the infrastructure of modern warfare. Trevor Paglen takes pictures of military installations (see below), drones and satellites.<sup>278</sup> Indeed, the deterring function of aircraft carriers alleged to result from the fact that these vessels are ‘massively visible’<sup>279</sup> is reminiscent of an older understanding of power where power stems from size and visibility. This approach can be – and has been – photographed. Indeed, the logic underlying much photojournalistic work is one of revealing things, for example the intimidating features of materiel and the gruesome horrors of war. In addition to documentation, the impetus underlying such photography has often been to make others, non-photographers, intervene in the scenes depicted with non-photographic means. But how do you, and how do you make others, intervene in things you do not see, things the existence of which you are aware of but which cannot be easily proven by the evidentiary capabilities photographs are often alleged to possess? One

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<sup>276</sup> H R Shell, *Hide and Seek: Camouflage, Photography, and the Media of Reconnaissance*, Zone Books, New York, 2012, p. 14.

<sup>277</sup> See Obama’s Secret Wars: An FP Special Report, Foreign Policy, March/April 2012.

<sup>278</sup> See, respectively, S Norfolk, ‘Ascension Island: The Panopticum (ECHELON for beginners)’, viewed on 16 January 2012, <<http://www.simonnorfolk.com>>; James Bridle, ‘DRONESTAGRAM,’ viewed 7 April 2014, <<http://www.dronestagram.tumblr.com>>; E Martins, *Topologies*, Aperture, New York, 2008; and T Paglen, *Invisible: Covert Operations and Classified Landscapes*, Aperture, New York, 2010.

<sup>279</sup> Captain Simon Petitt, commenting on the huge dimensions of Britain’s new aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, as quoted in *The Guardian*, 19 September 2013, <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/sep/19/royal-navy-aircraft-carrier-deterrent>>.

answer to this question may be found in Leonardo da Vinci's writings on paintings. If, as da Vinci suggested, 'the mind is stimulated to new inventions by obscure things'<sup>280</sup> then photography's revelatory potentialities cannot be limited to its capability of merely making things visible and representing them as they are (or as they seem to be); it can also be linked to invisibility or a certain form of visibility linked to obscurity.<sup>281</sup>

According to a conventional line of thought, what cannot be seen does not exist in public imagination. In this understanding, invisibility is the main culprit. However, the resulting idea that any kind of visibility is better than invisibility is not compelling. First, invisibility might be equated with obscurity thus stimulating new inventions; there is a growing body of literature discussing the merits of invisibility.<sup>282</sup> Secondly, numerous writings criticize on ethical grounds specific forms of visual representation of warfare and security policy, in particular photographic representations of human suffering, and demand alternative ways of representation.<sup>283</sup> Thirdly, photojournalism appears to be slightly exhausted or overwhelmed by competition emerging from citizen photographers. Either way, many photojournalists are currently looking for alternative forms of visual representation some of which are connected with or inspired by writings in the humanities challenging conventional understandings of visibility and politics in liberal political thought.

WJT Mitchell, for example, argues that what cannot be seen is more powerful than what can be seen. In his interpretation, making things visible would undermine their power; paradoxically, the power of imagination may be activated, not by a visible image but, rather, by the 'invisible and the

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<sup>280</sup> Quoted in E van Alphen, *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2005, p. 1.

<sup>281</sup> A standard dictionary entry 'obscure' includes '1. Devoid of light; dim; hence, gloomy, dismal. 2. Of, pertaining to, or frequenting the darkness; hence, eluding sight 1605. 3. Of colour, etc.: Dark, somber; in later use, dingy, dull 1490. 4. Indistinct, undefined; hardly perceptible to the eye; faint, 'light' 1593. b. Indistinctly perceived, felt, or heard 1597. 5. Of a place: Hidden, retired; remote from observation 1484. 6. Inconspicuous, undistinguished, unnoticed 1555. [...] 7. fig. Not manifest to the mind or understanding; hidden, doubtful, vague, uncertain 1432. b. Of words, statements, etc.: Not perspicuous; hard to understand. [...]' (The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles, Vol. 2, p. 1429).

<sup>282</sup> WJT Mitchell, *Cloning Terror: the War of Images, 9/11 to the Present*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2011; Shell; R S Andersen and F Möller, 'Engaging the Limits of Visibility: Photography, Security and Surveillance', *Security Dialogue*, vol. 44, no. 3, June 2013, pp. 203–221; D Campamy, 'What on Earth? Photography's Alien Landscapes', *Aperture*, no. 211, Summer 2013, pp. 46–51.

<sup>283</sup> See M Reinhardt, H Edwards and E Duganne (eds), *Beautiful Suffering: Photography and the Traffic in Pain*, Williams College Museum of Art/The University of Chicago Press, Williamsburg/Chicago, 2007; A Grønstad and H Gustafsson (eds), *Ethics and Images of Pain*, Routledge, New York, 2012.

unseen'.<sup>284</sup> Mitchell develops his argument with reference to the horror film but he does not limit it to this genre. He opens up questions pertaining to in/visibility also in connection with the visualization of security policy: is it possible to reveal something about the politics of security by visualizing security in a manner that is informed by the workings of the horror movie, that is, by both capitalizing on invisibility and adhering to (some degree of) obscurity? Does obscurity, when applied to the visualization of security, show viewers something that other approaches do not – cannot? – reveal, especially those approaches following the credos of photojournalism where revealing, not obscuring is the motto (still the dominant form of visual representation with regard to war, conflict and security policy including among citizen photographers)?

Thomas Keenan has observed that '[f]aced with something obscure ... it is radically insufficient merely to shine the light of publicity'.<sup>285</sup> Obscure photography responds to this insufficiency by making things visible without liberating them from obscurity; it exposes them without making them intelligible. Obscure photography utilizes both photography's revelatory potentialities and the power of obscurity: things remain hidden (to some extent), doubtful, vague, uncertain, and hard to understand but their existence cannot be denied. Approaching such photography in terms of understanding and explaining is based on misunderstanding: such photographs do not intend to explain anything; they are not meant to be understood in any conventional way. At the same time they are neither mere abstraction nor art. They are not meant to be approached in terms of beauty or be admired for the photographer's technological sophistication. Such photography is a stand-in for something more real, the existence of which, while not being made explicit, is alluded to in the photographs. Such photographs, by means of obscurity, aim to stimulate viewers to look behind the photographs in search of what cannot be seen in the picture, the existence of which viewers are nonetheless aware of because without it, the photograph would not exist.

Aftermath photography (currently the subject of much attention<sup>286</sup>) frequently utilizes obscurity – and beauty.<sup>287</sup> It is often based on lines of

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<sup>284</sup> Mitchell, p. 84. David Levi Strauss adds that withheld images 'can also unleash powers that may be even more difficult to control' than those unleashed by published images. See D L Strauss, 'Over Bin Laden's Dead Body: On Withholding and Displacing Public Images', in *Words Not Spent Today Buy Smaller Images Tomorrow: Essays on the Present and Future of Photography*, Aperture, New York, 2014, p. 149.

<sup>285</sup> T Keenan, 'Disappearances: The Photographs of Trevor Paglen', *Aperture*, no. 191, Summer 2008, p. 38. Keenan equates 'obscure' with 'something essentially dark' but 'obscure' has many more meanings (see note 7).

<sup>286</sup> See, for example, the exhibition *Conflict, Time, Photography* at Tate Modern, 26 November 2014–15 March 2015. See also A W Tucker and W Michels with N Zelt, *War/Photography: Images of Armed Conflict and Its Aftermath*, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2012, pp. 198–239, and F Möller, *Visual Peace: Images, Spectatorship and the Politics of Violence*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, 2013, pp. 77–98.

thought quite similar to those underlying the photographic work discussed below. Anna Ferran's series *Lost to Worlds*, for example, criticizes the standard revelatory approach to photography including its belief in 'the effectiveness of the single iconic grandiloquent image' and offers instead series of similar, seemingly unspectacular images.<sup>288</sup> Photographing the aftermath of violent conflict means arriving late, missing Henri Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment' or looking for it in the 'ongoing moment',<sup>289</sup> thus focusing on process, not moment. It means 'slowing down image-making, remaining out of the hub of action'<sup>290</sup> (or defining 'action' in ways other than photojournalistic ones). In contrast to aftermath photography, Paglen arrives early, referencing in his work not what has been but what is and what may be. Similar to much aftermath photography, he forgoes heroic gestures, complicates the viewing experience in that it is not immediately clear what his photographs are meant to reference and challenges viewers 'to bring [their] own knowledge and desires' to the photographs.<sup>291</sup>

Targeting the aftermath of violent conflict or the preparations for conflict – either way, obscure photography is demanding. It often deliberately confuses viewers who may look for verbal or written explanations. Such explanations, however, would only tell them what the photographer or another person speaking with sufficient authority want them to see, what they are *supposed* to see, not what they *do* see. Expert viewers may be able to understand or explain obscure photographs on the basis of knowledge acquired prior to and independent (within certain limits) of the act of seeing. However, obscure images may also stimulate non-expert viewers; they may invite and even incite them to do something in response to their viewing experience. Such photography requires viewers interested in the exploration of different ways of seeing. There is no reason to assume *a priori* that such viewers do not exist anymore although digital photography does not seem to favor 'viewers who scrutinize [photographs] with concentrated interest'.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> D Lisle, 'The Surprising Detritus of Leisure: Encountering the Late Photography of War', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 29, 2011, pp. 875–877.

<sup>288</sup> G Batchen, 'Looking Askance', in *Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis*, G Batchen, M Gidley, N K Miller, and J Prosser (eds), Reaktion Books, London, 2012, p. 227.

<sup>289</sup> G Dyer, *The Ongoing Moment*, Abacus, London, 2005.

<sup>290</sup> C Cotton, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art. New Edition*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2009, p. 167.

<sup>291</sup> Batchen, 'Looking Askance', p. 228.

<sup>292</sup> M Lister, 'Introduction', in *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture. Second edition*, M Lister (ed), Routledge, London and New York, 2013, p. 7.



Image 1. Trevor Paglen, *Chemical and Biological Weapons Proving Ground #2* (2006). Dugway, UT. Distance ~ 42 miles, 11:17 a.m. C-print, 101,6 x 101,6 cm. © Trevor Paglen, courtesy Galerie Thomas Zander, Köln / Altman Siegel Gallery, San Francisco / Metro Pictures, New York.

### *Trevor Paglen's geo-visual imagination*

The combination of obscurity and stimulation aptly describes recent photographic representations of security policy in Paglen's *Limit Telephotography* series.<sup>293</sup> Paglen's photography of security stands outside the visual-discursive frame within which images of war and security are regularly produced and re-produced.<sup>294</sup> The military installations Paglen is interested in are off limits to the public; they can be accessed only with security clearances. Given the lack of line-of-sight views, Paglen's objects cannot easily be observed; they are visually inaccessible because 'there is often no place on public land where a member of the public might see them with an unaided eye'.<sup>295</sup> Paglen photographs these installations from large distances – 18 miles, 42 miles, 65 miles. His efforts to bridge these

<sup>293</sup> Paglen, *Invisible*, pp. 19–53.

<sup>294</sup> See Tucker and Michels with Zelt, *War/Photography*.

<sup>295</sup> Paglen, *Invisible*, p. 19.



distances by means of astro-photographical devices are immense. Paglen's work – discussed elsewhere in terms of different 'modalities of visibility' derived from the tradition of semiotics<sup>296</sup> – visualizes core ingredients of the current politics of security: the increasing invisibility of (preparations for) warfare and the increasing absence of human beings from the battlefield. As Paglen notes, what used to be referred to as 'the war on terror' is a 'war that is everywhere and yet largely invisible'.<sup>297</sup> This invisibility is something '[p]hotographers should critically reflect upon' because 'photography has become a relational medium – a meta-network of machines, politics, culture, and ways of collective seeing' that is likely to dominate visual perception in the 21st century.<sup>298</sup> The issue, however, is not only one of making things visible but also one of making them visible in a specific manner, namely, by obscuring them. With regard to photography in general, Jae Emerling notes that 'we still must learn how to become spectators of images'<sup>299</sup> and this assessment has significance also, and perhaps specifically, with regard to obscure photographs: we still must learn how to become spectators of *these* images. To learn how to become spectators, it is useful to analyze how these images operate on viewers because if they fail to operate on viewers, then the images would have failed as images, and the visual experience would be inconsequential.

Among the strategies with which to engage vision, both the space of architecture (related to obscurity) and the space of landscape deserve attention.<sup>300</sup> Both spaces are discussed in the literature with regard to painting but I wish to briefly apply this discussion to photography. As Ernst van Alphen has argued, the depiction of space is not to be understood as 'an end in itself' but as 'the means by which the space of representation is explored, challenged, and exposed'.<sup>301</sup> What, then, does the space of architecture do, and what does the space of landscape do? Works of visual art utilizing the space of architecture keep 'setting up obstacles that make the viewer more and more eager to look behind them'.<sup>302</sup> Works of art utilizing the space of landscape build on attraction and seduction by means of which they invite viewers 'to merge into space'.<sup>303</sup> Both spaces operate on viewers by engaging vision but they do so differently,

*Architectural space engages vision by raising obstacles. And obstacles encourage the desire to conquer them, to do something*

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<sup>296</sup> Andersen and Möller, 'Limits of Visibility', p. 210.

<sup>297</sup> T Paglen, 'Images of the Everywhere War', *Aperture*, no. 209, Winter 2012, p. 78.

<sup>298</sup> T Paglen, untitled contribution to 'The Anxiety of Images', *Aperture*, no. 204, Fall 2011, p. 68.

<sup>299</sup> J Emerling, *Photography: History and Theory*, Routledge, London and New York, 2012, p. 165.

<sup>300</sup> Van Alphen, *Art in Mind*, pp. 71–95.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*

*when it is forbidden, to try something when it is impossible, to intrude on a space that is not yours and has to be respected as secret or somebody else's. In contrast, the space of landscape engages vision by seducing you or inviting you. Both can be effective, but the effects differ.*<sup>304</sup>

The spaces of architecture and landscape do not seem to be mutually exclusive. For example, the space of landscape may trick viewers into the image's space and seduce them to engage with the image while the space of architecture, by creating obstacles, may make it difficult for viewers to leave the image's space again.

It can be argued that *Limit Telephotography* utilizes both the space of architecture and the space of landscape: it is rather inaccessible but at the same time it is attractive and aesthetically appealing. This attractiveness may lead critics astray. Sandra Phillips, for example, writes with regard to one of Paglen's photographs that 'the light is as mysterious as that in a Rothko painting'.<sup>305</sup> That may be so but what is gained by this comparison? Indeed, once 'the machinery of art theory and art history roll into place' what they do is 'confusing and silencing my own reactions'.<sup>306</sup> Whatever else they do, references to painting approach Paglen's photography in terms other than its own, directing attention away from the photograph and the photographer's politics to (a comparison of the photograph with) a painting. Such a comparison may be interesting from an art point of view. When aspiring to elevate Paglen's photography to the status of 'art', however, it is misleading, since it disregards the question whether these images are meant to be (approached as) 'art' in the first place. Paglen's photographs engage vision both by seducing viewers and by raising obstacles; they are beautiful but they are also obscure and hard to understand. Importantly, these photographs cannot be reduced to aesthetic attractiveness. Beauty, in Paglen's work, is a vehicle with which to trick viewers into engagement; it is not an end in itself. Norfolk makes a similar point with regard to his photographs in Afghanistan in the footsteps of John Burke.<sup>307</sup> By referring to beauty as a means to an end, not an end in itself, Norfolk pre-empts criticism of aestheticization,<sup>308</sup> that is to say, criticism

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., pp. 91–92.

<sup>305</sup> 'Chemical and Biological Weapons Proving Ground/Dugway, UT/Distance ~42 miles/10:51 a.m., 2006.' According to Phillips, many surveillance photographs display 'a spirit of distance, abstraction, and a certain placid ambiguity'. These characteristics can also be found in Paglen's photographs. See S S Phillips, 'Surveillance', in S S Phillips (ed), *Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance and the Camera*, Tate Publishing, London, 2010, p. 143.

<sup>306</sup> J Elkins, *What Photography Is*, Routledge, New York and London, 2011, p. 109.

<sup>307</sup> Norfolk, Burke + Norfolk: *Photographs from the War in Afghanistan* by John Burke and Simon Norfolk, Dewi Lewis, London, 2011.

<sup>308</sup> Mark Reinhardt discusses aestheticization in 'Picturing Violence: Aesthetics and the Anxiety of Critique', in Reinhardt, Edwards and Duganne, *Beautiful Suffering*, pp. 23–25.

that his photographs are beautiful but not much more and that their beauty is inappropriate in light of the conditions depicted:

The beauty of these things is only ever tactical ... By making the pictures very beautiful you're almost tricked into coming inside that photograph's space for a while / [and] Engaging with it and being in conversation with the photograph / [and] then by surprise you find that you've listened to a whole load of my arguments / which you probably wouldn't have bothered to listen to if I hadn't seduced you into that space, into that dialogue.<sup>309</sup>

Paglen's work, too, is a work of aesthetic seduction. His photographs trick viewers into engagement – engagement with his aesthetics but ultimately also with his politics. Paglen – and Norfolk – have taken sides; taking sides is what photojournalists have traditionally done.<sup>310</sup> To paraphrase Norfolk, viewers would probably not have bothered to listen to Paglen's politics (which include defending each person's right to take photographs on public land and criticizing the national security-state and its current practices) had he not seduced them into the space of his images. Once seduced into this space, it is difficult to get out of it. And it is difficult because Paglen combines beauty with obscurity in a context – security policy – where viewers, used to the simplification in political rhetoric of complex social relations to seemingly easy, seemingly manageable formula, expect clarity.

It is arguable that aesthetic seduction is more effective than are the explanations provided in the captions (limited anyway to such technical information as the name and function of the photographed installation, place, date and distance). It may also be suggested that seduction is more effective than commentary telling viewers, or teaching them, what these pictures (are supposed to) mean: such commentary may stifle curiosity because everything seems to be settled; there is no need for engagement. These images explain nothing but their purpose is neither to explain anything nor to be understood. The search for meaning is futile. Paglen indeed 'welcomes distortion in his images' – and dislikes clearness – 'because his aim is not to expose and edify so much as to confound and unsettle'.<sup>311</sup>

Paglen's photography reflects a geographical approach to the world: whatever happens, it has to happen somewhere; and whatever happens

<sup>309</sup> Norfolk, Burke + Norfolk: Photographs from the war in Afghanistan by John Burke and Simon Norfolk, Video, viewed on 11 March 2014, <<http://timemachinemag.com/2011/12/31/simon-norfolk-burke-and-norfolk>>.

<sup>310</sup> With regard to Robert Capa's and others' work during the Spanish Civil War, for example, Brian Wallis explains that the photographer, in order to tell a story, 'had to be part of that story or action' and this meant among other things that he or she 'had to have judged the political stakes in that story, and had to have taken sides.' See 'Recovering the Mexican Suitcase', in C. Young (ed.), *The Mexican Suitcase: The Rediscovered Spanish Civil War Negatives of Capa, Chim, and Taro. Volume 1: The History*, International Center of Photography, New York and Steidl, Göttingen, 2010, p. 13. Taking sides was later marginalized in photographic discourses by emphasizing objectivity, neutrality and non-partisanship.

<sup>311</sup> J Weiner, 'Prying Eyes: Trevor Paglen Makes Art out of Government Secrets', *The New Yorker*, 22 October 2012, p. 56.

somewhere can be photographed (his is also a geographical approach to photography); or, in Paglen's words: 'if you're going to build a secret airplane, you can't do it in an invisible factory'.<sup>312</sup> His work shows that it is not impossible to transform the invisible into the visible but does it also render intelligible what he has made visible? Although the photographs transform invisibility into visibility, viewers are none the wiser after the viewing experience. Paglen's photographic work does not transform incomprehensibility into comprehensibility: what can be seen can neither be recognized nor identified as ingredients of security policy. Paglen prefers blurred images and rejects technologies with which to produce clearer images.<sup>313</sup> Such images would only give the illusion of comprehensibility – a house would look like a house rather than a 'shimmering configuration[]' reminiscent of 'the visual effect of desert mirages'<sup>314</sup> – but viewers still would not know what is going on inside the building, what purpose it serves, and how it is connected to warfare. The issue here is not one of buildings as realistic elements but as means with which to explore the representation of space and the space of representation and to this end, blurred images are more effective than clear ones: 'If [the image] is blurry, that is because it has to be. It would not be the same were clarity to be achieved'.<sup>315</sup> In some of the photographs airplanes can be identified, creating the impression that these airplanes are what Paglen is primarily interested in.<sup>316</sup> True, it is unclear how these airplanes are related to security policy and warfare but that they can be identified as airplanes weakens the pictures. They are lacking obscurity. They invite viewers to move on because there do not seem to be obstacles that have to be conquered: just airplanes, so what?

Paglen's work does not expose viewers to the simple choice between acceptance and rejection.<sup>317</sup> The photographs refuse simple answers to the

<sup>312</sup> Quoted in Weiner, 'Prying Eyes', p. 60.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>314</sup> H Gustafsson, 'Foresight, Hindsight and State Secrecy in the American West: The Geopolitical Aesthetics of Trevor Paglen', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2013, p. 156.

<sup>315</sup> Keenan, 'Disappearances', p. 38. Originally, 'What was so shocking about photography, after all, was not that it looked like the world of ordinary perception but instead that it did not.' See R Kelsey and B Stimson, 'Introduction: Photography's Double Index (A Short History in Three Parts)', in R Kelsey and B Stimson (eds), *The Meaning of Photography*, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, 2008, p. xv.

<sup>316</sup> See, for example, 'Unmarked 737 at "Gold Coast" Terminal, 2006 / Las Vegas, NV / Distance ~1 mile,' 'Tail Numbers, 2006 / Gold Coast Terminal, Las Vegas, NV / Distance ~1 mile,' 'Morning Commute, Gold Coast Terminal, 2006 / Las Vegas, NV / Distance ~1 mile,' 'N5177C at Gold Coast Terminal, 2007 / Las Vegas, NV / Distance ~1 mile' and 'Workers, Gold Coast Terminal, 2007 / Las Vegas, NV / Distance ~1 mile' (Paglen, *Invisible*, pp. 20–29).

<sup>317</sup> Strauss writes about 'acceptance or rejection' as a viewer's only choice when exposed to images without tension or compulsion in 'The Documentary Debate: Aesthetic or Anaesthetic? Or, What's So Funny About Peace, Love, Understanding, and Social Documentary Photography?' in D L Strauss, *Between The Eyes: Essays on Photography and Politics*. Introduction by John Berger, Aperture, New York, 2003, p. 10.

question of how current security policies operate and whether these policies are desirable or not; they render easy responses impossible. Importantly, however the viewer responds, it is his or her response, not the photographer's or some commentator's. Paglen does not only insist on a photographer's right to take pictures in public places; he also insists on the viewers' right – and obligation – to make their own judgments. It is a corollary that viewers' responsibility increases in the process of co-constructing meaning by trying to make sense of what they see. Such photography is demanding, it is inexplicable, it is uncomfortable. Its ambiguity complicates viewers' visual experience,

*I embrace the epistemological and visual contradictions in my work and am most compelled by images that both make claims to represent, and at the same time dialectically undermine, the very claims they seem to put forth. I think about the images in this book as making claims on both sides of the murky boundaries separating fact and fiction, empiricism and imagination, and literature and science, while insisting on underlying sociological, cultural, and political facts.<sup>318</sup>*



Image 2. Trevor Paglen, *Morning Commute (Cold Coast Terminal)* (2006). Las Vegas, NV. Distance ~ 1 mile, 6:26 a.m. C-print, 76,2 x 91,4 cm. © Trevor Paglen, courtesy Galerie Thomas Zander, Köln / Altman Siegel Gallery, San Francisco / Metro Pictures, New York.

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<sup>318</sup> Paglen, *Invisible*, p. 151.

While engaging with one of photojournalism's grand themes – war and security – Paglen's photographs expand photojournalistic conventions and capitalize on photography's potentialities. These potentialities include, as has been observed in a different context, photography's capability 'to engage itself otherwise, less obviously, in subtle ambiguity, in soaring metaphor, in questioning the nature of reality rather than delineating conventional responses'.<sup>319</sup>

### *Empty landscapes full of people*

Paglen's photography of the American West does not operate in a historico-photographical vacuum. Paglen builds on a powerful photographic tradition and it is in this regard that his photography shall finally be discussed. Historically, photography served 'as handmaiden to imperial campaigns and ethnocentric ideologies'.<sup>320</sup> Painting and photography – of which photography, due to its underlying myth of accuracy, 'was the more powerful promotional tool' – 'pictured the West as free for the taking, justifying the occupation of territory that had in fact been populated for millennia'.<sup>321</sup> With regard to the national security-state, the issue was, and still is, not only one of intrusion and occupation but also one of using and abusing land, considered 'worthless and lifeless',<sup>322</sup> among other things as test ground for nuclear weapons. The question I want to discuss here is: does Paglen's photography without people inadvertently help legitimize the state's taking possession and abuse of seemingly lifeless space in the name of national security?

It would be tempting to compare Paglen's work systematically with the work of such predecessors as Ansel Adams, Robert Adams or Richard Avedon, to name but a few. Such comparison, however, is far beyond the scope of this chapter. More importantly, for the purpose of this contribution, the 'American West' does not primarily reference a specific geographical location. Instead, the 'American West' serves as a metaphor for a certain practice in landscape photography that can be observed in this specific location but also elsewhere. In her discussion of Yosemite photography Rebecca Solnit specifies:

Yosemite is one of the most famous landscapes in the world, and it is usually pictured as a virgin wilderness. Literally pictured: In most of the photographs that have made the place familiar to the world, there are no people. And for landscape photography it is one of the most important places in the world. [...] It is hardly an exaggeration to say that no place on earth is more central to landscape photography and landscape preservation.

<sup>319</sup> F Ritchin, *In Our Own Image*, Aperture, New York, 1999, p. 126.

<sup>320</sup> Gustafsson, 'Foresight', p. 150.

<sup>321</sup> E Respini, *Into the Sunset: Photography's Image of the American West*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2009, p. 11.

<sup>322</sup> R Solnit, *Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Hidden Wars of the American West*. 20th Anniversary Edition, with a New Preface, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2014, p. 60.



What has been left out of the picture, then, says a lot about how we understand landscape.<sup>323</sup>

Photographic representation of Yosemite, thus, influenced landscape photography far beyond Yosemite. Likewise, Paglen's work symbolizes, and has something to say about, current developments in modern warfare *in* a particular location – the American Southwest – but also *beyond* and *independent of* this specific location. It refers both to and beyond the facts the photographer claims to engage with, including geographical facts; it refers to both the location where it is produced and beyond it. One of the typical ingredients of the kind of landscape photography Solnit writes about is the absence of people. The majority of Paglen's photographs, too, are photographs without people and without faces. The absence of people would seem to invite the impression that the landscapes depicted are 'free for the taking' (Respini) although referring to Paglen's subject matter as 'landscapes' requires a rather broad understanding of landscape. However, landscapes are always culture before they are nature, 'constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and rock'.<sup>324</sup> Depictions of landscapes as 'free for the taking' are an integral component of the triumph and expansion of nation-states. It has been observed, for example, in connection with landscape painting in Finland. The depiction in paintings of landscapes devoid of people was an important ingredient of Finnish cultural governance and the expansion of the nation-state from the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>325</sup> Different claims to land competed with one another: the consolidation of the Nordic nation-states in the north collided with east-west migratory patterns of the indigenous populations. The state's emphasis on modernization, development, civilization and capitalist land use confronted traditional understandings of lives and lands in terms of sustainability. Indigenous people were effectively painted out of the officially approved national landscapes or reduced to mere accessories. Landscape paintings served as a vehicle with which to visualize nationhood and to construct national identity<sup>326</sup> – a visual strategy initially confirmed but subsequently photographically challenged by means of re-visualizations of indigenous people located in what they regard as their own landscapes.<sup>327</sup> In sum, then, representations of the 'American West' refers here to a specific form of landscape painting and landscape photography depicting these landscapes as spaces without people: seemingly empty spaces to be

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid., pp. 221–222. As Solnit explains, war against the native population has been left out of the picture.

<sup>324</sup> S Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, Fontana, London, 1995, p. 61.

<sup>325</sup> M J Shapiro, *Methods and Nations: Cultural Governance and the Indigenous Subject*, Routledge, New York and London, 2004, p. 117–119.

<sup>326</sup> T Hautala-Hirvioja, 'Surveying Lapland', in *The Magic of Lapland: Lapland in Art from the 1800s to Today*, R Ojanperä (ed), Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki, 2011, p. 78

<sup>327</sup> J Puranen, *Imaginary Homecoming*. Essay by Elizabeth Edwards, Pohjoinen, Oulu, 1999. For Native American counter-visualizations, see *Aperture*, no. 139, Summer 1995, *Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices*.

occupied, colonized and developed by the nation-state for the benefit of (mostly white) intruders.

Paglen's photographs are 'apt representations of the intangible, abstract workings of state power' that are operating within largely anonymous structures of institutionalized authority which are notoriously difficult to photograph.<sup>328</sup> The depiction of people and faces would dominate viewers' perception – we would see faces but not much more.<sup>329</sup> Attention would shift from structures to individuals but structure is what Paglen wants to emphasize. However, the focus on structure and the absence of people may have undesired consequences: can it be argued that Paglen's photographs without people ultimately legitimize the taking possession of seemingly empty space by the security-state in search of national security? Do these photographs perhaps, on some level, also legitimize the very structures and policies they so eloquently criticize? Does the presence, activity and land use of the state appear legitimate because it does not seem to infringe upon or suppress competitive claims to land and land use and competitive understandings of security articulated by individuals or groups of people who define and understand their identities and interests different from the way state institutions understand and operationalize security?<sup>330</sup>

I want to suggest that Paglen's photography does none of the above. Criticizing it in terms suggested by the critical literature on landscape photography as briefly sketched above would seem to underappreciate 'the capability of images to work at the same time on different levels, to show by implication that which seems to be excluded from representation, and to co-represent presences and absences'.<sup>331</sup> It would also underestimate viewers' capabilities to identify these different levels. Furthermore, as James Elkins notes, 'most images without faces or people are actually full of people'.<sup>332</sup> By that he means that photographs without people can nevertheless be – and frequently are – *about* people. This specific *about-ness* can be traced throughout photography's history; different practices of image-making, however different from one another they otherwise appear to be, join hands in that they are about people.<sup>333</sup> For example, Robert Adams notes with regard to Timothy O'Sullivan's (seemingly) empty and barren landscapes – inspired by O'Sullivan's 'interest[] in emptiness'<sup>334</sup> – that the photographer was interested in people's 'response to nature'<sup>335</sup> and

<sup>328</sup> Andersen and Möller, 'Limits of Visibility', p. 205.

<sup>329</sup> Elkins, *What Photography Is*, p. 70.

<sup>330</sup> Everyday approaches to security in terms of human security, for example, tend to differ considerably from a given state's security-political agenda and emphasize seemingly mundane issues derived from lived experience rather than from such abstractions as 'national security'.

<sup>331</sup> F Möller, "'Wild Weirdness?' "Gross Humbugs!" Memory-images of the North and Finnish Photography', *Journal of Northern Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2011, p. 45.

<sup>332</sup> Elkins, *What Photography Is*, p. 50.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>334</sup> R Adams, *Why People Photograph: Selected Essays and Reviews*, Aperture, New York, 1994, p. 150.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

in this sense his photographs were about people although there are no people depicted in the images. Elkins shows that a photograph of empty space devoid of people can be seen as a photograph of space potentially occupied by people, or a space the main purpose of which is to be, at some point, occupied by people, or even a space normally occupied by people but not at the moment when the photograph was taken. All these spaces remind viewers of people; they are about people.<sup>336</sup> Paglen's photographs are about people in the sense that security policies and security installations do not make much sense without referent objects of security, among which there are people.

It is in this context that Paglen's photographs of airplanes<sup>337</sup> suddenly become more relevant than they seemed to be in the above discussion. In some of them there are people depicted.<sup>338</sup> This depiction of people influences viewers' perception of the photographs without people, especially when the photographs are seen sequentially and thus connected with one another. In a sense, Paglen socializes viewers into recognizing or looking for people even in those pictures from which people are absent. Thus, while the photographs *with* people (and airplanes) are less obscure and, thus, less powerful than those *without* people, those *without* people derive their strength to some extent from the viewing experience of those *with* people. To build upon Paglen (quoted above) it can then be said that 'if you're going to build a secret airplane, you can't do it in an invisible factory' and you cannot build a factory or operate an airplane without people; both – factory and people – can be photographed, the latter even without appearing in the resulting image.

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<sup>336</sup> Elkins, *What Photography Is*, pp. 50–51.

<sup>337</sup> See note 43.

<sup>338</sup> See, for example, 'Morning Commute, Gold Coast Terminal, 2006 / Las Vegas, NV / Distance ~1 mile' and 'Workers, Gold Coast Terminal, 2007 / Las Vegas, NV / Distance ~1 mile'; Paglen, *Invisible*, pp. 24–25, 28–29.



Image 3. Trevor Paglen, *N5177C at Cold Coast Terminal* (2007). Las Vegas, NV. Distance ~ 1 mile, 6:26 a.m. C-print, 76,2 x 91,4 cm. © Trevor Paglen, courtesy Galerie Thomas Zander, Köln / Altman Siegel Gallery, San Francisco / Metro Pictures, New York.

Elkins has another point: ‘most images without faces or people ... are places where people can find themselves in imagination’.<sup>339</sup> The absence of faces appeals to and triggers imagination, and this is exactly what should be expected to happen in light of Mitchell’s assessment, quoted above, that the mind can actually be stimulated, not by that which can be seen but by that which cannot be seen, and that making things visible would undermine their power ‘to activate the power of imagination’.<sup>340</sup>

### *Conclusion*

To conclude, then, Paglen’s *Limit Telephotography* series engages the limits of both representation and visibility. It transforms invisibility into visibility but, by cultivating some degree of obscurity, it does not make easily comprehensible that which it renders visible. It is dedicated to one of the grand themes of photographic work – war and security – but it approaches its theme in ways other than those inspired by the photojournalistic tradition in search of ‘great’ shots close to ‘action’. It involves viewers by utilizing the space of landscape and the space of

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<sup>339</sup> Elkins, *What Photography Is*, p. 50.

<sup>340</sup> Mitchell, *Cloning Terror*, p. 84.

architecture – the one by seducing viewers into the images' space, the other by making it difficult for them to leave this space – and tricks them into engagement with the conditions depicted. At the same time, Paglen's work cannot be accused of providing legitimacy for the security-state's activities in remote areas of the United States because his photographs, although seemingly without people, are ultimately *about* people.

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PART II

MEDIA, TECHNOLOGY AND  
PHOTOGRAPHIC POWERS

# Designed Moments

HANNA WESELIUS

## Abstract

This paper investigates the work of photographers in popular magazines in the 2000s. The analysis is based on ethnographic observations: actual photographic production processes are examined in the light of professional ideals originating from the 'golden era' of magazine photojournalism in the mid-1900s.

The analysis shows that the work of contemporary magazine photographers is to a great extent determined by editorial concepts. As a result, there has been a shift from individual modes of working towards teamwork and detailed briefing in the course of the 2000s. The power of decision is shared among several professionals involved in the image production. The commissioned editorial photograph is therefore an elemental part of the magazine identity and design, instead of being solely the photographer's individual account of the subject matter.

In this paper, I follow Erving Goffman's conceptualizations and analyse processes of producing editorial photography – including pre-designing, planning, and post-production – as social performances with different context-specific discursive biases. The research indicates that in these performances photographers are met with role expectations deriving from historical idealistic notions of the photographer as an authorial figure. Hence, photographers are often expected to create 'decisive moments' in surroundings where not only is virtually everything pre-designed and staged, but the photographs are also produced to fit the magazine's fixed story formats.

