

# GLOBAL PHOTOGRAPHY

## A CRITICAL HISTORY

Erina Duganne, Heather Diack, Terri Weissman



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*A Critical History*

**ERINA DUGANNE  
HEATHER DIACK  
TERRI WEISSMAN**



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# INTRODUCTION

There are many ways to learn about photography's histories. One method is simply to look at images—lots of them—in places like museums, galleries, books, or on social media platforms. Written histories of the medium, such as this one, provide another. Yet as knowledge about the geographic scope of photography's past expands and as an increasing number of disciplines begin to incorporate aspects of photography's histories into their own methods of understanding the world, how such a written history should look or be organized becomes a complex and political question. No single text can address all aspects of photography's rich history, but to us what feels essential is an investigative approach that is at once capacious in scope, critical in its specificity, and aware of its own limitations. With this need in mind, we have organized *Global Photography: A Critical History* around a set of analytical framings that encompass a variety of historical contexts, a diversity of locations, and a plurality of producers. By widening—geographically and conceptually—historical points of reference and contemporary points of entry, our book takes a critical approach to the multivalent practices and discourses that compose photography's histories across time and space.

Teaching introductory surveys on the history of photography to undergraduate students can present unique pedagogical challenges. If one elects to use a textbook, Mary Warner Marien's *Photography: A Cultural History* (currently in its 4th edition) is a popular choice, and her chronologically structured survey offers a broad overview of photography's varied and complicated histories. However, when classes are populated by photography, studio art, and design majors, all of whom tend to identify more readily with contemporary uses of the medium, teleological models that place such examples at the end of the book can alienate students who long for discussion organized around more current practices. Moreover, the separation of the contemporary from the historical results in a relevance gap: chronological surveys too easily lose sight of how historical antecedents inform and relate to contemporary questions, approaches, and practices. Naomi Rosenblum's *A World History of Photography* (in its 5th edition) presents many of the same drawbacks as Marien's text. Though admirably international in scope, and with a new section devoted to photography at the start of the twenty-first century, the book's structure nonetheless remains solidly linear and thus the pedagogical challenges posed by a chronological model remain as well. Additionally, chronologically organized texts tend to emphasize completeness over criticality, and even though we know comprehensiveness is impossible, the structure of a teleological survey with its discrete and contained bits of information make the reader feel a sense of completeness.

*Global Photography* addresses the problems inherent to exhaustive chronological studies in a number of ways. To begin with, rather than isolate international contemporary photographic practices from their historical pasts, we consider the two in relation to each other so as to bring out important and often overlooked interconnections and convergences. This approach aligns with a significant shift in teaching survey courses more generally. Over the past twenty years, a re-evaluation of the traditional survey course has been taking place in disciplines ranging from art history to American studies, and from design



history to the history of cinema.<sup>1</sup> For many, the teleological chronology, upon which many of these surveys is based, has become an outdated resource. One solution to this problem is to organize the survey thematically. Such an approach, in fact, has become a new standard for teaching the history of photography, with Liz Wells's *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (also currently in its 4th edition) as a leading model. Yet, despite the relevance and importance of Wells's edited survey, its focus on primarily U.S. and Euro-centric examples marginalizes global perspectives, thereby situating artists and projects from countries in the Global South (when mentioned at all) as ancillary to the mainstream.

More recently, scholars have begun a more explicit questioning of Euro-centric preconceptions surrounding photography's history. Photographer and historian Boris Kossoy and Latin American scholar Natalia Brizuela, for instance, have both sought to reframe photography's frequently recited Euro-centric origin story by turning to the groundbreaking photographic experiments that Hercule Florence conducted in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1833, independent of those of Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, and William Henry Fox Talbot in Europe.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, American studies scholar Sissy Helff and historian Stefanie Michel's edited collection, *Global Photographies: Memories—History—Archives* (2018), challenges conventional and normative narratives of the medium's history, particularly through their assertion that "Photography never belonged solely to the West nor was the idea of creating a likeness of a thing or person an exclusively western or modern notion."<sup>3</sup> *Global Photography* adds to this "global turn," and seeks to expand on what this new history might look like. We hope the chapters that follow here will continue to open the field, offering a myriad of case studies, rather than an exhaustive world history, that testify to the instability of, and unexpected possibilities within, the history of photography more broadly.

Admittedly, we recognize certain fundamental limitations to our positions as scholars of art history and visual studies writing from the perspective of the Global North. Scholarship on photography's global histories has grown in recent decades, yet as art historian Gael Newton points out, practical issues, including funding for travel, means that many scholars must nonetheless "rely heavily on biographies, collections and publications accessible in Euroamerica."<sup>4</sup> To contend with this constraint, some argue that a geographical emphasis on specific areas allows for greater cross-cultural understanding of photography's histories. The many geographically delineated histories of photography recently published, especially by Reaktion Books, which focus on a continent or country, are prime examples of this model.<sup>5</sup>

We understand the value of such studies, particularly after experiencing various geographic restrictions in our own research and writing. For instance, while it was relatively easy to find contemporary global examples to include in our chapters, we had more difficulty locating English language resources on international historical figures. Furthermore, our linguistic limitations threw into relief the inevitable concern one encounters when taking a global approach to history writing: losing specificity within the larger whole, or not dealing with cultural difference in as much depth as it requires. Aware of these drawbacks, we avoid claims to universalism and further believe, as Mark Miller Graham argued over twenty years ago in relation to the future of the art history survey, that we art historians should "stop fetishizing completeness."<sup>6</sup> For this reason, we adopt a thematic organization in which, through a series of critical framings, we connect past and present within various global contexts. The chapters in our volume also reference but do not claim the superiority of so-called canonical figures and "important" artworks often found in teleological surveys of photography's history. We believe this innovative and inclusive approach is more relevant and exciting to current students.

At the same time, we recognize that a thematic model is not everyone's preferred approach for teaching the history of photography. To those who continue to employ—for any number of reasons—a chronological approach, *Global Photography* still offers useful insights and ways for understanding how that knowledge might be deployed or organized. Our chapters, and even sub-chapters, while integrated into the larger framework of the book, can easily be taken apart and used as assigned readings in both lower level and upper level classes in art history, studio art, art education, and design, among other disciplines. The target audience for the book is undergraduate students, yet our emphasis on criticality should likewise appeal to graduate students as well as scholars interested in thinking about the global possibilities of photography's diverse and complicated histories.

It is important to note that the field we refer to as “global” photography is distinct from, though related to, globalization. These terms are often taken as synonymous. *Global Photography* seeks to problematize those assumptions. For instance, photography historian David Bate has convincingly argued that globalization “offers a new paradigm for thinking about photography,”<sup>7</sup> and he has offered a compelling account of how the global circulation of photographs affects meaning. But the flow of pictures across international borders forms only one facet of our inquiry into the global status of photography. Whereas globalization refers primarily to the interconnectedness of the world's economies, the “global” turn in art emerged after many decades of postcolonial approaches to art history and visual culture. The “global” method in art history, as for us, is preoccupied foremost with decolonizing or moving away from monolithic timelines and narratives.<sup>8</sup> It “requires,” as photography theorist Ariella Azoulay explains, “one to abandon the imperial linear temporality and the way it separates tenses: past, present, and future,”<sup>9</sup> and instead find ways to remap and reimagine the wider field of art.

This reorientation, however, does not mean that we disregard how photographs are made at specific times and places by practitioners who identify themselves in terms of particular nations and regions. Martinique-born, postcolonial poet and theoretician Édouard Glissant's conception of “globality,” and the crucial need to recognize difference among cultures in spite of being drawn into ever closer relations, provides a helpful model in this regard. For Glissant, globality marks a world that conceives of itself as “multiple and single,” with responsibilities to “face the density (opacity) of the other.”<sup>10</sup> This mode of interrelationships or, as photography historian Tanya Sheehan significantly writes, “the challenges of bringing into dialogue the global and local, the national and transnational, majorities and minorities, cultural identity and cultural difference,”<sup>11</sup> undergirds the project of *Global Photography*.

Our book is organized into six thematic units: Realisms, Evidence, Ethics, Art, Collections, and the Expanded field. The themes correspond to issues, genres, and approaches that we understand to have global relevance both today and in the past.

## Realisms

Photography's presumed indexicality forms the framework for the chapters in the unit on Realisms. Though scholars have long debated this characteristic of photography, what photography's indexicality in general implies is that the medium holds not only a similarity with or a resemblance to what it depicts—its referent—but is also said to have been directly caused by this referent and thereby could not exist without it. The chapters in this unit seek to destabilize and complicate this causal relationship between a photograph and its referent through an exploration of the medium's abstract and staged qualities.

## Evidence

This portion of the text builds on the insights of the Realism unit, in that it embraces the idea of representational instability. Here, however, this instability is talked about in relation to how artists mobilize photographic images (because of their indexical nature) to make arguments about the world around them. Paradoxically, part of this process involves breaking down photographs to show how histories, conflicts, and ideologies can be embedded within seemingly neutral views of people and land. The chapters in this unit thus address what artist and critic Hito Steyerl calls the “paradox of truth”<sup>12</sup>—that is, the challenge to understand photographic images as pictures that simultaneously provide historical truth and are manipulatable and opaque.

## Ethics

The unit on ethics considers the ways that photographs propose a moral encounter with the viewer. Specifically, the chapters in this unit explore the politics of representation and conflict photography through questions concerning the subjective dimensions of objectivity and the difficulty of capturing a “truthful” image. The role of photography in bearing witness and making visible is critically deliberated here, especially within situations characterized by crisis and suffering. The chapters in this unit reject the view of documentary photography as neutral and instead encourage ethical questions regarding how (and for whom) particular subjects are framed and viewed.

## Art

Of course, one of the key discourses of photography is art. As such, this unit looks at how aesthetic practices and considerations distinguish themselves (or not) from other discourses such as science, reportage, and documentary. By dealing with the theme and strategy of appropriation in art practices that use photography, across several time periods and locations, as well as thinking deeply about form as both the material and subject of photography, these chapters tackle how photography simultaneously troubles and identifies as art.

## Collections

Because of their reproducibility, photographs function not only as objects to be collected but also as a means to collect objects in the world. The chapters in this unit therefore take up the subject of the collections history of photographs and by extension their history as collected objects. To explore these dual functions of photography, each chapter highlights two distinct institutional sites of photographic collections and collecting: museums and archives. The chapters come together in their inclusion of photographers, curators, and exhibitions, both contemporary and historical, which engage with and raise questions around photography’s broader collections history.

## Expanded field

The photographic image operates in multiples fields, including art, anthropology, science, medicine, law, film, and fashion, to name only a few. Such multiplicity has been a part of photography identity (even if sometimes suppressed) since its “invention” in 1839 when Daguerre presented his daguerreotype process to a joint session of the Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Art in Paris, France. This unit investigates photography’s discursive promiscuity and inherent multiplicity by looking at two areas—fashion and cinema—that intersect with discussions of art photography but are often left out of traditional accounts. The chapters here, then, challenge photography’s accepted boundaries, in formal as well as social terms. How, for instance, does the relationship between still and moving images disrupt photography’s temporal ordering? Or, how does fashion photography push at the edges of acceptable cultural expression?

Overlaps between subsections and themes recur usefully throughout the book. Photography’s assumed realism, for instance, is a thread that runs across many of the chapters. And, though “art” headlines just one thematic unit, the featured examples in the book are predominantly art photography. Likewise, while there is no dedicated thematic unit on either photography’s temporality or materiality, these characteristics of the medium are taken up in many of the chapters in the book, including “Description and abstraction” and “Photography and the cinematic.” We see such overlap as a strength in that such layering encourages readers to think more holistically about contemporary photographic practices and their multifaceted relationships to the past.

Each of the twelve chapters examines a diverse group of photographers working at varying points in their careers, including well-known historical and contemporary figures and younger emerging artists. This means that many of the photographers we include are canonical, artists whose work is widely known and generally considered influential. At the same time, we have employed other standards for selecting artists, such as geographic location and critical engagement with the themes covered in the book. We find such criteria to be as important as prominence or validation through the art market because our book seeks to contribute to the construction of a more diverse and genuinely global history of photography than currently exists. Perhaps most importantly, however, we engage fewer photographers than most other introductory history of photography texts. We made this decision intentionally. Our choice of work allows us to demonstrate, especially to student readers, the practice and importance of looking critically, and the merits of placing their own art-making practices in historical and global terms. Our examples, then, are not intended to be either all-inclusive or comprehensive. Instead, they are designed to provide a flexible structure in which salient themes can be used in terms of the photographers we consider or with others. In so doing, our book provides a much needed historical, methodological, as well as practical model for readers.

The number of scholars and critics writing about photography has grown exponentially in the past decade and a half. We have attempted to incorporate some of these newer thinkers into the chapter narratives while also referencing more established historical and theoretical writings that remain relevant to the field. Still, there are many voices missing. In order to reflect some of the diversity of these more recent approaches, while maintaining a coherent overall narrative, each chapter of the book also includes a boxed focus study designed to highlight a new area of research or form of practice around the globe. These focus studies, which consist of short interviews, curatorial statements, and brief reflections written by prominent and emerging scholars and critics, but also photographers, serve to integrate the discussion of photography’s history and critical voices of its practice in a manner unlike other textbooks. Additional

pedagogical features at the conclusion of each chapter further support our emphasis on critical looking. These include chapter summaries that ensure the book's contents and structure are accessible and meaningful for introductory survey courses, suggested discussion points, as well as further case studies and suggested further reading.

The field of photography studies continues to shift and expand. But with this forward momentum, there is always the risk of loss. Writing in 1940, shortly before his untimely death while escaping the Nazis, literary theorist Walter Benjamin penned a text questioning the integral and immanent connection between history and time. One well-known passage from this work, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," speaks directly to our project: "every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably."<sup>13</sup> In this quotation and throughout the essay, Benjamin understands time as radically fragmented and cautions that, without care, the past will "flit by," vanishing into the ether. The historian's task, for him, is thus to establish a relation between history's fragments and to safeguard against its disappearance. *Global Photography* likewise grapples with the threat of history's irretrievable disappearance by looking for the past's appearance in and relevance to the present. Our hope is that the pointed thematic issues selected across these pages will offer multiple viewpoints, provoke investigation, and spark reassessments of photography's vast history, as a means of propelling fresh-eyed and critically-engaged directions in current photography practice, research, and criticism. Our approach, in other words, is to situate the past in the present by searching for historical antecedents in today's contemporary image world. This method serves as a guardrail against forgetting: it is a way to keep historical knowledge forward-facing.

## Summary

- An accessible thematic overview designed for introductory and upper-level undergraduate photography majors but also suitable for other related majors, including art history, studio art, art education, and design, among others.
- Structured as required or recommended reading for semester-long undergraduate courses, its thematic organization also makes individual chapters and sub-chapters suitable for courses dealing with the particular subject areas of those chapters.
- Covers a broad range of international historical and contemporary photographers, including emerging practitioners, and positions contemporary photographic practices and issues in terms of relevant historical antecedents.
- In addition to the main chapter narrative and focus box, each chapter includes the following pedagogical features: chapter summary, discussion points, further case studies, and suggested further reading.

## Notes

- 1 See, for instance, Sarah A. Lichtman, "Reconsidering the History of Design Survey," *Journal of Design History* 22, no. 4 (2009): 341–51; Lendol Calder, "Uncoverage: Towards a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey," *Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (March 2006): 1358–70; Frank P. Tomasulo, "What Kind of Film History

- Do We Teach? The Introductory Survey Course as Pedagogical Opportunity,” *Cinema Journal* 41, no. 1 (Fall 2001); Bradford R. Collins, ed., “Rethinking the Introductory Art History Survey: A Practical, Somewhat Theoretical, and Inspirational Guide,” special issue, *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (Fall 1995).
- 2 See Boris Kossoy, *The Pioneering Photographic Work of Hercule Florence* (London: Routledge, 2018); and Natalia Brizuela, “Light Writing in the Tropics,” *Aperture* 215 (Summer 2014): 32–7.
  - 3 Stephanie Michels, “Re-framing Photography – Some Thoughts,” in Sissy Helff and Stefanie Michels (eds), *Global Photographies: Memory—History—Archives* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2018), 9.
  - 4 Gael Newton, “Other World Histories of Photography: The First Century of Photography in Asia,” in Moritz Neumüller (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Photography and Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 87.
  - 5 See, for instance, Karen Fraser, *Photography and Japan* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011); Justin Carville, *Photography and Ireland* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011); and Andrés Mario Zervigón, *Photography and Germany* (London: Reaktion Books, 2017).
  - 6 Mark Miller Graham, “The Future of Art History and the Undoing of the Survey,” *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 33.
  - 7 David Bate, *Photography: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 189–90.
  - 8 See, for example, Jill H. Casid and Aruna D’Souza, eds., *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn* (Williamstown, MA, and New Haven, CT: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute and Yale University Press, 2014).
  - 9 Ariella Azoulay, “Unlearning Images of Destruction,” Foto Museum, September 17, 2018, [https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/explore/still-searching/articles/155283\\_unlearning\\_images\\_of\\_destruction](https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/explore/still-searching/articles/155283_unlearning_images_of_destruction).
  - 10 Édouard Glissant, *L’intention poétique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 24.
  - 11 Tanya Sheehan, “Introduction: Questions of Difference,” in *Photography, History, Difference* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2015), 6.
  - 12 Hito Steyerl, “Documentarism as Politics of Truth,” trans. Aileen Derieg, *transversal* (May 2003), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1003/steyerl2/en>. See also, Hito Steyerl, “Documentary Uncertainty,” *A Prior* 15 (2007), <http://re-visiones.net/anteriores/spip.php%3Farticle37.html>.
  - 13 Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in Hannah Arendt (ed.) and Harry Zohn (trans.), *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 255.

## Selected further reading

- Bate, David. *Photography: The Key Concepts*. 2nd edition. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.
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# PART ONE

# REALISMS

On March 31, 2003, nearly two weeks into the start of the Iraq War, staff photographer **Brian Walski** (b. 1958) sent a photograph to his editor at the *Los Angeles Times* in which an armed British soldier signals a group of Iraqi civilians to take cover. The following day, after the image circulated widely on the front page of the *Times* as well as in numerous other newspapers, Walski, a staff photographer since 1998, was fired. The reason for Walski's dismissal was the discovery of a duplication indicating that he had used a computer to combine elements from two photographs, taken moments apart, in order to improve his composition. Since *Times* policy forbids modifying the content of a news photograph, Walski's firing generated much discussion over the purported objectivity and truthfulness of photojournalism. We turn to this example, however, not to weigh in on the ethics (a theme taken up in a later unit) of Walski's act of manipulation but rather to call attention to photography's presumed indexicality.

Walski's firing results in part from assumptions around photography's so-called **indexical** relationship to the real. Unlike handmade images, which are often considered to be created not found, many believe photographs provide a record or trace of what was directly in front of the camera at a particular time and place. This means that while a painter or illustrator may invent a composition from her or his imagination, a photographer, as Francis Frith famously said in the mid-nineteenth century, "can only appreciate the difficulty of getting a view satisfactorily into the camera: foregrounds are especially perverse; distance too near or too far; the falling away of ground; the intervention of some brick wall or other commonplace object, which an artist would simply *omit*."<sup>1</sup> Photography, in other words, shares what some—borrowing the terminology of philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce—call an indexical relationship to the real. Though scholars have long debated this characteristic and Peirce's contribution to it, what photography's indexicality in general implies is that the medium holds not only a similarity with or a resemblance to what it depicts—otherwise known as its **referent**—but is also said to have been directly caused by this referent and thereby could not exist without it. The following two chapters seek to destabilize and complicate this causal relationship between a photograph and its referent through an exploration of the medium's abstract and staged qualities.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Francis Frith, "Introduction," in *Egypt and Palestine Photographed and Described*, vol. 1 (London: J.S. Virtue, 1858–9), n.p.





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# 1

## DESCRIPTION AND ABSTRACTION

In his essay “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs,” written between 1893 and 1910, Charles Sanders Peirce defines an “index” as a sign that points to an actual thing in the way that a bullet-hole designates the passing of a bullet. Peirce explains, “a piece of mould with a bullet-hole in it as a sign for a shot; for without the shot there would have been no hole; but there is a hole there, whether anybody has the sense to attribute it to a shot or not.”<sup>1</sup> This causal relationship between signs and their referents is especially evident in photographs known as **photograms**. The photogram is a camera-less, negative-less photographic process in which an object is often, though not always, placed directly onto light-sensitive material and exposed to light. The image that results is thus an “index” of the objects placed in contact with the light-sensitive material. Despite this indexicality, photograms, paradoxically, tend not to hold the same level of resemblance to what they depict as other forms of photography, especially those taken with a camera. This means that, though photograms are produced in direct contact with their referents, they hold both a fidelity to and, more significantly, a distance from observed reality. One can see this inconsistency in a photogram’s composition, which is made up of both white areas, where the light-sensitive material is covered by the objects, and dark regions, which have been exposed to light. Together these light and dark forms offer no surface details but only outlines and varying shades of grey that fluctuate according to the transparency of the objects with which they came into contact. It is this conflicting nature of the photogram—its ability to be at once real and abstract, evidentiary and evocative, literal and otherworldly—that is the subject of this chapter.

### Nature

Many trace the origins of photograms and other **camera-less photography** to the experimentations with light-sensitive materials that Thomas Wedgwood, Humphrey Davy, William Henry Fox Talbot, and John Herschel, among others, conducted in the first half of the nineteenth century. Though scholars now date these photographic investigations much earlier, and not exclusively to Europe, one consequence of these experimentations was the widespread use of the photogram in the nineteenth century for botanical book illustration. Until this point, the recording of empirical data through drawing had played a key role in scientific discovery. But, as this form of rendering “came to be seen,” as curator Catherine de Zegher notes, “more and more as too personal, idealized, and inaccurate,” other forms of representation, “in which nature seemed to draw itself,”<sup>2</sup> began to be used. These included the photogram, or what Talbot called “photogenic drawings.” In his book *The Pencil of Nature*, published in six installments between 1844 and 1846, Talbot promoted photogenic drawings as “impressed by Nature’s hand” and “executed without any aid whatever from the artist’s pencil.”<sup>3</sup> It was this emphasis on the photogram’s indexicality— or ability to serve as a physical trace of the natural world—that rendered it a preferred medium within

botanical illustration. Still, while the photogram was linked to empirical study during the nineteenth century, its lack of detail, particularity, and exactitude—or immateriality—kept it equally bound to the world of art and imagination. It is this paradoxical position that the photogram occupied between science and art in the nineteenth century that continues to inform its use today in contemporary art practices.

Since 2011, **Eva-Fiore Kovacovsky** (b. 1980) has collected leaves perforated by ravenous caterpillars as part of her ongoing series *Fotogramme*. But, unlike nineteenth-century practitioners who would rest their botanical specimens on top of a sensitized surface and then expose them to direct sunlight, Kovacovsky places her leaves in the negative holder of an enlarger and then exposes them in an analog color darkroom. To manipulate the formal outcomes of these images even further, Kovacovsky also prints multiple exposures of the holed leaves, both enlarged and cropped, on the same piece of paper and uses filters to either add or subtract color in between exposures. Through this printing process, which takes place completely in the dark, Kovacovsky relies on chance and instinct to transform these botanical specimens into fantastical shapes and patterns that are beautiful, whimsical, and, even, hallucinogenic. In so doing, she both upholds photography's indexical capacity and undermines expectations about its visual outcome, which is dictated as much by her performative actions in the darkroom as by the physicality of the leaves themselves. To further heighten such tensions within her images, for the 2014 exhibition *Midsummer Night*, organized by artist Sara van der Heide, Kovacovsky hung her photograms within a lush botanical garden that belongs to Vrije Universiteit in the Netherland's capital of Amsterdam (see Fig. 1.1). Through this act of staging her photograms outdoors amongst actual vegetation, instead of on the customary white walls of a gallery or museum, Kovacovsky encouraged viewers to contemplate the formal structures that make up the natural world in ways that are associative, expansive, and unfamiliar.

The natural world, especially water, is also the subject of the camera-less photography of **Susan Derges** (b. 1955). A number of scholars have discussed Derges's photograms in relation to science. They have noted, for instance, how her interest in ideas such as the visualization of sound waves and the life cycle of frogs share parallels with scientific investigation. But, while Derges has clearly adopted the techniques of empirical study in her practice, her attention to the natural world is informed as much by aesthetics and philosophy as by science. In the late 1990s, after producing works largely in a studio-laboratory environment, Derges began to work directly in nature through her series the *River Taw* (1997–8). For this series of photograms, Derges visited the River Taw, which runs through Dartmoor in Devon, England, near where she has lived since 1992. After examining the river during different seasons and weather conditions, Derges sought to document its ebb and flow. To accomplish this aim, she took large sheets of colored photographic paper out at night in an aluminum tray, which protected it from light, and then submerged the tray just below the water's surface. Using a flashlight, she then exposed the paper to light, capturing imprints upon the surface of the paper of the varied formal patterns of the water's movements—waves, ripples, and drops—which, at times, are overlain with more solid organic shapes made up of floating leaves and branches overhanging the water.

The resultant images mesmerize in their evocative documentation of the unseen, macrocosmic forces of water's movement. To further engage viewers with these hidden energies, Derges prints her photograms life-sized (roughly 5 x 2 feet), a format that recalls Japanese scroll painting, which Derges studied alongside Zen philosophy when she lived in Japan from 1981 to 1986. While Japanese aesthetics and philosophy have clearly influenced the scroll-like design of Derges's photograms, the severe verticality of these images responds as well to Derges's ongoing interest in natural theology. According to curator Martin Barnes, Theodor Schwenk's 1965 book, *Sensitive Chaos: The Creation of Flowing Forms in*



**Figure 1.1** Eva-Fiore Kovacovsky, *Fotogramm/Würmer*, 2013. From *Midsummer Night* by Sara van der Heide in conjunction with *If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution*, VU Hortus Botanicus Amsterdam, 2014. © Eva-Fiore Kovacovsky. Courtesy of the artist.

*Water and Air*, has been critical to Derges's thinking about water's movement. In this book, Schwenk connects the forms of water's ebb and flow to the structures of such things as the bones of the human body, the flight of birds, and the patterns of the weather to argue that there are fundamental, unseen forces that unite all natural and living things. Derges uses her series of river photograms to make a similar set of associations. Through these human-sized camera-less images, she seeks to dissolve the boundaries between science and aesthetics as well as science and spirituality and thereby encourage viewers to begin to understand how everything and everyone in nature is connected.

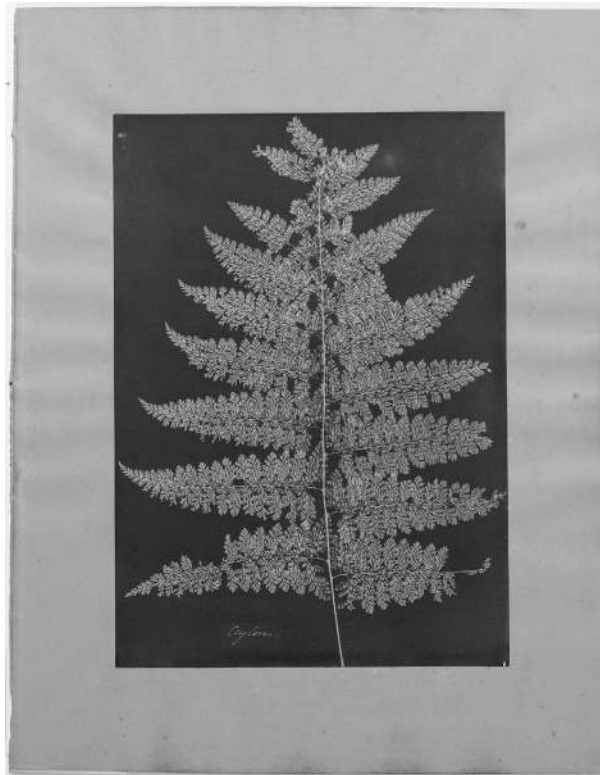
Like Derges, **Kunié Sugiura** (b. 1942) has also been influenced by Japanese aesthetics and philosophy. But for Sugiura, this inspiration is distinctly personal. Born in Nagoya, Japan, Sugiura moved to the United States in 1963 to study photography at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). At SAIC as well as in New York City, where she moved after graduating, Sugiura took up an experimental practice whose blurring of the distinctions between photography and painting as well as realism and abstraction came about in part through her interest in Eastern aesthetics. "In Asian art," Sugiura explains, "there has always been a co-existence of the real and the abstract; for example, flowers and birds are rendered realistically in a simplified space, painted in one color. It is a partial realism, pointing out the ephemerality of living."<sup>4</sup> This tension between the representational and the abstract, or a "partial realism,"

is evident in some of the very first images that she made. For these works, Sugiura brushed emulsion onto raw canvas in the darkroom, and then used an enlarger to expose the canvas to her own photographs depicting close-up patterns, mostly from nature, of tree bark, pebbles, leaves, and rocks. Printed large-scale and sometimes embellished with acrylic and pencil, these formalist yet surreal images are hybrids of drawing, painting, and photography.

In 1981, while attempting to make her practice more “dynamic,” Sugiura turned to the photogram technique, which she continues to employ today. As in her previous photographs, she uses the photogram process to create painterly works that are at once real and abstract as well as grounded in both Eastern and Western aesthetics. In *Compounds. A. Positive*, from 1997, Sugiura “draws” a composition using flowers and string onto light-sensitive paper. Next, she exposes the objects to light while, at the same time, disrupting the paper’s uniform development by pouring hot water over randomly selected areas. This action creates a tension between the relative clarity of the flowers and string and the immateriality of the background. Suspended in a kind of nebulous ether, the stringed flowers, whose forms are both opaque and translucent, appear to dissolve within the background at the same time they emanate from it. Evoking notions of both the infinite and finite, the limitless and the bound, Sugiura uses these photograms of the natural world to suggest not competing but a single, unified vision.

The interplay between realism and abstraction is also central to the cyanotypes of **Anna Atkins** (1799–1871). Beginning in 1843, Atkins, an amateur botanist, sought to make precise renderings of botanical specimens, including algae, seaweed, and ferns, among others. But though she was an outstanding draftsman who had previously made extensive hand-drawn studies of shells for an English translation of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s 1799 essays on conchology, she chose the **cyanotype** process. Developed by John Herschel in 1842, the cyanotype is a printing process in which a solution of iron salts is applied to light-sensitive material, which in turn is exposed to sunlight in contact with the plant specimen. The resultant image is a contact print or photogram, in Parisian Blue, which is then fixed by washing it in water (see Fig. 1.2). For Atkins, the cyanotype process was ideal “not only because it was relatively easy and archivally permanent,” as art historian Carol Armstrong explains, but also because it “emphasized over and over again the one-to-one, specimen-to-specimen relationship to the ‘real thing.’”<sup>5</sup> But while the indexicality of the photogram denoted its primary scientific value, even Atkins herself could not resist calling the cyanotype process “beautiful.” This observation was echoed by Atkins’s contemporary, Robert Hunt, who called “the effect” of her algae photograms “exceeding pleasing.”<sup>6</sup> Amplified by the blue background of the cyanotype process, Atkins’s photograms, much like the images of Kovacovsky, Derges, and Sugiura, resonate at once as scientific and aesthetic, naturalistic and strange. And, though produced as part of a systematic study of botany, one might even go so far as to call these phantasmagoria images abstract.

Within art history, the term **abstract** is generally used to denote artworks not intended to imitate observed reality. Often these works are referred to as non-objective. In painting, moreover, abstraction frequently refers to a reduction or a taking away of subject matter so as to find the essence of the medium, like paint on canvas. Working in the United States in the 1960s, artist Ad Reinhardt attempted to produce what he described as “a pure, abstract, non-objective, timeless, spaceless, changeless, relationless, disinterested painting—an object that is self-conscious (no unconsciousness), ideal, transcendent, aware of no thing but art.”<sup>7</sup> He called these works his “ultimate paintings,” since they represented his effort to reduce his paintings down to their structural or material components. This effort by Reinhardt to produce a “non-objective,” “disinterested” painting is not how abstraction functions in the photograms discussed here. Instead, it is more useful to think about abstraction in these camera-



**Figure 1.2** Anna Atkins, *Ceylon/Fern*, 1854. Digital image courtesy of Getty's Open Content Program.

less images, as curator Lyle Rexer argues, as an opening up instead of as a reduction or taking away. They are a form of abstraction, in other words, that builds upon and subverts photography's realism—or indexicality—and thereby offers a different way of seeing the world.

## The body

Photography's **realism**, or its ability to describe the world in a seemingly objective, accurate, and truthful manner, has made it an especially popular medium for recording the exterior features of the human body (a theme we will return to in Chapter 3). In fact, during the nineteenth century, one of the primary uses of photography was portraiture. Yet, parallel with this attention to outward appearance, since its beginnings, photography, and most especially camera-less photography, has also been used to represent the unseen. Nineteenth-century spirit photography, in which so-called medium-photographers turned to camera-less techniques to render what remains invisible to the naked eye, is but one example of these early practices. This dual capacity of photography—its evidentiary and evocative abilities—continues to preoccupy artists today. Many of the photograms of **Farrah Karapetian** (b. 1978) are based on actual political subjects: undocumented immigrants, protestors, riot police, and U.S. army veterans, to name a few. But rather than produce documentary images or even portraits of these subjects, Karapetian attempts to render



something more nebulous: their lived experiences and memories. To recreate these living histories, Karapetian turns to her friends, models, as well as, at times, the political subjects themselves, whom she orchestrates in the darkroom, often wearing costumes and holding props that she has cast out of resin. Through these performative life-size tableaux, which are at once traces and impressions, Karapetian explores but also complicates photography's, and especially news photography's, presumed indexicality and, by extension, its truthfulness, accuracy, and objectivity.

*Riot Police*, from 2011, is a product of Karapetian's long-standing fascination with the global uprisings, often referred to as the **Arab Spring**, which began in late 2010, first in Tunisia, then spread across North Africa and the Middle East (see Plate 1). For this five-panel work, which is based on an iconic *New York Times* photograph of police in Kyrgyzstan being stoned by protesters, Karapetian called on a group of her art world friends. Garbed in military gear and holding translucent shields that she manufactured out of resin, Karapetian instructed her subjects to recreate the gestures depicted in the news photograph. Next, she exposed these poses numerous times in the dark against light-sensitive paper so that her subjects's silhouetted bodies function more in terms of allusion and suggestion than as fact or document.

In conjunction with this image, whose larger than life size (8 x 13 feet) renders this historical event in markedly otherworldly terms, in 2011, Karapetian produced *Flyer Photograph*, an eight-part work based on a pamphlet distributed in Egypt prior to the fall of Prime Minister Hosni Mubarak. This flyer, which was initially distributed online as a PDF file, gave instructions about the objects and practices necessary to stage a successful protest. Karapetian learned about the document while interviewing Ahmed Maher, the Nobel Prize-nominated civil engineer and co-founder of the April 6 Youth Movement in Egypt. Maher is featured in one of the eight dyads that make up this expansive, life-size work, where he performs the dual role of protestor and riot policeman. To further act out the terms of the instructional guide, Karapetian also photogrammed objects—sneakers, sweatshirts, and spray cans, among others—listed in the flyer. To fabricate these objects, she cast them in resin so as to convey a sense of volume that would otherwise be missing if the objects were solid and opaque. As photograms, these semi-translucent objects take on the appearance of x-rays and thus further heighten the ethereal aspects of the work. Together these multiple layers of representation—the photographic, the sculptural, the performative, and the pictorial—destabilize long-standing assumptions about photography's inherent ability to objectively represent history and, by extension, civil unrest and, in so doing, encourage viewers to engage with these lived experiences in ways that are time-consuming, unfamiliar, and deeply evocative.

Like Karapetian, **Anne Ferran** (b. 1949) also uses camera-less photography to restage history. In 1998, Ferran accepted an artist-in-residence position at the Rouse Hill estate in Sydney, Australia, which had in its collection entire sets of undamaged nineteenth-century clothing that belonged to the successive families who lived in the house beginning in 1813. As part of her residency, Ferran decided to meticulously photogram all of the items in the house, beginning with the clothing. Daily, for a period of six months, Ferran unwrapped each piece of clothing, placed it on a photo-sensitive sheet of paper, and then exposed it to light. Printed as life-size and similar to the photogrammed objects in Karapetian's *Flyer Photograph*, these semi-translucent articles of clothing, which hover against the dark background of the paper, appear mystical, even phantasmagorical. Devoid of people, yet full of life, Ferran's photograms tenderly evoke the subjects to whom these clothes once belonged yet are now no longer living.

*Untitled* is part of the series *Longer than Life* (1997–9) that Ferran produced during her residency at the Rouse Hill estate (see Fig. 1.3). The subject of this image is a woman's bodice, but because of the translucency of the fabric, when Ferran photogrammed it, aspects of the garment, usually overlooked, were brought forth. These include overlapping patches to the underarms that provide evidence of its



**Figure 1.3** Anne Ferran, *Untitled* (1998) from the series *Longer than life*, 1997–9. Gelatin silver photogram, 75.9 x 103.6 cm (image and sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased with funds arranged by Loti Smorgon for Contemporary Australian Photography, 1999 (1999.387). © Anne Ferran/Copyright Agency. Licensed by DACS 2019.

long-term use value and forgotten female labor (a theme we take up in Chapter 3). Yet, while this image bears witness to the female bodies who wore as well as mended it, there is also something deeply melancholy about the work. Part of this quality has to do with the strangeness, even shimmering nature of this item of clothing, which is brought forth through the techniques of the photogram process and the way that Ferran arranges the garment with the arms spread out. These techniques produce an otherworldly quality that is further heightened by the fact that, though present through the photogram, Ferran's ethereal image of this nineteenth-century bodice conceals as much as it reveals. Photography historian Geoffrey Batchen elaborates: "Turned to an apparition, history is brought back to life, not as the truth of the past but as a ghostly presence that still haunts and entrances, today and forever."<sup>8</sup> Through these photograms, then, Ferran concerns herself not with documenting the lived histories of the owners of this clothing in any sort of factual or comprehensive manner. Instead, she uses the absence evoked through her images to suggest a past that is at once distant and ephemeral yet to which viewers in the present moment cannot help but long to recover.



Both Ferran and Karapetian turn to clothing to conjure absent bodies in their images. And, even though Karapetian's photograms also feature actual subjects, their clothing and movement largely obscure their genders. That is not the case for the *Körperfotogramms* (or whole-body photograms) of **Floris Neusüss** (b. 1937). When Neusüss first began to make these images in 1960, he had a nude female model lie down on a piece of light-sensitive paper. He then exposed the model to light so that, depending on the proximity of the body parts to the paper, the outlines of the figure vary from clear to blurry but nonetheless still register as female. Printed as life-sized, the female bodies in these images—which appear either as white figures on a black background, if standard paper was used, or as black figures on a white background, if auto-reversal paper was used—seem suspended or floating in a weightless ether, which has caused most to read them as detached not only from gravity but also from the reality of the world itself. But to what extent does the specificity of their gender complicate such readings? Can we read these traces of Neusüss's nude female bodies without also feeling voyeuristic or slightly unsettled? Are they somehow different than Yves Klein's contemporaneous *Anthropométries* (1960–1) for which he covered nude female models in blue paint and pulled them across the surface of the canvas?

Part of the answer to these questions hinges on photography's indexicality. The level to which the female models in these photograms can be detached from the **social construction** of gender depends in part on whether they read as real or not. Certainly, Neusüss has attempted to downplay their realness through his use of the dematerializing effects of the photogram process. His *Untitled (Körperfotogramm, Berlin)*, from 1962, for instance, literally offers itself as a trace of Neusüss's female model. At the same time, there is nothing in the picture that individualizes or personalizes her (see Fig. 1.4). Suspended within a white ground, the figure, rendered in black with her legs raised in what appears to be a fetal position, floats in space as if she has been born into a world unmoored from anything and everything that is known or knowable. Because of this perplexing sense of the enigmatic that haunts Neusüss's camera-less photographs, some have read them not as “photographic traces . . . but rather as the realization of visions.”<sup>9</sup> This metaphysical reading builds on the interplay between the evidentiary and evocative in Neusüss's photograms. Though these images are indices of the female body, their visualization of the human form is neither obvious nor clear but rather seems to be a product of the human imagination or, as has also been suggested, the human psyche.

The association between Neusüss's camera-less photographs and the unconscious finds visual support in the surrealist images of **Man Ray** (1890–1976), which Neusüss has cited as important influences. Although photograms flourished in the 1840s and 1850s, they were largely forgotten until the early years of the twentieth century when European avant-garde artists such as Christian Schad, László Moholy-Nagy, and Man Ray began to experiment with their visual possibilities. For Man Ray, much like his contemporaries Schad and Moholy-Nagy, what was most appealing about the photogram was its automatic nature. It did not require a lens or camera and thereby represented a certain freedom from more traditional art-making practices of the past. For Man Ray, this spontaneity, even instinctual potential, of the photogram also aligned it with Surrealist thought and practice.

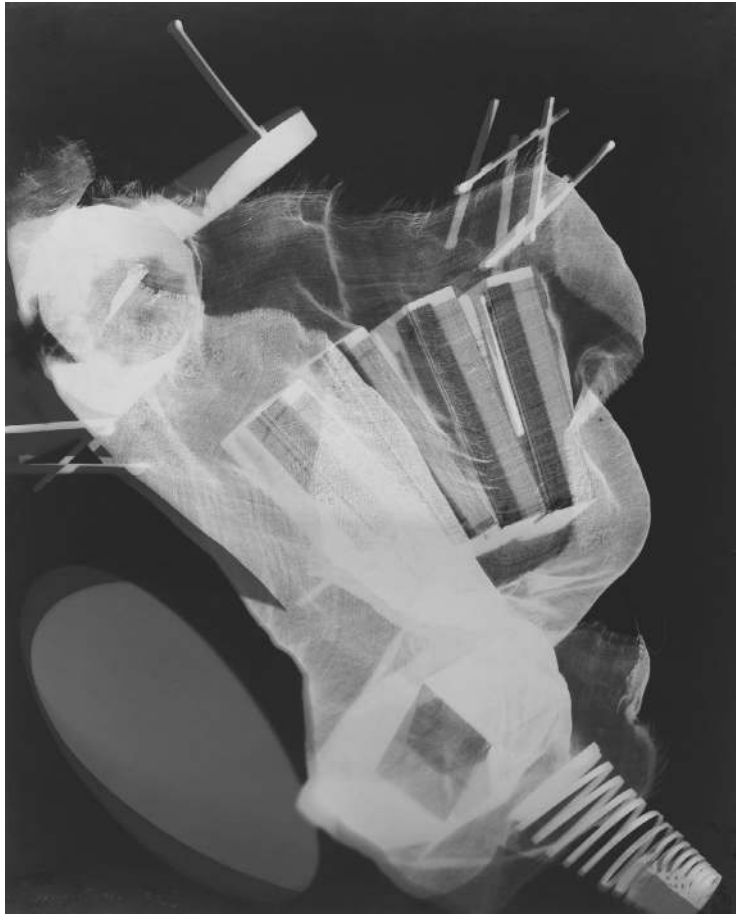
In his “First Manifesto of Surrealism,” written and published in 1924, poet André Breton defined **Surrealism** as “Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express . . . the actual functioning of thought . . . in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.”<sup>10</sup> For Breton, the aim of Surrealism was to help people gain complete access to their unconscious thoughts and thereby encourage them to discover a larger reality, or “surreality,” that existed beyond narrowly defined, rational notions of the world. One of the first artists that Breton claimed as part



**Figure 1.4** Floris Neusüss, *Untitled (Körperfotogramm, Berlin)*, 1962. © Floris Neusüss. Courtesy of Von Lintel Gallery, Los Angeles.

of this movement was Man Ray, who had emigrated to Paris from New York in 1921. It was in Paris that Man Ray supposedly “discovered” the photogram process, when he accidentally exposed objects sitting on photographic paper in his darkroom to light. Likening the process to a kind of automatic drawing with light—akin to the “automatic writing” of his Surrealist colleagues—Man Ray called these images rayographs, after his assumed name.

For Man Ray, what was most significant about the **rayograph**, his name for the photogram, was the manner in which it rendered ordinary objects, including the human body, ambiguous. In his *Untitled (Rayograph)*, from 1923, Man Ray transforms everyday objects—in this case, gauze, matchboxes, and a spiral—by placing them on light-sensitive paper in the darkroom, exposing them to light, and then repeating this process with additional objects and exposures (see Fig. 1.5). Through this technique, Man Ray emphasizes the enigmatic interplay of light, shadow, and form rather than the exact physical



**Figure 1.5** Man Ray, *Untitled (Rayograph) (Gauze, Match Boxes, and Spiral)*, 1923. Gelatin silver print, 29.5 × 23.8 cm (11 $\frac{5}{8}$  × 9 $\frac{3}{8}$  in.). © Man Ray TRUST/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2019. Courtesy of The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

characteristics of the objects in his composition. As a result, viewers are encouraged to read these otherwise banal items, which seem to hover detached in space and time—not unlike the figures in Neusüss's *Körperfotogramms*—in new, even uncanny, ways. For Man Ray, like the other artists discussed here, the photogram's importance depended on its ability to document the world at the same time it rendered it unfamiliar. Or, one could also say, returning again to Lyle Rexer, their interest in the photogram hinged on its ability to visualize “the paradox of unseen seeing.”<sup>11</sup>

## Process

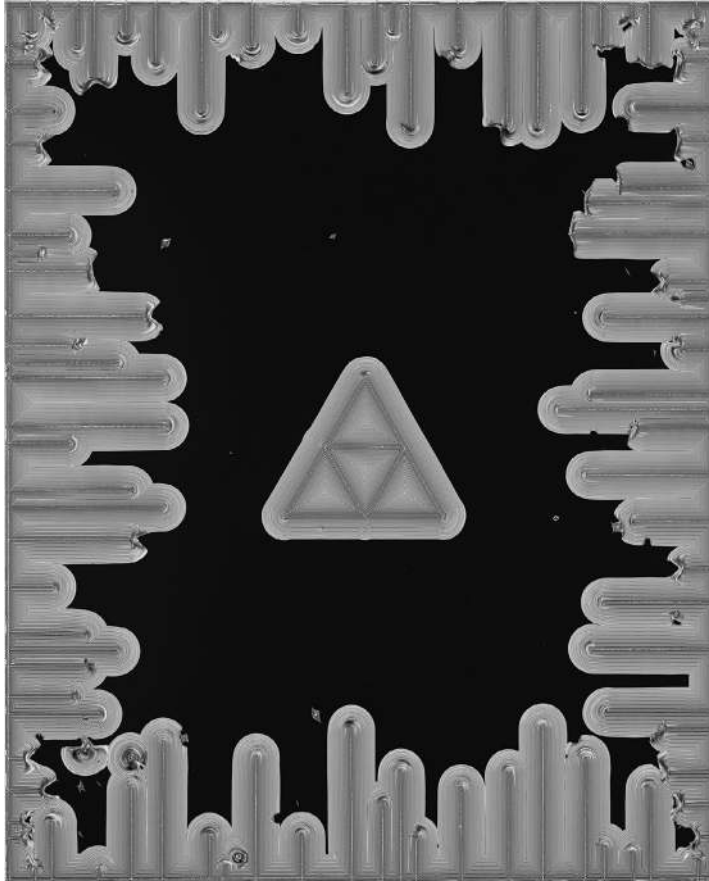
In the camera-less photographs discussed so far, an object has been necessary for their production, regardless of whether, in the case of photograms, that object is placed directly in contact with a light-

sensitive material or, for so-called **luminograms**, it is placed in between the light and photographic paper. It is also possible, however, to make camera-less photographs without an object per se by chemically treating the surface of the light-sensitive material or through the use of different light sources. In the late 1990s, **Wolfgang Tillmans** (b. 1968) produced two series of camera-less photographs using both of these processes. For his ongoing series *Silver*, begun in 1998, Tillmans passed photographic paper, at times unexposed and, at other times, exposed to various sources of colored light, through a photo-developing machine, which he either left dirty or cleaned to a certain point. Due to the remnants of water and leftover chemicals in the machine, when the paper passed through it, dirt and other chemical particles, particularly silver nitrate, settled on the paper's surface, where they produced streaks, scratches, dents, and deposits as well as altered the image's overall color. Because the accidental effects of the photographic paper passing through the photo-developing machine determined their visual appearances, the images are technically called chemigrams, or chemograms, as Tillmans likens them.

The **chemigram**—a form of camera-less, or more specifically lens-less, photography that combines the physics of painting (varnish, wax, oil) with the chemistry of photography (light-sensitive emulsion, developer, fixer)—is said to have been “discovered” by **Pierre Cordier** (b. 1933) in 1956 when he sent a handwritten note to a young German girl named Erika using nail polish on light-sensitive paper. Though this was not the first instance in which various chemicals—photo emulsion, fixer, and developer—had been painted onto photographic paper, Cordier was the first to actively develop and publicize its use; he is also credited with its naming. Cordier initially exhibited his chemigrams in 1958 as part of Otto Steinert's *Subjektive Fotografie*, a series of European exhibitions that sought to explore how photography might use techniques such as the close-up, blurring, solarization, and time exposure, among others, to reflect the inner psyche and personal emotions rather than document the reality of the exterior world. Cordier's chemigrams, in which he used physical and chemical actions and reactions taking place on the surface of his paper to draw viewers into imagined labyrinths of cosmic splendor, fit well within the aesthetic parameters of Steinert's *Subjektive Fotografie* (**subjective photography**) movement on view in his exhibitions.

Cordier produced chemigrams using several different methods that he has perfected through experimentation over time. The most basic includes applying—either pouring or brushing—photographic developer and fixer to gelatin-silver photographic paper, much like effects of watercolor. These images rely largely on the interplay between chance and control as the developer and fixer, the first of which creates dark areas, while the second produces lighter areas of spectral tones, interact with each other. In other works, he introduces additional materials such as varnish, wax, glue, oil, egg, and honey, what he calls “localizing materials,” which he applies to the photographic emulsion as a kind of protective surface onto which he then makes incisions and lines that react chemically or physically when dipped into the developer or fixer. In both cases, Cordier uses these physico-chemical techniques to produce hybrid works that function somewhere in between painting and photography.