The production of editorial photography has not been widely researched, perhaps due to difficulties in gaining access to scenes of media production. This paper sheds light to procedures that so far may only have been the tacitly held knowledge of practitioners of magazine journalism and thus contributes to scientific knowledge regarding media production.

In view of the ethnographic research materials, it is arguable that in contemporary popular magazines the 'decisive moments' are not what they were – they have been transformed into *designed moments* based on magazine identities.

## Introduction

This paper investigates and analyses the journalistic procedures through which reality and credibility are constructed in popular magazines,

specifically in their editorial photography. The study focuses on the roles of magazine photographers and addresses the issue of power by investigating the actual decision-making processes in the photographers' everyday work in relation to historical ideals embedded in the figure of the photographer. This paper sums up the results of a larger ethnographic research consisting of three case studies on Finnish magazine media, conducted between 2009 and 2012.<sup>341</sup> In addition, a set of materials consisting of fourteen interviews with staff or freelance magazine photographers and a web survey among magazine professionals (84 respondents) has been collected in 2013.<sup>342</sup>

Classical social studies of the media, such as Gaye Tuchman's 1978 study on the making of news, have shown how reality is constructed by professional journalists through strategic rituals of objectivity.<sup>343</sup> Christopher Anderson has used the notion 'the first strand of journalism studies'<sup>344</sup> to refer to early scholarly inquiries, including Tuchman's, that investigate processes through which knowledge is produced. According to Anderson, the main achievement of this period of research was 'the deconstruction of the idealised image of the journalist that saw him or her as the transparent relay of external events'.<sup>345</sup> Later, researchers such as Barbie Zelizer have brought up the cultural question of '*the constructed nature of journalists themselves*'.<sup>346</sup> Zelizer writes: 'Journalists use narratives to maintain their position and stature as an authoritative interpretative community. They function as a community that authenticates itself through its narratives, and whose authority has cultural dimensions designed to consolidate journalists into a cohesive group.'<sup>347</sup>

While the social aspects of journalism – both as media content and as a profession – have been studied in the news context, there is still relatively little social research on the production of photography. Michelle Seelig has studied the photo editing process in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*,<sup>348</sup> while Jenni Mäenpää and Janne Seppänen have written on the objectivity rituals in the work of photojournalists in the digital environment.<sup>349</sup> Even less research has been done on the production of photographic content in the

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<sup>341</sup> H Weselius, *Suunniteltu kuva. Henkilökuvien rakentaminen aikakauslehdessä*, Musta Taide, Helsinki, 2014.

<sup>342</sup> See Appendix 1 for the full list of ethnographic materials.

<sup>343</sup> G Tuchman, *Making News: a study in the construction of reality*, Free Press, New York, 1978.

<sup>344</sup> C Anderson, 'Journalism: expertise, authority, and power', in Hesmondhalg, D and Toynbee, J (eds.) *The media and social theory*, Routledge, New York and London, 2008, pp. 248–264.

<sup>345</sup> Anderson, p. 250.

<sup>346</sup> Anderson, pp. 253–254 (emphasis in original).

<sup>347</sup> B Zelizer, *Covering the body: The Kennedy assassination, the media, and the shaping of collective memory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992, p. 197.

<sup>348</sup> M Seelig, 'A Case for the Visual Elite', *Visual Communication Quarterly* 12, 2000, pp. 164–181.

<sup>349</sup> J Mäenpää and J Seppänen, 'Imaginary darkroom. Digital editing as a strategic ritual', *Journalism Practice*, Volume 4, Number 4, 2010, pp. 454–475.



context of magazines, the classical study being Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins' *Reading National Geographic*.<sup>350</sup>

In this paper, one journalistic cultural narrative,<sup>351</sup> the historical figure of the photojournalist, is investigated as a discursive element in constructing photographers' professional identities and roles. In the context of journalism, photographers and their images have traditionally been seen as the conveyors of 'truth'. This idea provides both the photographer figure with an aura of power and the researcher with a good example of journalists constructing themselves.

The pact between truth and power has been extensively studied by Michel Foucault, who states that 'truth is a thing of this world', not 'a reward of free spirits'.<sup>352</sup> 'Truth' and power are deeply intertwined within 'régimes of truth',<sup>353</sup> which also include and produce the statuses of 'those who are charged with saying what counts as true'.<sup>354</sup> Furthermore, according to Foucault, 'power itself does not exist' as something one could possess, but should be understood as an aspect or a process of social relations.<sup>355</sup>

This paper draws upon Erving Goffman's work and addresses the question of power as a process of social relations by analysing micro-level activities at the workplace. Richard Jenkins<sup>356</sup> and Ian Hacking<sup>357</sup> have noticed correlations between Foucault's and Goffman's theories of power. According to Jenkins, power is a 'mundane matter of everyday relationships'.<sup>358</sup> A critical Goffmanian approach is, in Jenkins's view, a potential way to comprehend the diffuse ubiquity of power 'according full recognition to the practices of individuals, whether self-conscious or habitual, rule-observant or improvisational'.<sup>359</sup> According to Hacking, Foucault and Goffman complement each other: Foucault's research was 'top-down', directed at entire 'systems of thought', while Goffman's research was 'bottom-up' – concerned with individuals in specific locations.<sup>360</sup> As for studying editorial photography, the Foucauldian perspective would thus suggest focusing on the discourses of 'truth' that are systematized among magazine professionals. Following Goffman, the focus of the study is set on

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<sup>350</sup> C Lutz and J Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1993.

<sup>351</sup> Zelizer, p.197.

<sup>352</sup> M Foucault, *'Power/Knowledge. Selected interviews and other writings 1972–1977'*, edited by Colin Gordon, Harvester Press, Brighton, 1980, p.131.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>355</sup> M Foucault, 'Subject and Power', *Critical Inquiry*, Volume 8, Number 4, 1982, p. 786.

<sup>356</sup> R Jenkins, 'Erving Goffman: A major theorist of power?', *Journal of Power*, Volume 1, Number 2, 2008, pp. 157–168.

<sup>357</sup> I Hacking, 'Between Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman: between discourse in the abstract and face-to-face interaction', *Economy and Society*, Volume 33, Number 3, 2004, pp. 277–302.

<sup>358</sup> Jenkins, p. 159.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>360</sup> Hacking, pp. 277–278.

the specific ways through which power relations and discourses of 'truth' – or other discourses – are created and sustained in everyday social interaction.

Following Goffman, the production of photographs is in the following sections viewed as a social performance<sup>361</sup> while the resulting photographs are seen as hyper-realizations of everyday social displays<sup>362</sup> such as photography itself with its cultural professional ideals. The analysis of the materials will also show how these performances and hyper-realizations are given different magazine-specific discursive leanings.

### *The photographer as a cultural historical figure*

The production processes and functions of editorial photography have changed through history. Magazines started to publish photographs early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Photographs gave a visual form to news stories and validated the publications' claims of truth and objectivity. In the 1930s, titles such as *Life* and *Look* in the USA, *Vu* in France, and *Picture Post* in the UK, started publishing documentary photo essays.<sup>363</sup> This new magazine photojournalism was connected to the humanist movement in photography.<sup>364</sup> The latter focused on everyday life and ordinariness in and around certain historical contexts, with an eye for universal emotions and an empathetic attitude towards its subjects, identifying with laypersons' views, and adopting a predominantly black and white aesthetic.<sup>365</sup>

Among journalists, the period of mass-market magazines is often referred to as the 'golden era' of magazine photojournalism. According to the lore, the photographer was a 'free agent'<sup>366</sup> waiting for 'decisive moments'<sup>367</sup> in which real life events would fold neatly into an aesthetically perfect order. The task of popular magazines was to publish the photographers' unique shots, unedited and untampered.

In his study of *Life Magazine* and its most celebrated photographer, W. Eugene Smith (1918–1978),<sup>368</sup> Glenn G. Willumson investigates the cultural

<sup>361</sup> E Goffman, *The presentation of self in everyday life*, Penguin Psychology, Penguin, London, 1990/1959.

<sup>362</sup> E Goffman, *Gender Advertisements*, Harper and Row, New York, 1979.

<sup>363</sup> D Price, 'Surveyors and surveyed. Photography out and about', in *Photography: A critical introduction. Third edition*, L Wells (ed), Routledge, London and New York, 2004, p. 70.

<sup>364</sup> M Marien, *Photography: a cultural history*, third edition, Laurence King, London, 2010, pp. 235–238, 279–308, 313–314, 337.

<sup>365</sup> P Hamilton, 'France and Frenchness in post-war humanist photography', in *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*, S Hall (ed), Sage, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, 1997, p 101.

<sup>366</sup> A Azoulay, 'What is a photograph? What is photography?' *Philosophy of Photography* Volume 1, Number 1, 2010, pp.11–12.

<sup>367</sup> Marien, p. 258. The original concept by Henri Cartier-Bresson, 1952.

<sup>368</sup> G Willumson, *W. Eugene Smith and the Photographic Essay*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1992.

myths of the 'authorial' photojournalistic practice.<sup>369</sup> From Willumson's analysis, it becomes clear that Smith had very original ideas about 'truth' and about his own abilities in constructing and communicating it,

*So, I feel free, and use it as sparingly as possible, to have a certain amount of readjustment direction in a photograph if, by doing this, I'm gaining an optical cohesiveness and a stronger editorial statement, if – and this is the great hinge word, which goes back to objective honesty – if the rearranging that I have done is of the spirit and the truth of the actuality.*<sup>370</sup>

What the editors of *Life Magazine* explicitly delivered to the readers were Smith's ideas about 'the spirit and the truth of the actuality'. In practice, however, the photographers were not – either in *Life* or other magazines of that period – given full authority over their 'own' work. As Willumson writes, the authorship of the photographic essay was hidden behind 'two layers of disguise': first, the photographer concealed his participation in the events, and second, the editors gave the byline to the photographers in order to hide the editorial superstructure on which the photographic narrative was built.<sup>371</sup> The contradiction between freedom and obedience was what finally ended the cooperation between Smith and *Life*. Smith resigned in 1954 after his photo essay on Albert Schweitzer, *The man of mercy*, had been published without his permission.<sup>372</sup>

In spite of – or perhaps due to – the fact that Smith was an *enfant terrible* of the magazine industry, his mythical figure is still influential for photographers and the photographic culture.<sup>373</sup> Independence is still one of the most constructive ideals of the photographic profession. In Finland, staff photographers in magazines operated relatively freely until the 1990s, which was when art directors (ADs) came to power. To give an example, one of the most influential Finnish photojournalists, Seppo Saves (1940–2013), writes in his memoirs: 'The editorial management has never given me any demands – not even any instructions – about taking a picture this way or that way.'<sup>374</sup>

Questioning Saves' personal account of his work is no longer possible. Nor would it be fair to compare today's popular magazines and *Life Magazine* as media products, or magazine photographer's work in the 1940s and in the 2000s. The aim of this study is rather to pinpoint the prevalence of historical discourse in the context of today's media. In the 2000s, popular magazines invest in editorial portraits, rather than photo essays. Yet, many

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>370</sup> Eugene Smith to a camera club audience in 1954, quoted in Willumson, p. 242.

<sup>371</sup> Willumson, p. 248.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., pp. 226–232.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>374</sup> S Saves, *Kuvajournalismi sellaisena kuin olen sen kokenut*, Weilin & Göös, Espoo, 1986, p. 29.

professional ideals underlying photography date from the distant 'golden era'. The following analysis of ethnographic materials will show how these idealistic discourses resonate in contemporary magazine work.

*The production: planning, performance, and construction of authenticity*

After the decline of the mass marketed general interest magazines in the 1960s and 1970s, special interest magazines begun to flourish. David Abrahamson describes the latter as 'editorially driven'. In other words, they pay great attention to the editorial treatment of content and focus much energy on devising and refining editorial formulae that would appeal to their targeted audiences. The magazines develop individual 'editorial personalities' that are 'essentially enthusiastic' about their subject matters. According to Abrahamson, the readers of these magazines 'had to feel that their devotion to and reverence for a specific avocation was reflected in the particular publication's point of view'.<sup>375</sup>

The 'editorial persona' of a magazine is the voice with which the publication speaks to the readers. Accordingly, it sets the tone for the entire editorial content.<sup>376</sup> Today, virtually all magazines are targeted at particular audiences with particular interests. The strength of the editorial persona depends on the size of the readership: the smaller the latter is the stronger the former can be.<sup>377</sup> In my three case studies, I have focused on the production of editorial portraits<sup>378</sup> in different kinds of popular magazines: women's magazines (*Anna* and *Me Naiset*), a family magazine (*Meidän Perhe*), a general interest magazine (*Seura*), and a news magazine (*Suomen Kuvalehti*).

For the first case study,<sup>379</sup> I analyzed the production of five cover stories of the actress/theatre director Maria Sid for four different magazines (Imagea 1–2). I interviewed the ADs and the photographers involved, using the cover stories as reference material. I also interviewed Maria Sid. The interviews were conducted primarily with the aim of reconstructing the processes of production and seeing if there were substantial differences between magazine brands. I asked the photographers practical questions about their work: how the planning, briefing, photographing, editing, and page design were accomplished? Had something changed in the process during recent years? I also asked about their views on working in the

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<sup>375</sup> D Abrahamson, *Magazine-made America. The Cultural Transformation of the Postwar Periodical*, Hampton Press, Cresskill, New Jersey, 1996, pp. 55–56.

<sup>376</sup> Abrahamson, p. 56.

<sup>377</sup> M Le Masurier, 'Independent magazines and the rejuvenation of print', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Volume 15, Number 4, 2012, pp. 383–398.

<sup>378</sup> I define the 'editorial portrait' loosely: my reference material includes many kinds of images of people, from presentational studio portraits to documentary style.

<sup>379</sup> Weselius, pp. 127–188.

context of the magazine's editorial concept or philosophy: were the portraits representing Maria Sid's personality or the editorial persona of the magazine instead?

The photographic work process was relatively similar in all the scrutinized magazines. The designing started in small groups from which the photographer was usually absent. The story format and the corresponding style and technique of photography were chosen in these meetings. The photographers were then briefed, sometimes using earlier issues of the magazine or sheets from the visual stylebook as reference material. Several people were present at the photo sessions: the photographer and model, sometimes the AD, and often also the stylist and the make-up artist. Afterwards the photographer gave a set of images to the AD or graphic designer, who decided – sometimes consulting the photographer – which images should be published.



Image 1. Case study 1: cover stories featuring the actress Maria Sid.

According to Goffman, a social performance is an arrangement where individuals become performers, who subject themselves to observation, and where certain type of behaviour is also expected from the viewers of the performance.<sup>380</sup> The social performance we see in editorial portraits is the very performance of posing for the photographer. According to Goffman, the historical continuum of portraiture makes photographs of posing people a 'central case of pictures representing other pictures'.<sup>381</sup> In the light of the interviews, it becomes clear that the ADs, the photographers and the cover

<sup>380</sup> E Goffman, *Frame analysis. An essay on the organization of experience*, Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1974, pp. 124–137.

<sup>381</sup> Goffman, *Gender advertisements*, p. 17.



person were aware of this performative aspect of the image construction. Indeed, Maria Sid referred to herself in the images as 'she' – not 'I'. The magazines clearly wanted to show themselves and their professional competence in all their editorial images. The images were addressed to the readers, who were expected to accept the role designed for them. As one interviewee noted,

*And then we show it – that we are there in between, that we have met this person for the reader.*<sup>382</sup>

Consequently, also the models were expected to behave in a certain manner, taking into account the reader's role as well,

*He's a smart bloke, so he well understood what he was expected to do, and what we wanted. He had experienced some trouble and been in rehab, and we showed in the picture that he was fit, in good shape, smiling. So it was like, for the reader, that you can survive too. Like, you may have, or have had, trouble, but come on, go cut your hair and get a job, for heaven's sake, that's that.*<sup>383</sup>

In the magazines in question 'the reader' assumed different forms and roles: while the magazine journalists regarded the reader as a *model reader* or the measured readership, the portrayed person viewed it in the form of a personal audience. The model readers of the studied magazines had specific characteristics such as nickname, age, hometown, and occupation, and the content was targeted to these imaginary persons. Goffman gives two different roles to the viewers of a performance: the role of a theatre-goer and the role of an onlooker. Unlike the theatre-goer, the onlooker is more than a random representative of an audience: they adapt to the level of the performance and identify with the events.<sup>384</sup> Goffman's onlooker therefore resembles the figure of the model reader. With regard to this imaginary reader, the repetitive photographic performances facilitate adaptation to the magazine's world and to its conception of realism and thus further identifying with the experiences of the people in the photographs. The magazine reader is expected to identify with the people in editorial portraits; yet it becomes clear in the interviews that the images were not seen as representing the personality of the model as much as advertising the editorial persona of the magazine. In this aspect, even if produced and published in the context of journalism, editorial portraits – in their designed, staged and propped visuality – resemble advertising images. In Goffman's terminology, the editorial portrait can be seen as a hyper-ritualization of real life social performances.<sup>385</sup> What distinguishes the

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<sup>382</sup> Interview, May 10, 2011.

<sup>383</sup> Interview, Mar 11, 2011.

<sup>384</sup> Goffman, *Frame analysis*, pp. 124–147.

<sup>385</sup> Goffman, *Gender Advertisements*, passim.

scenes depicted in advertisements from real life is standardization, exaggeration, simplification, and the will to erase everything that is not ideal.<sup>386</sup> This conception is easy to transfer into the realm of popular magazines and their editorial photography.



Image 2. Case study 1: cover stories featuring the actress Maria Sid.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

In the interviews, the widely acknowledged performativity of photography was also criticized. One respondent photographer said he would never do the poses to which his sitters agree, and that he thinks they lapse into a state of 'mental regression' in the studio.<sup>387</sup> Another said,

*I still wonder how they keep on doing it. Like, for how many decades, these people will come to the studio for cover shoot and go on about something irrelevant, and the writers will do all they can to get something else out of them.*<sup>388</sup>

What was then this 'something else' that the magazines were after? On the textual level, it was something the interviewees had not uncovered in public before. As for photography, it was seen as 'authenticity',

*To me, [authenticity] means that the image seems very genuine, and you can feel, even smell it. Like this [points at an image], she has stepped out of the path and smokes a cigarette in the cold air. I think it's very authentic. I can hear that crunching of snow and smell that smoke.*<sup>389</sup>

It is difficult to pinpoint the 'authenticity' mentioned by this interviewee. To her, 'authenticity' was a trait of the image that could be achieved through photographic techniques and direction of the model. A talented photographer, then, could construct authenticity. This view comes close to Eugene Smith's views of his relation to 'truth'<sup>390</sup> and resonates also with the notion by Paul Frosh that 'cultural producers, socialized into their roles within a commercialized system of creative activity, employ discourses of personal and artistic authenticity to make and express their own forms of 'resistance''.<sup>391</sup>

The 'genuineness' discourse prevailed in the interview materials. It is also commonly present in discussions about photography, articulated with different expressions, such as Yousuf Karsh's – also a photographer for *Life Magazine* – 'greatness'<sup>392</sup> or 'penetrating to the spirit' in the following example from David Goldblatt, who compares two photographs depicting a young malnourished boy,

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<sup>387</sup> Interview, unidentified (for research ethical reasons, with a small group of respondents, I have left some of the most critical accounts as unnumbered. The identity of the respondent is documented in research data).

<sup>388</sup> Interview, Dec 20, 2012.

<sup>389</sup> Interview, Jan 26, 2011.

<sup>390</sup> Willumson, p. 242.

<sup>391</sup> P Frosh, 'To thine own self be true: the discourse of authenticity in mass cultural production', *The Communication Review*, Number 4, 2001, p. 554.

<sup>392</sup> Y Karsh, *In search of greatness: reflections of Yousuf Karsh*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1962.

*In Mary Ellen Mark's 1985 photograph [---] something extraordinary happens. [---] We sense something of his being: fragile yet strong and not without hope. Compare this with the very similar 1974 photograph by Ovie Carter. Carter seems to have looked at the child and the child warily back at him – or probably at his camera. No resonance, no meaningful moment of awareness of each other seems to have occurred between Carter and his subject. The difference between the two photographs is subtle, but while Carter's photograph is an honest and compassionate description of the exterior of things, Mark's penetrates to the spirit.<sup>393</sup>*

Goldblatt admits that the differences between the two images are subtle. Yet he bestows the photographer with an ability to show the 'being' of the depicted person. Goffman provides a contrasting view on portraiture,

*[I]n photographic portraits, the model is frankly 'posed'. His having taken up a position before the camera simply in order to be photographed in no way detracts from the picture being thought authentic, 'real' one. Moreover, what is pictured is what is really going on, namely, portraiture, the giving of the model over to the process of being rendered. We would not say, then, that such a picture was 'merely posed', as though to correct anyone's belief that it was something else.<sup>394</sup>*

The interviews indicate that the respondents recognized both the 'penetrating to the spirit' discourse and the 'posing as the ultimate subject' discourse. What caused most confusion in the process was their occasional coincidental presence.

### *Discursive variations of the photographic performance*

To understand the specific ways in which photographic performances are given their magazine-specific discursive characteristics, I collected material for two further case studies in *Meidän Perhe*,<sup>395</sup> a special interest magazine for families with small children,<sup>396</sup> and *Suomen Kuvalehti*,<sup>397</sup> a news

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<sup>393</sup> D Goldblatt, 'The human spirit and the photograph. On photographing the invisible subject', in S Mayes (ed.) *This critical mirror. 40 years of World Press Photo*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1995, p. 17.

<sup>394</sup> Goffman, *Gender advertisements*, p. 17.

<sup>395</sup> *Meidän Perhe* translates as 'Our Family'. See Appendix 2, Case 2 for the image material.

<sup>396</sup> Weselius, pp. 189–250.

<sup>397</sup> *Suomen Kuvalehti* translates as 'The Illustrated Magazine of Finland'. See Appendix 2, Case 3 for the image material.

magazine established in 1916 with a special position in the cultural, economical and political discussions in Finland.<sup>398</sup>

*Meidän Perhe* had a strong intention to identify with its readers. The magazine's position towards them was constantly discussed in the editorial meetings I followed. 'Standing in muddy boots in the same swamp with the readers' is a phrase that was repeatedly used throughout the observation period. This newsroom slogan crystallized the editorial philosophy of the magazine and embraced the three recurring themes in the discussions about photography: realism – what would be credible; feeling – how to provoke the right kind of emotions in the readers and thus make the photographs 'feel real'; and 'us', that is, the magazine community compared to the outside world. These constructive elements in the magazine identity were sometimes very concretely transformed into speculations about editorial personae, as happens in the following quote, where a journalist characterizes a competing magazine,

*I think [Magazine X] is someone I could party with. I could, like, talk to her a bit while sipping the first beer. Like, how is the love life and what my partner has now been up to and what we had for dinner in the weekend [laughing].*

*[---] And we might talk about bags, but then the bag she has bought would be absolutely too expensive for me.*<sup>399</sup>

As for photography, it was stated that the style of the magazine's editorial images should not be too polished. The photographs should have 'the spirit of real life' in them,

*[O]n our cover, we want to show the spirit of real life. The child can stick the tongue out or something. Like, it's not like posing, where you have chosen your expression and then you just wait there for something, some moment to happen.*<sup>400</sup>

According to this interviewee, posing amounts to 'waiting for some moment to happen', while the 'spirit of real life' is something that can be proactively produced – a view shared with the AD from another magazine quoted further above.

The freelance photographer, responsible for catching and visualizing the 'spirit of real life', was familiar with the magazine's editorial philosophy. The following extract is from a cover photography session co-directed by the photographer and the AD (Image 3). The session took place in the spotless home of the cover persons, a father and a daughter, who had taken on their roles as models by pre-arranging everything for the session and welcomed the visitors in their new, perfectly matching clothes. As both the

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<sup>398</sup> Weselius, pp. 251–316.

<sup>399</sup> Editorial meeting, Mar 9, 2010.

<sup>400</sup> Interview, Sep 28, 2009.

photographer and the AD later admitted in an interview, everything looked 'unbelievably perfect'. Having noticed that the little girl had lost one of her socks, the AD and the photographer steered the performance towards their editorial philosophy,

*Now where's your other sock?*

*It's really nice with only one sock. We'll absolutely have only one sock there. [---] We let real life show in our pictures. Like... something like just one sock. Really showing that. And yet [the picture] looks really good. [---] I think, I've got the feeling that this is going to be nice. I like this skirt so much and then the sock. We should stick to this.*

*Now we'll get this lovely, like, genuine [picture]. And we have only one sock there, that will make the thing. I think this shirt is lovely.*

*Just like, perfect. Not too lovely.* <sup>401</sup>

In his interview, the photographer said that his work 'resembled theatre'. He directed the situation towards the desired scene, and hoped for everything to 'click'. However, in his view, the photoshoots in general had 'very little to do with coincidence'.<sup>402</sup>



Image 3. Case study 2: a cover story featuring the singer Janne Raappana and his daughter Senni.

<sup>401</sup> Cover photography session, Sep 28, 2009.

<sup>402</sup> Interview, Dec 20, 2012.



In *Suomen Kuvalehti*, I observed a particularly interesting production process where old ideals and new practices were clearly visible. In the winter of 2011, Finland was preparing for the parliamentary elections, and *Suomen Kuvalehti* intended to publish a series of articles focusing on the chairpersons of the main parties. The series was to be opened with an article about the Prime Minister of Finland, Ms. Mari Kiviniemi (Image 4). As the journalistic procedures were negotiated, Kiviniemi insisted on bringing her own make-up artist to the studio. The magazine agreed to this, and according to the interviewed journalists it was the first time in the magazine's history of political portraits.<sup>403</sup>

The series of articles had been thoroughly planned in several meetings. The political leaders were to pose in a 'neutral' way; smiling or gesturing would not be allowed. The shooting arrangements were also directed towards providing as similar 'neutral' portraits of all four party leaders as possible: a white background, a colourless transparent acrylic chair and relatively simple flashlights were set in the studio.

During the session, the make-up artist kept correcting the Prime Minister's hair and clothing, prompting the photographer to tell her to stop interrupting her work. The tension was palpable. Afterwards the photographer seemed overwhelmed. The combination of having a make-up artist present and the task of photographing the Prime Minister in a 'neutral' way had been like acting in a performance with two manuscripts, colliding the practices of popular editorial portraiture and political journalism.

In the following extracts, the photographer comments her double role and characterizes the difference between working for women's magazines and news magazines,

*[I]n portraiture, the make-up artist is like the best friend for the sitter, and the photographer's the bad guy, bossing around and telling to take poses. The make-up artist always, you know, makes them perfect and beautiful...*

*[---]...and the photographer just spoils it.*

*[The covers of women's magazines] are made on the terms of the sitter. So, it feels like here in [Suomen Kuvalehti] the photographer has a lot more responsibility and choice. [In women's magazines] you try to make them beautiful, and to fit in the magazine's world that is beautiful and fresh and soft and so on, but [SK's] view of the world is, sort of, putting all things against the wall. And [in SK] it has to be like, somehow like neutral, but what is then being neutral, I don't know.*<sup>404</sup>

<sup>403</sup> A Huovinen and H Weselius, "No smiling, please, Ms Prime Minister!": Constructing a female politician on the cover of a news magazine', *Catalan Journal of Communication & Cultural Studies*, Volume 7, Number 1, 2015, pp. 3–20.

<sup>404</sup> Interview, Jan 24, 2011.

The idea of 'neutrality' was put in practice by not letting any of the politicians smile. In the studio, the photographer had to give strict orders to the Prime Minister,

*Good. Now you can look straight here towards the camera.*

*'And is it now OK to smile?'*

*No.* <sup>405</sup>



Image 4. Case study 3: a cover story featuring the former Prime Minister of Finland, Ms. Mari Kiviniemi.

<sup>405</sup> Discussion in the photographic studio, Jan 24, 2011.

Later in the interview the photographer remarks that she should have let the Prime Minister laugh and then have photographed the outcome. This would have been closer to her professional ideals as a photojournalist.

The magazine also published a making-of video of the studio session, on which the styling and make-up of the Prime Minister is shown and discussed. In the following extract, the editor-in-chief ponders whether political portraits should penetrate the spirit or just show the posing. He explains the magazine's present choice of 'showing the package', as a way of pinpointing what he had earlier referred to as the 'commodification of politicians',

*We shouldn't only be at the mercy of the [politician as a] product, we should instead look what's inside the package, and that's, like, our duty to open that package. But, on the other hand, we can just show the package.*<sup>406</sup>

This case study<sup>407</sup> provides one example of an immediate situation that is connected with larger systems of power. In this professional and well-planned journalistic production, different intentions and randomly overlapping role expectations – of both the photographer and the politician – generated an awkward and unforeseeable social situation. As Jenkins notes, 'influence is sometimes – perhaps even often – exercised as an unintended consequence of actions or inactions'.<sup>408</sup>

These two case studies show how different discursive leanings in the editorial philosophies and photographic performances of the magazines dictate what is considered as 'real', 'authentic' or 'neutral' – that is, how their 'truths' and their credibility are being constructed. In *Meidän Perhe*, photography was subjected to a strong community discourse in which the most important aspect was to appeal to the readers and provoke a 'feeling of realness' in them. In *Suomen Kuvalehti*, the traditional journalistic discourse was stronger, and the magazine aimed at neutrality. In *Meidän Perhe*, the performative quality of photography was openly discussed, whereas in *Suomen Kuvalehti* it was only starting to receive more attention after a lengthy dominance of the documentary style and its ways of hiding the editorial superstructure.<sup>409</sup> In both magazines, the photographers were expected to accommodate fully with the editorial philosophy.

#### *Who decides about photography?*

*[T]he lack of photo magazines, the development of online reporting and the decline of photo stories in newspapers (in*

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<sup>406</sup> Interview, Feb 2, 2011.

<sup>407</sup> Huovinen and Weselius 2015.

<sup>408</sup> Jenkins, p. 159.

<sup>409</sup> Weselius, pp. 321–326.

*favour of single shots to illustrate the news) together with a new interest in personality based stories, have all led to a growing crisis in photojournalism, which can only flourish where there are editors to commission work and outlets in which to publish them.<sup>410</sup>*

In both the academia and among media professionals, critical voices, such as Derrick Price quoted above, have proclaimed the crisis of photojournalism for decades. The commercial press has been accused of publishing mere clichés<sup>411</sup> whereas digitalisation has been credited with challenging the very ontological status of the photograph. It is therefore likely that discursive contradictions appear in the everyday work of photojournalists producing editorial photography. If one endorses the photojournalistic ideals of showing 'the accurate record of how things are'<sup>412</sup> and the entailing claims of the images' authorial nature, the imagery published in popular magazines indeed looks devastatingly banal with its recurring arrays of smiling portraits.

On the basis of the fourteen interviews conducted with photographers working for consumer and customer magazines,<sup>413</sup> this dilemma seems to be clearly linked to the decision-making processes. The respondents indicated a shift from individual authorial control towards teamwork and collective or shared decision-making. Young photographers were relatively content with the situation that forces them to publish their 'own' work elsewhere via competitions, independent books or joint projects, while some of the eldest respondents had grim visions about their position in the current working environment,

*Now it's the AD who dominates, while before it was the photographer. And there were lots of quarrels between photographers and graphic designers. I remember once I made a big reportage for [Magazine X]. The graphic designer went home crying and stayed there for two days. And [the layout] was opened again and re-designed. The photographer had a say. [---] But today, if someone goes home crying, it's the photographer. There's the change.<sup>414</sup>*

The emotional charge in this statement reminds of Eugene Smith, whose resignation from *Life Magazine* was seen among contemporaries as a gesture of idiosyncratic frustration. According to Glenn Willumson, Smith was an emotionally difficult man who endowed his clashes with the editors

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<sup>410</sup> Price, p. 71.

<sup>411</sup> C Caujolle, 'The World Press Photo, the press and stereotypes. A visual grammar or simple clichés?', in S Mayes (ed.) *This critical mirror. 40 years of World Press Photo*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1995, pp. 54–77.

<sup>412</sup> Price, p. 74.

<sup>413</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>414</sup> Interview, Jun 20, 2013.

with the aura of a personal crusade, and his obstinacy regarding his authorial control of his photography was seen by many as a matter of arrogance rather than principle.<sup>415</sup> In the light of the research materials, such an attitude seems to prevail especially among the older generation of photographers. In contrast, the younger peers were more ready to comply with the editorial system, critical comments being sarcastic rather than openly emotional.

Who is then to decide about photography? According to the research materials, the decisions were made mostly by groups of ADs, photo editors, photographers, and graphic designers, but also in groups including 'text people' such as managing editors and writing journalists. In customer magazines, representatives of the client organization's editorial board also had decisive power in the process. When asked who *should* make the decisions about photography, most of the respondents suggested 'visual people' only. This was a similar type of divide as has been, in the context of news production, documented in detail by Wilson Lowrey.<sup>416</sup>

What became clear in my analysis of work processes was the photographers' understanding of their problem-solving role in the performance. They had to operate in groups of people with different interests. As one interviewee described,

*The task of the photographer is to combine everything and find the compromise. [---] To your other ear you have the make-up artist whispering that the hair should be this way, shading this eye. And to your other ear you have the stylist saying that the dress is too small and your angle makes it look dreadful. And in front of you there's the model who doesn't listen to what you say and just fusses around. In that situation you can all but laugh: please tell me what I can do for you!*

*Then you just shoot a lot of frames and hope for a miracle. This is the worst scenario. And [---] it's you where everything culminates. As the photographer, you should be able to solve everybody's problems.*<sup>417</sup>

### *Conclusion: Designed images – designed moments*

On the basis of the ethnographic materials, I conclude that editorial photography and collectively designed editorial images are contextualized performances that have different discursive leanings. Editorial photographs construct and sustain the editorial philosophy and credibility of the

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<sup>415</sup> Willumson, p. 266.

<sup>416</sup> W Lowrey, 'Word people vs. picture people: normative differences and strategies for control over work among newsroom subgroups', *Mass Communication & Society*, Volume 5, Number 4, 2002, pp. 411–432.

<sup>417</sup> Interview, May 22, 2013.

magazine. The photographs refer to themselves and to their production processes as much as to their external subject matters. The photographs are performative; their meaning and credibility are partly based on repetition.<sup>418</sup>

The analysis of the materials has shown how photographic performances are given different magazine-specific discursive leanings. Some editorial photographs may refer to the documentary tradition of photography and seem to aim at a truthful depiction of the actual life of the portrayed person, whereas other images are more open about their constructed performativity. However, as the photographs function within the context of magazine design, they are unavoidably entangled with performative processes of signification in which images can simultaneously construct, embody and represent their own contingent realities.<sup>419</sup>

From this perspective, the 'author' photographer can be seen as one possible role in the performance. The performing group of journalists, photographers, models, and readers may voluntarily and temporarily subscribe to the idea of the photographer revealing the 'true human nature', no matter how designed and staged the photoshoot is. Indeed, as Goffman argues, what is essential in a social performance is everyone's willingness to participate in it.<sup>420</sup> As a performance, photography is thus a meaningful action in itself, and photographs need not be 'true' or 'untrue' in the traditional sense. Hence, editorial photography again comes close to advertising. As Goffman writes: 'Advertisements that employ commercial realism or some other variety of overtly concocted scene can be aptly compared to what the stage presents. In both cases the viewer is to engage knowingly in a kind of make-believe, treating the depicted world as if it were real-like but of course not actually real.'<sup>421</sup>

It is arguable that constructing 'authenticity' into the make-believe worlds of the magazines forms an essential part in the profession of a contemporary magazine photographer. Yet the photographers, however 'authentic' images they produce, do not show in the research materials as free agents but on the contrary: in the pre-designed situations of photography they often function as problem-solvers who use their intuition in trying to find solutions that satisfy all parties and manage to visualize the magazine's views and values. Having to abide by the editorial philosophy and visual design of the magazine while being utterly creative at the same time is not always the easiest place to be in. Accordingly, protests occur. Willingness to participate in social performances is essential of people, but some photographers are unwilling to participate in those particular performances that are being played in their magazines. This seems to be the result of discursive confusion between old ideals and contemporary practices.

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<sup>418</sup> Weselius, p. 318.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 320–321.

<sup>420</sup> Goffman, *Gender Advertisements*, *passim*.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.



At the one end of the continuum of the photographer's professional identity, the photographer can be seen as a mere manufacturer of standard images, a 'button presser' with no control over the outcomes. At the other end of the continuum there is the idealistic notion of the photojournalist who authors his or her own images. The analysis of the materials has provided examples of how these discursive polarities appear in the actual photographic work and how the roles of photographers move back and forth between them.

If the 'golden era' photographer brought credibility to the magazine by channelling 'decisive moments' and 'truth' onto its pages, today's magazine photographers do not lag far behind. For in the context of contemporary magazines, the photographer is still the agent of 'genuineness', creating self-congratulating, performative images of *designed moments*.

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# Flower Power – Photographic Resonances in the Aftermath of the 2011 Terror Attacks in Norway

ANN HEGE SIMONSEN

## Abstract

This article addresses the social and symbolic transition of a piece of news footage photographed in the aftermath of the terror attacks in Norway on 22 July 2011. The footage has been relocated from its initial status as journalistic documentation into an image compilation that lends visual support to the Norwegian national anthem, thus celebrating an important part of Norwegian identity. This transition can be read as a visual merger of two political spheres that are normally considered separate. As a result of this entanglement in a new context, the performative powers of the original news are transformed, simultaneously re-politicising the entire context in which it is displayed.

## Introduction

On every New Year's Eve, the King of Norway, Harald V, delivers a speech to the nation, followed by a mighty choir performing the national anthem. Yet the actual singers are not shown. In contrast, the music is emotionally enhanced with beautiful images portraying the grandeur of Norwegian nature. Forests merge into waterfalls, majestic mountains fade into coastal splendour.<sup>422</sup>

In 2011, a newcomer was introduced into this emblematic bouquet of images. Judged on style, the new entrant may be described as an ugly duckling compared to its twinkling peers. It was a piece of news, slightly out of focus and lacking the aesthetic enhancements applied to the other images. The news footage portrays an immense flower carpet in front of the Oslo Cathedral, filmed some time after the double terror attacks on 22 July 2011 (Image 1). During these tragic events, a car bomb exploded near the government buildings in the city centre, killing eight people and wounding numerous others, before the bomber a few hours later massacred 69 youths at the Labour party youth wing summer camp at Utøya. People from all over the country were killed that day, 77 in total, and the tragedy left the nation in a state of shock from which it is still recovering.

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<sup>422</sup> The King's speech is available on the internet at <http://www.kongehuset.no/tale.html?tid=119318&scope=0>. The national anthem starts towards the end, at 15 minutes and 17 seconds.



Image 1. A screen capture of news footage showing the mass of flowers left in front of the Oslo Cathedral in commemoration of the victims of the 2011 terror attacks in Norway.

In this article I will try to explain the trajectory of this piece of commemorative journalism by looking at what Elizabeth Edwards calls the photograph's social biography.<sup>423</sup> I find the transformation from journalistic documentation to national emblem theoretically interesting for two reasons. First of all, the transformation alters the political dimensions of both image categories. It also shows photographic agency as relational. A new context implies new readings of photographic material, but the photograph also contributes to the transformation of the context itself.

### *Photography in transit*

It is broadly recognized that nature plays a key symbolic role in constituting Norwegian identity.<sup>424</sup> Nature images are imbued with a totemic and ritualized value that most Norwegians seldom question. According to Nina Witoszek, the ideational origin of this national mythology stems from the political and ideological struggle for an independent Norwegian nation state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this period, the largely barren and inhospitable Norwegian nature was transformed into sublime landscapes, in vogue with ideas launched by European Romanticists. As Marianne Gullestad points out, nature is still considered “the best [Norway] has to offer” to nationals

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<sup>423</sup> E Edwards, *Raw Histories*, Berg, Oxford, New York, 2001, pp. 13–16.

<sup>424</sup> See e.g. N Witoszek, *Norske naturmytologier: fra Edda til økofilosofi*, Pax, Oslo, 1998, p. 44, O. Christensen, 'Vinter, en norsk nasjonal årstid. Det norske vinterfriluftslivets ideologiske forutsetninger' in *Idrett og fritid i kulturbildet*, G Klepp and R Svarverud (eds.), University of Oslo, Oslo, 1993, pp. 143–145.



and foreigners alike.<sup>425</sup> Nature images are thus clearly not neutral, but may rather be seen as what Sherry Ortner calls key symbols, politically constituting and re-constituting Norwegian nationhood even today.<sup>426</sup>

In my view, the political aspects embedded in the flower footage from the aftermath of July 22 belong to a different order. Where the national anthem images have been chosen to enhance a symbolic moment of nationhood, the flower carpet footage from the Oslo cathedral was originally a journalistic documentation of a specific historic moment in time. Even if we accept that the flower images in the news footage resonate visually with the sublime in the national anthem image compilation, the political content is anchored elsewhere. The terror attacks on 22 July generated a specific situation that was photographed, while the national anthem photographs are situated within an overarching and deliberately imprecise political context.

Maruška Svašek has noted that artefacts are in a constant process of what she calls *transit* and *transition*. Whereas transit designates the actual trajectory of an individual artefact, transition implies the different interpretations and re-interpretations the object is subjected to in different contexts and by different people.<sup>427</sup> Together, these movements in time and space can be seen as constituting what Elizabeth Edwards calls an object's social biography.<sup>428</sup> I find this concept fruitful in a quest for photographic agency, which is often fluid, relational and contextual. My empirical material implies a transition process that was prompted by the initial representational powers of the news photograph in its original setting. The flower footage seems to have been imbued by the situation that created it, and it is reasonable to assume that it was the perception of the situation, more than for example the aesthetic qualities of the actual footage, that paved the way for its social transition. However, as Svašek observes,

*When artefacts are shifted from one location to another as part of the process of transit, or when the values of the society where they are located undergo transition, they become entangled with national and international political or religious issues'.<sup>429</sup>*

Such entanglements are central to this study, as they transforms the performative spaces in which the flower footage operates.

### *The disaster and the rose*

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<sup>425</sup> M Gullestad, *Det norske sett med nye øyne*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 2002, p. 286.

<sup>426</sup> S Ortner, 'On key symbols', *American Anthropologist*, vol 75, 1973, pp. 1338-1346.

<sup>427</sup> M Svašek, *Anthropology, Art and Cultural Production*, Pluto Press, London, 2007, pp. 4–5.

<sup>428</sup> Edwards, pp. 13–16.

<sup>429</sup> Svašek, p. 5.

The flower footage from the Oslo cathedral lasts for only a few seconds. It starts with a close-up of some of the many bouquets and individual flowers that people spontaneously had placed in front of the cathedral after the first memorial service a few days after the tragedy and that continued to grow in the weeks to come. The camera then zooms out to capture the immensity of the flower carpet, and ends in a shot where the entire church, as well as the temporary fence that was put up to protect the flowers, are visible.

To understand the footage's trajectory, we need to look at the circumstances underlying its production, and also some of the other journalistic images it refers to. It should be noted that so far there is no single great journalistic icon that visually sums up the 22 July experience.<sup>430</sup> Such an image would, of course, be an impossibility. Yet, in time this may change, as photographic icons are not always recognized as such from the start, but seem to be created over longer periods of time through reductionist discursive practises. The visual material from 22 July show that most of the news media covered the same events, and most motifs have been captured in many different shapes and from many angles. This includes the flower carpet in front of the Oslo cathedral.

There is no room here for a full account of this rich material, but I have selected a few images that I believe may help to reconstruct the social biography of the flower footage. The rose is central to all of them, as the dominant trope in the commemorative media imagery from the first few weeks after the terror attacks. The rose is a powerful and multi-vocal symbol, bordering on a cliché, but in the aftermath of 22 July most people found it to be appropriate. While roses of all colours were seen in the press photos, the red rose dominated symbolically. On a general level a red rose signifies both love and grief. However, its role as the symbol of the social democratic Labour Party in Norway is also relevant in this context, since the Labour Party was the terrorist's main target and ideological hate object.

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The terror attacks were entailed by what Tamar Liebes has characterised as a "media disaster", a situation in which the coverage follows certain pre-scripted, ritualized moves.<sup>432</sup> In a media disaster, not only the disastrous event is prioritized, but also the societal effects; funerals, memorial services etc. Quite often these events turns into so-called "disaster marathons" where the same facts keep being repeated and the same people are interviewed again and again. Johanna Sumiala, who

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<sup>430</sup> For a more extensive introduction to journalistic photographic icons, see e.g. R Hariman and J L Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2007. For more on the visual coverage of the 22 July terror attacks in Norway, see A H Simonsen, *Tragediens bilder. Et prosessuelt perspektiv på den visuelle deknningen av 22 juli*, University of Bergen, Bergen, 2015 (in print).

<sup>431</sup> See e.g. T Claussen, '22. juli –perspektiver, verdier og ansvar' in *22. juli – Forstå –forklare – forebygge*, S Østerud (ed), Abstrakt forlag, Oslo, 2012, p. 75.

<sup>432</sup> T Liebes, 'Television's disaster marathons: A danger for democratic processes?' in *Media, Ritual, and Identity*, T Liebes and J Curran (eds), Routledge, New York, 1998, pp. 71–86.

has studied the coverage of tragedies in a Finnish context, points out that the need for ritualized coverage seems to be even stronger when a tragedy involves children or youth. Children represent the future of society, and in modern society it is perceived as unexpected and unheard of that young people should die.<sup>433</sup>

Commemorative journalism, including its often strong visual dimensions, should thus be analysed somewhat differently from other dominant strands of media coverage, such as the media's attention to the criminal investigation into the terrorist's motives and actions, or to the different consequences of the attacks on other realms of society. In the aftermath of 22 July, we do find friction caused by the coexistence of regular news coverage and commemorative news reportage. The Norwegian tabloids Dagbladet and VG were, for instance, criticised for the way they visualized their more investigative stories, particularly when dealing with the terrorist's personal history and motives. Their visual choices (showing the terrorist's face on the front page, for example) were seen by some readers as running the killer's errand by promoting his face, and also as a disturbance or interference with the grief of private individuals and/or the society at large.<sup>434</sup> As stated by Carolyn Kitch, who has studied the media coverage of the deaths of Princess Diana and John F. Kennedy jr., commemorative journalism has other aims than digging up facts: 'Commemorative journalism reaffirms rather than informs, and its subject is collective identity – social, generational and national'.<sup>435</sup>

From this perspective, the flower carpet footage is in line with the national anthem compilation, and the latter's intention to enhance national solidarity. However, its journalistic origin points at the opposite direction. The role of the news photograph is, on a general level, to represent an event or situation in a journalistically relevant manner. This implies a truthful rendering of something factual and concrete, even when the factual is symbolically loaded.

### *The rose as a threshold*

A photograph is never created in a vacuum and to designate some of the relevant, or active contextual structures, I find Victor Turner's concept of the *social drama* useful. As a kind of rite of passage, the social drama is divided into four phases: *breach*, *conflict*, *redressive action* and

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<sup>433</sup> J Sumiala, *Media and Ritual: Death, Community and Everyday Life*, Routledge, New York, 2013, p. 95.

<sup>434</sup> A H Simonsen, *Tragediens bilder. Et prosessuelt perspektiv på nyhetsfotografi fra 22. juli*. PhD dissertation. University of Bergen. A Gjestvang, *En dag i historien: 22. juli*, Pax, Oslo, 2012, p. 50.

<sup>435</sup> C Kitch, 'A News of Feeling as Well as Fact' Mourning and Memorial in American Newsmagazines', *Journalism* Vol 1, nr. 2, 2000, p. 171.

*reintegration*.<sup>436</sup> When applied to the 22 July tragedy, the breach corresponds to the actual terror attacks that created a severe rupture in the fabric of Norwegian society. The aftermath of the initial shock was first marked by the conflict phase, a liminal threshold between the old and the new, structure and anti-structure. As Turner notes, liminality is marked by an extraordinary potential for both conflict and intense solidarity, or what he calls *communitas*. The liminal phase is highly creative, yet also volatile. Liminality implies that the natural order of things no longer applies the way it used to. As a result, it facilitates the formation of new relations and alliances. People from all walks of life may under such circumstances get together and develop an unprecedented feeling of togetherness. After a while, life gradually returns to normal and the struggle for normalcy is what the redress phase is about. At a certain point (which we have not yet reached in Norway), closure is achieved, either as reintegration or as a more permanent rupture.<sup>437</sup>

The images of roses that I will discuss in the next sections were all photographed during the liminal phase, and they represent two significant and potent themes from this period: grief and resistance. These two emotions came together as a particular case of *communitas*, which I believe is central to any analysis of the flower footage mentioned above.

### *Roses and grief*

The rose may easily be understood as a trope for grief. In their study of the prize winning photographs at the World Press Photo contest, Marta Zarzycka and Martijn Kleppe define tropes as conventional patterns of understanding that "remain unchanged despite their travels across the visual sphere".<sup>438</sup> They claim that photographic tropes have many aspects in common with Hariman and Lucaites' definition of photographic icons, but where icons may be understood as "commemorating decisive moments in history", the trope takes one step further away from the actual event. To Zarzycka and Kleppe the trope frames a visually homogenous content, and the turn from the indexical content borders on a generic visualization, in particular when it comes to war and suffering. The wounded soldier, the suffering mother, the maimed woman are all examples of motifs that are easily understood as tropes. A trope, then, is.

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<sup>436</sup> V W Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1974, G St. John, 'Victor Turner and Contemporary Cultural Performance – An introduction' in *Victor Turner and Contemporary Cultural Performance* G St. John (ed) , Berghahn, New York, 2008 pp. 1–38.

<sup>437</sup> V W Turner, 'Social dramas and stories about them' in *Performance: Critical concepts in literary and cultural studies*, P Auslander (ed), Routledge, London, New York, 2003, pp. 108–34.

<sup>438</sup> M Zarzycka and M Kleppe, 'Awards, archives, and affects: tropes in the World Press Photo contest 2009–11', *Media, Culture & Society*, vol 35, nr. 8, 2013, p. 979.

*easily accessible, undemanding in their familiarity, and well-suited to mass-mediated collective memory, tropes prove particularly effective in case of coverage of atrocity: while trauma is culturally understood as a form of data loss or representational void [...] tropes replace the un-picturable with the recognizable, transporting internal sensations into a knowable, external world.* <sup>439</sup>

On the front page of the former labour party newspaper Dagsavisen one week after the terror attacks, we find an image that suits this description perfectly.



Image 2. The front page of the newspaper Dagsavisen a week after the 2011 terror attacks in Norway.

Two roses are floating on water under the title “One week after”. On the middle of the page is a subtitle saying: “Things will never be the same”, surrounded by four quotations. Any Norwegian would know what the front page represents. The roses commemorate the Utøya victims first by the dyadic love/grief symbolism, and, as mentioned above, to a lesser extent the Labour Party. The water also carries an important symbolic value in this image. Water is often an image of life, as well as its opposite – death. In Greek mythology, the river Styx separates the world of the living from

<sup>439</sup> Zarzycka and Kleppe, p. 979–980.

Hades' realm of the dead. However, this image is basically a generic visualization. Even if the image shows concrete flowers that were probably used in an actual commemorative ceremony, this might just as well have been a stock photo.

However, not all the newspaper images portraying the rose as a symbol of grief are as nonspecific as the example above. Those that maintain the indexical link to the specific situation seem to tell a story with more depth, even when the symbolism is easy to read. This image from Norway's biggest tabloid is a case in point (Image 3).



Image 3. A spread from a Norwegian tabloid soon after the 2011 terror attacks.

In the foreground to the right, three red and three white roses are floating on the water. On a diagonal line towards the back we can see a dozen more flowers, adding movement to the central scene. In the back, Utøya's dark silhouette is the most prominent visual feature. The sky is a troubled greyish blue, heavy with rain but not yet bursting. The island's shadow almost reaches the flowers in the middle ground, but the darkness never touches them. Apart from the shadow and the flowers at the back, the most noticeable element is a swallow flying low over the quiet water. The bird's position is right above the flowers in the front, thus forming a triangle of the three major visual elements; bird, flowers and island. The colours are dense. The visually central flowers in the foreground seem to have captured a ray of sparse sunshine, giving them an almost unnaturally shiny hue. The water has a nearly oily quality to it, dark and heavy, and the Utøya island is an ominous black.



In this photograph the water-related symbolism is particularly salient: The roses represent a farewell from the living, floating towards the black, inaccessible territory of the dead, visualized through Utøya. In this case this imagery has a double reference, as many tried to find rescue from the terrorist by swimming away from the island. Some were shot in the water and others drowned. The water is thus concretely linked to both death and rescue or life. The little bird that seems almost to come flying out of the water may be read as a symbol of hope, resurrection and future.

Zarzycka and Kleppe claim that tropes have a cynical dimension to them because they are 'ideologically pre-structured' and 'function as mental and emotional templates'. They state that tropes 'do not document or bear witness, but rather symbolically represent marketable concepts'.<sup>440</sup> I believe this to be an important point, but the two examples above indicate that tropes may be more than just generic illustrations. The rose photographs from 22 July may have had a pre-structured form, which made them easy to read and maybe a little too easy to use in abundance, but what they actually communicated was far from one-dimensional. Both images in this section were heavily loaded with generic symbolism, but the second gained additional power from its indexical link to the actual event.

### *The rose as resistance*

The rose as a symbol of resistance refers to a different and perhaps less obvious trope. In the Judeo/Christian tradition the rose sometimes symbolises Christian martyrs who died for their faith under the reign of the Roman Empire. In modern times there was a resistance group in Nazi Germany called 'The white rose' that contested the Nazi regime non-violently and through intellectual opposition. The group was named after the white rose due to its presumed innocence and purity. As mentioned above, the Labour Party red rose is an international symbol for several social democratic parties. Here the colour stands for the struggle for material equality while the flower is an old anti-authoritarian symbol that may also be read as a softening (or broadening) of other socialist symbols, like the hammer and sickle.

The event that established the rose as a symbol of resistance in the 22 July context may be traced to 25 July, three days after the terror attacks, when people were encouraged to demonstrate their grief and solidarity with the terror victims by bringing a rose to what was later labelled "the rose marches". This proposal struck a cord with the entire nation. In Oslo the shops quickly sold out their supplies of roses and some people ended up carrying potted flowers to the march. People with no flowers were quickly provided one by strangers. Approximately 200 000 people gathered in the streets around the Town Hall in Oslo, an unprecedented number for a Norwegian demonstration. The crowd eventually turned out to be so huge

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<sup>440</sup> Zarzycka and Kleppe, p. 980.

that it was out of the question to actually go marching. Instead there was music and appeals on the spot, and people left the event elevated and united across political, ethnic and other lines. This unity was socially and politically important, not least because it was initially commonly suspected that the terror attacks were attributable to Muslim extremists, possibly related to the Norwegian engagement in the NATO bombing of Libya. The Muslim minority in Norway was seriously worried during the first hours after the bombing, and the rose event played an important part in defusing this tension. Since the terrorist turned out to be an ethnic Norwegian with an extreme right wing agenda, it was also important for people with political affiliations to the right to express their disgust with the terror attacks and solidarity with the victims.

Dagsavisen published one of the strongest front pages related to this event (Image 4). The front consists of one single photograph with a minimal text. The central element is a six year old girl who sits on a man's shoulders, presumably her father's. She is photographed in the midst of a huge crowd of people, and like everybody else she is carrying a rose. The little girl, however, holds her flower higher than the others, which sets her out of the crowd. The serious expression on her young face indicates that she is conscious about her act. Her seriousness is reflected in the faces around her, but only her face, and the partly covered face of the man who carries her on his shoulders are in focus.



Image 4. The front page of the newspaper Dagsavisen soon after the 2011 terror attacks in Norway.

The only text on this page simply identifies the girl: ‘Nora (6)’. The text is placed in the foreground, on top of some blurry faces. The simplicity of the design is uncommon for a front page of a newspaper in Norway, where the papers usually refer to more than just one event. In this case the paper has trusted the image’s affective quality, while leaving the interpretation to the reader. According to Barbie Zelizer it is common for the media coverage of highly dramatic events to let images play a more prominent role than they would do under normal circumstances.<sup>441</sup>

This particular image also evokes the intertextual reference to a song entitled “For the young ones”. This song is commonly heard in left wing demonstrations and rallies on a lot of different subjects, and it was also one of the most common songs heard after the 22 July terror attacks.<sup>442</sup> In this song the following phrase is central: “This is your weapon, this is your sword: the faith in life, the faith in humanity”.<sup>443</sup> The flower in the little girl’s hand may be interpreted as such a sword, and she looks as if she knows it. The photograph thus signifies a way to take back the future. Although the loss of lives at Utøya was painful, Nora’s very existence personifies hope. Interestingly, she is not identified by her family name, which probably would have lessened the collective level of identification.



Image 5. A spread from a Norwegian tabloid soon after the 2011 terror attacks.

<sup>441</sup> B Zelizer, *About to Die: How News Images Move the Public*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, p. 17.

<sup>442</sup> In Norwegian the song is called 'Til ungdommen'. It was written by N Grieg in 1936.

<sup>443</sup> In Norwegian this phrase goes: 'Her er ditt vern mot vold, her er ditt sverd: Troen på livet vårt, menneskers verd'.

Another image of resistance is found in the tabloid VG (Image 5). Here the composition is rather flat and no particular person or detail has been highlighted as central. The picture is taken from above, with a wide angle lens. Throughout the picture plane people with serious faces lift their flowers into the air. Most seem to be adults, but among them there are also children, young people and elderly. The faces and the flowers turn in different directions and the picture is full of details. The lack of focus on anything in particular underlines the voluminousness of the crowd that seem to go on forever. Together the text and the image form an unambiguous expression of resistance. The title, 'Slo tilbake med roser' means 'Struck back [at the terrorist and his ideology] with roses'.

Turner's *communitas* has been described as "a matrix of individuality"<sup>444</sup>, dissolving the social personae, and this is visualized in the photograph. Something about the atmosphere in the crowd tells us that there and then, in that moment, there was a sense of unity between these people. The entire crowd seems imbued with a calm determination, actively participating and engaging in a conscious collective moment. Although the rose is the central trope, there is nothing generic or superficial about the way it is used.

For most people the rose march was a positive experience and mentally it was a good place to rest in a turbulent and confusing situation. The poetic and symbolically loaded visual coverage that I have referred to above signals that the press understood and reacted to this, not only as professional observers, but as active participants in society. The Kingdom of Norway also participated officially, thus underlining the *communitas* aspect of the event. During the rose event, Crown Prince Haakon held a speech in which he claimed that "the streets are full of love", and the prime minister at the time, Jens Stoltenberg, stated that the Norwegian way to counter terror was through "more openness and more democracy". These messages were widely celebrated and most Norwegians were proud to live in a country where leaders spoke about love and democracy instead of war and revenge.

Due to the rose march the symbolic value of the flower carpet in front of the Oslo cathedral was augmented. Day by day the number of flowers grew and the authorities decided to put up a protecting fence around it. The largest Norwegian broadcasting company, NRK, had placed a bus by the church to cover the first memorial service on the first Sunday after the attack, but as days went by it became impossible to remove the bus without destroying the flowers. The bus had to stay there and at some point a photographer documented the flowers. The images then "disappeared" into the NRK's archive as one of numerous visual news pieces related to the event.

According to Turner, people often find *communitas* to be a liberating experience in which the conformity of normality is put on hold.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> St. John, p.8.

<sup>445</sup> Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, p. 52.

*Communitas* may thus be seen as an expression of anti-structure, in a situation where conventional structured activity is experienced as dry and unfulfilling in comparison. There is also often an element of euphoria connected with *communitas* that people would like to hold on to, and that sometimes makes them try to transform the experience into a norm. I think this is essential to understanding why the rose carpet footage was included in the national anthem compilation.

### *Found, founding, fetish*

I have already implied that the flower images from the Oslo cathedral obtained added value through their relocation next to other national emblems. This is a rare situation with respect to an ordinary piece of news, with no apparent extraordinary iconic qualities. As mentioned above, the NRK footage was originally a piece of documentation, not an icon. We might characterize it as that which W.J.T. Mitchell calls "a found object". This is an ordinary everyday image that achieves a life beyond documentation through its indexical content and emotional connotations.<sup>446</sup> But what is the index in these images? The flower carpet, yes, but I would suggest that the *communitas* euphoria may be the true index. However, within this new context, the *communitas* sentiment is removed from the actual historical setting and introduced as part of "Norwegian Identity". From a more or less generic 'found object' it transforms into a 'founding object' and as such it also reinvents the new context and re-politicises it.

However, as Turner has pointed out, to establish *communitas* as a norm is difficult and a somewhat risky undertaking.<sup>447</sup> Since *communitas* is inherently anti-structural it is not a lasting emotion. The Norwegian population is no longer unified in grief, and today there are several, and conflicting, interpretations of what the 22 July experience signifies to society.<sup>448</sup> Even if the flower footage still signifies *communitas*, the actual moment of national unity has passed. In trying to freeze the emotion in the form of an image, it becomes objectified, and the footage representing it acquires a fetishist character.

Mitchell distinguishes between the fetish and the totem, as a way to describe added value in relation to images. Whereas the totem represents family, and symbolises group unity (which we may say the original national

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<sup>446</sup> W J T, Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 114.

<sup>447</sup> Turner, *Social dramas and stories about them*, p. 113.

<sup>448</sup> For a selection of perspectives, see: R T Enerstvedt, *Massemorderen som kom inn fra ingenting*, Marxist forlag, Oslo, 2012, O Agedal, P K Botvar and I M Høeg (eds), *Den offentlige sorgen, Markeringer, ritualer og religion etter 22. juli*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 2012, Å Seierstad, *En av oss – En fortelling om Norge*, Kagge forlag, Oslo, 2013, A S Borchgrevink, *En norsk tragedie – Anders Behring Breivik og veiene til Utøya*, Gyldendal, Oslo, 2012.

anthem compilation does), the fetish is more subversive. As David Graeber puts it,

*Fetishism [...] is the point where [...] objects we have created or appropriated for our own purposes suddenly come to be seen as powers imposed upon us, precisely at the moment where they come to embody some newly created social bond.* <sup>449</sup>

It is not the object (image) as such that is interesting, but its relational aspects. According to Mitchell, a specific image may be read as either totem or fetish according to the circumstances,

*[...] it is not the cognitive or perceptual features of the image that shift [...], but its value, status, power and vitality. The totem-fetish distinction, then, is not necessarily a visible difference, but can only be apprehended through a sounding of the image, an inquiry into what it says and does, what rituals and myths circulate around it.* <sup>450</sup>

### *Concluding remarks*

In this article I have analysed the trajectory of a piece of news footage from journalistic documentation to national fetish within a new context. The analysis of the materials show the value of investigating the social biography of photography and highlights the relational powers of photographic agency. Even if a photograph may never escape the context in which it is displayed, it also actively contributes to the shaping and sometimes reinvention of the context. In new surroundings the photographic image occupies a new symbolic space that highlights the affective powers of the image in a new and transformative ways. In this case, in a more politicized way.

In my view, the flower carpet footage from the Oslo cathedral changes the content of the national anthem's visual representation. The national anthem may be described as a musical totem, and even if most of the images that anchor the song visually cannot stand alone as national icons, they all have emblematic characteristics and qualities that tie them to the much quoted national romanticism that is commonly evoked when Norwegians try to describe or explain what Norway really is. The flower carpet footage and its reference to the historically specific *communitas* euphoria after the 22 July terror attacks adds a moral dimension to this notion of Norwegian identity which is highly political, and in a new manner that transcends the romanticist idea. It assumes a national political unity

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<sup>449</sup> D Graeber, 'Fetishism as social creativity or, fetishes are gods in the process of construction', *Anthropological Theory*, vol 5, no. 4, 2005, pp. 407–38.

<sup>450</sup> Mitchell, p. 189.



and a superior way of dealing with political crisis that simply is not true on such a general – and totemic – level. The flower carpet moment portrayed in the news footage definitely has sublime characteristics that are worth venerating, but the 22 July reference is also a reminder of the fact that the terrorist was “home grown”, that there was and still are severe rifts between the insiders and outsiders of the society, and that the Norwegian crisis response apparatus failed to protect the youth. The added morality to the notion of Norwegianness thus simultaneously undermines the idea of a united people and opens the totemic value of the national anthem image compilation for debate. The moment of *communitas* was destined to pass, as the flowers in the footage were ordained to turn to earth.

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# The Power of Photography in the News Service of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

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## **Abstract**

This article deals with the manner in which the newspapers in a country occupied by Nazi Germany – The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia established through German occupation of Czechoslovakia – informed people about important news concerning world politics. The examples of these events and their reflection in the Protectorate press demonstrate how flexibly the propaganda responded to the prevailing political line. They show how the strategies of the control authorities changed regarding the use of photo news in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The primary sources for this article are newspapers from the protectorate period (1939-1945) and I would like to draw attention to the important link between the published photograph and its commentary that guided readers to a correct understanding and interpretation of the pictures. This article aims to describe how photography contributed to and answered the demands of a National Socialist interpretation of the world. The methodology used is a historical comparative analysis, which discusses the transformation of Protectorate propaganda attitudes in the dependence on the historical context, and semiotic analysis, which deals with the media discourse of that time and reveals ideology sustained on the level of sign systems.

## *Introduction*

Photography was, alongside motion pictures, one of the most powerful tools of Nazi propaganda. Although it was eventually overshadowed by film, it held its place in the media communication strategies of the Third Reich until the end of the war. Its use and distribution costs were far more modest than the costs associated with shooting a propaganda film, because modern rotogravures enabled the printing of photographs in relatively high quality and in large volume. Photography and film had the power to attract and deceive audiences. Many photo theorists point out its chemical-physical base, which tempts to convince the audience it is an authentic imprint of reality – this fact was essential for propaganda. German historian Annegrett Jürgens-Kirchhoff points to this particular advantage adding that

a Nazi monopoly on photography also meant a sort of monopoly on truth itself.<sup>451</sup>

Nazi ideas of what role photography should play in the Third Reich clearly formulated the propaganda exhibition *Die Kamera: Ausstellung für Fotografie, Druck und Reproduktion*, which took place in Berlin in November 1933 under the sponsorship of minister of the *Reichpropaganda* Joseph Goebbels. He said in his speech during the gala opening of the exhibition,

*Photography is the concrete expression of the value of our culture. The mission of this exhibition is to show that taking photographs is not only part of the artistic life, but also, and above all, the everyday fight for our being, and that it stands with graphic work on the side of the German cause. We believe in the objectivity of the camera and we are skeptical of news provided to us by ear or via letters. Nowadays man distrusts news and reports which he hears or which are transmitted through letters. He wants to see everything with his own eyeball and he has a right to high quality photographic art and illustrated print.*<sup>452</sup>

Photography, seen this way, is essential to the way Nazi ideology constructed a world view. It is appreciated for its documentary character and its ability to truly reflect reality, but at the same time it serves as the bearer of cultural and social values and therefore it is an instrument for the legitimization of power. Photography is also a significant channel for the ideas of superiority of the Aryan race and anti-Semitism. Mass photo distribution via printed media is supposed to provide a sort of common experience of the whole nation and its values. It contributes to the identification of the individual with the nation and creates collective consciousness. Minister of the propaganda Goebbels formulated this in his exhibition speech: 'The experience of the individual becomes the experience of the nation, and that all only thanks to camera'.<sup>453</sup>

News photographs were subjected to a deliberate control system, which included not only practical, common censorship, but also the effective governing of print and photo agencies, the administration of media content via press conferences, or the control of photographers themselves through the mandatory registration in professional associations, which required proof of racial origin. Obligatory registration in such associations prepared

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<sup>451</sup> A Jürgens-Kirchhoff, , Zur Kenntlichkeit montiert – die Kunst John Heartfields' in Benütze Foto als Waffe! John Heartfield – Fotomontagen, Ausstellung der Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main aus Anlass des Jubiläums "150 Jahre Photographie", 21. September bis 28. Oktober 1989, Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main, 1989, pp. 21–31.

<sup>452</sup> F Blask, T Friedrich, Menschenbild und Volksgesicht: Positionen zur Porträtfotografie im Nationalsozialismus, [Berliner Blätter, Ethnographische und ethnologische Beiträge, Vol. 36](#), LIT Verlag Münster, München, 2005, p. 161.

<sup>453</sup> Blask, 2005, p. 162.

ground for expelling many photographers from the public arena – either for their non-Aryan origin or their political or religious background. Some chose exile, others ended up in the concentration camps. On the other hand, Aryan photographers committed to the new regime gained new opportunities to apply their artistic capacities. This enabled the Nazis to control news photography not only in Germany but also in all occupied countries, including the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

The main task of photo news in Germany and in the occupied countries was the demonstration of the power of the Nazi order and the invincibility of the Reich army. The central argument of this article is that photography served as a pillar of the Nazi ideology and as a powerful tool for formation of the public opinion in the Germany and in the occupied countries as well. In my article I will illustrate how this happened in Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

For this purposes of this article I have chosen two historical events, which in my opinion could best explain the changes of the photo news in the Protectorate and how closely it followed the interests of the occupation power. The first is the nonaggression pact signed between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union in 1939 (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact). The second is the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 (Fall Barbarossa). These events best demonstrate how published photography in the media was influenced by the Nazi ideology and the political interests of occupants.

But before I describe the photographic coverage of these two topics, it is essential to take a short detour and to explain political and media situation in the Protectorate. It allows us to better understand which rules applied to photography in the approval and printing process and how this routine was closely bound to the will of the occupiers' power.

### *The Political framework of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia*

The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was established on 16 March 1939 as a succession state after Czechoslovakia. Half a year earlier Hitler's Germany annexed areas of the Czechoslovakia border on the basis of the Munich Agreement. This step not only brought about military, economic and strategic paralysis of the country, but also caused its social and moral decay.

Adolf Hitler called for the end of Czechoslovakia in October 1938, not quite a month after the Munich Agreement. Hitler issued special directives concerning the occupation of the rest of Czechoslovakia. He added a footnote: the German occupation should look like an act of "pacification", not an act of warlike violence.<sup>454</sup> The occupation itself ran smoothly and with no resistance. This was a result of an agreement between Hitler and the Czechoslovakian government, which was framed by immense German pressure and threats that the Luftwaffe would bomb Prague. Hitler's decree

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<sup>454</sup> T Pasák, *Pod ochranou říše*, Práh, Praha, 1998, p. 12.

from 16 March 1939 declared Czech lands part of the Reich as the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. This special form was chosen because of the international-political situation: it created the fiction of the semi-sovereignty of the occupied country and it was designed to dampen the concerns of other countries which German aggression would target in the future.<sup>455</sup>

The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was essential for the Reich and inevitable for the successful realization of Nazi war plans: Czechoslovakia was among the most industrialized countries of the world after the World War I. Adolf Hitler and his Nazis planned total Germanization of this area and its incorporation into the body of the Reich in the long-term horizon, but during the war the main goal was to fully exploit the industrial and agricultural potential of the Protectorate and its people. This goal manifested itself in the special status of the “protectorate”: its fake autonomy had to convince people in Bohemia and Moravia to be obedient and to stay calm; moreover, the production of factories in the Protectorate had to be preserved in the name of Reich. Propaganda worked towards this goal.

#### *Censorship of print and photography in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia*

Media were from March 1939 fully under German influence and became the main instrument of state propaganda. Journalists were forbidden to criticize the local government and Hitler's Germany.<sup>456</sup> Harsh sanctions were introduced not only for those who stood opposed to it, but also for the newspapers themselves – including their suspension. All protectorate media, without exception, were under the surveillance of an all-pervading, non-stop system of censorship. The censoring body could stop or forbid the release of newspapers. But also released everyday directives which quite exhaustively determined the way newspapers should work, including which information should be highlighted, which should be suppressed, and what editorial comments should result.<sup>457</sup> The censorship body used specialized officials to conduct preliminary censorship in the editor's office. They watched over and gave their approval to media content at three different levels: handwritten manuscript, page layout and pre-distribution.<sup>458</sup> Therefore it was almost impossible to find anything against the interests of the occupiers in the media.