Painting has served not only as an important influence on Cordier but also as the subject of his chemigrams. *Chemigram 7/5/82 II «Pauli Kleei Ad Marginem»*, from 1982, is inspired by Paul Klee's 1930 painting *Ad Marginem* (see Fig. 1.6). Cordier's chemigram transforms Klee's painting, in which a dark, sun-like form glowing in the center of the composition seems to attract various animal and botanical forms inhabiting the edges of the frame, in several ways. First, he renders the sun into a series of triangular shapes. Second, he morphs the creatures and foliage at the edge of Klee's composition into a series of curvilinear shapes that appear to grow out the framing edge, even as they disintegrate into the black void of the background. Despite these changes, however, Cordier's chemigram maintains the



**Figure 1.6** Pierre Cordier, *Chemigran 7/5/82 II «Pauli Kleei Ad Marginem»*, 1982. © Pierre Cordier. Courtesy of the artist.

overall structure of Klee's work, thus suggesting their shared interest in exploring ideas around creation and destruction, death and rebirth. Moreover, though Cordier's chemigrams may lack the referent to which the other works in this chapter depend, like the other artists discussed here, his use of this physico-chemical process pushes the boundaries of the real in substantial and innovative ways.

While Cordier positions himself and the chemigram process at the intersection of painting and photography, Wolfgang Tillmans is adamant that his abstract works, including his series *Silver*, which many have noted shares a visual resemblance to mid-twentieth-century abstract painting, are photographic. One of the reasons that Tillmans wants to maintain this separation is to ensure that viewers are invested in their indexicality, or "the assumption," as Tillmans explains, "that [they] must be of something."<sup>12</sup> The same holds true for Tillman's series *Blushes*, *Freischwimmer*, *Mental Pictures*, and *Super Colliders*, which are abstract pictures that he began in the late 1990s alongside his *Silver* series. For the images in these series, rather than turn to the accidental effects produced by the photo-developing machine, Tillmans used different light sources—flashlights, lasers, and so forth—which he manipulated over light-sensitive paper in the darkroom and then processed through a conventional

means. Though produced differently, the resulting images also share a remarkable visual affinity with **color-field paintings** of the 1950s and 1960s not only in appearance—in his *Freischwimmer* series, for instance, strands of color flow over the paper's textured, unglossed surface much like the bands of color that U.S.-based color-field painter Morris Louis poured onto his unprimed canvases—but also in size—Tillmans prints many of these images as large ink jet prints, generally over 12 x 8 feet in size.

Beyond this formal affinity with mid-twentieth-century color-field painting, Tillmans's statement that his turn to abstraction relates to his ongoing interest in medium-specificity further aligns it with the intentions of these color-field painters. But while "Tillmans's abstractions . . . do indeed illuminate properties specific to their medium," as critic and scholar Lane Relyea points out, they do so "in ways that can only be considered expansive rather than reductive."<sup>13</sup> In making this distinction, Relyea addresses an aspect of Tillmans's practice that separates him not only from the mid-twentieth-century American modernists, to which the color-field painters belonged, but also from the more recent turn in contemporary art photography to abstraction. Whereas many of these more recent artists have turned to abstraction to investigate the formal properties of photography, including its materiality and objecthood (subjects we address in Chapter 7), for Tillmans, it is not enough to take up questions around the physical characteristics of the medium as ends in themselves. Instead, it is necessary for him to also situate this exploration within the lived experiences of the social world.

Two monumental works (each 19 x 6 feet) from Tillmans's *Freischwimmer* series speak to this distinction. In 2004, Tillmans produced *Ostgut Freischwimmer rechts* and *Ostgut Freischwimmer links* for Berghain, a nightclub in Berlin, where, for five years, they hung over the dance floor in a space known as the Panorama Bar (see Plate 2). Berghain is a reincarnation of an earlier Berlin nightclub, Ostgut (1998–2003), which was located in an empty railway shipping warehouse near the Ostbahnhof S-Bahn railway station in former East Berlin. Ostgut, after which Tillmans's titles his photographs, reopened as Berghain in 2004 in an East German-era electrical plant on the other side of Ostbahnhof's railway tracks, and soon became infamous in the Berlin dance-club scene as a place of excess, experimentation, and sexual freedom. Tillmans has participated in as well as photographed this scene extensively since the 1980s. Yet, what renders Berghain critical for understanding Tillmans's abstractions is not the artist's intimate knowledge of this place and others like it, but rather the kinds of association that these abstract compositions, as *photographs*, take on in terms of the lived experiences of the people who look at and interact with them within this space. It is this connection to yet disassociation from the real that Tillmans's camera-less photography both depends on and seeks to complicate.

Like Tillmans, **James Welling** (b. 1951) has also used camera-less photography to explore questions around photography's referentiality, or the idea that photographs must fundamentally refer to or be an index of observed reality. Welling's interest in the idea that "content is not the only way a photograph has meaning"<sup>14</sup> extends back to the early 1980s when he began two series using aluminum foil and drapery. Though Welling is often categorized with a group of loosely-knit artists working in the U.S. at this time commonly referred to as the **Pictures Generation** (a group we discuss in more detail in Chapter 8), his interest in ideas around representation and meaning making did not always align with the group's more explicit focus on using photography to interrogate art's originality and authenticity. In both of Welling's series, the objects—crumpled aluminum and folded cloth, sprinkled with phyllo dough crumbs, which the artist photographed close-up—cause uncertainty in viewers since, as art historian Rosalind Krauss notes, they "[hold] the referent at bay, creating as much delay as possible between seeing the image and understanding what it was of."<sup>15</sup> Welling extended this investigation into the instability of the photographic referent in his *Degradés* series that he began in 1986 and continued to produce until 2006. To make this



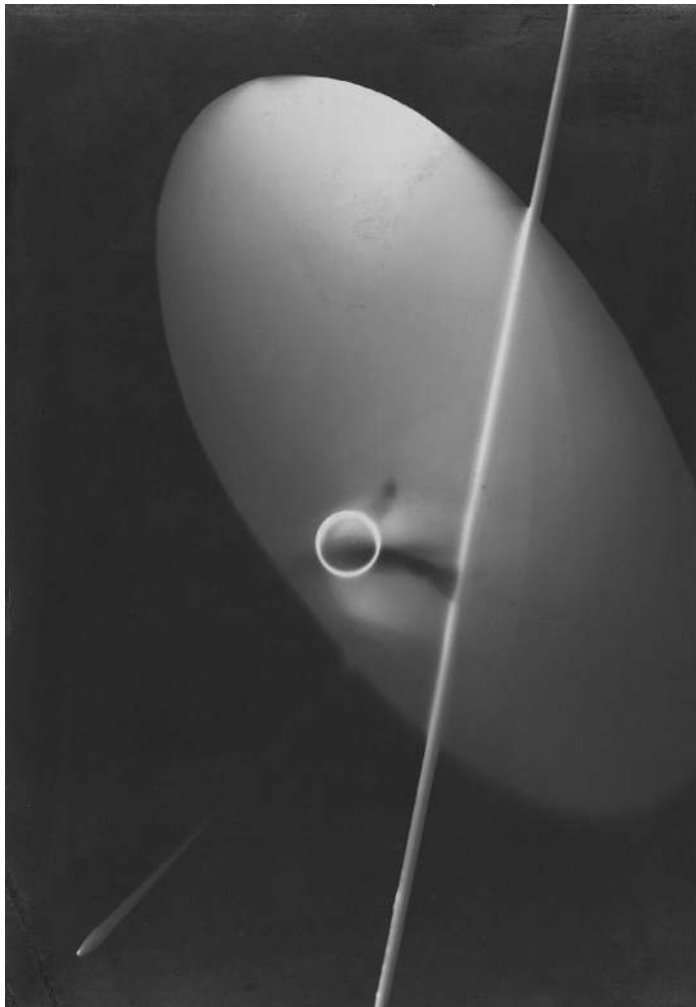
body of camera-less photography, Welling worked in total darkness where he exposed one half of a piece of chromogenic paper to a specific color filtration and then turned the paper and exposed it to a different color filtration. At the same time the paper was being exposed, Welling gradually shaded it using a piece of cardboard or foam core so as to produce a soft line through the middle. Named after the shaded color backgrounds used in advertising photography in the mid-1980s, the images in his *Degradés* series do not index an object per se; rather, like many of the other images discussed in this chapter, they record and are the product of indiscernible transitions of light produced in the total darkness of the studio.

Many have noted the visual resemblances between Welling's *Degradés* series and the color-field paintings that Mark Rothko produced in the late 1940s through 1960s. Welling does not deny such associations. Nor has he refuted the formal affinity that some critics have also identified between his subsequent camera-less, black-and-white photography series, *New Abstractions* (1998–2001), and the large black-and-white gestural canvases that **Abstract Expressionist** painter Franz Kline made in the 1940s and 1950s. However, it would be amiss to discuss his work solely in terms of their commonality with these mid-twentieth-century U.S. modernist artists, especially since, at the same time that the images in his *Degradés* series reference these paintings, they also engage with, as curator Carol Squires points out, “postmodern issues of commercial aesthetics”<sup>16</sup> and, as critic Rosalyn Deutsche beautifully argues, the “vulnerability of abstraction that underlies representation and subjectivity.”<sup>17</sup> In the end, it is more productive to read Welling's abstract, verging on sensual color studies in terms of all of these things and none of them. They are both legible and incomprehensible and fulfill desire as much as they defer it.

Though at times diverging from each other, what brings the artists in this section together is their preoccupation with, as **László Moholy-Nagy** (1895–1946) writes in his seminal *Painting, Photography, Film* (1925), the “basic elements of the photographic process.”<sup>18</sup> For Moholy-Nagy, who serves as a central interlocutor for the artists in this section, the primary property of the “photographic process” was light, and the photogram—which he named in response to the directness and quickness of the telegram—was the perfect medium to explore photography's connection to light. Moholy-Nagy believed that as a camera-less form of photography, the photogram could reorient a viewer's perception of space away from the traditional one-point perspective that lens-based photography seemed to reinforce. Because of this realignment, the medium could then move beyond reproducing the appearance of observed reality and begin to construct something new. Moholy-Nagy elaborates: “The photogram opens up perspectives of a hitherto wholly unknown morphosis governed by optical laws peculiar to itself. It is the most completely dematerialized medium which the new vision demands.”<sup>19</sup> For Moholy-Nagy, in other words, the revolutionary potential of photogram is its ability to formulate a “New Vision.”

Moholy-Nagy coined the term **New Vision** in the mid-1920s while working at the **Bauhaus**, an early twentieth-century German art school that combined aesthetics, design, and technology. There, in collaboration with his wife, Lucia Moholy, who taught her husband darkroom and technical skills—since Moholy-Nagy, in fact, taught the preliminary course and a metal workshop—he began to experiment with how to use photography, alongside other media, not to depict the “objective meaning” of an object or what it was assumed to look like but, rather, to “productively” reflect a “direct optical experience without any objective meaning.”<sup>20</sup> With the photogram's unique ability to both see and record the effects of light and shadow, Moholy-Nagy believed photography was uniquely positioned to reflect this New Vision and thereby expand the boundaries of human perception in ways that were unfamiliar and revolutionary.

Moholy-Nagy used the photogram foremost as a vehicle of **dematerialization**. This meant that though various objects may be identifiable (or not) in his compositions, recognizing them as such is



**Figure 1.7** László Moholy-Nagy, *Untitled Photogram*, c. 1923. © 2015 Estate of László Moholy-Nagy. Courtesy of The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

completely beside the point (see Fig. 1.7). Instead, as he writes for the caption of his *Untitled Photogram* (c. 1923), “The organization of light and shadow effects produce [sic] a new enrichment of visions.”<sup>21</sup> What Moholy-Nagy sought in his photograms was for viewers to no longer see the represented objects in terms of what they already knew about the world but rather to visualize them in terms of the new relationships of light, color, and form brought forth through the photogram process. In so doing, the photogram process transforms objects into abstract representations of light and form or a New Vision that he believed could revolutionize the way people see and, more pertinently, how they understood and form knowledge about the world. For Moholy-Nagy and the other artists in this chapter, this characteristic was precisely what made camera-less photography so pivotal: its ability to not only reorient the real but to register it anew.



## FOCUS BOX 1

### The Helsinki School

*Timothy Persons*

The Helsinki School grew out of an experimental educational platform initiated in the early 1990s at the University of Art and Design Helsinki (now Aalto University) for selected MA students in the photography department. It was a turbulent moment in Finnish history, as the whole country was mired in the worst economic recession since the 1920s. Unemployment was rampant, galleries were few, and those who did manage to survive were focused primarily on a regional market. The only real hope for developing a stable professional artistic career was to build one outside of the country. Yet to do so required another approach. I decided to develop a professional studies program so as to explore new ways to take students outside of the classroom and into the international arena. It was a dire time, but it also set in motion opportunities that would not have otherwise existed in Finland.

The Nordic region, and Finland in particular, needed to measure itself by a different standard. In this sense, Aalto University created a program whose primary purpose was to introduce selected students to galleries, curators, publishers, and museums, the majority of which were based outside the region. Gallery Taik came into existence as part of this shift. This gallery, which eventually expanded into a physical base of operations in Berlin a few years later, began actively working as the vehicle by which these international introductions would be made possible. Content was the key, cooperation the engine, and learning through shared experiences was the bridge that sustained this unique program for over twenty-five years. Pop-up exhibitions, combined with direct participation in selected international art fairs, became the means to teach curatorial as well as presentational skills. Commercial fairs were utilized not only for selling of works but as platforms to reference and for self-evaluation.

The name “Helsinki School” came from a 2003 article by Boris Hoymeyer entitled “Aufbruch im hohen Norden” (Emerging in the Far North), which was published in the journal *Art Das Kunstmagazin*. This was the first time this title was deployed to describe a specific group of artists, all of whom originated out of the photography department at Aalto University. The Helsinki School thus became a brand name identifying five generations of artists who used photography as a medium and who have either taught or graduated from the university over this extended period of time. More importantly, it also referred to a certain professionalism and standard of excellence. An ongoing challenge remains how to teach such an attitude, which is based on managing recognition rather than coping with failure.

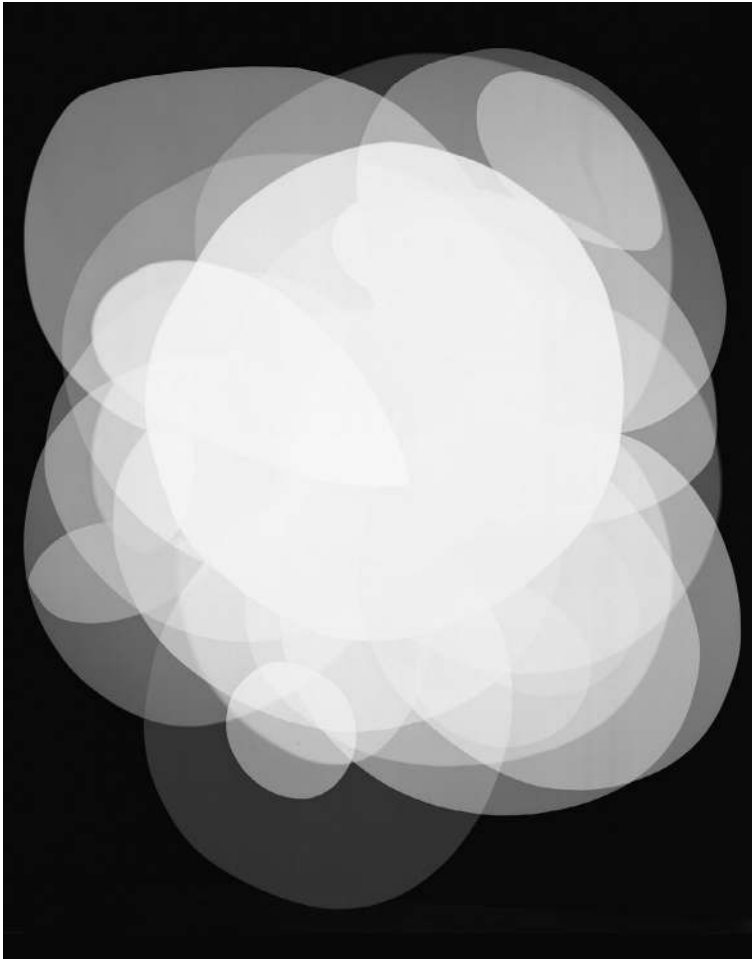
The success of any program is measured to a certain degree by how it deals with criticism directed towards it. For some, the Helsinki School represented the

commercialization of Finnish photography. Specifically, it was thought that the selling of a work would interfere with the quality of the original idea. This outdated and narrow attitude about the commercial value of photography grew from remnants of the late 1960s and 1970s and still plagues certain artistic quarters active in Finland today. A mid-2000s research project, "The Making of Polar Stars: Internationalization of Finnish Photography and Video Art," funded by the Academy of Finland, attempted to justify this line of thinking based on secondary sources. With no primary sources cited, it was ultimately proved to be an academic embarrassment. As for the question of why the criticism, I believe it can be summed up by the common misconception that the success of a few will draw away attention from others. The Helsinki School represents an educational platform based upon an adaptable program that has evolved to meet the challenges each generation has had to face. With over 140 publications accredited to various artists evolving from its beginnings, and a strong institutional presence combined with the museums and various biennales selections, it stands today as a reference point and as one of the leading educational platforms for photography anywhere in the world.

Aalto University supports an approach to teaching photography using the photographic process as a tool for conceptual thinking. It was never about promoting a national but a common identity, as 20 percent of MA students come from other countries. The focus instead is on creating a sustainable system built around an open environment for collaborative dialogue between students and teachers based on constructive criticism. By utilizing the international art market in all its various formats, in particular the fairs that have become integral to it, as a teaching instrument, a new avenue is opened for experimentation. The emphasis is not only on the originality of an idea but on how it is realized and then presented. The concept is simple. Create real-life situations where selected students can use art fairs and the international art market more generally as a platform for experiencing a broader spectrum of the art world.

While conceptual art is one of the cornerstones upon which the Helsinki School was built, there is no specific approach that bonds these artists together, other than their openness to challenge the parameters of their own art-making. However, there has been a tendency towards abstraction (see Fig. 1.8). Some of the best examples include the works of Jorma Puranen, Niko Luoma, Mikko Sinervo, Pertti Kekarainen, Timo Kellaranta, and Jaana Maijala. These artists helped to expand the semantics of abstract thought, inspiring different ways to use light and reflections as measures of how we process the passage of time. These artists make up a relatively new history of abstract photography in Finland, which dates back to the mid-1980s with the early experimentations of Timo Kellaranta. At this time, abstraction became more of a norm than an exception, especially with the introduction of large color photographs from the 1990s. The trend is still on the rise today, with nearly 25 percent of Helsinki School

students exploring different ways of how to expand ideas around abstraction in their works.



**Figure 1.8** Niko Luoma, *Self-titled adaptation of Fourteen Sunflowers (1888)*, 2016, from the series *Adaptations*. Analogue photograph, 196 x 156 cm. © Niko Luoma. Courtesy Gallery Taik Persons, Berlin.

Still, while abstraction remains central to the work of many students, the longevity of the Helsinki School as a whole is directly linked to the cooperative interaction between disciplines that range from documentary to performance art. Photography in all its forms is the media by which this century will define how it looks as well as how it thinks. The goal at Aalto University is not only to sustain the conversation but to be a leader in how the medium may be used as a means of discovering one's own voice as an artist.

## Summary

- Though produced in direct contact with their referents, photograms hold both a fidelity to and, more significantly, a distance from observed reality.
- In their depiction of the natural world, photograms have been valued for both their realist and abstract potential.
- Photograms have been used to depict the human body in ways that are both evidentiary and evocative.
- The photogram has been used to explore photography's medium specificity in ways that are expansive rather than reductive.

## Discussion points

- What is photography's so-called indexical relationship to the real?
- What is a photogram and why is its relationship to observed reality paradoxical?
- In what ways are photograms both real and abstract?
- How have photograms been used to suggest the otherworldly or uncanny?
- How have photograms been used to explore photography's medium specificity?

## Additional case studies

Emilio Amero (1901–76)

Anita Douthat (b. 1950)

Jaromír Funke (1896–1945)

Shi Guorui (b. 1964)

György Kepes (1906–2001)

Len Lye (1901–80)

Garry Fabian Miller (b. 1957)

Abelardo Morell (b. 1948)

Arthur Siegel (1913–78)

Ewa Stackelberg (b. 1966)

## Notes

- 1 Charles Sanders Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs," in Justus Buchler (ed.), *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover, 1955), 104.
- 2 Catherine de Zegher, "Ocean Flowers and Their Drawings: Introduction," in *Ocean Flowers: Impressions from Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 70.
- 3 William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1844–6), n.p.

- 4 Kunié Sugiura, "A Conversation with Kunié Sugiura," in *Kunié Sugiura: Photographic Works from the 1970s and Now* (New York: Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, 2012), n.p.
- 5 Carol Armstrong, "Cameraless: From Natural Illustrations and Nature Prints to Manual and Photogenic Drawings and Other Botanographs," in *Ocean Flowers: Impressions from Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 104.
- 6 Quoted in Larry J. Schaaf, *Sun Gardens: Victorian Photograms by Anna Atkins* (New York: Aperture, 1985), 31.
- 7 Ad Reinhardt, "The Black-Square Paintings," in Barbara Rose, *Art-as-Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt* (New York: University of California Press, 1953), 83.
- 8 Geoffrey Batchen, "History Remains: The Photographs of Anne Ferran," *Art on Paper* 4, no. 3 (January–February 2000): 50.
- 9 Martin Barnes, *Shadow Catchers: Camera-less Photography* (London: Merrell Publishers in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2010), 27.
- 10 André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 26.
- 11 Lyle Rexer, *The Edge of Vision: The Rise of Abstraction in Photography* (New York: Aperture, 2009), 69.
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## 2

# TRUTH AND FICTION

In 2002, **Kelli Connell** (b. 1974) began a series of photographs called *Double Life* in which she explored dualities of the self—male/female, irrational/rational, exterior/interior, and motivated/resigned, among others—that are frequently experienced in relation to decisions about intimate relationships, family, belief systems, and lifestyle options. To create these photographs, Connell scanned and manipulated multiple images of the same model in different poses and clothes in Adobe **Photoshop** to create a “believable” situation that Connell had herself witnessed, often in public spaces or in the mass media. This meant that, while the scenes depicted in her photographs “looked” real, in fact they had never actually occurred. For critic Veronica Dye, the fictive nature of these images was deeply unsettling. As Dye remarked, “One disappointing revelation is that, as pointed out by the artist in her statement, these photographed scenes never occurred.”<sup>1</sup> In making this criticism about the apparent lack of truthfulness in Connell’s digitally manipulated photographs, Dye evokes anxieties around digital photography first formulated in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

As developments in digital technology increased in the 1980s and into the 1990s, so did fears about how these advances would impact traditional **analog photography’s** truth-value. Part of this anxiety centered on how **digital photographs** are made. Both analog and digital photographs produce the “same” picture of a scene, as it might be printed on photographic paper. But, whereas traditional analog photographs consist of “marks” physically made by light to the chemical emulsion on the paper, digital images are instead produced by translating light into “information” or numerical codes that can be infinitely altered through the aid of computer software, often without leaving any evidence of the modification. Because of this inherent manipulability, many at this time feared that digitization abandoned analog photography’s assumed indexicality, or the belief, as discussed in Chapter 1, that a photograph is an “index” of the objects placed in contact with the light-sensitive material. This new digital technology, then, seemed to cast a doubt on analog photography’s long-standing truth-value and was capable, some went so far as to argue, of bringing about its so-called death.

Over time, these fears about how digital photography would ruin the integrity of analog photography have mostly proven unfounded. The digital camera-phone photographs taken in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, in 2004 (which we return to in Chapter 12), as well as those taken of the terrorist attack on London, in 2005, for instance, were both received as “true.” These and other examples attest that digital photography has not brought about the death of photography. In fact, if anything, digitalization has expanded photography’s cultural value, especially in terms of how the medium is electronically disseminated and consumed as part of a larger and more complex global communications network. Still, when staging or manipulation is discussed in relation to contemporary art photography, there remains a tendency to situate these images in terms of changes to the medium brought about through the advent of digital photography in the late 1980s to early 1990s. This chapter significantly enlarges this scope by situating current interests around the constructed or staged photograph in terms of a more expansive as



well as diverse history. It also seeks to undo the binary between “truth” and “fiction” often evoked in discussions of digital photography and thereby suggest how technology, including digitalization and computers, did not alone introduce fiction into the photographic image.

## FOCUS BOX 2

*DAILY, IN A NIMBLE SEA*

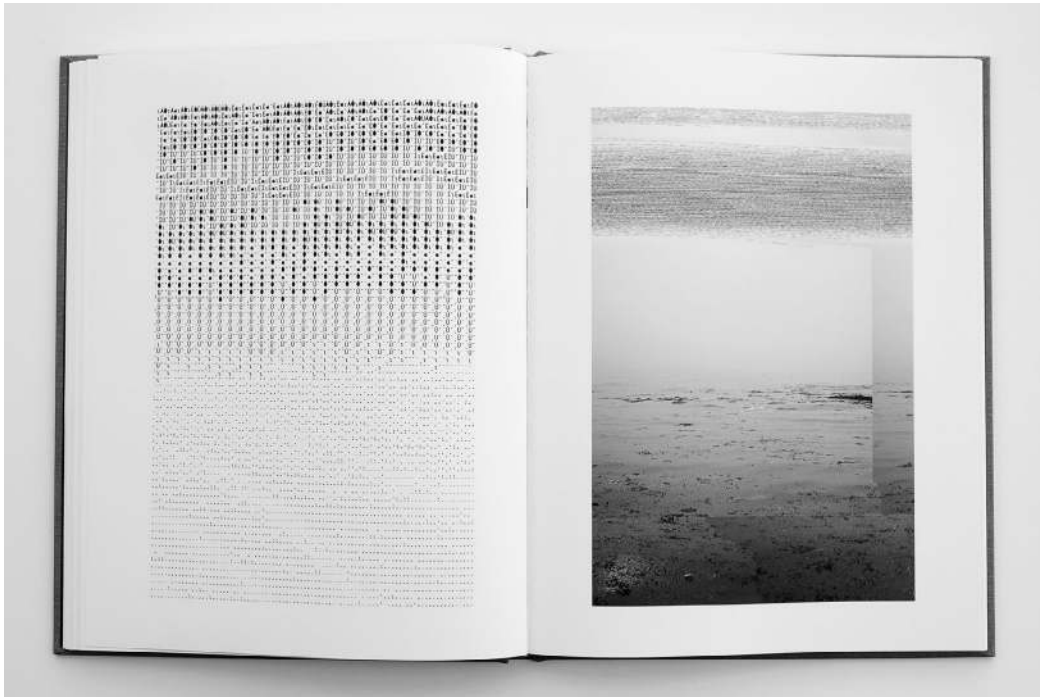
*Barry Stone*

### I.

I make photographs with a digital camera, which is an instrument for coding light. If you open the file generated by a digital camera in a text-editing program, you will see pages and pages of numbers and characters. This is the code of the image. A digital camera’s sensor is comprised of an array of light cavities, wells, or “photosites” that collect photons and store them as electronic signals when light enters the lens after the shutter has been released. The code of a photograph is generated by the camera’s software when it assigns values (according to the varying wavelengths and intensities) to the light it has captured. Each photosite on a camera’s sensor (often referred to as a pixel), at full resolution, corresponds to a tiny single square (also called a pixel) among millions that make up a digital image. A digital photograph maps a translation of visual experience into a still image; it is a memory harnessed from incarcerated photons converted into text and ultimately expressed as light from a screen and then translated once again into ink on a page.

My book, *DAILY, IN A NIMBLE SEA*, is an album of digital photographs that I took on a small sweep of the New England coastline (see Fig. 2.1). I have visited this shoreline every summer with my family over the past ten years. The code of each photograph I take forms a kind of picture, one that is literally a text. I sometimes choose to purposely rearrange and precisely disorder these texts to create a generative glitch in the image. These tiny shifts or glitches in the arrangement of the code give life to whole new views of this sliver of the Maine coastline. The new syntax of symbols morphs into aberrant pixels that alter the color of fog and the contours of the sea to take the shape of mirages only made possible in the information age.

My title, an anagram of “BAILEY ISLAND, MAINE,” is derived in the same way that I make the glitches in my photographs: by a changing and rearranging of the symbols of the code contained in the image file. Just as chemicals might form stains on analog film or glass plates, digital disorder or glitches likewise create gestural aberrations endemic to the image’s constituent material. In my book, I pair straight and altered photographs with the symbols from the computer code that I cull from the correspondent digital



**Figure 2.1** Barry Stone, *DAILY, IN A NIMBLE SEA*, 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

image files. I also place glitched photographs next to unaltered images, which in turn are placed adjacent to blocks of code that I have molded into paragraphs shaped like pictures. I make many iterations of the same seascape and place them next to each other in sequences throughout the book. This structure mirrors my experience on the island, where, due to the shifting climate and the cycles of the tides, one awakens each day to what feels like an entirely new and yet enduring landscape.

## II.

Photography is as closely associated with time as it is with chance. I find that luck breathes life into photographs of observed circumstances, in which the world is allowed to talk back to the camera. In a digital photograph, by rearranging the code, there is an extended opportunity for the “material” of the digital image to inject a welcome alteration of the controlled vision so often associated with contemporary digital photography. Artist Jeff Wall famously claimed that there is a “dry” and “wet” side to the photographic medium. Wall co-opts these terms from those used to describe the common practice of segregating the physical work areas in a traditional darkroom to prevent finished “dry” prints from getting stained by unruly “wet”

chemicals spilled from open trays and beakers during developing and printing. For Wall, the “wet” side conveys photography’s “liquid intelligence,” which creates a “memory trace” of the medium’s chemical past. Its “dry” side, conversely, speaks to the technical/optical precision of the medium’s impassive lenses. When combined, these processes create the perfect conditions to depict the fragile and ephemeral state of natural forms. Wall laments that, with the shift from (wet) film to digital (dry) based photography, “there will be a new displacement of water in photography,”<sup>1</sup> thus tipping the balance towards dryness and a new kind of sterility. I see creating glitches as a way to put the water back into dry digitization, a view elaborated on and echoed by Anne Pasek in her essay “The Pencil of Error: Glitch aesthetics and Post-liquid Intelligence.”<sup>2</sup> An aberration in a digital photograph is created by gesture to form a fluid pictorial movement of chance operation.

Cameras and books are technologies. Photographers have always played with the tools of their time in an attempt to create new kinds of pictures that transcend expectations. In the mid-nineteenth century, in order to circumvent the technical limitations of contemporary cameras, French photographer Gustave Le Gray combined different exposures of clouds and the sea to create a seamless, single seascape. This photographic process required that the chemicals applied to his glass pane remain wet when exposed. Citing these constraints and other conceits, Le Gray wrote about a “theory of sacrifices.” In it, he warned would-be photographers to be prepared to lose overall sharpness in favor of a more desired “artistic” effect. If we look closely at Le Gray’s photograph *Mediterranean with Mount Agde*, we can perceive the details of a halted ocean and clouds (see Fig. 2.2). We can also faintly discern other “sacrifices” made: undulations possibly created by the wet emulsion gliding down the glass plate upon which it was applied. This cataract of collodion and silver nitrate creates a kind of meta photograph, forming itself from its own material, which in turn intermingles with the image of the sea and clouds, also, of course, made from water.

### III.

The concept of what nature is and its role in our lives is constantly evolving. In the world in which Le Gray grew up, nature was the measure of all things. In fact, William Henry Fox Talbot wrote in *The Pencil of Nature* (published in London between 1844 and

<sup>1</sup>Jeff Wall, “Photographie et intelligence liquid/Photography and Liquid Intelligence” in Jean-Francois Chevrier and James Lingwood, *Une Autre Objectivité/ Another Objectivity* (Milan: Idea Books for Centre Nationale des Arts Plastiques; Paris and Prato: Centro per l’Arte Contemporanea Luigi-Pecci, 1989), 231.

<sup>2</sup>See Anne Pasek, “The Pencil of Error: Glitch Aesthetics and Post-Liquid Intelligence,” *Photography and Culture* 10, no. 1 (March 2017): 37–52.



**Figure 2.2** Gustave Le Gray, *Mediterranean with Mount Agde*, 1857. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1996.

1846) that photographs were uniquely “impressed by nature.”<sup>3</sup> Talbot’s initial thoughts about photography came of age in the time of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*. Darwin’s pioneering work provided a theory of natural selection that allows for life’s evolution to be considered as a cascade of infinitesimal and incremental mutations, which over yawning spans of geologic time allow for a universe to be born and keep developing. Romantic artists such as Le Gray attempted to portray the world as if cloaked in the eerie fog of the sublime, where the force of nature is a source of inspiration, fear, and reverence in equal measure. Rebecca Solnit, writing about the time of Le Gray, Talbot, and Darwin, argues that the industrial age brought about an “annihilation of time and space,”<sup>4</sup> as cities became linked by the speed of light through

<sup>3</sup>William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (London: Longman Brown, Green & Longmans, 1844–6; facsimile, Boston: Da Capo Press, 1969), n.p.

<sup>4</sup>Rebecca Solnit, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), chapter 1.

telegraph wire, rather than the postman's trot, and the locomotive easily outpaced the fastest racehorse. Writing in the 1980s, Fredric Jameson theorized that as part of the twentieth-century's postmodern condition, nature, as the subject of landscape imagery, had been supplanted by technology to forge a new "hysterical sublime."<sup>5</sup>

We see the world through the translations facilitated by our contemporary conditions. In today's post-digital society, information is the currency of the times. My book looks at nature through the twin lenses of the history of photography and the optics of this digital sublime. As an industrial object, printed with inks on paper from digitally created plates, the book forms a link between the industrial and digital age, in which the code of fog looks both like a grid of grammatical notations signifying gray blankness and the symbols of concrete poetry denoting air heavy with moisture. Through this intuitive intervention and play, I create a depiction of the world at its edge, where the full weight of the caprices of nature, the fragility of time, and the complexity of our understanding of our contemporary world are precipitously laid bare.

The shore at Bailey Island is a universe of impossible rocks. Rather than sand, the beach is blanketed with assorted stones polished by the tides over unfathomable spans of time. The smaller rocks are smoothed into handheld perfect ovals washed in myriad shades of gray and laced with the threadlike white veins of other rocks in amalgams seemingly too perfect to be the result of mere chance. The larger boulders form roughly hewn cliffs in miniature and masquerade as landlocked craggy leviathans that appear and recede with the tides. Rachel Carson, writing in a similar New England setting, elegantly described the coastline in *The Edge of the Sea* as "an elusive and indefinable boundary," where "[t]oday a little more land may belong to the sea, tomorrow a little less."<sup>6</sup> The view of "our" coastline is completely transformed by the changeable interactions among the fog, sun, and tides. When the tide goes out, a rocky field of seaweed is revealed. To walk across it is to traverse the ocean floor in the open air. Against this capricious summer backdrop, I have made thousands of pictures of my daughters growing up among the circadian iterations of the coast where the illusion of an endless horizon is formed from the curvature of the Earth. The landscape looks to be obdurately fixed, but in images, my daughters appear to abruptly grow from year to year in staccato bursts when they are pictured immobilized in this landscape haphazardly shaped by a long wander of a billion days.

<sup>5</sup>Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 34.

<sup>6</sup>Rachel Carson, *The Edge of the Sea* (London: Staples Press Limited, 1955), 1–2.

## Staging

Because of its assumed indexicality, photography is often valued for its ability to truthfully and objectively document observed reality. Yet, since the medium's beginnings in the nineteenth century, photographers have engaged in staging both through the construction and performance of events in front of the camera. This interest in fabrication remains a constant today. But whereas in the nineteenth century staging was used primarily to establish photography's status as art as well as to overcome limitations imposed by the time period's often bulky camera equipment and lengthy exposure times, today it has become a widely accepted visual strategy most frequently evoked in discussions around the role of narrative in contemporary art photography. Storytelling, however, is not the only means through which contemporary artists have engaged with staging. Twin brothers **Hasan and Husain Essop** (b. 1985), for instance, have turned to this visual strategy to investigate the historical complexities of their identities as Muslims, as South Africans, and as global citizens of the world.

Having grown up in a devout Muslim home with no pictures or family portraits on the walls, the Essop brothers are intimately familiar with the limitation within Islamic art of representing human figures. Yet, rather than passively follow this rule, the artists have sidestepped this restriction by only including themselves in their images, believing that, as Husain explains, "God will judge us for our actions, and hopefully see the positive in us."<sup>2</sup> To construct these photographs, the brothers enact different personas, often through pose and dress, that are part of multifaceted staged events based on actual memories, environments, or situations that they have personally experienced. They document these events using a camera mounted on a rotating tripod that shoots thirty-six frames per sequence. In Photoshop, they then digitally "stitch" these hundreds of images together to create the final 360-degree or "spherical" work in which everything is at once in focus and the figures in perspective. Yet, while the images that result appear "truthful," their works are not meant to faithfully replicate what was in front of the camera at a specific moment in time. Rather, through their use of performance, alongside the digital technology of the panoptic sweep, the artists use their constructions or "fictions" to consider the contradictions and ambiguities of growing up as devout Muslim men in largely secular and cosmopolitan post-apartheid South Africa.

Born and raised in Cape Town, the Essop brothers are Muslims, a minority population who trace their lineage to the first wave of dissenters and slaves brought to the Cape from the Indian Ocean islands by the Dutch East India Company around 1652. Much of their work interrogates the complexities of this heritage. This interest is especially evident in photographs such as *Thornton Road*, from 2008, in which the artists both assume and challenge stereotypical Muslim personas through both costume and pose (see Plate 3). To construct *Thornton Road*, the brothers enacted multiple roles. In the foreground of the composition, they drink bottles of coke donned in both traditional Muslim prayer clothes, sometimes wearing scarves with Palestinian flags, as well as military fatigues. This incongruous juxtaposition of symbols from popular culture and religion is further heightened in the middle and background of the composition where the brothers, almost like zombies, pray to the iconic red and white Coca-Cola logo that hovers just out of reach behind a colossal red brick wall in the background of the composition that visually resembles the "Separation Barrier," or "Apartheid Wall," in the West Bank. Through these digital amalgamations of themselves and popular culture, the brothers not only explore stereotypes of the East and the West but, more significantly, the difficulties, even challenges, of navigating the religious, moral, and cultural expectations embedded within them. Husain explains:

We all suffer an inner struggle. You have this split personality within yourself because of the different lifestyles we're exposed to. We were raised by traditional parents, but the moment one leaves the home you step into a world full of peer pressure. You grow up with this inner tension. You have your Islamic garb when you're going to pray. But when you take that off, you have your Diesel top underneath, which you feel more comfortable with."<sup>3</sup>

While the artists use *Thornton Road* to explore competing notions of Muslim identity in contemporary South Africa, they also situate this struggle within the larger history of racial conflict that makes up the country's apartheid past. To evoke this past, the brothers turn to place: Thornton Road. Located in a suburb of Cape Town with a large present-day Muslim population, this street is prominently identified in the photograph by a sign that one of the brothers attempts to climb in his effort to get closer to the omnipresent Coca-Cola logo. In addition to this contemporary connection, this street also holds historical relevance. In the mid-1980s, Thornton Road was the site of an apartheid-era atrocity known as the Trojan Horse Massacre. On October 15, 1985, armed police concealed themselves behind wooden crates in a South African Railways truck. The truck was then driven down Thornton Road to where an anti-apartheid student protest was being held. When a rock was supposedly thrown at the vehicle, the armed officers, hidden behind the crates, sprang up and opened fire on the unarmed protestors, killing three young people—Jonathan Claasen, age twenty-one; Shaun Magmoed, age fifteen; and Michael Miranda, age eleven—and injuring several others. In deliberately staging their digital “**panoptic**” or “all seeing” photograph (that is significantly made through time) at this historical location, the Essop brothers align contemporary struggles—including religious discrimination—among South Africa's Muslim community within the country's larger history of racial strife. In so doing, they ask viewers to consider what parts of South Africa's apartheid-era history of discrimination continue today and how these current struggles, which have largely been overlooked, especially in the news media, might be made more visible. Yet, they do not pose these questions in any sort of dogmatic or prescriptive way. Instead, by positioning these historical references within what otherwise appears as a playful commentary about the intersection between religion and consumerism, the brothers use their “fictional” digital reconstruction to further visualize the historical complexity of the “realities” of their experiences as Muslims in South Africa.

Like the Essop brothers, **Laurie Simmons** (b. 1949) has also used staging to reflect on the nature and influence of media representations, most especially those found in the United States in such post-World War II era magazines as *Life* and *Look* as well as in that period's advertising campaigns and television programs. But whereas the Essop brothers use their digital reconstructions in part to situate the media's overly simplistic representation of Muslims within a larger historical context, Simmons is more interested in how these postwar media representations, which she grew up looking at and watching, are remembered over time. And although, like the Essop brothers, Simmons also uses staging in her work to explore shifting boundaries between “truth” and “fiction,” in contrast to them, she mostly constructs her photographs in the studio without the aid of digital technology.

Though Simmons owned a brownie camera as a child, it was not until she moved to New York City in 1973 that she began to realize, after encountering the “more casual and unselfconscious”<sup>4</sup> photo-based works made by such 1960s U.S. artists as Robert Smithson, Mel Bochner, and Barry Le Va, that the medium could function differently than the one institutionalized at this time by the Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) Director of Photography, John Szarkowski (who we return to in Chapter 9). In contrast to the 1960s documentary and street photography of Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand, which Szarkowski championed for expanding the medium-specific vocabulary of photographic



description, Simmons sought a different approach. In 1976, she began to set up small vignettes in her studio that consisted of female dolls, dollhouse furnishings, miniature props, and postcards, which she placed in the rooms and in front of the facades of disassembled dollhouses. Through these miniature worlds that she assembled and photographed, Simmons referenced both general stereotypes of women in interior spaces and, more significantly, her own personal memories from her childhood about these domestic settings. In creating these tiny vignettes, Simmons has said that she sought to create “a moment that wasn’t quite real, but was quite perfect.”<sup>5</sup> Here Simmons suggests that while it was important that her arrangements looked “real,” the observed reality that she attempted to represent in them was not about the accurate portrayal of either the dollhouses themselves or how these domestic settings appeared in media representations from the postwar period. Instead, the “real” in her photographs is one that is remembered, even misremembered, over time, or as she puts it, “the way your memory white-washes the image when you think about something from the past—making it far more perfect.”<sup>6</sup>

Simmons’s interest in how the real is transposed through memory is substantially different from the general approach to cultural memory used by other artists of the Pictures Generation—Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince, Louise Lawler, and Sarah Charlesworth, among others—with whom Simmons is most frequently associated (and to whom we will return in Chapter 8). Whereas, many of these U.S. artists from the 1980s appropriated images from mass culture to consider the ways in which these representations were constructed as real, Simmons’s work, as art historian Michael Lobel notes, is far “more personal and intimate, even autobiographical.”<sup>7</sup> But that does not mean that her dollhouse recreations, which she shot between 1976 and 1978, are devoid of cultural resonances. Quite the contrary: the tensions between the “real” and the “artificial” in these images—or the uncanny ability of these photographs to read as both truth and fiction—also “point out,” as Simmons explains, “the darker subtext lurking beneath the whitewashed presentation of this time period.” In other words, in her effort to explore how her personal memories of her childhood have been transposed over time, Simmons also alludes to the ways in which these recollections are intertwined within the larger cultural history of the U.S. postwar period, an era that “represented itself as fresh and young, a country reborn and replenished with economic opportunities and the promise of ‘the good life.’”<sup>8</sup> Yet, as her photographs of these miniature domestic interiors so pointedly suggest, these well-rehearsed postwar images were as much the product of fantasy and desire as her own memories of them.

Staging was also central to the art-making practice of **Juan Manuel Figueroa Aznar** (1878–1951). Yet, unlike Simmons who used the staging of miniatures to address how postwar U.S. media representations are remembered over time, much of Figueroa’s work, produced in Peru during the first decades of the twentieth century as part of **Cuzco School of Photography**, responded to representations of that country’s indigenous population. Figueroa moved to Cuzco in 1904, where he worked first as a portrait photographer in a studio set up by a British missionary society. This studio, like many European-run portrait studios in Peru at this time, largely used photography, in the form of captioned **carte de visite**, to create images of Peru’s Indian “types” for the European and North American tourist market. Though Figueroa learned his art in part from this studio, his theatrically staged photographs of Indian “types” varied significantly from the more anthropological and scientific images of Indian subjects featured on many of these *cartes de visite*, which consisted of small portrait photographs mounted on pieces of card around 2½ x 4 inches in size.

Part of this difference may be traced to a strain of **indigenismo** in Cuzco known as the **New Indianist movement**. Influenced by the writings of José Uriel García, Cuzco’s New Indianists understood “cultural identity, or ‘ethnicity,’” as anthropologist Deborah Poole explains, “not [as] a natural or historical





**Figure 2.3** Juan Manuel Figueroa Aznar, *Tipo indígena*, c. 1920. Courtesy of Archivo Figueroa Yabar, Peter Yenne, and the Photographic Archive Project, Cusco.

identity waiting to be empirically discovered and described.” Instead, it was the product of social construction. Figueroa’s photographs of Indian “types,” which he carefully staged through costumes, props, and pose, including noticeably positioned backdrops painted by Figueroa himself, visualize these New Indianist ideas (see Fig. 2.3). For Figueroa, then, photography was not a tool to record or even to transform reality. More significantly, it provided a means through which he could use performance and staging to visualize the artifice and malleability of indigenous cultural identity in Peru and, in so doing, begin to point out the conventions and codes—or visual constructions—through which the very idea of an “authentic” Indian type was visually evoked in the first place.

Around the same time that Figueroa was using staging in Peru to emphasize the constructedness of Andean cultural identity, in the United States, **Edward Curtis** (1868–1952) was avidly staging Native American subjects in his photographs. Curtis has been widely criticized for these manipulations. A number of scholars have responded to these criticisms by arguing that the soft focus and romanticized approach of his photographs belongs more to the art movement of **Pictorialism** than to the fields of science or ethnography. Photography historian Alan Trachtenberg, for instance, writes that in the introduction to the first of the twenty-volume set of his *The North American Indian*, Curtis himself claimed, “the story of Indian life will not be told in microscopic detail, but rather will be presented as a broad and

luminous picture.” In using the terms “broad” and “luminous” to define his practice, Trachtenberg maintains that Curtis situates his work in terms of the lighting techniques of Pictorialism, an early twentieth-century international art movement whose practitioners emphasized photography’s capacity to create expressive pictures rather than to record objectively (which we take up again in Chapter 9), thereby “distancing,” as Trachtenberg further contends, “the viewer from the ‘mere accuracy’ of the lives depicted.”<sup>9</sup>

But in spite of the important context that Pictorialism provides for understanding the aesthetic function of staging in Curtis’s photographs of Native Americans, his pictures, as Native American writer and critic Gerald Vizenor aptly points out, were rarely included in the salons and societies in New York City that promoted this style of photography and, in most histories of this movement, his photographs are seldom cited. In short, though Pictorialism serves to situate Curtis’s photographs of Native Americans as pictorial representations, this context is not sufficient to offset the ethnographic purpose that his photographs likewise served, especially as published within *The North American Indian* and backed by the ideological perspectives of his patrons: Theodore Roosevelt, J. P. Morgan, and Frederick Hodge. Vizenor elaborates upon this contradiction in Curtis’s practice through the photograph *In a Piegan Lodge*. In the photogravure—a favored artistic medium of the Pictorialists—that Curtis made of this image and which was published in volume six of *The North American Indian*, Curtis upholds the romantic and picturesque Pictorialist vision of a pre-modern or pre-industrialized world through his focus on the so-called traditional Native American subject (see Fig. 2.4). To achieve this effect, Curtis, like many Pictorialists, not only



**Figure 2.4** Edward Curtis, plate 188 from *The North American Indian*, vol. 6, 1910. Courtesy of Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries.

staged his subject but also altered his negative through the removal of a small box with a (modern) clock that was initially positioned between the two seated indigenous subjects. According to Vizenor, this erasure cannot be explained merely in terms of the aesthetic strategies of Pictorialism. On the contrary, in removing the clock, or the evidence of the modernity of his indigenous subjects, Vizenor contends that Curtis, in spite of his creative Pictorialist intentions, not only perpetuates visual stereotypes about Native Americans but also upholds mainstream political ideologies about their savagery and the inevitability of their extinction. Here we see a very different use of staging to that employed by Figueroa in Peru. Whereas Figueroa used his constructions to problematize the idea of an “authentic” Andean cultural identity, Curtis’s fictional constructions, like the empirically-driven photographs of science and anthropology, served not only to fix Native American people and culture, but also, more detrimentally, to wield power over them.

## Painting

Within contemporary art photography, staging has become widespread, even commonplace. Yet, historically, this visual strategy was much derided, in part because it seemed to go against what made photography unique, namely its potential for realistic depiction. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, poet and critic Charles Baudelaire famously declared that photography’s “true duty . . . is that of handmaid of the arts and sciences.” In making this statement, Baudelaire sought to distinguish what made photographs different from other works of art. For Baudelaire, as would be the case for later advocates of “**straight photography**”—those images with high contrast and sharp focus produced in the early to mid-twentieth century by such photographers as Alfred Stieglitz, Imogen Cunningham, Edward Weston, and Ansel Adams (a subject we also take up in Chapter 9)—photography’s “absolute material accuracy,”<sup>10</sup> as Baudelaire called it, or its ability to describe something truthfully and realistically, is what distinguished it from other media, most especially painting.

At the same time that critics such as Baudelaire attempted to define what makes the medium of photography unique and thereby different from painting, many nineteenth-century photographers looked to painting, especially Renaissance painting, as both a model and source material for their own art-making practices. The relevance of painting to photography continues today in **Azadeh Akhlaghi’s** (b. 1978) series *By An Eyewitness*. Akhlaghi began this series in 2009 in the wake of the death of Neda Agha Soltan, a young Iranian bystander who was killed by a gunshot near protests organized by supporters of presidential opposition candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi. Like many people around the world, Akhlaghi witnessed the killing and subsequent transformation of Soltan into a symbol of the Iranian anti-government movement via a cellphone video that went viral over the internet. After watching this video, as well as others like it from the Arab Spring, Akhlaghi began to wonder about similar figures in Iran’s history, whose deaths had likewise served as “crucial turning points” since, as Akhlaghi continues, “if any of them hadn’t died in that particular moment, our history would have been different.”<sup>11</sup> The seventeen photographs that make up *By An Eyewitness* are Akhlaghi’s attempt to render visible such forgotten figures from Iran’s history.