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<sup>455</sup> P Maršálek, *Protektorát Čechy a Morava*, Karolinum, Praha, 2002, pp. 25–27.

<sup>456</sup> J Končelík, P Večeřa, P Orság, *Dějiny českých médií 20. století*, Portál, Praha, 2010, p. 80.

<sup>457</sup> T Pasák, *Soupis legálních novin, časopisů a úředních věstníků v českých zemích z let 1939-1945*, Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Praha, 1990, p. 54.

<sup>458</sup> K Zajíček, *Československo a Norimberský proces: hlavní dokumenty norimberského procesu o zločinech nacistů proti Československu*, Ministerstvo vnitra, Praha, 1946, p. 95.



This system of censorship included photography as well. Pictorial material which would be presented in the media was treated with special attention. This was result of the fact that the interwar era was defined by the faith in the objectivity and authenticity of the photography in comparison to the written text.<sup>459</sup> But photography could be more interpretative than text, and therefore the censorship body tried to limit the viewers' imagination as much as possible, and restrict the connotation of the pictures. Captions provided this important task. They were checked in relation to the images to avoid inappropriate "reading" and understanding. It was quite easy to cross the border here--for example, with a false connotation in relation to a title somewhere else on the page, or with an advertisement. The Nazi censorship body was afraid of undesirable readings which might result from the wilful, patriotic acts of journalists; thus, they imposed harsh penalties, including stopping the media when such infringements occurred.

Besides the mandatory membership of the photographer in a professional association, which basically ensured their loyalty, there was another crucial part of managing the photographic agenda's meticulous control of the taken pictures on the level of news agencies. These agencies worked as an official distribution channel in Germany and in the occupied areas including the Protectorate. From these official channels came the majority of images. Specifically, in the Protectorate it was from ČTK<sup>460</sup>, or DNB,<sup>461</sup> a subsidiary of the firm *Weltbild*. Photographs were taken from the *Central European Press Service* and from *Presse-Illustrationen Heinrich Hofmann*. Images from the battlefield were spread by the *Propagandakompanie*. It was the nickname for the five special units of the German army whose goal was to influence the people at home and German soldiers as well, while also working as field journalists. They wrote reports, took photographs and made films or sound recordings, which were then used by media in Germany and in the Nazi controlled states.

Photographs, which appeared in the service of the agency, were carefully sorted. The records of the picture censor (footnotes, etc.) are available in the Bundesarchiv zu Berlin as part of the Fund of the Reichs Ministry of Public Enlightenment of Public Propaganda (R55/21777). Images were controlled by the *Bildpressereferat* on Friedrichstraße 171 (part of the Press department of the Ministry of the Propaganda). Censors worked there week-days from 8 AM to 8 PM, Saturdays from 1 PM to 7 PM. Their shifts were of course longer in the event of an emergency.<sup>462</sup>

Censors were given orders from the governing body. These orders were written down in the service book with the number of pictures allowed to be

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<sup>459</sup> O Kunde, *Geschichte des Fotojournalismus, Magisterarbeit*, GRIN – Verlag für akademische Texte, 2000, p. 25.

<sup>460</sup> Česká tisková kancelář (Czech News Agency)

<sup>461</sup> Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro

<sup>462</sup> Bundesarchiv zu Berlin (BARCH), R55/21777.

released. Images from the agencies were stamped to recognize whether it was possible to use them in Germany or elsewhere.<sup>463</sup>

It is obvious that media in the Protectorate worked almost all the time with the images, which were all checked at least once. Despite the fact that every photo had to be submitted to a new round of censorship supervision before it went to print, this approval lasted only for one week.<sup>464</sup> This multilevel control assured the censorship body ultimate control over the pictorial material and virtually excluded the possibility of an undesirable reading.

### *Images of the Second World War on the pages of the Protectorate media*

In my dissertation I research the way selected media in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia photographically covered important events of the Second World War and their own existence. Specifically, it covers the signing of the German-Soviet nonaggression pact in August 1939, the occupation of Paris in June 1940, the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, the battle of Stalingrad from autumn 1942 to winter 1943, and battles to gain Berlin which began in April 1945. The core of my research consists of five of the most important daily newspapers and magazines: *Venkov*, *Polední list*, *Večerní České slovo*, *Lidové noviny* and *Ilustrovaný zpravodaj*. I researched the photographic coverage one calendar month after each event happened. During my research I looked at hundreds of photographs. Due to large amount of material, I used simple content analysis to categorize the general aspects of the printed pictures and the depicted themes. This work led me to categorization of the main topics used in the photographic coverage in the studied newspapers.

Most significant photographs went through deeper semiotic analysis, which gave me a deeper understanding of the role photography played in the construction of the Nazi-sanctioned state of reality. I also use a historical-comparative analysis, enabling me to look at not only differences between researched media sources, but also the development of photographic news in that period.

### *Soviet Union, an invisible ally*

On 23 August 1939, Germany signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union known as the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. In the seven-article-long document, both sides agreed that in "case of an act of war by a third party against the signatory, they would not provide help to that third party. They also agreed to consultations and to refuse participation in pacts which could

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<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> J. Končelík, B. Köpplová, J. Kryšpínová, *Český tisk pod vládou Wolfganga Wolframa von Wolmara*, Karolium, Praha, 2003, p. 487.

be used against one of the signatories. Finally they agreed to solve conflicts solely in friendly debate, or via arbitration".<sup>465</sup>

The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, signed for the duration of 10 years, also included secret amendments concerning the division of spheres of influence in Poland and the Baltic, thus paving the road to war. These amendments disclosed the proper significance of the pact. According to them, Finland, Estonia and Latvia would become part of the Soviet Union, and Germany would seize Lithuania. Germany also declared its interest in the area of southeastern Europe, while the Soviet Union wanted to grasp Bessarabia (part of Romania). The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact was also a prelude to the occupation of Poland – both powers divided the country and the border was constituted by the rivers Narew, Visla and San.<sup>466</sup>

The treaty was signed on 31 August 1939 and gave Hitler the opportunity to operate on the western front, where his armies achieved significant successes. But the idea of "*lebensraum*" in the east was never far from Hitler's mind, and it inevitably led to war with the Soviet Union. But before that he needed to conquer Poland and deal with the English-French threat. He could not have achieved these goals without the treaty with Stalin. The Soviet leader, on the other hand, considered the German-Soviet pact as a counterweight to the Japanese threat in the Far East.<sup>467</sup>

The signing of the pact in September 1939 caused an unforeseen turmoil in the international arena. The treaty, which allowed Hitler to invade Western Europe, completely contradicted the propaganda used by Hitler and Germany. Besides "world Jewry" there was propaganda sharply aimed against "world Bolshevism" and its center, the Soviet Union. The sudden change in the foreign policy was a formidable task for a propagandist, because their work should keep to the idea of continuity, while the real course of the country had just rotated 180 degrees.

For this period of protectorate propaganda I use the nickname "invisible friend" for the USSR, because the invisibility of the USSR in the protectorate media was a significant feature. Although it was one of the most formative events of the history of The Second World War, which influenced international politics in favor of Adolf Hitler, there appeared almost no photography documenting or visualizing this event in the printed media of the time. During the first month after signing of the pact, there were three images which directly captured the new German ally, only two of them clearly demonstrated the newly established German-Soviet friendship.

The first image (Image 1), was taken on the 5th of September 1939 and captures the newly-appointed ambassador of the Soviet Union, Alexey Shkvtsev, during a welcoming ceremony at the Berlin Tempelhof airport. The Soviet ambassador is shaking hands with the German Secretary of State and the caption of this photo reads,

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<sup>465</sup> M Pečenka, *Encyklopedie moderní historie*, Libri, Praha, 2002, p. 476.

<sup>466</sup> Y Santamaria, *1939, německo-sovětský pakt*, HZ Editio, Praha, 2001, p. 109.

<sup>467</sup> A Bullock, *Hitler a Stalin*, Mustang, Plzeň, 1995, p. 599.

*Führer received on Sunday at noon in the New Reichkanzlei. The new ambassador of the Soviet Union, Alexey Shkvartsev, and foreign minister Ribbentrop were also present. The newly-appointed ambassador is welcomed by the state secretary Woormann and Chief of the Protocol von Doernberg upon his arrival on the Tempelhof airport.<sup>468</sup>*

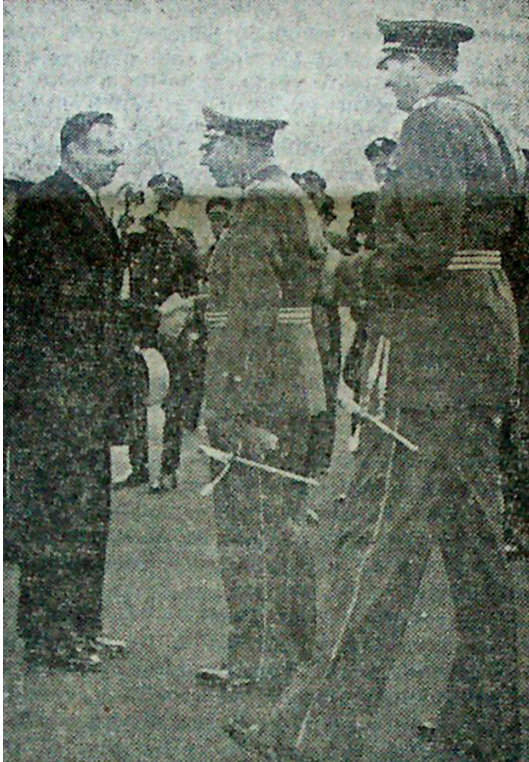


Image 1.

The second image (Image 2) was captured on the 27th of September 1939. This is a military parade of the German and Soviet army in Brest (Belarus) and two generals – German and Soviet – are standing together. The third image was a small portrait of the ambassador Shkvartsev. The image is accompanied by this short caption: *A parade of the German and Soviet troops in Brest.*

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<sup>468</sup> AP, *Venkov*, 5. 9. 1939, vol. 34, n. 207, p. 1.

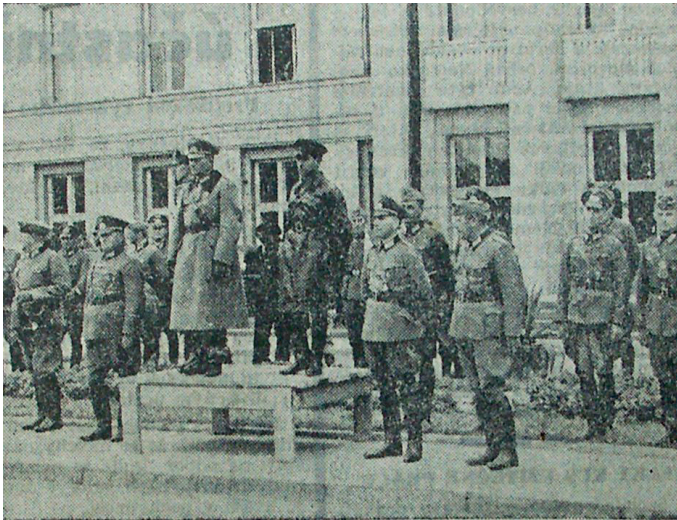


Image 2.



Image 3.

Except for Shkvartsev and a Soviet general from the parade, who were not on the top level of the Soviet hierarchy, readers of the protectorate media, had, I believe, no opportunity to see the face of an official exponent of the USSR.

Newspapers did not publish any images concerning the German-Soviet pact negotiations. The change of the course of foreign politics presented only photographs (Image 3) of the German foreign minister Joachim

Ribbentrop from an airport in Moscow. Again, a very short caption: *Reich's foreign minister von Ribbentrop flew to Moscow in a special flight.*<sup>469</sup>

Although he was welcomed by the Soviet delegation, he is captured alone. I consider this photo to be the most characteristic of the attitude of the protectorate's photo coverage, because it fully demonstrates the obvious invisibility of the Soviet state. The reason for this attitude is also obvious: the signing of the nonaggression pact was a terribly complicated case for the propagandist, because the new course was in direct contradiction to the old one. The Third Reich and Adolf Hitler had for years mobilized against Bolshevik dangers and the hatred toward Bolshevism was one of the main pillars of the Nazi propaganda. It was of course unthinkable to visualize the new alliance in a flamboyant way. It could only bring attention to a strikingly obvious discontinuity of the political development and its ideological rift. The main information role was played by written text, which used solely neutral expression.

### *From invisible friend to ubiquitous archenemy*

The first plans to attack on the Soviet Union, also known as Operation Barbarossa, were formulated in the summer of 1940 – a whole year before the German invasion of the Soviet Union started. The background of the invasion was determined in Hitler's directive Nr. 21 from 18 December 1940. The beginning of the operation was planned to take place on 15. 5. 1941. However, due to the German campaign on the Balkan Peninsula, it was postponed to 22 June 1942. The ultimate aim of Operation Barbarossa was to destroy the Red Army and to intercept its retreat into inner Russia.<sup>470</sup>

The invasion of the Soviet Union was not only a fight against the Bolshevik enemy, but in the first place it was a fight for a *Lebensraum* for the German nation, which Hitler saw in the East. Hitler's goal in the war against the Soviet Union wasn't idealistic. On contrary, his steps were driven by a lust for prey and the war was to be total. The main goal of Operation Barbarossa was to annex the land for later colonization, to enslave the Slavic masses and to create an autarchic, self-sustaining economic system, which could, if need be, endure the Anglo-Saxon naval blockade. Apart from that, Bolshevism should be destroyed, and all Jewish inhabitants wiped out.<sup>471</sup>

The attack on the Soviet Union was a massive one. Germany alone deployed, in the very first days of invasion, three million soldiers. And to this count we have to add the military strength of its allies.<sup>472</sup> The attack

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<sup>469</sup> ČTK, *Venkov*, 24. 8. 1939, vol. 34, n. 197, p. 1.

<sup>470</sup> M Pečenka, 2002, p. 44.

<sup>471</sup> F Bedürftig, *Třetí říše a druhá světová válka: Lexikon německého nacionálního socialismu 1933-1945*, Prostor, Praha, 2004, pp. 328–329.

<sup>472</sup> M Pečenka, 2002, pp. 476–477.



was, from the German side, an utter betrayal of the explicit understanding of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, and therefore it was essential to adequately explain this twist in German foreign policy to the people in the Reich itself as well as those in the occupied countries. It was an easier task to do this than to explain the previous alliance with the archenemy – German propaganda and rhetoric just went to back normal: to its “natural anti-Bolshevik” mood.

Photographic coverage concerning the Soviet Union, which was quite rare for readers, undertook the main role in the propagandist war against the Soviet Union. Images of so far almost invisible Soviets flooded the protectorate newspapers day-to-day. The Soviet Union had changed from the invisible ally to a very visible enemy. Neutral shots from the distance replaced naturalistic and emotive details, very often beyond the border of good taste.

Many printed photographs were, by contemporary standards, so large, that readers could not escape them. Only during the first month of the German invasion of the Soviet Union have newspapers been observed printing 66 images capturing Soviets. Quite unusually these photographs were not only on the front pages, but even on the inner pages of newspapers.

Large quantities of printed photographs and their strong emotional charge could be partly explained by the efforts of the censorship body in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia to tame pro-Soviet tendencies in the Protectorate, which appeared shortly after the beginning of the invasion. People in the Protectorate placed hope in their liberation and the future reestablishment of Czechoslovakia in the conflict between Germany and Soviet Union. The Soviets were among the countries that did not recognize the existence of the Protectorate in March 1939. Therefore the Soviet Union raised hopes among the anti-fascist resistance.<sup>473</sup>

The photographic collage in image 4, which appeared one month after the invasion, in my opinion illustrates the significant shift which took place after the German attack.

Images printed in two of the five observed newspapers captured details of the faces of Soviet captives and provided close contact with the enemy. Furthermore, in operation were the same mechanisms Nazis used in displaying Jews: physiognomy of the enemy is used to delegitimize and demonize, which is proved by the caption to the image (Image 4),

*These are Bolshevik soldiers. This world – which has raised up in the East against the Reich and was preparing a blood-bath not only for the Reich, but for the rest of the Europe – this world is alienated and disgusting to us. That is the world we do not like to*

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<sup>473</sup> This was typical especially for the communist part of the resistance, the Soviet Union constituted for its members the main power in the destiny of the Europe. in: J Gebhart, J Kuklík, *Dějiny země Koruny české*, Vol. 15 b, Paseka, Praha, 2007, p. 254.



*be compared with, because these faces reflect all kind of primitive human urges, but not the noble-mindedness of civilized man.*<sup>474</sup>

Captions of photographs in general played an important part in Protectorate newspapers – most of the images had them. They were there to provide not only the correct interpretation of the picture, but also amend the visual information with details photograph was not able to give. They were extensions and clarification of the image. The importance of captions proves the fact images were censored in a special, three-fold way: as images, as providers of context, and finally in relation to textual information on the page.



Image 4.

This collage clearly illustrates a propagandist distinction between “us” and “them”. The physiognomy of Soviet enemies should not only raise negative emotions on a subconscious level, but also provoke the reader to draw a line

<sup>474</sup> Ceps, *Polední list*, 13. 7. 1941, vol. 15, n. 191, p. 1; NESG, *Večerní České slovo*, 12. 7. 1941, roč. 23, č. 162, p. 1.

against the barbarism of the enemy and identify with the civilized world, which, in the eye of propaganda, was of course the Third Reich. The principle is the very same the Nazis used in the propagandist “image crusade” against the Jews. The lack of physiognomic features connected to the Aryan race – such as tall, slim, blue-eyed and blonde haired with angular facial features – was highlighted. Jews were depicted as bent-over figures, very often with some kind of deformation, hairy, bearded and with large bellies.<sup>475</sup> Non-Aryans were taken from a slightly higher perspective, which added shadows to their faces. Aryans were shot directly, straight on, to show their features and the purity of their faces. Quite typical for the pictures of the Non-Aryans were their sidelong gazes -- they don't stare directly to the camera – which should induce the feeling of weak character.<sup>476</sup> Even the attack against the Soviet Union was presented as a crusade against the eastern barbarians.

This fact also influenced the way of depicting Soviet soldiers in the protectorate newspapers – usually as captives in handcuffs or with their hands up. These photographic proofs of defeat were, in a semiotic way, moving the Reich towards triumph in the war and supported the myth of invincibility of the *Wehrmacht*. The strength and success of the German army is illustrated, for example, by this picture (Image 5) with a caption : ‘German troops beset after heroic battle the city of Brest and moves the Russian captives away’<sup>477</sup>. The Picture captures at first sight the endless flow of captives with their hands behind their heads. The other picture (Image 6) is a detailed insight into the helplessness and defenselessness of a Soviet captive.<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> F Schmidt, *Zur Visualisierung der Macht: Vor- und Fremdbilder in Menschenbild und Volksgesicht: Positionen zur Porträtfotografie im Nationalsozialismus*, LIT Verlag Münster, 2005, pp. 179-183.

<sup>476</sup> Schmidt, 2005, p. 187.

<sup>477</sup> P. - H. *Polední list*, 2. 7. 1941, vol. 15, n. 179, p. 1.

<sup>478</sup> AP, *Venkov*, 28. 6. 1941, vol. 36, n. 150, p. 2

<sup>29</sup> K Durman, *Popely Ještě žhavé*, Karolinum, Praha, 2004, p. 81.



Image 5.



Image 6.

A specific role in depicting the Soviet enemy was played out in the pages of newspapers with the so-called Ukrainian Campaign: news about the German advance in conquering the Ukraine, which was at that time part of the Soviet Union. Ukraine had a crucial strategic significance for the Soviets, because its fields served as the granary of the whole Union.<sup>479</sup> Therefore, it was there that the highest number of troops of the Soviet army were deployed, and it was there that the Germans faced the strongest resistance from the Soviets. Information about it in the protectorate news was part of the harsh, anti-Bolshevik campaign. It had one aim: to present the enemy as an inhumane behemoth. Only after retreat could the atrocities, inflicted upon the Ukrainian people during Soviet rule be revealed. Propaganda used the fact that the Soviet secret service NKVD was not able to evacuate the prisons, penal colonies and camps it had in the Ukraine. So often they simply executed prisoners. The NKVD did not want them to be caught, interrogated and used by the Germans. This happened in the Western Ukraine, where the NKVD slaughtered 10 000 prisoners at the end of June of 1941. The same fate awaited 1 200 prisoners in Lutsk, 1 500 in Stanislav and 500 in Dubno. There appeared dozens of photographs in protectorate newspapers with drastic content related to the NKVD actions in Ukraine.

One of them is a picture (Image 7) which captures almost endless rows of corpses of Ukrainian prisoners shot in Lvov. Drastic photo is accompanied by this caption: 'The picture is from Lvov, where the GPU shot more than 3 000 imprisoned Ukrainians. A terrifying look at countless corpses lying in rows in front of the prison building'.<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> SS-PK-Jugatlantie, Polední list, 9. 7. 1941, roč. 15, č. 186, s. 1



Image 7.

The censorship body of course knew that photographs from Ukraine were far beyond the limits of good taste. Notwithstanding, they supposed that naturalistic, emotive images would best serve the purpose of anti-Soviet propaganda. The importance of captions illustrate reports taken in special conferences, where editors were given instructions by the censorship body on how the newspaper should look – that includes visual information as well.

These records are available in the National Archive in Prague as part of the fund of the Archive of the Syndicate of Journalists, in the period from 1939 to 1945. They include a word-for-word log of how press conferences were conducted. They contain instructions from the censorship body, who attended these meetings, and what questions were raised to censors. For example, on the conference on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1941 was decided that, 'the most important topic is the visual material concerning Bolshevik atrocities in Lvov and other Ukrainian cities'.<sup>481</sup> This photographic material should appear in the next few days in *large volume*<sup>482</sup> in all newspapers in the Protectorate and it should answer the question *who commits cruelties and violence and who behaves well*.<sup>483</sup> When newspapers were flooded with dramatic photographs, the members of the censorship body arranged another meeting, they admitted that "it was not aesthetic to print these shots in the newspapers, but despite this it was necessary to point to the inhumane Bolshevik methods and to atrocities of their system."<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> NA, fond Archiv Syndikátu novinářů, k. 108, Porada šéfredaktorů 7. 7. 1941.

<sup>482</sup> NA, fond Archiv Syndikátu novinářů, k. 108, Porada šéfredaktorů 7. 7. 1941.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid.

<sup>484</sup> NA, fond Archiv Syndikátu novinářů, k. 108, Porada šéfredaktorů 10. 7. 1941.



Image 8.



Image 9.

Photographs of that type replaced other images from newspapers. What is exceptional is not the detailed shots or cut-outs with drastic content. An illustrative example is the photo printed by the *Lidové Noviny* on 11 July 1941. It depicted piles of dead bodies in Lvov and the picture (Image 8) is accompanied by the caption: *'This is the work of the GPU in Lvov. A view of the barbarically mutilated corpses of political prisoners, killed by the GPU tormentors'*,<sup>485</sup> Far more drastic is the image printed on the front page of *Polední List* also on 11 July 1941. It is a very detailed shot (Image 9) of a dead child with this emotive caption,

*This 10-year-old boy was mutilated and stabbed to death by the Soviet political commissars for one reason: he had a German mother. Because of her the child was placed in the political prison as untrustworthy and dangerous to the Soviet regime, and he was killed with other prisoners before the Bolsheviks escaped.*<sup>486</sup>

Photographs were very often accompanied by an emotive legend which strengthened psychological impact. The volume of printed images and their gradual dispensation boosted the effect of the campaign and created the impression that the enemy committed dreadful atrocities each day, repeatedly.

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<sup>485</sup> AP, *Lidové Noviny*, 11. 7. 1941, vol. 36, n. 161, p. 2

<sup>486</sup> PK, *Polední list*, 1., 2. a 3. vydání, 11. 7. 1941, vol. 15, n. 189, p. 1.



*Campaign comparison*

German-Soviet nonaggression pact	German attack on the Soviet union
Altogether 3 photographs published during first month after signing	66 images published during first month after invasion
Main characteristic: invisibility	Main characteristic: extreme visibility
Dominant impression: neutral	Dominant impression: negative
Type of the composition: whole	Type of the composition: half/whole; detail
Depiction of the USSR: neutral	Depiction of the USSR: demonization, delegitimization, stultification

I draw basic differences between the two propaganda campaigns in this table. Notice the huge imbalance in the case of the volume of photographs and depictions of the USSR. It perfectly reflects the interest the Reich had in both propaganda campaigns. It seduces us to guess that Adolf Hitler considered the German-Soviet pact only as a temporary arrangement, and that was the reason for handling the USSR almost “invisibly” and depicting the USSR in a neutral way. The strongly negative style of propaganda in the second case could be considered a “return to normal”, a return to an ideological nature, and it was also a response to the pro-Soviet mood in the Protectorate.

*Conclusion*

The examination of the coverage of both events revealed that the monitored newspapers did not give the same space and energy to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and Operation Barbarossa. During the Soviet-German friendship, the Soviet Union was given considerably less print space than during Soviet-German hostilities. A large difference in the polarity of the rating scale was also detected: while the “friendly” Soviet Union was presented rather neutrally, the hostile Soviet Union was presented in an extremely negative way. This fact was supported, among other items of evidence, by the unequal allocation of photographic material in both monitored periods. During the Soviet-German partnership, photographs relating to the Soviet Union were nowhere to be found in the pages of monitored newspapers. After the start of Operation Barbarossa, the situation was exactly the opposite.



The impermeability and severity of the control system is illustrated by the high level of photo-coverage by official sources, namely the photo agencies ČTK and DNB. These photographs were on the pages of a majority of the Protectorate's newspapers.

How successful the anti-Bolshevik campaign was in subverting the people in the Protectorate is unfortunately hard to say. I personally suppose that even its negativity and drastic nature could not defeat the hatred most inhabitants of the Protectorate felt against Nazi occupation.

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# The Power of Charisma: Images of Nelson Mandela

PAULA HORTA

## Abstract

Since his release from prison in 1990, countless images of Nelson Mandela have been published, chronicling his political and private life, and subsequent role as the first democratically elected president of post-apartheid South Africa. Some of these photographs, now gathered in the Nelson Mandela Digital Archive (<http://archives.nelsonmandela.org>), have unquestionable documentary and historical value. Rather than engage with this aspect of the collection, however, this paper focuses on the narrative quality of the photos. Drawing on charismatic leadership theory, the paper reflects on both the visual narratives encapsulated in the images and their emotional impact. I contend that the power of Nelson Mandela's leadership is mediated through photographic representations that show his ability to evoke awe, respect, and affection in people who come into contact with him. The power of the images resides in their capacity to both communicate these qualities in Nelson Mandela and engender an emotional response in the viewer.

## *Charismatic leadership and the affective power of photography*

South Africa celebrated 20 years of freedom and democracy on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2014. This occasion has prompted reflection not only about the progress that has been made since the implementation of democracy, but also about the leadership styles of the three presidents elected after 1994: Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma. In this paper I will narrow the focus of my discussion to Mandela's charismatic leadership. I am interested in the affective dimension of Mandela's leadership and, in particular, in how Mandela's dynamic interpersonal interactions are captured and transmitted through photographs. I will argue that the power of the images discussed in this article stems from their capacity to encapsulate the awe and elation Nelson Mandela evoked, thereby reinforcing the characterisation of Mandela's leadership as essentially charismatic.

Each image might be described as comprising "the Moment" (*Augenblick*), meaning an intense moment of experience, a concept developed in the work of Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, or "the decisive moment", a phrase identified with Henri Cartier-Bresson. For Cartier-Bresson, the seizing of a meaningful moment before it vanishes originates in the "simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as the precise organization of forms which

give that event its proper expression”.<sup>487</sup> I would add that the decisive moment is the capturing of an event that rises out from a succession of events, or of human emotion, or a sense of intimacy when all the visual elements within the frame fall into the right place, in other words, a moment of perfect timing that imbues the photograph with narrative quality. I define the narrative quality of photographs as the vehicle that enables viewers to (re)construct the visual text as a narrative. As Schirato and Webb point out, “As social creatures, we think in story – in time, character, event and causality – and we make sense of our lives, as well as our connections to other people in terms of the narratives we craft. Narrative is a site of interaction (an active verb) rather than a static object”.<sup>488</sup> In this regard, Marianne Hirsch considers that “images and text both tell stories and demand a narrative reading and investment on the reader’s part”.<sup>489</sup>

This investment might be cognitive (in which narrative scripts are formed in readers’/viewers’ minds in response to a text), as Marie-Laure Ryan proposes,<sup>490</sup> or contemplative, as Koral Ward’s analysis of the decisive moment suggests. A contemplative mode of viewing arises when one comes across “a pictorial image through the contemplation of which one might gain some insight not only into oneself but also the wider human condition”.<sup>491</sup> In this regard, the photographic experience is elevated from, to borrow from Ward, the “‘external’ to the ‘internal’ domain, from a moment of experience in ordinary temporality to a subjective experience which allows a surpassing of ordinary time and forges a connection with something ‘eternal’”.<sup>492</sup>

With this reflection in mind, I argue that the viewer’s experience of the photographs under discussion in this article unfolds at two distinct moments of viewing. The first moment is mediated by an affective response to the emotional or symbolic content of the photographic image. The sense of privileged intimacy afforded by the photographer’s approach to the subject(s) prompts the viewer to create in his/her mind a story. It is one which relates the circumstances that led to that particular event and what the portraitee’s experience was like. The second moment of viewing encompasses the response to the photograph’s compositional elements, or signifying units, in articulation with the oral/written testimonies accompanying it. The viewer thus engages with two narratives: a verbal and

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<sup>487</sup> H van Gelder & H Westgeest, *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2011, p. 88

<sup>488</sup> T Schirato & J Webb, *Understanding the Visual*, Sage, London, 2004, p. 97.

<sup>489</sup> M Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 1997, p. 9.

<sup>490</sup> M-L Ryan, ‘Introduction’, in *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, University of Nebraska Press, 2004.

<sup>491</sup> K Ward, *Augenblick: The Concept of the Decisive Moment in 19th and 20th Century Western Philosophy*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2008, p. 127.

<sup>492</sup> Ward, Ashgate, p. 1.

a visual narrative. In Marianne Hirsch's words, "the former gives testimony while the other transmits it".<sup>493</sup>

I am suggesting that notwithstanding the affective power of certain photographs, resulting from, in Avery's words, their "capacity to make meaning meaningful, to convey the existence of something profoundly or vividly or eloquently so that it matters to the viewer",<sup>494</sup> the viewer's affective and imaginative engagement with photographs of Mandela is anchored in the intricate tapestry of ideas and images that has been formed about Mandela across time and that, according to Nuttall and Mbembe, has contributed to "the making of his aura".<sup>495</sup> Thus, the viewer comes to a photograph of Mandela with both a repertoire of personal experiences and a set of expectations. Photographs of Mandela spark more than, as Barthes described it, a *polite* interest, "that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste" in what he conceptualised as the *studium*, the photograph's documentary or informative value;<sup>496</sup> they provoke the need to look for, in Barthesian terms, the "essence" of the photograph, an element that "rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces [the viewer]".<sup>497</sup>

Central to Barthes's often cited, but still very pertinent, meditation on photography in *Camera Lucida* is the idea that it acts on the body as much as on the mind. The photograph articulates a lived experience, stimulating the viewer's memory and imagination, as well as provoking recognition of some past experience which triggers the establishment of correspondences. Subjectivity, the personal or individual response to the photograph, enables the viewer to be drawn into an affective mode of photographic interpretation that is attentive to a particular photographic detail that "pricks" or "wounds" him/her. In the case of images of Nelson Mandela, that detail might become the conduit for a process of identification and recognition of, among the many qualities that have been attributed to Mandela, the "stupendous heart" and the "gargantuan will" of the man Maya Angelou called "Our Gideon", "Our David", "Our great courageous man".<sup>498</sup> It is this intuitive and emotive form of engagement that I wish to explore with relation to the photographs discussed in this article, but in the course of doing so I feel it is worth recalling the historic and social contexts out of which the photographs grew.

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<sup>493</sup> Hirsch, 1997, p. 4.

<sup>494</sup> G Avery, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, 1997, p. 106.

<sup>495</sup> S Nuttall & A Mbembe, 'Mandela's Mortality', in *The Cambridge Companion to Nelson Mandela*, R. Barnard (ed), Cambridge University Press, New York, 2014, p. 275.

<sup>496</sup> R Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Trans. Richard Howard, Hill & Wang, New York, 1982, p. 27.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>498</sup> M Angelou, *His Day is Done: A Nelson Mandela Tribute*, Random House, New York, 2014, p. 39.

*Let us now praise Nelson Mandela*

Internationally, Mandela has been identified with South Africa's peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy, due largely to his project of national unity, a political and personal endeavour motivated both by the vision of a peaceful post-apartheid society and a commitment to freedom, social justice and racial reconciliation. To South Africans, he was a national hero and "the father of the nation", who was affectionately known by his clan name "Madiba". Everywhere, he was revered, and often talked about as a source of inspiration, personifying resilience, dignity, integrity, tolerance and compassion.

Nelson Mandela's life and political career have been widely and thoroughly documented in literature and on film. Alongside the autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, first published in 1994, and the more recent collected papers titled *Nelson Mandela: Conversations with Myself* (2010),<sup>499</sup> the bibliography on Nelson Mandela includes a growing body of biographies; scholarly and journalistic articles; photo essays, television documentaries and feature films. In most sources, Mandela is often referred to as a national hero, an icon, a legend and/or a myth.<sup>500</sup>

While it is not my purpose to puzzle out the choice and use of each of these concepts, it merits note that Mandela's multifaceted and changing image over time is located in specific political, social and cultural circumstances. Mandela is inextricably tied to both the history of the anti-apartheid struggle and the political and social changes preceding and following the demise of apartheid in South Africa, in the so-called transition period from apartheid to democracy.

Images of Mandela were banned in South Africa for most of the twenty-seven years he spent in prison, but, as Tomaselli and Shepperson point out, rather than erase the memory of the once influential leader in the ANC, the absence of the visual signifier inflated the power he invoked in the popular imagination. During that period, Mandela was projected as the icon of the anti-apartheid struggle through the reproduction, both in the resistance media in South Africa and in the anti-apartheid movement around the world, of a pixelated image of a young man with a bearded face and neatly parted hair. Tomaselli and Shepperson further analyse "the accretion of layers of meaning or connotation" to the image of Nelson Mandela after his release from prison<sup>501</sup>, arguing that "Mandela's face has become to the

<sup>499</sup> The book is presented as a compilation of materials from Nelson Mandela's personal archive, consisting of interviews, transcripts of conversations, unpublished manuscripts smuggled out of jail, notebooks, diaries, letters, meeting notes, travel journals, and jottings on calendars.

<sup>500</sup> See, for example, *Mandela: A Critical Life* by Tom Lodge (2005); *Nelson Mandela: A Very Short Introduction* by Elleke Boehmer (2008), and *Reflections on Nelson Mandela: Icon of Peace* by Antoinette Haselhorst (2010).