To construct these images, Akhlaghi first spent around three years researching Iranian freedom fighters—political activists, intellectuals, poets, writers, journalists, and athletes—most of whom had died between the Constitutional Revolution in 1906 and the Islamic Revolution in 1979 but also during the Iran and Iraq war of 1980 to 1988. She became most interested in figures from these periods whose

deaths had not only been suppressed within Iranian history but, more significantly, lacked any sort of visual documentation. To reconstruct the terms of these deaths, Akhlaghi turned to historical sources, including written words, confidential documents, witness reports, newspaper articles, and radio reports; she also interviewed key eye witnesses. Despite the extensiveness of her research, she quickly “realized that historical precision is just impossible” and so instead sought to “captur[e] the spirit of the moment.”<sup>12</sup> To reconstruct this more nebulous impression within her photographs, Akhlaghi turned to cinema and literature as well as Renaissance nineteenth-century painting for inspiration. For Akhlaghi, these sources not only provided narrative techniques but also compositional models. Her photograph of Bijan Jazani, the leftist intellectual who was executed in mysterious circumstances in 1975, is a case in point (see Fig. 2.5). In positioning Jazani, arms raised in submission, in front of a line of men with their guns aimed at him, Akhlaghi’s composition recalls Francisco José de Goya’s iconic 1808 painting *The Third of May*, in which a group of French soldiers likewise aim their guns at a Spanish man who raises his arms in submission. It is this compositional affinity as well as the orchestrated manner in which she constructs her images that most closely aligns her series with the genre of tableau photography.

**Tableau photography** takes its name from the French term “**tableau vivant**,” or “living picture,” in which actors or models, mostly in the nineteenth century, would be hired to act out a scene from a work of art or a literary source. In photography, this term has been used to refer to images that have both been self-consciously choreographed, often with the assistance of a cast and crew (akin to filmmaking), and



**Figure 2.5** Azadeh Akhlaghi, *Evin Hills, Tehran—Bijan Jazani*, leftist intellectual who was executed in mysterious circumstances. 18 April 1975. Courtesy of the artist and Mohsen Gallery, Tehran.

which knowingly reference or make use of compositional devices from historical paintings. Besides referencing Renaissance and nineteenth-century European paintings, Akhlaghi orchestrated the production of her series much like a film director (a job she knows intimately from having served as the assistant director to Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami). She hired a director and a professional crew, with whom she worked for about one month in pre-production and then for about twenty days actually shooting her friends and extras posing as the characters in the series's seventeen photographs. But it is not just that Akhlaghi's photographs explicitly allude to historical paintings and are approached through the strategies of filmmaking that render them examples of tableau photography. What is also key are the ways in which the photographs in her series make use of the tableau's temporal dimension.

According to literary scholar Jay Caplan, "the characteristic tense of the tableau," at least as it was used in the eighteenth century, "is future perfect," which he goes on to explain as "a perspective that simultaneously recognizes the mobility (or inherent 'pastness') of the present and claims to bring it all together from a fixed (transcendent), future perspective." The idea that the tableau establishes a relationship between "the past and the future"<sup>13</sup> is critical to understanding the temporal dimension of Akhlaghi's series *By An Eyewitness* and, most especially, her decision to include herself as one of the characters in each of her photographs. Donned in a black dress and wearing a red scarf, Akhlaghi appears in all of her compositions as a kind of "time traveller," or someone who, as she explains, interferes "with chronological time." By inserting herself as an eyewitness from the present into the historical past depicted in her reconstructions, Akhlaghi interferes with the linear progression of time. In so doing, her photographs not only call attention to the cyclical nature of the forgotten histories that she uncovers, but also, more significantly, render this past fundamental to the lives of Iranians today.

Because of her use of a tableau-style approach, the images in Akhlaghi's series *By An Eyewitness* are often compared with those of **Jeff Wall** (b. 1946). But, despite certain visual affinities, including their large size (most of Akhlaghi's photographs average 6 x 3 feet), their approaches to the tableau as a pictorial strategy differ significantly. Whereas Akhlaghi has turned to the tableau to bring history into the present day, when Wall first turned to this approach in the late 1970s, he used the tableau largely to address issues fundamental to the pictorial problem of picture-making.

Wall's interest in the visual strategies of the tableau developed primarily out of his frustrations with 1960s U.S. **conceptual art** in which ideas of art-making supersede its material form. Although Wall had been influenced by conceptualism and especially its interest—as exemplified by such artists as Dan Graham and Robert Smithson—in both using and subverting photography's documentary potential, he soon rejected the explicit criticality of this approach, which he found to be overly antagonistic toward the pictorial potential, even visual pleasure, of photography. In its place, Wall turned toward a different tradition, the staged tableau photograph, whose pictorial and illusionistic qualities he attempted to infuse with the criticality of conceptualism. Part of what appealed to Wall most about the tableau was its potential presence on the gallery wall. Until this time, art photography had been largely confined to suites of small fine prints intended to be viewed within the pages of a book and not as self-sufficient, singular images on the gallery wall. With his tableau photographs, Wall altered that tradition by thinking about how photographs might command a presence not unlike paintings on the wall. To accomplish this objective, yet without giving up photography's reproducibility, in the late 1970s, Wall began to display his photographs as enormous transparencies lit from behind by fluorescent bulbs such as were used in advertising. Because of their spatial and luminescent qualities, these large-scale back-lit light boxes gave his images a physicality and authority that was unexpected in the viewing of art photography at this time.



In addition to making gallery-specific images, Wall's turn to the tableau also positioned his photography, in a manner akin to his contemporary Laurie Simmons, squarely within the studio as opposed to the outside world that had been lionized through the traditions of documentary and street photography sanctioned by MoMA's John Szarkowski in the 1960s. But rather than use the studio as a space in which to simply stage his tableaux, as is the case with the work of Simmons, Wall made the studio's artificiality an integral component of the content of his works. Wall's 1978 *The Destroyed Room* clarifies this aim. To create this photograph, Wall staged a woman's decimated bedroom within his studio. Yet he undermined the illusionism of this domestic space by including elements that call attention to its fabrication as a staged set. As Wall explained, "Through the door you can see that it's only a set held up by supports, that this is not a real space, this is no-one's house."<sup>14</sup> Wall further heightened the artificiality of *The Destroyed Room* by also basing its composition on Eugène Delacroix's 1827 painting *The Death of Sardanapalus*, which depicts the ancient Assyrian king, in his last act of defiance, destroying all of his favorite possessions—his wives, pages, and even his horses and dogs—before his palace is besieged by enemies and he takes his own life. Wall's photograph recalls Delacroix's nineteenth-century composition not only through the room's red-painted walls but also through the violent central diagonal that begins at the pilfered dresser drawers in the upper-left corner, extends through to the slashed mattress in the center of the composition, and continues on to the overturned table and decimated chair in the lower-right corner. At the same time, devoid of any figures, Wall's photograph is not meant to simply imitate the composition of Delacroix's painting. Instead, he uses this reference, much like the self-conscious artificiality of the staged set, to undermine photography's assumed transparency or realism. But unlike many conceptualist artists who sought to make a similar critical statement in their works, Wall does so in a manner that upholds photography's pictorial authority and singularity as a form of picture-making.

While tableau photography is widely accepted today within contemporary art photography, when Wall first began to produce these back-lit staged photographs, this approach was greatly undervalued, even scorned. Photography critic David Company explains, "Throughout photography's high modernist decades (the 1920s to the 1950s), the staged tableau remained a repressed idea, derided from all sides." In the 1970s, U.S. artists like Les Krims, Duane Michals, and Lucas Samaras, among others, sought to revitalize this visual strategy. But their frequently comic and at times upsetting staged compositions remained largely misunderstood, and some would say, despised. "Indeed," as Company continues, "by then [tableau photography] had just about the lowest reputation of any type of photography."<sup>15</sup> Despite its marginalization during the twentieth century, in the nineteenth century, Victorian photographers like **Oscar Gustave Rejlander** (1813–75) gained notoriety for their use of the tableau, most especially for how they turned to this visual strategy to legitimize photography as art.

After studying painting and sculpture in Rome, in 1853, Rejlander moved to England where he took up photography. While in Rome, he had made a living by copying **Old Master paintings**, or those made by so-called great European painters prior to 1800. It was through this work that he became acquainted with Raphael's famous sixteenth-century fresco, *School of Athens*, whose composition, with its theme of allegorical opposing points of view, would eventually become the basis for Rejlander's large tableau photograph from 1857: *The Two Ways of Life*. In the center of Raphael's fresco, Plato points towards the heavens, the philosophical realm of the ideal, while Aristotle points to the Earth, the philosophical source of material knowledge. Rejlander uses this juxtaposition as the basis of his photograph of a bearded sage who introduces two youths to two moral choices in life. On the left is a life of debauchery or idleness, while on the right is the moral life of honest industry or work.

Rejlander produced the photograph, which is unusually large (16 x 30 inches) for the nineteenth century, over a period of six weeks. During this time, he completed preparatory sketches, hired and posed sixteen professional models, and made thirty separate negatives, which he then masked, printed on two pieces of paper, and connected using the technique of combination printing. In using this process, Rejlander argued that the labor involved, combined with the image's inspiration from Renaissance source material with a morally uplifting theme, distanced the work from contemporary understandings of photography as an imitative technology and instead aligned it with the imaginative practice of painting, thereby justifying it as art. While Jeff Wall would revitalize this approach in the late 1970s, the difference is that while Rejlander turned to the tableau to establish photography's artistic value through its parallels with painting, Wall's concern, at least in his early tableau photographs, was not with whether or not photography is art, but rather with how the pictorial terms through which art photography is produced and understood might be re-envisioned.

## Constructions

Most discussions of staged and tableau photography address images whose compositions, though fictional, nonetheless have an illusionistic appearance. But as the images of **Yamini Nayar** (b. 1975) attest, contemporary **staged photography** need not necessarily "look" real. It can also include images that appear abstract as well as non-representational. Nayar's staged architectural photographs are often said to recall the work of German photographer Thomas Demand, whom she has also cited as an influence. This comparison derives in part from their art-making process. Like Demand, Nayar first creates three-dimensional models. Next, she photographs these assemblages with a large format camera and then discards the model after her documentation is done. Similar to Demand, Nayar also frequently bases these models on found images. But the two differ in what their models actually depict. Whereas Demand's life-sized, three-dimensional paper models meticulously attempt to replicate the source material upon which they are based, Nayar's smaller, tabletop-sized models refer to imaginary not actual spaces. To that end, many of her photographs depict the model, which she constructs from found objects, including scrap materials, photographs, magazine clippings, and other detritus, not in a "finished" state but at various stages and from different angles in the process of its construction. Because of this choice, the large-scale images that result (generally 4 x 5 feet), as critic Emily Hall notes, "conjure a feeling of push and pull: an invitation into spaces that are impossible to enter, both imaginatively and literally."<sup>16</sup>

Though Nayar's constructions at once beguile and mystify, certain architectural forms can be identified nonetheless. In works such as *Cleo* and *Between the Lines*, both from 2009, walls, doors, and floorboards, among other architectural elements, are identifiable. However, their relationships to each other remain uncertain thus making what they signify difficult, if not impossible, to determine. Critic Sharmistha Ray explains that "Nayar shuts down meaning. The objects cease to be even signifiers. The possibility for meaning is erased, and the viewer is left with just the boundaries of the room to contemplate."<sup>17</sup> Some have read this disjunction and incoherence in Nayar's photographs as a product of her personal history. Though Nayar was born and raised in the U.S., her parents kept strong family ties to India, where she spent much of her formative years visiting relatives in Delhi, Calcutta, and Kerala. These experiences in India made a lasting impression on Nayar, especially in terms of her often-ambivalent feelings about the complexities of her hybrid identity as an Indian-American. Nayar recalls, "Some of my

earliest memories are in Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi, which was initially called ‘Displaced Colony’ for the Bengali refugees who settled there post Partition. These in-between spaces are fertile ground.”<sup>18</sup> Nayar’s staged architectural tableaux function in a similar in-between space. At once photography, sculpture, painting, and performance, her constructions offer spaces that, much like her own fragmented diasporic identity, are as much about belonging as they are about non-belonging or the impossibility of belonging.

More recently, Nayar’s architectural compositions have become increasingly ruptured and confusing. The images in her 2011 exhibition *Head Space*, for instance, are sourced from mid-century modernist buildings, including Frank Lloyd Wright’s Fallingwater and the Johnson Wax Administration building. But these architectural structures would be completely indecipherable were it not for the source material that hangs next to her photographs on the gallery wall. The inclusion of these references, however, is not intended to limit what Nayar’s photographs actually depict. Instead, they represent yet another element in her ongoing effort to visualize how the historical architectural forms that she quotes within her compositions serve not only as vehicles for remembering her own past but can function as the act of remembrance itself. “My concerns,” explains Nayar, “lean towards subjectivity and memory—and thus my photographs are less tied to being read as ‘real.’ I’m much more interested in process, and how we shape memory and how it shapes us.”<sup>19</sup> That concern for visualizing the intricacies of memory is most apparent in images such as *Cascading Attica* from 2011, whose title, like the beguiling nature of the composition itself, is impossible to pin down (see Fig. 2.6). Referring at once to the classical Greek region



**Figure 2.6** Yamini Nayar, *Cascading Attica*, 2011. Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York.



projecting into the Aegean Sea, the 1971 prison riot in upstate New York, and a waterfall in Wyoming, the photograph exemplifies Nayar's deep-seated interest in using her staged photography to explore issues around fluctuation and change as well as fluidity and variability.

Like Nayar, **Lucia Koch** (b. 1966) has also created architectural interventions that trouble the assumed illusionism of staged photography. Yet in contrast to Nayar whose process-oriented approach addresses questions of identity, memory, and time, Koch is more interested in using her fabricated constructions to consider the complexities of seeing. Many of Koch's staged photographs depict the interior spaces of small cardboard boxes or other ordinary food items such as empty paper popcorn bags, coffee packages, and spaghetti boxes. Koch photographs the insides of these items up-close, often illuminated by both natural and artificial light, and then prints the resultant images large-scale (up to 10 x 20 feet) so that they have the appearance of actual architectural spaces. Through the optical illusions that she creates, Koch invites viewers to enter the immersive, fictive spaces of her photographs as if they were real places. Yet when images such as *Riso Arborio*, from 2006, are examined more closely, that perception dissipates as the viewer begins to notice its deception. What is depicted is not the interior of an actual room but the inside of an empty box of rice.

Koch further troubles the relationship between the real and the illusionistic in her photographs through the placement of her images within the architectural space of the gallery itself. Her 2013 *Oratorio*, for instance, depicts the receding interior of a trapezoidal concrete enclosure (see Fig. 2.7). But rather than hang this photograph on the gallery wall, she places it in the corner, on the floor, so that the image appears to be a physical extension of the gallery's grey concrete floor. In so doing, Koch blurs the



**Figure 2.7** Lucia Koch, *Oratorio*, 2013. Pigment print on cotton paper, UV matte laminate, 59¼ x 91½ inches; 150.5 x 232.5 cm (framed) 56½ x 91½ inches; 143.5 x 232.5 cm (installation). Edition of 6 with 2 AP. Courtesy of the artist and Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica.

distinction between what is real and imaginary and thus forces viewers to try to make sense of what they do and do not see and the ways in which “the deceptions we accept,” as critic Leah Ollman explains, are “part of the basic perceptual processing of visual, especially photographic information.”<sup>20</sup>

Koch’s interest in the complexities of seeing shares commonalities with the staged photography of James Casebere, who, like the other Pictures Generation artists with whom he is associated, has sought, since the mid-1970s, to challenge the documentary model of photography espoused by John Szarkowski at MoMA during the 1960s. But whereas Casebere turned to staged architectural models, mostly constructed out of Styrofoam, paper, and plaster, to disrupt and unsettle the disciplinary nature of such institutional spaces as prisons, hospitals, schools, and asylums, Koch is more interested in using her architectural interventions to explore spatial boundaries around seeing. That concern is especially evident in a series of photographs that she produced in response to the regional architecture of *el Cono Norte*, the northern district of Lima, Peru. For these images from 2011, Koch again photographed the insides of empty boxes but in this instance, all of the boxes have cut openings that expose different views of the outside. These views to the outside, which are at best vague and restricted, contrast sharply with the expansiveness of the interior spaces and thus create a tension between what lies inside and out. In so doing, they not only address the spatial limitations of seeing, but also, more critically, provide visual metaphors for the region’s own recent struggles with massive migrations to urban centers caused largely by poverty and a lack of resources in the rural parts of Peru.

Devoid of human figures, the staged photographs of Yamini Nayar and Lucia Koch employ architectural forms, both real and imagined, to engage with viewers in distinctly spatial terms. Produced mostly between 1946 and 1955, the staged constructions of **Frederick Sommer** (1905–99) are also unpeopled. Yet, unlike the large-scale, immersive works of Nayar and Koch, these constructed images, much smaller in size (around 7 x 9 inches), are markedly anthropomorphic. Likewise, rather than challenge viewers to explore their own relationships to the depicted spaces in his photographs, Sommer instead uses the visual associations that he sets up within his compositions to consider how the inanimate objects represented in his photographs might be experienced as living entities.

Beginning in 1946, Sommer became less interested in photographing the world around him and instead began to search out discarded objects that he would in turn assemble and photograph in his studio. At a time when the modernist tradition of “straight photography,” which advocated objective depictions of the reality of the world as they were encountered, was favored in the United States, Sommer’s decision to make or construct his images was largely rejected as “unphotographic.” Yet for Sommer there was no difference between making and finding photographs since, as he explains, “You have to make it to find it. You have to find it to make it. You only find things that you already have in your mind.”<sup>21</sup> This emphasis on the role of the imagination is critical to understanding Sommer’s art-making process. To create these tableaux, Sommer was most interested in bringing together discarded objects—broken toys, old engravings, encrusted paint can lids, torn and weathered pieces of wood or wallpaper, among other items—that, despite their incongruities, might “still have a mathematical chance to meet and work together.”<sup>22</sup> To that end, in constructing his assemblages, he sought out combinations of objects that shared some sort of visual affinity. He would then position these objects on a found background in a manner that would encourage new visual associations to emerge. His *Moon Culmination, 1951* consists of three separate objects that Sommer seamlessly brings together into a unified whole (see Fig. 2.8). The background is made up of a discarded and discolored piece of wallpaper. On top of that object he placed part of a palette covered with dried, encrusted paint, which he in turn juxtaposed with a torn illustration of a couple dancing. Sommer aligns each of these objects within the flattened



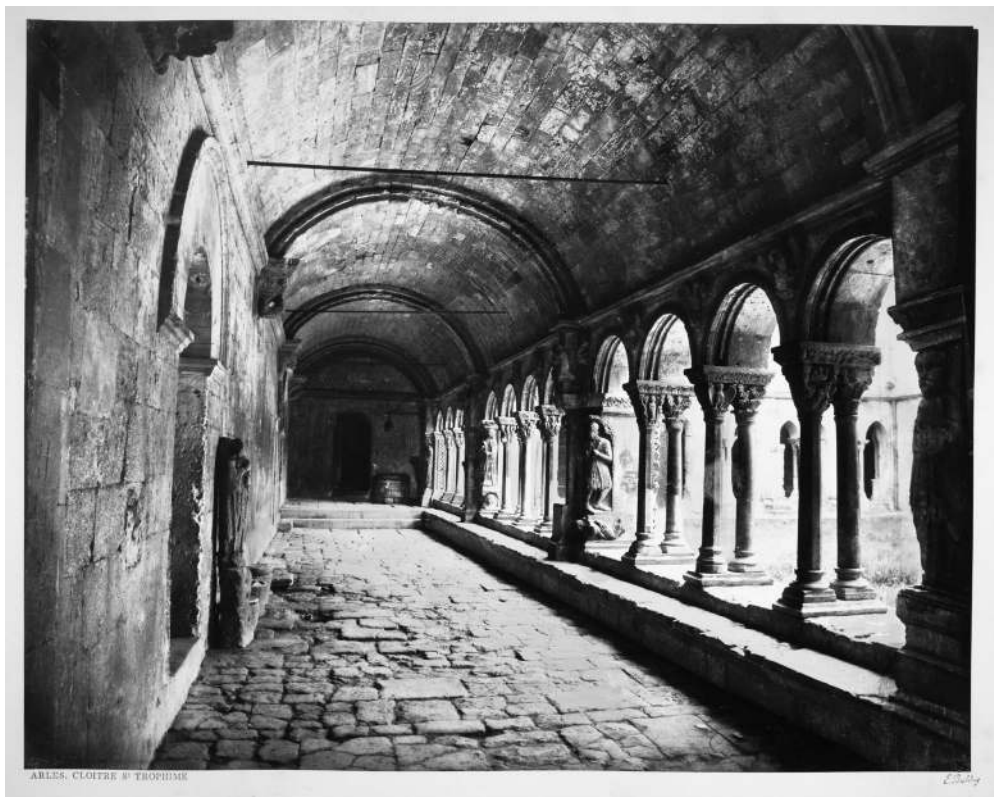
**Figure 2.8** Frederick Sommer, *Moon Culmination*, 1951. Gelatin silver print, 24.3 x 19.1 cm. © Frederick and Frances Sommer Foundation. Courtesy of The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

space of his photograph so that the three representational forms appear to merge and thereby animate the otherwise lifeless dancing couple. While Sommer's use of chance in this and his other found tableaux owes much to the approaches and sensibilities of Surrealism, Sommer—who had met Surrealist artists Max Ernst and Man Ray in 1941 and would later develop a close friendship with Ernst—never subscribed to the movement's aims of using techniques like free association or automatism to access the unconscious. Instead, for Sommer these staged constructions were more about the possibility of transformation and regeneration, or the idea that photography might be used to create new realities based within the imagination. As curator Keith F. Davis observes, "With their original utility gone, they become *ours* in an important way—to be used for new ends or simply as spurs to the imagination."<sup>23</sup>

Through his emphasis on making as opposed to finding, Sommer's practice aligns with what photography critic A. D. Coleman in 1976 famously called the "**directorial mode.**" Coleman used this term to make a distinction between those photographers who believed that the medium should be understood as "an accurate, reliable transcription" of the world and those who sought "to free [it] from the imperative of realism" either through "intervening in ongoing 'real' events or by staging tableaux." It was the latter group of photographers, who "consciously and intentionally *create*[d] events for the express purpose of making images"<sup>24</sup> that Coleman not only identified as directorial, but, more significantly, argued had been active since the nineteenth century. Despite the groundbreaking nature of Coleman's

historical positioning of the “directorial mode,” as curator Marta Weiss importantly points out, his conclusions though “useful” are “insufficient for a broader consideration of the practice.” This is because they largely rely on twentieth-century assumptions about the need “to segregate photographs of real and imaginary subject matter.” For Weiss, this understanding is problematic, because “it was not as natural an assumption in the nineteenth century as it is today that a photograph that documents an existing aspect of the world is incompatible with one that records a deliberately set up scene.”<sup>25</sup>

The architectural photographs of **Édouard Baldus** (1813–89) address this important distinction. In 1851, France’s Historic Monuments Commission organized the **Missions Héliographiques**, a government-sponsored photography project whose aim was, in accordance with the renovation efforts of Napoleon III, to document the country’s important architectural sites and monuments. The commission identified two kinds of structures to be photographed: those significant to French history and those that had been singled out by architect Eugene Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc as in need of repair. Baldus was one of five photographers hired by the commission for this project. Among the buildings that he was tasked with photographing was the church of Saint-Trophime in Arles in the south of France (see Fig. 2.9). For Baldus, however, photographing this building posed certain problems. The barrel-vaulted cloister at Saint-Trophime, for instance, contained ornate bas-relief sculptures and full-length sculpted figures. Yet because of the limitations of nineteenth-century photographic technology, Baldus’s camera lens could



**Figure 2.9** Édouard Baldus, Arles. Cloister of Saint-Trophime, c. 1851. Digital image courtesy of Getty’s Open Content Program.

only accommodate a small portion of the total space of the cloister and his negative could only register a limited amount of tonal ranges. To overcome these physical constraints, Baldus shot about ten negatives of the site, each focused and properly exposed, which he then joined together along the contours of cornices and columns so as to minimize the evidence of his handiwork. He then further retouched these seams as well as other areas of the negatives themselves, clarifying details and painting in sections of stonework with brush and ink. The resultant print is at once painstakingly real in its depiction of an actual place and entirely fabricated from the artist's imagination, thus suggesting that truth and fiction could not only coexist harmoniously within a single nineteenth-century print, but also, more significantly, that their paradoxical relationship has been a preoccupation of artists long before the advent of digital technologies in the 1980s and 1990s.

## Summary

- Digital technologies did not alone introduce fiction into the photographic image.
- Storytelling is not the only means through which photographers have engaged with staging in their works either today or historically.
- Photographers have looked to painting, especially Renaissance painting, as both a model and source material when staging their tableaux images.
- The construction of models, both real and imaginary, is another means through which photography's assumed realism has been challenged.

## Discussion points

- What made digital photography so troubling initially?
- What are some other ways besides storytelling that artists have turned to staging in their photographs?
- What is tableau photography and what role has painting played within this genre?
- How have artists used constructions, both real and imaginary, to engage with the paradoxical relationship between truth and fiction in photography?

## Additional case studies

Herbert Bayer (1900–85)

F. Holland Day (1864–1933)

Joan Fontcuberta (b. 1955)

Anthony Goicolea (b. 1971)

Marcos López (b. 1958)

Angus McBean (1904–99)

Camille Silvy (1835–69)



Wang Qing Song (b. 1966)  
 Maurice Tabard (1897–1984)  
 Newsha Tavakolian (b. 1981)

## Notes

- 1 Veronica Dye, “Kelli Connell: *Photographs*,” *Art Lies* 39 (Summer 2003): 61.
- 2 Husain Essop, quoted in Sean O’Toole, “Doing it Ourselves,” *Enjin Magazine* 48 (March–April 2010): 40.
- 3 Husain Essop, quoted in “Essops’ travails,” *Mail & Guardian*, June 22, 2008, <http://mg.co.za/article/2008-06-22-essops-travails>.
- 4 Laurie Simmons, “The camera lies; or why I always wanted to make a film—a conversation via email with Laurie Simmons, August 2006,” interview by Jan Seewald, in Ingvild Goetz and Stephan Urbaschek (eds.), *Imagination Becomes Reality, Part V: Fantasy and Fiction* (Munich: Sammlung Goetz, 2006), 150.
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## PART TWO

# EVIDENCE

**Delilah Montaya's** (b. 1955) series *Sed: Trail of Thirst* (2004–9) depicts the perilous migration route that extends from Mexico across the Arizona Sonora desert and into the United States. Few people populate the photographs in this series, though the viewer can see the tracks and footprints made by individuals as they move through the desert hoping to cross the border. Visible as well are a number of water tanks and bottles strategically placed by humanitarian workers seeking to prevent migrant deaths from dehydration. The presence of just these few signs and objects—the scarred land that marks the terrain where people have walked and the empty water bottles that signal life—reveals the photographed scenes to be complex sites that store the hidden stories of those who have lived on and travelled across the land. As the politics and violence that haunt the represented borderland spaces slowly emerge, the images appear less as landscape views and more as assemblages of power that contain complicated and contradictory histories of pain, conflict, and hope.

The following two chapters, “Measuring the body” and “Mapping the land,” consider how histories, conflicts, and ideologies are embedded in seemingly neutral views of people and places, a point Montaya’s series makes clear. We have chosen the words “measuring” and “mapping” to emphasize this point, as such terms generally refer to “objective” processes. Similarly, the title of this section, “Evidence,” is meant as a provocation. What types of evidence can or do photographs provide? Can such evidence ever be neutral? Are the water bottles left in the desert landscape a kind of mapping technique that provides evidence of someone else’s pain? Of social policy gone wrong? This section challenges readers to question both how photography has been used as evidence in arguments and as examples of historical “truth.”





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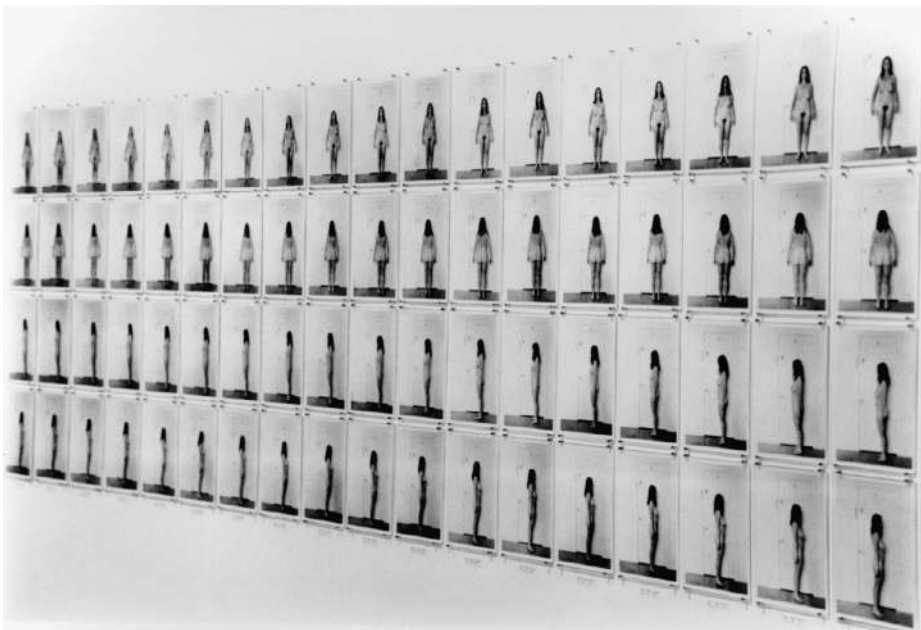
<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

### 3

# MEASURING THE BODY

In 1972, between July 15 and August 21, **Eleanor Antin** (b. 1935) photographed herself naked each morning in four different positions: straight on; from behind; standing in profile looking to the right; and standing in profile looking to the left. *CARVING: A Traditional Sculpture* (see Fig. 3.1), the work to emerge from this daily practice, consists of a total of 148 photographs, and documents the artist's severe diet and resulting ten-pound weight loss over the thirty-six-day period in question. Each day's photographs are arranged in a vertical column with a small text panel placed beneath indicating the date and time the images were taken and her current weight. Most often, this piece is discussed as a landmark work in the history of **conceptual art**, as a project in which Antin literally carves her own body as one would carve a sculpture. Moreover, by highlighting a process that chips away and removes one's own body fat, *Carving* criticizes conventional standards of beauty and the pressure to lose weight, effectively joining conceptual and feminist art practices.

But *Carving* also provides insight into photography's long history of recording, measuring, and assessing the body. Although a performance-based conceptual work, much of the piece's success



**Figure 3.1** Eleanor Antin, *CARVING: A Traditional Sculpture* (detail), 1972. © Eleanor Antin. Courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

stems from the particular way Antin made herself the object of the camera's penetrating lens. Arranged in a giant grid, each photograph features Antin standing, somewhat awkwardly, against the same white door in approximately the same place. The repetition of that door—and doorframe, lock, handle, and so on—provides a constant against which the viewer can measure and evaluate Antin's changing body. The consistency of the framing and purposeful “administrative” as opposed to artsy look of the images (think, for instance, of how the photographs are simply tacked to the wall, or how they resemble medical documentation) further connects Antin's photographic approach to systems of measurement and control, as well as to pseudo-scientific studies of the body, such as those used in nineteenth-century ethnographic imagery, which were explicitly designed to control, dominate, and rule populations.

In 1986, about fifteen years after Antin produced *CARVING*, artist and writer **Allan Sekula** (1951–2013) wrote an essay entitled “The Body and the Archive,” in which he describes the way photography, since its inception, has been used as just such an agent of control and tool for social categorization. In the text, Sekula argues that photographs of human subjects—even the most intimate of personal or family portraits—are always haunted by disciplinary archives, systems of surveillance, and a generalizing equivalence of the commodity.<sup>1</sup> “Every proper portrait,” writes Sekula, “has its lurking objectifying inverse in the files of the police.”<sup>2</sup> He illustrates the essay with examples of the Bertillon identification card: a document used by police in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that detailed a criminal suspect's facial and bodily characteristics and featured standardized frontal and profile photographs of that suspect's head and shoulders. When Sekula takes his own portraits, usually as part of larger projects such as *Waiting for Tear Gas* (1999) or *Shipwreck and Workers* (2005–7), he does so as if to escape exactly the surveillance aspect of the police file archive. Sekula's subjects, often partially obscured or shown while performing labor, are figured not as fixed and stable objects available to the viewer's gaze, but as individuals who are connected to others in an ongoing process of political and social becoming. In this, his portraits also seek to avoid, as art historian Benjamin Young has pointed out, a kind of **photographic humanism** (the belief that photography has a special status enabling the communication of “universal” humanistic values) that erases specific histories of social struggle and injustice, and that naturalizes historical meaning.<sup>3</sup>

The three sections of this chapter, “(Radical) Ethnography,” “Self and body,” and “Labor,” examine moments when photographic representations of the body either seek to control and surveil—as with the Bertillon identification card, or conversely when they challenge such purposes—as with Antin's *CARVING: A Traditional Sculpture* or Sekula's portraits.

## (Radical) Ethnography

In the nineteenth century, **ethnographic photographs** of colonized people functioned as tools of surveillance, classification, and control. Made by photographers such as **John Lamprey** (active 1870s), and encouraged by scientists such as Thomas Henry Huxley, these types of images were designed by and for Europeans to observe and compare human bodies of people from different ethnicities and racial backgrounds. The goal was to create, as curator and scholar Brian Wallis has pointed out, “a photographic archive of human specimens, or types”—a fact Lamprey's own text from 1869, “On a Method of Measuring the Human Form,” makes crystal clear.<sup>4</sup> In this text, Lamprey proposed that the scientific study of race should be based on visual observations of the nude human body, which would reveal differences in skin color, hair texture, hair style, physique, and so on. Photography, he went on to argue,

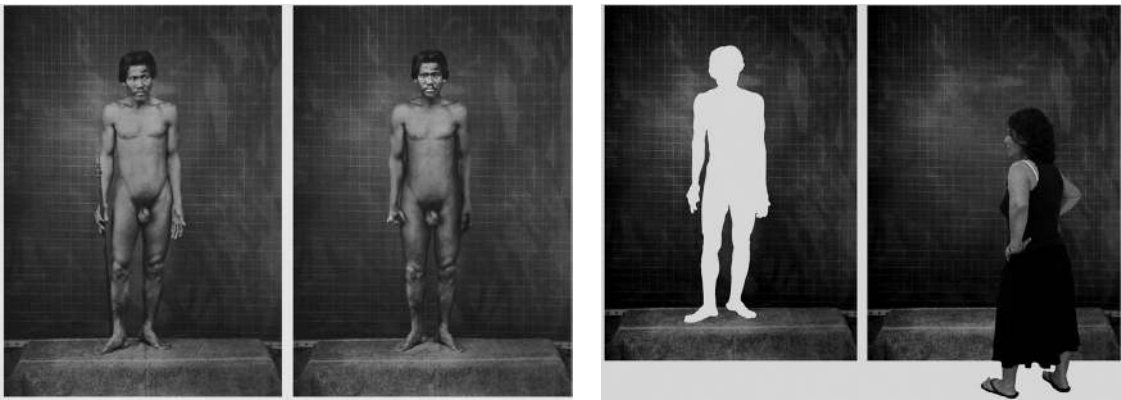
was essential to this process because the photographic image would be able to highlight features that “no verbal description can convey.”<sup>5</sup> To this end, Lamprey introduced a background grid in his pictures, explaining that such a structure allowed for “the study of all those peculiarities of contour which are so distinctly observable in each group.”<sup>6</sup>

But in functioning as a tool by which to measure and observe humans, the grid created an absolute divide between the photographer and photographed subject, itself becoming a marker of difference and authority. In one image produced by Lamprey, simply labeled “Chinese Male” (c. 1870) (see Fig. 3.2), a naked Chinese man stands on a small platform against a gridded background—his left hand lays across his chest while his right rests by his side, holding the end of his pigtail, which for Lamprey was an important indicator of race. Shown in profile, the figure gazes to the right, impassively. Artist-scholars Deborah Willis and Carla Williams have argued that the profile shot, as opposed to a straight-on view, directs the spectator’s gaze to the shape of the subject’s skull, thereby suppressing any contemplation of character or a person’s internal life.<sup>7</sup> The grid, as it measures and delineates, is crucial to this interpretation. It turns the figure into a specimen: looking at Lamprey’s photograph, it is easy to imagine the square marks of the grid as transferred onto the man’s body, fragmenting his form and dehumanizing his being.

In her diptych, *Study of Lamprey’s Malayan Male I & II* (2009) (see Fig. 3.3), contemporary Malaysian artist **Yee I-Lann** (b. 1971) challenges Lamprey’s ethnographic project by appropriating, rephotographing,



**Figure 3.2** John Lamprey, *Chinese Male with very long plait against a Lamprey grid—profile*, c. 1870. © RAI. Courtesy Royal Anthropological Institute, London (400\_001187).



**Figure 3.3** Yee I-Lann, *Study of Lamprey's Malayan Male I & II*, 2009. © Yee I-Lann. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York.

and editing one of his images in order to make visible the traces left by European colonialism in the Southeast Asian archipelago, and the photograph's unequal distribution of power. I-Lann, who was born in Malaysia and currently resides in Kuala Lumpur, explains that she first came across Lamprey's *Malayan Male* in Mary Warner Marien's photography textbook, and "wanted to see if this image from a colonized past which spoke of the gaze, of power and the 'other' could change its meaning in a post-colonial world."<sup>8</sup> I-Lann's piece consists of two panels, each containing two images. The left panel includes an unaltered reproduction of Lamprey's photograph of a stripped male next to a digitally adjusted version of the same photograph that shows the figure slightly repositioned into a more confident stance. The man's legs have been straightened so he stands taller, the angle of his head has been adjusted such that he confronts the camera's gaze, and the spear—a frequent marker of "savage" otherness—has been removed altogether. As if responding to Willis and Williams, I-Lann's gestures remove the Malayan male, at least in part, from the realm of measurement and the spectacle of display. But a bigger change to Lamprey's photograph comes in the second panel. In the first of the two images in this panel, I-Lann whited-out the Malayan man's body, leaving visible only a silhouette of his form; in the second, she erased his body entirely. All that remains of Lamprey's original photograph here is the grid. Moreover, standing in front of this empty frame is an image of I-Lann herself, hands on hips, examining the Lamprey image as well as her own manipulations of his original print.

The contrast of I-Lann's clothed body juxtaposed against the Malayan man's white silhouette is particularly effective in revealing a European fascination with colonial nakedness that associates various states of undress with savagery. To be without clothes, or only partially clothed, was, as historian Philippa Levine has argued, "to be in a state of nature, unschooled, unselfconscious, lacking in shame and propriety."<sup>9</sup> Yet I-Lann's insertion of herself into Lamprey's staged photographic scene does more than highlight the racism upon which Western imperialism depends. The combination of her manipulation of Lamprey's photograph, and her gaze back at his gridded structure, turns Lamprey's project (rather than the pictured "Malayan male") into the object of study. By decomposing Lamprey's supposedly scientific gaze into its constituent elements—the grid, the pose, the spear, and so on—I-Lann, standing sure-footed, becomes the one who examines, measures, observes, and makes judgments. This action, it could further be said, inverts colonialism's claim that only Western looking is neutral and objective, and

that “primitives” or native subjects lack the ability to see clearly, do not possess aesthetic judgment, and cannot understand representational art.<sup>10</sup>

Contemporary artist **Sammy Baloji** (b. 1978) makes work that, like Yee I-Lann, confronts the joint legacy of colonialism and Western ethnographic imagery. Born and raised in Katanga province, a mineral rich region in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Baloji examines how the ethnographic body, as configured and disciplined by a photographer like John Lamprey, fits into a history of resource extraction, colonial greed, and postcolonial disillusionment.<sup>11</sup> Particularly important to this history is the Gécamines mining company, which, founded in 1906 by Belgian colonizers and taken over by Mobutu Sese Seko’s government in 1966, has dominated and controlled much of the DRC’s economic life throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Since the 1990s, however, due to failing equipment, aging infrastructure, and ethnic violence, the company’s finances have suffered, leaving thousands of workers without job security. Since 2010, in an effort to reestablish their prior dominance, Gécamines has sought to modernize and partner with international firms, though this has led to a whole new set of problems related to foreign investment. Further complicating this history is the fact that prior to independence, when Gécamines was known as the UMHK (Union Minière du Haut Katanga) and run by the Belgian government, the company afforded its workers medical care, education, housing, food, and running water. Though capitalist and paternalistic, the UMHK was thus able to provide the kinds of social services that Gécamines, in its decline, has been unable to do. Baloji, deeply aware of this difficult and layered history, has said that although the Congolese “know Gécamines will never be the same ‘goose that lays golden eggs,’ it has fed, clothed, and educated not only themselves but also their parents, their grandparents and even great great grandparents.”<sup>12</sup>

The sobering after-effects of the insatiable desire to exploit resources on the part of the DRC’s Belgian colonizers, Mobutu’s famously corrupt and violent government, and companies like Gécamines, is the subject of Baloji’s series of **photomontages** from 2006 titled *Mémoire*. In these works, Baloji juxtaposes archival images of Congolese laborers from the early twentieth century with more recent pictures of imperial debris from the DRC’s postcolonial industrial landscape. *Untitled 13, Mémoire* (2006) (see Plate 4), for example, depicts a black-and-white archival image of a man wearing the striped clothes of a prisoner, disciplined with a chain around his neck. He stares out at the viewer, but as with most ethnographic imagery, the man’s expression tells us little to nothing of his interior life. Behind him are three color photographs, taken by Baloji, of contemporary Katanga. What looks like an abandoned warehouse fills the right edge of the image, while empty train tracks—and other signs of an aging infrastructure and deindustrialization—fill the left. The viewer is thus confronted with an unsettling paradox between past abuse seen in black and white and present devastation shown in color.

To this point, art historian Sandrine Colard argues that Baloji dislocates subjects from the petrification of colonial circumstance and resituates them in the contemporary landscape, thereby creating a bridge between the colonial era and our own time. As a result, she argues that Baloji’s work should be seen not as an attempt to recover the distorted identities of the pictured figures, but rather as a process of their (and others’) retrieval from oblivion, a return to history.<sup>13</sup> The colonial past, in other words, is placed in its political present; it looks at us—to us—for an explanation or resolution. Baloji’s images are powerful, then, not only for how they refer to the past, but also for how they speak to the ongoing predatory practices of global capitalism in the present. They stand as a warning to the future. In this, Baloji’s images might also be thought of in terms of **radical ethnography**, that is, as an approach to representing figures from history such that they ethically engage today’s viewers by challenging assumptions about the dispossession and destruction of others.

In the nineteenth century, ethnographic and **anthropometric photography** was part of the Western colonial project; it provided a way for Europeans to observe, measure, and assert control over bodies they perceived as different from and inferior to their own. Sammy Baloji and Yee I-Lann, as well as others such as Leonce Raphael Agbodjélou from Benin or Boushra Almutawakel from Yemen, present a rebuttal to this use of photography as a tool of domination. Yet engagement with photography as an ethnographic practice is not confined to contemporary artists of color who address the legacy of colonialism. As art historian Julian Stallabrass notes, Dutch artist **Rineke Dijkstra** (b. 1959) makes work that recalls in form (if not content) the deadpan expression, minimal background, and standardized format of ethnographic pictures.<sup>14</sup> For example, Dijkstra's series of adolescent bathers standing, mostly alone, on beaches in various locations around the globe capture subjects in remarkably similar and controlled situations. Her *Almerisa* series (1994–2008) provides another example. In this series, she records the transformation of Almerisa from a six-year-old girl, who arrived in Amsterdam in 1994 as a Bosnian refugee, into adulthood. Using a **large format camera** and tripod, Dijkstra made eleven photographs of Almerisa over a period of nearly fifteen years. Each image is similarly structured, with Almerisa centered in the frame, sitting on a chair in an interior space, directly engaging the camera. However, the photographs' insistent formality, along with their unnerving stillness, lush color, and high resolution work against, or at least complicate, this otherwise formulaic presentation. Stallabrass notes, for instance, that while the images's standardized format references ethnographic imagery, the lush color and overall affect refers more to commercial fashion photography (a subject we turn to in more detail in Chapter 11).

The first picture in the series, *Almerisa, Asylum Center, Leiden, The Netherlands, March 14, 1994* (1994) (see Fig. 3.4), was taken in Amsterdam in an asylum center, and shows Almerisa in a red chair—her feet dangling in the air, unable to reach the ground. The chair is significant in that it disciplines Almerisa's body by dictating an expectation: she must sit here in this chair and face that camera over there. But over the course of years, as Dijkstra photographed Almerisa in various positions—slouching, leaning, sitting cross-legged, posing comfortably, and eventually holding her own child—the chair begins to feel less disciplinary and more connected to Almerisa's own self-presentation. In this way, the change in her gestures and shift in her bodily movements come to mark Almerisa's cultural assimilation from an Eastern European subject to a Western European one, from a socialist citizen to a capitalist one. Or as Stallabrass more critically describes, the viewer witnesses Almerisa's "socialization into the commercialized image world," putting her at risk of becoming a mere image.<sup>15</sup>

Another artist who engages with ethnographic form, though earlier in the twentieth century, is German photographer **August Sander** (1876–1964). In the 1920s, Sander began work on a project conceptualized as a visual accounting of all the different people that made up Germany's democratic society. He started the project, titled *Citizens of the Twentieth Century*, during the years of the Weimar Republic, and continued to work on it, despite enormous obstacles, until his death in 1964. Weimar was established in 1919 to replace the German Empire, and ended fourteen years later in 1933 with the rise of Nationalist Socialism. On the one hand, this brief democratic moment between World Wars I and II has become known as a period of German cultural renaissance. Berlin especially thrived during this time, hosting a vibrant cabaret scene, as well as significant literature, cinema, theater, and art communities. On the other hand, economic turmoil, hyper-inflation, and political extremism plagued the republic, creating the chaotic conditions that culminated in Hitler's rise to power in 1933. This cultural and political context is critical for understanding Sander's work in part because his aspiration was to create a photographic typology of Weimar society in particular, and in part because Weimar's ultimate failure, which also contributed to the failure of Sander's project, imbues the work with additional meaning.





**Figure 3.4** Rineke Dijkstra, *Almerisa, Asylum Center, Leiden, The Netherlands, March 14, 1994*, 1994. © Rineke Dijkstra. Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

Sander's plan for *Citizen* was to create a series of books that contained portraits of hundreds of German citizens. He planned to organize the images by profession and social class, establishing categories such as peasants and farm laborers, skilled laborers, bankers and merchants, aristocrats, women, and intellectuals. The project was also designed to include marginalized populations in categories such as the insane and beggars. Like other ethnographic projects, the images share a remarkably similar mode of presentation: most photographs feature a single figure in a work setting or living situation centered in the frame, and displayed in a full-length or three-quarters view. The expression on the man in *Pastry Chef*, from 1928, straightforward and serious, is typical of Sander's approach: the camera confronts the subject directly, and the subject rarely, if ever, smiles back. On its own, *Pastry Chef* would be a compelling portrait—extraordinarily crisp, as is typical of Sander's work, the chef's white jacket and his silver mixing bowl, a tool of the trade, glows against the kitchen's darker grays—but situated in Sander's larger archive of Weimar "types" (comprised at one point of tens of thousands of images), this image comes to represent one part of a social collective as much as it does any specific individual.



In the summer of 1934, the Nazi Ministry of Culture ordered the seizure of Sander's work; they ruined copies of his book *The Face of Our Time*, which was conceived as a prelude to *Citizens*, as well as his printing plates and thousands of negatives.<sup>16</sup> Anathema to Nazi totalitarianism, Sander's project rejected the idea of the singular bourgeois portrait that often worked to glorify wealthy individuals. By contrast, his work, at least in part, sought to create a new kind of portraiture based on collectivity and class identity. As the Nazis rose to power, Sander's project thus came to function as an unwelcome visual reminder of a past German democratic society, a memory Nazis thought best eradicated by destroying its visual remains. Though Sander's own politics were not as left-leaning as this description might suggest, and in fact the specimen quality of those he pictured, along with the ethnographic roots of his work, still served as a measuring and cataloguing strategy (as we detail in Chapter 10), Sander's historical placement and the tragedy that befell his projects transform that measuring and cataloguing from a strategy of control into one of dissent.

## Self and body

In the early to mid-1860s, six decades before Sander's project, American abolitionist and great nineteenth-century thinker Frederick Douglass argued that photography should be used after the Civil War to affect a new vision of the United States as a nation.<sup>17</sup> Daguerreotypes, **ambrotypes**, and other forms of **early photographic technology**, he believed, could break the optics of racism and picture instead a nation based on the ideals of equality. In his 1861 speech "Pictures and Progress," he asserted that "the moral and social influence of pictures" might shape national culture more than "the making of its laws."<sup>18</sup> Unlike paintings and illustrations, which Douglass believed were always distorted by the visual stereotypes held in the minds of artists (resulting in features such as exaggerated lips and low and depressed foreheads that fed into popular myths regarding black ignorance), photography created opportunities for self-presentation. Moreover, like many early commentators on photography, Douglass saw in the new technology the potential to break down class divisions, exclaiming, "What was once the special and exclusive luxury of the rich and great is now the privilege of all. The humblest servant girl . . . may now possess a more perfect likeness of herself than noble ladies and court royalty . . . could purchase fifty years ago."<sup>19</sup> And, as if to demonstrate how one might assert control over their own presentation and public image, Douglass was a frequent and compelling model for early portraitists. In fact, he became one of the most photographed men of the nineteenth century.

Yet Douglass's dream for representational justice, which he believed the camera's unwavering and objective eye would bring, did not occur the way he might have imagined. Consider just the fact that for many decades in the twentieth century, color film was optimized for white skin color. Researcher Lorna Roth explains the effect this has had on subjects of color, particularly in a North American setting. She writes, "Problems for the African-American community . . . have included reproduction of facial images without details, lighting challenges, and ashen-looking facial skin colours contrasted strikingly with the whites of eyes and teeth."<sup>20</sup> This imposed bias notwithstanding, Douglass was not entirely wrong about photography's ability to help individuals self-fashion. From Douglass's time until today, the camera has, without doubt, served as an important tool for constructing identities, both of self and other.