<sup>501</sup> K Tomaselli, G Keyan & A Shepperson 'The Absent Signifier: The Morphing of Nelson Mandela', in *Cultural Icons*, K. G. Tomaselli & D Scott (eds), Intervention Press, Højberg, 2009, p. 21.



international audience the marker of almost any symbolic assertion about human rights and freedom”.<sup>502</sup>

Despite his emphatic insistence, when he addressed the crowd assembled on the Parade in Cape Town after his release from prison in 1990, that “[He] was not a messiah but an ordinary man who had become a leader because of extraordinary circumstances”, Nelson Mandela was cast in the public imagination as a saint, a messiah, and a saviour at different moments during the struggle against apartheid and the transition to democracy.<sup>503</sup> In an article titled “Conversations with a Myth”, Ariel Dorfman reviews this phenomenon,

*This sacrosanct image was deliberately built by the African National Congress as a way of personalising the struggle against apartheid in one man who had already become something of a legend, a “Black Pimpernel”<sup>504</sup>, during his clandestine years as head of the ANC’s armed wing. It helped that Madiba (his clan name) incarnated an exemplary story of rural and tribal boyhood, adolescent rebellion against discrimination and an increasing commitment, as an adult, to social justice and non-racial politics, all of which culminated in the 1963-64 Rivonia trial, where he and seven of his co-defendants were sentenced to life imprisonment.<sup>505</sup> Mandela’s story became even more of a model when, over the next twenty-seven years he withstood with exceptional nobility the most extreme forms of humiliation exacted upon him and his faraway family.<sup>506</sup>*

Shortly after his release from prison, Nadine Gordimer observed that, parallel to embodying the ideals of the liberation struggle, at that moment of transition from apartheid rule to democracy, Mandela was identified with the redemption and regeneration of South Africa, giving rise to the myth of Mandela as the Saviour.<sup>507</sup> In this respect, in a paper titled “Of Icons and Myths: Mandela – Father of the Nation”, Sam Raditlhalo reveals his

<sup>502</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>503</sup> N Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Abacus, London, 1995, p. 676.

<sup>504</sup> Mandela explains the origin of this name in *Long Walk to Freedom*: “I was dubbed the Black Pimpernel, a somewhat derogatory adaptation of Baroness Orczy’s fictional character the Scarlet Pimpernel, who daringly evaded capture during the French Revolution”(p. 316).

<sup>505</sup> At the Rivonia Trial he delivered the following speech that was to become the manifesto of the anti-apartheid movement: “During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against Black domination. I have cherished the idea of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.” (N Mandela, *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, Penguin, London, 1965, pp. 169-170).

<sup>506</sup> A Dorfman, ‘Conversations with a Myth’, *The Nation*, January 10/17, p.24.

<sup>507</sup> N Gordimer, ‘Mandela: What he means to us’, in *Living in Hope and History*, Bloomsbury, London, 1999.

fascination not only with the iconization and mythification of Nelson Mandela during and after his imprisonment, but mostly with the “transition from popular hero to father of the nation” or simply “tata”, as he was affectionately called.<sup>508</sup> He questions why this status had been conferred on Nelson Mandela alone, considering that other “struggle leaders”, like Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki, also played a significant role in the liberation struggle. Having compared Nelson Mandela to Thabo Mbeki and Robert Sobukwe, Radithalo concludes that Mandela conjured up an unmatched combination of political and personal qualities.

In an insightful analysis of Mandela’s political and moral authority, Dorfman illuminates the circumstances and character traits that nurtured the awe, respect and affection levelled at him,

*[T]his is one of those cases where one individual changes the path of history. The end of the racist South African regime is simply inconceivable without the moral capital and charisma Mandela had accumulated during his prison years. As a symbol of dignity and resistance he was, well, irresistible; but the compassion he showed once he was released, the ability to speak to his enemies and bring them to the table, his disposition to forgive (but never forget) the terror inflicted on him and his people, his willingness to see the good in others, to trust their deepest sense of humanity and honour, turned him into the sort of ethical giant that our species desperately needed in a petty era of devastation and greed.<sup>509</sup>*

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<sup>508</sup> S Radithalo, ‘Of Icons and Myths: Mandela – Father of the Nation’, *Track Two*, 8(3), 1999, p. 36.

<sup>509</sup> Dorfman, p. 24.



Image 1. Benny Gool, *Nelson Mandela*, Leon Wessels, F.W de Klerk, Tuynhuis, Cape Town, 1996, as published in *My Moment with a Legend* exhibit.

Dorfman's meditation brings me back to Raditlhalo's paper and, in particular, to one of the questions with which he begins his reflection: "How does a man become the epitome of the dreams of millions of people in his country?" The answer to this phenomenon — Radithlalo, Gordimer and Dorfman suggest — resided in Mandela's personal and political qualities. A photograph taken on 8 May 1996 – the day the negotiations over the constitution were concluded – affords a sense of Mandela's many qualities (Image 1). Framed at mid-range, four men wearing suits and ties are walking in a courtyard towards the photographer and, by extension, the viewer, but the three men in the forefront become the focus of the photograph. On the left of the frame, Nelson Mandela has clasped his hands together and is laughing heartily in a display of triumph. F.W de Klerk, who has turned towards Mandela, is responding unreservedly with amusement. Walking behind the two men, Leon Wessel's face is turned sideways, but he too seems to be enjoying the good-natured banter going on around him. The signs that can be read from the men's faces and body gestures constitute a story about friendly relations and a relaxed atmosphere. However, the neo-colonial buildings in the background, a signifier of apartheid, suggest otherwise. Indeed, it has often been acknowledged that Mandela and de Klerk's relationship became tense and riven by mutual resentment when the negotiations over elections and a new constitution began in earnest,<sup>510</sup> but, as David Blair points out: "[T]hese two men, politicians to their fingertips, knew that they needed one another. If a

<sup>510</sup> R Stengel, *Nelson Mandela 1918-2013: Portrait of an Extraordinary Man*, Virgin Books, Croydon, 2010.

negotiated burial of apartheid was to be achieved, then Mandela and de Klerk would have to stay on speaking terms. And so they did.”<sup>511</sup>

The signing into law of the constitution was the culmination of a long process of negotiations. It signified the official dismantlement of apartheid and the birth of a multi-racial democracy. The moment of elation captured in the photograph represents not only a truce between Mandela and de Klerk but also the beginning of the reconciliation process in a divided country. The image evokes Mandela’s stature, but I am proposing that charismatic leadership theory can provide us with a different set of tools with which to consider images of Nelson Mandela.

### *Charismatic leadership theory: a framework for interpreting images of Nelson Mandela*

The term “charisma”, deriving from the Greek *charis* meaning “favour” or “grace”, is used in Christian theology to allude to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, most notably the capacity to prophesy, heal or speak in tongues (Harrington et al.; Hexham).<sup>512</sup> In the 1930s the German sociologist Max Weber applied the term in his analysis of different types of authority in both secular and religious institutions.<sup>513</sup> In a collection of essays titled *On Charisma and Institution Building*, Weber defines charisma as,

*[A] certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.*<sup>514</sup>

Central to Weber’s conceptualisation of different types of authority is the argument that charismatic leaders emerge in times of social turmoil and uncertainty. In these circumstances, unlike traditional (inherited), rational or legal leaders, who are appointed or elected under existing traditions and rules, charismatic leaders are chosen because of their exceptional qualities.

<sup>511</sup> D Blair, ‘Nelson Mandela’s fraught relationship with FW de Klerk’, in *The Telegraph*, 6 December 2013.

<sup>512</sup> A Harrington et al. (eds), *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, Routledge, Oxon, 2006.

I Hexham, *Concise Dictionary of Religion*, Regent College Publishing, Vancouver, 1993.

<sup>513</sup> Weber identifies three “pure” or “ideal” types of legitimate authority: legal-rational, traditional, and charismatic. Power that emanates from the latter is considered legitimate, by those to whom it is applied, as opposed to coercive, economic or ideological power.

<sup>514</sup> M Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1968, p. 48.

According to Weber, “What is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his ‘followers’ or ‘disciples’”.<sup>515</sup> Weber contends that charismatic leaders go through a process of recognition and validation, upon which followers respond with “devotion ... hero worship, or absolute trust in the leader”.<sup>516</sup>

Weber’s seminal discussion on charisma, has since then been both applied and challenged across different fields of research. Diverse interpretations and definitions of the term have emerged, raising conceptual haziness and controversy about, in particular, whether charisma derives from distinctive qualities or character traits of the leader or stems from external sources. More recently, research on charismatic leadership has taken up distinct strands of inquiry that include the social and political circumstances that give rise to charismatic leadership; the affective and symbiotic relationship between leaders and adherents; and common threads among different forms of charismatic leadership (Sandberg and Moreman; Ibrahim and Wunsch; Stutje).<sup>517</sup>

Notwithstanding the use of distinct definitional approaches to the concept of charisma, common to most studies on charismatic leaders is the recognition of the emotional effect such leaders have on their followers, and the response they evoke, most notably awe, deference and devotion. In a provocative essay, the philosopher Robert C. Solomon argues that

Charisma ... has much to do with emotion, but not just the emotion generated by leaders. It is also, first and foremost, the passion *of* the leader. It is strange, then, that the nature of emotion, the very heart of charisma should have been so long neglected by leadership scholars.<sup>518</sup>

Solomon stresses that discussions about leadership should address “the emotions involved in both leading and being led”<sup>519</sup>, since “leadership is not just instrumentality — ‘getting things done’. It is also *moving* people, in both senses of the term” (emphasis in the original).<sup>520</sup> Semantically, the verb “move” in the expression “*moving* people” denotes both motivating action and arousing emotion. Importantly, there is an implicit correlation between the emotion people experience and what they do. Solomon’s treatment of charismatic leadership foregrounds the notion of the intensity

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<sup>515</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

<sup>517</sup> Y Sandberg & C. M. Moreman, ‘Common threads among different forms of charismatic leadership’, *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 2(9), 2011, pp. 235-240.

V Ibrahim & M Wunsch (eds), *Political Leadership, Nations and Charisma*, Routledge, Oxon and New York, 2012.

J W Stutje (ed.), *Charismatic Leadership and Social Movements: The Revolutionary Power of Ordinary Men and Women*, Berghahnbooks, New York, 2012

<sup>518</sup> R. C Solomon, “Ethical Leadership, Emotions, and Trust: Beyond “Charisma””, in *Ethics, the Heart of Leadership*, J. B. Ciulla (ed.) Praeger Publishers, Westport, 2004, p. 83.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

of emotion of both the leader and the led. On the part of the leader it motivates and expresses caring, and on the part of the led it inspires admiration and devotion.

Much has been said and written about Mandela's qualities and character traits, and about the historical, political and social conditions that gave rise to his political career, but little has been thematised about Mandela's affective leadership.<sup>521</sup> In the private sphere of the family, Mandela is said to have been rational, reserved, stern and unsmiling (Munro; Stengel), but in his public interactions he established warm and trusting relations grounded on empathy, individual attention, active listening and other interpersonal skills, often relying on his bodily posture, hand gestures, facial expressions and vocal intonation and pitch.<sup>522</sup> As Munro points out, "He seems able to magnetically draw feeling out in other people."<sup>523</sup> With this in mind, I am suggesting that photographs of Mandela in the public sphere are valuable resources for contemplating this aspect of Mandela's leadership.

### *The singularity of the photographic encounter*

On this basis, I would like to examine two photographs taken from an online exhibit titled "My Moment with a Legend" in the Nelson Mandela Digital Archive.<sup>524</sup> Developed within the framework of The Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory's (NMCM)<sup>525</sup> mandate to preserve historical documents, to collect and curate Nelson Mandela's personal archive and provide free public access to these resources, the Nelson Mandela Digital Archive project has been funded by — and developed in partnership with — the Google Cultural Institute. This online multimedia archive was launched in March 2012. The archive consists of more than 1,900 documents, photographs and video footage distributed along interactive exhibits, covering Nelson Mandela's early life, his years in prison, the negotiation for democracy, the presidential years, and his retirement.

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<sup>521</sup> See *Nelson Mandela: A Very Short Introduction* (2008) and "Madiba magic: Nelson Mandela's charisma" (2012) by Elleke Boehmer.

<sup>522</sup> See B Munro, 'Nelson, Winnie, and the Politics of Gender', in *The Cambridge Companion to Nelson Mandela*, R Barnard (ed), Cambridge University Press, New York, 2014.

See also Stengel, 2010.

<sup>523</sup> Munro, p. 99.

<sup>524</sup> My Moment with a Legend, *Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory*, viewed on 26 June 2014, <http://archives.nelsonmandela.org/home?hl=en-GB>

<sup>525</sup> In 2004, the Nelson Mandela Foundation inaugurated The Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory (NMCM) with the aim of both documenting "The Life and Times of Nelson Mandela" and developing two other core projects: "Dialogue for Justice" and "Nelson Mandela International Day".



Image 2. A screenshot of the *My Moment with a Legend* exhibit.



Image 3. A screenshot of the *My Moment with a Legend* exhibit.

The exhibit *My Moment with a Legend* showcases written, audio and visual testimonies of people who met and/or worked with Nelson Mandela. The forty-eight photographs in this gallery were taken by the photographer Benny Gool between 1990 and 2010.<sup>526</sup> The photographs depict Nelson Mandela's interaction with ordinary people, public figures and politicians at public events (Images 1–2). A written testimony, published alongside each image, contextualises the photograph and conveys a personal story or memory of the person photographed with Nelson Mandela. Importantly, the emotional experience of meeting and interacting with Nelson Mandela is mediated by both visual and textual information, resulting in a multi-layered narrative of Nelson Mandela's affective leadership.

<sup>526</sup> The journalist Benny Gool was an anti-apartheid activist, whose vast archive contains photographs documenting the anti-apartheid struggle, Nelson Mandela's release and the liberation, freedom and democracy process.





Image 4. Benny Gool, *Dirk Willem Venter*, 1996, as published in *My Moment with a Legend* exhibit.

The locus of attention in a close up portrait of Nelson Mandela and a young boy is the two faces of the portraitees (Image 4). The photographer has closed right in on the subjects' faces so that they fill up the picture frame. The black and white medium increases the level of intimacy; it simplifies the image, stripping it down to its essential elements — light, shade and form. The frame, set tightly around the subjects, excludes any signifying context, obliging the gaze to focus on the elements of signification in this composition that make it a revealing and beautifully executed image. Leaning down, Nelson Mandela has brought his face up close to the boy's face, displaying a radiant smile. The boy is seen in profile. His eyes look away from the face of the man he is delicately touching with his outstretched hands. Nelson Mandela exudes kindness; the boy emanates a quiet gentleness. What is striking about this photograph is that the empathic encounter between the portraitees is engendered through a different sense perception, other than the visual. The boy's affective response to Nelson Mandela does not stem from the observation and automatic replication of Mandela's smile; rather, it is triggered by the non-visual senses that prompt an intuitive empathic act.

In a phenomenological description of the nature of empathy, Edith Stein maintains that "sensations are among the real constituents of consciousness, which means that they cannot be suspended or doubted any more than the cogito can."<sup>527</sup> For Stein, the essence of the empathic encounter resides in the experience of the alterity of the other — the

<sup>527</sup> E Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, Trans. Waltraut Stein, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, ICS Publications, Washington, 1989, p. xx.

recognition of the other as subject and not object. This entails de-centring the self, while resisting the temptation of assimilating or suppressing the other's experience. Thus, in Stein's words,

*I feel my joy while I empathically comprehend the others' and see it as the same. And, seeing this, it seems that the non-primordial character of the foreign joy has vanished. Indeed, this phantom joy coincides in every respect with my real live joy, and theirs is just as live to them as mine is to me. Now I intuitively have before me what they feel. It comes to life in my feeling, and from the "I" and "you" arises the "we" as a subject of a higher level.*<sup>528</sup>

Yet, Stein stresses, "[i]t is also possible for us to be joyful over the same event, though not filled with exactly the same joy".<sup>529</sup> Stein's understanding of empathy provides a critical lens through which to consider the emotional journey occasioned by the empathic encounter between the photographer and portraitees, and between viewer and photograph. To return to the image under discussion, the photograph is aesthetically, splendidly composed. It reflects, according to Hariman and Lucaites' analysis of the iconic image, "a moment of visual eloquence ... an aesthetic achievement made out of thoroughly conventional materials",<sup>530</sup> providing, as the authors continue, "the viewing public with powerful evocations of emotional experience ..., [placing] the viewer in an affective relationship with the people in the picture".<sup>531</sup>

What the photographic medium does is push against the boundaries of language and its ability to fully account for emotions even as it describes them. The image attains affective depth precisely from what cannot be effectively described. The boy's hands cradling Mandela's face make an expressive focus for the viewer, offering what Barthes has termed a *punctum* of significance,<sup>532</sup> "that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)", that disturbing detail that makes one linger over the photograph, that induces the viewer (me) to explore the photograph "as a wound", inciting me to see, to observe, to notice, to feel, and finally to respond.<sup>533</sup>

I want to suggest that the viewer's emotional journey mentioned earlier will be incomplete without the information provided by the oral testimony provided in an interview (filmed fifteen years after the photograph was taken) and transcript appearing alongside the photograph of Nelson Mandela and Dirk Willem Venter, which I feel is worth quoting at length,

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<sup>528</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid.

<sup>530</sup> R Hariman & J L Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2007, p. 30.

<sup>531</sup> Hariman & Lucaites, 2007, p. 35

<sup>532</sup> *Punctum* derives from the Latin word *pungo*, meaning "to prick".

<sup>533</sup> Barthes, p. 27.

*Even though this photograph was taken almost 15 years ago, the day I met Mr. Mandela still stands out in my memory. I heard many stories of how lucky we were to have a great man such as him as our president and although I was very small, I felt deep awe at being lucky enough to meet him face to face. As time passed and his distinctive voice filled my ears, my understanding grew about what a blessing he was for our country.*

*He visited Worcester for the official launch of the Blue Train. I was selected from a group of students from my school to hand him a gift. I remember being nervous and a little apprehensive as I didn't know what to expect when meeting such a great man. He did not talk down to me as a grown-up to a kid, but instead smiled and told me how happy he was to meet me and my fellow students from the Pioneer School.*

*I did not know it then, but meeting him truly changed my life. I am one of only three completely blind students in the country to study BSc Computer Science. His example taught me to never give up and never regard myself too highly above others.*

The photograph of Mandela and Dirk Venter reveals the emotional resonance of the still photograph: essentially, it demonstrates its capacity to sum up an event and hold it in presence, as representative of a decisive (or historic) moment. It is a site of contemplation that bears witness to something that exceeds words: the possibility of relations of trust emerging out of the shadows of apartheid. It further conveys a plea for the nurturing of an inter-dependent humanity that resonates accurately with Nelson Mandela's proposal of a new set of values framing social relations in the post-apartheid landscape.

The linguistic text, which is filled with emotional lexicon, complements the visual narrative of the photograph by providing a more detailed account of the deep impact Nelson Mandela had on Dirk Venter, who speaks of him with reverence. The emotional experience of having met Nelson Mandela evoked vivid, detailed memories, but the meaning and value of this life-changing event resides in a singular encounter between a blind boy and the man with a "distinctive voice" and gracious nature, a moment that left a lasting impression on his life.

Mandela's ability to affect others is further displayed in a three quarter length photo (Image 5). The left side of the frame is taken up by a tall man who has been met at the door by a woman. He has not quite entered the house yet, as the woman has reached out to embrace him warmly. There is a sense of emotional contagion in the way her arms and hands enfold his shoulders, and his arms are wrapped tightly around her waist. The subjects' faces are locked against each other, preventing the viewer from seeing the expression on the man's face, which is turned away from the camera. The

woman is exuberant. She has closed her eyes in contentment, savouring the moment. Mandela's familiar demeanour offers clues as to who the man is. The emotional content of the photograph is further heightened by the presence, on the right side of the frame, of a woman who has been moved to tears by the affective display she is witnessing.



Image 5. Benny Gool, *Lindiwe Fassie*, 1993, as published in *My Moment with a Legend* exhibit.

The photograph is of Lindiwe Fassie, whose detailed recollection of this singular and emotional event is reproduced in the accompanying written narrative,

*It was a Sunday morning. Me and my family were all sitting in the lounge reminiscing about my mom's funeral. We had buried her on Saturday ...*

*He came into the house and greeted us all by our names which was very surprising indeed. He sat us all down and told us that the tree has fallen (mom) and that we have to be very careful and not let this house go down. He gave us advice on life and whilst he was talking, I was crying. I felt honoured to have Tata Madiba sitting on my mom's chair. To be honest I will never forget that day ever.*

*After giving us all advice, he left us and people outside started ululating, 'Tata Tata'. I feel very honoured to be writing about my favourite person in the world.*

For Lindiwe Fassie, the day Nelson Mandela entered her house is remembered with the clarity of a recent event, since she relates the experience with the emotional memory of her mother's passing. Since then she seems to have relived the moment countless times, claiming that she "will never forget that day ever". As Reisberg and Heuer explain,

*Emotional events are ... likely to be perceived as worth thinking about after the fact and so probably are rehearsed to a greater extent than neutral events are... In addition, emotional events are likely to be somewhat unusual (if they were more familiar, it seems likely that they would lose their emotional power), and this, too, may influence how they are remembered.*<sup>534</sup>

In this case, Mandela entered the domestic and private domain of the family, and briefly occupied not only the role of the matriarch — a powerful female force that holds the family together — but also the chair that had previously been hers. The fact that Mandela was invited into the privacy of the home and allowed to occupy the emotional and physical space of what would otherwise only be allowed a member of the immediate family at a time of mourning is paramount. Upon the death of a nurturing mother, a void is felt within the family, and Mandela's presence acts as a symbol of the enduring familial bond, since he reminds those present they must be very careful not to "let this house go down".

When one attunes to the portraits of Dirk Venter and Lindiwe Fassie a sort of quiet excitement is generated as one examines them slowly and attentively, without recourse to words, images or concepts. There is a sense that these kinds of images are meant not so much for quick consumption as for slow chewing. To borrow Walter Benjamin's words, "[t]here remains something that goes beyond testimony to the photographer's art, something that cannot be silenced" and that beckons us to immerse ourselves in the images.<sup>535</sup> Of crucial importance is the role of the stories presented in the form of captions or text accompanying the photographs, since they reveal concrete, lived and meaningful experience that not only adds new layers of understanding to the interpretation of the images but also provides an emotional experience for the viewer.

In the photographer-portraitee(s)-viewer triangulated relationship that evolves out of the encounter between the interaction taking place in front of the camera, the photographer's treatment of his subject-matter, and, finally, the viewer's own empathic response to the story evoked in each frame (and expanded in the accompanying written/audio text) there is no

<sup>534</sup> D Reisberg & F. Heuer, 'Memory for Emotional Events' in *Memory and Emotion*, D. Reisberg & P. Hertel (eds), Oxford University Press, New York, 2004.

<sup>535</sup> W Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', in *Selected Writings: Volume 2. 1927-1934*, M W Jennings et al. (eds), Harvard University Press, US, 1999, p. 510.

longer an “I”, a “he” or a “she” in isolation, but rather a “we”. As Edith Stein notes,

*[W]e empathically enrich our feeling so that "we" now feel a different joy from "I", "you", and "he" in isolation. But "I," "you," and "he" are retained in "we". A "we," not an "I," is the subject of the empathizing. Not through the feeling of oneness, but through empathizing, do we experience others. The feeling of oneness and the enrichment of our own experience become possible through empathy.*<sup>536</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The photographs examined in this article take their place in a sequence of images and stories, the governing theme of which is Mandela’s charismatic leadership (Images 6–8). The narrative construction of the display — accomplished by the juxtaposition of images, text and video — interweaves a plurality of stories and individual subjective experiences that provide a platform for reflecting on the “magnetic” quality of Nelson Mandela’s personality and ability to draw people to him.

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<sup>536</sup> Stein, 1989, p. 18.



Image 6. Benny Gool, *Veronica Simmers*, 1990, as published in *My Moment with a Legend* exhibit.





Image 7. Benny Gool, Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane, 1997, as published in *My Moment with a Legend* exhibit.



Image 8. Benny Gool, Nurahn Ryklief, 1997, as published in *My Moment with a Legend* exhibit.

In *Nelson Mandela 1918-2013: Portrait of an Extraordinary Man*, Richard Stengel, who got to know Mandela well whilst collaborating with him on his autobiography, observes that Mandela was self-controlled, disciplined and focussed. He was given to very few displays of emotion in public, but would always accept other people's affection courteously. Stengel writes,

*He wants to be liked. He likes to be admired. He hates to disappoint. He wants you to come away from meeting him thinking that he is everything you had ever hoped for. This requires tremendous energy, and he gives of himself to almost everyone he meets.*<sup>537</sup>

While this paradox reflects the complexity of Mandela's character, as Stengel and Schalwyk note, it has been suggested that there was a carefully constructed public persona underpinning the performative aspect of political life, in which, Schalwyk adds, "Mandela, both young and old, excelled."<sup>538</sup> In this regard, Stengel remarks that Mandela was astutely aware of the power of images, claiming that "[a]ll his life, he cultivated and curated images of himself. He helped orchestrate those he wanted to symbolize him and avoided those that would create an impression he did not want."<sup>539</sup>

This observation does not detract, I would argue, from the genuineness and spontaneity evoked in the photographs presented in the exhibit "My Moment with a Legend". The photographer has framed the subjects at mid or close range, stripping the compositions down to their essential elements. The compositions do not evoke a sense of place. They focus on people, conveying both the kind of attention Mandela bestowed on those he met and the intense emotions he induced in others. A common thread running through the images is the general mood of elation surrounding Mandela wherever he seemed to go or whomever he seemed to be with.

The emotional content and narrative embeddedness of Benny Gool's photographs underscore the affective interpersonal dimension of Nelson Mandela's political legacy, bringing to mind Robert C. Solomon's meditation,

*[W]e should avoid the temptation to suggest that leadership does not so much involve emotions (i.e., the emotions of the leader) as it does the emotional impact or effect of the leader on the led. This would reduce leadership to manipulation, perhaps even to creating appearances that affect followers, perhaps to mere 'acting', and raise the question of authenticity. The emotions of leadership must, in part, be the emotions of the leader. He or she is not a puppeteer, a strategic manipulator of other people's feelings. He or she is, first of all, the subject of passions.*<sup>540</sup>

Similarly, Munro stresses,

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<sup>537</sup> Stengel, p. 6

<sup>538</sup> D Schalwyk, 'Mandela, the Emotions, and the Lessons of Prison', in *The Cambridge Companion to Nelson Mandela*, R Barnard (ed), Cambridge University Press, New York, 2014, p.51.

<sup>539</sup> Stengel, p. 96

<sup>540</sup> Solomon, pp. 87-88.

*The sacrifice of personal family life ... is part of Mandela's appeal as an imagined national father. The famous pleasure he takes in holding other people's babies, that staple of the political photo op, comes across as authentic rather than rehearsed because his audience knows that he was deprived of them for so long in prison.*<sup>541</sup>

Indeed, Nelson Mandela's humaneness and the emotion he is depicted as bringing into the public sphere are what, amongst his many defining qualities, have made him one of the most cherished leaders of the twentieth century. It seems then apt to conclude this paper with Maya Angelou's words,

*We will not forget you.  
We will not dishonour you.  
We will remember and be glad  
That you lived among us.*<sup>542</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> Munro, p. 100.

<sup>542</sup> Angelou, p. 40

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# Investigating Sites of Power: Audiovisual Archives and Social Media Platforms

JESSICA BUSHEY

## Abstract

The widespread use of social media platforms for accessing and storing digital photographs and videos raises a number of questions regarding the traditional roles and responsibilities of archivists for managing and preserving audiovisual collections as trustworthy records of historical facts and societal memory. This paper explores the archival concept of trustworthiness in the context of photographic records and the importance of digital image metadata. It discusses the characteristics of contemporary photographic practice and the benefits and risks posed to archival acquisition and preservation of audiovisual collections held in social media platforms. The Occupy Wall Street Movement is presented as a case study, in which archivists wrestle with the challenges posed by collecting and preserving user-generated content created by Occupy participants while the demonstrations were in progress. Lastly, social media service provider's Terms and Conditions Agreements are discussed from the perspective of future access to and control of inactive and deleted accounts.

## *Introduction*<sup>543</sup>

A turn of the century leather-bound photo-album, a series of aerial photographs made by the government survey office and a set of digital radiographs taken at a dental office are examples of audiovisual records that are the by-products of personal and business activities. If the creators of these records deem them to be valuable beyond their immediate use the decision is made to keep them, stored away on a shelf or saved on a hard drive for future reference and use. After a length of time, for any variety of reasons, the stored records may be transferred or donated to a trusted third-party such as an archival institution for secure long-term preservation and future use by researchers and the general public. Archival institutions protect and preserve archival materials so that historical facts and social memory can be accessed and understood. In turn, scholars consult archives to find answers to specific questions that support their research and the public consults archives to seek evidence of a claim that is to be proven.<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>544</sup> L. Duranti, 'The Archival Bond,' *Archives and Museum Informatics* vol. 11, no. 3–4, 1997, p. 215.



Therefore, assurance of the trustworthiness (i.e., the accuracy, reliability and authenticity) of archival records is tantamount to their function in society as documentary evidence of the activities they participated within.<sup>545</sup>

Archivists appraise and select archival materials for acquisition in accordance with their institution's mandate and collection policy. Archivists tasked with acquiring, managing and preserving audiovisual records have developed expertise in the characteristics and recordkeeping requirements of still and moving image heritage. Their decisions regarding the acquisition of audiovisual records are based on the capacity of the institution to properly manage and preserve the collections, and provide ongoing access. Archival methods of arrangement, description and preservation are guided by the principles of provenance and original order, and aid in protecting the trustworthiness of archival records for the long term.<sup>546</sup>

In the 2002 article, 'Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory', archival scholars Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook re-examine the role of archival institutions as neutral repositories of facts and the activities of archivists as impartial and objective custodians of documentary heritage.<sup>547</sup> Their examination incorporates the entire archival ecosystem, one that wields enormous power over what we know of ourselves and the evidence we rely upon to explain the past and control the future. Schwartz and Cook suggest that archivists need to assess developments in the creation, management and use of textual and audiovisual materials, as well as changes in the media of records in order to analyze the impact of these differences on recordkeeping, archives and archival practice. '[I]t is essential to reconsider the relationship between archives and the societies that create and use them. At the heart of that relationship is power'.<sup>548</sup>

In the years following the publication of Schwartz and Cook's article, social media platforms such as *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *Twitter* have emerged as the most popular websites in the world for sharing, re-using and storing personal documentation, both textual and audiovisual.<sup>549</sup> Social media services are defined as a 'group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content'.<sup>550</sup> These applications comprise technologies that provide interactivity, syndication of content, multi-media streaming and asynchronous retrieval of data from web servers. Recent technological developments such as cloud computing

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<sup>545</sup> L. Duranti, 'Reliability and Authenticity: The Concepts and their Implications,' *Archivaria* no. 39, Spring 1995, p. 6.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>547</sup> J. Schwartz and T. Cook, 'Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory,' *Archival Science* no.2, 2002, pp. 1–19.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>549</sup> C. Fuchs, K. Boersma, A. Albrechtslund, and M. Sandoval, eds., 'Introduction,' in *Internet and Surveillance: The Challenges of Web 2.0 and Social Media*, Routledge, NY, 2011.

<sup>550</sup> A. Kaplan and M. Haenlein, 'Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media,' *Business Horizons* vol. 53, no. 1, 2010, p. 61.

enable social media providers to utilize the Internet (i.e., interconnected networks) and communication protocols to provide businesses, organizations and individuals with 'ubiquitous, convenient, on-demand network access to a shared pool of configurable resources (e.g., networks, servers, storage, applications and services) that can be rapidly provisioned and released with minimal management effort or service provider interaction'.<sup>551</sup> Scholars from the fields of archival science, information studies and the law are conducting research on the impact of social media services and the online environment on recordkeeping and the trustworthiness of digital records.<sup>552</sup> Additional studies provide critical analysis of social media platforms in the context of power, surveillance and politics.<sup>553</sup>

Responding to the call issued by Schwartz and Cook, this paper explores social media platforms as part of the larger information space, in which power over knowledge is constantly being negotiated. Utilizing the theory

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<sup>551</sup> P Mell and T Grance, *The NIST Definition of Cloud Computing*: NIST Special Publication 800-145, Computer Security Division, Information Technology Laboratory National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD, 2011, p. 2.

<sup>552</sup> The Records in the Cloud (RIC) Project <http://www.recordsinthecloud.org> (2012–2016), is led by the University of British Columbia (UBC) School of Library, Archival and Information Studies (SLAIS), the Faculty of Law, and the Sauder School of Business. The four-year research project is an international collaboration, which focuses on identifying and examining the management and storage of records in the cloud from an operational, legal and technical perspective, in order to determine the policies and procedures a cloud service provider should have in place before implementing records management and archival preservation. The aim of RIC is to develop guidelines to assist organizations in assessing the risks and benefits of outsourcing records management and archival preservation to cloud providers. The Law of Evidence in the Digital Environment (LEDE) Project <http://www.lawofevidence.org> (2012–2015) is led by the UBC Faculty of Law and SLAIS. The three-year research project focuses on the ability of rules governing admissibility of evidence to deal with challenges presented by digital documentation. The LEDE project is exploring methods for establishing the accuracy and authenticity of digital documents, developing procedures for documenting the chain of continuity for digital documentary evidence and is aiming to draft guidelines for maintaining the authenticity of digital documentary evidence over the long term. The InterPARES Trust (ITrust) Project Trust <http://interparestrust.org> (2013–2018) is a multi-national, interdisciplinary research project based at the Centre for the International Study of Contemporary Records and Archives (CISCRA) at SLAIS, UBC. ITrust builds on the foundations of International Research on Authentic Records in Electronic Systems (InterPARES), which was carried out in three phases (1998 – 2012). ITrust is exploring issues concerning digital records entrusted to the Internet and aims to generate theoretical and methodological frameworks to support the development of procedures, standards and legislation that will ensure public trust and a persistent digital memory. Two independent publications explore social media platforms and archival concerns: A Acker and J R Brubaker, 'Death, Memorialization, and Social Media: A Platform Perspective for Personal Archives,' *Archivaria* vol. 77, Spring 2014: pp. 1–23; and H Besser, 'Archiving large amounts of Individually-created Digital Content: Lessons from archiving the Occupy Movement,' in *Proceedings of the Memory of the World in the Digital Age: Digitization and Preservation*, edited by L Duranti and E Shaffer, UNESCO, Vancouver, B.C., 2013, pp. 1432–1439.

<sup>553</sup> Fuchs et al., *Internet and Surveillance*.

and principles of archival science and diplomatics (i.e., the study of genesis, form and transmission of documents in order to establish their authenticity and reliability) this paper presents a unique contribution to the discourse on social media platforms and user-generated content.<sup>554</sup> Of particular interest are the characteristics of contemporary photographic practice, photographer's use of social media platforms for sharing and storing audiovisual collections, and the impact of legal agreements between social media providers and their members on archival repositories, including special collections libraries and museums.

In addition to the introduction and the concluding remarks, this paper is divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents the archival definition of trustworthiness in the context of photographic records and includes a subchapter on the important role of digital image metadata. Chapter two introduces the characteristics of contemporary photographic practice. The third chapter examines the Occupy Wall Street Movement as an example of archivists actively documenting the now and provides contextualization for many of the issues raised in this paper.<sup>555</sup> This is followed by an in-depth analysis of the Terms and Conditions agreements of the social media service providers in chapter four. The paper is aimed at both creators and preservers, as these traditionally separate roles have been brought closer together by the vulnerability of digital media and our increasingly digital lives.

### *Trustworthy Photographs*

Archivists formed in archival science and diplomatics are committed to the protection of records as reliable and authentic evidence of past actions, and have established through observational principles that trustworthiness is comprised of reliability, accuracy, and authenticity.<sup>556</sup> A digital photograph is reliable when it can stand for what it is about: reliability is established by examining the completeness of the photograph's form and the amount of control exercised on the process of its creation. A digital photograph is accurate when its content is precise, correct, free of error or distortion: accuracy is based on the competence of the photographer and the controls on the capture and transmission of the image content. A digital photograph is authentic when it is what it purports to be and has not been tampered with or corrupted: authenticity is assessed on the basis of the photograph's identity (i.e., the whole of the unique characteristics that distinguish it from another photograph) and integrity (i.e., the quality of being whole and unaltered) as well as the reliability of the system that contains it. In the

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<sup>554</sup> L. Duranti, 'From Digital Diplomatics to Digital Records Forensics,' *Archivaria* no. 68, Fall 2009, pp. 39–66.

<sup>555</sup> K. Theimer, 'The Role of Archives in a Digital Society: Now Is What Matters,' *Archivaria* no. 78, Fall 2014, pp. 145–147.