In the more recent past, a number of artists, including Moroccan-born **Lalla Essaydi** (b. 1956) and Cuban-American **María Magdalena Campos-Pons** (b. 1959), have combined performance with photographic practice in order to describe the experience of living in brown and black skin. For example,

Essaydi's series *Les Femmes du Maroc* stages re-enactments of **Orientalist** paintings from the nineteenth century, such as those made by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres or Jean-Léon Gérôme, in order to confront past portrayals of Arab women as sexual objects for men's fantasy. In these performance-photographs, Essaydi arranges her models in positions inspired by nineteenth-century European paintings, but then drapes their bodies in garments that are covered in calligraphy and writes on their exposed skin with henna. The effect is stunning. It also gives voice to the depicted subjects, and exposes the stereotypes upon which earlier representations—like those produced by Ingres and Gérôme—rested. About her practice, Essaydi states, "In my art, I wish to present myself through multiple lenses—as artist, as Moroccan, as traditionalist, as Liberal, as Muslim. In short, I invite viewers to resist stereotypes."<sup>21</sup>

Campos-Pons's work is similarly informed by a structural condition of multiplicity and double-ness. Campos-Pons's great-grandfather was sent from Nigeria to Cuba in the middle of the nineteenth century, during the final wave of the transatlantic slave trade, to work on La Vega sugar plantation. Campos-Pons herself grew up in Matanzas province in a landscape populated by sugar plantations and though she later moved to Havana, she was still surrounded by the creolized cultural legacy of Africa. In 1988 Campos-Pons left Cuba to study in the United States as an exchange student, and became a U.S. permanent resident in 1991. Initially, she believed travel back and forth from the United States to Cuba would be possible, but the U.S. embargo against Cuba, a policy that defined the two countries' relationship in the late 1980s and 1990s, restricted her movement. This unforeseen complication reinforced and deepened Campos-Pons's diasporic identity, and her work often presents a clear and thoughtful articulation of double displacement: black Africans' forcible removal from Africa, and then Campos-Pons's own exile from Cuba, the nation of her birth.

In the series *When I am Not Here/Estoy Allá* (1994) (see Plate 5), Campos-Pons photographs herself as she performs rituals connected to Santería, the Afro-Cuban religion derived from traditional Yoruba beliefs. One diptych in this series references the river goddess Oshun, who is also associated with fertility and motherhood. In the work's left panel, Campos-Pons holds out a carved wooden boat as an offering to Oshun; on the right, the image is similar, except that here Campos-Pons holds her hands above the carved boat as honey—one of Oshun's signs—drips from her fingers. Throughout *When I am Not Here/Estoy Allá* Campos-Pons uses her body as a canvas, and in this diptych she transforms her naked torso into an image of the sea by painting it with yellow dash marks over a blue field. As her skin mutates from biological matter to a painted surface, her body appears suspended in a state between stasis and narrativity, between sculpture and painting; or, in the context of her work's exilic thematics, between the historical and the contemporary. The honey's viscous consistency allegorizes this state of suspension, while the wooden boats refer not only to Oshun and the Middle Passage, but also to the complex history of the migration of Cubans to the United States since Castro's revolution.

Earlier in the twentieth century, many photographers, especially women, including artists such as Claude Cahun (1894–1954), Lotte Jacobi (1896–1990), and **Berenice Abbott** (1898–1991), had already experimented with how performance before the camera's lens might be used to challenge gender roles and the normative frameworks of compulsory heterosexuality. Abbott, who was born in the United States, in Cleveland, Ohio, moved to New York as a young woman in 1918 to study journalism at Columbia University. Scornful of Columbia's factory-style education and contemptuous of her classmates' obsequious behavior, she soon dropped out of school, believing that her real education lay not in the academy, but in the experiences of life in the city. Initially inspired by New York's urban environment and politicized arts scene, Abbott soon felt frustrated—as did many of her generation—by the city's lack of support for the arts and more generally by America's increasingly commercial culture. In 1921, when an

artist friend described Europe's more artist-friendly environment, Abbott decided, without any real goal in mind, to move to Paris. There she found a job working as a darkroom assistant to photographer Man Ray. Eventually she opened her own studio, which became one of the most fashionable places in Paris to have your likeness taken. Abbott's ability to make the genre of portraiture socially relevant helped distinguish her practice from others working around the same time. "There's one thing I think about photography," Abbott said in 1978, reflecting back on her practice, "it's the most contemporaneous medium there is, it's what going on at the time that counts, the only thing you can photograph is now . . . [and in the 1920s], people were very important . . ."22

Part of the "now-ness" of Abbott's portraits involved showing gender play as lived experience, and her photographs of figures such as Jane Heap, the Princess Murat, Sylvia Beach, Isamu Noguchi, Foujita, and James Joyce all reveal ongoing negotiations between feminine and masculine gender identifications, as well as the fluidity and contingency of individual identity generally. In Abbott's portrait of *Janet Flanner*, from 1926 (see Fig. 3.5), Flanner sits on the floor, with her legs loosely crossed and her left arm resting naturally on her leg. Her back, which is slightly hunched, adds a palpable physical presence. The informality of this gesture also speaks to the easy and frank relationship Abbott developed with many of her sitters. Not shy or demure, Flanner's gaze meets the viewer straight on with a self-assurance that seems to declare, "I am here looking at you on my own terms." Even the props—the top hat and attached masks—seem to emphasize Flanner's authentic presence as the masks' two hollow sets of eyes accentuate the intensity of Flanner's own gaze.



**Figure 3.5** Berenice Abbott, *Janet Flanner*, 1926. © Getty Images.

Abbott never dressed or posed her subjects—the clothes they wore into her studio or themselves brought there were the clothes in which Abbott photographed them. And the gestures or poses they assume in conversation with Abbott are the gestures or poses presented in their portraits. This was important not only to Abbott, but also to her sitters, as evidenced by the inscription Flanner wrote on the back of a small proof from the top hat series. “Photo by Berenice Abbott . . . it is NOT,” Flanner declared, “an Uncle Sam take off. . . it was Nancy Cunard’s father’s ascot topper which I ornamented with a cerise and a black mask for fancy dress in public . . . dressed as a concierge . . . No disguise at all . . .”<sup>23</sup> Rejecting the idea that her outfit is a “disguise,” Flanner makes clear that she is not dressed up, not mugging for the camera—but playing on, and with, the photograph’s projective surface in the same way that she would play with and in the city’s streets.

When Abbott photographed people, her images situated subjects as beings who must negotiate between one’s own sense of self and an outside world, and who, in this negotiated relationship, can never find completion. This means, in a sense, that the subjects of Abbott’s portraits are always in process or incomplete in that their identities depend on dialogue and exchange with others. In the nineteenth century, images of the **Countess de Castiglione** (1837–99), made in collaboration with the photographer **Pierre-Louis Pierson** (1822–1913), reveal how photography has long been used to similar ends, though in the case of the countess, this self-presentation is not explicitly subversive. Born to an aristocratic Italian family, Virginia Oldoini entered into an arranged marriage at age seventeen to Count Francesco Verasis da Castiglione. Sent to Paris in 1856 to strengthen Napoleon III’s interest in the cause of Italian unification, she gained notoriety as Napoleon’s mistress, though was also associated with wealthy bankers, politicians, and other prominent men of the day. Soon after arriving in Paris, the countess visited the photographic studio of Mayer & Pierson, a visit that began her long collaboration with Pierre-Louis Pierson and resulted in the production of over 400 portraits taken between 1856 and 1895. In the images made with Pierson, the countess’s displayed and eroticized body emerges as the locus of her identity. Yet within this structure she also plays with expectations of self-presentation, pictures herself as a woman of mystery, can be seen wearing extravagant gowns, and sometimes assumes roles drawn from literature or her own imagination. Moreover, as photography historian Shawn Michelle Smith notes, the 400-plus photographs of the countess “disrupt, in their very multiplicity, the process whereby a singular self is constructed around a definitive sign . . . Instead of attempting to identify herself as a unique being in an archive of others, the Countess de Castiglione generated an archive of multiple identities from her ‘singular’ self.”<sup>24</sup>

The result of this multiplicity is that Pierson’s images of the countess exist as a symbiosis of truth and fictionality, a system full of contradictions and the ability to hide, mask, and transform their subject. In one photograph taken between 1861 and 1867 (see Fig. 3.6), the countess stands centered in a room elegantly dressed in white, gazing at herself in the mirror as she touches, and perhaps adjusts, her hair. The photograph stages the countess as a subject interrupted, looking at herself, suspended between a state of complete and incomplete self-presentation. The space of the photograph becomes a space of splitting: the countess standing before the mirror and the countess’s image in the mirror form two brackets demarcating a gap between selves, a gap that remains open. There is no experience of finitude, no ultimate person who the viewer gains access to because the subject emerges only through her exposure to others. One might say that the danger in this loss of self to seemingly endless plurality and relationality is a state of perpetual exile. Art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau references this danger when she describes the countess as a “tabula rasa on whom is reflected a predetermined and delimited range of representations” that speak to the forces of patriarchy and capitalism that defined the era and



**Figure 3.6** Pierre-Louis Pierson, *Countess Virginia Oldoini Verasis di Castiglione*, 1861–7. Gilman Collection, Gift of The Howard Gilman Foundation, 2005. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

the countess's social context.<sup>25</sup> But where Solomon-Godeau understands the countess's images as obedient to a patriarchal gaze, Smith sees the countess's performance before the camera and the hundreds of resulting images as a disruptive strategy, an act of self-construction that—like Abbott's subjects—acknowledges the self's basis in relationality and performativity even while holding on to some idea of a unitary selfhood.<sup>26</sup>

### FOCUS BOX 3

#### Photography of the Minamata disaster

*Namiko Kunimoto*

In postwar Japan, photography played an influential political role in stirring local and global concern about the “Minamata disaster.” The scandal in this case involved the local Chisso Corporation, which had routinely and covertly pumped industrial waste into the port of Minamata City in the 1950s. Photographs in local newspapers, in

medical studies, and in books by photographers, such as Kuwabara Shisei (b. 1936) and W. Eugene Smith (1918–78), raised public awareness of industrial pollution (and, more specifically, mercury poisoning) through haunting images of ravaged bodies. They also fueled demands that the state and Japanese corporations be held responsible for their actions.

The story of the Minamata disaster (I call it such here, for to call it simply Minamata disease—the direct translation of *Minamatabyō*—casts the issue in narrow medical terms and obscures the event's direct ties to consequential choices made by the government and Chisso) was filtered through a gendered frame.<sup>1</sup> Minamata sickness affected more men than women, since many fishermen worked directly with (and subsisted on) contaminated fish. It was young girls, however, who triggered community attention. The first photographs to appear in the local news were those of young girls stricken by the disease. As early as 1957, a Kumamoto prefectural newspaper published a photo of a naked two-year-old girl, under the headline “Minamata strange disease: is manganese the cause?” The photograph is disquieting: the girl's bare legs are folded in a fetal-like position, and her eyes are blocked out in a strange attempt to hide her identity. As these images circulated in national newspapers, the issue took hold with activists and photojournalists.

Kuwabara Shisei (a photographer who had lost one eye as a child and was dedicated to social justice issues) learned of the disease from a photograph and article in the *Weekly Asahi* newspaper in 1960. His most powerful photographs were those that captured the devastating effects of mercury poisoning on the body, and his work became evidence of congenital defects before they had been medically recognized. Kuwabara gained access to the Minamata Municipal Hospital and captured critical photographs of patients that most newspapers were unable and unwilling to publish—he even went so far as to discretely photograph documents that also became legal evidence of Chisso's culpability. His 1962 exhibition in Tokyo, *Minamata: factory effluent and coastal fisherman*, marked a turning point of public awareness of the disease.

Kuwabara's portrait of Matsunaga Kimiko, a girl who contracted the disease at age six, is a haunting and beautiful portrait of victimhood. A wall-sized enlargement of the image greets visitors to the Minamata Disease Memorial Museum, setting the tragic tone for the permanent exhibition space. The grainy quality of the image suggests the visual language of photojournalism, while the intense close-up on the face and body exceeds the usual vantage point of typical photojournalism. Matsunaga's hands are deformed, clawlike, and unable to touch others in a normal manner. Her head is turned to one side, her uneven gaze focused outward beyond the frame. The photograph is titled *A Living Doll*, directly citing a foreboding headline about Matsunaga that

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<sup>1</sup>See Namiko Kunimoto, “Introduction,” in *The Stakes of Exposure: Anxious Bodies in Postwar Japanese Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).



appeared in the newspaper *Asahi Shin-bun* in 1960: “Girl is a living doll: unconscious for four years.” Both the photograph and the news headline emphasize her liminal state between life and death.

Yet unlike the newspaper image of the young girl, Kuwabara’s oeuvre as a whole avoids the prurient gaze. His lens trains on the landscape of the fishing village, the shy smiles of resilient victims passing flyers to young women celebrating Girl’s Day in their luxurious kimonos and elegant hairstyles, and the grim unity of protestors fighting for compensation into the 1970s. At times, he links the bodies of the fish with those of the fisherman; for example, in an untitled image from 1970, we view scores of sardines laid out to dry, neatly organized on wooden pallets, their shiny scales alluring. Between the numerous pallets and the sea, a fisherman with his back to us gazes pensively into the waters. His boat is anchored, as though his day’s work was done, and a thirteen-year-old boy named Hamada Ryōji (a congenital victim of the disease) stands nearby. The cycle of predator and prey here implicates corporations and laborers, and the long-term effects of environmental disaster are brought to the fore.

Kuwabara’s images made an impact on U.S. photographer W. Eugene Smith and his wife, Aileen Mioko Smith, and they traveled to Minamata to photo-document the disaster in the early 1970s. Their book, *Minamata: Life, Sacred and Profane*, is a photo-narrative that captures the devastating effects of mercury poisoning on men, women, and children. The book also operates as a position paper on photojournalism. Smith opens with the following statement: “This is not an objective book. The first word I would remove from the folklore of journalism is the word objective.”<sup>2</sup> Smith uses the prologue to situate himself against an editor at *Life* magazine and argues that his responsibilities lay only with his subjects and his readers. His photographs powerfully convey his commitment to social responsibility in aesthetic terms.

Smith’s *The Chisso Corporation: Waste-water, #1* is a striking photograph that places Chisso (and the responsibility it bears) front and center. A large pipe is central to the image, acting as a synecdoche for the company, and encouraging the viewer to consider the origins of the disaster. In the book, the photograph of the pipe is placed adjacent to an image of an anonymous victim, his or her head tilted back, raising a disfigured hand that seems to point a crooked finger towards the pipe on the next page. The cause and effects of the Minamata disaster could not be clearer. Speckled with rust, the corroded pipe itself seems to have fallen victim to the hazardous pollutants it carries. Smith’s bold contrasts of black and white in the photograph are ominous, as we observe the vast outflow of the pipe and are left to imagine its destructive path. In the distance, Smith includes the calm waters, mountain range, and a small boat, perhaps suggesting the larger stakes involved in the disaster.

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<sup>2</sup>W. Eugene Smith, *Minamata* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Watson, 1975), prologue.



Despite the persuasive political power of this photograph, it garnered little attention in comparison to Smith's *Tomoko in the Bath*, which author Jim Hughes has described as Smith's masterpiece and "the defining image in a lifetime of important photographic images."<sup>3</sup> *Tomoko in the Bath* was taken in 1971, while the Smiths were living in Minamata in a home close to the Kamimura family and were actively engaged in the struggle for justice for Minamata Disease victims.<sup>4</sup> The Kamimura family had agreed to the photograph, which depicts Tomoko naked in the bathing chamber, being held tenderly by her mother, Kamimura Ryoko, who gazes down into her eyes. The vulnerable, deformed body of the then fifteen-year-old girl is brought into relief by soft light from above, and the intimate positioning of the mother and child is reminiscent of a pietà scene. The photograph was published in *Life* magazine in June 1972 as a centerpiece in Smith's photo essay on the Minamata disaster. Not long afterwards, the ongoing local movement against Chisso and the Japanese state gained international attention.

Not only did Tomoko's image represent the disaster, but her living body did as well. During the court case that stemmed from the disaster, for example, Tomoko was taken to the Central Pollution Board to be witnessed. Activist patients demanded that the board members "look, touch, hold this child, and remember the experience as they evaluated human beings in dollars and cents." Tomoko passed away in 1977 at age twenty-one.

The media spotlight created tensions for Tomoko's family, and in 1997 the family requested that the image be removed from public circulation. Aileen Smith, who was the copyright holder for the photograph following her husband's death in 1978, met with the family and agreed to their request. In response, several curators and photo-historians wrote letters encouraging Aileen Smith to allow the image to circulate, while others believed that since the photograph was taken inside the family home with their permission, the family also had the right to withdraw that permission. Their change of heart bespeaks their awareness of the easy slippage of such portraiture from a vehicle for social change to an intimate family memorial to an objectifying image displayed largely for shock value.

Other artists and photographers have added to the visual record of the Minamata disaster, such as Tabe Mitsuko (b. 1933), one of the principal members of Kyūshū-ha (the Kyūshū School), an avant-garde artist collective active in the nearby city of Fukuoka from 1957 to 1970. Tabe's 1957 mixed media work, *Gyozoku no ikari* (Anger of

<sup>3</sup>Michael Sand, "Latent Image: Eugene Smith's Controversial Minamata Photograph," *Aperture* 160 (Summer 2000): 18.

<sup>4</sup>For more on the decision to withhold copyright of *Tomoko in the Bath*, see Aileen Smith's statement of July 5, 2001 in Aileen Archive, <http://archive.is/e84c>. The family's decision is also mentioned in Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz, and Jay Ruby, "Introduction," in Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz, and Jay Ruby (eds.), *Image Ethics in the Digital Age* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xxiii. Note that Eugene and Aileen Smith read the family's name as Uemura, but the family's pronunciation is Kamimura. Most descriptions of the photograph continue to refer to the family as Uemura.

Fish Tribes), expresses rage at the treatment of the environment. The artist Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba (b. 1968) saw Smith's photos as an art student in the United States, and said it left a lingering impact. His *Memorial Project Minamata: Neither Either nor Neither, A Love Story* is a four-channel video projection, created underwater at Minamata Bay. Artists like Nguyen-Hatsushiba have demanded that the Minamata disaster have a place in public memory.

From the time of its official recognition as a disease caused by pollution, the Minamata disaster revealed the drive toward industrialization as ruthless and reckless, with the poor and disenfranchised bearing the greatest risks. Photographers, in partnership with activists and journalists, have sought to sound the environmental alarm and prevent such tragedies from happening again. The photographic image has been a vital tool in this mission.

## Labor

Prior to photography's invention, artists rarely represented workers, and when they did, those representations tended to focus on laboring people as ethnographic evidence or social data.<sup>27</sup> Seldom were workers seen as individuals with personality and rich interior lives. To some extent, the camera's lens changed this. For example, **Lewis Hine's** (1874–1940) stunning photographs from the first decade of the twentieth century of newsies in New York City, or of young children working in cotton mills in the southern United States, or of worker injuries caused by unsafe industrial conditions in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, reveal how early practitioners aimed the camera at this previously underrepresented population. Hine's photographs were in fact so compelling that social reform campaigns frequently mobilized his work to help pass legislation designed to improve the poor working conditions he exposed. Early film also focused its lens on the figure of the worker, though with a different social agenda. In 1895, shortly after the motion picture camera's invention (a subject we return to in Chapter 12), French brothers **Louis and Auguste Lumière** produced the forty-five-second-long film, *Workers Leaving The Lumière Factory in Lyon*. The film's opening sequence—as the title suggests—features workers leaving the gates of a factory presumably after a full day's work, and then exiting the picture frame on both sides. This theme of workers leaving together (indeed surging out of the workplace as one big group) makes it appear as if they have something in common, that they are united. But as filmmaker Harun Farocki points out, “The appearance of community does not last long. Immediately after the workers hurry past the gate, they disperse to become individual people . . . their image as workers disintegrates.”<sup>28</sup> Farocki also calls attention to the fact that the cameras, aimed at the factory gates, serve as a precursor to today's surveillance cameras, which, designed to protect factories, warehouses, yards, fences, walls, and so on, record in order to safeguard private property and monitor potentially “criminal” bodies, *not* to help build worker solidarity.<sup>29</sup> Thus, while early filmmakers and photographers periodically directed their cameras toward the laboring subject, and while there are some positive pictures of and about work from the mid-twentieth century, working-class solidarity and working-class labor has not emerged as a widespread or popular theme.

In recent years, however, as global economic policy has created greater wealth inequality, labor (both productive and non-productive) has become an increasingly common subject among artists and photographers. Allan Sekula's *Shipwreck and Workers*, which portrays working-class people like seafarers, metalworkers, and lumberjacks, provides one example. Jason Larkin's *Platinum* (2014), which pictures striking platinum miners in South Africa, provides another, as does Andreas Gursky's large-scale color pictures of factory interiors from the 1990s. Many scholars attribute the recent and dramatic increase in wealth inequality to a late twentieth and early twenty-first century neoliberal orientation.

**Neoliberalism** promotes deregulation, financial markets, and the privatization of the public sector. Political theorist Wendy Brown provides one especially compelling critique of neoliberalism, arguing that it financializes all aspects of one's life. Neoliberalism, she contends, makes all conduct economic conduct, and transforms all social practices and relationships into economic ones. In a neoliberal economy, when individuals think about their education or retirement, or their health care, they are required to do so in a way that demands participation in financial markets through mechanisms such as student debt and bank loans, individual retirement savings plans, or insurance companies. The state no longer delivers these types of services as part of a social contract; instead, individuals are on their own.

But neoliberal policies also affect everyday life in more granular ways. For instance, as governmental responsibilities are transferred to the private sector, financial support for public transportation often declines, leaving many individuals—especially in rural or poorer communities—isolated and without access to efficient or reliable forms of transportation. **Alejandro Cartagena** (b. 1977), in his series *Car Poolers* (2011–12) (see Fig. 3.7), examines some of the effects of these kinds of neoliberal policies on working-class people. Cartagena was born in the Dominican Republic but lives and works in Monterrey, Mexico. Monterrey, the capital of the northeastern state of Nuevo León and the third largest metropolitan area in Mexico, is a huge industrial center, and often cited as the best city in Mexico for quality of life. Yet the workers upon whom such growth rests do not always enjoy the benefits of the city's economic boom. Cartagena first began to notice this discrepancy while on a commission from a research institute about how people use the streets in Monterrey. "Construction workers," he would later say, "were buying houses an hour or more away from where they worked."<sup>30</sup> With no available public transportation, this observation led Cartagena to contemplate—and then photograph—how people depend on privately owned cars and carpooling networks to get themselves to and from their jobs. His images thus capture both the complexity of traveling to work in an overdeveloped city where the suburbs are expanding and the strain such travel puts on the body.

What makes Cartagena's pictures so visually striking, however, is that he chose to document this travel from a bird's eye view. Situated on an overpass above the highway taken by most construction workers on their forty-five to ninety-minute daily commute to work, Cartagena shot *Car Poolers* by aiming his camera down at the traffic moving below him. As a result, his photographs capture figures (all men) laying low in the back of pick-up trucks, often asleep and huddled together, sometimes covered in blankets, nestled in amongst the tools and other equipment needed for their jobs. Occasionally, a sole figure—such as the man dressed in a brown T-shirt positioned in the middle of *Untitled Carpoolers No 29*—appears to look back at the camera with a disconcerting, maybe even aggressive, gaze. Despite this particular look back, however, the power to look freely, and to assess and measure, remains with us, the viewer. From this voyeuristic vantage point of above, Cartagena's photographs not only expose the bodies of workers, but also the unseen labor upon which Monterrey's economy depends. His images make literal the invisibility of the working class—men hidden in the flatbeds of pick-up trucks—in a society that, Cartagena notes, increasingly values material wealth. The images in *Car Poolers*, which are



**Figure 3.7** Alejandro Cartagena, *Untitled Carpoolers No 29*, 2011–12. © Alejandro Cartagena. Courtesy of Kopeikin Gallery, Los Angeles.

often displayed in a grid, do not tell a specific story. Rather, each tightly framed photograph reveals just a small bit of the complex scenario that plays out daily for the working class laboring under neoliberal rationality.

If *Car Poolers* addresses productive labor in an era of neoliberal governance, then **Nikki S. Lee's** (b. 1970) performative mimics of yuppie culture attend to the role played by **non-productive labor**, that is, labor that adds value to objects not through construction or manufacturing, but from other types of work such as advertising or branding. Typical yuppie jobs, like financial analyst or money manager, might also be described as non-productive forms of labor. Born Lee Seung-Hee in South Korea, Lee chose her American name—Nikki S. Lee—after moving to New York City in 1993. In New York, she attended the Fashion Institute of Technology, assisted well-known photographer David LaChapelle (who was working commercially at the time), and eventually earned her Master's degree in photography at New York University. In the late 1990s, when Lee began to pursue her own artwork, she quickly achieved success with her *Project Series* (1997–2001), of which *Yuppie Project* (1998) is a part.<sup>31</sup> In some ways, the *Project Series* is like a sociological experiment. Before making any photographs, Lee would select a subculture (such as yuppies), hang out with members of that group for roughly a month, adopt the group's codes of dress, assume their bodily gestures, learn their habits, and then “become them” by mimicking their lives in her own. Her performances were recorded by a friend, who took informal snapshots of Lee staging herself as a member of these various “other” communities.

In *Yuppie Project* (19) Lee sits dressed in a navy suit at a desk lined with computers and papers; behind her we see two co-workers, and behind them rows of computers. Lee faces the camera while

her colleagues appear to address some issue displayed on the computer screen in front of them. Other *Yuppie Project* photographs show Lee similarly dressed shopping at upscale retail stores, lunching at the World Financial Center, and drinking with other financial analysts. Generally, one of the amazing qualities of the *Project Series* photographs is how seamlessly Lee integrates herself into the communities she observes. In the *Yuppie Project*, however, including *Yuppie Project (19)*, she appears slightly out of place and uncomfortable in her own clothes. Her glance at the viewer in contrast to her co-workers' glance at the computer further separates Lee from her colleagues, as well as from the office space behind her. One consequence of this separation is that the suits and computers, the fancy lunches and brand names—the yuppie lifestyle Lee exposes—comes to represent not so much mastery or upward mobility as it does illusion and the pretense of being in control. The distance Lee creates between herself and the other yuppies she depicts also, importantly, makes visible American whiteness and privilege as it exists in the world of young Wall Street professionals, especially in the 1980s and 1990s. About the *Yuppie Project*, art historian Maurice Berger writes, “Lee does not depict her white subjects as overtly bigoted or malevolent, but the underlying racial tensions of her Wall Street experience slip into almost every frame . . . she never quite fits into the yuppie milieu. Though she masquerades in the fashions, make-up, and body language of white yuppies, her Asianness and her visceral discomfort read as distinctly as their whiteness.”<sup>32</sup>

Lee's *Yuppie Project* is notable in part, then, for how she makes whiteness visible in the workplace of the privileged class. But even when whiteness is not so explicitly named, the difference or tension between laboring bodies of color and white bodies is evident in a variety of photographic projects from the nineteenth century to today. Tina Modotti's *Hands Resting on a Tool* (1927) shows the dusty hands of a peasant working in Mexico in the 1920s after the armed revolution. Berenice Abbott's *Dirt Farmer, Hertzell, West Virginia* (1935) depicts an African American man separated from the viewer (and Abbott, the white photographer) by a fence that runs across the horizontal plane of the image. Or in the later twentieth century, Alfredo Jaar's *Gold in the Morning* (1985) or Sebastião Salgado's project, *Archeology of the Industrial Age* (1986–1992), both call attention to the arduous work performed by some of the world's poorest inhabitants, almost all of color, as well as to the spectacular and sometimes romantic ways in which the global art market visualizes these bodies.

Another example are **Marc Ferrez's** (1843–1923) photographs of enslaved individuals working on coffee plantations in the Paraíba Valley in Brazil in the nineteenth century. These images are instructive for how they reveal, in an earlier moment, the way in which some photographs helped maintain an established—and racist—social hierarchy. Ferrez was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, into a family of artists who immigrated from France. After attending school in Paris, Ferrez returned to Rio de Janeiro in 1865 where he established a photography studio. First recognized for his images of Rio's urban landscape, in the early 1870s, Ferrez began to focus his lens on rural landscapes (often shot with a panoramic camera) and on enslaved people working on coffee plantations, such as *Slaves at a coffee yard in a farm, Vale do Paraíba, Sao Paulo* (1882) (see Fig. 3.8). This photograph is extraordinary in its orderliness: the overseer on the left-hand side of the image points out toward the field of workers, both men and women, who, staged in a grid-like formation, all appear engaged in their work, whether that be carrying baskets or raking the earth. One woman, in the center, nurses her child surrounded by other workers. Ferrez thus represents the plantation as a modern space of production in which the conflict between a landowner's fantasy of industrial rationality and the violence of the slaveholding reality is completely repressed. As scholar Mariana de Aguiar Ferreira Muaze observes, the “pacified slave” depicted in many of Ferrez's shots is protected from social conflict, abolitionist ideas, and slave



**Figure 3.8** Marc Ferrez, *Slaves at a coffee yard in a farm, Vale do Paraíba, São Paulo, 1882*. Marc Ferrez/Gilberto Ferrez Collection/Instituto Moreira Salles.

resistance.<sup>33</sup> She further notes that also omitted from view is the evidence of violence—such as scars, burns, broken limbs, branding marks, and health problems—that was common in newspaper descriptions, announcements, and inventories of the bodies of enslaved individuals.<sup>34</sup>

Photographs such as Ferrez's *Slaves at a coffee yard* downplay the brutal and inhumane conditions wrought by slavery and focus instead on the institution's economic viability. Yet viewers looking at this image today, or others like it, can (and have a responsibility to) construct a different historical narrative that accounts for the mix of brutality, racial injustice, and coercion and punishment that the slave–master relationship entails. Just as artists like Yee I-Lann or Sammy Baloji return to nineteenth-century ethnographic images in order to challenge Western imperialist ways of looking at and understanding the world, contemporary spectators can see Ferrez's visual constructions of an ordered slavery as evidence of a system in peril. Photography played a role in maintaining the slave-owner's visual discourse, but enslaved individuals also glance back at the camera, and it is this returned look that allows us to see these figures too as active social agents.

## Summary

- A number of contemporary artists appropriate the conventions established by nineteenth-century ethnographic photographers in order to disrupt the racist assumptions and myth of objectivity that such practice professed.

- From the nineteenth century until today subjects have performed in front of the camera in attempt to take control of their public image and self-presentation.
- Only occasionally did early photographers take pictures of workers or record the toll that labor can take on the human body. As wealth inequality increases in the later twentieth and early twenty-first century, however, an increasing number of photographers have begun to picture workers and working conditions in order to reveal the effects of that inequality on the body.

## Discussion points

- Can photography ever be used to measure and assess bodies in a manner that does not depend on or reproduce stereotypes?
- How can photographic practice participate in the construction of one's self-identity?
- How has photography been used to surveil workers?
- How has neoliberalism changed the way photographers depict workers?

## Additional case studies

Diane Arbus (1923–71)

Dana Claxton (b. 1959)

Lala Deen Dayal (b. 1844, d. unknown)

Adolphe Duperly (1801–65)

Etienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904)

Delilah Montoya (b. 1955)

Daniela Rossell (b. 1975)

Lorna Simpson (b. 1960)

Ilona Szwarc (b. 1984)

Pinar Yolaçan (b. 1981)

## Notes

- 1 Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 3–69.
- 2 Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," 7.
- 3 Benjamin Young, "Arresting Figures," *Grey Room* 55 (Spring 2014): 78–115.
- 4 Brian Wallis, "Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz's Slave Daguerrotypes." *American Art* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 45.
- 5 John Lamprey, "On a Method of Measuring the Human Form, for the Use of Students in Ethnology," *Journal of the Ethnological Society* 1 (1869): 85. See also Philippa Levine, "States of Undress: Nakedness and the Colonial Imagination," *Victorian Studies* 50, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 189–219.
- 6 Lamprey, "On a Method of Measuring the Human Form," 85.



- 7 Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 11–12.
- 8 Yee I-Lann, “About the Series,” <http://www.silverlensgalleries.com/artists/i-lann-yee/series/study-of-lampreys-malayan-male>.
- 9 Levine, “States of Undress,” 192.
- 10 Levine, “States of Undress,” 215–16.
- 11 See “Contested Terrains: Sammy Baloji,” Tate Modern, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibitionseries/project-space/project-space-contested-terrains/contested-2>.
- 12 “Contested Terrains.”
- 13 Sandrine Colard, “New Perspectives in Photographic Portraiture from Africa,” lecture at *Beyond the Frame: Contemporary Photography from Africa*, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, October 21, 2016, [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/wallach/exhibitions/Expanded%20Subject\\_Beyond%20The%20Frame.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/wallach/exhibitions/Expanded%20Subject_Beyond%20The%20Frame.html).
- 14 Julian Stallabrass, “What’s in a Face: Blankness and Significance in Contemporary Art Photography,” *October* 122 (Fall 2017): 72.
- 15 Stallabrass, “What’s in a Face,” 84.
- 16 In 1944, Allied bombs destroyed more negatives.
- 17 See Sarah Lewis, “Vision and Justice: Guest Editor’s Note,” *Aperture* 223 (Summer 2016), <https://aperture.org/blog/vision-justice/>. Douglass, “The Negro as Man,” probably written in the mid-1850s, “Pictures and Progress,” mid-1860s.
- 18 Frederick Douglass, “Pictures and Progress,” in John W. Blassingame (ed.), *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, series 1, vol. 3 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 456.
- 19 “Pictures and Progress,” Library of Congress, <http://frederickdouglass.infoset.io/islandora/object/islandora%3A2179#page/3/mode/1up>.
- 20 Lorna Roth, “Looking at Shirley, the Ultimate Norm: Colour Balance, Image Technologies,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 34, no. 1 (2009): 117.
- 21 See “Lalla Essaydi,” <http://lallaessaydi.com/1.html>.
- 22 This is Abbott’s response to the question “Why did you take portraits?” Berenice Abbott, *Learning From Performers*, 1978 Harvard Interview, Archives of American Art.
- 23 Photo in private collection; collector shared this information with me in November 2002.
- 24 Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 97.
- 25 See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “The Legs of the Countess,” *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 105, 69.
- 26 Smith, *American Archives*, 103.
- 27 Phillip Kennicott, “The American Worker: Exploited from the beginning,” *Washington Post*, November 20, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/the-american-worker-exploited-from-the-beginning/2017/11/20/7ae8fe6a-c890-11e7-b0cf-7689a9f2d84e\\_story.html?tid=ss\\_tw&utm\\_term=.ca985040016a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/the-american-worker-exploited-from-the-beginning/2017/11/20/7ae8fe6a-c890-11e7-b0cf-7689a9f2d84e_story.html?tid=ss_tw&utm_term=.ca985040016a).
- 28 Harun Farocki, “Workers Leaving the Factory,” in Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-Lines* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), 239.
- 29 Farocki, “Workers Leaving the Factory,” 238.
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- 31 Examples of other subcultures performed by Lee in her *Projects* series include punk, hip hop, tourism, and seniors, among others.

- 32 Maurice Berger, "Picturing Whiteness: Nikki S. Lee Yuppie Project," *Art Journal* 60, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 54.
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# 4

## MAPPING THE LAND

In 1996, **Santu Mofokeng** (b. 1956) began work on a series of photographs titled *Chasing Shadows*. One picture from this series, *Dikgoro with Washing Line* (see Fig. 4.1), depicts a shallow, rocky place that Mofokeng tells us was sometimes used by local inhabitants as a prayer site. In this image, however, we see no people, only a washing line of white shirts and other garments hovering in the air, occupying the place like familial ghosts or spirits overseeing their home. This photograph, as well as others in his *Chasing Shadows* series, was taken in South Africa near the border of Lesotho—a country whose history is intertwined with the legacy of apartheid in South Africa. During the years of apartheid (1948–1991), South Africa’s racially discriminatory government claimed, among other things, that black people belonged in spaces geographically separate from whites, and it passed a series of laws zoning all towns and cities as white-only areas. This practice effectively created debilitating systems of spatial oppression and forced black South Africans to live in separate regions like Lesotho, or other economically deprived areas deemed “homelands.”<sup>1</sup> From these “other” places, men would travel as part of a migrant labor force, often leaving families behind.



**Figure 4.1** Santu Mofokeng, *Dikgoro with Washing Line*, from the series *Chasing Shadows*, 1996. © Santu Mofokeng Foundation. Courtesy of Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.

Mofokeng's photograph does not overtly reference this history, and none of the photographs from his *Chasing Shadows* series show the degrading living conditions that were and still remain a part of apartheid's legacy. Instead, Mofokeng engages the history and legacy of apartheid by photographing places affected by it as sites of memory and spiritual significance, a process he hopes will contribute to a reclaiming of traumatic space. While the actual location represented in *Dikgoro with Washing Line* might remind viewers of how apartheid-era laws erased and removed people from their homes and land, and denied people of color full access to space, to law, and human rights, Mofokeng does not picture this directly. Rather, he shows the border area between South Africa and Lesotho as a spiritual home. Think again of how the garments float above the space, filling it with a sense of history and the possibility of salvation.

*Chasing Shadows* as well as other projects by Mofokeng, such as *Train Churches* (1986) or *Nightfall of the Spirit* (2002), thus reveal the way in which landscape imagery is not only—or not necessarily—about natural beauty. Photographs of the land are also about human history. This chapter takes up how landscape imagery is inextricably bound to the world of human politics and culture, including struggles over national borders, climate and ecological challenges, and history. As historian Finis Dunaway explains, “nature is an important actor in human history.”<sup>2</sup>

## Borders

Santu Mofokeng's photograph *Dikgoro with Washing Line* provides one example of how histories of struggle and conflict are embedded within seemingly “natural” scenes. Similarly, national borders—the lines that divide nations—can also appear “natural.” But borders are not “natural,” nor are they self-evident or intrinsic to countries; human beings create borders through acts of negotiation, war, and politics. It is through these processes, moreover, that borders create inequalities, obstacles to travel, and (for better or worse) disruptions to or avenues for the easy flow of goods. As a number of contemporary politicians around the globe have recently made clear, borders are also fundamental to arguments about sovereignty—the power and authority of a governing body over itself—and can be used to promote nationalist, often racist, discourse.

For more than a decade, Parisian-born, Moroccan-educated photographer **Yto Barrada** (b. 1971) has focused on the border between Europe and Africa. Her project, *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project* (1998–2004), documents life in Tangier, a Moroccan port city at the Strait of Gibraltar. The Strait of Gibraltar is a small space—only 8.7 miles wide at its narrowest point—that separates Morocco and the African continent from Spain and the rest of Europe. Because of its location and size, the Strait of Gibraltar has, for hundreds of years, been used as a passageway between Africa and Europe both for trade and as a site of diplomacy. In recent history, it has become a popular gateway for the migration of Africans into Europe. However, while Europeans come to Morocco all the time as tourists, and ferries can cross the Strait in as little as thirty-five minutes, Moroccans and other Africans do not enjoy the same mobility or freedom of movement. For this reason, the Strait of Gibraltar has also become known as a one-way street.

Playing with the concepts of border, travel, and a one-way street, Barrada's photograph “*Le Détroit*”—*Avenue d'Espagne, Tangier*, from 2000 (which appears on the cover of this volume), depicts an actual street in Tangier: Avenue d'Espagne, from an oblique, bird's eye angle. At the top of the picture, a number of pedestrians stand in or walk across the street while a young boy holds a toy boat towards the bottom. The image includes very little other contextual information; indeed, the street fills the majority of the frame.

It does so, however, in such a way that the concrete ground starts to look itself like a body of water. In an essay on Barrada, art historian T. J. Demos further notes how the toy boat in the corner of the image consumes and obscures the boy who holds it, dislocating him from the frame of representation. The boy is seen and not seen, neither his body nor his face are fully discernible. It is as if the dream of crossing the Strait—not only for this photographed child, but also for all those who travel to Tangier for the purpose of crossing—has blurred the boy's identity and in so doing separated him from his community.<sup>3</sup>

*Girl in Red, Tangier* (1999), also from *Life Full of Holes*, similarly plays with this idea of hiding or purging one's identity in order to move from one geopolitical context, one landscape, to another. The image shows a woman dressed in red facing a wall, the pattern of her dress merging with the tiled pattern on the wall she faces. A complex design results: the woman's contour begins to flicker back and forth from positive to negative shape, from presence to absence. She is, like the child holding the boat, simultaneously there and not there. In a 2006 interview, Barrada commented on how those who attempt to cross the Strait frequently hide their identities, effectively articulating in words what her images do visually: "There's a whole new vocabulary that's invented around [crossing the Strait]," she says, "'to cross' is called 'to burn' because you burn your past, your identity, your papers, because if you're caught on the other side and you're from Algeria you may get permission to stay, because of the political situation; if you're from Morocco you're sent back right away."<sup>4</sup> The wall in *Girl in Red* or the street in *Le Détroit* thus function like borders between countries. They are barriers, but also imaginary dream sites that represent spaces of potential escape. This duality—escape and obstruction—governs the imaginary space of Barrada's *Life Full of Holes* series, and emphasizes the spatial insecurity that comes with refugee existence.<sup>5</sup>

**Emily Jacir** (b. 1972) is another artist whose work addresses the way political borders affect how humans experience, use, and understand the land on which they live. Jacir, a Palestinian-American artist, was born in the West Bank of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Occupied Territories refer to land captured and occupied by Israel in the War of 1967, and consist of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. Because Israel imposes stringent travel restrictions on Palestinians in these spaces, individuals holding Palestinian passports are frequently barred from entering Israel, moving between countries, or even just crossing the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Jacir, however, holds an American passport, and so has the mobility and freedom to travel between places with an ease not granted those holding Palestinian papers. Jacir's project, *Where We Come From* (2001–3), investigates the discrepancy between her ability to move across land and borders with others' inability, as well as the impact such difference has on one's desires and experience of the world; it is, in essence, a project about the complexity of exile.

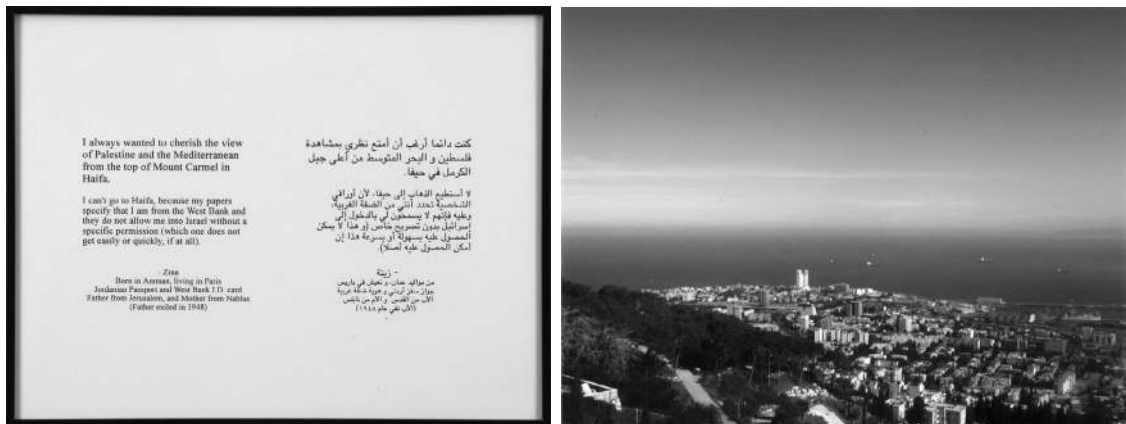
To make *Where We Come From*, Jacir asked more than thirty Palestinians, living within and outside the Occupied Territories and Israel, this question: "If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?" After gathering responses, Jacir carried out the requests, taking a color photograph—often of herself—as she did so. A black-and-white text panel, written in English and Arabic (and occasionally Hebrew), accompanies each image, explaining what wish Jacir fulfilled and for whom. Some requests are practical: "Go to the Israeli post office in Jerusalem and pay my phone bill." Others, more affective: "Go to my mother's grave in Jerusalem on her birthday and put flowers and pray." But all, in some way, express the pain of distance and forced absence from a land one considers home: "Go to Bayt Lahia and bring me a photo of my family, especially my brother's kids." Or even more explicitly: "Go to Jaffa and find my family home and take a picture. As a refugee, I am denied a visit to my country by the Israelis, who control all borders . . ."

The task of carrying out these various requests led Jacir into a kind of protracted performance of wish fulfillment by proxy.<sup>6</sup> Over and over again, in *Where We Come From* Jacir comes to occupy, virtually, the

position held by another who is the subject of some privation, either physical or emotional. Two requests, from subjects identified as Zina and Maha, ask Jacir to behold the Mediterranean Sea from atop a mountain. “I always wanted to cherish the view of Palestine and the Mediterranean from the top of Mount Carmel in Haifa,” Zina exclaims. Or Maha’s instructions to Jacir read, “Climb Mount Carmel in Haifa and look at the Mediterranean from there. I have always dreamed of climbing Mount Carmel, but as a West Banker I cannot enter the 1948 areas.” To look at the photograph Jacir took as she fulfilled these requests—and she uses the same image for both—is to understand the subjects’ yearning to witness this view (see Fig. 4.2). Divided into four regions—the dark green land of the mountain; the white and gray architecture of the port city; the deep expansive blue of the sea; and the cobalt blue sky—the photograph speaks plainly of a site layered with history. But more significantly, the image displays a view of the city of Haifa, which is located in a country known for its politicized and often deadly borders, here without obstruction or violence. Moreover, because Jacir frames the shot such that the spectator identifies with the camera’s viewpoint, it feels as though we have been incorporated into the scene, and, in manner not so different than Mofokeng’s *Dikgoro with Washing Line*, as if we are floating above.

Everyone Jacir spoke to faced severe limitations on their movement, many of whom, living abroad, had been denied access to their places of birth for years. In this, the question posed by Jacir—“What can I do for you anywhere in Palestine?”—highlights postcolonial scholar Edward Said’s description of exile as representing “the unhealable rift between a human being and a native place, between self and its true home,” a rift that separates one from “the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography.”<sup>17</sup> The land of one’s birth, the “where we come from” in Jacir’s piece, can only be a place of memory, imagined and dreamt about, but not physically occupied, at least not by those responding to Jacir’s inquiry.

Like Jacir’s *Where We Come From*, the images in **Joseph Koudelka’s** (b. 1938) photobook *Wall: Israel and Palestinian Landscapes*, published by Aperture in 2013, record how the Middle East’s fraught political history registers itself on the natural landscape. Best known for his series of images of the Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968 and as a member of the photojournalist organization **Magnum**, Koudelka made *Wall* after traveling to East Jerusalem, Hebron, Ramallah, Bethlehem, and various other Israeli settlements along the border between Israel and Palestine between 2008 and 2012. His focus was the



**Figure 4.2** Emily Jacir, *Where We Come From*, detail (*Zina*), 2001–3. Thirty framed prints, thirty-two mounted photos, one video. © Emily Jacir. Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York.



construction and effects of the border wall Israel began erecting in the early 2000s. The book begins with a timeline detailing the controversial wall's construction (Israel calls it a "security fence," Palestinians call it the "apartheid wall") and is followed by a series of beautifully rendered panoramic black and white images. Captions, which specify location and provide facts about the wall's building and its effect on the surrounding land and people, accompany the photographs.

In one of the earlier photographs in the book, *Shu'fat Refugee Camp, overlooking Al 'Isawiya, East Jerusalem* (2009) (see Fig. 4.3), the border wall swoops down from the background and divides the foreground space almost exactly in half. On the right sit buildings of a refugee camp; on the left a dirt road runs alongside the border fence leading toward a home in the distance. Throughout the book as a whole, the separation barrier functions alternatively as figure and ground, but here in this image, it appears as figure and edge—dividing, partitioning, and regulating space (even the space of the photograph, which it splits in two). The caption reads, "If completed as planned, the Wall will be approximately seven hundred kilometers long, more than twice the length of the 320-kilometer 1949 Armistice Line or 'Green Line' between Israel and the West Bank."<sup>8</sup> The "Green Line" refers to a series of agreements signed in 1949 between Israel and Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria that ended the 1948 Arab–Israeli War and established Israel's borders. Present only as text, this history feels absent from the photograph. Missing, too, is any mention of the fact that the barrier wall caused serious problems for this particular village. Because the wall's route placed the refugee camp in the West Bank even though it is officially part of the Jerusalem municipality, a complication leading to serious issues concerning the availability of basic human services such as water, garbage collection, and regular access to medical care.

The fact that the *Shu'fat* image is devoid of people or any signs of active life seems to push further aside questions of contemporary politics. This absence, combined with the photograph's formal beauty and Koudelka's choice to use black and white, makes the picture feel like it is speaking from the past—formal and distant.<sup>9</sup> Or as art historian Kristin Romberg has observed, "The temporality of *Wall* . . . is more future perfect than present; the mood, more Greek tragedy than twenty-four-hour news cycle. Devoid of heroes and martyrs, the human conflict driving the wall's construction already seems petty. The wall goes up like a ruin in reverse." Romberg goes on to argue, however, and this is significant, that the "dramatic mood and epic timescale" of the images in *Wall*, when placed in tension with the book's impassive news-like captions, generate their own kind of political power.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the very quality—the



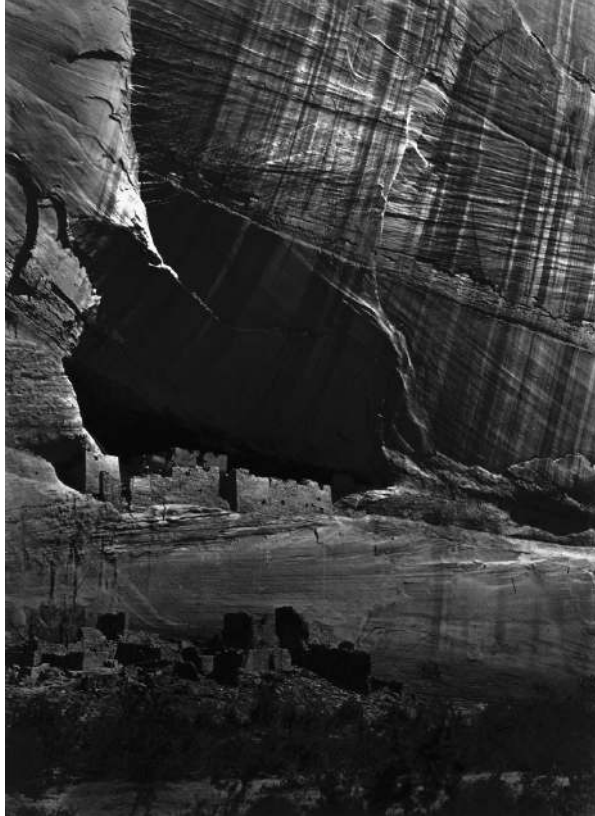
**Figure 4.3** Joseph Koudelka, *Shu'fat Refugee Camp, overlooking Al 'Isawiya, East Jerusalem*, 2009. © Josef Koudelka/Magnum Photos.

formal beauty—that can make it seem like history is missing from these images might also, ultimately, be the source of their political address. That is, the formal tensions in Koudelka's work open up a space for contemplation on the same themes of territorial division and human privation that the work of someone like Emily Jacir does, just on a different register. Whereas Jacir's work incorporates the spectator into the scene as if standing in the negative space of another's life, Koudelka's photographs lack emotional immediacy and move the viewer back into a more meditative state.

Photography's relationship to the formation and experience of national borders and territorial expansion has a long history that predates any twentieth- or twenty-first century concern. In the nineteenth century, just decades after photography's "invention," the British and French deployed photographers to their colonies and throughout the world as a way to mark space and claim ownership over lands and people. Around the same time in the United States, cameras and photographs became key tools in the promotion of **Manifest Destiny**—the claim that the westward expansion of the U.S. was not only justified in social, economic, and political terms, but also destined by God. William Henry Jackson, Timothy O'Sullivan, and Carleton Watkins are among the nineteenth-century photographers who, working for the U.S. government as well as private developers, participated in geological surveys designed to navigate western lands and help build (and reinforce) the legitimacy of the settler state. Photographers who participated in these expeditions played various roles, but most frequently used their skills to document specimens (e.g. rocks and natural formations too big to bring home), record possible land routes for future travelers, and sometimes, employing an anthropological lens, take pictures of native people.

One of the most important tasks performed by these nineteenth-century survey photographers was the imaging of wilderness itself—that is, the representation of vast geological wonders in an imagined untouched and trackless land. On the one hand, such photographs were used to frame the U.S. as a rugged, growth-oriented country distinct from Europe. Europe—this line of thinking implied—may have cathedrals that are thousands of years old, but California has giant sequoia trees.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the very idea of wilderness—the idea that space exists without human settlement—suggested that there is endless opportunity for expansion, a belief critical to the establishment of a **settler colonial state**, which is a form of colonialism that functions on the sustained dispossession of indigenous people and their land. Furthermore, when survey photographers did picture traces of indigenous life or Native pasts, it was usually presented as the inherited property of settler society.<sup>12</sup>

**Timothy O'Sullivan's** (c. 1840–82) image *Ancient Ruins in the Canyon de Chelle, New Mexico* (1873) (see Fig. 4.4) possesses many of the qualities described above. O'Sullivan shot this image while working on a survey led by Lieutenant George Wheeler of the Army Corps of Engineers, and in it, a patchy foreground of rocks and shrubs gives way to a hugely expansive rock façade notable for the vertical striations on its surface. In the middle of the image sits a dilapidated wall, ruins from an American Indian structure. Two tiny figures can be seen climbing the wall, their forms echoed by another pair of figures standing on more ruins below. Ropes, necessary for the climb, connect the two pairs of bodies, and in their diagonal pull, also mirror the striations on the rocks above. Photography historian Robin Kelsey has argued that together, the ropes and the rock's striations flatten the image, making it appear more like a diagram than a traditional western scene with recessional space and penetrating line of sight that pierces the landscape and leads the viewer in.<sup>13</sup> Thus, in at least two ways, the *Ancient Ruins* photograph reveals how expansionist images from the nineteenth century were governed by the logics of possession and settler belonging. First, it charts, like a diagram, European-American exploratory penetration of the West as nothing more than a vigorous climb (think of the men ascending the ruins); and second, it links settler exploration to the inevitability and grandeur of the geological process (think of how the climbing ropes mirror the striations on the rocks above).



**Figure 4.4** Timothy O'Sullivan, *Ancient Ruins in the Canyon de Chelle, New Mexico*, 1873. Digital image courtesy of Getty's Open Content Program.

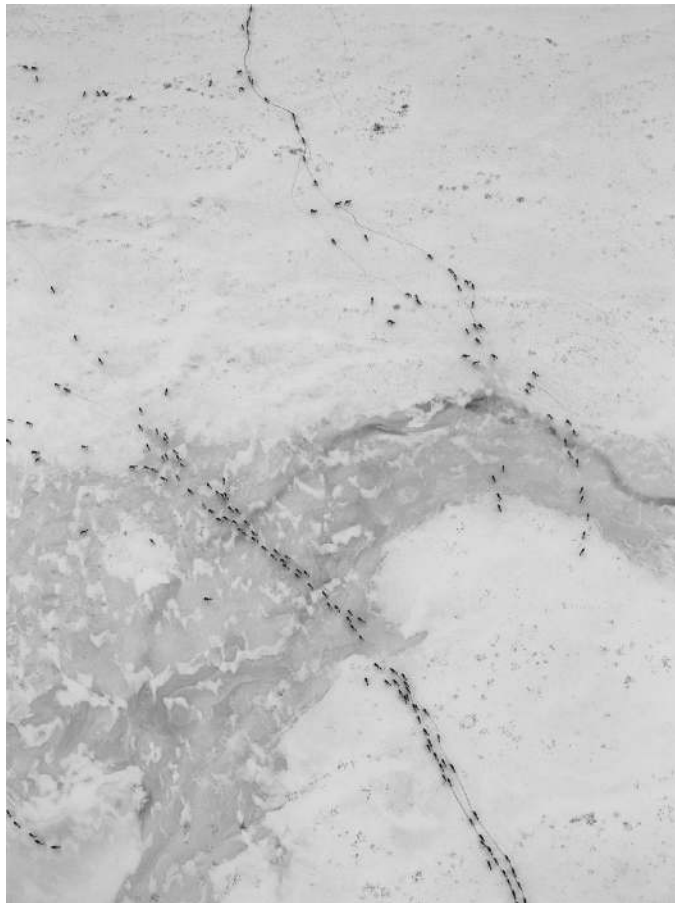
Among the most precious resources recorded by photographers on survey explorations of the American West, then, was that of the West itself. That is, the West as an open space, forever available for exploration and conquest, regardless of any indigenous life or geologic obstacle. An image of the ideal American male—the rugged individual/cowboy, capable of the kind of vigorous climb pictured in O'Sullivan's *Ancient Ruins* photograph—accompanies this notion of the West as a space of unfettered exploration and becomes so ingrained in the American imaginary that the image persists well into the twentieth century, past the time of any actual U.S. territorial expansion. This disjunct, between the fantasy of endless expansion and wilderness and the reality of cowboy life, results in the later twentieth century in a new kind of exploration imagery—one that expresses anxiety rather than confidence about the future. The most famous example of this might be the 1967 Patterson-Gimlin film of Bigfoot scampering around the northern Californian woods.<sup>14</sup> This short film, which was staged by its authors, spawned a near cottage industry of Bigfoot photographs, typically consisting of individuals pointing to empty sites in wooded locations where they claim to have spotted the mysterious Sasquatch beast.<sup>15</sup> Though there is a certain bathos in such imagery of figures pointing to nothing, perhaps the final blow to the romanticized vision of the American cowboy comes in the 1980s with a series titled *Cowboys* produced by photographer (and member of the **Pictures Generation**, discussed more extensively in Chapters 2 and 8), **Richard**

**Prince** (b. 1949). To make his cowboy photographs, Prince rephotographed a number of Marlboro cigarette advertisements that featured a cowboy, known as the Marlboro man, traversing mountainous landscapes on horseback. Prince removed all the text and reframed the images as high art photographs, and without text or product, the pictures appear more nostalgic than promotional. Their concentrated color and grainy surface now seeming to advertise not the possibility of a rugged life in western lands, but rather the fear of a vanishing frontier and the collapsed dream of endless expansion.<sup>16</sup>

## Ecology

Just as human decision determines and regulates national borders, so too does it affect and change the natural world. Though not always immediately apparent, “natural” landscapes—of mountains, sunsets, oceans, and so on—are shaped as much by human life and human actions as they are by forces beyond human control; neither the natural nor the human world exists without influence from the other. To account for the profound impact that humans have had on the planet, including rising ocean waters, hotter weather, and stronger and more erratic storms, some scientists, as well as scholars from emerging fields such as the environmental humanities, have designated our contemporary geological epoch as the **Anthropocene**. The term refers to a new era, most often considered to have begun in the mid-twentieth century, in which humanity’s impact on the planet is so profound that it determines the Earth’s natural systems and geological conditions.<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that a number of ecologically-minded thinkers have challenged this term, arguing, among other things, that it universalizes responsibility for climate change—placing it in the hands of all humans everywhere—when in fact developed and colonial nations, as well as fossil fuel corporations, have contributed more to the problem than less developed and indigenous nations. Similarly, some feel the term universalizes the impacts of climate change, as if everyone will be equally affected, when in reality climate change carries differential impacts according to geography, class, economic resources, and race.<sup>18</sup>

**Subankar Banerjee** (b. 1967), an Indian-born American photographer, writer, and activist makes work that not only addresses the physical and social effects of climate change, but also recognizes some of its differential impacts. Banerjee, who abandoned his career as a research scientist in 2000 in order to photograph the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in Alaska, focuses on the shifting patterns of non-human life in the Arctic caused by climate change. Banerjee’s images are also remarkable for the way in which he creates non-objectified images of animals, representing both the meaningful relationships that exist in non-human (animal) communities, and the relationships that such communities have with humans. One strategy Banerjee uses to achieve this is to photograph the tracks and traces that non-human species draw into the Earth while migrating. Thinking outside any idea of **human exceptionalism**, these marks come to function in Banerjee’s work as a kind of speech—even a kind of articulation of the animals’ rights to the land. For instance, *Caribou Migration I*, from 2002 (see Fig. 4.5), depicts, from an aerial perspective, pregnant caribou migrating across the ANWR’s Colleen River Valley. The image wavers between abstraction and realism, the white field of snow and dark brown dots only revealing themselves as land and a pack of traveling caribou upon close and sustained inspection. Notable too is the way in which the caribou’s footprints draw lines across the surface of the image in a manner similar to the rope and striations of O’Sullivan’s *Ancient Ruins* image. Here though what marks the ground, and claims its right, is non-human life, thus disrupting the settler colonial grammar of place as it is articulated by O’Sullivan’s photograph.



**Figure 4.5** Subhankar Banerjee, *Caribou Migration 1*, 2002. © Subhankar Banerjee. Courtesy of the artist.

Color also plays a role in how Banerjee seeks to reorient his viewer's sense of place and picture Arctic sites as decolonized spaces. For instance, he often organizes his work by color as a way to help viewers unlearn the misconception that the Arctic is a hostile, uninhabitable, bleached-out wasteland. Banerjee explains:

In the popular conception around the world, the Arctic is primarily thought to be a space of “snow and ice” and “ice and snow.” In the words of pro-oil-development USA politicians, the Arctic has been variously described as “flat white nothingness,” “frozen wasteland of snow and ice” and “barren wasteland”. . . I began to ask: Can I make a photograph with only brown; white and brown; only grey; white, grey and brown; white, blue and brown; only green; green and blue? . . . Colour, I thought, would be a wonderful visual language to help us unlearn some of these intolerances.”<sup>19</sup>

Such an approach situates the Arctic not as vast other-land, but as an “eco-cultural” space in which animals and people—and some of Banerjee's ANWR images also feature Native Inupiat and Gwich'in people—cohabit the land and are interdependent.

## FOCUS BOX 4: Ecocritical voices

### Peripatetic photography—crossing borders, building bridges

*Subhankar Banerjee*

Since 2001, I have been encouraging residents of the lower latitudes to consider how the Arctic is connected to their own lives and places of residence and, in so doing, slowly transform how we speak about the Arctic—no longer as the *far north* but instead as a *near north*. Recently, after sixteen years of telling others why “they” should care about the Arctic, I began to ask myself why “I” care about the Arctic so much. This happened because, after working independently for sixteen years, in 2016 I joined the University of New Mexico (UNM) faculty and had to think about the classes I might like to teach and other activist and scholarly activities in which I might like to engage.

In the spring of 2017, I taught my first class at UNM: “Integrative Ecology and Social Transformation.” The class was cross-listed with eleven different departments and programs: American studies, arts, biology, communication and journalism, community and regional planning, geography and environmental studies, Native American studies, public administration, religion, sustainability, and the Honors College. Thirty-nine students from fifteen departments registered. That semester I also convened a four-day interdisciplinary public forum called “Decolonizing Nature: Resistance/Resilience/Revitalization” (<http://decolonizingnature.unm.edu>), which brought to Albuquerque over thirty speakers from diverse academic disciplines, including, art, architecture, science, religion, and the humanities, as well as environmental conservation and indigenous human rights activists. How does someone like me, who has no academic training in arts or humanities, dare venture into such an interdisciplinary realm? The answer lies in what I call “peripatetic photography.”<sup>1</sup>

Peripatetic photography is built on the foundation of “The Itinerant Languages of Photography.” Established by Eduardo Cadava, Gabriela Nouzeilles, and their colleagues, The Itinerant Languages of Photography was a three-year transcontinental interdisciplinary project that examined for the first time the movement of photographs across space, time, media, and genres. The project hosted several symposia in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Spain, and the United States, and culminated, in 2013, with an exhibition at the Princeton University Art Museum. As Cadava and Nouzeilles explain in the exhibition catalogue, “The phrase ‘itinerant languages’ refers to the various means whereby photographs not only ‘speak’ but also move across historical periods, national borders,

<sup>1</sup>In 2017, I introduced the term “peripatetic photography” in two separate lectures: first, at the “Extraction Speaker Series” organized by the Center for Creative Ecologies at the University of California-Santa Cruz in February, and then at the symposium “Art of Environmental Justice in an Expanded Field” at Princeton University in April.



and different mediums.” In its focus on how the photographs “redefine themselves and take on different and expanding significances”<sup>2</sup> as they migrate across time, space, and media, the attention of *The Itinerant Languages of Photography* remained largely focused on the photographs and not on the spaces to which the photographs migrate.

Peripatetic photography, on the other hand, draws attention to the spaces to which a photograph migrates and encourages us to critically engage with those spaces. To mark the distinction, I articulate peripatetic photography in this manner: A photograph is not merely an object on a wall, or on a printed page, or online, that may induce pleasure or spark intrigue and other human emotions, but more importantly, it is a portal to activism and knowledge—collaborative social-environmental activism and the interdisciplinary production of knowledge. The aim of peripatetic photography is to apprehend the significance of cross-pollination of knowledge and practices across various spaces into which photographs migrate across time.

The migrant lives of *Caribou Migration I* and its two variants, *Caribou Migration II* and *Caribou Migration III*, are examples of peripatetic photography. Made in early May 2002, those images depict pregnant female caribou of the Porcupine herd migrating across frozen river valleys or steep mountain slopes. Every spring the Porcupine caribou herd embarks on the longest land migration of any mammal on earth, journeying from their wintering grounds in northeast Alaska and the adjacent northwest Canada to the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, where they calve and nurse their young. With their minimal color palette—white, brown, grey, and teal—and a spare, near-abstract aesthetic, the photographs have been widely reproduced in various creative, academic, activist, and public spaces in formats that range from small postcards to large art objects. The following is a list of some of the print and online venues to which the caribou photographs have so far migrated:

## Books and anthologies

*The Alaska Native Reader: History, Culture, Politics*

*American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*

*Animal Eye* (book of poems; caribou migration appears in a literary form in the poem “Arctic Scale”)

*Arctic Voices: Resistance at the Tipping Point*

*Conservation Education and Outreach Techniques*

*Critical Landscapes: Art, Space, Politics*

*Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*

*A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History*

<sup>2</sup>Eduardo Cadava and Gabriela Nouzeilles, “Introduction,” in Eduardo Cadava and Gabriela Nouzeilles (eds.), *The Itinerant Languages of Photography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Art Museum, 2013), 17.



## Exhibition catalogues

*Photographers and Research: The Role of Research in Contemporary Photographic Practice all our relations* (18th Biennale of Sydney exhibition)

*(Re-)Cycles of Paradise: An Exhibition at the Intersection of Art, Gender, and Climate Change*

*True North: Contemporary Art of the Circumpolar North*

## Journal articles

“Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology” (special issue of the *Third Text*)

“Gender on Ice” (a special issue of *The Scholar & Feminist*; online)

## Miscellaneous

“Big Oil is Willing to Pay You a Penny to Let Them Destroy the Arctic Refuge” (ad in the *New York Times*)

“GWANDAI K'EERAAANTYAA GOO'ALL (TAKE CARE OF ALL LIFE) 25 YEARS OF PROTECTING GWICH'IN WAY OF LIFE” (Gwich'in Steering Committee poster)  
*A Moral Choice for the United States: The Human Rights Implications for the Gwich'in of Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge* (report published by the Gwich'in Steering Committee)

“Protecting ‘The Sacred Place Where Life Begins’” (Gwich'in Steering Committee website, [ourarcticrefuge.org](http://ourarcticrefuge.org); online)

Each time one of the caribou migration images appeared in a new forum, I engaged with that space. From the path-breaking book *The Alaska Native Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, I learned about the rich history of “Native Solidarity” and began to think and speak about Alaska differently. As editor Maria Shaa Tláa Williams writes in the book's preface:

I grew up reading about the brave pioneers who came to Alaska or the early Russians who “discovered” my ancestral land. Most non-Native people do not realize what an affront this is—to read about the “discovery” of the place that is our home/heart/spirit and where my ancestors have lived and hunted since the end of the Pleistocene age, as if we have been somehow invisible all these tens of thousands of years.<sup>3</sup>

From *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History*, I discovered ecocriticism and the significance of close reading. From “Contemporary Art and the

<sup>3</sup>Maria Shaa Tláa Williams, “Preface,” in Maria Shaa Tláa Williams (ed.), *The Alaska Native Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), xiii.

Politics of Ecology” and later, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*, I began to think about art’s role in addressing political ecology. All of these disciplinary forays profoundly influenced my writing, teaching, and activism, not to mention my subsequent photography. New, sometimes even contradictory, ideas started to surface as I began to build bridges across all that I was learning from the social life of my photographs.

For example, in the introduction to *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*, the book’s editor, influential environmental journalist and climate change activist Bill McKibben, writes that “only here [in the United States] did that witness [to environmental destruction] take place in a context of general affluence that made vigorous questioning possible—more and more of us were freed from the need to directly subdue the natural world in order to secure our dinner.”<sup>4</sup> Beyond the obvious and problematic nationalism evident in the larger paragraph in which that text appears, two questions jumped out at me. Do I need to be affluent to be environmental? Can I not secure my dinner from conservation worthy land? Then, as if in response, in *A Moral Choice for the United States: The Human Rights Implications for the Gwich’in of Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge*, I found the following: “For thousands of years, the Gwich’in have relied on the caribou as their primary food source” and, “The herd and its birthing and nursery grounds are so significant to the Gwich’in that they call the Coastal Plain *Izhik Gwats’an Gwandaii Goodlit*, ‘The Sacred Place Where Life Begins’”<sup>5</sup>—one of the most biologically diverse nurseries in the Circumpolar North.

The caribou migration photographs acted as a portal into such radically different spaces as *American Earth* and *A Moral Choice for the United States*. I then interpreted and brought together some of the information presented in those two documents to illustrate the principal aim of peripatetic photography: to apprehend the significance of the cross-pollination of knowledge and practices across various spaces into which photographs migrate across time. Such cross-pollination has also helped me to develop the concept of “long environmentalism,” which arises out of multiple-decades-long social-environmental engagement. The two principal tenets of long environmentalism are (i) collaboration among unlikely allies through the act of sincere listening giving rise to *radical hope*, and (ii) a period of time that is long enough to enable what was once considered marginal (like a human community or an idea) to become significant and essential.<sup>6</sup> In the preceding paragraph both of these two tenets

<sup>4</sup>Bill McKibben, “Introduction,” in Bill McKibben (ed.), *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau* (New York: Library of America, 2008), xxiii.

<sup>5</sup>“Executive Summary,” in *A Moral Choice for the United States: The Human Rights Implications for the Gwich’in of Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge* (Fairbanks: The Gwich’in Steering Committee, 2005), iii.

<sup>6</sup>I gave several talks on “long environmentalism” between 2013 and 2015, which resulted in the book chapter “Long Environmentalism: After the Listening Session,” in Salma Monani and Joni Adamson (eds.), *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies: Conversations from Earth to Cosmos* (London: Routledge, 2016).

are highlighted: the idea of securing dinner from conservation worthy land was once considered antithetical to conservation aims, and yet today, indigenous food security is an essential argument in the campaign to defend the Arctic Refuge from oil gas development; and this social transformation has happened because unlikely allies—white environmentalists and indigenous human rights activists—have worked together to defend the Arctic Refuge over the past four decades.

In February 2018, I convened “The Last Oil: A Multispecies Justice Symposium on Arctic Alaska and Beyond” (<https://thelastoil.unm.edu>) to address the expansive war the Trump administration had launched on Alaska’s Arctic by aiming to open up vast areas to oil and gas development, including the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. With nearly thirty speakers from diverse disciplines and indigenous activists and conservationists, participants gathered at UNM to speak about how US energy policy threatens biological nurseries of global significance and endangers indigenous food security. I presented the symposium program as a blueprint of what a twenty-first-century university could and ought to strive for: to dissolve disciplinary silos. The myriad entangled ecological and social crises of our time—climate change and the Sixth Extinction included—caused and/or amplified by capitalism, colonialism, militarism—impel us to—not enter our individual wells and fortify the walls but instead to reach out and build bridges across cultures, geographies, disciplines, institutions, race, class, gender, age. Scholars in environmental humanities have also made a similar call for integration, as is highlighted in Joni Adamson and Michael Davis’s 2016 book, *Humanities for the Environment: Integrating knowledge, forging new constellations of practice*. Peripatetic photography participates in this contemporary development by showing the possibilities of crossing borders and building bridges.

## Art in the Anthropocene

### T. J. Demos in conversation with Charlotte Cotton

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**Charlotte Cotton (CC):** In the first chapter of your book *Against the Anthropocene*, you raise a question that really struck me: “How does the Anthropocene enter into visuality, and what are its politics of representation?”

Conversations around independent, authored photography are extremely adept at working through the politics of representation, especially those of identity. But “landscape photography,” even photographic works that are at least symbolically aligned with environmental trauma, is rarely positioned under the same critical

microscope as other photographic genres. Why do you think we are reluctant to consider the intersectionality of representation and our socioecology?

**T. J. Demos (TJD):** The first thing to remind ourselves is that, as you indicate, there's no unified field of photographic practice, but rather a multiplicity of approaches, many conflictual. Long-standing conventional and dominant ones tend to aestheticize landscapes in ways that exclude conflict and socioecological, political concerns. Landscape has a long art-historical tradition, and the tendency to portray "nature" as a separate realm, defined by the absence of humans and highlighting the beauty of "wilderness," has been endlessly repeated. Yet we know that the construction of landscapes has been part of the colonial project. The translation of that construction into conservation practice is no less predicated upon the forced displacement of Indigenous Peoples and supporting racial and class privileges, something that continues to this day under the aegis of the extractive economy, which also contains a strategic visual component.

In this sense, landscape photography, driven by the art market or commercial journalistic imperatives, tends to support that expansive colonial project, sometimes unintentionally, by practicing the objectification of the nonhuman and its transformation into a commodifiable picture that can be possessed within economies of wealth accumulation. Perhaps some are reluctant to consider this intersectionality because it threatens not only deeply held beliefs and aesthetic values, but also economic interests.

**CC:** How has the pronouncement of the Anthropocene affected landscape photography's approach to image making?

**TJD:** With the Anthropocene epoch, we're witnessing a shift in visibility toward post-photographic remote-sensing, where the landscape becomes regionalized, becomes the Earthscape. The image is not only directed toward commercial markets, but also toward the technoscientific corporate-state-military complex, in the name of surveillance, climate data modeling, green capitalist rationality, and geoengineering.

The problem here is that the environment is once again reified as a discrete realm, cut off from sociopolitical realities. Environmentalist activism often follows suit by challenging carbon pollution but also accepting the delimitation on what *climate* means. By doing so, it perpetuates the nature-culture divide and limits its own intervention in the science that is alienating and irrelevant to the present urgencies of many submerged in the conditions of everyday state, corporate, and police violence.

Meanwhile, genres of portraiture and social documentary, for their part, tend to reify their own respective categories, failing to consider how present climate transformation exacerbates economic inequalities and social violence.

**CC:** What alternative approach do you think you are calling for?

**TJD:** One thing I'm calling for is the disarticulation of the term *environment* into its many possible meanings so that we can recognize and engage with cross-sectoral conditions. A "climate" might be one of antiblackness (as Christina Sharpe writes, as John Akomfrah and Arthur Jafa visualize). "I can't breathe" is not only a matter of police brutality directed disproportionately at people of color, but also a matter of polluted air owing to the Capitalocene, where geology is increasingly determined on a global scale by our economic order, and its violences and inequalities. I write now from a burning California where it's unsafe to be outside for extended periods—but for the multitudes who are houseless there is no option.

An intersectional approach would insist on seeing the visual field as structured by these inextricable relations of power, economic forces, and ideological mechanisms. Certainly there are numerous practices today attempting to do just that. Works by Forensic Architecture, Ursula Biemann and Paulo Tavares, Laura Kurgan, and Richard Misrach in collaboration with Kate Orff and Scape, to mention only a few, are exemplary for me. Such an approach might also include focusing on sites of environmental trauma, in order to raise awareness or inspire new legal orders based in biocentric imperatives. Yet even here there's a danger—that of aestheticizing destruction, something I address in *Against the Anthropocene*. For example, the epic photography of Edward Burtynsky for me calls up Benjamin's Nazi-era but still resonant critique of a political aesthetics that relishes scenes of self-destruction, which is not helped by Burtynsky's determinedly apolitical self-positioning and market-directed practice.

**CC:** You've mentioned a number of contemporary art practices you admire. One of the elements I appreciate so readily about your writing and thinking is that the artists you focus our attention upon—which include Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski, the Argos Collective, Amy Balkin, Ravi Agarwal, Kristina Buch, and the Otolith Group—are revealed to the reader rather than offered up as illustrators of a theory.

**TJD:** In creating images, framing points of view, arranging affective sensation, and reconfiguring perception, artworks exhibit intelligence, model forms of life, produce subjectivities, and enact politics. In my work, I'm always interested in exploring these convergences between theoretical writing, political force fields, and aesthetic emergences, where art plays an active role in constructing intersections.

When I look at the work of the artists you mention, my ultimate objective is to get at that distinctive movement that only this or that particular work achieves. I try to honor its contribution by thinking with it, and by articulating the resonances that speak to the relevance and significance of its project.

**CC:** In your perspective, where and how do artists shape our socioecological narrative?

**TJD:** Without perpetuating the notion of the heroic, exceptionalist quality of art that's long been part of the avant-garde mythos, I do believe that art is able to shape narratives in unique ways. Though art history and criticism have been, as art has, corrupted by markets, they still hold the potential to redeem art as a place where we can invent, experiment with, deliberate, and critically consider emergent forms of life, which is more urgent than ever, now that we're facing an ever more likely near future of mutually assured self-destruction.

This points to the sociopolitical and, indeed, ecological significance of artistic practice as a laboratory where we can create, restore, and decolonize futures on the basis of social justice and multispecies flourishing, where social transformation can be advanced, where we can “stay with the trouble,” as Donna Haraway advises. It's a place where we can insist on the importance of anti-anti-utopian thinking—thinking against the nihilism and cynicism that otherwise rule the current hegemony of capitalist realism.

**CC:** Can you illustrate how art might create meaningful space for this kind of thinking?

**TJD:** One of my most recent essays is on Arthur Jafa. Looking at Jafa's work, in particular his video *Love is the Message, the Message is Death* (2016), allowed me to open a dialogue between environmental studies and its technoscientific leanings, on the one hand, and social-justice critiques of racial capitalism, on the other. By situating this conversation alongside Jafa's video, we can avoid what some call white environmentalism, or ecologies of affluence—modes of advocacy based on privilege that seek to sustain livability without addressing profound social inequalities—and while also pushing antiracist activism toward wider considerations of unjust atmospherics and ecologies of inequality. Ultimately, the art allows us to think with it in the experimental formulation of new collectivities that might actually contribute to widening social transformation in crucial and necessary ways.

**CC:** You write about how artists can provide us with proximity to our socioecology, and, therefore, to some hope of social transformation. I am curious where your own proximity to our socioecology stems from.

**TJD:** I first had the chance to address political ecology in a catalog essay for *Radical Nature*, an exhibition at the Barbican in London in 2009. I wrote about the ideological functions of sustainability discourse in environmental art and activism, where, as it turns out, “sustainable development” has always meant the imperative to sustain *economic* growth before all else. Meanwhile, I had been researching politico-economic conflicts under globalization since 1989, particularly in relation to U.S. military zones,

migration and border control, and the way many artists were investigating these subjects, which led to my book *The Migrant Image* (2013). It was only a logical step to consider the environmental impacts of our world economic order in turn.

Soon it became clear that environmental violence was not simply a peripheral problem to social inequality and state violence, but integral to globalization. What's more, conditions were gradually worsening to the point where our very livability as a global civilization was increasingly seeming imminently at risk. What drives my work, after years of researching ecology, stems from the basic activist imperative I feel, which requires doing everything possible to contribute to the movement to stop catastrophic climate breakdown, and to work toward solutions grounded in social justice rather than green capitalism. It not only matters *that* we address this crisis, but *how* we do so, and it's clear that financial elites, for instance, are already mobilizing climate-change responses to serve their own interests. This, as journalist Allan Nairn points out, is allied with "incipient fascism" in the U.S., mobilizing the worst elements of white supremacy and antimigrant xenophobia to reach its goals. We're facing a war of the worlds, and we must do whatever we can, as well as all we can, by advancing a progressive and intersectional agenda.

**CC:** Is your commitment to writing and teaching driven by a desire to serve the human imperative?

**TJD:** Writing is a key instrument for me, and it connects to researching, collaboration, teaching, and activism. Like art, writing isn't illustrative or supplemental to thinking or meaning making. It's a generative process. Through its very difficulties and revisions, mistakes and corrections, dead-ends and breakthroughs, it allows and provides the material conditions for new insights and realizations to emerge, for positions to be tested and taken, for commitments and political stakes to be articulated.

That said, I don't generally speculate about where my texts might end up someday, or how they'll be regarded in the future. Certainly we can think of books as messages to the future, as time-travel machines, and I definitely consider past literature in this way. Take experimental sci-fi where the text is a place where time-travel can occur, as in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), or the Otolith Group's notion of erstwhile events as holding within them past-potential futures, which might be critically decoded and newly mobilized in the present—also part of the magic potential of photography, you might say.

In my recent writing, though, I'm more interested in writing as a site where we can collect and reflect on messages from the future by considering multiple, conflictual potential movements that are now at stake. Knowing that things can get worse, even to the point of the end of human civilization as we know it, ultimately drives my work. I figure it as a contribution to social transformation, which nonetheless, as I'm well aware, may still not be enough to save us.



**Ravi Agarwal** (b. 1960), like Subhanker Banerjee, positions himself as both a photographer and an environmental activist. Trained as an engineer in his native India, Agarwal seeks to create images that picture nature not as a view, but, in his words, as “culture, mythology, relationships, water, livelihood.”<sup>20</sup> His series *Have You Seen the Flowers on the River?* (2007–12) was completed in New Delhi on the banks of the Yamuna river. This river is often described as dead because of its black color, and the “toxic cocktail of raw sewage, industrial waste and surface runoff” that spills into it. As Manoi Mishra, a noted environmentalist, has said about the Yamuna, “A river that does not flow is no river.”<sup>21</sup> Yet Agarwal, unwilling to completely abandon the Yamuna, represents it as a complex site that enables and sustains part of New Delhi’s significant flower economy, and as a place where families cook and bath and raise their children along its banks. For Agarwal, the river is “not just a water body flowing through the city, but a network of myriad relationships—interconnected to the city and its people, *and* to nature.”<sup>22</sup> In one photograph from this series, Agarwal contests the idea of a “dead” river by portraying the intense saturated colors characteristic of the flower economy: the orange of marigolds, the rich green of fields, blue sky, and the bright sandy tan of the fertile land by the river’s bed (see Plate 6). A bicycle with clothes draped over the handlebars rests in the foreground of this image, as if to invite the viewer to ride through the marigold fields and witness for herself this sustainable use of land.

*Have You Seen the Flowers on the River?* consists not only of individual photographs representing aspects of the flower economy, but also videos, postcards, a blog, field notes, walking tours, a public picnic, and other components all designed to show the possibilities, if not current realities, of what the river could be for Delhi. The constellation here of different events, practices, and images combine historical, political, and aesthetic discourses in a manner designed to disrupt a straightforward linear narrative of progress, which in the end, always seems to aid those with power. And, despite Agarwal’s work on *Have You Seen the Flowers on the River?*, the Indian government has already acquired thousands of acres of land from farmers around the Yamuna in order to meet the demands of the expanding city and to construct buildings, including a number of stadiums built for the 2010 Commonwealth Games. The sustainable life and economy that Agarwal began to record as evidence of what can exist in the middle of a densely populated city has thus already begun to disappear. This raises difficult questions about the relationship between progress, ecology, and equality. For part of the appeal of Agarwal’s images is their ground-up perspective, that is, the way in which the images feel rooted in a specific location, but also tactile—as if the viewer could touch the illustrated scene and in so doing begin to understand the site’s local history. As the Indian government and other corporate entities acquire land around the Yamuna, that grounded, local specificity—understood and captured so well by Agarwal’s photographs—will inevitably give way to new development spawned by the city’s continuing **globalization**.<sup>23</sup>

Another recent project organized around the life of a river is **Zhang Kechun’s** (b. 1980) *The Yellow River* (2012), a series of photographs documenting the effects of modernization along the Yellow river in China.<sup>24</sup> The second longest river in China, the Yellow is associated with ancient Chinese civilization; from the first Chinese dynasty, the Xia (c. 2070–1600 BCE), onward, the area has served as the center of economic, political, and cultural life. Prone to flooding, in recent years a number of developments and towns along the river have been devastated by climatological changes, increasing pollution, and shifts in the direction of the river’s flow.<sup>25</sup> Zhang’s photographs capture the visual impact of such change on the Chinese landscape, the scars of development, as well as the affective impact on local populations. But when Zhang first began photographing the Yellow river, he did not anticipate the project becoming a meditation on China’s changing environment. It was only after he started traveling (by bicycle, one month at a time, over several years) along the river from Shandong, a coastal province, to Dongying, a city with

approximately 2 million residents, to the mountains of Qinghai, a largely rural area, that he realized how tensions caused by modernization in China have become visible along the river's path. Zhang's choice to travel from urban to more rural settings, from the river's mouth to its source, contributed to this recognition as it threw into relief the astonishing rate of development that has characterized China for decades. As Zhang explains, "I started off wanting to photograph my ideal of the river, but I kept running into pollution . . . [and] I realized that I couldn't run away from it, and that I didn't need to run away from it."<sup>26</sup>

In keeping with the river's mythical status in Chinese culture, Zhang employed a **large format Linhof camera**, which in photography's own history also carries a certain mystique. Though the technology is outdated (the camera uses analog film rather than digital files, for example) and the process is slow and manual, the Linhof does give a photographer a lot of control over image-making. With a large format camera, it is nearly impossible to photograph anything accidentally, and the larger negatives necessitated by the large format allow for sharper and more detailed images. Zhang embraced both this slowness and the control, explaining that he wanted to take his time when photographing the river, "to slow down and experience every second of the moment." He further explains that he chose to photograph only on "cloudy, gloomy days" and that he overexposed his images in order to add "a soft and gentle touch."<sup>27</sup> The result of these choices is that almost every photograph in *The Yellow River* series is blonde, consisting of shades of white and gray, tan and beige, speckled with periodic bursts of color or spots of darker contrast.

One picture from the series, *People Fishing by the River, Shaanxi, China* (2012) (see Fig. 4.6), features a single abandoned concrete and brick cylinder jutting out from a deep pool of water in which two small



**Figure 4.6** Zhang Kechun, *People Fishing by the River, Shaanxi, China*, from the series *The Yellow River*, 2012. © Zang Kechun. Courtesy of the artist.

figures stand, or possibly swim. Their dark clothing contrasts with the image's overall sandy grayness, highlighting the difference between the scale and temporality of the abandoned ruins and the living subjects. A number of writers and curators have described Zhang's project as depicting everyday life along the Chinese waterways, yet nothing *feels* daily about an image such as *People Fishing by the River*. The picture's slow dreaminess endows it with a contemplative quality not unlike, at least on an emotive level, the photographs from Koudelka's *Wall* series. As with the images in that series, the *Yellow River* photographs develop conceptually over time in the viewer's mind. This is in sharp contrast to China's rapid pace of development, and key to the work's impact. In other words, Zhang's choice to use an analog camera invites a comparison between the development of his ideas about the ecological consequences of China's rapid growth and the photographic medium's process. The imprint of an image or idea has to be there from the start, but time deepens its definition, contrast, and complexity.<sup>28</sup>

In their ethereal otherworldliness, Zhang's photographs draw an analogy between disturbances in the social or human world and disruptions in the natural one. The other photographers examined in this section, Ravi Agarwal and Subhanker Banerjee, reject the idea of analogy because for them, "nature" and "culture" do not exist as distinct categories or separate orders of being. In the nineteenth century, avid outdoorsman **George Shiras** (1859–1942) created images that, at least at first, seem to straddle the two approaches mapped out by Zhang on the one hand, and Agarwal and Banerjee on the other. Shiras once served in the U.S. Congress, was friends with prominent American conservationists such as Theodore Roosevelt, and considered himself not only a photographer and conservationist, but also a hunter. Shiras believed that photography connected conservation and hunting in that both relied upon a rugged method of tracking and capturing wild animals—the click of the shutter replacing, in a sense, the trigger of a gun. In essence, Shiras and other like-minded individuals—many of whom published work in *National Geographic*, which was first printed in 1888—believed that the hunt to get a good picture would replace actual hunting expeditions, and correspondingly, that photographs would replace hunting trophies. As wildlife photographer William Nesbit described in 1926, a number of hunters underwent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century a "conversion from gun to camera."<sup>29</sup>

In 1890, Shiras took a photograph—or rather, helped create a photograph—captioned "The first wild animal to take its own picture" (see Fig. 4.7). The phrase "helped create" is used here to communicate how Shiras sought to abdicate his own agency in the making of this picture, and pass it onto the represented "wild animal," in this case, a doe. In reality, the photograph was taken with a **trap camera** posted on a stake or tree. Trap cameras are remotely activated cameras equipped with a wire that when tripped, triggers the shutter's click. By identifying the doe as having taken its own picture by tripping the wire, Shiras positioned his animal-generated photographs as declarations of animal agency. In this, the marks left on icy terrain by migrating herds of caribou in Banerjee's *Caribou Migration I* relate to the doe's clicking of the wire, both gestures giving voice to non-human agents. But the similarities end there. For while Shiras may remove the sight of humans from his photographs, it is nonetheless human life that dictates the terms of his production. Setting up the camera, knowing where to place it, leaving treats for animals next to the trip wire—these actions all reinforce human mastery over wild lands and animals, and remind us that Shiras's images are guided as much, or more, by a mode of hunting-imperialism as they are by a belief in animal agency. Importantly, this outlook, which encourages the imagined absence of human life in spaces considered "wild," also contributed to the erasure of indigenous people and histories from any pictured land.

On a final note, denying the presence of human agents in spaces considered "wild" also obscures the ways in which human interaction with non-humans has shaped both species. For a scholar like Donna



**Figure 4.7** George Shiras, “The first wild animal to take its own picture,” 1891. Courtesy of National Geographic Creative.

Haraway, this is a critical point. Haraway, as a critic of the Anthropocene, believes we live in an age of **multispecies ecological being**. Humans, according to Haraway, can no longer be considered singular discreet beings; rather, the human is an assemblage dependent on companion species such as the bacteria in our guts or other external environments, such as water, soil, plants, and animals, without which we could not live.<sup>30</sup> Haraway’s work, along with an increasing number of artists, critics, and scholars, refuses the boundaries that cordon nature from culture and in so doing look for the possibility of sustaining life in the Anthropocene, or in what anthropologist Anna Tsing identifies as capitalist ruins.<sup>31</sup>

## History

In 1959, the collaborative photography team Hilla Becher (1934–2015) and Bernd Becher (1931–2007), founders of what is now known as the **Düsseldorf School of Photography**, began a project that preoccupied them until Bernd’s death in 2007: the systematic recording of anonymous European and American industrial architecture. The Bechers grew up in devastated post-World War II Germany (Hilla under the socialist regime in the German Democratic Republic, Bernd in West Germany), and the objects they chose to document and archive—structures such as water and winding towers, gas tanks and coal tipples—emerge from that landscape. Under threat of disappearance through neglect and decay, the Bechers developed an extraordinarily controlled approach to recording these structures by establishing

a number of self-imposed and rigorously enforced restrictions on their practice. Critic and art historian Benjamin Buchloh has identified a number of these, including a prohibition on color; the systematic exclusion of human agents; a focus on structures erected during a particular temporal frame (the 1880s to the 1960s); and the suppression of photographic effects that might lead to expressive interpretation.<sup>32</sup>

*Water Towers (Wassertürme)*, from 1980 (see Fig. 4.8), perfectly conforms to the Bechers's self-imposed rigid production conditions. Arranged in a grid, as is typical of their display methods, the nine photographs here each portray a centrally framed water tower in a crisp gray scale. The flat presentation deflects any anecdotal or symbolic interpretation even as the picture's formal stillness grants the work a deep sense of melancholia. Such a sense of loss typifies the Bechers's work and is largely responsible for their project's uncanny ability to draw in viewers. But this sense of loss is also part of a dialectic that governs the work, a dialectic between a desire to record and preserve on one side, and the melancholic realization of loss on the other. As Buchloh again explains, "This dialectic articulates the extreme ambivalence with which the Bechers contemplated the once-utopian Enlightenment, the promises of the industrial age as an era of continuous progress and collective advancement, only to recognize that these had now also delivered the legacies of industrialized death, dystopian catastrophe, and ecological destruction."<sup>33</sup> The Bechers' work, in other words, traces the German experience of capitalist development (and its culmination in fascism) by mapping a landscape of industrial decay.



**Figure 4.8** Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Water Towers, (Wassertürme)*, 1980. © Estate Bernd & Hilla Becher, represented by Max Becher. Courtesy of Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur—Bernd and Hilla Becher Archive, Cologne.



The Bechers' work thus poignantly demonstrates how photographs of the land register memories and history even when those memories are not immediately apparent and that history is largely repressed. Santu Mofokeng's *Dikgoro with Washing Line*, a peaceful image about South Africa's violent past—and the photograph that opened this chapter's discussion—likewise demonstrates how the quiet accumulation of history can map onto a photograph's surface. Another South African photographer, David Goldblatt (1930–2018) has similarly approached his country's past, focusing his camera on daily life rather than explosions of hostility or a blood-soaked landscape. But Goldblatt, in some ways like the Bechers, looks to buildings and structures as a way of representing, or analogizing, the racist structures that governed his country during apartheid rule. Goldblatt's *Café-de-Move-On Braamfontein, Johannesburg, November, 1964* exemplifies this approach (see Fig. 4.9). The image illustrates a coffee cart, the kind used to serve food to black workers in Johannesburg who were not welcome at nor could afford other cafes or restaurants. Built from cast-off construction materials from white-owned and occupied projects, carts such as the one pictured in *Café-de-Move-On Braamfontein* stood on sidewalks wherever there were significant numbers of workers—such as in front of factories or by bus and rail stations. In 1962, thousands of these carts populated the landscape, but by 1965 there were almost none. The entrepreneurs who operated these establishments were put out of business and the carts themselves destroyed.



**Figure 4.9** David Goldblatt, *Café-de-Move-On Braamfontein, Johannesburg, November, 1964*, 1964. © David Goldblatt Legacy Trust. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery on behalf of David Goldblatt Legacy Trust.

Photographed in 1964, just as these structures were disappearing, the formal precision and straight-on view of Goldblatt's photograph at first seems to downplay the cafe carts' charged history, framing them as neutral, uncontested objects. Yet the ubiquity—and then ensuing disappearance—of these objects across Johannesburg's landscape tells a history of social segregation. The seeming neutrality of an image like *Café-de-Move-On Braamfontein, Johannesburg. November, 1964*, then, might be thought of differently, understood not as a sign of detachment, but instead as a measuring device set to analyze the city's history of racist objectification. Just as colonizers feigned neutrality in their images of indigenous bodies (as discussed in Chapter 3), Goldblatt's photographs mobilize objectivity in order to map aspects of apartheid's repressive regime. In this way, Goldblatt's work critiques the tyranny of South Africa's visual hegemony. In Goldblatt's own words:

Embedded in the bricks, mud, stone, steel, and concrete of all the structures in South Africa are choices we and our forebears have taken . . . For as long as a building or structure is, it may “tell” something of the needs, imperatives, and values of those who put it there and of those who used it and of the ideologies upon which their beliefs and lives may have been contingent . . . When buildings cease to exist as coherent structures, their remains or footprints may yet be eloquent not only of what ruined them but what may follow.<sup>34</sup>

As with other photographers discussed in this chapter—including the Bechers and Mofokeng, but also Subhanker Banerjee, Emily Jacir, Zhang Kechun, and Ravi Agarwal—Goldblatt's work, as exemplified in *Café-de-Move-On Braamfontein, Johannesburg. November, 1964* presents place—that is, the land we see and space we occupy—as itself a dynamically historical process. Photographs of land, the images in this chapter thus assert, make claims for spatial justice, tell histories, mourn the past, and propose new futures.

## Summary

- Photographers play with seeing and obstruction, or presence and absence, as a way to visually illustrate the precarious position occupied by many migrants traveling across borders.
- Expansionist discourse, especially in the nineteenth century, relied upon photographic representation to support its goals.
- Since the nineteenth century, photographers have taken a variety approaches toward the imaging of animals and non-human life, with some seeking to break down the distinction between the “natural” and human worlds.
- Photographs that appear peaceful or beautiful might nevertheless address struggles over land, and associated violence.

## Discussion points

- What constitutes a landscape photograph?
- How do some photographers capture the difference between the natural and human worlds? What strategies do other photographers use to erase such differences?



- Does the type of camera used by an artist affect the way that artist's work will be interpreted?
- How can a beautiful photograph of an expansive landscape reveal histories of oppression, violence, and suffering? Is this an effective method of communication?

## Additional case studies

Robert Adams (b. 1937)

Pia Arke (1958–2007)

Amy Balkin (b. 1967)

Edward Burtynsky (b. 1955)

Martin Chambi (1891–1973)

Weng Fun (b. 1961)

Ken Gonzales-Day (b. 1964)

Chris Jordan (b. 1963)

Sanjay Kak (b.1958)

Manuel Pina (b. 1958)

## Notes

- 1 The Land Act of 1913 or the Natives Act of 1923 were laws that officially zoned all towns and cities as white-only areas; plans were then made to construct black-only townships as well as ethnic enclaves in rural areas.
- 2 Finis Dunaway, "Hunting with a Camera: Nature Photography, Manliness, and Modern Memory, 1890–1930," *Journal of America Studies* 34 (2000): 209.
- 3 T. J. Demos, "Life Full of Holes," *Grey Room* 24 (Summer 2006): 73.
- 4 Yto Barrada and Charlotte Cotton, "Morocco unbound: an interview with Yto Barrada," *openDemocracy*, May 2006, [https://www.opendemocracy.net/arts-photography/barrada\\_3551.jsp](https://www.opendemocracy.net/arts-photography/barrada_3551.jsp).
- 5 Demos, "Life Full of Holes," 73.
- 6 T. J. Demos, "Desire in Diaspora: Emily Jacir," *Art Journal* 62, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 72.
- 7 Edward W. Said, "Reflections on Exile," *Granta* 13 (Autumn 1984): 159.
- 8 Josef Koudelka, *Israel and Palestinian Landscapes* (New York: Aperture, 2013), n.p.
- 9 When the *Wall* came out, some criticized Koudelka for omitting figures and thus also the human suffering that he must have witnessed on his trips to this area.
- 10 Kristin Romberg, "Josef Koudelka: Nationality Doubtful," <http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/2402#.WcV5da2ZM6g>. Romberg also makes the point in this review about the wall functioning as figure and edge in the *Shu'fat Refugee Camp* photograph.
- 11 Texts such as Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 essay on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in which he contends that westward expansion accounts for the individualistic and democratic characters of Americans (a term which at this time referred exclusively to those of European ancestry) should be seen in relationship to survey photographs and as part of this trend toward **American exceptionalism**.
- 12 Claire Urbanski, "Genocidal Intimacies: Settler Desire and Carceral Geographies," paper presented at the American Studies Association, 2016.
- 13 Robin Kelsey, *Archive Style: Photographs and Illustrations for U.S. Surveys, 1850–1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 75–142.

- 14 For more information on the relationship of the Patterson-Gimlin film to expansionist discourses and the construction of nature, see Jessica Landau's dissertation, "Critical Habitat: Picturing Conservation, Extinction, and the American Animal in a Long Twentieth Century," University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2020.
- 15 The continued infatuation with Bigfoot is evidenced by the FBI's 2019 release of secret Bigfoot files.
- 16 The fact that these photographs emerge from a multinational corporation's marketing material underscores the fact that westward expansion was always a commercial endeavor.
- 17 Some scholars date the beginning of the Anthropocene to the late fifteenth century, specifically to the beginning of the colonization of the Americas. This dating is significant for it connects the Anthropocene with other practices of dispossession and genocide.
- 18 For two more critiques of the Anthropocene, see Jason Moore *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015) and Donna Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene," *e-flux* 75 (January 2017), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67125/tentacular-thinking-anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/>.
- 19 Subhankar Banerjee, "Photography's Silence of (Non)Human Communities," in Catherine de Zegher and Gerald McMaster (eds.), *The 18th Biennale of Sydney: All Our Relations* (Sydney: Biennale of Sydney, 2012), 362.
- 20 Interview with Ravi Agarwal, "Regarding India: Conversations with Artists," [www.regardingindia.com](http://www.regardingindia.com).
- 21 Julie McCarthy, "Can India's Sacred But 'Dead' Yuma River Be Saved?" National Public Radio, May 11, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/2016/05/11/477415686/can-indias-sacred-but-dead-yamuna-river-be-saved>.
- 22 Ravi Agarwal, "Have you Seen the Flowers on the River?" <http://raviagarwal.com/webdocs/text-18-e16d1e39.pdf>.
- 23 See Agarwal's comments in T. J. Demos, "The Art and Politics of Ecology in India: A Round Table with Ravi Agarwal and Sanjay Kak," *Third Text* (January 2013): 157–8.
- 24 Sometimes Zhang exhibits these photographs as individual works in galleries, but they also exist as a series in book form.
- 25 Given the impact that the shift in the river's flow has had on local populations, the work's Chinese title, *Bei Liu Guoguo*, which means "the river rushes north," is perhaps more evocative than the English: *Yellow River*. Adam Monohon, "Zhang Kechun: Photographing China's Sorrow," *YISHU: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 15, no. 4 (July 2016): 47.
- 26 "Zhang Kechun, The Yellow River," Huxley-Parlour, <http://www.beetlesandhuxley.com/zhang-kechun-yellow-river.html>.
- 27 Zhang Kechun cited in Emily Rauhala, "Root of the Nation: Zhang Kechun Photographs China's Yellow River," *Time*, November 12, 2012, <http://time.com/54766/root-of-the-nation-zhang-kechun-photographs-chinas-yellow-river/>.
- 28 Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 7. Buck-Morss discusses Walter Benjamin's work as developing only in the sense of how a photographic plate would develop.
- 29 William Nesbit, *How to Hunt with the Camera: A Complete Guide to All Forms of Outdoor Photography* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1926), vii.
- 30 See Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).
- 31 See Anna Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).
- 32 Benjamin Buchloh, "Passages: Hilla Becher 1934–2015," *Artforum* 54, no. 5 (January 2015): 54.
- 33 Buchloh, "Passages," 58.
- 34 David Goldblatt, from "Structures," 1987, quoted in David Goldblatt and Nadine Gordimer, "David Goldblatt: Homeland," *Aperture* 108 (Fall 1987): 42.