<sup>556</sup> L. Duranti, *Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science*, SAA, ACA, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, MD and London, 1998.

context of social media content, the system that contains the digital photograph is the social media application.

Until recently, the discussion of trustworthy photographs in archival literature has focused primarily on the conflation of content with meaning and the need to communicate the functional context of archival photographs to researchers and patrons through archival practices of arrangement and description.<sup>557</sup> In her article on photography and diplomatics, Schwartz highlights the production of photographs by the early Canadian War Records Office (1914–1920), in which retouching and composite negatives were used to convey the author’s intended message of “what our men have achieved.”<sup>558</sup> The altered photographs are not accurate depictions of reality per se, as they were tampered with to alter such reality, but they are reliable and authentic records of the activities of the Canadian War Records Office as they were used in the course of their promotional activities and are evidence of those activities. Her point reveals the tendency to equate a photograph’s trustworthiness with the realism of its content instead of the context of its creation. The equation of photographs with visual truth is discussed in archival literature as a consequence of claims made in mid-nineteenth-century writings based on photography’s mechanical origins and scientific applications.<sup>559</sup>

The status of photography as either a reliable witness or a fabrication has been debated throughout the twentieth century. The advent of digital cameras and image editing software in the 1990s reignited interest in this topic, specifically areas that relied on the trustworthiness of photographs in the conduct of their business, such as law enforcement, medical diagnostics and journalism. A review of the literature in these fields reveals concerns about manipulation and alteration occurring at the time the digital photograph is captured or during management and storage activities that involve transmitting digital files across systems and networks. Typically, people believe a photograph is trustworthy because they trust the source that has provided it. For example, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, people accept a particular newspaper as a credible source for world news, its photographers and editors as reliable professionals guided by ethical principles and established procedures, and the photographs it publishes as trustworthy visual records. Unfortunately, in recent years,

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<sup>557</sup> L Koltun ed, *Private Realms of Light: Amateur Photography in Canada 1839–1940*, Fitzhenry and Whiteside, Markham, ON, 1984; J Schwartz, ‘We make our tools and our tools make us: Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomats,’ *Archivaria* no. 40, Fall, 1995, pp. 40–74; and T Schlak, ‘Framing Photographs, Denying Archives: The Difficulty of Focusing on Archival Photographs,’ *Archival Science* vol. 8, no. 2, 2008, pp. 85–101.

<sup>558</sup> J Schwartz, ‘We make our tools and our tools make us: Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomats,’ *Archivaria* no. 40, Fall, 1995, p. 53.

<sup>559</sup> J Schwartz, ‘Records of Simple Truth and Precision: Photography, Archives, and the Illusion of Control,’ *Archivaria* no. 50, Fall 2000, pp. 1–40.

there has been evidence to the contrary and a number of news photographs have been discovered to be untrustworthy.<sup>560</sup>

In the preface to his recent book *Bending the Frame* Fred Ritchin states that “[t]he era of the photograph as automatically credible is over, for better and for worse.”<sup>561</sup> Therefore a greater emphasis has been placed on authentication procedures for digital photographs, including the importance of image metadata to provide contextual information. Understandably, legal practitioners need to ensure that records submitted as evidence in court are trustworthy so that justice can be served; just as archivists need to ensure that the archives they preserve are trustworthy so that historical facts can be ascertained and a reliable social memory can be construed.<sup>562</sup>

### *Digital Image Metadata*

As stated earlier, a trustworthy photograph is comprised of reliability, accuracy and authenticity. The following exercise demonstrates the role of image metadata in establishing the identity and demonstrating the integrity of a digital photograph. Archivists understand that in order to verify the authenticity of a digital photograph, one must be able to verify its identity and integrity. The International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems (InterPARES) Project 1, 2 and 3 (1998–2012) investigated issues associated with the long-term preservation of authentic digital records and produced a number of valuable research products including the ‘Creator Guidelines, Making and Maintaining Digital materials: Guidelines for Individuals’ and ‘Preserver Guidelines, Preserving digital Records: Guidelines for Organizations,’ which will be applied in this sub-section to clarify what metadata are necessary for establishing the identity and demonstrating the integrity of a digital photograph.<sup>563</sup>

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<sup>560</sup> M Carlson, ‘THE REALITY OF A FAKE IMAGE, New norms, photojournalistic craft, and Brian Walski’s fabricated photograph,’ *Journalism Practice* vol. 3, no. 2, 2009, pp. 125-139.

<sup>561</sup> F Ritchin, *Bending the Frame: Photojournalism, Documentary, and the Citizen*, Aperture, NY, 2014.

<sup>562</sup> H MacNeil, ‘Trusting Records: The Evolution of Legal, Historical, and Diplomatic Methods of Assessing Trustworthiness of Records, from Antiquity to the Digital Age,’ PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia, Canada, 1998, p.1.

<sup>563</sup> L Duranti and R Preston, ‘Creator Guidelines, Making and Maintaining Digital Materials: Guidelines for Individuals,’ *InterPARES 2 Project*, 2008, viewed on 31 May 2014,

[http://www.interpares.org/public\\_documents/ip2\(pub\)creator\\_guidelines\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.interpares.org/public_documents/ip2(pub)creator_guidelines_booklet.pdf);

L Duranti and R Preston, ‘Preserver Guidelines, Preserving Digital Records: Guidelines for Organizations,’ *InterPARES 2 Project*, 2008, viewed on 31 May 2014,

[http://www.interpares.org/public\\_documents/ip2\(pub\)preserver\\_guidelines\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.interpares.org/public_documents/ip2(pub)preserver_guidelines_booklet.pdf).

The approach involves examination of metadata embedded in the image file header as *Exchangeable Image File Format* (Exif) and *International Press Telecommunications Council* (IPTC) schema standards.<sup>564</sup> Exif metadata is automatically captured by imaging devices (e.g., camera phone) and exchanged (i.e., read and written) with other devices and applications that participate in the presentation and publication of digital photographs. Exif metadata is mainly technical metadata (e.g., image size, colour space, date and time, GPS, etc.) that is automatically embedded in the image file header (e.g., JPEG, TIFF). IPTC metadata is mainly descriptive metadata (i.e., photographer name, subject, source, rights etc.) that is manually added and embedded in the image file header using an imaging application.

An authentic digital photograph possesses identity (i.e., the whole of the unique characteristics that distinguish it from another photograph). In digital photographs the identity metadata can be fulfilled through Exif and IPTC metadata embedded in the image file header (see below).

- *Persons concurring in its creation (e.g., photographer name, organization or group name, licensor, models),*
- *Subject or action it participates within (e.g., title, event, assignment),*
- *Place (e.g., location created, location in image, GPS),*
- *Documentary form (e.g., image resolution, bit-depth, colour space),*
- *Date(s) of creation, use, receipt and storage,*
- *Expression of documentary context (e.g., classification code, image supplier image ID),*
- *Copyright and licensing notice (e.g., copyright restricted, creative commons, link to rights document on the web),*
- *Other forms of authentication (e.g., watermarks),*
- *Version number (e.g., original, access copy), and*
- *Authoritative version (e.g., final).*

An authentic digital photograph possesses integrity (i.e., the quality of being whole and unaltered). In digital photographs the integrity metadata can be partially fulfilled through IPTC metadata embedded in the image file header (see below).

- *Name of handling office (e.g., photographer, organization or group, media outlet, stock photography agency),*
- *Indications of annotations added to the record (e.g., comments, tags), and*
- *Indication of technical changes to the files (e.g., checksums).*

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<sup>564</sup> JEITA, *Exif Specification*, v.2.2, April 2001, available at: <http://www.exif.org/Exif2-2.PDF>; and IPTC, *Photo Metadata*, v.1.2, October 2014, viewed on 28 December 2014, <http://www.iptc.org/std/photometadata/specification/IPTC-PhotoMetadata>.

Unfortunately, recent studies conducted by the IPTC's Metadata Working Group and the Activist Archivists reveal that the process of uploading digital photographs and video into social media platforms can strip away important metadata from the digital files.<sup>565</sup> The issue of metadata being removed and digital files being altered during upload into social media platforms and during download of digital files out of these services presents a real threat to establishing the trustworthiness of digital photographs. Criticism by the IPTC of social media platforms for not supporting standard metadata schemas for digital photographs has yet to prompt a response from social media providers.<sup>566</sup>

### *Characteristics of Contemporary Photographic Practice*

The changing characteristics of contemporary photographic practice influence the type of images that are captured, the methods for sharing and storing digital collections and expectations of permanence. Literature from the social sciences on the role of photo-sharing and social networking sites in personal photographic practice highlight the importance of media convergence, spontaneous image-making and sharing, and changing notions of photographic value.<sup>567</sup>

Convergence is used to describe the technological, industrial, cultural and social changes in the way that media circulates within society.<sup>568</sup> Media convergence is used to describe the adaptation, merging and transitioning that occurs when old and new technologies converge. In the context of digital photography, media convergence can be used to reference the flow of photographs between cameras, mobile phones, computers and the Internet.

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<sup>565</sup> IPTC, 'IPTC study shows some social media networks remove rights information from photos,' *Media Release IPTC website*, 2013, viewed on 31 May 2014,

[http://www.iptc.org/site/Home/Media\\_Released/IPTC\\_study\\_shows\\_socme\\_social\\_media\\_networks\\_remove\\_rights\\_information\\_from\\_photos](http://www.iptc.org/site/Home/Media_Released/IPTC_study_shows_socme_social_media_networks_remove_rights_information_from_photos); and Rufus de Rham, 'Embedded Technical Metadata,' in *Preservation Week 2012*, New York University Press, N.Y., 2012, viewed on 31 May 2014, <https://archive.org/details/EmbeddedTechnicalMetadatapreservationWeek2012>.

<sup>566</sup> M Steidl, 'IPTC Study shows some social media networks remove rights information from photos,' *The IPTC website*, viewed on 12 March 2013, [http://www.iptc.org/site/Home/Media\\_Releases/IPTC\\_study\\_shows\\_some\\_social\\_media\\_networks\\_remove\\_rights\\_information\\_from\\_photos](http://www.iptc.org/site/Home/Media_Releases/IPTC_study_shows_some_social_media_networks_remove_rights_information_from_photos).

<sup>567</sup> L Pauwels, 'A private visual practice going public? Social functions and sociological research opportunities of web-based family photography,' *Visual Studies* vol. 23, no. 1, April 2008, p. 35; M Sturken, 'Memory, consumerism and media: Reflections on the emergence of the field,' *Memory Studies* vol. 1, no. 1, 2008, pp. 73–78.

<sup>568</sup> H Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: where old and new media collide*, New York University Press, N.Y., 2006. Cited in T Dwyer, *Media Convergence*, McGraw-Hill Publishing, Maidenhead, GBR, 2010, p. 24; N Van House and E Churchill, 'Technologies of Memory: key issues and critical perspectives,' *Memory Studies* vol. 1, no. 3, 2008, p. 304.



At one time, these devices and their technologies were distinct and self-contained, but now they are recombined into a new distribution mode that integrates various platforms and access devices seamlessly. This characteristic can be seen as a benefit when camera phone apps (i.e., specialized programs for mobile devices) facilitate the addition of metadata that contribute to the identity and integrity of a digital photograph, allowing photographers to persistently link information about the context of creation to a digital image as it is transmitted across networks to different platforms.<sup>569</sup> However, this characteristic can be seen as a risk when creators may be unaware of the layers of distribution involved in accessing and delivering their digital photographs, and as a result, lose control over the management of their growing digital collections and invite the opportunity for loss and corruption. Scholarly research into personal information management (PIM) of digital photographs has produced findings, which confirm that an abundance of digital images stored on different devices and in multiple online platforms present a significant obstacle to managing collections over the long term.<sup>570</sup>

Spontaneous image-making and sharing is supported by changing cultural attitudes towards visual documentation and evolving tools for transmitting multi-media files. Contemporary photographic practice is no longer limited by film costs or development times; instead easy-to-use camera phones encourage limitless image capture of anything at any time. Characterized by immediate capture and instantaneous dissemination, the digital image is no longer associated with a pictorial representation of something that-has-been (as posed by Barthes).<sup>571</sup> Instead, the digital image inhabits the now and transmits the presence of something that-is-happening.<sup>572</sup> As a result, the digital photograph circulates online as visual communication to be quickly consumed or re-used and re-circulated. The addition of tags, comments and other actions within social media applications creates the opportunity for image variants and collaborative authors. This presents a challenge to existing archival strategies of appraisal and selection that are suited to film-based practices, in which photographers often weeded-out the duplicates and selected images for inclusion in albums or portfolios prior to transfer to the archival institution. The ongoing transformation of a digital photograph challenges the concept of a fixed image, one that is a permanent visual record of a person, place or event. This process of becoming more within the social media platform can be viewed as a continuation of something that-is-happening and presents a

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<sup>569</sup> Tagg.ly is an app that provides context to social media content by stamping it with metadata. See Tagg.ly, available at: <http://www.tagg.ly>

<sup>570</sup> N Van House, 'Personal photography, digital technologies and the use of the visual,' *Visual Studies* vol. 25, no. 1, June 2011, p. 130.

<sup>571</sup> R Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, N.Y., 1980, p. 76. Cited in M Sandbye, 'It has not been – it is. The signaletic transformation of photography,' *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* vol. 4, 2012, p. 1.

<sup>572</sup> M Sandbye, 'It has not been', p. 4.

degree of complexity for archivists tasked with acquiring the image as part of an aggregation of records that has been designated by the original photographer for permanent preservation.<sup>573</sup>

Changing notions of photographic value are closely linked to the ease of transmitting multi-media files via mobile devices and the lack of control over shared content in social media platforms. The online publication of personal photographs has introduced concerns regarding the privacy of individuals represented in the images, as well as the privacy of the photographer. Traditional approaches to sharing physical photographs through albums and framed prints provided a reasonable guarantee of privacy and control. In light of increasing surveillance technologies such as facial recognition it is possible that the use of social media services as dissemination platforms may be re-evaluated by individuals and activist groups that desire anonymity. Emerging alternatives, such as the 2013 mobile app *Snapchat*, which enables creators to capture photographs, share them with designated friends and then delete the images from the recipient's phone after a specific time period (up to 10 seconds).<sup>574</sup> Snapchat currently has sixty million installs, thirty million active users, and processes four hundred million "snaps" (i.e., photos and videos) per day.<sup>575</sup> These figures suggest that there is a need for an application that shares visual documentation, but also deletes it. Essentially the value of the photograph has shifted from permanence to ephemeral. The benefit is that fewer digital photographs will be saved, making the task of collecting and preserving personal digital archives more manageable. However, the risk of this approach is that potentially valuable audiovisual records will be deleted due to concerns over privacy. One can only imagine the number of diaries and personal photographs held in archives that would not exist if their creators had anticipated their future use as primary sources in scholarly research.

### *Occupy Wall Street*

The Occupy Wall Street Movement, also referred to as the Occupy Movement once it spread beyond New York City, is a useful case study of the relationships between individuals, social media platforms and archival institutions. More specifically it reveals the challenges of actively collecting and preserving the visual documentation of a social movement while it unfolds. The analysis presented in this section is based on the original research of Christian Fuchs, Howard Besser and members of the Activist

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<sup>573</sup> J van Dijck, 'Flickr and the culture of connectivity: Sharing views, experiences, memories,' *Memory Studies* vol. 4, no. 4, 2011, pp. 401–415.

<sup>574</sup> A Shontell, 'The truth about Snapchat's active users (the numbers the company doesn't want you to see),' *Business Insider*, 2013, viewed on 31 May 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/snapchat-active-users-exceed-30-million-2013-12>; Snapchat, 'Learning the Basics: Snaps and Stories,' *Snapchat website*, 2013, viewed on 31 May 2014, <http://support.snapchat.com/ca/snaps>.

<sup>575</sup> A Shontell, 'The truth about Snapchat's active users'.

Archivists, as well as the publications produced by the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) Archives Working Group and journalist Michelle Dean (who attended OWS Archives working group meetings).<sup>576</sup>

The Occupy movement began on September 17, 2011 in New York City and quickly spread across the globe with demonstrations and protests calling for social and economic equality in over eighty-five countries.<sup>577</sup> The importance of collecting and preserving the physical and digital documentation produced by Occupy participants, such as posters, General Assembly minutes, digital photographs and videos was recognized by a number of activists, archivists, educators and students as early as September 24, 2011.<sup>578</sup> Therefore, the Occupy movement presents a unique case of archivists attempting to document “the now.” A number of digital projects have resulted from these efforts, including the #Occupy Archive hosted by the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University and the Occupy Movement 2011/2012 hosted by the Internet Archive Global Events at Archive-It.<sup>579</sup>

An essential element of the Occupy movement was the use of mobile phones to capture photographs and videos and the dissemination of these audiovisual materials via social media platforms. In his article ‘Archiving large amounts of Individually-created digital Content: Lessons from archiving the Occupy Movement,’ moving image archivist Besser reports that in the first six months the Occupy hashtag (i.e., #Occupy) was linked to 500,000 photographs uploaded to Flickr and 169,000 videos posted on YouTube.<sup>580</sup> Activist Archivists analyzed the image metadata from a sample of these audiovisual materials and discovered that upon upload, YouTube and *Vimeo* strip-out a significant proportion of the Exif metadata automatically captured by mobile phones and embedded in the original digital file.<sup>581</sup> The removal of metadata that contribute to identifying the provenance of the video (e.g., date, time and GPS) has a profound impact on the trustworthiness of digital materials. In the case of the Occupy movement, activists capturing photographs and videos during

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<sup>576</sup> C Fuchs, *OccupyMedia!* Zero Books, UK, 2014; H Besser, ‘Archiving large amounts of Individually-created digital content: Lessons from archiving the Occupy Movement.’; Activist Archivists <http://activist-archivists.org/wp/>; Occupy Wall Street Archives Working Group <http://owsarchives.wordpress.com/>; and M Dean, ‘The Struggle for the Occupy Wall Street Archives,’ *The AWL*, 21 December 2011, viewed on 29 December 2014, <http://www.theawl.com/2011/12/the-struggle-for-the-occupy-wall-street-archives>.

<sup>577</sup> Occupy Wall Street <http://occupywallst.org/about/>. See also Internet Archive, ‘Occupy Movement 2011/2012,’ *Archive-It website*, 2011, viewed on 29 December 2014, <https://archive-it.org/collections/2950>.

<sup>578</sup> M Dean, ‘The Struggle for the Occupy Wall Street Archives,’ comment made by AmyA.

<sup>579</sup> #Occupy ARCHIVE, Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, George Mason University, viewed on <http://occupyarchive.org/>; and Internet Archive, ‘Occupy Movement 2011/2012’.

<sup>580</sup> H Besser, Archiving large amounts of Individually-created digital content,’ p. 1435.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1437.

demonstrations did not add IPTC metadata (e.g., photographer name, title, subject, etc.), making the removal of Exif metadata by social media platforms all the more damaging. “This means that cultural organizations seeking to collect videos posted to online services would have to reconstruct date, time, and location information for anything they collected from YouTube or Vimeo’s free service, and would also be collecting poor quality videos without assurances of fixity, integrity or authenticity.”<sup>582</sup> As Besser points out, the importance of metadata in establishing the identity and maintaining the integrity of digital materials cannot be overstated in the context of archival institutions acquiring user-generated content from social media platforms.

It is important to understand that the digital materials produced by the Occupy movement are a result of both social and technological influences. The ideology of the movement was unique in its critique of conventional media outlets, prompting Occupy activists to use media as both the producers and diffusers of knowledge, and its rejection of established institutions to store and control ownership of the Occupy archives, including university repositories.<sup>583</sup> The demonstrators needed their audiovisual devices to be small, mobile and connected to the Internet for instantaneous global dissemination via social media platforms. The focus of most activists documenting Occupy events was on the immediate and/or short-term needs of the movement, which precluded decisions about capturing in standard file formats, adding metadata to digital materials, and pre-determining the licensing and copyrights of materials uploaded to social media services.

The Activist Archivists recognized these issues as obstacles to collecting and preserving Occupy materials and created the ‘Why Archive? Card’ in collaboration with the Internet Archive’s Rick Prelinger and members of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) Archive working group.<sup>584</sup> The card explains the role of archives in preserving historical records and the responsibility of groups to document their activities. The Activist Archivists also created ‘Best Practices for Video Archivists’ as “a guide for creators of video and audio content on how to capture and prepare material to be effectively collected, shared and preserved by organizations to ensure the integrity and discoverability of digital documentation of the Occupy movement.”<sup>585</sup> Lastly, the principles of sharing and openness held by Occupy members became obstacles in the negotiation of archival acquisition of Occupy materials by established institutional repositories, such as New York University’s Tamiment Library. The Activist Archivists began promoting Creative Commons licenses to bridge the donor agreements between Occupy and the archival institution. The application of a CC license to

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<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1436.

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>584</sup> Activist Archivists, ‘Why Archive?’ viewed on 29 December 2014, [http://activist-archivists.org/wp/?page\\_id=1431](http://activist-archivists.org/wp/?page_id=1431).

<sup>585</sup> Activist Archivists, ‘Best Practices for Video Activists,’ viewed on 29 December 2014, [http://activist-archivists.org/wp/?page\\_id=356](http://activist-archivists.org/wp/?page_id=356)

audiovisual files enable creators to allow any individual or repository to copy, collect and/or disseminate the Occupy materials for the purposes of research, education and preservation.<sup>586</sup>

The volume and broad dissemination of Occupy materials throughout the online environment, along with the movement's desire to control their own archives made it difficult to determine an appropriate archival appraisal and selection strategy. Besser discusses the process considered by New York University's Tamiment Library regarding selection of digital videos on YouTube and reveals its inability to scale the existing approach to handle the volume of Occupy videos posted within the first six months of the movement.<sup>587</sup> Alternative approaches to selection were discussed, including categorization of videos and crowd-sourcing. Besser suggests that an alternative approach to acquisition and aggregation of user-generated content pertaining to a specific event or group could be performed by apps for camera phones that pre-populate extensive metadata, including a list of online services such as YouTube and the Internet Archive that copies of the digital file would be uploaded to.<sup>588</sup> The benefit of this approach is that it fulfills immediate needs for global dissemination through social media platforms while ensuring long-term goals of preservation and ongoing access to digital materials by depositing them with a cultural organization and granting them legal stewardship for preservation purposes.

Besser asserts that users of social media platforms 'believe that these services will preserve their material *forever*,' but there is no guarantee offered by Flickr or YouTube that 'the material will remain posted for any length of time.'<sup>589</sup> Unfortunately, the complex and ever-changing social media service providers' Terms and Conditions Agreements make it difficult for individuals and organizations to determine the extent of licensing and copyright of user-generated content. Additionally, the use of cloud-based services to deliver and store social media content means that personal data is circulating across international borders, which may complicate the application of privacy policies. In general, the contracts between social media service providers and their members enforce terms that empower the provider and enable them to takedown content and remove user accounts if violations of the agreement occur at any time. It is important to remember that these are commercial platforms owned and

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<sup>586</sup> H Besser, 'Archiving large amounts of Individually-created digital content,' p. 1437

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1438.

<sup>588</sup> Besser builds upon functionality that is used in the InformaCam app, released by the SecureSmartCam (SSC) Project. See 'Introducing InformaCam, The Next Release of the SecureSmartCam Project,' *Witness blog*, 13 February 2012, viewed on 29 December 2014, <http://blog.witness.org/2012/02/introducing-informacam-the-next-release-of-the-securesmartcam-project/>; and 'InformaCam: Secure & Verified Mobile Media,' *Guardian Project website*, viewed on 29 December 2014, <https://guardianproject.info/informa/>.

<sup>589</sup> H Besser, 'Archiving large amounts of Individually-created digital content,' p. 1433; and WITNESS, *Cameras Everywhere*, NY, 2011, available at: <http://www.cameraseverywhere@witness.org>.



operated by for-profit businesses, which are vulnerable to censorship, re-branding and bankruptcy.

### *Social Media Provider Terms and Conditions Agreements*

A review of legal literature, in which digital photographs and social networking platforms are discussed, reveals a growing concern regarding the Terms and Conditions Agreements between service providers and their users.<sup>590</sup> These agreements regulate the relationship between social media service providers and their members and are comprised of a number of documents, which include the Terms of Service (ToS), Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) and Privacy Policy. To receive all the services of the social media platform, one must open an account and become a member. The legal community refers to the type of contracts used by social media service providers as 'clickwrap' and 'click-to-agree', because the potential member agrees to the terms and conditions by simply starting to use the software, or by clicking a box onscreen. Legal scholars report that for different reasons, the majority of people enter into click-to-agree contracts without ever reading the terms of the contract.<sup>591</sup>

These Agreements are central to the service provider's control over the type of content uploaded to the social media platform, the licensing of user-generated content, access to account information and sharing usage analytics with third parties, and future use of content held in inactive and terminated accounts. In late 2012, the photo-sharing service Instagram received media attention for changing its Terms of Use (ToU) without alerting its members prior to doing so. The change gave Instagram a royalty-free license to the perpetual use of photographs and videos stored on its site, as well as unlimited rights to sublicense the images to any and all third parties. The license persisted even if members downloaded their content off the site and terminated their accounts.<sup>592</sup> The public response to Instagram's change in ToU was negative and resulted in the temporary withdrawal of high profile accounts, such as National Geographic, as well as criticism from national associations representing professional photographers and photojournalists. Instagram quickly published an apology, clarified the existing ToU and Privacy Policy for members, and provided a thirty-day grace period before any changes to terms and

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<sup>590</sup> S Bradshaw, C Millard and I Walden, 'Contracts for clouds: comparison and analysis of the Terms and Conditions of cloud computing services,' *International Journal of Law and Information Technology* vol. 19, no. 3, 2011, pp. 187–223. doi:10.1093/ijlit/ear005; R Buntrock and J Madden, '#KnowYour(Copy)Rights: Applying a Legal Filter to Instagram's Revised Terms of Use,' in *The Instagram Papers*, pp.16–20, American Society of Media Photographers, 2013; and T Lipinsky, 'Cloud Computing TOS Top Ten: Five Provisions You Want and Five Provisions You Do Not Want,' presentation at *International Symposium on Information Management in a Changing World (IMCW)*, Limerick, Ireland, 2013.

<sup>591</sup> J. M. Radin, *Boilerplate*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2013, p. 8.

<sup>592</sup> ASMP, 'Photographic community deems Instagram terms too far-reaching,' *ASMP website*, 2013, viewed on 31 May 2014, <https://asmp.org/articles/press-release-13-08-22.html#.U2B2hMcXh7c>.

conditions governing member accounts and user-generated content went into effect.<sup>593</sup>

In early 2014 the American Society of Media Photographers (ASMP) on behalf of professional associations, including the British Association of Picture Libraries and Agencies (BAPLA) and the Australian Institute of Professional Photography (AIPP) published a letter to Instagram, in which they requested the following changes to the most recent ToU: provide the rights of users to close their accounts and remove permissions for use of their identities and content by the service provider at any time, and add the requirement that sublicensing or third parties using digital photographs and videos should gain permission from the creator (i.e., photographer) and provide compensation to the creator.<sup>594</sup> At this point there has been no response from Instagram.

Another legal concern that is being raised in regards to social media provider terms and conditions agreements is the issue of digital assets and estate planning.<sup>595</sup> As individuals accumulate digital assets across social media services, the value of these assets to future generations needs to be considered. The growing volume of user-generated content stored in phones, computers and social media platforms is challenging traditional estate planning. The fact that an individual's digital collections are spread across devices and online service providers makes it difficult to manage and transfer these assets as personal property from one person to another.<sup>596</sup> Traditionally, physical property is transferred through testamentary deposit and there are statutory rules to ensure the authenticity of the will and the testator's intent. In the case of digital content held within social media accounts it is necessary to establish where the digital asset is located, who owns the digital asset, and whether the deceased prepared for digital asset transfer by recording the account name, user name and passwords.<sup>597</sup>

Unfortunately, many social media providers' Terms and Conditions Agreements restrict their members from sharing or forwarding their account to another person. For example, the Terms of Service for Yahoo! (the parent company of Flickr) states that an account is non-transferable and content within an account is terminated upon death whereas, Facebook will consider requests for account contents of a deceased person from an authorized representative with a court order.<sup>598</sup> From an archival perspective, the ways in which social media platforms memorialize the

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<sup>593</sup> K Systrom, 'Thank you, and we're listening,' *Instagram blog*, 2012, viewed on 28 December 2014, <http://blog.instagram.com/post/38252135408/thank-you-and-were-listening>.

<sup>594</sup> ASMP, 'Letter to Instagram,' ASMP website, 2014, viewed on 31 May 2014, [https://asmp.org/pdfs/Letter\\_Instagram\\_Jan14.pdf](https://asmp.org/pdfs/Letter_Instagram_Jan14.pdf)

<sup>595</sup> J P Hopkins, 'Afterlife in the Cloud: managing a digital estate,' *Hastings Science and Technology Law Journal* vol. 5, no. 2, 2013, pp. 209–244.

<sup>596</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>597</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225; Yahoo! 'No Right of Survivorship and Non-Transferability,' *Yahoo Terms of Service*, 2012, viewed on 31 May 2014, <https://info.yahoo.com/legal/us/yahoo/utos/utos-173.html>.



deceased and govern control over access to inactive accounts impacts the acquisition and preservation of personal digital archives by archival institutions.<sup>599</sup>

### *Conclusion*

This paper discusses contemporary photographic practices involving camera phones and social media platforms from an archival perspective. In doing so, the relationships between creators, social media service providers and archival institutions are examined and the benefits and risks assessed. The experience of archivists attempting to collect and preserve the Occupy Wall Street Movement archives was provided as an example of the challenges posed by contemporary photographic practices, along with changing cultural attitudes towards ownership and control of user-generated content.

There are guidelines for acquiring, managing and preserving physical audiovisual archives, as well as digital records created, managed and preserved offline or in networks that rely on servers under the control of the individual or organization.<sup>600</sup> The more recent adoption of social media platforms for sharing and storing personal audiovisual collections provides an opportunity for creators and preservers to re-examine existing guidelines, as well as assumptions about the role of archival institutions and the actions of archivists. It seems probable from an archival perspective that the future of personal digital archives will involve working with creators and social media providers to legally acquire and/or license copies of user-generated content for archival preservation. Alternatively, social media platforms may introduce and/or incorporate digital preservation services for their members, which would challenge existing archival institutions and potentially force them into obscurity. The fear of social media platforms becoming private troves of visual culture has prompted scholars to recommend the creation of alternative social media, which is neither commercial nor proprietary.<sup>601</sup>

At this stage, the key issues that need to be understood and adopted by creators, social media providers and preservers are: the importance of creating, managing and preserving image metadata linked to audiovisual files throughout activities of creation, dissemination and preservation to ensure trustworthy archives; and the impact of legal contracts and

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<sup>599</sup> A Acker and J R. Brubaker, 'Death, Memorialization, and Social Media: A Platform Perspective for Personal Archives, *Archivaria* no. 77, Spring 2014: pp. 1–23.

<sup>600</sup> M L Rizenthaler and D Vogt-O'Connor eds., *Photographs: Archival Care and Management*, Society of American Archivists, Chicago, IL., 2002; L Duranti and R Preston, 'Creator Guidelines, Making and Maintaining Digital Materials: Guidelines for Individuals,' and 'Preserver Guidelines, Preserving Digital Records: Guidelines for Organizations.'

<sup>601</sup> C Fuchs, OccupyMedia!

legislation on the future access and long-term preservation of personal digital archives. This latter issue applies not only to social media service providers' contracts, but also to current legislative provisions on copyright and archival acquisition and preservation that may be inadequate as they were developed prior to digital lives and networked environments.<sup>602</sup> There is a real sense of urgency in addressing these issues as staggering numbers of audiovisual files without metadata accumulate in social media platforms. Throughout this paper the lack of response from social media service providers to issues of metadata removal and unfair Terms and Conditions Agreements has been noted. The decision of Activist Archivists to educate creators is controversial as it goes against the traditional role of the archivist as a passive custodian; yet, in the absence of public pressure it may be the responsibility of archivists and other preservers from the cultural heritage profession to speak out and attempt to reset the balance of power before it is too late.

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<sup>602</sup> E Goh, 'Clear skies or cloudy forecast? Legal challenges in the management and acquisition of audiovisual materials in the cloud,' *Records Management Journal* vol. 24, no. 1, 2014, pp. 56–73.

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# Moved Images – Velocity, Immediacy and Spatiality of Photographic Communication

WINFRIED GERLING

## **Abstract**

This article discusses how the formerly motionless and silent photographic image is set in motion and how this shift affects its usages. This turn is viewed under the changing conditions in production and circulation of social media platforms and the technical unity of photo and video camera.

Various photographic practices and aspects will be addressed: the accelerated and ubiquitous production of images (capture and processing), which is dialectically related to the aesthetics of the images, their mode of reception (displays), their distribution and storage (platforms) and the (photographic) apparatuses, with which they are produced.

The increase in photographic production is accompanied by a shift away from the decisive and composed single image. The unified apparatus of photographic and video technology is bringing both media ever closer together, which in turn supports the tendency toward the mobile and mobilized image.

The article shows how communication has become immediate with digital photographs, how mobile, spatial images, people and apparatuses are related to one another as well as how they create and influence powerful realities; this has always been one of the most fundamental issues of photography.

## *I*

In this article, I will attempt to show how the formerly motionless and silent photographic image is set in motion and how this shift affects its usages. This turn will be viewed under the changing conditions in production and circulation of big social media platforms such as flickr, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc. and the technical unity of photo and video camera often with net and GPS connectivity.

It will address various practices with the photographic image, or file: the accelerated and ubiquitous production of images (capture and processing), which is dialectically related to the aesthetics of the images, their mode of reception (displays), their distribution and storage (platforms) and the (photographic) apparatuses, with which they are produced.

The increase in photographic production is accompanied by a shift away from the decisive and composed single image.<sup>603</sup> The unified apparatus of photographic and video technology is bringing both media ever closer together, which in turn supports the tendency toward the mobile and mobilized image. This article will focus primarily on these issues: mobility of images, apparatuses and producers (bodies).

I will discuss two larger, disparate themes here: first, photography in the context of so-called “social media” or sharing platforms and secondly, the confluence in terms of apparatus of photography and video.

I will not approach another related category of images, which is linked to the omnipresence of photographic apparatuses in a different way, namely, images as they are created by surveillance cameras, drones and satellites. I will thus restrict myself solely to images produced more or less intentionally by people.

My argument will necessarily meet with a certain vagueness: on the one hand, I must deal with the conditions of typically private (non-professional) photography; on the other, I will reference a tendency toward the disappearance of the distinction between photography and film/video by use of artistic and technologically advanced examples.<sup>604</sup> Both phenomena must be placed at the forefront of current photographic modes of production and should thus be considered together.

## II

I will begin with those media that serve the exchange of images in an undefined to relatively defined social field. When considering photographic practices, it is necessary to refer to at least four generations of these types of platforms.

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<sup>603</sup> The “decisive moment” (Cartier Bresson) no longer corresponds to aesthetic appearance – the composition of the image – but rather to the most immediate pictorial conveyance of an occurrence possible.

<sup>604</sup> Here, it is necessary to ask whether a video snapshooter exists today? Pierre Bourdieu has already included private amateur filmmakers in his study of Photography: A Middle-Brow Art, Stanford 1996.