## Selected further reading

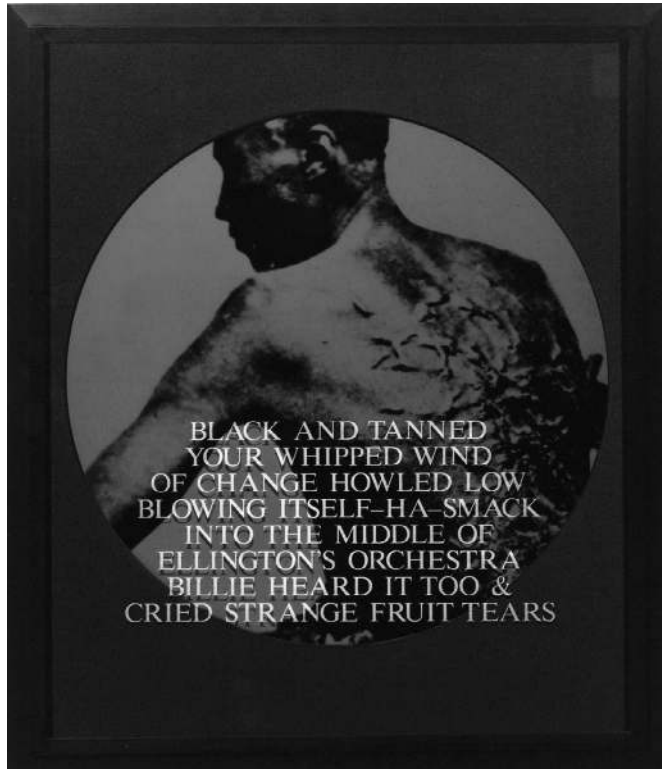
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# PART THREE

# ETHICS

Photography has long been conceived of as a medium of witnessing. Whether photographs picture people one knows or strangers living at a great distance, photography invariably summons a complex relationship between viewer and subject pictured, a relationship that involves an ethical encounter as well as a power dynamic. For what does it mean to be visible? Or to have the capacity to look and thereby bear witness? On the most basic level, what does it mean to look at others through photography? Artist **Carrie Mae Weems** (b. 1953) explicitly brings these questions to the fore. Weems confronts the viewer with the unavoidable ethics of looking and asks how the viewer might be complicit in the injustice, inequity, and violence purported not only within the scene of the image, or by the photographer, but, perhaps more poignantly, by photography itself. For her series *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995–6), Weems implicates photography as an agent of exploitation, used to perpetuate demeaning racist stereotypes and contribute to the systemic implementation and justification of racism (see Fig. 5.1).

Each of the thirty-four images in Weems's series are appropriated photographs of enslaved people in the American South and other nineteenth- and twentieth-century photographs of Africans and African Americans that Weems found housed in respected museum and university archives. Among these are daguerreotypes of South Carolina slaves, originally commissioned by the Harvard naturalist Louis Agassiz in 1850, and photographed by Joseph T. Zealy. Agassiz used these images to develop a visual taxonomy, claiming them as evidence of the racial inferiority of people of color. According to Weems, "When we're looking at these images, we're looking at the ways in which Anglo America—white America—saw itself in relationship to the black subject. I wanted to intervene in that by giving a voice to a subject that historically has had no voice."<sup>1</sup> Weems challenges the history and legacy of these photographs, as well as the institutions that preserve them, by rephotographing and enlarging them, printing them through color saturated filters, and presenting them within circular mattes. Each print is exhibited under glass, furthering the physical impression of looking through a camera's lens. Evocative text is etched over top. Consider *Black and Tanned Your Whipped Wind of Change Howled Low Blowing Itself—Ha—Smack Into the Middle of Ellington's Orchestra Billie Heard It Too & Cried Strange Fruit Tears*, a work that incisively layers references to the subjugation of slavery, violence on the black body, the iconic lament of jazz music, and the history of photography.<sup>2</sup> In this case, the source image depicts an escaped slave named Gordon, who enlisted with the Union Army during the American Civil War (1861–5). Titled *The Scourged Back* and taken in 1863, the image, showing a man's back gruesomely laced with scar tissue, was widely circulated by abolitionists as antislavery propaganda.



**Figure 5.1** Carrie Mae Weems, *Black and Tanned Your Whipped Wind of Change Howled Low Blowing Itself—Ha—Smack Into the Middle of Ellington's Orchestra Billie Heard It Too & Cried Strange Fruit Tears*, from the series *From Here I Saw What Happened And I Cried*, 1995–6. © CARRIE MAE WEEMS. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

This image and the others that compose *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* trouble easy presumptions regarding the role of photography, the politics of representation, and the ethics of conflict photography. Using this visceral image of violence inflicted on the body, Weems questions how painful images might complicate and shape notions of subjectivity, empathy, and political engagement. What ethical considerations are involved in the photographic documentation of violence? And, what does it mean to look at such images? How can a viewer engage with this mode of photography? The following section deals with issues of representation and agency, investigating ethical dilemmas that face photographers and artists as they grapple with how to represent their subjects. It also addresses the ethical relationship that the viewer is drawn into via photography. Moreover, the next two chapters ask what responsibility we as viewers might have towards those framed by particular pictures.

## Notes

- 1 Carrie Mae Weems, audio interview for *MoMA 2000: Open Ends*, Museum of Modern Art and Acoustiguide, Inc., 2000, <http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/207/2012>.
- 2 See Jennifer Doyle, "Feeling Overdetermined: Identity, Emotion, and History," in *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 112–25.

## 5

# POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

A key question facing photographers today is how to represent visually those who are not represented politically. In an attempt to grapple with this difficulty, numerous contemporary photographers create images that attempt to acknowledge the power dynamics of photography itself, both in terms of who is pictured and how, as well as who is able to look and what they are allowed to see. These photographers consciously approach photography as a political tool and propose an ethical encounter between the viewer and the subject pictured. **Ahlam Shibli's** (b. 1970) series *Unrecognised* (1999–2000), for instance, depicts fellow Palestinians, the inhabitants of a Bedouin village, 'Arab al-N'aim in Galilee, located within the borders of Israel but not officially recognized by the Israeli government. Consisting of twenty-four photographs and centered on the village of 'Arab al-N'aim and its 900 inhabitants, Shibli's images appear sparse yet poetic, characterized by few people, many rocks, and dusty, desolate roads. Set within a ravaged geography, a view of small homes looks as vulnerable as the humble stones that outline burial plots or the laundry pictured blowing in the wind. The visual language of Shibli's photographs is down to earth and ordinary, with somewhat haphazard framing. While much of the color appears muted, pops of vibrancy appear in every still. For Shibli, this contrast "underlines the self-empowerment of the inhabitants who decided not to give in to the bleakness of the situation imposed on them."<sup>1</sup> As opposed to seeing these scenes of mundane life as either art photography or documentary, they appear instead with the immediacy of snapshot photography. In order to capture the precarious position of the figures she photographs, some of Shibli's images show people who are not fully discernible to the camera's lens—for example, a figure might be obscured by shadow or architectural elements, off in the distance or cut off by the frame's angle, looking away from the camera entirely, or, as in one particularly tender moment, a child peers from behind the garments of a woman one imagines is his mother. One way to understand this decision would be to say that the partial visibility of Shibli's subjects reflects in some ways their partial political recognition.

At first glance, Shibli's photographs seem to conform to the tradition of social documentary, with its commitment "to expose the plight of the disenfranchised who are otherwise rendered invisible by mass media and ignored by political elites."<sup>2</sup> However, as art historian T. J. Demos explains, by contrast these photographs deliberately interrupt expectations regarding the role of photography and the viewer's ability to "know" the subjects pictured. Demos continues, "The austere, enigmatic photograph, disjointed and unwelcoming to the viewer, frustrates exposure in more ways than one, thus troubling the basis of documentary's logic."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in spite of the meager provisions pictured, many of Shibli's photographs also seem to be covert assertions of kinship and the persistence of life, even under duress. Children, for example, appear repeatedly, playing together and running down the road, as in *Back from school* (*Unrecognised no. 5*) (see Fig. 5.2). However, even these interpretations are unstable. From another point of view, playing looks like fighting, and, especially since their backs face the viewer, whether the children run joyously or in fear is indiscernible. Though still deeply connected to the realities of lived experience,



**Figure 5.2** Ahlam Shibli, *Back from school (Unrecognised no. 5)*, 'Arab al-Na'im, Palestine/Israel, 1999–2000. Chromogenic print, 60 × 91 cm. © Ahlam Shibli. Courtesy of the artist.

in effect documenting what was indeed in front of her camera, Shibli's matter-of-fact representations function as a mode of counter-discourse. By resisting the expectation of clearly showing her subjects, Shibli uses obscurity to her advantage as a means to address the complexities of photography and representation as such, as well as to document the unique situation of the people she photographs and the strictures placed on their daily existence.

This chapter situates the recent interplay between visibility and invisibility in terms of the rich and varied practice of documentary photography, which traditionally sought to expose the unrepresented and publicly reveal that which was previously hidden or unseen. The critique of documentary photography, and in particular the challenge to the presumed or desired neutrality of images, is referred to by the term "politics of representation," a designation that first appeared in the subtitle to Allan Sekula's essay "Dismantling Modernism" (1976/1978).<sup>4</sup> Building on this logic, the chapter historically situates recent and emerging practitioners in relation to documentary impulses of the past in order to develop a complex understanding of how the politics of representation have changed over time and in relation to specific social conditions.

## Visual signs

Inspired at an early age by Lewis Hine's social documentary work (which we discuss in more depth in Chapter 3), **Catherine Opie's** (b. 1961) practice is built around a compassionate questioning of the



relationship between identity and representation—who is visible, who is not, and, moreover, *how* are they made visible? Opie's *Bush Smiling, Help Us*, from the series *Close to Home* (2005), uses a strategy of juxtaposition to provoke viewers to think about the politics of mass media representations (see Plate 7). The artist has described the genesis of this project as having developed from watching disparate news narratives unfold and wanting to make poignant connections across stories. Turning to her Polaroid camera, Opie photographed directly from her television screen and organized the results into sets of images. Notably, this is the only artwork by Opie that uses **Polaroid** technology, a square-shaped, negativeless process that uses instant film. As Opie explains, "I was trying to play metaphorically with the notion of manipulation of the media versus the non-manipulated material of Polaroid. The news is instantaneous and it just floods thorough your life on a constant level. I was able to really think about the materiality of that on a photographic level, it landed with Polaroid for me, at that moment in time."<sup>5</sup> In trying to build compelling relationships between stories, and underscore how the news is framed, it is difficult to read Opie's comments, and their evocation of the "flood" of images, without being immersed into the specific subject matter of the two images conjoined in *Bush Smiling, Help Us*.

The moment pictured is late summer 2005, and more specifically the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. On the morning of August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast of the United States, making landfall as a Category 3 storm. The effects were devastating and, more than a decade later, are still felt. Hundreds of thousands of people in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama were displaced from their homes. The city of New Orleans was particularly vulnerable, especially neighborhoods that existed below sea level and housed many of the city's poorest residents. Despite mandatory evacuation orders, many were unable to leave, without transportation or places to turn. The flooding occurred quickly, breaching levees, and rising steeply to between eight and twenty-five feet in some areas, forcing numerous people to go on top of the roofs of their homes for safety.

The federal government was woefully unprepared for this situation. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) took days before they began to establish operations. President George W. Bush, then already in his second term in office, was away on a five-week vacation, and needed to return early to Washington, before traveling to New Orleans several days later. Publicly, the President's indifference to the crisis was mind-boggling to many. He appeared unphased and the gravity of the situation, including the mounting death toll, did not seem to register in his reactions. This led a *Newsweek* journalist to write on September 18, 2005:

How this could be—how the president of the United States could have even less "situational awareness," as they say in the military, than the average American about the worst natural disaster in a century—is one of the more perplexing and troubling chapters in a story that, despite moments of heroism and acts of great generosity, ranks as a national disgrace.<sup>6</sup>

Importantly, the televised and photographed aftermath showed a disproportionate number of those effected were African Americans, reflecting the fact that 64 percent of the city's residents were black, and 30 percent of the overall population lived in poverty. The Bush administration's inaction famously prompted rapper Kanye West to declare "George Bush doesn't care about black people" during a televised concert for hurricane relief. More than a natural disaster, Hurricane Katrina brought a preexisting social and political disaster to the fore. *Bush Smiling, Help Us* encapsulates this terrible reality. Bush grins absurdly on the left-hand side, while to the right, we see two young black boys holding a sign scrawled with the words "Help Us." Their faces are occluded from view, and, somewhat paradoxically, their

anonymity becomes folded into their plea to be seen. The fragility of the photograph itself adds to the tension between the two scenes and, moreover, the untenability of the situation.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the global threat of rising flood waters and the disturbing normalization of environmental disasters around the world have taken on increasing prominence as social and environmental justice concerns as well as photographic subjects. In response, some photographers and artists have attempted to find ways to pierce through the problems of denial and complacency that often surround these events when they are witnessed at a remove. Moreover, these practitioners have tried to use photography as a vehicle to challenge the uneven media coverage of various populations suffering from the effects of climate change. The politics of representing this growing crisis in part has to do with the idea (or ideal) that seeing the effects of climate change will motivate individual action. Such projects (as discussed in Chapter 3) often aspire to make people more knowledgeable about climate change and global warming via visual evidence and, perhaps more hopefully, thereby encourage advocacy and the systemic implementation of policy in ways that are preventative rather than simply responsive. However, since the devastating effects of humans on the Earth and its environment are difficult for many people to fathom without direct experience, these photographs often occupy an unsettled position.

Photographs that engage with the politics of environmental degradation often run the risk of aestheticizing situations that are indeed calls for action rather than contemplation. This kind of criticism has been leveled at numerous photographers, including for example Edward Burtynsky, whose work some argue turns the ugly realities of environmental degradation into sublime scenes. A key question with such works is what the ultimate power of a picture can be. When exhibited within the context of art as opposed to photojournalism, the troubling implications of making a beautiful picture are exacerbated further. The photographic work of **Gideon Mendel** (b. 1959) poses a fascinating case study in this regard. Like Opie, Mendel has built an art practice concerned with representing those who are often invisible and drawing affective connections between communities. For his project *Drowning World* (2007, ongoing), Mendel documents a series of interconnected situations, which, brought together, remind us of humanity's fragility and its mutual responsibility.

Rather than seeing climate change and sea level rise as an abstract phenomenon, Mendel hopes his viewers will recognize the personal impact. As part of *Drowning World*, Mendel began his *Submerged Portraits* in 2007, after photographing two floods that occurred in quick succession, one in the United Kingdom and the other in India. Though the contexts of these natural disasters were very different, the "shared vulnerability" of the flood survivors was remarkable.<sup>7</sup> Since that time, Mendel has documented people in the aftermath of floods all around the world, including Haiti (2008), Pakistan (2010), Australia (2011), Nigeria (2012), Germany (2013), the Philippines and Bangladesh (2015), and the U.S. (2015), among others. Importantly, each portrait is accompanied by specific information regarding the individuals pictured in the respective photographs, including their name, location, and the date.

This mode of title as caption takes seriously the need to put not simply a face to a name but also to a crisis, and it personalizes the photograph in a manner that might affect the viewer and respect the subject. Take the subject in *João Pereira de Araújo, Taquari District, Rio Branco, Brazil, March 2015*, who is neck-deep in murky waters, wincing sternly at the camera (see Plate 8). Or, the subject in *Anchalee Koyama, Taweewattana District, Bangkok, Thailand, November 2011*, who holds her young daughter steadfastly in her arms above the water line, while the child's feet disappear beneath the dark wet surface. Standing in the floodwaters with the remains of their submerged homes and destroyed belongings in the background, *Submerged Portraits* figuratively brings the magnitude of climate change home. Each photograph is eerily composed. The subject of the picture is centered and calm. They stare

intently out at the viewer, returning our gaze, challenging us to bear witness, and, in effect, refusing to be simply there to look at. Instead they seem to challenge the outsider to come into the frame, to feel the threat of global warming which threatens all humans, and moreover to act. The tone of Mendel's photographs is disturbingly still, working against the spectacle that characterizes much disaster photography. The waters themselves are placid around the flood survivors in an ominously permanent manner. Each individual is doubled as a mirror-reflection in the water, suggesting a world that is literally and figuratively turning upside down.

## Absence

Questions of visibility are paramount to gauging the politics of representation within individual images and photographic practices. As such, an equally important assessment is what remains invisible or inaccessible to the camera and to the viewer. **Hrair Sarkissian's** (b. 1973) series *Execution Squares* (2008) depicts the locations of public execution in three Syrian cities: Aleppo, Lattakia, and Damascus. Comprised of fourteen large color photographs of vernacular urban scenes mounted on aluminum, each image was photographed purposefully in the dawn of the early morning light, the time executions usually take place (see Fig. 5.3). The artist explains how, for him, these "quiet images reveal a fragile paradox that exists between the beauty and constancy of the physical environment and the political and social



**Figure 5.3** Hrair Sarkissian, *Execution Squares* (detail), 2008. © Hrair Sarkissian. Courtesy of the artist.

realities that they obscure.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the warmth of the morning sun in these photographs creates a scene that appears fresh, open, and full of possibility as opposed to being weighted with violence and ominous memories. In one sense Sarkissian’s images may be understood as memorials to the dead. And yet, in the stark absence of any bodies at this early hour, either dead or alive, these photographs also testify to erasure and the perplexing limits of photography to relay a coherent history.

According to Sarkissian, the fourteen images together form a single work of art, and therefore it is important that they be exhibited as a group. The culmination of the photographs together, rather than individually, is paramount. In this way, a strong notion of community and complicity between pictures and people is underscored. Produced using a large format film camera, rather than a digital one, and with no post-production manipulation, Sarkissian’s decision to document the sites of execution without corpses is crucial to the work’s internal politics of representation. Consider how the knowledge of the title changes the way the photograph is understood. The many windows of various homes and apartment buildings surrounding the squares become much more than architectural studies, and the subtleties of how many are open or shuttered take on a new resonance. Amidst the empty streets, the scattered palm trees, the billboard advertisements, and the parked cars, one begins to imagine the experience of living there, and, perhaps even dying there. These photographs call attention to photography’s role as a witness and how viewers are by extension interpellated as witnesses themselves when confronted with photographs.

*Execution Squares* is also an act of sharing. In interviews, Sarkissian tells the personal story of a disturbing moment from his childhood, walking to school in the early morning at around the age of twelve and passing the dead body of a man hanging in the neighborhood square, eyes startlingly and morbidly open. Though Sarkissian’s work appears unpopulated, signs of life abound, and its ghostly aspect eerily, nearly threateningly, fills each frame. On the other hand, however, the ultimate absence of explanatory detail and context poses its own challenges. The viewer is not given sufficient information to understand the specificities of what they are seeing with any significant depth. Why, for example, were people executed and by whom? Who was executed? Paradoxically, without this background, the onus to know more is left to the viewer.

Questioning surface appearances and negotiating between absence and visibility in photography are also part of **Oscar Muñoz’s** (b. 1951) photographic investigations. Recognized for his artistic use of ephemeral materials and his preoccupation with memory and mortality, Muñoz is a Columbian artist who has used video, painting with water, charcoal dust, shattered glass, and bathroom curtains, among other unconventional materials, to examine the intersecting dimensions of the politics of representation and the permeability of the photographic medium. For example, Muñoz’s *The Game of Probabilities* (2007) addressed the fragmented nature of identity photographs in an inventive play on self-representation and identification photographs. Collected over the course of a number of years, Muñoz appropriated six of his own “official” portraits—including passport photographs and driver’s license identification cards—showing the artist aging and donning various hairstyles. These were then cut into smaller sections and rearranged to create twelve new configurations, a material gesture that suggests the endless mutability of identity and photographic representation.

In his 1988 book, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, photography historian John Tagg examined the role of photography within power relations and discussed how photographs are always enmeshed with the dynamics of power and control. On the one hand, according to Tagg, the “politics of representation” functions as a rhetorical inversion of “the representation of politics,” importantly shifting attention to the constructed (and therefore contestable) relationships between subjects and the apparatuses of power.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, emphasizing an understanding of

politics as “representational” also offers a means to structurally critique the power dynamics that are often concealed by purportedly objective images, such as photographs. Acknowledging the entrenched power of photography has similarly been central to Muñoz’s practice, particularly in terms of the relationship between the state and “official” memory. For *Aliento (Breath)* (1999), ten steel discs are mounted on a wall, inviting the viewer to look at themselves (see Fig. 5.4). Drawn in by one’s own reflection in front of the concave mirror, the viewer’s breath activates the image embedded in the glass to surface. These photographs have been fused to the metal mirror through a photoserigraph technique used in silk-screening. In contact with human exhalation, a barely perceptible, sepia-toned obituary-style photograph of a young man appears, excerpted from a Columbian newspaper, before vanishing again with the dissipation of breath. As a result, the viewer is made keenly aware of the temporality of the image as a larger reflection on the fragility of life, as well as their own inescapably ethical engagement with representations of others. In the artist’s own words, “In this instant, which the spectator cannot retain for very long, his reflection is lost in order for the image of the other to appear, activating a dialogue which includes him.” As witnesses to these faces, we are called into relationship with them, and yet their identities are not discernible to us.



**Figure 5.4** Oscar Muñoz, *Aliento*, 1996–2002. © Oscar Muñoz. Courtesy of the artist and Sicardi/Ayers/Bacino Art Gallery, Houston.

The portraits that appear, document men and women who count among the tens of thousands of *Desaparecidos*—Columbian citizens proclaimed “disappeared” by their government. By some estimations, the disappeared number over 90,000 in the course of the last fifty years, including many who are “victims of armed conflict between government troops, right-wing paramilitary groups and leftist rebels, while others are victims of ongoing drug-turf wars.”<sup>10</sup> The sheer magnitude of Columbia’s history of violence impedes our ability to identify the people pictured, the nameless and the bodiless. This fact is made even more poignant by way of Muñoz’s strategic blending of reflections and representations or, as scholar Maria del Rosario Acosta Lopez elucidates, “[I]t summons our responsibility, as spectators, to assume the task of memory to which the work’s evocative darkness responds.”<sup>11</sup>

Performance historian Amanda Graham notes the ways breathing functions in Muñoz’s work as both an event and a metaphor, explaining that “the aesthetic disappearance parallels the corporeal-political one.”<sup>12</sup> By virtue of using breath and the viewer’s own bodily engagement as a vital component of the work, Muñoz thus defies the photograph’s ability to objectify the subject captured in the image. Instead, we are reminded of the lived experience of the body, in relation to images and in relation to other people. Graham further argues that each photograph acts as a *memento mori*, thereby embodying writer Susan Sontag’s summation of photography’s inevitable relationality and temporality: “To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt.”<sup>13</sup> Understood in this way, we recognize that the qualities of absence and disappearance are as fundamental to an understanding of photography as the acknowledgment of presence.

## Identification and dislocation

The invention of photography and its proliferation as a medium coincides with a period of global mass migration. During the Progressive Era in the United States (1890–1920), Danish American social reformer **Jacob Riis** (1849–1941) engaged with the dynamics of displacement and dispossession that too often accompany immigrants, using photography as a critical tool for social change. Riis argued adamantly that poverty was the result of imperfect social and economic systems. Being an immigrant himself who landed in New York in 1870 at the age of twenty, Riis claimed to understand the plight of the poor. He had lived in desperate circumstances before becoming a police reporter for the *New York Tribune* in 1877, and ten years later for the *New York Evening Sun*. Throughout his life, Riis waged a continual fight for model tenements, more parks, and better playgrounds, leading President Theodor Roosevelt to dub him “the most useful citizen of New York.”<sup>14</sup> Riis believed that if people were confronted with photographic evidence and accompanying discourse, social injustice would no longer be tolerated.

Riis made a practice of dramatically recounting his harrowing trips to the city’s slums as he presented illustrative lantern-slide presentations documenting his visits to audiences in upper Manhattan, often accompanied by music. Now iconic images such as *Lodgers in a crowded Bayard Street tenement*, from 1889, demonstrate his nocturnal experiments with flash powder as he startlingly catches his sleeping subjects unaware. Riis’s *Madonna of the Slum* (1890) solicits the viewer’s sympathy as it references the classically pious pose of the Madonna and Child within the rugged setting of a New Jersey slum. The subjective enhancement of Riis’s own point of view by extra-photographic means, including oral and written rhetoric, is worth considering in more depth. It calls into question not simply



the documentary claim to objectivity but furthermore draws attention to the many ways the framing of an image affects its received meaning.

In 1890, Riis published the influential book *How the Other Half Lives*, a compendium of photographs accompanied by text that provoke complex questions regarding immigration, assimilation, social control, and cultural diversity in the late nineteenth century. According to historian Edward T. O'Donnell, "those who bother to read *How the Other Half Lives* are more often than not shocked by what Riis wrote about the people he proposed to save."<sup>15</sup> For example, Riis

. . . dwell[s] in considerable detail on racial and ethnic stereotypes of the German whose "Teutonic wit is too heavy"; of Jews for whom "money is their God"; of "John Chinaman" about whom "there is nothing strong, except his passions when aroused"; of the Negro who accepts "poverty, abuse, and injustice alike . . . with imperturbable cheerful-ness"; and of the "swarthy" Italian who is "gay, lighthearted and if his fur is not stroked the wrong way, inoffensive as a child."<sup>16</sup>

Marguerite Lavin, Curator of Photographs at the Museum of the City of New York, recalls her experience with the disjuncture between Riis's photographs and his writing: "For years no matter how many times I reproduced Riis' photographs for books, documentaries, and museum exhibits, I never ceased to be moved by the heroic images of the inspiring masses of poor immigrants. Eventually I picked up a copy of *How the Other Half Lives* and when I read what Riis had to say about these people I almost fell out of my chair."<sup>17</sup>

Riis, of course, is only one among many photographers who have taken the social documentary approach in ways that are questionable and in need of critique. It is after all a privilege to be able to look at others in photographs. And moreover, particularly when an image is presented of people suffering or in need, the politics of representation urge the viewer to consider how the subjects pictured are actually affected by the image's creation and dissemination, by being made "visible" so to speak. In addition to challenging the perceived neutrality of images, as noted at the outset of this chapter, it is important to be vigilant about the implied artistry of photographs as well. Consider briefly, for example, the work of **Sergio Larrain** (1931–2012). Largely considered the most prominent Chilean photographer in history, Larrain worked internationally for the Magnum Photos agency for many years. Using predominantly black-and-white photography, Larrain frequently depicted homeless and orphaned children in the streets. He is praised for his poetic approach, for an inventive use of shadow and angles. One particularly captivating photograph from Santiago in 1955 shows a pile of at least five boys asleep atop a metal sidewalk grate. Caught unaware, most of their faces are obscured, tucked into the bodies of each other for comfort while they slumber. One child's face is propped out, facing the viewer, eyes closed and mouth agape. While the composition of this image is indeed formally stunning, enigmatically filled with textures and gestures, what does it mean to regard these children in this way? Ostensibly, to turn their dispossession into a pleasing work of art? "A good image is created by a state of grace," Larrain once explained, continuing by saying, "Grace expresses itself when it has been freed from conventions, free like a child in his early discovery of reality. The game is then to organize the rectangle." Larrain's allusion to the implicit innocence or freedom in this passage gives some sense of the illusory state of "grace" he aspires to. It is also suggestive of one of the central escapist fantasies projected onto such images, one of the key reasons this particular image of sleeping boys and others like it are largely celebrated. Yet this statement also reveals the photographer's, and potentially the viewer's, disturbing disconnect from the harsh worldly realities experienced by the impoverished individuals pictured.



Artist Martha Rosler has written one of the most incisive critiques of Riis and other photographers working in this vein of social documentary as part of her study of documentary photography and photojournalism that she initiated alongside Allan Sekula, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, and others in the late 1970s and early 1980s. She refers to Riis's muckraking use of photography as "social-work propagandizing" and argues that such work "strongly appealed to the worry that the ravages of poverty (crime, immorality, prostitution, disease, radicalism) would threaten the health and security of polite society as well as to sympathy for the poor, and their appeals were often meant to awaken the self-interest of the privileged."<sup>18</sup> In this way, as art critic Craig Owens explains, "'concerned' (or what Rosler calls 'victim' photography) overlooks the constitutive role of its own activity, which is held to be merely representative (the myth of photographic transparency and objectivity.)"<sup>19</sup> This mode of photography thereby runs the risk of reinstating the very thing it claims to want to overturn. In Owen's estimation, the subjects of such photographs "are twice victimized: first by society, and then by the photographer who presumes the right to speak on their behalf."<sup>20</sup> Riis's photography book thus poses a crucial historical example of how important it is to critically evaluate the claims made about particular images in conjuncture with close looking at the pictures themselves, questioning how they are characterized and contextualized. Without this kind of critical engagement, we risk leaving problematic and established systems of power intact, and in fact adding to their concealment within the visual and verbal rhetoric of benevolence.

## FOCUS BOX 5

*In her influential 1981 essay, "In, Around and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography)," artist Martha Rosler identified a number of recurring ideological blindspots within documentary photography. Rosler framed her argument against the claims of social documentary (including conflicting ones of objectivity and of concern for the subjects pictured), as well as against the young street photographers championed by curator John Szarkowski in his 1967 New Documents exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York—then photography's most important curatorial perch. The three photographers in the show, Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand, exhibited a disimpassioned, if not cynical, view of the world. Szarkowski presented the work of these photographers within a modernist-formalist frame (a subject we discuss at greater length in Chapter 9), emphasizing the incidental details and compositional elements of their photographs as evidence of their status as art. For Rosler, this anti-humanist stance was unethical, failing to acknowledge the privileged position of art and photography, on the one hand, or to engage with the fraught socio-political contexts of the late 1960s, on the other. On the 50th anniversary of Szarkowski's exhibition, Rosler explored the ways the politics of representation are concealed by the rhetoric surrounding the famed exhibition. Rosler provides a poignant account of how "documentary is a process, often an embedded one." Below is an excerpt adapted from Rosler's consideration of the show.*

## Documents and documentary

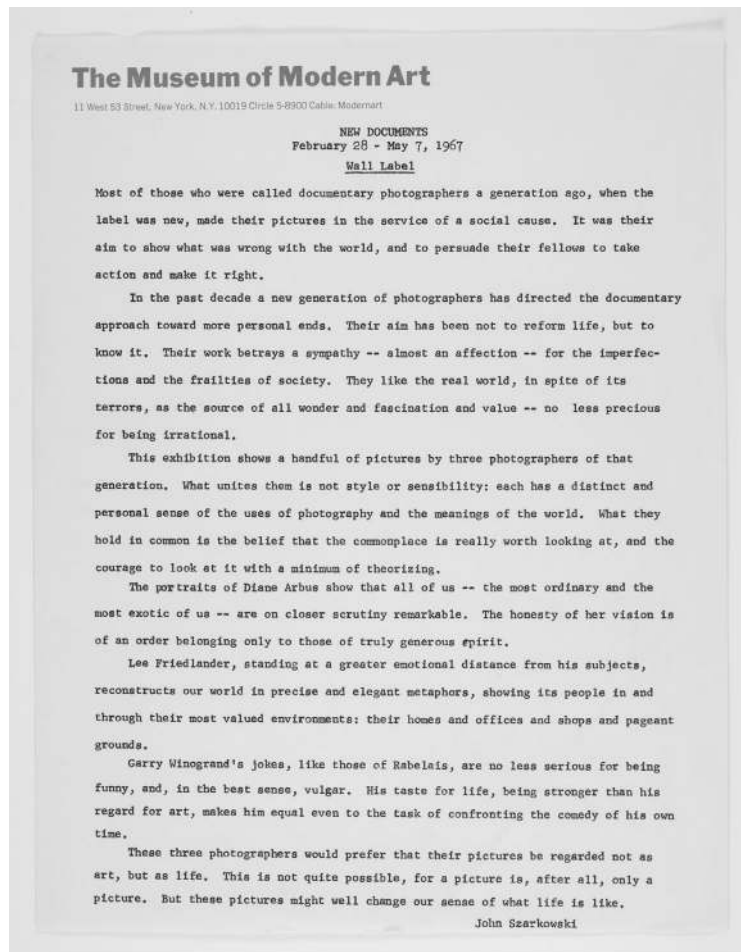
*Martha Rosler*

The introductory texts and proposals for John Szarkowski's *New Documents* exhibition direct us to the show's significance (see Fig. 5.5). The title itself, *New Documents*, flirts with the word "documentary," but with a clear difference: documents are objects, while documentary is a process, often a socially or journalistically embedded one. The text opens a generational divide, telling us that pre-war documentarians "made their pictures in the service of a social cause," to make things right. Their photos, then, were communicative acts, prodding viewers toward action. The "social cause" was likely to be among the many left movements of the era—the Spanish Civil War and interwar European unrest, photographed by Robert Capa, Greta Taro, David Seymour, and others—as well as the militant worker-photographers' movements whose view of photography went beyond the arguments of more mainstream documentarians, speaking not *about* the people pictured but *from* and *to* them. In contrast, the photographers in the show have "directed the documentary approach to more personal ends"—more fully, "non-social, non-hortatory, and personal." This deals a powerful rebuke to the dreams of political utopia or just social betterment, further spelled out by assertions like these: "They hold in common the belief that the world is worth looking at, and the courage to look at it without theorizing." Or more strongly, "The world, in spite of its terrors, is ... the ultimate source of wonder and fascination, no less precious for being irrational and incoherent."

### I.

I would frame Szarkowski's task in rescuing an artistic strain in photography—a personalized, idiosyncratic body of work—as teasing it away from the noise in the channel, whether photojournalism, on the one hand, or the immense array of vernacular photos, on the other. The allure of the snapshot—however appealing to institutional gatekeepers in the 1960s—was its apparent authenticity, without conscious scripting. It offered a record of an interactive event in which the photographer confronts the audience as one of its own. Snapshots can convey a certain unfathomability of human motives in that the photographers' intentions may be recoverable only with difficulty from these found archaeological artifacts of an unselfconscious world.

Two of the three photographers in *New Documents* (but Arbus only rarely) are classifiable as snapshotters, if only superficially. The authenticity of the snapshot is differentiable from propaganda and public relations on the one hand, and from the political certitude of the ideologically driven, on the other. Szarkowski puts his faith in the confinement of the work to the "four walls of the frame," reiterating the Cold War caveat that serious art is not about messages nor is it thematic. It does not join documentary; at the end of a decade of widespread war and upheaval, it supersedes it and blots it out.



**Figure 5.5** Wall Label by John Szarkowski, *New Documents*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1967. The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 821.3. The Museum of Modern Art Archives. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

## II.

High rates of college attendance and the growing power of consumers did not forestall critiques by intellectuals and Bohemians of the political repression and saber rattling of 1950s Cold War America: If this was a prosperous nation, with a burgeoning suburban expansion, why was it experienced by so many as a vacuous and conformist nightmare, with its unfulfilled subjects in a land of plenty? And then, upending the quiescence of the 1950s, came the upheavals of the 1960s, which brought civil rights struggles, political assassinations, wars, and nuclear crises, a huge student revolt, and a growing counterculture.

In the 1960s, sociological studies became widely appealing for the educated middle classes' attempts at self-understanding. Sociologist Erving Goffman's "dramaturgical

approach” to human interaction, particularly in reference to everyday life rather than extraordinary events, introduced the idea of the performance of the self and won him a broad readership. It also underpins any serious discussion of Diane Arbus’s work, with its focus on the construction of appearance and the role of consciousness in dealing with stigma (*Stigma* was one of Goffman’s most-read books) in producing oneself as an object of the public gaze. Arbus’s portraits raise the question of whether the people are unaware of the flaws of their performance. I think the flaws are always visible to viewers, certainly, but in Arbus’s late-career photographs of children seemingly with profound degrees of mental disability, we see subjects unconcerned with the management of their appearance; they suggest an Arbus at the telos of her project: people without masks.

This performative frame applies as well to the other New York photographer, Garry Winogrand. Stemming from the working-class Bronx rather than Arbus’s decidedly upper-middle-class Manhattan milieu, Winogrand frequently enacts his alienation by his position within the photographic transaction. But I should note, in passing, the role of Jews during that era within both urban sociology and urban photography. Often of immigrant background, the Jewish working class in New York, though sensitive to the often-unexpressed divisions and exclusions they experienced on the basis of class and race, were brought up to respect the importance of social criticality, since it aligned with their interest in personal opportunity as well as socialist ideals of universal justice. But I would be hard pressed to locate any of that complexity in Winogrand’s photographs, whose sometimes bitter cynicism and separation has led me to think of him as one of the cranky, permanently disaffected guys from the Bronx, and Brooklyn, who I always imagined populated the ranks of marauding street photographers.

Friedlander, however, brings to the trio as leavening a Northwest-coast-formed, small town or suburban sensibility, of looking at stuff in passing and surprise perhaps, but without the invested bite of the other two of urban origin and habitat. Friedlander, if no less “alienated” than the other two, shows the cooler influence of Pop but also of humor. He often allows the joke to be on himself as he exhibits a kind of deflated dishevelment. He is a young self-portraitist exhibiting a transparent failure to manage his image—but slyly he is a master formalist.

### III.

The politics of identity, while a major formation of the late 1960s, had not yet become a persistent theme in society or in the art world. The trajectory of *New Documents* was toward abjection, in the sense of that which provokes a recognition in viewers of a disturbance in identification and which consequently disturbs one’s sense of identity and the understanding of the social order. This is something that stares out at us from Arbus’s photos.

It is here, within the sociological and inevitably psychoanalytic frame, that Szarkowski’s assertion regarding the photographers wanting their work to be seen as

life, not as art, finds its most contemporary purchase. *New Documents* established the foundations for a new, drastically restricted canon largely on the basis of exclusions. This differentiation can be read in terms of the political: from the critical observations of documentarians bent on social change or even just revealing the living culture of urban working-class people—of whatever color or ethnicity. The exhibition's efforts were instead to relocate the practice of documentary, even of photography *tout court*, within the confines of Modernism. Of course, there are more recent and more nuanced counter-arguments to this version of documentary. As documentarian and curator Jorge Ribalta suggests, documentary exists as a fragile compromise between the aesthetic, the communicative, and the epistemic conditions of photography. It exists, he writes, at “the intersection of the discursive spaces of the museum, the archive, and the media.” And so, at the very moment that the certainties and boundaries of Modernism were growing imprecise, and at a moment when the understandings of photography as resident within them was subjected to an increasingly insistent contestation, the documentary practices in *New Documents* were reappropriated as the self-representation of the suppressed and excluded others.

In 2010, **Martina Bacigalupo** (b. 1978), a photojournalist from Italy, came upon curious piles of discarded portraits with their faces nimbly cut out. Identical blank spaces appear in place of each face, thereby marking the absence of what is commonly considered to be the most pertinent information in any portrait. This truism is all the more relevant considering the source of these particular photographs. These abandoned images were found in the back of the **Gulu Real Art Studio**, the oldest photo studio in Gulu, northern Uganda, a business whose main source of commerce is creating identification photos. The studio owner and photographer Obal Denis explained the rationale behind the rejected images as a matter of efficiency. His machine for developing passport-style photographs prints four at a time, whereas most people only need one. Therefore, it is less expensive to shoot a regular full-length portrait and cut out the necessary headshot. Bacigalupo recognized the potential trove of these vernacular castoffs, however, and, with Denis's permission, reclaimed the photographs as part of her own art project (see Plate 9).

Displayed at the Walther Collection in New York during 2013, as a series of ninety images, and also assembled in book form, art critic Holland Cotter has described these gathered photographs as “images technically bereft of identity but filled with personal and cultural information.”<sup>21</sup> The startling lack of faces diverts the viewer's attention to other previously unnoticed aspects of the picture. The subtle positioning of individual sets of hands on laps takes on new resonance and the posture and clothing of each sitter becomes a site of interest. Vibrantly patterned dresses or military uniforms, hands folded or hands tentatively resting on knees, a purse or a child's head resting on a lap, the variation is eclectic. Among the strange details that stand out as one peruses these serial photographs is a recurrent dark, navy blue blazer, which, as it turns out, is in fact the same blazer. The jacket is kept on hand at the studio because it is an official requirement for all account applicant and employee identifications at Barclays Bank. This compulsory garment adds to the repetition and standardization of the series, while at the same time strangely challenging that very premise. On some bodies it appears excessively oversized and out of

place, while on others it seems figure-fitting and distinguished. The salvaged photographs from the Gulu Real Art Studio operate in opposition to the expectations and strictures typical of the identification photograph, namely their insistence on uniformity and anonymity—or, in other words, conformity. As scholar Tina Campt has insightfully explained, “Ironically, details intended to impose uniformity—jackets, poses, and backdrops—are now serialized enactments of individuality and difference.”<sup>22</sup> In this way, the subjects pictured assert their uniqueness even from within the constraints of categorical photography.

The proliferation of identification photographs in contemporary life is a widespread phenomenon. Specifically, within the context of Gulu, its ubiquity correlates to the institutionalization of post-conflict Uganda and the many ways everyday life is policed. Employed as a means to “validate and verify identity,” these official photographs contribute to the enforcement of neoliberal economic structures created after the unrest of civil war during the 1980s, required by non-governmental organizations, international aid organizations, and corporate financial institutions, among others.<sup>23</sup> Powerfully, however, what remains most striking about Bacigalupo’s seemingly mundane collection of Gulu photos is the way they serve as a perplexing archive of identities that ultimately refuse to be assimilated within the conventions and authority of categorical photography. Instead, the project speaks of displacement and diaspora, and the possibility of counter-narratives, to and within the politics of “official” documentation.

Korean-born Canadian artist **Jin-me Yoon** (b. 1960) is familiar with the dynamics of displacement and identity and has developed a practice that investigates the intersections of multicultural feminism and the politics of race. For *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (1996–7), Yoon invited sixty-seven members of Vancouver’s Korean community to be photographed standing in front of Lawren Harris’s renowned painting, *Maligne Lake, Jasper Park* (1924) (see Fig. 5.6). These same individuals were then photographed with their backs to the camera, looking towards Emily Carr’s celebrated oil on canvas painting, *Old Time Coast Village* (1930). Importantly, Yoon herself was also photographed and included amongst the final sixty-seven double portraits. Arranged in a grid pattern and installed with the rectos and versos on adjacent walls, Yoon created an immersive environment in which the viewer could feel physically and cognitively involved in the piece.

The title, *A Group of Sixty-Seven*, sounds like a conceptual conceit, a plain pseudo-scientific report of what is presented. It contains multiple layers of meaning, however. On the one hand, it refers to the Group of Seven, the eponymous assembly of seven male artists painting between 1920 and 1933 who became synonymous with Canadian art and culture. The Group created numerous iconic modernist landscape paintings, focusing primarily on the wilderness of northern Ontario, and are foundational to the mythology of Canadianness. Harris is historicized as a core member of the Group. Carr, on the other hand, painted mostly in isolation from a broader artistic community, was not a member of the all-male cohort, and practiced predominantly on the West Coast. Both Harris and Carr shared an interest in experimenting with form, and it is worth noting that their vision of nature was frequently abstract, filled with diffuse colors, obscure geometries, twisted contours, and distinctive lines. Against these canonical works of Canadian art, Yoon’s subjects stand rigidly within each portrait, and as an installation, the seriality of the piece is mesmerizing, if not dizzying.

Picturing her Korean-Canadian subjects within the context of “Canadian” aesthetics, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* calls attention to the rights of belonging and the resoundingly abstract nature of Canadian national identity through its engagement with the politics of representation. There is indeed a play here on the immigration concept of “naturalization,” and, moreover, on the perplexing instability of national identity. In photographing Korean immigrants in the context of these paintings, Yoon created, in the words of Cynthia Foo, “a space for race in traditional iconic representations of Canadianness.”<sup>24</sup> On the





**Figure 5.6** Jin-me Yoon, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (detail), 1996. 134 chromogenic prints. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Acquisition Fund, VAG 97.2 a-eeeeee. © Jin-me Yoon. Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

one hand, these considerations lead the viewer to think more deeply about immigration as a result of the economic, political, and social forces of globalization. On the other hand, they deal with specific debates regarding national identity and culture, or as Nicole Elizabeth Neufeld aptly explains, Yoon “makes reference to recognizable landscapes which she exposes as exclusionary in the way they frame representations that visualize subjectivity.”<sup>25</sup> Neufeld discusses the Canadian predilection for landscape images emptied of human presence, and how such representations perpetuate colonial fantasies of uninhabited land on offer. This ideological backdrop points to yet another key reference embedded in Yoon’s title, namely, the year 1967, which marked the 100th anniversary of the confederation of Canada by British settler colonials, claiming indigenous territory as their own and displacing First Nations peoples. The artist puts it plainly when she asks, “Imaged in the heroic setting of the Canadian [landscape], can I as a non-Western woman enjoy a ‘naturalized’ relationship to this landscape?”<sup>26</sup> Yoon’s photographs problematize the possibility of nature and natural relations, while critically redressing the mutable characteristics of culture.

**Wang Jinsong** (b. 1963) uses photography to document the experiential effects of government policies on contemporary Chinese society, in effect capturing and critiquing distinct elements of “Chineseness.” In order to understand Wang’s project, it is important to recall the crisis of 1989 in Tiananmen Square, Beijing. That spring, student-led demonstrators called for democratic freedoms (including freedom of speech for individuals and freedom of the press), as well as increased government accountability. Media coverage of these events was heavily censored. Violence erupted on the evening of June 4 as these demonstrations were violently crushed by the government’s declaration of martial law,



resulting in the deaths of protestors numbering somewhere between several hundred to 10,000. No consensus has ever been reached regarding the death toll, in part because the history of this event remains suppressed in China.

In the wake of this political and social turmoil, Wang actively criticized the communist regime and turned to photography as a vehicle for this critique. Working in a style that has been referred to as “cynical realism,” in opposition to “socialist realism,” Wang employs a conceptual method of accumulation, gathering a large series of images together in order to represent the real effects of government policies on everyday life.

Arranged in a tight grid, Wang's *Standard Family* (*Biaozhun Jiating*) (1996), for example, shows the viewer a collection of family studio portraits, each organized in an identical way (see Fig. 5.7). Seen alongside one another, the repetition of generic expressions, postures, and family forms becomes apparent. These are a combined result of collectivism and the will of the state. Wang's photographs attempt to make these underlying social structures visible. Comprised of 200 straightforward photographs of single-child families, *Standard Family* specifically documents the effects of China's “one-child” policy, put into effect in 1973 as a means of mitigating China's massive population. Discontinued only in 2016, China's one-child policy severed the tradition of multi-generational families, resulting instead in a “standard family,” limited to three people—two parents and one offspring.<sup>27</sup>

In China, the family unit is envisioned as a micro-model of state collectivity, and thus conforms to specific conventions. Adhering to the rules of Mao's China, the father is positioned on the right, the mother on the left, and the child in the middle, giving an overall impression of collective similarity.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Wang photographs each family against a stark red background, chromatically creating an additional reference to the communist state. Picturing a “standardized” lifestyle, this project is hypnotic in its formal echoes between portraits. In spite of its inherent structural constraints, however, it bears asking what we do not see represented in *Standard Family* as well as who is not included and who does not belong.

Noticeably male children appear more frequently than girls, and all of the children pictured appear healthy. This too is a direct outcome of China's socio-economic policies. As sociologist Leslie K. Wang discusses in her study *Outsourced Children: Orphanage Care and Adoption in Globalizing China* (2016), this may in part be attributed to parental aversion to caring for special needs children or children with



Figure 5.7 Wang Jinsong, *Standard Family*, 2006. © Wang Jinsong.

costly illnesses, as well as a desire to bear at least one healthy male heir who can care for them in old age. Moreover, “in what has been labelled a ‘gendercide,’ parents have turned to sex-selective abortion, abandonment, hiding, or even killing of *tens of millions* of daughters to protect the possibility of having a son.”<sup>29</sup> Wang remarks further on the correlation between rapid economic expansion, environmental pollution, and the number of children born in China with congenital illnesses and disabilities. Notably, these populations are not represented within *Standard Family*. Rather, what is reiterated is an idealized view of content, middle-class Chinese families, whose upward mobility has been made easier by virtue of providing for an only child.

The overwhelming lack of individual expression in these family portraits is also striking in the way it resists the viewer’s ability to glimpse personality. As art historian Roberta Wue has explained, this uniform aspect of Chinese portraiture functions directly against “two assumptions of nineteenth-century Western portraiture in general and American portraiture in particular: that the individual and his or her inner life could be understood through telling physical idiosyncrasies and that conveying the sitter’s individuality was crucial to a successful portrait.”<sup>30</sup> There are moments that defy these strictures however. Smirks and head tilts can be found amongst Wang’s photos, suggesting the possibility, however subtle, of escaping “standard” codes. Like Wang’s *City Wall—Beijing* (2006), a cumulative series of photographs that visually attempts to represent an experience of the startling speed of urban architectural change in China, *Standard Family* employs an overwhelmingly uniform approach that intrigues one to search for inconsistencies, uniqueness, and where social and political barriers might waiver.

It is also worth noting that the very concept of the politics of representation considered throughout this chapter is neither stable nor static. Indeed, there exist a multitude of variations on this mode of critique in relation to visual images. For example, the artist and theorist **Hito Steyerl** (b. 1966) recently coined the term “post-representational” as a means of experimenting with new modes of contemporary politics and aesthetics, while addressing the emerging socio-technological conditions of visual culture. It is curious to consider how the politics of “post-representation” might be envisioned within this rubric. In an interview with Marvin Jordan for *DIS* magazine, Steyerl relates an encounter with a smartphone camera developer in Holland, who helped her realize how fundamentally different the representational mode of camera phone technology is from traditional understandings of analog photography and indexicality. Steyerl explains, that since

. . . the lenses are tiny and basically crap, about half of the data captured by the sensor are noise. The trick is to create the algorithm to clean the picture from the noise, or rather to define the picture from within noise. But how does the camera know this? Very simple. It scans all other pictures stored on the phone or on your social media networks and sifts through your contacts. It looks through the pictures you already made, or those that are networked to you and tries to match faces and shapes.

What Steyerl is describing is the way that photographs now regularly generate and define other photographs, often without the user taking any notice. The camera on the smartphone creates pictures based on pictures, interpreting aggregate data and the user’s history of preferences in order to anticipate what it thinks you might like to see. Strikingly, though a connection to what was in fact in front of the camera’s lens still exists, it is modified by, and linked to, already existing pictures. “You don’t really photograph the present, as the past is woven into it,” declares Steyerl.<sup>31</sup> This socio-temporal-technological shift has profound implications for the politics of photographic representation and the political economy of seeing.

Renowned for her writings on the intersections of representation with postcolonialism, globalization, and feminism, Steyerl has pushed for reinventing documentary practices in face of the multiplicity of global media, the increasing challenge of sifting misinformation from fact, and the continuing need for “social engagement and historical integrity” in a digitally mediated era.<sup>32</sup> Addressing the conditions of hypervisibility and surveillance that characterize the world of the present, Steyerl’s *How Not To Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational.MOV File* (2013) parodies the conventions of the internet tutorial. Within this fourteen-minute single channel video projection, a digitized male voiceover narrates five satirical lessons on how individuals can resist being visually captured, including camouflage or reducing oneself to less than a pixel, and living in a gated community or a militarized zone. While these strategies are recounted, individuals, including the artist, humorously pantomime movements to accompany the instructions, against the backdrop of a green screen. In Steyerl’s own words, the piece is “precisely about being unable to escape the gaze.”<sup>33</sup> As with other works by Steyerl, this video questions how the status of “visibility” has changed in the age of information and a world replete with constant monitoring, and how a nuanced contemporary re-envisioning of the politics of representation is therefore necessary. Moreover, Steyerl’s artwork and writings posit that being “visible” or documented photographically does not always mean being seen in any real sense, let alone understood as a subject with agency.

Throughout this book, we have emphasized the ways that the indexical underpinnings of the photograph have been crucial to the way the photograph is believed and, by extension, its meaning interpreted. Steyerl’s description of the camera phone’s technological and representational challenge to this dynamic alters the way that the medium is conceived. In this way, we might more aptly describe this mode of photography as “pre-conceived” and “recombined,” not based on the photographer’s intentions, choices, or desires, but rather shaped by the technological aggregation of visual information and predetermined digital algorithms. One implication of this new form of photography is that it decreases the likelihood of ever seeing unpredictable subjects, since it draws on ratios of probability and statistics of occurrence. Within this technological example, Steyerl sees clear political analogies to the state of representational politics and contemporary democracies, as in the representational paradigm in which a citizen assumes that they are voting for someone who will represent them. If this were indeed the case, then the interests of the population would be proportionally represented. Current democracies, however, work rather more like smartphone photography by algorithmically clearing noise and boosting some data over others. It is a system in which the unforeseen has a hard time happening because it is not yet in the database, which ultimately impinges on the possibilities for actual political change and progress. Through this lens, the need to rethink the political potential and limitations of photography in the present becomes all the more urgent.

## Summary

- Photography poses an ethical encounter between viewers and subjects.
- Questioning the politics of representation in relation to particular photographs challenges the idea of documentary photography as neutral.
- Making complex situations such as climate change and social injustice visible through photography can offer a sense of mutual connectedness and responsibility.
- Portraiture is a long-standing photographic genre with various tropes in different cultural contexts.

## Discussion points

- What ethical questions are potentially involved in looking at photographs of other people?
- What kinds of power relationships might be implicated in documentary photography?
- Are there limits to the role photography can play in making a social or political issue visible?
- How have artists and photographers created counter-narratives to the established tenets of portraiture?

## Additional case studies

Taysir Batniji (b. 1966)

Victor Burgin (b. 1941)

Hichem Driss (b. 1968)

Pablo Ortiz Monasterio (b. 1952)

Malik Nejmi (b. 1975)

Farah Nosh (b. 1974)

George Osodi (b. 1974)

Trevor Paglen (b. 1974)

Gordon Parks (1912–2006)

Althea Thauberger (b. 1970)

## Notes

- 1 Correspondence with author, July 9, 2018.
- 2 T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 123.
- 3 Demos, *The Migrant Image*, 124.
- 4 See Heather Diack and Erina Duganne, “Not Just Pictures: Reassessing Critical Models for 1980s Photography,” *photographies* 10, no. 3 (Autumn 2017): 235–43, fn 3: “The term politics of representation first appeared in the subtitle to Allan Sekula’s 1978 essay ‘Dismantling Modernism,’ and in James Donald’s introduction to the special issue of *Screen Education* 36 (Autumn 1980), which included John Tagg’s essay ‘Power and Photography.’ In a footnote to her essay ‘Who is Speaking Thus?,’ Abigail Solomon-Godeau further associates this term with Victor Burgin’s 1977 essay ‘Looking at Photographs’ and his 1980 essay ‘Photography, Phantasy, Function,’ as well as with Martha Rosler’s 1981 essay ‘In, Around and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography).’”
- 5 “Breaking News: Turning the Lens on Mass Media,” *Getty.edu*, <http://www.getty.edu/art/mobile/center/breakingnews/stop.php?id=362201>.
- 6 Evan Thomas, “How Bush Blew It,” *Newsweek*, September 19, 2005.
- 7 “Submerged Portraits,” *Gideon Mendel*, <http://gideonmendel.com/submerged-portraits/>.
- 8 “Execution Squares,” *Hrair Sarkissian*, <http://hairsarkissian.com/work/execution-squares/>.
- 9 John Tagg, “Discipline and Protest: Thinking Photography after Foucault,” in Lars Willumeit (ed.), *The (Un) Becomings of Photography: On Reaggregating and Reassembling the Photographic and Its Institutions* (Krakow: Fundacja Sztuk Wizualnych, 2016), 62.

- 10 Anastasia Moloney, "Silence surrounds Colombia's 92,000 disappeared: ICRC," Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-foundation-colombia-missing/silence-surrounds-colombias-92000-disappeared-icrc-idUSKBN0GT22520140829>.
- 11 María del Rosario Acosta López, "Memory and Fragility: Art's Resistance to Oblivion (Three Colombian Cases)," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 71–98; 88.
- 12 Amanda Jane Graham, "Assisted Breathing: Developing Embodied Exposure in Oscar Muñoz's 'Aliento'," *Latin American Perspectives* 39, no. 3 (May 2012): 63–73; 63.
- 13 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1997), 15.
- 14 Louis Filler, *The Muckrakers* (Oakland, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 45.
- 15 See Edward T. O'Donnell, "Pictures vs. Words? Public History, Tolerance, and the Challenge of Jacob Riis," *Public Historian* 26, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 7–26.
- 16 O'Donnell, "Pictures vs. Words," 8; Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives, Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: n.p., 1890).
- 17 Marguerite Lavin, curator of photographs, Museum of the City of New York, telephone interview with Edward T. O'Donnell, May 10, 1998. See O'Donnell, "Pictures vs. Words," 7–26, fn 1.
- 18 Martha Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)" (1981), in *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings 1975–2001* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 177.
- 19 Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 178.
- 20 Owens, *Beyond Recognition*, 178.
- 21 Holland Cotter, "A Local Place for a Global Neighbourhood," *New York Times*, November 7, 2013.
- 22 Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 20.
- 23 Campt, *Listening to Images*, 22.
- 24 Cynthia Foo, "Portrait of a Globalized Canadian: Ken Lum's 'There Is No Place Like Home'," *RACAR* (2005): 39–47; 42.
- 25 Nicole Neufeld Elizabeth, *Displacing Identity Politics: Relocating Sites of Representation in the Work of Jin Me Yoon*, Master's thesis, Carleton University, 2008, 40.
- 26 Yoon quoted in Germain Koh, "Jin-Me Yoon," in Diana Nemiroff (ed.), *Crossings* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1998), 182.
- 27 "Wang Jinsong," in *Lines of Descent: The Family in Contemporary Asian Art*, 2000, <http://www.visualarts.qld.gov.au/linesofdescent/works/wang.html>.
- 28 Jiehong Jiang, *Burden or Legacy from the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 21.
- 29 Leslie K. Wang, *Outsourced Children: Orphanage Care and Adoption in Globalizing China* (Oakland, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 9.
- 30 Roberta Wue, "Essentially Chinese: the Chinese portrait subject in nineteenth-century photography," in Wu Hung and Katherine R. Tsang (eds.), *Body and Face in Chinese Visual Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 257–82; 261.
- 31 Hito Steyerl in conversation with Marvin Jordan, "The Politics of Post-Representation," *DIS* magazine, <http://dismagazine.com/disillusioned-2/62143/hito-steyerl-politics-of-post-representation/>.
- 32 "Traveling Images: The Art of Hito Steyerl," *Art Forum* (Summer 2008), <https://www.artforum.com/print/200806/traveling-images-the-art-of-hito-steyerl-20392>; T. J. Demos, "Hito Steyerl's Traveling Images," in *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 74.
- 33 Hito Steyerl in conversation with Lynn Hershman Leeson, in Eva Respini (ed.), *Art in the Age of the Internet, 1989 to Today* (Boston and New Haven, CT: Institute of Contemporary Art and Yale University Press, 2018), 150.

## Selected further reading

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## 6

# PICTURES OF WAR

*Falling Soldier* is renowned as one of the most iconic extant pictures of war (see Fig. 6.1). Photographed by **Robert Capa** (1913–54), co-founder of the Magnum Photos agency, the image depicts a soldier's death in September 1936 on an open hillside. With this close-up, we as viewers become witnesses to the graphic scene. We see the precise moment at which he is shot, his fatally wounded body flung backwards as he releases his rifle from the grip of his right hand. Taken during the Spanish Civil War (1936–9), this image has been studied closely since its creation for both its emotional power and as a model of conflict photography. Newly available lightweight **Leica cameras** and 35mm film allowed photographs to be taken for the first time in the heat of battle. In capturing the instantaneity of this startling moment, Capa's image exemplifies photography's prowess as a vehicle of reportage and immediacy. Very explicitly it shows how photographs could now be shot out in the field by nimble photojournalists, able to capture the action of warfare with all its sudden intensities, including death. At the same time, however, it raises a number of important ethical questions, including whether or not the photographer has any responsibility beyond documentation, in the face of violent acts. Notoriously, this photograph continues to be the subject of ongoing debates regarding its veracity, opening up yet another set of ethical and visual conundrums. Since the 1970s, its authenticity as a "true" picture has been called into doubt, and many suggest it was indeed staged. More recently, José Manuel Susperregui, a communications professor at the Universidad del País Vasco, has conducted detailed studies of Capa's picture and, based on the surmised location, concludes that the photograph is faked.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the uncanny power of this photograph endures. As addressed in the discussion of truth-value in relation to photography in Chapter 2, staging and artistry have long been integral to the history of photography and used in the service of making compelling images. Beyond whether or not *Falling Soldier* is actually a picture of a fatality, the photograph is without question a war photograph. Capa was indeed on the ground, so to speak, and was both emotionally and ideologically invested in the Spanish Civil War. By all accounts, he "sympathised with the plight of the anti-fascist Republicans, consisting of the workers, the trade unions, socialists and the poor."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Capa's photograph is a palpable attempt to convey the shocking horror of war, and as such, a statement against armed conflict. Regardless of whether the image was staged, Capa used his camera as a tool that reconceptualizes the viewer's relationship to war. As photography historian Sally Stein has argued, despite *Falling Soldier* being "discredited as a battlefield record," it persists as an "iconic" image in deliberations regarding the "ever-changing criteria for, and boundaries between, photography, propaganda, and art."<sup>3</sup> The element of persuasion, as a mode of address, is worth exploring in more depth.





**Figure 6.1** Robert Capa, *Falling Soldier*, 1936. Robert Capa [Death of a Loyalist militiaman, Córdoba front, Spain], early September 1936. © International Center of Photography/Magnum Photos (2560.1992).

From author Richard Whelan's perspective, *Falling Soldier* engages viewers in fundamentally subjective ways by calling them to think about the mortal effect of war on individual humans. Whelan explains:

The horrific tendency of modern warfare is to depersonalize. Soldiers can use their weapons of mass destruction only because they have learned to conceptualize their victims not as individuals but as a category—the enemy. Capa's strategy was to *repersonalize* war—to emphasize that those who suffer the effects of war are individuals with whom the viewer of the photographs cannot help but identify.<sup>4</sup>

This realization triggers a series of crucial questions, pertaining to the role and subject matter of war photography, as well as its modes of creation, dissemination, and reception. Ultimately, what is the meaning and effect of a photograph such as *Falling Soldier*, in its depiction of deadly violence? Moreover, are photographs of war ever simply documents? What role do they play in engaging public sentiment? Can or should they function as calls to public action more broadly? These uncertainties, among others, are central to this chapter.

Almost immediately after the so-called invention of photography in 1839, journalists and photographers used the medium to record and report on war to citizens located at a distance from their nations' conflicts. Beyond reportage, affinities between photography and modern warfare were evident early on,

including the shared allusion to “shooting.” As writer Susan Sontag aptly remarked, “War-making and picture-taking are congruent activities.”<sup>5</sup> And yet, from the outset, the relationship between images of war and the actualities of war were far from natural or self-evident. Many early photographs of conflicts (for example, Felice Beato’s 1858 photograph from the Indian Mutiny, discussed in greater detail in Chapter 12, or Alexander Gardner’s photographs from the American Civil War, which we take up later in this chapter) show scenes that we know were staged, a fact that would seem to challenge the medium’s presumed evidentiary function as well as the journalist’s desire for truth-telling. This chapter investigates the constructed nature of war imagery and asks whether or not its staging—what might be called its manufactured realism—automatically makes such pictures any less “real.” Can staged or even imagined images of war still function as “true” pictures, that is, “true” expressions of the frustration, violence, and trauma of war? Additionally, what happens when pictures of war are viewed within the context of art, and the photographer identifies as an artist rather than a journalist? How might this change the register and affect of pictures of war?

## The politics of proximity

“If you’re pictures aren’t good enough, you are not close enough.” This oft-quoted piece of photographic advice is attributed to none other than Robert Capa. For Capa, the notion of “getting close” implied not simply a metaphorical intimacy but rather a literal dictum for photographers to physically get closer to the subject of the photograph. By such means, the revered photojournalist believed a more powerful picture would result. *Falling Soldier* exemplifies this logic. But again, what does this kind of closeness suggest beyond the photographer’s willingness to be up close and personal with danger, death, and despair? How does “getting close” connect to the role of the viewer in relation to the image? In other words, what are the politics of proximity as regards pictures of war?

Artist **Martha Rosler** has reflected deeply on the impetus of the “real” in photography, and relatedly, the photograph’s claim to evidence. Furthermore, critically examining the politics and ethics of individual engagement in relation to representations of war has been central to Rosler’s practice. Consistently topical and prescient, her work has critically examined the role of visuality in the Vietnam War, the multiple incarnations of the Gulf Wars, feminism, globalization, and, not coincidentally, homelessness—all issues that are profoundly interconnected.<sup>6</sup> Created and circulated first as photocopied flyers before being published in anti-war journals, Rosler’s series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* (1967–72) addresses the politics of proximity specifically during the war in Vietnam. Frequently referred to as “the livingroom war,” the war in Vietnam spanned two decades between 1955 and 1975 and was the first to be systematically televised. Publications such as *Life* were immensely popular during this time period. Art historians Carol Payne and Laura Brandon explain that “[b]etween 1961 and 1972, *Life* magazine published more than 1,200 images of Vietnam War zones, largely focusing on individual soldiers’ experiences, and a further six hundred from the home front depicting mounting resistance to the conflict.”<sup>7</sup> Now iconic photographs such as Eddie Adams’s picture of Brigadier General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing the Vietcong suspect Bay Hop in 1968 and Nick Ut’s image of Phan Thi Kim Phuc and other children fleeing a napalm strike in 1975 first came to public attention in this way.

By such means, graphic coverage of the atrocities of war entered the homes of ordinary American civilians on a daily basis. Nevertheless, within the comfort of one’s personal space, viewers had the prerogative to tune out this news coverage or to see it simply as a spectacle at a remove. And, moreover,

the war raged on. Poignantly, Rosler employed the strategy of photomontage, which allowed her, as curator Brian Wallis argues, to “seamlessly splice together grim Vietnam War photographs from *Life* magazine with views of attractive upper-middle-class homes from the popular magazine *House Beautiful*”<sup>8</sup> in order to shatter any sense of comfort within one’s assumed private refuge of the home. Rather than allowing the horror of war to be seen as remote and mundane, Rosler used unexpected juxtapositions to point to the implicit and complicit presence of militarism in daily life. GIs searching through designer kitchens and rooms with views onto battlefields strewn with corpses are imaged in order to critique the complacency and insular reality of United States consumer culture. These manufactured scenes relay important information about the true experience of war while collapsing the distance between home and abroad, pointing to the fact that these two realities are interdependent. Addressing the effects and limitations of the circulation of images of war, Rosler seeks to undo the problematic binary of “us and them.” The notion of “bringing the war home” suggested by the subtitle implies making familiar, begging the question: What does it mean to become familiar with the terrible realities of war? Are there ways in which desensitization sets in?

One particularly jarring photomontage from the series is entitled *Balloons* (see Fig. 6.2). We see a panic-stricken woman bracing a bloodied infant’s body amidst a serene, affluent, idealized domestic

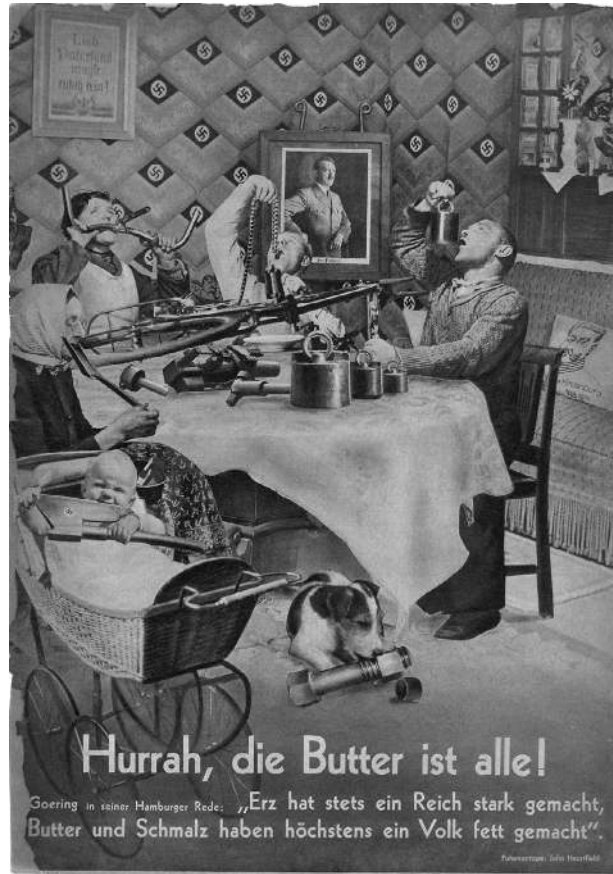


**Figure 6.2** Martha Rosler, *Balloons*, from the series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*, c. 1967–72. © Martha Rosler. Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

interior. By contrast, the balloons are inconsequential, tucked decoratively in the far corner. This photomontage is heartrending while simultaneously asking how images mobilize feeling. In *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), writer Susan Sontag discusses the “exploitation of sentiment (pity, compassion, indignation) in war photography and of rote ways of provoking feeling,” explaining that, “It used to be thought, when the candid images were not common, that showing something that needed to be seen, bringing a painful reality closer, was bound to goad viewers to feel more. In a world in which photography is brilliantly at the service of consumerist manipulations, no effect of a photograph of a doleful scene can be taken for granted.”<sup>9</sup> Rosler’s use of photography is particularly attuned to such risks. It is also notable that her original series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* received renewed attention from the public and the media during the first Gulf War in 1991, in tandem with the uncanny sense that the new war was all too familiar. Rosler returned to the subversive strategy of photomontage with an updated version of the project in the early 2000s, during the onset of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, this time including new technologies of communication and imaging, including cellular phones, and featuring disquieting sites such as the ruins of Saddam Hussein’s palatial residence.

Yet another controversial home front forms the subject of “*Hurrah! The butter is finished!*” (*Hurrah, die Butter ist alle!*), first published in *AIZ (Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung—Worker’s Illustrated Newspaper)* 14, no. 51 (December 19, 1935) (see Fig. 6.3), a leftist weekly dedicated to advancing the political education of workers. The publication began in Berlin in 1921 and later relocated to Prague after the Nazis came to power in 1933, where production continued until the Germans invaded Czechoslovakia in 1938. This 1935 photomontage by Dada artist **John Heartfield** (1891–1968) parodies a speech by the Nazi leader Hermann Göring (a figure prominently involved in the establishment of concentration camps) delivered in Hamburg, a quote from which is included at the bottom of the image. It reads, “Ore has always made an empire strong, butter and lard have made a country fat at most.” The quote exemplifies Göring’s aggressive militarist rhetoric and his callous attempts to convince Germans of the necessity of making sacrifices for the country’s rearmament, even if it meant going hungry. For though it is the interwar period between World War I and World War II, Weimar was characterized by a continuation of food scarcity and the new National Socialist regime is asking Germans to make further sacrifices. Heartfield’s photomontage uses wit and sensationalism to lay bare Göring’s cold-hearted logic, and the ruthless cruelty of Nazism more broadly.

Shown as a single image, despite the fact that it is a cut-and-paste montage of elements, the absurdity of the scene is presented as a unified whole, as credible, as real. This montage is a prime example of manufactured realism. Art historian Sabine Kriebel describes the imagined instant, noting that “[f]or a hallucinatory moment, we suspend disbelief: Hitler is a Kaiser, and this family obligingly eats a bicycle in their ornate dining room, the decorative excess competing with their nutritive austerity.”<sup>10</sup> This terrifyingly patriotic family devours inedible metal parts, including a bicycle, farm implements, weights, and weapons, surrounded by ornamental swastikas. Most gruesome of all is the sneering baby in the lower-left foreground chewing on a threatening axe. The image is disturbing and deliberately so. Heartfield was vehemently opposed to the spread of fascism and saw the potential of art and photography as political tools. He also believed in the critical power of humor. Formerly Helmut Herzfeld, the artist adopted his anglicized pseudonym as “a wartime protest against German chauvinism and a symbolic alliance with the English enemy.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, in response to the Nazi mobilization of propaganda, Heartfield explained, “I started making photomontages during the First World War. I found out how you can fool people with photos, really fool them . . . You can lie and tell the truth by putting the wrong title or wrong captions under them.”<sup>12</sup> Heartfield’s trenchant critique of fascism and militarism uses photomontage to



**Figure 6.3** John Heartfield, “Hurrah! The butter is finished!” (*Hurrah, die Butter ist alle!*), from *AIZ* 14, no. 51, December 19, 1935. Collection of the Akron Art Museum. Gift of Roger R. Smith.

activate the viewer. Confronted with the intimidating prospect of this macabre domestic scene, we acknowledge that the monstrosity of war is inextricably connected to ordinary families, to the stuff of everyday life, and can grow out of quotidian ideologies.

More than seventy years separate Heartfield’s artistic practice from that of Tehran-based **Gohar Dashti** (b. 1980), and yet, like Rosler and other artists working with manufactured realism as a means of critique, Dashti creates compelling pictures of war that interrogate seemingly ordinary everyday life as a site which is ripe to reveal the sutures of conflict and the far-reaching effects of war. Though Dashti’s work deliberately engages with the “staging” of war as a subject, she does not use photomontage. Rather, she employs a tableau aesthetic, featuring a single coherent image that questions the “real” effects of war on daily life. Notably, Dashti’s birth coincided with the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq war (1980–8), on the heels of the Islamic Revolution (1979) under the leadership of the Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Growing up within this context, war obtained an unnerving level of normalcy. As such, *Today’s Life and War* (2008), a series of ten color photographs, engages with the emotional impact of the direct experience of war on the continuation of everyday life (see Fig. 6.4). We see a young couple go about their daily





**Figure 6.4** Gohar Dashti, *Today's Life and War*, 2008. © Gohar Dashti. Courtesy of the artist.

activities, hanging laundry out to dry, celebrating a birthday, and watching television, among other seemingly mundane moments. In each image, the two don blank, unaffected facial expressions. All the while, in each scene, they are surrounded by the unsettling military materials of war. We see soldiers in gas masks with assault rifles, the laundry line is in fact a barbed wire fence, and their meagre celebration takes place behind a sandbag bunker. In one image, the couple sits down for tea together, and the woman is distracted by a cellphone call. The man stares absorbingly at her, and yet, astoundingly, neither seem preoccupied at all with the massive tank that encroaches on their peaceful meal, the daunting barrel of its gun aimed straight at them. Within Dashti's fictionalized battlefield filmset, in spite of being staged, a very real and moving sense of the insidiousness of warfare can be felt. These photographs question what one is able to accept as routine, as well as the ways that the violence of war seeps into all aspects of society and personal relationships.

## Afterimages

In 1994, **An-My Lê** (b. 1960) returned to her homeland of Vietnam to capture images of the aftermath and upheaval of the war between American forces and the Viet Cong. According to the art historian Lisa Saltzman, once there, Lê found “the war-torn landscape of her disrupted childhood remained largely

invisible beneath signs of postwar industrial development and consumer culture,"<sup>13</sup> and as such the resulting photographs demonstrate this new layer of reality. Born in Saigon, Lê recalls living in her family home, amidst nightly mortar attacks, before relocating to the United States in 1975 as a refugee. For Lê, the temporal disjuncture between now and then intersects irrevocably with the geographic displacement of here and there. Her photographic work and its investigative take on the genre of war photography demonstrate this attention. Building on her interest in the afterlife of war, both in terms of memory and physical traces, Lê subsequently created *Small Wars* (1999–2002), a series of photographs documenting American civilians who spend their free time re-enacting the Vietnam War in the forests of Virginia, regardless of the fact that the landscape bears little resemblance to Southeast Asia (see Fig. 6.5). Invoking the aesthetics of documentary photography and combat photojournalism, Lê's black-and-white images, and their sometimes-gritty blurs, mimic battle scenes while in fact being the result of restaging. Armed men in camouflage and helmets appear poised for battle, positioned around props, maneuvering for rescue operations in some pictures and ambushes in others. Lê's large format photographs focus on armed conflict and yet rarely show any actual military engagement. Instead, though they are re-enactments, many of these photographs nevertheless seem to be characterized by an anticipation of action. In photographically documenting re-enactors, Lê effectively, as curator Karen Irvine writes, "explores the cumulative effect that various accounts of war have on memory, both individual and collective, and



**Figure 6.5** An-My Lê. *Small Wars* (*Sniper 1*), 1999–2002. © An-My Lê. Courtesy of the artist.



ultimately questions how we remember, glorify, and imagine war after the fact.”<sup>14</sup> Above all, *Small Wars* evokes a profound sense of ambiguity, in terms of both depicted content and meaning. As viewers, we must ask ourselves by what criteria an “authentic” photograph of war might be assessed, while questioning how representations of war shape our broader understanding of conflict. Moreover, these complex photographs are also striking in that they are quite beautiful, even contemplative. On this point, curator Mark Godfrey has argued that their aesthetic appearance “mitigates against any danger of them being taken for two-dimensional political statements.”<sup>15</sup> This possibility presents yet another dilemma requiring further consideration, namely the troubling status of beauty when depicting subjects of war.

Lê’s decision to explore scenes of war that do not depict the heat of action has many precedents in the history of photography. Photographs of fast-paced, active battles are in fact absent from the photographic records of the two most heavily documented conflicts of the nineteenth century, namely the Crimean War (1853–6) and the American Civil War (1861–5). Rather, photographs from these wars consist predominantly of portraits. Carol Payne and Laura Brandon elucidate: “Today, viewers are often surprised by the inert, calm formality of nineteenth-century war photography, but cumbersome and fragile equipment, as well as long exposure times simply prohibited photographing battlefield action.”<sup>16</sup> Dominated by tranquil and controlled poses, the demeanor of the soldiers might seem misleadingly out of sync with the violence and chaos of war. This tension, however, can be mined for its own effects.

Consider the work of **Richard Mosse** (b. 1980) in this regard. Using Kodak Aerochrome, a discontinued brand of reconnaissance film developed in the 1940s that registers infrared light as it is reflected off the chlorophyll in live vegetation, Mosse’s series *Infra* (2011) transforms the war-torn landscape of the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), turning foliage that would normally appear green into shocking hues of pink. These photographs depict child soldiers, refugee camps, and armed rebel forces presented against the backdrop of ravaged topographies that appear nearly extra-terrestrial in glowing, unnatural shades of magenta, fuchsia, and rose. The vibrancy of pinks becomes all the more disturbing in relation to the context—more than 5.4 million people have died in war-related causes since 1994 in the DRC. This particular war is a notoriously complex conflict, fought by numerous factions, largely over the ownership and exploitation of the country’s mineral resources, including rare materials necessary to make smart mobile phones and computers (such as tantalum from coltan and tin ore). Despite, or perhaps because of, the overwhelming atrocities in this region, including an estimated 30,000 children conscripted into various fighting forces, more than 300,000 women raped, and 3.4 million people forced to flee their homes,<sup>17</sup> the conflict has not retained the interest of the international news media.

In an effort to document this ongoing war, Mosse describes his desire to find a new way of showing what he refers to as a “forgotten war,” explaining, “I wanted to export this technology to a harder situation, to up-end the generic conventions of calcified mass-media narratives and challenge the way we’re allowed to represent this forgotten conflict . . . I wanted to confront this military reconnaissance technology, to use it reflexively in order to question the ways in which war photography is constructed.”<sup>18</sup> Noting the widely popular reception of these images, and the obsessive return of critical attention to the loaded potential of pink, art historian Gabrielle Moser has insightfully reflected on whether the intensive visual pleasure of the work in fact detracts from the violent reality represented, particularly when the photographs are understood foremost as surreal or dreamlike. Moreover, Moser points to the racialized dimensions of this violence, and how the instability of color throughout the series might serve to “remind us of photography’s long-standing role in constructing race as a category of natural, visible, classifiable, *coloured* difference.”<sup>19</sup>

Among the compelling shots by Mosse, *Rebel Rebel* particularly resonates (see Plate 10). We see a young armed rebel on the Lukweti to Pinga road, Masissi Territory, North Kivu. He poses with his AK47 in a manner that exaggerates his biceps, in a performance of machismo. His childish face stares assertively back at the viewer from behind the mask of aviator sunglasses. One can only imagine the horrors he has seen and participated in. His pretense of fearlessness and control is tempered by a detail that is at once inconspicuous and yet entirely disquieting: he is wearing a SpongeBob SquarePants cut-off T-shirt. The presence of this goofy-grinned American cartoon character reinforces the terrible irony that there is nothing to be taken lightly here, and moreover, that even childhood innocence is a luxury that is not available to everyone.

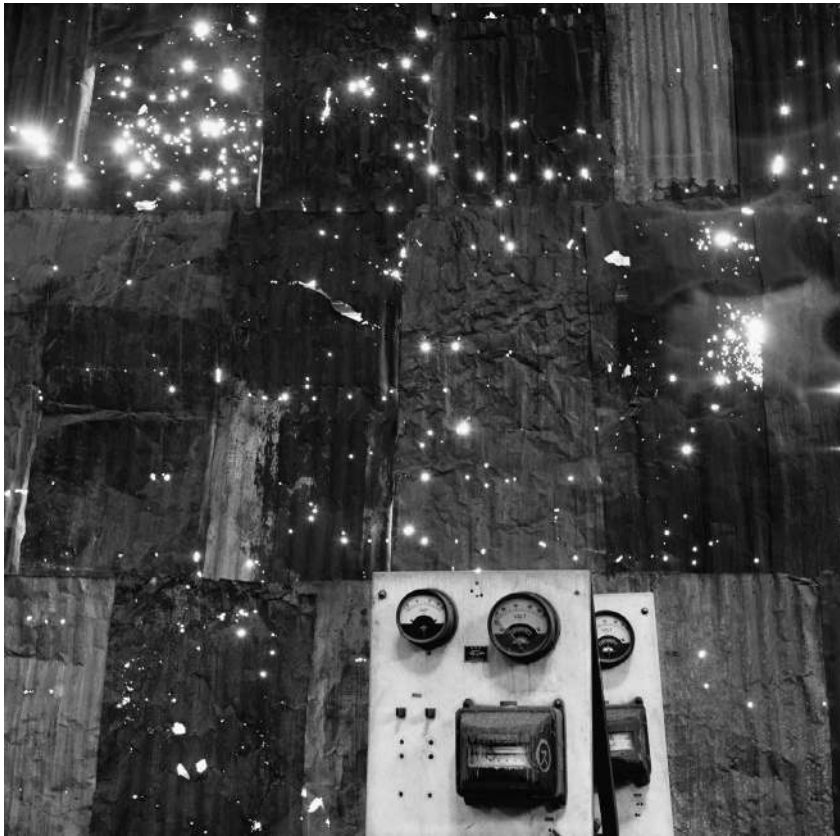
Visually stunning photographs of war have the potential to be mobilized in various and contradictory ways. Toshio Fukada's photographs of an ominous mushroom cloud blooming over Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, less than twenty minutes after the United States dropped the atom bomb, remain potent images. They possess what has been characterized as an "evil beauty," that still has "the power to terrify in their roiling ordinariness."<sup>20</sup> Only fourteen years old at the time, the photographs Fukada took are chilling reminders of the terrifying capacity of nuclear warfare. Yet what they do not show clearly are the horrific and enduring results of nuclear war on human life.

The ongoing aftereffects of war form the subject of **Shomei Tomatsu's** work (b. 1930), an artist widely considered the most important figure in Japanese postwar photography. *Nagasaki*, Tomatsu's photographic book made twenty-one years after the horrific bombing of that city on August 9, 1945, grapples with the manifestations of trauma that remain long after war has "officially" ended. Featuring graphic black-and-white images of the scarred and disfigured faces and bodies of survivors as well as everyday remnants, such as a cracked wristwatch with its hands halted at 11:02 am, the exact time of the nuclear detonation, the series is a powerful indictment of the physical and mental impact of war. Using a characteristically raw and grainy style, numerous warped objects are recorded by Tomatsu, including a haunting Coca-Cola bottle deformed by the searing intensity of the atomic blast, which, at first glance, appears to be the grotesque corpse of a flayed animal.

Tomatsu uses a formalist approach to photography, focusing on details, close-ups, and composition, in a manner that at once underscores the aesthetics of its subjects, drawing viewers in by its appearance, while persuading them to take the time to contemplate and question what exactly is pictured before them. Within the book format, looking at damaged objects alongside the visceral physicality of human suffering further suggests the disturbing ways in which the violence of war dehumanizes, turning people into objects. These moments of optical confusion possess both symbolic and ethical implications.

Tomatsu's *Untitled*, from the series *Memory of War, Toyokawa, Aichi* (1959), is one such instance (see Fig. 6.6). Speckles of light, reminiscent of a starry sky, emerge like whimsical constellations within a darkened expanse. Nevertheless, like other photographs by Tomatsu, this image is in fact a brooding record of the aftermath of atomic devastation and military occupation. Closer inspection reveals that the subject is a corroded wall of a bombed munitions factory, pierced with holes that may be read as "a powerful symbol of the deterioration of martial ambition in Japan."<sup>21</sup> Simultaneously, the connotations derived from the night sky remain important, particularly in the ways they evoke existential questions regarding the finite fragility of human life by contrast to the infinite unknowns of outer space.

**Jo Ractliffe** (b. 1961) shares Tomatsu's interest in capturing the haunting traces of war. And like Mosse, she photographs eerie landscapes that link vision and violence while revealing the ways war permeates both social and territorial space. Her series *Terreno Ocupado* (2007) depicts scenes of the aftermath of the Angolan Civil War (1975–2002), following Angola's independence from Portuguese rule,



**Figure 6.6** Shomei Tomatsu, *Untitled*, from the series *Memory of War*, Toyokawa, Aichi, 1959. Printed 1974 Art. © Shomei Tomatsu—INTERFACE.

focusing on what arts writer Karen Wright has described as “the acceptance necessary for survival, the quasi-normality of living contrasted with the trauma.”<sup>22</sup> These black-and-white photographs “explore the idea of landscape as pathology; how past violence manifests in the landscape of the present, both forensically and symbolically.”<sup>23</sup> *Roadside stall on the way to Viana* captures a stretch of bare ground in and around Angola’s capital city, Luanda, showing traces of urban life in the background (see Fig. 6.7). The area is home to unmarked mass graves and vestiges of military testing sites from the protracted civil war. However, the camera does not show these disturbing elements explicitly. Instead, in the photograph, the land appears harsh and dusty, desolate and empty. It seems marked more by anonymity than recognizable specifics. This ghostly aspect is further reinforced by the foreboding dark garments hanging from a tree. Uninhabited and suspended, these workmen coveralls take on a symbolic importance, combining abstract poetics with the rawness of the real. The bodies may have vanished but the signs of them have not. The artist has described her interest in such spaces and in their connotation of temporal disjuncture, explaining, “Quite often, sites of significance don’t evidence their historical weight.”<sup>24</sup> Ractliffe’s project engages themes of dispossession and erasure that are also inextricable aspects of war, questioning what it means to be occupied as well as abandoned.



**Figure 6.7** Jo Ractliffe, *Roadside stall on the way to Viana*, 2007. Digital silver gelatin print, 50 x 50 cm. © Jo Ractliffe. Courtesy of STEVENSON, Cape Town and Johannesburg.

## Bearing witness

In 1924 the conscientious objector **Ernst Friedrich** (1894–1967) published *Krieg dem Kriege! Guerre à la Guerre! War against War! Oorlog aan den Oorlog!*, initially in German, English, French, and Dutch. It has since been published in over fifty additional languages. Featuring graphic photographs from World War I (1914–18), including mutilations, suffering, and death, drawn from previously censored German military and medical archives, the book was intended as a condemnation of war.<sup>25</sup> Friedrich believed that if people saw the atrocities of war that they would be motivated to prevent future wars. In other words, by bearing witness to war through photography, war could be prevented. As historian Dora Apel explains, “Friedrich’s visual strategy depended primarily on an identification of the viewer with the humanist image of the suffering soldier as a universal subject.”<sup>26</sup> One reviewer in 1926 described the “shocking and horrible photographs” contained therein as being far beyond the capacities of language, explaining that, “no written work can come near the power of these images . . . Whoever sees these and does not shudder is not a human being . . .”<sup>27</sup> Throughout this chapter, we have seen numerous photographers

and artists who have engaged with photography as a means of assessing the implications of the act of looking at violent events that defy description, and how images can be mobilized in varying ways as anti-war visual campaigns. In thinking of Friedrich's approach, we return to the questions posed at the outset of this chapter regarding the impact of seeing death. Does the visibility of violence on bodies aid in preventing the militarization of society? Is the viewer positioned as a passive bystander when confronted with photographs of the victims of war, or as an active witness, with the capacity to effect social and political change?

Yet another German anti-war publication forms the basis of **Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin's** (b. 1970; b. 1971) *War Primer 2* from 2011. In this case, Broomberg and Chanarin developed a project that layers photographic history, using appropriated copies of an English language edition of Bertolt Brecht's *Kriegsfilibel* (*War Primer*), originally published in German in 1955. The artists were inspired by Brecht's creative gesture and his critique of the mystifying power of mass media images. Brecht himself had appropriated photographs of World War II (1939–45) from newspapers, adding four-line poems as captions to each image, which he referred to as photo epigrams. Sharing Brecht's skeptical view of photojournalism within the political economy of capitalism, Broomberg explains, "Our project was a continuation of his concerns. [Brecht] was obsessed with how opaque photographs were. He called them hieroglyphics, and 70 years later we are further away from understanding how images work than they were back then."<sup>28</sup> In their version, Broomberg and Chanarin superimposed low-resolution screenshots, culled from Google image searches of the ongoing "War on Terror," onto the pages of 100 copies of Brecht's book. In order to avoid *War Primer 2* becoming an exclusive, rarefied object, they also made it available as a scanned free e-book.

Broomberg and Chanarin share connections with Heartfield's anti-fascist montages. The duo similarly used photographic images in unexpected combinations as a means of activating the viewer's perception, thereby posing complex questions rather than giving the impression of either easy explanation or empathy. These images and their attendant text are not immediately transparent and, in many cases, deliberately subvert rational understanding. One page shows a jovial image of former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld balancing on a unicycle, pastiched atop a news photograph of Adolf Hitler presenting a speech. Another shows a photograph of an American soldier languidly smoking a cigarette above the dead body of a Japanese soldier. An image from the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, of a wildly smiling female U.S. Army soldier, Sabrina Harman, giving a proud thumbs-up sign to the camera as she bends over an unidentified rotting corpse, is pasted on top. Brecht's poem here reads:

We saw each other—it happened very fast—  
I smiled, and both of them smiled back at me.  
And so at first we stood and smiled, all three.  
One pulled his gun. And then I shot him dead.

Such visual and textual combinations offer a critique of the horrors of war, the banality of evil, and, additionally, the voyeuristic ways images of war are disseminated and consumed. *War Primer 2* includes numerous pictures of photographers taking photographs, further underscoring the point that images and the politics of vision are integral to contemporary warfare. *Plate 62*, for instance, consists of a grid of photographs (see *Plate 11*). The bottom layer includes a black-and-white series of dead soldiers, some in trenches, some nestled on the ground. They could nearly be mistaken for sleeping bodies. Broomberg and Chanarin have then included a color image of a dead body, face exposed to the camera phones held

by four sets of hands looming above his head. This conjunction of gruesome images, as well as the complex drive to document and view them, forces the viewer to ask whether pictures of war indeed awake moral outrage and, by extension, the possibility of ethical intervention.

It has been nearly two decades since the U.S. war in Afghanistan began in October 2001. The iPhone had not yet been invented and there was no cellular service in Kabul. Cell-phone towers now dot the Earth and we are more than twelve generations into the world's favorite smartphone. Nevertheless, with the development of new technologies for recording, circulating, and seeing atrocities, wars continue to proliferate. At present, war is widely acknowledged as the leading cause of human displacement, and it is questionable whether our ability to view conflict and to "bear witness" via photography has reduced this onslaught.

It is worth remembering that the first full-scale attempt to document a war occurred during the American Civil War by a firm headed by Mathew Brady. According to writer Susan Sontag, these photographs showed subjects such as "encampments populated by officers and foot soldiers, towns in war's way, ordnance, ships, as well as, most famously, dead Union and Confederate soldiers lying on the blasted ground of Gettysburg and Antietam."<sup>29</sup> When **Alexander Gardner** (1821–82), a photographer operating in Brady's employ, exhibited a series of Antietam photographs at Brady's New York Gallery in 1862, American civilians were exposed for the first time to pictures of casualties of war. Brady and others are said to have justified the brutality evidenced by the photographed bodies of the dead as the necessary duty of the photographer. Supposedly, in defense of these graphic images, Brady quipped, "The camera is the eye of history."<sup>30</sup> In other words, despite the cruelty depicted, the photographs were captured, and needed to be seen, as a matter of historical integrity. However, the loftiness of historical documentation is far from all that is at work in this scenario. It is now well known that, in some cases, the Brady photographers rearranged the bodies of the recently dead in order to convey a more persuasively photogenic picture. Gardner's *The Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg* (1865), from his *Photographic Sketchbook of the War* (1865), poses an infamous example of such intervention. The body of a dead Confederate soldier was moved, his head propped up to face the camera, and even the adjacent rifle, leaned to the side of the barricade, is an erroneous detail, identified as an infantryman's rifle rather than a sharpshooter's. Nevertheless, the inconsistencies between the image and the truth here are not so clear-cut. While some viewers may feel manipulated by this revelation of the photographer's role in constructing the image, the body before us is all the same dead as a result of armed combat. Sontag succinctly summarizes the irony of this attachment to the fidelity of the photograph: "What is odd is not that so many of the iconic news photos of the past, including some of the best-remembered pictures from the Second World War, appear to have been staged. It is that we are surprised to learn they were staged, and always disappointed." Arguably, Gardner's alteration of the scene before the camera intensifies the emotional effect of the photograph. The Battle of Gettysburg was the deadliest of the Civil War. Though Gardner and his assistant Timothy O'Sullivan arrived two days after the battle, many bodies remained unburied, and they were determined to capture the overwhelming impact of the ferocious carnage. As such, is it any less a real picture of war? By some measure, could it in fact be more "true" than had the photographer not added these elements?

In some instances, perhaps paradoxically, the removal of the bodies of victims of war has been employed as a strategy to make visible the systemic realities of war and its intricate image economy. **Khaled Barakeh's** (b. 1976) *The Untitled Images* series (2014) denies the voyeuristic spectacularization of victims of atrocity while also questioning the politics of mass media censorship, asking when, where, and whose bodies are shown and viewed. In Barakeh's sequence of images, casualties, often children,



are cut out of the picture with a scalpel. This technique leaves behind a blank space etched into the photographic paper, which appears as a solid white trace of their absent bodies when hung against the gallery wall (see Fig. 6.8). The artist has described these as productive “excisions” that open up paradoxes of “concealment.”<sup>31</sup> These pictures were taken during the brutal, ongoing civil war in Syria. We see anguish, panic, fear, distress, and mourning—the corporeal impact of conflict made visceral. Each photograph shows individuals clinging to the limp, abstract figures of the wounded and dead. In Miriam Wilhelm’s words, “By altering the modes of visibility and invisibility through erasure, forgetting and disappearance become radical, profoundly productive acts.”<sup>32</sup> Notably, these photographs are hung low when exhibited, both as a means of humbling the viewer physically while also embodying further the discomforting reality of the images, as we try to make sense of what we are witnessing. Barakeh’s project addresses the limitations of looking, laying bare the relationships that the circulation of pictures of war assumes.

On this subject, Ariella Azoulay, a scholar of visual culture and contemporary philosophy, has written provocatively about the mass circulation of photographs of atrocity, and in particular the “interrelations prompted by the image as a productive political space.” In describing what Azoulay calls the “civil contract of photography,” she explains how viewing photographs itself is a “civil act,” which always demands more contextualization, thus enacting a form of participant viewership. The ways pictures of war engage the viewer’s responsibility towards the photographed subject is crucial for Azoulay. Such theorization builds upon the critique of documentary photography enacted in the writings and artistic



**Figure 6.8** Khaled Barakeh, *Untitled Images*, 2014. © Khaled Barakeh. Courtesy of the artist.



projects of Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula in the 1970s and 1980s, as a means of moving beyond the apathy that so often characterizes the aestheticization of suffering and towards a critical politics of representation, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Ultimately, examining the history of war photography reveals that such images are created and used in a number of varying and even contradictory ways. Some photographs claim to provide documentary truth, while others serve to challenge preconceptions of war and broaden our understanding of how we are implicated in battles that seem very distant, in part by virtue of looking at photographs. Recall that among the impactful elements in Rosler's *Balloons* from the series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* (1967–72), one of the most striking is the perplexing incongruity contained within a single frame. How can we make sense of the anguish and fear on the face of the woman holding a child's blood-spattered body, against the backdrop of the meticulously decorated and tranquil home? Combined together, as discussed previously, they draw attention not simply to the stark inequities of everyday life in different locations around the world, but more potently suggest the ways these seemingly opposed realities are intertwined. In other words, how the comforts of some often depend on the discomforts of others, and how the complicity of some can be linked to the visceral suffering of others.

Another result of this provocative visual combination is that the viewer might be able to recognize realities that are unfamiliar or seemingly remote by virtue of seeing them within a familiar context. In this regard, imaging ordinary, everyday life can be a powerful tool. Rather than sensational or dramatic photographs of war, which frequently alarm, confuse, and overwhelm with their unfathomable violence, pictures such as Rosler's allow space for thinking about relationships between oneself and others. Again, Sontag's ideas resonate: "Something becomes real—to those who are elsewhere, following it as 'news'—by being photographed."

The photographic work of **Muhammed Muheisen** (b. 1981), the Associated Press chief photographer for the Middle East, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, is revealing in this regard. Let's look more closely at one of his photographs. The descriptive caption reads, "An Afghan refugee girl, right, holding her younger brother, sits on a wooden-cart looking at her friend playing with a balloon, in a poor neighbourhood on the outskirts of Islamabad, Pakistan, Sunday, Feb. 2, 2014" (see Fig. 6.9). We see no weapons or corpses, but this too is a photograph of war. Though battle may not be explicitly pictured, the effects of conflict are as visceral here as in the *Rebel Sharpshooter*. Muheisen spent six months capturing a series of portraits of Afghan children living in refugee camps in Pakistan. The children appear unguarded, and in their visible vulnerability, Muheisen seems to ask for the viewer's compassion. What kind of life is possible in war zones? Muheisen's photograph might be categorized as a picture of everyday life. However, the specificities of the lives pictured compels more critical detail. We have before us another kind of "livingroom war," and in this case, it is perhaps the complete absence of familiar domesticity that brings the message home. As the Associated Press reports:

For more than three decades, Pakistan has been home to one of the world's largest refugee communities: hundreds of thousands of Afghans who have fled the repeated wars and fighting in their country. Since the 2002 U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan some 3.8 million Afghans have returned to their home country, according to the U.N.'s refugee agency, but thousands of others still live without electricity, running water, [sewage disposal] and other basic services.<sup>33</sup>

In this image, we see squalor and desperation, but also innocence and hope—the pink balloon appears almost as a symbolic beacon of the latter, offering a stark contrast to the dust and ruin of its surroundings.



**Figure 6.9** Muhammed Muheisen, *Islamabad, Pakistan*, 2014. Courtesy of Muhammed Muheisen/AP/Shutterstock.

And yet we know that balloons are fragile, transient, and the joy they might provide is both short-lived and superficial. The impact of Muheisen's photograph (and the same could be said of many of the images we have looked at throughout this chapter) is due in part to its beauty and its unresolved difficulty. Such photographs ask the viewer to think as well to look, and moreover, emboldened by this new awareness of the complicated pain of others, to potentially act, if and when possible, as a citizen of the world. Particularly considering the protracted nature of war in the present, its seemingly interminable presence, and the expansive scale of dispossession it engenders, our understandings of war, and thus of pictures of war, also demands expansion.