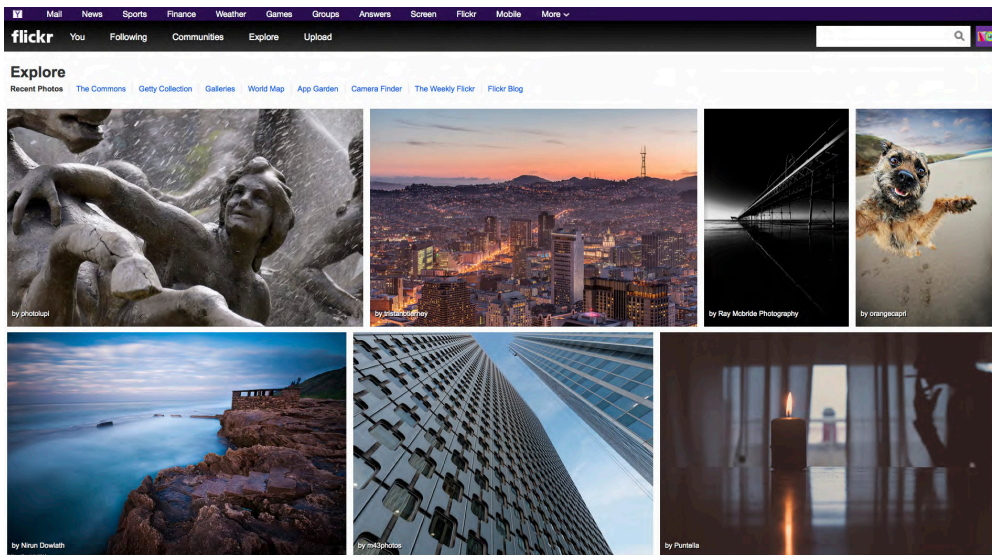


Image 1. flier (Source: <http://www.flies.com/explore>)

In the first generation, there are explicit photo communities, of which flickr (2002) is probably the earliest and most significant (Image 1). To this day on the platform, photographs originating from all areas of photography are distributed and exchanged, from private and non-professional images, to photographs from amateur and professional photographers and finally to those of collectors and museums. The sole aim of this platform is to show, trade and comment on photographs. This occurs in an almost classic fashion by means of albums, which were referred to as sets until the middle of 2014.

The social networks (Image 2) comprising the second generation are those that mainly appear as websites, such as Facebook (2004), Twitter (2006) Google+ (2011) and, to a certain extent, Tumblr (2006). On these platforms, the exchange of images is only one part of the communication in the profile/blog of an individual.

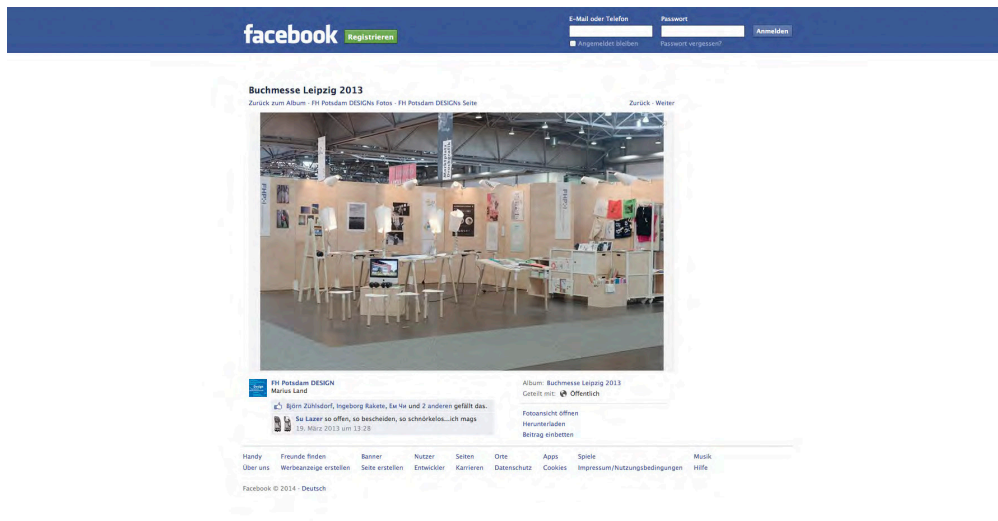


Image 2. Facebook (Source: <https://www.facebook.com/FHPdesign/photos/1579994682012559.1073741825.228954263783271/579994815345879/?type=1&permPage>)



Image 3. Instagram (Source: <http://cypressnorth.com/social-media/why-i-love-instagram-why-this-app-is-so-popular/>)

The app Instagram (2010) is an example of the third generation (Image 3). It is developed for the smartphone; it is used for capture. Its sole usage is the distribution of photos. From within the app, it is possible to post pictures directly to various networks. Photos can also be edited from within the app.





Image 4. Snapchat (Source: <http://sneaky-snaps.com/fresh-out-of-the-shower-no-make-up-funny-snapchats/>)

An interesting turn occurs in the fourth platform generation with WhatsApp (2009) and especially Snapchat (2011). Snapchat only supports the direct distribution of an image to one or more users (Image 4). The picture is no longer stored on a server or shown on the web. With a notably young audience, it is the platform through which the most pictures per day

are distributed at the moment. The daily numbers are currently approximately 700 million images on Snapchat, 700 million on WhatsApp, 350 million on Facebook, 70 million on Instagram and only about 1 million on flickr.<sup>605</sup> If we assume therefrom that almost two billion images are produced and distributed daily via these types of platforms, it is clear that the photographic image has become a central component of our direct interpersonal communication. A typical example of this usage is the video advertisement for the introduction of Facebook Timeline (Image 5):

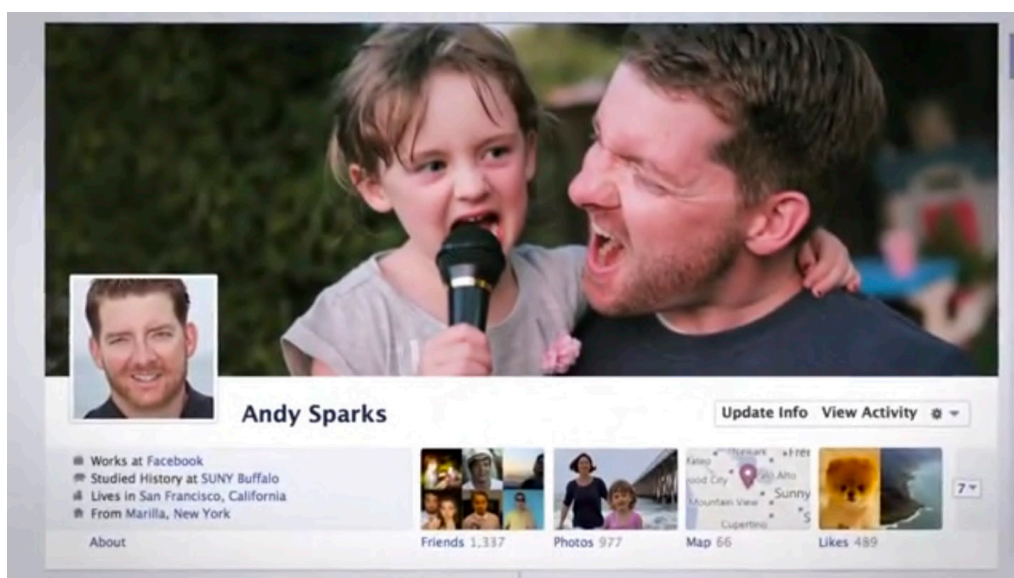


Image 5. Facebook Promo Timeline (video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZPEPfJHfKU>)

As this example perfectly shows, pictures are becoming ever more mobile: photographs are moving images in the context of social media; they are moved on screens, and pushed to be updated both automatically and by the user. Due to the constant urge for updating, images are taken for consumption rather than for concentrated observation.<sup>606</sup> This quality distinguishes the current practice of snapshooters (private photographers) from that of the previous century.<sup>607</sup> However, the images still serve as visualization of the self in a social context, although this is increasingly defined by its economies. The snapshooter of today ‘works’ in one way or

<sup>605</sup> Mary Meeker, *Internet Trends 2014 – Code Conference*, May 28, 2014, p. 62, <http://www.kpcb.com/internet-trends> [accessed on 27 December 2014].

<sup>606</sup> In May 2014, an average of 350,000,000 images were adjusted on Facebook each day. Even profile pictures have a half-life of only 2–3 weeks.

<sup>607</sup> See: Winfried Gerling, ‘Knipsen’ in *Historisches Wörterbuch des Mediengebrauchs*, Matthias Bickenbach, Heiko Christians & Nikolaus Wegmann (eds.), Böhlau, Köln 2013, pp. 342–351.



another for the platform on which he posts his pictures.<sup>608</sup> In the first three generations of distribution networks described above, the point is often simply to be seen. There is often great effort invested in determining the ‘correct’ keywords (tags) in order to satisfy categories such as “interestingness” on flickr and thereby appear on the platform’s start page or to be ranked higher.<sup>609</sup> The effort expended in raising awareness is also clearly economically beneficial to the platform, which, according to the individual business plan, either uses the images directly or generates higher advertising revenues. This working model has thus also become part of photographic reality. In this context, the purported sharing of images must instead be understood as publishing. It is not about sharing something, but rather distributing it. On the other hand, in the currently most popular platforms from the fourth example, Snapchat and WhatsApp, the goal is to remain as intimate as possible and stay immediately and personally connected to a small circle of people.<sup>610</sup>

*Evan Spiegel, the CEO of Snapchat, commented as follows,*

*We no longer have to capture the ‘real world’ and recreate it online – we simply live and communicate at the same time. [...] And until now, the photographic process was far too slow for conversation. But with Fast + Easy Media Creation we are able to communicate through photos, not just communicate around them like we did on social media. When we start communicating through media we light up. It’s fun.*

This is a considerable assertion. It implies that the “real world” no longer needs to be recreated, but rather that photographic representation in Snapchat is part of this “real world” now. Spiegel brings life and photographic communication together as one and thereby addresses photography’s extreme push for movement. Liveness is equated with life and promises authenticity.

### III

<sup>608</sup> Refer to the aspect of production in social networks: Mark Andrejevic, ‘Facebook als neue Produktionsweise’, in: Oliver Leistert, Theo Röhle (eds.), *Generation Facebook – Über das Leben im Social Net*, Bielefeld 2011, pp. 31–49.

<sup>609</sup> Refer to this aspect: Susanne Holschbach, ‘Framing (on) Flickr: Modes of channeling an interdisciplinary reservoir of images’, in: *PhotoResearcher*, No 14 (2010), pp. 46–53, here: pp. 47–49.

<sup>610</sup> This even includes intimate business contacts.

See: Eike Kühl, ‘Sexting gegen Bezahlung’, in *Zeit Online*, 18 November 2014 <http://www.zeit.de/digital/mobil/2014-11/snapchat-snapcash-bezahlung-chat> [accessed on 27 December 2014]

With the abovementioned in mind, I will now turn to the photographic scene that Vilém Flusser aimed to characterize in “The Gesture of Photographing”:

*The man with his apparatus is the centre of the situation only for us, watching him, not for himself. He believes himself to be outside the situation, for he is watching it. For him the man on the chair, at the centre of his attention, is the centre of the situation. And we, too, located in the space, watching the man with the apparatus, we are part of the situation for him. That could mislead us into supposing that there are two different situations, one in which the man with his apparatus, whom we transcend, is at the centre and another in which the man on his chair is at the centre and in which we are involved. The two situations are different, yet bound up with one another. But there is actually only one situation.<sup>611</sup>*

When considering the photographic scene underlying the concept of Snapchat and Instagram, we must picture scenarios as in both of the following example images (Images 6–7):



Image 6. Papal Election (copyright: Luca Bruno / Michael Sohn AP)

<sup>611</sup> Vilém Flusser, ‘The Gesture of Photographing’, in: *journal of visual culture*, 2011, 10(3), pp. 279–293, here: p. 285.



Image 7. Arab Spring (copyright: Mosa'ab Elshamy)

What sets these scenes apart from the one described by Flusser is that today we as observers always carry cameras. The photographic apparatuses underlying this point are extremely powerful minicomputers, smartphones or tablets, which, due to their ubiquity are no longer a part of the photographic scene that can be delimited. Instead, they are an inseparable element of the situation and reality they record. In Google's estimation, this may be a temporary situation, at least visually, if one looks at the introduction of Google Glass. At the moment, however, there is a public visibility of photographic apparatuses like never seen before.

The picture no longer originates from the position of an observer who generally stands outside what is being photographed, but rather as part of the expanding photographic scene. Flusser was aware of this: "The photographer cannot help manipulating the situation. His very presence is a manipulation. And he cannot avoid being affected by the situation, he is changed by simply being there."<sup>612</sup>

Today's reality is pervaded by photographic apparatuses and is thus in a constant state of alteration, even if this is only the most superficial modification. This is visible, for example, in the case of the papal election or the Arab Spring, where the displays themselves become part of the photography. The bodily gesture performed by the photographer is the holding up of an apparatus without choosing the picture detail or a specific standpoint. What counts is the here and now, as shown by the gesture. Under these conditions, perhaps the "it was so" that Barthes characterized

<sup>612</sup> Flusser, p. 291.

as the *noema* of photography should be revised to “it is so right now”<sup>613</sup> as Wolfgang Ulrich suggests. Indeed, as a description of a Snapchat app says, “[t]he images might be a little grainy, and you might not look the best, but that’s the point. It’s about the moment, a connection between friends in the present, and not just a pretty picture.”<sup>614</sup>

“The photograph’s relative lack of selection”<sup>615</sup>, as Tom Gunning wrote, is held up in this culture as the principle of photography.<sup>616</sup> Yet this gesture can also be one of resistance: I am showing that you are being photographed. When many people do this, it makes it more difficult for injustice to remain invisible. As Florian Ebner and Constanze Wicke illuminate in the catalog for the “Cairo – Open City” exhibit on photography in the Arab Spring, this image culture is characterized more as one of testimonies than of evidence photos:

*These pictures serve multiple functions, as a call to arms, as a recording of events, as a legitimization of one’s own violence. As a means to analyze the manipulative use of images, as a memorial to the victims of the violence, and as a way to remember what happened. Among these it is possible to draw out a general motif that might be termed ‘testimony’.*<sup>617</sup>

However, the outside observer also actively plays a role in the scene and is at the same time someone who bears witness. This problematizes a purely documentary status for these photographs. The observer is ‘embedded’ in the scene.<sup>618</sup> As can be seen at many protests, these images can be injected back onto the street and into the protest in no time at all.<sup>619</sup> As Ebner and Wicke note,

<sup>613</sup> Wolfgang Ulrich refers to this aspect in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* on 10 June 2013: *Rückkehr der Aura – Instant Glück mit Instagram*. See: <http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/feuilleton/uebersicht/instant-glueck-mit-instagram-1.18096066/> [accessed on 16 August 2013].

<sup>614</sup> Self-description of the app in the Apple Appstore, 15 May 2014

<sup>615</sup> Tom Gunning, ‘What’s the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs’, in: Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (eds.), *Still Moving*, Durham 2008, pp. 23–40, p. 37.

<sup>616</sup> Incidentally, even in professional photography, an image is selected from a baseline of masses of captured images.

<sup>617</sup> Florian Ebner & Constanze Wicke, ‘Intervening Images: Towards a Mapping of a Revolution in Pictures’, in: Florian Ebner & Constanze Wicke (eds.), *Cairo – Open City*, Leipzig 2013, pp. 39–45, here: p. 42.

<sup>618</sup> See: Susan Sontag, *Das Leiden Anderer betrachten*, Frankfurt 2005, p. 71 ff and with reference to Judith Butler, ‘Fotografie, Krieg, Wut’, in: *ibid.*; *Krieg und Affekt*, Zürich/Berlin, pp. 53–68, here: pg. 61 f and: *ibid.* ‘Folter und Ethik in der Fotografie’, in: Linda Hentschel (ed.), *Bilderpolitik in Zeiten von Krieg und Terror*, Berlin 2008, pp. 205–228, here: p. 214 ff.

<sup>619</sup> As with the image of the “woman (girl) in a blue bra”. The photo of a woman who was beaten and attacked by the military at the Cairo demonstrations on 17 December 2011 was immediately brought back into the protests. Demonstrators repeatedly held up newspapers with the image at demonstrations on the following days. Afterwards, the image was injected on yet another level as a returned and intervening image back into the media.



*Thus the images do not have a distancing effect and they are not mere depictions of the event they represent; rather they are already a part of the political process, an act of intervention. This does not mean that we should naively believe in the good of images, that they should replace the arguments of political dispute, but that, by engendering emotional identification, they represent a key instrument of political participation.<sup>620</sup>*

#### IV

At the moment of capture, the pictures are ‘developed’ (processed), which means that they are influenced by the user settings via the software according to the possibilities of the app and are distributed to the corresponding networks and respective platforms. Here, they become visible immediately and/or are announced via acoustic signals or the vibrating of the linked users’ apparatuses. If they do not look at the image immediately, a new one takes its place and the old one becomes insignificant, relegated to oblivion, or even deleted, as in Snapchat. The constant updating could be described as a moving image that is not unrelated to digital video; only the frequency of cuts into time is not as standardized as in video.

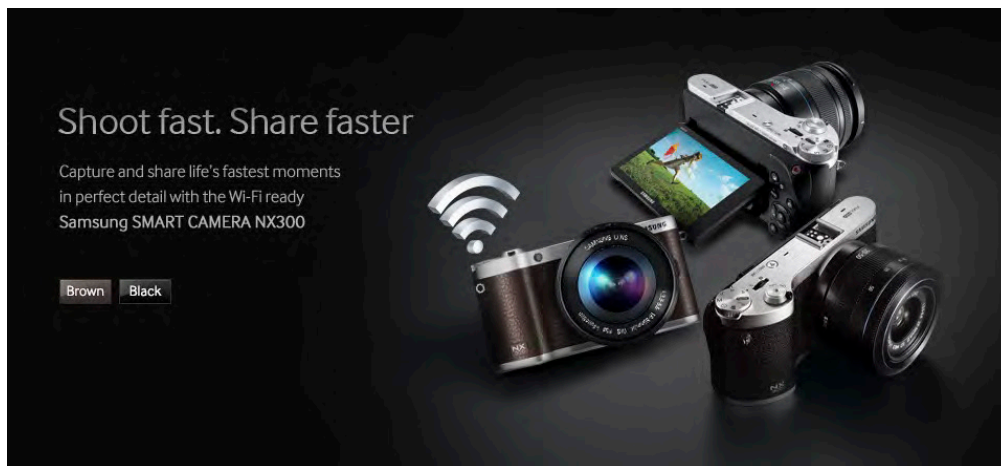


Image 8. Share (Source: <http://www.samsung.com/id/product/digital-camera/2013/EV-NX300ZBSTID/>)

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See, for example.: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/pictureshow/2011/12/21/144098384/the-girl-in-the-blue-bra> [accessed on 27 December 2014].

<sup>620</sup> Florian Ebner and Constanze Wicke, ‘Intervening Images: Towards a Mapping of a Revolution in Pictures’, in: Florian Ebner and Constanze Wicke (eds.), *Cairo – Open City*, Leipzig 2013, pp. 39–45, here: pp. 44–45.

The apparatuses on which we observe the distributed images have in the meantime become just as mobile as those on which they were created, as they are usually one and the same. Furthermore, the images on display are shown in software environments that hardly allow for the static image any longer (Image 8). The user scrolls down past the image, it is replaced by the next one in the stream or it is automatically renewed (updated).

Here, a comparison to the Walkman, though somewhat unexpected, is particularly useful. Shuheï Hosokawa writes in 1990 in the “Walkman Effect”: “The Walkman listener takes on the ‘behavior of the poacher’ (De Certeau) quite clearly. Secrets arise in the background of a relationship of communication and non-communication. The secret bearer has the constant advantage over the uninitiated insofar as the former can only ‘confess’ to hiding something unknown to the latter. This secret is revealed when the secret bearer discloses its content.”<sup>621</sup> A key question here is, who is sharing pictures with whom? In the times of PRISM and Tempora, this question certainly seems unidirectionally relegated to the margins. This is a further principle of the linked image.

## V

We turn now to the second thematic grouping, technologically and artistically advanced examples resulting from a close relationship of photography and the ‘moving image’. At the outset, it must be taken for granted that the unity of apparatus on cameras that record both photographic and chrono-photographic/moving images (video) runs through all product lines, from simple consumer products and smartphones to the flagships of professional product lines, such as the Canon 1D Cinema (Image 9).<sup>622</sup>



Image 9. iPhone and Canon 1D

(Source: [http://de.canon.ch/About\\_Us/Press\\_Centre/Press\\_Releases/Consumer\\_News/Cameras\\_Accessories/EOS\\_1D\\_C\\_4K\\_video\\_capture.aspx](http://de.canon.ch/About_Us/Press_Centre/Press_Releases/Consumer_News/Cameras_Accessories/EOS_1D_C_4K_video_capture.aspx) und apple Produktfoto)

<sup>621</sup> Shuheï Hosokawa, ‘Der Walkman Effekt’, in: *Aisthesis – Wahrnehmung heute oder Perspektiven einer anderen Ästhetik*, Karlheinz Barck et al (eds.), Leipzig 1990, pp. 229–251, here: p. 247. (Translation by John Benjamin)

<sup>622</sup> Video functionality and connectivity are currently strong selling points for cameras.

In this subject area and the consequent aesthetic, I will first deal with a short video segment (Image 10) from the Russian artist collective AES&F, *Allegoria Sacra* (2012), which refers to a painting of the same title by Giovanni Bellini from between 1490 and 1500 (73x119 cm, oil on wood).



Image 10. AES&F, *Allegoria Sacra*, 2013

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORihBvC7Plc> (16:13-17:30)

This video was produced with current photographic camera technology from Canon.

Whereas in the context of cinema, images from digital (photo) cameras are viewed in terms of a 'cinematicity' deficit resulting from an exaggerated sharpness, depth of sharpness and a different color space (tonal value distribution or rather differentiation)—thereby addressing the photographic—the Russian artist collective presents us with a very natural and confident digital (photo) aesthetic. The same 'hyper-reality' that is criticized in the context of cinema, which allows spaces to be recognized as sets and characters as their performers, is assembled here as a separate reality.

There is an interesting contradiction in the make-up of the video: on the one hand, it is produced with the high frame rate of 50 images per second, more or less the same as is used in Peter Jackson's "The Hobbit" (2012), the most technologically advanced that the film industry currently has to offer; at the same time, the chrono-photographic foundation of the video has a frame rate of 3 images per second. That makes 40,000 single images in this case.<sup>623</sup> In the sense of an illusion of the film's movement, one could take issue with Peter Jackson's claim that: "[...] the result looks like normal speed, but the image has hugely enhanced clarity and smoothness. [...]" It

<sup>623</sup> Curiously, the number of images plays a part in their very reception, while also displaying photographic principles inherent in the process of their creation. Yet, in the case of a moving image-based work, it would never occur to anyone to count the individual images.



looks much more lifelike, and it is much easier to watch, especially in 3-D.”

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Here, speed is emblematically connected with life insofar as the result is “lifelike”, as in the aforementioned statement by the CEO of Snapchat. Speed appears as a claim to being true to real life and belongs together with the ideology of the new “NYou Media”<sup>625</sup>. However, Peter Jackson’s assertion is valid to the extent that a lesser sharpness of movement results from the shorter illumination times possible for the individual images. The simulation of movement for our perception apparatus also appears less divided through the higher number of frames than the standard film frame rate of 24 images per second. However, in the clip shown here, the high frame rate is contradictory in a surprising way and is used in a two-fold manner. On the one hand, the simulation of the image’s movement is very soft and fluid. This pertains to the computer-generated images that result from 3D renderings. They are calculated and moved with 50 FPS. On the other hand, the simulation of movement, as an emulation/illusion of the movement of human bodies, comes off as strangely awkward. This comes from the fact that the images were created on the basis of photographic images with 3FPS and intermediate images were produced through a morphing. In this sense, the outward form of the video is a reflection of its digital, hyperreal genesis or condition and alternatively of a fundamental problem of film, namely that it is—still to this day—made up of moved, photographic single images; stasis can only be simulated by the absence of movement. From the perspective of film, mobility is the condition of the medium. This holds true especially for digital film, or digital video: (film) material is no longer moved—as moving image—but rather, the image is repeated virtually—as (re-)moved image. For the computer display, there is no distinction in terms of processing between a virtually static and a moving image. Today, the image can be shown with a very high (almost unrestricted) repetition rate, yet it still remains a divided image, a cut in time. In the digital realm, it is closer to ‘material’ of photography than to that of film. As Henri Bergson notes, we are thereby approaching an undivided movement—reality—but we will never reach it on this current path: “To tell the truth, there never is real immobility, if we understand by that an absence of movement. Movement is reality itself.”<sup>626</sup>

The mobile and variable photographic image—as data packet—is conveyed quite vividly by a new type of camera technology, light field metering, for which Lytro (Image 11) was the first company in the consumer arena. These cameras are able to measure the so-called light field with only one lens, including the space and directional data of the incidental light. The result allows the photographer to focus after the fact and move to a

<sup>624</sup> <https://de-de.facebook.com/notes/peter-jackson/48-frames-per-second/10150222861171558> [accessed on 27 December 2014]

<sup>625</sup> Wendy Chung, on 26 September 2014, at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin at a conference titled “*Schwindel der Wirklichkeit*”.

<sup>626</sup> Henri Bergson, ‘The Perception of Change’ in *Key Writings*, London, 2002, pp. 248–266, here: p. 257.

limited extent within a three-dimensional image of what was photographed. In these image files, what is implicit in the RAW format becomes explicit, that is, the absolute variability of a digital photographic image. In the end, the photographic image is mobile, expanded by the aspect of space.

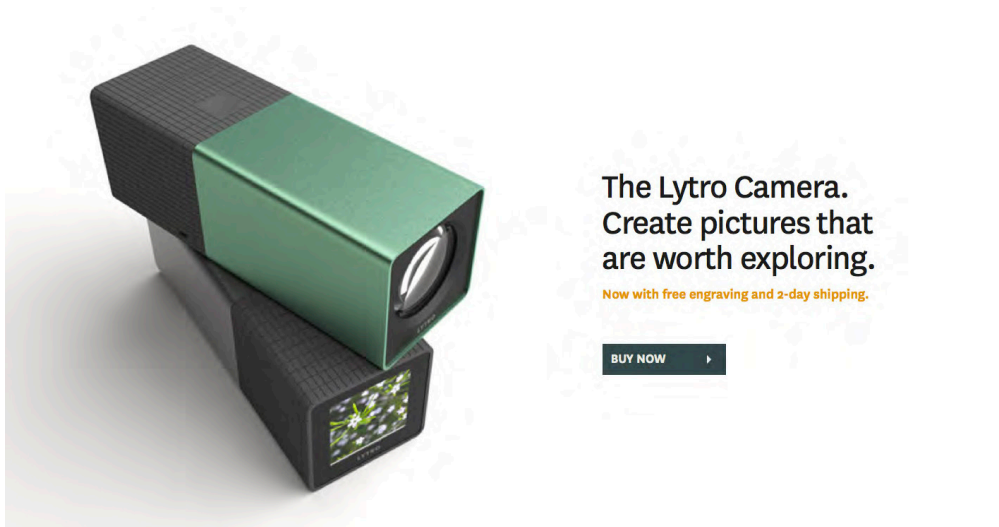


Image 11. Lytro (Source: [www.lytro.com](http://www.lytro.com))

It seems important to note here that more and more design considerations of the photographer are being deferred to postproduction,<sup>627</sup> and that this type of image (.lfp as a specific file-type) can deploy its meaning only in computer-based environments on the screen, because it must be seen as an image which is to be moved. In short, movement is an integral element of this image type. Variability as principle,<sup>628</sup> as Lev Manovich termed it as a foundation of digital media, is demonstrated in a specific way through this type of photography. A spatio-temporally paradoxical constellation of photography is generated: spatial movement as well as movement within photographic parameters (depth of field) become possible in an immobilized image, not unlike “bullet time” or its historical model, photo sculpture.<sup>629</sup> We accomplish movement in stasis, an undividedness in the interval (the cut in time).<sup>630</sup>

<sup>627</sup> This has been the case in digital film production for quite some time. It is becoming ever more common in photographic practice in digital photography with formats such as RAW, interactive 360° panoramas and not least the LFP (Light Field Picture) of the Lytro camera.

<sup>628</sup> See: Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge 2001, p. 36 ff.

<sup>629</sup> For this issue, see: ‘Die eingefrorene Zeit oder das bewegte, stillgestellte Filmbild’, in: *Freeze Frames – Zum Verhältnis von Fotografie und Film*, Eds.: Stefanie Diekmann and Winfried Gerling, Bielefeld 2010, pp. 147–170, here especially p. 163 ff.

<sup>630</sup> 360° ball cameras like the Panon Panono or Arrays from GoPro exhibit a further variety of this constellation.  
<https://www.panono.com>

Gilles Deleuze's remarks on a modern cinema hint at this aesthetic:

*The new images no longer have any outside (out-of field), any more than they are internalized in a whole; rather, they have a right side and a reverse, reversible and non-superimposable, like a power to turn back on themselves. They are the object of a perpetual reorganization, in which a new image can arise from any point whatever of the preceding image. The organization of space here loses its privileged directions, and first of all the privilege of the vertical which the position of the screen still displays, in favour of an omni-directional space which constantly varies its angles and co-ordinates, to exchange the vertical and the horizontal. And the screen itself, even if it keeps a vertical position by convention, no longer seems to refer to the human posture, like a window or a painting, but rather constitutes a table of information, an opaque surface on which are inscribed 'data' [...].<sup>631</sup>*



Image 11. GoPro (Source: [https://www.flickr.com/photos/gopro\\_photos/4955000854/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/gopro_photos/4955000854/))

As a final symptomatic example—and this has already been hinted at in reference to Google Glass—there is an increasing tendency toward the

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<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2333867/The-amazing-360-degree-video-camera-revolutionise-photography.html>

<sup>631</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: Time-Image*, Minneapolis 1989, p. 265.

dissolution of the difference between apparatus and (human) body. The GoPro (Image 12), the “world’s most versatile camera”, as is claimed in the self-description, is attached to the body. This gesture of extreme mobility spreads to the actions of the self-shooter and the reverse holds true as well. The camera’s hardiness is such that it can withstand any extreme actions of the user, often even better than the photographer himself.

Mark Hansen describes the relationship of body and image as follows,

*As I see it, digitization requires us to reconceive the correlation between the user’s body and the image in an even more profound manner. It is not simply that the image provides a tool for the user to control the ‘infoscape’ of contemporary material culture, [...], but rather that the ‘image’ has itself become a process and, as such, has become irreducibly bound up with the activity of the body.*<sup>632</sup>

The GoPro’s versatility is linked to a relationship of the apparatus—as an image-producing machine—to the body, which indivisibly connects the activity of the body with the image production.

## VI

What I have attempted to show with these – necessarily – disparate examples is that the digital photographic image is extremely mobile and mutable in various ways: first, through mass production and live-distribution across various networks, secondly, through the convergence of photographic and filmic devices, and finally, through the exhibited variability of the file, that we still refer to as photography or even the digital negative. The photographic image is extremely flexible and mobile in the digital sphere. The ever-increasing unity of body and apparatus brings about its own effects and affects. From this perspective, the distinction between still and moving images is becoming ever more problematic. The digital photo is variable, mobile and mobilized in a way that was unimaginable in the analog world. Digital photography is so clearly embedded in complex circumstances of capture, processing, distribution, and observation that it appears as a discrete medium only in the rarest of cases. It is integrated into our reality as an ambient technology.<sup>633</sup>

Yet the argument that the digital image does not exist, as, for example, Claus Pias and Wolfgang Hagen claimed a few years back,<sup>634</sup> and that the

<sup>632</sup> Mark B.N. Hansen, *New Philosophy for New media*, Cambridge 2007, p. 10.

<sup>633</sup> Sarah Kember, ‘Ambient intelligent photography’, in *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*, Martin Lister (ed.), Routledge, London/New York 2013, pp. 56–76.

<sup>634</sup> See: Claus Pias, Claus Pias: ‘Das digitale Bild gibt es nicht – Über das (Nicht-)Wissen der Bilder und die informatische Illusion’, in: *zeitenblicke* 2 (2003), Nr. 1 [08 May 2003]. <<http://www.zeitenblicke.historicum.net/2003/01/pias/index.html>>

image, as a result of its algorithmic character, is a digital object lacking connection to reality no longer seems justifiable. This is not to dispute the idea that digitality remains the core of this image or data set; on the contrary, algorithmic culture must be brought into light along with the affects caused by the image.

I have sought to clearly show how communication has become immediate with digital photographs, how mobile, spatial images, people and apparatuses are related to one another as well as how they create and influence powerful realities; this has always been one of the most fundamental issues of photography.

(Translation by John Benjamin)

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# Awakening the past, expressing the present: Stories of Photography, Migration and Belief in a Mexican Village

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## **Abstract**

How may the practice of photography shift ways of looking at oneself and at one's community? Can creating visual narratives also support reexamining the past, whereby old pictures and other objects gain new significance? This article addresses these questions in a study of several workshops on transmedial storytelling in the town of St. Ana Zegache, Oaxaca, Mexico. We chose photography as the primary medium for the workshops, based on our interest in the visual vernacular and the relative ease of using simple cameras to acquire first-person accounts of everyday experience. We did not anticipate that participants would seize the opportunity to work across media, to include other objects and images, weaving alternative histories into their stories.

We found that telling stories through photographs opened possibilities for some participants to reinterpret experiences of the self in relation to place, community and beliefs. This became 'empowering' in the moment when each person presented his or her story, sharing this reinterpretation with other workshop participants, simultaneously re-enacting his or her place within the community. Examples included experiences of migration, familial relations, and their own creative practice.

Old photographs and objects, as repositories of histories and memories, acquired new dimensions when incorporated into contemporary stories. Participants also reflected on the value of their narratives beyond the immediate community, to people elsewhere who would be interested in the culture of Zegache, and 'how we live here.' They saw the digital interface as a network offering the possibility of sharing their stories with an audience from afar. The reflexive power of photography in this context revealed the image as multidimensional, beyond visual representation, encompassing both individual and collective experience.

## *Introduction*

The aim of this article is to analyze the image-based narratives created by participants in a series of workshops on transmedial storytelling in the town of St. Ana Zegache, Oaxaca, Mexico. The workshops were initially designed to complement several artistic collaborations that had previously been carried out in Zegache, in an attempt to understand the significance of these

artworks for other Zegache residents, both adults and children. We chose photography as the primary format for the narratives, based on our own interest in the visual vernacular and the relative ease of using simple cameras to acquire first-person accounts of everyday experience, accounts that often include people, objects and places with significance for the narrator/photographer. Many of the workshop participants did in fact photograph some of the previous artworks, weaving them into their stories of the town and its histories. More striking, however, were the ways in which the act of photographing itself supported the agency of the participants. We could see that the activities of choosing a specific frame and scene, followed by creating a sequence of images, and then presenting these to others seemed to establish a connection between the individual's personal biography and the history of the community as a whole. Nor had we anticipated that the participants would use the workshop as an opportunity to work across media and to weave alternative histories, including other objects and images, into their stories. These observations suggested that we return to the "results" of the workshops with a different set of questions, aimed at unpacking the story about the power of photography, underlying these Zegache residents' visual narratives. How can the practice of photography, as a storytelling device, shift ways of looking at oneself and at one's community? Further, how does creating such visual narratives in turn support reexamining the past, providing objects and old pictures with new significance?

We begin with a brief description of the town of Santa Ana Zegache, and of the Talleres Comunitarios, the artisan studios where the workshops were held. We then position the workshops in relation to several documentary traditions and methods where photography has been used to give people the means to narrate, reflect upon and share their life experiences, and describe the method we developed in Zegache. This is followed by a discussion of our findings, first regarding the practice of photography and supporting a shift in the participants' ways of seeing the familiar, and second, concerning several themes that emerged from their stories dealing with different forms of empowerment of the individual and of the group. We then consider the reflexive turn that occurred as the adult participants discussed a small collection of old photographs from the community, and reported insights they said they had gained during the workshop into the power and limitations of photography.

### *The Workshop Setting*

St. Ana Zegache has a population of around 3,600 and is located in one of the poorest regions of Mexico. Extensive migration to other cities in Mexico and to the U.S. takes a toll on families and the community as a whole; recent census figures show that fifty per cent of the population has lived or

is currently living elsewhere.<sup>635</sup> At the same time, however, Zegache retains a strong and resilient indigenous heritage. In addition to Spanish, most people speak either Zapotec or Mixteca, or both, and there is a rich and lively craft tradition as well. As we learned, many people from Zegache trace their roots to pre-hispanic culture. Santa Ana, mother of Maria, is the patron saint of the town, which takes its name, in Zapotec, from the seven holy hills that are scattered across the landscape.

The workshops took place within the framework of Talleres Comunitarios, an artisan studio that was established over twenty years ago by the artist Rudolfo Morales to train local residents in various techniques of conservation and restoration. In so doing, Morales was also following the tradition of giving back to his own community some of the fruits of his success. A further aim of Morales' endeavors was to provide a sustainable alternative to the town's substantial out-migration. Eventually, his efforts lead to the restoration of the town church, left in ruins after earthquakes and years of neglect. The project was initiated in 1997 and with the aid of grants, including from the Rockefeller Foundation, the work was completed a few years after Morales' death in 2000. The church is now a source of pride and a tourist attraction, recognized as a masterpiece of "Indian Baroque". At the same time, the Talleres Comunitarios has grown to include 17 members, both men and women.<sup>636</sup>

Over the years, the Talleres has also hosted visiting artists and workshops, occasionally open to children and adult members of the community. Following this example, we had presented an initial design for two workshops aimed at gathering stories and photographs from adults and young people who live in Zegache. The two groups included Talleres artisans, members of their families and Zegache residents for whom this was their first contact with the studio. There were six participants in the workshop for adults, and five in the young people's workshop.

### *Approaches to Transmedial Story-telling*

*Transmedial storytelling* is the term we use to account for the weaving together of new and old strands in the narratives that emerged through these workshops, regarding the life of this village with its ongoing histories of migration, violence, and veneration. *Transmedial* refers to the ways in which the participants connected and integrated different visual, verbal and tactile media, both digital and material, in their narrative process. It is important to note how our use of the term deviates from Henry Jenkins' initial introduction of transmedial storytelling into media studies.<sup>637</sup> First,

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<sup>635</sup> Plan Municipal de Desarrollo 2011–2013.

<sup>636</sup> For a full account of the history of Talleres Comunitarios, see their home page: <http://www.proyectozegeche.com/>

<sup>637</sup> H Jenkins, *Convergence Culture. Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press, New York, 2006.

these stories emerge from *vernacular experience* and diverge sharply in this regard from the forms of fiction and entertainment generated by media industries. There is no "property" here that can be bought and sold across media sectors; they have little "market potential". Yet, following Jenkins, a kind of *world-building* is evident in the narratives and across these media, regarding social roles, and involving stories and legends of the past, and goals for the future. There are also clear *performative* dimensions in the visual forms of these narratives and also in the their potential to expand across media platforms.

The workshops in Zegache are inspired by the long tradition of facilitating people's personal documentary projects using their own words and/or images. One source of inspiration is *digital storytelling*, initiated at the Center for Digital Storytelling in San Francisco. Since the early 1990s, the Center has worked with groups to develop multi-media pieces ranging over a broad spectrum of personal and cultural experience, generating over 12.000 examples, with hundreds of spin-offs across the globe.<sup>638</sup> Over the past decade, digital storytelling has come to encompass "the whole range of personal stories now being told in potentially public form using digital media resources."<sup>639</sup> Many of these efforts are inspired by a belief in the potential for empowerment that lies in giving people tools to narrate, reflect upon and share their life experiences. Personal narratives are recognized as "powerful cultural tools" that can challenge received frames of reference and ideologies.<sup>640</sup> Although many digital storytelling projects include visual forms, we have not found any that focus specifically on the power of photography within the narrative process. Our particular interest is in the photographic image, and what takes place when exploring one's own environment with a digital camera and then using the photographs to tell a story about oneself and one's community.

This led us in turn to the array of participatory visual methods developed within the social sciences where typically video or still photography (but occasionally also drawing) are used to gain insight into seeing and acknowledging another's point of view. As visual anthropologist Richard Chalfen points out, authors who use these methods 'frequently cite the need to work with under-represented, disenfranchised sectors of the population.'<sup>641</sup> In an example from the early 1990s, public health scholars Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris asked women in rural Yunnan province, China, to take photographs that portrayed their daily routines, common events or community life, and then to talk about the significance

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<sup>638</sup> J Lambert, *Digital Storytelling. Capturing lives, creating community* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Digital Diner Press, Berkeley, CA, 2006; K Lundby, *Digital Storytelling, Mediated Stories. Self-representations in new media*, Peter Lang, New York, 2008, p. 2.

<sup>639</sup> N Couldry, 'Digital storytelling, media research and democracy: Conceptual choices and alternative futures' in *Digital Storytelling*, K Lundby (ed.), p. 42.

<sup>640</sup> O Erstad, and J V Wertsch, 'Tales of mediation: narrative and digital media as cultural tools' in K Lundby, *Digital Storytelling*, p. 28.

<sup>641</sup> R Chalfen, 'Differentiating Practices of Participatory Visual Media Production', in *The SAGE Handbook Visual Research Methods*, E Margolis and L Pauwels (eds.), SAGE Publications, London, 2011, p. 187.

of the images with other members of the community and with the researchers.<sup>642</sup> Originally described as 'photo novella', the method is now largely referred to as 'Photovoice', with 'voice' as an acronym for 'Voicing Our Individual and Collective Experience'.<sup>643</sup> Individual and community empowerment is an explicit goal of these action research methods, and Wang and Burris formulate their own aims with reference to Paulo Friere's 'education for a critical consciousness' using photography as the specific tool for empowerment.<sup>644</sup> An important dimension of these visual methods is the discussions with participants, during which the photographs or video can serve as a 'catalyst or trigger' in the process of empowerment. Drawing on their extensive community-based research using visual methodologies, Claudia Mitchell and Naydene De Lange maintain that it is not the technology per se, but participation in the collective process of developing themes and interpretations that serves as the catalyst to critical reflection.<sup>645</sup>

These methods implicate a range of ethical issues, involving informed consent and the use and re-use of the participants' material, issues that we sought to acknowledge during our workshops. Related to this is the challenge for the researcher to retain a critical perspective throughout a process that is unavoidably hierarchical. A majority of these projects carry a celebratory tone, attributing an empowerment and agency to participants that is hard to support. For this reason, in many studies and interventions that rely on participatory methods, it is difficult to say that power has in fact shifted into the hands of community members. Mitchell and De Lange claim that one reason for this is the lack of attention to the ways in which visual media can – and cannot – alter perspectives and behavior. In their own work using participatory video to address social issues of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, Mitchell and De Lange try to be 'both critical and celebratory'.<sup>646</sup>

The workshops we organised in Zegache were much shorter in duration than the participatory projects considered here, and did not have the explicit aim of initiating policy changes or challenging social structures. We were motivated by our curiosity to find out whether, given the ease of using and sharing digital photographs, these relatively simple forms of storytelling could open ways for the participants to create visual narratives focusing on central aspects of their lives. We saw their participation primarily as a documentary and expressive exercise, instead of viewing it as

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<sup>642</sup> C Wang, and M Burris 'Empowerment through Photo Novella: Portraits of Participation' *Health Education & Behavior*, 21(2), 1994, pp. 171–186.

<sup>643</sup> C Wang, and M Burris 'Photovoice; concept, methodology and use for participatory needs assessment', *Health and Behaviour*, 24(3), 1997, pp. 369–387; also F Lapenta, 'Some Theoretical and Methodological Views on Photo-Elicitation' in *The SAGE Handbook Visual Research Methods*, E Margolis and L Pauwels (eds.) SAGE Publications, London, 2011, p. 207.

<sup>644</sup> Wang and Burris, 1994.

<sup>645</sup> C Mitchell and N De Lange 'Community-Based Participatory Video and Social Action in Rural South Africa' in *The SAGE Handbook Visual Research Methods*, E Margolis and L Pauwels (eds.), SAGE Publications, London, 2011, pp. 171–86.

<sup>646</sup> Mitchell and De Lange, p. 183.

a form of self-actualization or therapy that characterizes many digital-storytelling projects. In our double role as workshop organisers and researchers, we found it difficult to remain critically aware of our own influence. As a result, we may have, at times, verged toward the 'celebratory', and exaggerated the impact this brief experience with photography had on the participants.

That said, based on our experience and the response of the workshop participants, we remain convinced that photography can be a powerful way to condense complex meanings and trajectories of life. Telling stories through photographs can open possibilities to reinterpret experiences of the self in relation to place, community and beliefs. The process during the workshop began with the idea of photography as an experience, where holding the camera and looking through the viewfinder create a relationship between body the technology. The act of taking a picture connected the *idea* of the photograph to additional layers of meaning that arose when selecting a specific scene and frame; in the moments of imagining, visualizing, choosing, and perceiving each image. This was then followed by creating a sequence of images that involved a correlation between a personal biography and the larger community and its histories. We see this as empowering in the moment when each participant presented this sequence as his or her own story, sharing the outcome of this experience with other workshop participants. As each story was told, orally and visually, the narrator simultaneously created or reinterpreted his or her place within the community.

### *Methods and Procedures*

All participants were asked to create two brief stories, the first focusing on what they saw as the most important features of the town, and the second a more personal story regarding their own lives. In each group, the workshops began by mapping important sites, using colored pens on a large sheet of paper. Following a brief introduction to the cameras (Image 1), the participants spent two hours walking through the town and out to the fields, taking pictures. Upon their return, we first downloaded all the photographs, then asked the participants to edit their stories down to five images. We recorded each story as it was presented to the group gathered around the computer (Image 2). The participants then had a day and a half to put together a second story, a more personal account of their own lives. The younger participants were asked to take pictures that could describe their own lives to someone of their own age who had never been in Zegache. The aforementioned procedure was then followed, as the images were first edited down to five images per story, and then presented to the group, as each participant in turn told their story visually and orally.





Image 1. Juana and José Luis try out the digital camera.  
Photo by Karin Becker.



Image 2. Veronica presents her story to the group. Photo  
by Karin Becker.

We organized our own roles in the workshop with the aim of creating a fluid and confident environment for the participants. Tovar did oral translations during the workshops and was responsible for the sound recordings, transcriptions of the stories and the final translation into English, while Becker did photographic documentation, introduced the digital cameras and helped the participants edit and download their photographs onto the

computer.<sup>647</sup> Between the meetings with participants we spent time reflecting on the process, considering for example how age, gender and cultural difference might enter the participants' experience of the workshop. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogue and the dialogic imagination, we developed a dialogic, intercultural methodology based in our common interest in photography's potential to open relationships between private and public domains and to connect imagination and memory.<sup>648</sup>

This dialogic methodology depends upon a fluid relationship among the workshop participants. Consequently, at its best, the workshop can become a space where horizons are fused through the dialogic process that includes trajectories from each participant. With photography as a central element in this dialogue, everyone has a voice and no one can be silenced, as the stories continually draw on other dialogues and histories. These additional threads are woven together, often in a foreshortened or fragmentary form, as condensed visual references to larger histories. When a story is told, oral expression is added to these visual references, which may or may not be familiar to other participants. New meanings regarding individuals, the community and its histories may arise and be negotiated as participants interact in an ongoing dialogue. This is made more complex, too, by the reflection that may arise *within* each participant, and that continues between and after each meeting. Maintaining this complexity was a challenge, especially for Tovar, who had to first transcribe and then translate the oral presentations into print. It required negotiating between the spontaneity and flow of the presentation and the static quality of the written text, and where knowledge of the indigenous culture was as important as fluency in English and Spanish.

In a closing dialogue with each group we asked what they had seen and learned, about the town and about taking pictures. Becker showed a few photographs she had made during the workshop, and we explained how we planned to use their photographs in our research and asked how they might want to use them. (Each participant had been given a CD with all the pictures s/he had taken.) One woman had brought a collection of old photographs and these gave rise to a lively discussion among the adults. Both groups talked about using their stories to communicate with people and communities far from Zegache, for example using their own Facebook accounts, developing a community archive and adding to the website of the Talleres Comunitarios. Several months after the transcriptions were completed, the project was presented as an Internet web page, in both Spanish and English.<sup>649</sup>

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<sup>647</sup> The cameras were purchased with funds from the Swedish Research Council, as part of a funding grant Becker had obtained. The grant also provided the means to reimburse each participant, based on a comparable hourly wage, to compensate for potential loss of income.

<sup>648</sup> M Bakhtin, *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

<sup>649</sup> See [http://euroaxaca.org/zegache\\_stories](http://euroaxaca.org/zegache_stories).

### *Looking with a camera*

Most workshop participants had taken photographs with their cell phones, but for many of them, this was the first time they had used digital cameras. They quickly mastered the basic technology of framing, zooming in and out, and reviewing and deleting images. Walking through the village, they took pictures, reviewed what they had taken and edited out some images, in an ongoing process. They sought out different perspectives on familiar places and objects: One of the men convinced the church janitor to unlock the tower so that we could climb up on the roof, for a view over the town that none of us had ever seen before. Some climbed over fences to get closer views, and peered into windows. The family wells were mentioned as one of Zegache's important resources, and two participants experimented with photographing down into the dark wells with and without flash.

Photography, as noted by the art historian Hans Belting, allows the subject to have a forceful encounter with his or her own imagination and body.<sup>650</sup> The camera becomes an extended prosthesis of the eye, sharpening and externalizing vision. 'Taking' a picture involves an appropriation of the object and an accommodation of the body. It involves actively exploring the space, appropriating the outside/exterior and creating images.<sup>651</sup> For the children, there was an open manifestation of 'power' and a feeling of freedom in 'having our own cameras,' as 15-year-old Laura said. 'It was fun because we used creativity and imagination, since catching an image is not just about memory, we need to find a way to communicate through an image, and if the others can get the message that's good because it means that the purpose is achieved.' They understood this way of looking as a personal, individual perspective. As Laura added 'I think we all like to have something that feels like it's ours, and here we could take pictures of what we wanted and no one could tell us yes or no, and that was very good.'

Linked to the participants' understanding of the camera as a tool that could change one's perspective on the familiar was their emphasis on the photograph itself. For most participants, the photograph came before the story. The first condensation of their reality and experience was the image and the act of shooting. With few exceptions, the stories emerge from the pictures, not vice versa. One can see different decisions taken when photographing: composition, light, distance, angle, with attention to foreground and background. Many of the pictures are quite beautiful, and obviously involve careful consideration of what to photograph and how. The participants were also using symbols and places of symbolic meaning - both in their stories of the town - eg. the hills and chapels - and in their personal stories (Image 3).

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<sup>650</sup> H Belting, *An Anthropology of Images. Picture. Medium. Body*. Trans. T. Dunlap. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2011.

<sup>651</sup> J Aumont, [\*The Image\*. BFI Press, London, 1993.](#)



Image 3. This photograph "of the pond next to the hill of Maria Sanchez", that nine-year old Karen Chompa Aquino included in her story of Zegache is an example, showing this important water source in the quiet beauty of late afternoon.

Once the participants had reviewed all their photographs, the selection and sequencing went quickly, also indicating that their stories emerged from the images rather than vice versa. The stories were told without notes, as the image sequence unfolded on the screen. We could see in their eyes and gestures that in the moment of narration the performing participants were thinking about what to say. The stories were created between the visual and the oral, an improvised performance that could hardly be repeated. The photographs became actions, rather than representations, hence the emphasis on pragmatics rather than semantics in the narrative. The audio recording is merely a documentation that makes it possible to settle the ephemerality of the visual and oral story.

There are different degrees of complexity in the stories; some of the complexities are linked with fragments of the everyday, others are more deep or profound, like those touching on issues of migration. Every story consists of different layers. Even in the simplest stories, we find information and symbols referring to home, community and gender relations, the importance of the fields, the wells and ponds, family structure, daily life and some of its struggles. One limitation was the brevity of the workshops which narrowed down the participants' opportunities to experiment, to channel their new knowledge back into their practice and to explore new themes. One of the women said that she registered for the workshop as a step toward her desire to become a professional photographer, which was

not a stated aim of the workshop. Nevertheless, the participants stressed that it was important for others in the town to see their stories and therefore suggested providing the schools with copies. They all seemed to agree that the workshop had changed their perception about the act of photographing, making it an act laden with symbolism and sometimes contradictory realities that are difficult to foresee as well as to retell.

*From image to oral expression.*

We begin with Laura whose narrative of the town is the most complete, and interesting in a variety of ways. She is the older daughter of one of the Talleres artisans, and participated in the workshop together with her sister, Karen (Images 4-8).

*(1) The story of my people begins with the image of María Sánchez hill, because in the past there were no houses or buildings or big constructions, people lived in houses made with carrizo or huts, and this picture shows how the hill looks. We know that, before, it had more green areas but those are lost to pollution, garbage burning and forest fires.*

*(2) The second photo is of the Mogote of Santa Ana Zegache. The town is called Santa Ana because the mother of the virgin, she is 'la patrona', and Zegache means the seven Mogotes. This is the main Mogote that is in the center of the town, and it has a legend that is a magic Mogote. Long time ago, two buddies were there and one of them saw a store inside the Mogote and went in and it took a year for him to get out, that person thought they had spent few seconds but had been so long.*

*(3) The community has increased, here we see how people live, the mountain is the main thing, the principal occupation of people is to work in the field, as well as raising cattle, and this is the way that people live in my community.*

*(4) The church was restored because a long time ago there was a big earthquake that caused a lot of damage, the church crashed, but people did nothing to fix it, then Mr. Rodolfo Morales, a painter, helped us restore the church and put the bell, paint and put more touches from his art and now it is one of the three most beautiful churches around Oaxaca and has a museum and the church has a rich history.*



(5) *Most recent construction is the chapel at the entrance of the village, which has a video inside about Santa Ana, teaching the Bible to the Virgin Mary, and the story ends here.*



Images 4–8 (from above left). *The story of my people*. Photos and text by Laura Jessica Chompa Aquino.

Laura begins her story with an image, not an event. Her story is 'of my people', she said, not about the town itself, and refers to historical knowledge verging into a myth of origin. She then moves to the mogotes, with an image of the largest of these sacred hills after which the town is named. Together these two photographs evoke a mythic past, together with an active social imaginary that produces stories. When the photographs are joined to an oral story, a fusion is created between the emotions associated with this shared past and the image itself.

Laura included many of the topics that were mapped out during the initial dialogue, in a chronological sequence weaving together history and legend with brief facts about housing and the economy of the town. From the framing, angle and her use of color, we see that she has composed each photograph with great care. She uses words to describe what we cannot see (the church in ruins) and what has been lost (the green hillside). Cultural heritage is a central theme, as she describes the restoration of the church and concludes with the chapel, as the newest addition. She has also used her sequence of photographs to trace an arc of local belief, from the sacred mountain to the new chapel that both mirrors and stands in opposition to the church, a symbol of local syncretic belief, with its video image of Zegache's patron saint, St. Ana, teaching her daughter to read. It is significant that she does not mention that both the chapel and its video animation resulted from a collaboration between the Talleres and two Swedish artists, suggesting that these works have become a self-evident aspect of village life.<sup>652</sup>

While Laura's story of Zegache is the most complete in its visual and narrative structure, a majority of the other participants had photographs of significant sites in their stories as well: the church, the mogotes or hills that figure in many of the town legends, the family wells and the green fields of alfalfa. Several of the children also included in their narratives the new basketball court and the park, also a recent addition, and the video and sweets shop.

### *Personal stories – visualizing the authentic*

Pride taken in personal achievements was a theme running through many of the adults' stories. They had photographed their homes and gardens, and described the years of hard work they had invested in them. Two of the women, Veronica and Juana, included photographs of their children, with obvious pride. Many had photographed objects they had made themselves: photographs of Angeles' expertly varnished wooden cabinet, Juana's embroidery (done 'in my free time') and the house José had built for his mother, with money earned during the eight years he lived in the US, were

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<sup>652</sup> For an analysis of this collaboration, see K Becker and G Brecevic 'Veneration and Wonder: The politics of making art in an Oaxacan village', *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, 6, 2014.



placed like a coda at the end of their respective stories. Directing the camera at their own lives, the adult participants reflected on their experiences and visualized their personal significance. As a result, their photographs transformed the intimate nature of the colloquial space and its history into an experience that could be shared.

Forms of self-representation and expressions of identity are not only found in virtually all modes of digital storytelling, but they are also generally recognized as an empowering feature in such projects. However small in scale, these 'bottom up' media practices seem to give participants a way of externalizing their experience and making it public and collective.<sup>653</sup> For the Zegache residents, photographing one's environment and placing it in a narrative that they shared with a group, seemed to alter or enhance this sense of pride and empowerment, in a performance of their own agency. This may arise from the sense of authenticity embedded in the photographs and out of the group's common experience, which would also explain the mutual respect and affirmation we noted as the participants shared their stories with each other. Media researchers Hertzberg Kaare and Lundby have noted in their overview of similar projects that the individual's story, using digital material and drawing on lived experience, in these contexts represents the performance of a mediated story that is understood as 'authentic.' They argue that authenticity is fundamentally a social phenomenon, founded on 'a relation between the individual and the collective'.<sup>654</sup>

A striking example occurred during José's story of his migration to the U.S., and the hardship and loneliness he had experienced. When he faced the photograph he had taken of his mother, sitting in her kitchen, he broke down, and spent several minutes fighting his tears. The others in the group waited in silence until he was able to continue. He then described his own sense of responsibility for his mother's chronic illness; he had been a troublesome son, often opposing her wishes. 'Before this workshop,' he said, 'I never told anyone that I felt guilty about her illness.' Several in the group thanked him and said it took courage to share this experience. Witnessing this had also given them a deeper understanding of the hardship and loneliness of migration and of José's pride when he showed the final photograph, of the house he had built: 'That's why I went there; to have a house for my mom. My dad and I built this house, but I always remember how guilty I feel for the illness of my mother because I caused her anger, and our arguments led to her being sick. That's all.'

Veronica's story included photographs that linked her personal history to recovering part of her Zapotec cultural heritage. She had married at the age of 16, and learned Zapoteca from her mother-in-law, who also taught her the traditional way to make tortillas that she now sells at the school. Her photograph of the stove where she learned this skill (Image 9) also stands

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<sup>653</sup> K Lundby (ed.).

<sup>654</sup> B Hertzberg Kaare and K Lundby, p. 110; C Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, Routledge, London, 2008, p. 151.

for the place she learned the language that connects her with her indigenous past. Although Veronica did not mention this, the metate or grinding stone with its painted memorial dedication was probably a wedding gift from her own mother, following a Zapotec tradition. She had also photographed a row of several small artefacts and described finding these in the family's field: 'One day working with the shovel my husband found these whistles, these prehispanic figures, and we have them in the house because we think it is important.' They had offered these objects to a museum, to no avail. Veronica brought the artefacts to the final workshop meeting, and passed them around for us to handle (seen lying on the table in Image 17). In her story she has woven together images, memories and objects in a symbolic performance of her ethnic heritage. Further, the lighting and composition in her close-up photograph of these artefacts stands in opposition to institutional structures of cultural history that, in her story, would allow the indigenous culture to remain buried and forgotten.



Image 9. 'I married when I was 16. When I got married the mother of my husband taught me how to make tortillas. This has become very important because we all love the handmade tortillas. Photo and text by Veronica Aquino Ambrocio.

### *Shaping a life through images*

Photography can also provide a means to express aspects of distinction in one's life. José Luis, a Talleres artisan who had interrupted his engineering studies to return to Zegache and support his two sisters and niece,

constructed a series of visual metaphors to explain the path his life was  
taking [Images 10-15]:



Images 10–15. *How I see my life*. Photo and  
text by José Luis Gutierrez Mendoza (Ches).

(1) *I'll tell you about how it was, my life or how I see my life. I feel my life like a chess board, which I have practiced and understand many things about this game and I have adopted as part of how to live.*

(2) *At first I wanted... or well, I'm remembering an anecdote; I once asked my mother what I wanted to be when I was little, and she was cooking, and she said that I wanted to be a pilot and that was important because I knew it was my childhood dream.*

(3) *My life has been very different, had many faces, I have done many things, among them I have highlighted something in dance since childhood, folk dance.*

(4) *I'm also very interested in math, most of my life was focused on mathematics and I think is very nice to understand many things and to know more and more. I left a career in engineering and right now what I do is wood carving.*

(5) *I've been doing many different things, and sometimes they are totally apart from one another, but I can do all of them and a few times I've been recognized for what I've done.*

(6) *Now after all that I have lived I conclude or I understand, as I said earlier, that my life is like a chess game and I can understand how a pawn that could have aspirations to one day may be crowned.*

The photographs in José Luis' story show elements that are both personal and prosaic, transformed into metaphors of his particular life experience. He has used photography to express his sense of difference, presenting his own story and identity in a visual/oral sequence that develops through his own changes. The second image of a flame symbolizes a specific moment of his life; his childish curiosity, his relationship with his mother, and a burning fascination to go far beyond, to be able to pilot a plane. In the third and fourth images, the sequence plays with the possibility of bringing into the present specific keys of his distinction, like his love for dancing and mathematics. The fifth photograph shows the tools of his present trade, while also symbolizing that he is still in the process of 'carving' and shaping his life. The photographic sequence allows him to combine what was thought to be incompatible, transforming him into a complex, unfinished being.



### *The power of recycled photographs*

Many workshop participants used the digital cameras to reproduce photographs from their past to be inserted into their stories. José Luis' collage of photographs from his childhood dance performance provides one example. Karen built her entire story around earlier photographs of herself that she presented as a chronological sequence. The first shows her as a three-year-old, full of energy, followed by images of her performing the 'La Pluma' dance, carrying the flag as the honored 'Zehuapila', in her football uniform, and concluding with an image she made of awards she has received. Clearly proud of her achievements, she constructed a story using photographs that stand for her experience of these activities and the identity she has created during her young life.

Karen's 'remediated' narrative using older photographs concretizes a general characteristic of narratives; while being rooted in memories, narratives also depend on invention and reuse. Before we, as viewers, are given access to these 'real' or 'lived' situations, the narrator makes decisions about what can or cannot be revealed. Narratives are then generated as the individual – be it the photographer/author or the viewer/reader – reflects upon, creates and re-creates her or his social and personal space. Revealing personal matters involves aspects of emancipation and empowerment, but also entails risks. Karen chooses to tell us not only that she used to be a 'naughty' child who frequently got into fights, but also that she has succeeded in taming her earlier self by channeling her energies into activities where she excels.

Using old pictures is also a way to include different layers of space and time into a visual narrative. Through storytelling, information and knowledge from the image can be connected to the present and projected onto an imagined or desired future. The words accompanying the visual narrative give one version out of several that could appear. The story that we recorded is one of the many possible ways to narrate and express a personal identity, moving through time as the narrator encounters different spaces, whether public or private.

As Karen's narrative demonstrates, using old photographs to retell stories of the self is one way to negotiate with one's past. Juana, a single mother and Talleres artisan who participated in the workshop for adults, understood this all too well. Unlike the others who had quickly sequenced their images, Juana revised her selection several times before arriving at a version she felt she could share with the group. Central to each version was a photograph of her with her young son, 'and because of him I'm trying to move forward and succeed.' Although she is employed at the Talleres Comunitarios, she still needs help from her parents. Hers is also a story of migration – she lived and worked in Guadalajara for six years, sending money back to her parents – but unlike José who returned from the US with the means to build a house for his mother, Juana returned to Zegache pregnant and in need of additional support. She could easily describe her

life situation in words, and did not shy away from describing herself as a single mother. However, she decided to exclude from her story the copy of an old photograph of her parents, posing in a church at a family member's wedding. To insert the power of this image into her story would have undermined Juana's struggles for self-determination, for herself and for her son.

### *Renegotiating a collective past*

Old photographs were also used to draw out narratives and negotiate with different versions of a shared history prevailing among these Zegache residents. Dolores introduced a small collection of old photographs at the adults' final discussion. She brought these valuable images from the past to be shown to the others, but also for us to scan and preserve. The collection included a few badly damaged photographs of the church prior to its restoration and others that showed community celebrations and ceremonies, with people posing for the camera, often in traditional dress. Initially the group's discussion focused on identifying the people, events and festivals portrayed in the pictures. However, their curiosity and eagerness to talk about these photographs with each other brought out a great deal of the history of the town, including changes in communitarian relations and ideas about community life (Image 16). Dolores was not a Talleres artisan and had never been to the studio before the workshop; she said that she had had no idea what went on in the building. By introducing these visual links to the past, she was in effect broadening the Talleres' restoration work to include the creative reconstruction of collective narratives of the past, and where additional community members, past and present, were also represented in photographs and stories.



Image 16. Traditional ceremonies in old and new photographs. Photo by Karin Becker.

Looking at the old photographs also opened a conversation about moments of internal violence in the village, as each image became a window onto a landscape full of symbolic and emotional elements. There were several photographs of men posed with rifles, and at one point Veronica commented, 'Here, some time ago, people killed each other' (Image 17). Angeles pointed to a man she recognized and said 'And this man is one of the thugs.' Gradually a story emerged of this former town resident, Eusebio Venegas, also known as 'Trick'. In one photograph he is playing guitar on a rooftop in Mexico City, and in another he is the boy in the part of Juan Diego, the peasant who is visited by Maria, during the annual pageant of the Virgin of Guadalupe. When José sees a photograph showing 'Trick' posed on one knee and taking aim with his rifle, he identifies him as his father's uncle. His own sons were reluctant to talk about him, but in this group there was no such reticence. He was not a thug, Dolores argued; he was like one of the police, and helped to clean up the town. Others described him as an intellectual who read widely and was politically well informed. Interspersed with the story of this legendary figure who inspired fear and respect, there emerged other accounts of violence and conflict from the past. In the emergent and improvised way these stories were told, various borders were crossed, between present and past, between families and villages, and also venturing into taboo subjects. The photographs provided the means to negotiate and make manifest what had been private, as the workshop participants pooled their knowledge of the past.





Image 17. The group talks about the photographs Dolores (Maria Dolores Lopez Ramirez, seen on right) has brought. In the foreground are the pre-hispanic artefacts Veronica describes in her story. Photo by Karin Becker.

Eusebio Venegas had given his collection of photographs to Dolores, a married woman to whom he was not related, recognizing her as someone who would value and take care of them. Realizing their value to the community, Dolores in turn introduced the photographs to a setting that re-empowered them as material artifacts and symbols in the re-creation of a collective past. The stories that emerged in this session were also a form of witnessing, through the power of the images in their embodiment of history, and the collective building of narratives about what they represented. The participants were surprised by all the relationships they discovered: José said that he began to see 'How through pictures so many stories come back to us'. The photograph opens a passage from one space and time to another without restriction or prejudice, releasing a reflexive process for each participant, whereby the image transcends time and place, to become multidimensional. The adults acknowledged this complexity in their final discussion. As José Luis commented, 'In a picture you can have a reflection of the past, the present and the future, you can have all these dimensions together,' and others nodded in agreement.

### *Concluding discussion and reflections on empowerment*

The initial aim of this project was neither to empower the participants nor to investigate the power of photography, but to learn more about the town and its residents through their eyes and words. The empowerment that nevertheless took place during these few days began with the act of taking pictures, of seeing and exploring a familiar visual environment in a previously unfamiliar light. The participants' visual field expanded as they photographed everyday objects and scenes, and then saw them anew, as reflected back to them on the camera's small screen. In this process, photographing generated knowledge that the participants then used to further expand their ways of looking.<sup>655</sup>

When the participants then shared their stories with others in the group, additional dimensions arose, emotional, symbolic and often burdened with the weight of history that was only partially known to the others. The performance of showing and narrating these images was tactile and physical as well as visual. The workshop participants became aware of this complexity, but also experienced the constraints of the image, wanting it to do more. José Luis described this challenge as follows:

*Every moment, every second, things are happening and changing and I wanted to capture that change, and that's a challenge for me to capture all those things that are moving. With a word that has no size or shape, you can tell a lot, but in theory with an image, you can do more than with one word and I think it is possible to use the image to communicate these complex things that happen.*

Initially, this meant affirming a personal vision and an individual story, generated by the images they had made. As a second step, some of the photographs and stories were then connected to a broader collective history of the community.

The relationship between the individual and the collective is a common feature of digital storytelling, and accounts for much of the power in these stories. By highlighting and situating the individual's experience, one that is understood and to some extent shared by others in the group, these photographs supported a deepened reflection on both commonality and difference. The power of the photographs became dialogic, in the same way that memory works, as Oliver Sacks has noted, arising 'not only from direct experience but from the intercourse of many minds.'<sup>656</sup>

There are of course other forms of interventionist practices – video, theater, music, painting – that might have had a similar impact. It is

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<sup>655</sup> This is consistent with Nyboe and Drotner's investigations of digital narration and aesthetics among children and young people (L Nyboe and K Drotner, 'Identity, aesthetics and digital narration' in Knutby (ed.), p. 110).

<sup>656</sup> O Sacks, 'Speak Memory', *New York Review of Books* 21 February 2013, p. 21.

admittedly difficult to distinguish which dialogic forms of shared experience can be traced specifically to the intertwined practices of taking, sequencing, talking about and looking at photographs. Nevertheless, we would argue that the photograph, as a still and framed image of a scene, provides a unique opportunity to see again or 're-view' that scene, a re-viewing which can involve various levels of reflexion. By visually 'stopping' the moment when it was made, the photograph externalizes the situated performance of photography and the experiences it represents, opening the image and its context (in this case including other photographs in a series and an oral narration) to additional interpretations. Externalizing the experience can also be a bridge to letting go, as we saw in José's story of his migration and return. Narrating the stories revealed their commonality and the shared cultural knowledge that was the foundation of many of the photographs. Because of the social and political history of the town, migration is a frequent theme in the stories; crossing borders, the consequences of leaving home and returning are sedimented into the collective experience of this community. Other borders were also crossed during these few days, for example between the Talleres Comunitarios and community residents with no previous experience of the Talleres. The workshops in transmedial storytelling seemed to provide a framework that actualized other trans- and intercultural experiences that are embedded in the culture of Zegache with its multiple indigenous heritage and syncretic religious practice, and also in the Talleres Comunitarios with its frequent contact with artists from elsewhere.

The value of old photographs, as repositories of personal histories and memories, also became evident. Personal images of the past acquired new dimensions and depth as they were incorporated into contemporary histories. In some cases, the photographs became almost too powerful, embodying a memory or conflict that overwhelmed the narrator, as we saw in José's story of his mother's illness and in Juana's exclusion of her parent's photograph. In this way photographs functioned as tools to negotiate with difficult parts of the past. Looking through the small collection of old photographs together, the discussion followed a parallel course; as difficult and conflicting events from the past emerged, the photographs provided a means to open the histories to renegotiation and reinterpretation in light of the participants' shared knowledge and experience. From this, the participants realized the power – and also the ephemerality – of old photographs. Faced with the rapidly disintegrating pictures of the church, and the fragility of these few surviving photographs of their grandparents, for example, they spoke of the value and importance of an archive, in order to retain these histories of Zegache.

This importance to local knowledge and history also had larger, even global dimensions. Participants from both groups were able to reflect on the value of their visual stories beyond the immediate community, to people from elsewhere who would be interested in the culture and history of Zegache, and in 'how we live here' as Laura said. They felt it was important

that these pictures and stories be preserved and shown to others. The sense of pride in their heritage and their interest in showing it to others was evident - a consequence of digital media and its transmedial potential. Several of the children mentioned, for example, places in other parts of the world that they would like to share their stories with. They understood the digital interface as a network that offers the possibility of sharing their photographs and stories with an audience from afar. The reflexive power of photography in this context revealed the image as multidimensional, beyond visual representation, encompassing both individual and collective experiences of the continuities and ephemerality of time and place.

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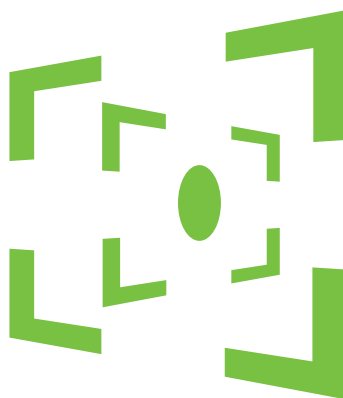
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