## **FOCUS BOX 6**

### **Images of war or war of images?**

*Khaled Barakeh*

The most successful and well-known curator of the twenty-first-century is technology. We are constantly bombarded by data and especially visual information. According to a 2014 annual web trends report, we are sharing and uploading upwards of 1.8 billion

photos a day. With an approximate number of 95 million photos and videos posted to Instagram and 300 million to Facebook daily, it is hard to keep track of every piece of visual information that is available for us to see. Social media, with its immense availability and wide range of information, has created a new context within which anybody can become a creator of social debate. The result is a competition of images in their potential to go viral.

As the volume of horrendous war images increases alongside this influx, the world becomes more and more indifferent, almost accepting towards them. After years of repetitive images of Middle Eastern misery shown in the Western media, one can notice the numbness, even the cruel boredom, of viewers who are used to seeing scenes of massacre on a daily basis. During the past few years as part of the Syrian Civil War, this problem has escalated into a cruel war of violent images. The Syrian regime, the opposition, and all other actors in the conflict have entered into a cold-blooded war of images, a competition to see who can reach the global news feeds first and attain the highest numbers of views—with only those who post the most horrific visual materials gaining the world's attention. The intensity of this war continues to increase, as certain players, guided by the necessity of creating ever more exaggerated visual materials to satisfy the world, have begun to stage images by replaying the horrors they did not manage to capture on film. Groups like ISIS have understood and leveraged this dynamic, creating images of extreme violence with an almost Hollywood-esque dramaturgy. The victims of the Syrian war also started to produce images with their own cameras, not only documenting events directly and immediately from the conflict zones that they were in, but also taking part in a violent competition of imagery being played out on all sides in the conflict. Feeling that their pain was no longer recognized and that they could win more of the world's attention only by posting more and more extreme pictures, they started to create overly intensified depictions of a reality that is already brutal. Exaggerating the real pain and real stories became a must in this cruel war of images, as the more shocking the content and the more attention it attracts, the more real extreme violence becomes.

To challenge the reality of this horror and find ways to recontextualize and intervene in it, I created a series of artworks, *Untitled Images*. After selecting a collection of photographs from the Syrian conflict zones portraying scenes of terror and grief, I began to erase the bodies of those deceased from the images, leaving just an outline of their silhouettes. This act of visual manipulation allowed me to recreate the real events—however, in this restaging, the victims are no longer present, though their deaths are more visible than ever. Syrian reality is often more surreal and brutal than what we are used to seeing in photographs, even war images—and anything beyond what we are accustomed to seeing has the potential to be categorized as staged. On the other hand, for the sake of creating more convincing and descriptive images, staging pictures is sometimes inevitable. Even if the timing is not exactly real, the

scenes are still valid and portray realistic events. A lack of both photographers and professional equipment results in millions of lost scenes daily, which would not otherwise be seen by anybody but witnesses and which will never find their way into public imagery. It should be noted that while we can indeed stage a photo, we should not stage the reality, as the unthinkable horrors of war should not be viewed as purely visual material. Those who were still determined to show Syrian reality as it is have had to carefully put the images they produce in a time-space frame, constantly proving that they are not hoaxes. Accused of faking news, Syrian media activists started highlighting the realness of their photographs and videos by including newspapers with dates on them or well-known buildings within frame so as to put them in a real context.

At the same time, we are witnessing an increasingly popular phenomenon of anonymous war photography that has a potential to shift the importance of real-time journalism and irreversibly change the roles of photographers and their agencies. Since anybody with access to the internet can create, upload, and share images, therefore shaping the public debate and reality itself, professional photography agencies stand to lose their credibility and demand for their products. Images created by regular people, civilians, and even victims of certain conflicts themselves are distributed throughout social media outlets, fighting for acknowledgment of their authors' desperation and hoping for users to temporarily stop their casual scrolling.

In 2015, I stumbled upon a collection of amateur photographs, posted anonymously on Facebook, that pictured the bodies of refugee children who had drowned during their attempt to reach Europe. Their meaningless and horrific deaths, which had scattered their bodies along Libya's shores, meant not only that they stopped existing physically but that they departed without any remembrance, adding to the growing percentage of refugees who have lost the battle with the sea. They were to be unknown to the world forever, not existing in a collective memory of any country, any continent, or any group of people, except their grieving relatives. They were no longer considered human, but from now on, only as numbers. After I reposted those photographs, I witnessed a wide range of social media dynamics. Within a few days, the album had thousands of comments, shares, and reactions—some compassionate and others outraged by the visual brutality of the images. Eventually, the album that I've titled "Multicultural Graveyard," was blocked by the authorities. Apparently, death only feels real when on social media—maybe, even, terrifyingly too real—so the victims and their corpses became inconvenient, unpleasant to look at, even with the low quality of the images. Clearly, uploading this kind of content—not approved by mainstream media—to one of the most powerful social media platforms created a new discussion and social debate about digital curation and censorship.

Within seconds, from any place in the world, at any given time, through a digital search engine we are granted access to any information we wish to access. After typing any words into the search bar, a specially designed algorithm decides what

information we should find based on our search history and other factors that define us as targets of customized data. As we move through the internet and interact within social media, we continuously create our own media programs. The hundreds of images that we see daily are suggestions based on our previous clicks, and so our perceptions of reality become framed—everything outside of this frame is hidden and therefore not available for us to acknowledge. Due to the proliferation of images in a globally connected world, the mass media follow editorial strategies that protect or expose people to certain content. It is decided from above what content should and will be promoted, allowing us to create a position and opinion—or letting us believe we are doing so.

When we believe the image is an undeniable fact, it becomes real. Therefore, viewers create a new reality, not only for themselves but, because a photograph holds the power to shape collective memory, for large groups of people. Last year, a former Syrian military photographer known as “Caesar” smuggled a staggering 55,000 photographs picturing those deceased in Assad’s prisons out of the country. Flash drives full of haunting photographs, taken between 2011 and 2013, depicted around 11,000 dead bodies that Caesar was assigned to document. Recently, he began posting those images online, hoping to help families to track the fate of their missing relatives. Those prisoners and their deaths are becoming real only now, with their tortured bodies showcased to the public. We could say that, in fact, these images exist only in connection with the attention we give them.

Perhaps we should try to save the dignity of the victims by not showing photographs of their deepest despair, horror, or grief. By capturing on film moments that destroyed their lives, are we not sentencing the victims to a never-ending exposure of those harsh memories, and somehow hurting them and robbing them of their inner peace all over again? James Nachtwey has said about his experiences photographing war:

[T]he worst thing is to feel that as a photographer I am benefiting from someone else’s tragedy. This idea haunts me. It is something I have to reckon with every day because I know that if I ever allow genuine compassion to be overtaken by personal ambition I will have sold my soul. The stakes are simply too high for me to believe otherwise.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, not showing their stories would mean ignoring them and cold-bloodedly denying the realness of their struggles. Those people, including Syrians, want their voices to be heard, want their stories to be seen, and want to get their dignity back through the public eye—even if it was brutally taken away from them a long time ago.

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<sup>1</sup>James Nachtwey, quoted in the film *War Photographer*, directed by Christian Frei (Switzerland: Christian Frei Film Productions, 2001).

## Summary

- Conflict photography raises a number of ethical dilemmas for both the photographer and the viewer.
- The concept of “war photography” has changed over time and within various contexts.
- Some photographers approach conflict photography with an emphasis on the aftermath rather than the action of direct combat.
- A number of artists have developed bodies of work that explore the links between photographic technologies and war.

## Discussion points

- What kinds of ethical dilemmas are photographers and viewers confronted with in relation to conflict photography?
- How has the definition of “war photography” changed?
- What can be learned from war photography that does not picture combat?
- How can photography and its technologies be instrumentalized in war?

## Additional case studies

Felice Beato (1832–1909)

Larry Burrows (1926–71)

Luc Delahaye (b. 1962)

Fouad Elkoury (b. 1952)

Rula Halawani (b. 1964)

Kikuji Kawada (b. 1933)

Lee Miller (1907–77)

Louie Palu (b. 1968)

Gilles Peres (b. 1946)

Sarah Pickering (b. 1972)

Geert van Kesteren (b. 1966)

## Notes

- 1 See José Manuel Susperregui, *Sombras de la Fotografía: los enigmas desvelados de Nicolasa Ugartemendía, muerte de un miliciano, la aldea española, el Lute* (Bilbao, Spain: Universidad del País Vasco, 2009).
- 2 “Robert Capa and the Spanish Civil War,” *Magnum Pro*, <https://www.magnumphotos.com/newsroom/conflict/robert-capa-spanish-civil-war/>.
- 3 Sally Stein, “Republican Soldier, Spanish Civil War, 1936,” in Jason E. Hill and Vanessa R. Schwartz (eds.), *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of News* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 60–1.



- 4 Richard Whelan, "Robert Capa in Spain," in *Heart of Spain* (New York: Aperture, 1999), 29–32.
- 5 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 66.
- 6 "Too Close to Home: Rethinking Representation in Martha Rosler's Photomontages of War," *Prefix Photo* 14 (Fall/Winter 2006): 59.
- 7 Carol Payne and Laura Brandon, "Guest Editors' Introduction: Photography at War," *RACAR* 39, no. 2 (2014): 3.
- 8 Brian Wallis, "Living Room War," *Art in America* (February 1992): 104–7.
- 9 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 79–80.
- 10 Sabine Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 11.
- 11 Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty*, 5.
- 12 Quoted in Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty*, 65.
- 13 Lisa Saltzman, *Daguerreotypes: Fugitive Subjects, Contemporary Objects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 24–5.
- 14 Karen Irvine, "An-My Lê: Small Wars Oct 27–Jan 7, 2007," Museum of Contemporary Photography, <http://www.mocp.org/exhibitions/2006/10/an-my-le-small-wars.php>.
- 15 Mark Godfrey, "An-My Lê," in T. J. Demos (ed.) *Vitamin Ph: New Perspectives in Photography* (London: Phaidon, 2006), 154.
- 16 Payne and Brandon, "Guest Editors' Introduction," 1–6.
- 17 Adam Hochschild, *Infra: Photographs by Richard Mosse* (New York: Aperture, 2012), 26.
- 18 Olivier Laurent, "Richard Mosse: La Vie En Rose," *British Journal of Photography* (November 2010): n.p.
- 19 Gabrielle Moser, "Chromophobia: race, colour and visual pleasure in Richard Mosse's *The Enclave*," *Prefix Photo* 32 (Winter 2015): 32.
- 20 Karen Wright, "Photographing war: 150 years of conflict in Tate Modern's new exhibition," *Independent*, November 24, 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/photographing-war-150-years-of-conflict-in-tate-moderns-new-exhibition-9880619.html>.
- 21 "Untitled, from the series Memory of War, Toyokawa Aichi," *The Met*, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/266343>.
- 22 Wright, "Photographing war."
- 23 Kate de Klee, "Jo Ractliffe's black and white images show the eerie silence that remains after war," *Design I bada*, September 18, 2015, <http://www.designindaba.com/articles/creative-work/jo-ratcliffes-black-and-white-images-show-erie-silence-remains-after-war>.
- 24 Jo Ractliffe quoted in Marcus Buyan, "The Photograph As Unoccupied Land," *Art Blart*, December 16, 2015, <https://artblart.com/2015/12/16/exhibition-the-aftermath-of-conflict-at-the-metropolitan-museum-of-art-new-york/>.
- 25 Dora Apel, "Cultural Battlegrounds: Weimar Photographic Narratives of War," *New German Critique* 76 (Winter, 1999): 49–84.
- 26 Apel, "Cultural Battlegrounds," 50.
- 27 Kurt Tucholsky, "Waffe gegen den Krieg," *Die Weltbühne* 8 (February 23, 1926): 312–13.
- 28 Lucy Davies, "The new war poets: the photographs of Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin," *Telegraph*, March 29, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/photography/9955106/The-new-war-poets-the-photographs-of-Adam-Broomberg-and-Oliver-Chanarin.html>.
- 29 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 51.
- 30 Judith A. Giesberg, "'Eye of History': Looking at Civil War Prisoners of War," in J. Matthew Gallman and Gary W. Gallagher (eds.), *Lens of War: Exploring Iconic Photographs of the Civil War* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 188.
- 31 "Selected Projects: Untitled Images," *Khaled Bara*, <http://khaledbarakeh.com/the-untitled-images.html>.

- 32 Miriam Wilhelm, "Absent Atrocities," <https://khaledbarakeh.com/absent-atrocities.html>.
- 33 "Close Up: Photographer Muhammed Muheisen," *Associated Press*, October 21, 2014, <https://apimagesblog.com/blog/2014/10/21/close-up-muhammed-muheisen>.

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**Plate 1** Farrah Karapetian, *Riot Police*, 2011. © Farrah Karapetian. Courtesy of the artist.



**Plate 2** Wolfgang Tillmans *Ostgut Freischwimmer rechts*, 2004. Collection of Kunstmuseum Basel. Courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner Gallery, New York.



**Plate 3** Hasan and Husain Essop, *Thornton Road*, 2008. C-print, 70 x 130 cm. Courtesy of the artists and Goodman Gallery, Cape Town.





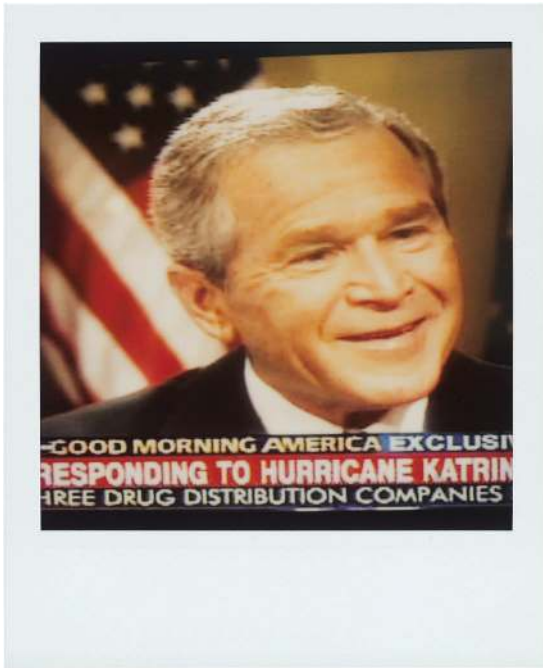
**Plate 4** Sammy Baloji, *Untitled 13*, *Mémoire* series, 2006. © Sammy Baloji. Courtesy of Twenty Nine Studio & Production, Brussels.



**Plate 5** María Magdalena Campos-Pons, *When I am Not Here/Estoy Allá*, 1994. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco.



**Plate 6** Ravi Agarwal, *Have You Seen the Flowers on the River?*, 2007–12. Courtesy of the artist.



**Plate 7** Catherine Opie, *Bush Smiling, Help Us*, from the series *Close to Home*, 2005. © Catherine Opie. Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles.



**Plate 8** Gideon Mendel, *João Pereira de Araújo, Taquari District, Rio Branco, Brazil, March 2015*, 2015. © Gideon Mendel/Drowning World. Courtesy of the artist.





**Plate 9** Obal Denis/Martina Bacigalupo, "Gulu Real Art Studio" (Uganda), 2013. © Martina Bacigalupo. Courtesy of the artist.



**Plate 10** Richard Mosse, *Rebel Rebel*, 2011. © RICHARD MOSSE. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



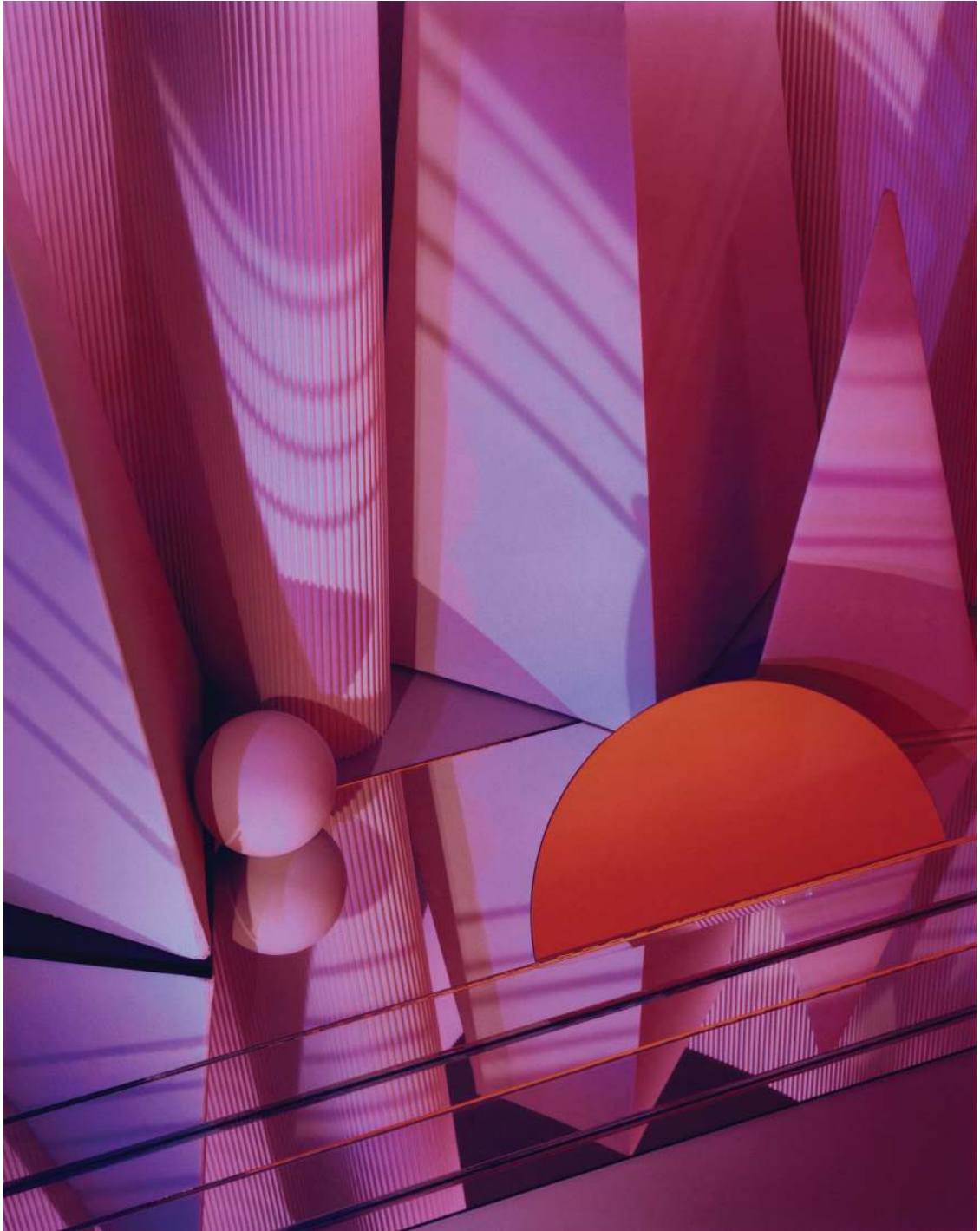




**Plate 12** Elad Lassry, *Circles and Squares (A Tasteful Organic Melons Arrangement)*, 2007; c-print, in artist's frame, 11 x 14 ½ in. (27.9 x 36.8 cm). © Elad Lassry. Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York.

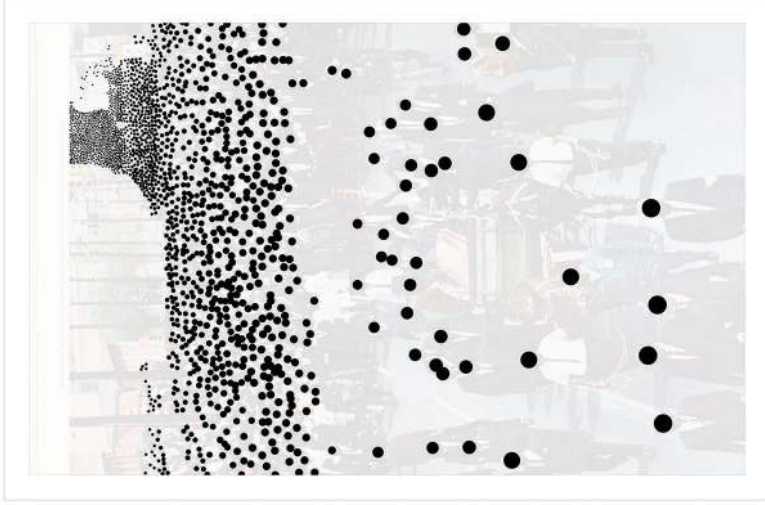


**Plate 13** Raghubir Singh, *Pavement Shop, Howrah, West Bengal*, from the series *The Grand Trunk Road*, 1991. © Raghubir Singh.



**Plate 14** Barbara Kasten, *Construct NYC 11*, 1982. © Barbara Kasten. Courtesy of the artist and Bortolami Gallery, New York.





**Plate 15** Alfredo Jaar, *Life Magazine, April 19, 1968, 1995*. Three pigment prints on Innova paper mounted on 6 mm Sintra. Overall dimensions: 65 x 132 in./165.1 x 335.28 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co., New York.



**Plate 16** Installation view, *Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography*, the International Center of Photography, 2006, with Tracey Rose's *Lucie's Fur Version 1:1:1—Annunciazione (After Fra Angelico)*, c. 1434–2003. Courtesy of International Center of Photography, New York. Photograph by John Berens.



**Plate 17** Rosângela Rennó, *Rio Montevideo*, 2011–16. Photograph by Kate Elliot.



**Plate 18** Kimiko Yoshida, *Painting (Monna Lisa) Self-Portrait*, 2010. © Kimiko Yoshida. Courtesy of the artist.





**Plate 19** Darren Almond, *Fullmoon@Cerro Chaltén*, 2013. Print 180 cm x 180 cm. © Darren Almond. Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery, New York.



**Plate 20** Saïdou Dicko, *La Bouilloire (The Tea Kettle)*, 2014. © Saïdou Dicko. Courtesy of ARTCO Gallery, Aachen.

# PART FOUR

# ART

In 1913, Mexican-born artist and art critic Marius de Zayas proposed understanding photography's relationship to the category of art as one that depends on the ways a photograph reflects its own unique means of representation, and by extension, its own formal qualities. "[P]hotography is not art," wrote De Zayas, "but photographs can be made into art."<sup>1</sup> It is true that since its inception as a medium, photography has been repeatedly taken to task over whether or not it possessed the status of "Art." Its mechanical nature denied the value usually associated with the artist's hand, including skill and labor. Where was the human *techne* in something so technical? Furthermore, the reproducibility of the photograph denounced the uniqueness and preciousness of the art object, another well-worn criterion of art. Dating back to the nineteenth century, claims were made for photography as art by virtue of its ability to imitate painting. De Zayas's view strikes out against this logic and instead opens the possibilities of photography as a self-reflexive and even a self-critical practice. During the twentieth century, numerous artists took innovative positions in relation to photography and questioned photography in or as art. In the twenty-first century, artists continue to expand those frames of reference even further, exploring how photography alters human vision, mobilizes the mundane, and exists as a malleable material object.

Consider, for example, the photographs of Israeli-born artist **Elad Lassry** (b. 1977). Some of his artworks are actual, direct appropriations, culled from vintage picture magazines and film archives, while others are scenes photographed to resemble appropriations. Imitating the generic look of **stock photography**, Lassry's saturated hues challenge expectations of still-photography and artistic originality. Using techniques such as double exposures and superimpositions, adding frames keyed to match the contents, Lassry magnifies and extends the commercial logic of art photography in the present. In works like *Circles and Squares (A Tasteful Organic Melons Arrangement)* (2007) an admittedly ordinary scene is subtly transformed into an intriguing formal and conceptual puzzle (see Plate 12). Lassry playfully blends the historic genre of still life with an abstract geometric construction, while punning on "taste." As he explains, "I'm fascinated by the collapse of histories and the confusion that results when there is something just slightly wrong in a photograph."<sup>2</sup> Never exceeding the proportions of a magazine page or spread, Lassry's photographic compositions impose their own constraints and make reference to the networked reality of images in contemporary life. The following two chapters expand further on the dimensions of form and appropriation specifically in the context of art photography, looking at how the register and rationale of photography as art shifts across time and place.

## Notes

- 1 Marius De Zayas, "Photography and Artistic Photography," in Alan Trachtenberg (ed.), *Classic Essays in Photography* (New Haven, CT: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 125–32. Originally printed in *Camera Work*, 1913. See Graham Clarke, "The Photograph as Fine Art," in *The Photograph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 167–86.
- 2 "New Photography 2010: Elad Lassry," MoMA, <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/newphotography/elad-lassry/>.

# 7

## FORM

Using a spare and poetic aesthetic vocabulary, artist **Felix Gonzalez-Torres** (1957–96) engaged themes of love and loss, or more broadly presence and absence, throughout his career. For his installation *Untitled (Aparición)* (1991), Gonzalez-Torres created a stack of posters, each featuring an identical photograph of hovering cloud formations.<sup>1</sup> Despite its focus on a single reproduced image, the piece is in fact never the same twice. Rather, the form of the work changes over time with the interaction of the gallery visitor. Installed low on the floor, this stack of photographic posters is conceived of as endless. In an act of generosity and sharing, it is offered as a free take-away for visitors, that is replenished at intervals by the gallery as the stack diminishes. Its evocation of clouds metonymically reflects on the persistent formlessness of photography, including the ways the medium morphs and is ever changing. It also suggests the legacy of photography as art, by reference to Alfred Stieglitz's famed fine art cloud studies from the 1920s, known as the *Equivalent*s series. However, whereas Stieglitz claimed his photographs were apolitical and foremost about beauty, Gonzalez-Torres self-consciously activates the formal possibilities of photography as a socially-engaged form. Gonzalez-Torres's art deliberately disorients: the ephemerality of sky becomes paradoxically grounded, as the viewer looks at it lying on the floor. Moreover, the piece also works against the view of photography (or art for that matter) as either static or transparent. Instead, *Untitled (Aparición)* challenges the viewer to understand photography simultaneously as a formal object and as an elusive form.

"Form" itself has posed long-standing and varied sets of problematics within the history of photography, as well as in terms of the conception of photography's artfulness. A much-discussed trend in recent contemporary photography is what some have called **New Formalism**, a term coined by curator Christopher Bedford.<sup>2</sup> Included within this approach are photographers such as Liz Deschenes, Eileen Quinlan, Anthony Pearson, Mikko Sinervo, and Walead Beshty, who explore issues around photography's material and physical properties, including its relationship to light and space. While discussions of New Formalism have largely centered on its relationship (or not) to abstraction, this chapter instead situates the practice in terms of other relevant historical antecedents that have likewise pursued the formalist properties of the medium, including Italian Futurism, Bauhaus photography, Russian Constructivism, and twentieth-century street photography in Asia. Through these historical examples, we explore the diverse social uses to which a formalist practice in photography has been put and raise significant questions about the ways in which the recent practice of New Formalism departs from or connects to these past examples, especially in its self-reflexive investigation of the photographic image-making process itself.

## The shape of vision

A formalist approach to art emphasizes visual aspects above all else, including paying special attention to the way the work is made and what it looks like. That is not to say that visual appearance is without psychological or political impetus. In fact, throughout the history of photography many artists have turned to the medium as a means of engaging a radical form of aesthetics that was specifically motivated by ideology. Consider for example the Russian avant-garde in the early twentieth century. After the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917, Russian artists were enlisted to promote an active citizenry in the service of the state. With roots in Cubism and Futurism, **Constructivists** challenged realism as a mode of representation. Akin to Gonzalez-Torres's experiments with inverting photographic expectations (for example by placing his work horizontally on the floor rather than vertically on the wall), **Aleksandr Rodchenko** (1891–1956) fundamentally altered the orientation of photographic practice. Rodchenko saw photography as a heightened way to express the dynamic reshaping of his country. According to art historian Abigail Solomon Godeau, the artist's "use of vertical rather than horizontal perspective" exemplifies the strategy of *ostranenie* (or "making strange"), an implicitly political notion, and was "intended as the optical analogue to revolution—quite simply a revolutionizing of perception to accord with the demands of a revolutionary society."<sup>3</sup>

Importantly, Rodchenko and the Russian avant-garde more broadly understood their work to be distinctly against the established tenets of art, inherited over centuries. In fact, the ordinary and instantaneous ways photography could evade artistic conventions formed part of the medium's allure. As Rodchenko asked:

What ought to remain of Lenin . . . an art bronze, oil portraits, etchings, watercolors, his secretary's diary, his friend's memoirs—or—a file of photographs taken of him at work and rest . . . ? I don't think there's a choice. Art has no place in modern life . . . Every cultured modern man must wage war against art . . . Photograph and be photographed!<sup>4</sup>

For Rodchenko, a revolution of daily life required destabilizing the entire canon of art, including the very notion of "fixity."

As part of a program to overhaul traditional habits of perception and visual representation under the banner of Socialist order, Constructivists used a repertoire of defamiliarizing devices, including extreme close-ups, abstracted forms, dramatic angles, upward and downward perspectives. This visual inventiveness is visible in photographs such as Rodchenko's *Demonstration* (1932) or *Parade on Red Square* (1938), shot from above rather than the then dominant "belly button" view of most photographs.<sup>5</sup> Aided by the invention of the **Leica camera** by Oskar Barnack in 1914, this lightweight, handheld 35mm camera, freed from the constraints of the tripod, made the radical photographic experimentation of the Russian avant-garde in part possible. A photograph such as *Dive (Pryzhok v vodu)* (1935) demonstrates Rodchenko's use of photography to problematize objective vision (see Fig. 7.1). The figure of a taut diver in midair appears nearly supernatural in this photograph. It is not clear if this is the body of a man or woman, and with that we also understand that this anonymous figure is the inspirational stand-in for the concept of participation. The elegantly folded body hurtles diagonally through the image, across the abstract ground of the sky. Here we have perspectival games with revolutionary meaning. For one thing, the documentation of sporting displays and athletic bodies was crucial to the image and ideology of the Soviet state, for the physical form of these bodies represented the vibrancy and health of the



**Figure 7.1** Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Dive (Pryzhok v vodu)*, 1935. Digital Image © Rodchenko & Stepanova Archive, DACS RAO 2019. Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.



communist future, with fitness being tightly wound up with the notion of the nation. The astounding suspension of the contoured body in space adds to the sense of revolutionary (even utopian) defiance of gravity created by Rodchenko in this captivating picture.

The son of a pioneer in the Italian film industry, **Anton Giulio Bragaglia** (1890–1960) preceded Rodchenko in his experiments with photography's visual flexibility. An early member of the Italian **Futurist** movement, Bragaglia was a close associate of the group's leader, the Milanese poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* (1909) derided the past in favor of a new, hyper-masculine, modern industrial age, calling for the destruction of all museums and libraries. In its place, Marinetti heralded the power of the machine, and the triumph of speed and dynamism. Photography's instantaneity easily lent itself to these desires, even as the medium remains essential to the logic of archives and museums (as we discuss in more detail in Chapter 10). In response to Marinetti's Futurist and intensely fascist call to arms, Bragaglia produced a treatise titled *Fotodinamismo Futurista* (written in 1911 and published in 1913), and developed what he dubbed "photodynamism," thereby declaring his avant-garde break from pictorial conventions.<sup>6</sup>

Bragaglia renounced objective vision, stating for example, "It is a pleasure to observe that my brother Arturo and I are not *photographers* and could not be further from that profession." He also criticized the "the pedestrian photographic reproduction of the immobile reality, stopped instantaneously,"<sup>7</sup> and derogatorily referred to Pictorialism as "overly mummified 'artistic photographs' where the monkey imitation of Old Masters is evident."<sup>8</sup> For Bragaglia, the camera offered a means of "formalizing images of active motion."<sup>9</sup> Leaving the lens open for an extended exposure, he sought to capture action within a single frame, showing, as art historian Antonella Pelizzari has put it, "a ghost-like trace almost dematerialized through its movement."<sup>10</sup> His emphasis was above all on the continuity of movement and thus the sensation of dynamism, which Bragaglia described as "the vertiginous lyrical expression of life, the lively invoker of the magnificent dynamic feeling with which the universe incessantly vibrates."<sup>11</sup> *Lo Schiaffo*, or "The Slap," of 1912 encapsulates this view of dynamism, as the subject receiving the blow is thrown from his chair in a blurry trajectory (see Fig. 7.2). The violence of this act as subject matter also attests to the fascist leanings of the Futurists, who lauded aggression, force, and machismo. It also



**Figure 7.2** Anton Giulio Bragaglia, *Lo Schiaffo*, 1912. © DACS 2019.

suggests the influence of Etienne Marey's chronophotography or motion studies—however, for Bragaglia, “the formal marks in Marey's images served to convey not realism but psychic values,” reinforcing his own interests, above all else, in the potency of dynamic energy and formal synthesis.<sup>12</sup>

**Tina Modotti's** (1896–1942) black-and-white photography is closer to Rodchenko's aesthetics and his view of “movement.” Like Bragaglia, Modotti believed in the revolutionary role of photography, yet Modotti shared Rodchenko's astute attention to variations in tonality. Consider *Workers Parade* (1926), a photograph that has been praised for balancing formalism with socially engaged content, while using the aesthetic dimensions of the image to buttress ideological meaning (see Fig. 7.3). Cropped tightly and



**Figure 7.3** Tina Modotti, *Workers Parade*, 1926. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

viewed from above, the crowd pictured is propelled forward, moving up through the frame vertically. The dominant motif of the sombrero, and the rhythmic display of circular hats, structures the image. In one sense, this formal pattern and its visual privileging of sombrero over body might be interpreted as distancing the viewer from the individual subjects, and by extension the politics, in the photograph. Importantly, the photograph was made in the aftermath of the 1910–20 Mexican revolution, an armed struggle that toppled the twenty-seven-year dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz. However, rather than seeing the emphasis on form in this image as objectifying or abstracting, we might recall that within the context of 1920s Mexican cultural politics, the sombrero was an iconic symbol of the revolution and mass mobilization.<sup>13</sup>

In her brilliant close analysis of *Workers Parade*, photography historian Andrea Noble draws critical and nuanced connections to the historic and iconographic contexts of the photograph's creation, arguing for Modotti's photograph as a document of "the continuing surge of popular power as the revolution entered its institutional phase."<sup>14</sup> According to Noble, though Modotti's work has frequently been read in relation to the autonomous modernist photographs of Edward Weston, an understanding of a specifically Mexican context is crucial to grasping this image: "As viewers, we are immediately drawn to the sombreros: to their circular shape with their indented peaks, to the way in which the light bounces off them, producing points of focus set against the grainier, textured bodies below."<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, form dominates *Workers Parade* as a means to mobilize aesthetics in the service of politics and participation.

Finding new subjective positions within formal compositions was also at the center of Japanese-born **Ishimoti Yasuhiro's** (1921–2012) postwar photographic practice. Famed foremost for his formalist photographs of modern Japanese architecture, Yasuhiro studied with Harry Callahan and took a deep interest in the evocative power of shape and light. *Untitled* from the *Tokyo* series (1970) uses manifold layers of representations (see Fig. 7.4). A close-up of a man's profile juts dramatically into the scene from the left. Uncannily, we realize it is the protagonist from a movie poster—with supporting actors appearing almost comically in miniature in the lower corner. As planes formally collide and shadows crowd this street, multiple realities merge. There is the reference to mass media and popular culture, as well as the alienation of the man in the trench coat striding pensively down the city block with a plastic take-away parcel in hand. Abstraction is graphically employed here by Yasuhiro, whose street photograph stills a moment in time in a manner that contrives to have it appear as though constructed from the outset, denying its actual reality.

Connecting Yasuhiro's work to the discourse on *eizō* ("image" or "camera-generated image") usefully unpacks the multivalent and ambiguous aspect of the image. *Eizō*, a Japanese term coined during the Meiji era (1868–1912) to refer to the optical reflection of light, acquired the dual meaning of a "mental image" in the 1920s, and by the late 1950s signified active experimental processes and mental associations. More literally according to scholar Fabienne Adler, *eizō* means "reflected image," and encapsulates an important photographic paradox: "a medium that both mirrors and ponders, off of which things bounce, and through which they are also bent and altered."<sup>16</sup>

Film critic Okada Susumu presents the term *eizō* as a break away from a simplistic understanding of realism, and a move "towards a more complex definition of the role of subjectivity in the image: 'the word *eizō* has two meanings,' he explains, 'it is a visual medium of expression (me de miru hyogen baitai), as well as the image emerging mentally for the viewer (atama no naka ni omoiukaberu imejimeji).'"<sup>17</sup> It is worth thinking about the ways that the very notion of realism might be challenged and even overhauled through photography, a medium that has been so weighted by associations to the "real." Noticeably, black-and-white photographs have been somewhat ironically associated with credibility and with



**Figure 7.4** Ishimoto Yasuhiro, *Untitled* from the series *Tokyo*, c. 1975. Gift of the artist in memory of Ishimoto Shigeru, 2009.325. © Kochi Prefecture. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

documentary “truth.” This is in spite of the fact that life is certainly not lived in such a reduced palette. In this regard, it is worth marking how every black-and-white photograph is an abstraction from the outset.

From yet another angle, **Raghubir Singh** (1942–99) strikingly captured the flux of everyday life in contemporary India, including what art critic Max Kozloff referred to as “all of its cultures, whose ordinary sights he treated as glimpses from a vast epic.”<sup>18</sup> In Singh’s series *The Grand Trunk Road* (1991–1995), the photographer documented his passage through this legendary route across India, from Calcutta to Atari-Wagah, with unprecedented vibrancy. Singh has been heralded as a pioneer of color street photography. He began working with color film in Jaipur during the mid-1960s, a time when black and white was firmly established as the dominant mode of art photography, and created thirteen photobooks before his untimely death at age fifty-six. Singh embraced color by contrast to the monochrome bent of the times, breaking with the limits of two-toned images. According to art historian Partha Mitter, “One singular quality of [Singh’s] photographs is the balance of intensity and saturation in the range of colors that adds essential drama and texture to the bustling humanity in his images.”<sup>19</sup>

*Pavement Shop, Howrah, West Bengal* (1991) exemplifies the frieze-like logic of Singh’s practice, with its intriguing repetition of forms and its unexpected reflections and framing (see Plate 13). We see what appears to be a cart vendor within the frenzy of a crowded street, selling mirrors that hang at uneven

slants throughout the image, thereby creating fractured and refracted images across the larger whole. Though layered with multiple and competing focus points, the photograph is remarkably composed. As though playing a self-conscious game with the act of looking, the artist himself can be spotted in a mirrored echo, camera poised, at the top-center margin.

Lively color has frequently been emphasized as a source of beauty and directness in Singh's photographs, and in particular as being revealing about the people in his pictures. "Even the clothes they wear," writes Singh, "those bright and vivid fabrics, are a symbol of their colorful spirits."<sup>20</sup> Critic Ratik Asokan demands more of these photographs however, including a more rigorous analysis of the social valences they assume.<sup>21</sup> For Asokan, Singh's obsession with compositions of "visual interest" and his celebration of India being "colorful" as an inherent statement of joy are deeply offensive, and in fact belie the artist's larger avoidance of issues of class, caste, and the lived reality of many Indians. While Asokan commends Singh on his "manipulation of perspective, latitudinal tension, gestural choreography or melodies of colour," he also adamantly challenges the dominant interpretation of Singh's photographs. Noting Singh's upbringing as "a semi-royal Rajput pursuing an elite art form" (when for example, due to heavy import duties, access to cameras and film was a unique privilege), Asokan calls Singh's work "rosy abstraction." Moreover, he likens Singh's documentation of the idiosyncrasies of India to Diane Arbus's photographs of marginalized members of society in the United States of the 1960s, including giants, midgets, cross-dressers, and nudists. From this point of view, Singh's formal complexity avoids grappling with the actual social complexities of contemporary India, instead concealing and spectacularizing them in seductive color. This debate over Singh's photographs and in particular the problematic relationship between their formal appearance as art and the difficult social conditions they in fact depict serves as a helpful reminder that photography is always more than initially meets the eye.

## The unexpected in the ordinary

Still life is an artistic **genre** in which inanimate objects often take on allegorical meanings. Exemplified by Dutch sixteenth-century paintings, realism is central to the history of the still life in art. A central trope in the tradition of Netherlandish still life painting is *vanitas*, a symbolic means of alluding to the ephemerality of life, in spite of the captured stillness or sense of timelessness presented in the work of art. This might be an orange or a vase of flowers. While at first glance they may appear ideal in the image, often, if one looks more closely, early tell-tale signs of decay and decomposition are visible, a peel falling off, a petal wilting. Photography's ability to "still" the transience of life with the camera, as well as the medium's inherent connection to realism, lends itself nearly naturally to this genre. In fact, for this reason, photography's somewhat paradoxical connection to the genre of still life has formed crucial fodder for contemporary artists using photography. Our earlier discussion of Elad Lassry's *Organic Melons Arrangement* offers a rich example of this maneuver. In the following section, we consider still life through the lens of photography, by contrast to the emphatic dynamism we saw in the work of Rodchenko, Bragaglia, and Modotti, Yasuhiro, and Singh earlier in this chapter, and yet sharing their interest in the formal capacities of photography.

**Luigi Ghirri** (1943–92) is a photographer recognized for his interest in how ordinary scenes can become intriguing by virtue of photographic framing. With connections to Surrealism, particularly in the ways his photographs prompt free associations of meaning, Ghirri has been lauded by curator and



critic Germano Celant for his “interrogative vision”<sup>22</sup> In Ghirri’s work, the traditional art conventions of still life take on new resonance, combining a documentary approach with a Surrealist imaginary. Using straight photography rather than procedures such as collage and montage, Ghirri registers a provocative sense of strangeness in which the rational and the irrational blur. Among the many artist books Ghirri assembled, one captivating collection of photographs created between 1975 and 1981 was in fact entitled *Still Life*. In this series and others, Ghirri surprises the viewer by what might be hidden in plain sight.

The power and intrigue of ordinariness is visible in works such as *Marina de Ravenna* (1972) or *Tellaro* (1980). Most of Ghirri’s photographs focus on Emilia-Romagna, a small area in northern Italy where the artist was born. The scale of each photograph is intimate and small, no larger than a snapshot, and its quietness adds to the unassuming and often bizarre details found in banal scenes. Reminiscent of the artwork of painters like Giorgio de Chirico and Giorgio Morandi, Ghirri’s work was also in dialogue with his Italian contemporaries such as Franco Vaccari, Mario Cresci, and Vittore Fossati.

Photography critic Teju Cole has pointed to Ghirri’s “defamiliarization of scale” and washed-out color as among the artist’s elusive compositional techniques. Cole quotes Ghirri directly when he writes:

The world might appear at first through a telescope, and then under a microscope, or perhaps through a set of binoculars that can be used to both magnify and minimize. In some photographs we can make out the building blocks of fables, the supporting framework and the scaffolding which props up this “land”; and yet, rather than exposing the tricks or taking away the magic, they contribute to the illusion.<sup>23</sup>

For Ghirri, the world is vast yet filled with unresolved fragments, and as such his photographs reflect this consistent and compelling lack of coherence in everyday life.

Angolan artist **Edgar Chagas’s** (b. 1977) *Found Not Taken* (2013) consists of photographs documenting his walks through the streets of Luanda, London, and Newport, Wales, that, like Ghirri’s, intervene in the conventions of still-life art while embracing the camera’s ability to make visible that which previously went unnoticed. In each instance, Chagas came upon a discarded object and rearranged it within a nearby setting, creating what one critic has deemed “abstract icons that animate the city.”<sup>24</sup> Importantly, the photographs were then enlarged to posters, exhibited in stacks atop wooden pallets, and, much like Gonzalez-Torres’ practice of generous dispersion discussed earlier, available as take-aways for the gallery visitor. This mode of installation art offers a new way of interacting with photographic images as art and, furthermore, calls attention to the constructed nature of photography. One picture shows an upended piece of a dilapidated chair, positioned against the crumbling corner of a white building, between the rusty slats of two vent blocks. Another presents an empty, lop-sided clothing rack framed against a patterned brick wall amidst the outlines of bricked-in rectangles where windows had once been. Using the logic of the Surrealist found object, the viewer’s attention is drawn to the shape and color of ordinary things while also refereeing to the cast-offs of urban life. This aspect is underscored by the invitation to “take away” an image of the objects that were “cast away,” suggesting the possibilities of renewed attention to the everyday. Luanda contains a population that is estimated to be as numerous as New York City with approximately 8 million people, and yet without any sense of adequate infrastructure. Chagas’s artwork is surely a comment on this situation as well.<sup>25</sup>





**Figure 7.5** Edson Chagas, Angola Pavilion 'Luanda, Encyclopedic City' 55, International Art Exhibition organized by La Biennale di Venezia, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and APALAZZOGALLERY. Photograph by Paolo Utimpergher.

*Found Not Taken* formed the centerpiece of the Angolan pavilion at the 2013 edition of the Venice Biennale, in an exhibition titled *Luanda, Encyclopedic City*, where it was awarded the prestigious Golden Lion prize (see Fig. 7.5).<sup>26</sup> It was the south-west African country's first official representation at the biennale, and just over a decade after the end of twenty-seven years of brutal civil war. Curated by Stefano Rabolli-Pansera and Paula Nascimento, Chagas's work was installed in the Palazzo Cini, in the Dossoduro district, a space that houses a private collection of Tuscan and Ferrara Renaissance art. Keeping the Cini collection of art on the walls, Chagas's forms and imagery posed both contrast and conversation with the religious triptychs and realist oil paintings. His photographic reproductions of crumbling plaster and disowned objects were put in tension with the European art history on the adjacent walls. By contrast to Gonzalez-Torres's stacks, it is worth noting that once Chagas's prints were taken by gallery visitors, they were not replenished. Instead they were limited, and as the exhibition continued, fewer and fewer pallets with pictures were available to view. Recontextualization and questions of how value in art is not only established but also preserved or discarded are at the crux of this exhibition. Chagas's work also formally engages with unease, access, and ambiguity while questioning what in the world is worth paying attention to.

A dialogue between abstraction and representation (a subject we explore further in Chapter 1) continues in the playful photographic art of **Barbara Kasten** (b. 1936), who has questioned repeatedly whether it is actually possible to make an abstract photograph considering photography's deep

connections to the “real.” Her *Construct* series from the 1980s draws connections to Constructivist experiments with form in the 1930s, yet, as Kasten explains, “ultimately points back to the conceptual question of the construction of the photograph,” though it is “less concerned with the state of media than with material.”<sup>27</sup> For these works, Kasten built structures in her studio and photographed them, using columns, pyramids, spheres, wires, and mirrors. *Construct NYC 11* (1982), for example, demonstrates Kasten’s recurrent interest in sculpture, and volume, as well as the seductions of color, light, line, and refraction (see Plate 14). More than simply formal geometry, however, Kasten’s interrogation of the visual possibilities of three-dimensionality through photography possesses an uncanny sense of tactility and phenomenological awareness.

Describing Kasten’s *Construct A + A* (1984) as “a prismatic tableaux of arches, isosceles triangles, and stuccoed domes that give a taste of history enmeshed in warped space,” art historian Alex Kitnick concludes that, “[b]oiled down to dislocated elements, the past is dropped into a *mise en abyme*.” Moreover, hybridity and inconclusiveness are central to this series. Since “[m]aterial and image appear only as refractions of one another,”<sup>28</sup> Kitnick sees poignant connections to the material logic of postmodern architecture, for example in Kasten’s extensive use of glass and mirrors. Frequently employed in the construction of corporate buildings, such materials prompt hallucinations and even the mystification of capital through formal means. The writings of Marxist geographer and social theorist David Harvey are revealing in this regard: “Wherever capitalism goes its illusory apparatus, its fetishisms, and its system of mirrors comes not far behind.”<sup>29</sup> Through this lens, we might rethink Kasten’s evocation of unreality through photographic form and staging, in order to see it as underscoring the real conditions of contemporary life, rather than distracting us from it.

Spatial ambiguity was central for **Florence Henri’s** (1893–1982) photographic practice in the early twentieth century as well and may serve as a touchstone for further understanding work by contemporary artists such as Barbara Kasten and Elad Lassry. Henri’s work is perhaps best known for her mirror compositions, and the use of spherical balls, including those that she exhibited in the famed *Film und Foto* exhibition in Stuttgart in 1929 (which we take up in more detail in Chapter 10). Henri was influenced by Constructivism and **Cubism**, particularly in the ways their formal compositions could not only disorient but also provoke new dimensions from within a picture’s surface. In 1927 (at the age of thirty-four), Henri enrolled as a student at the **Bauhaus** in Dessau, where she studied photography with László Moholy-Nagy and developed a close friendship with Lucia Moholy (two artists we explore further in Chapter 1). Having begun first as a painter, Henri’s work is characterized by an awareness of artifice and an imaginative approach to composition.

*Obst* (1929) consists of a black-and-white still life photograph and uses devices such as angled mirrors to suggest multiple surfaces and colliding planes (see Fig. 7.6). Featuring a lemon, a pear, and an apple, the photograph is at once ordinary, and yet compelling in its subtle abstraction of form. In the absence of color, the formal texture and shape of each fruit appears nuanced. Working against the camera’s realism, “Henri’s manipulation of mirrors, prisms, and reflective objects to frame, isolate, double, and otherwise interact with her subjects—one of the most distinctive and adventurous features of her photographic work—often confounds viewers’ ability to distinguish between reality and reflection.”<sup>30</sup> “What I want above all,” Florence Henri explained, “is to compose the photograph as I do with painting. Volumes, lines, shadows and light have to obey my will and say what I want them to say. This happens under the strict control of composition, since I do not pretend to explain the world nor to explain my thoughts.”<sup>31</sup> Openness and multiplicity, but also ambiguity, are pivotal to her forms, and to the artist’s keen awareness of photographic artifice.



**Figure 7.6** Florence Henri, *Obst*, 1929. © Galleria Martini & Ronchetti, Genoa, Italy. Courtesy of The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

## Hybridity and objecthood

The desire to exceed the traditional two-dimensional form of the photograph has existed since the medium's beginnings in the nineteenth century. Consider, for example, **Hippolyte Bayard's** (1801–87) *Lace Glove* (c. 1843–7), a piece that attempts to bring physical presence and tactility to the fore (see Fig. 7.7). As though reaching beyond the surface of the image, we see a ghostly hand pressed flat. And yet, this photograph touches simultaneously on the implied depth of its dimensions, as the viewer's eyes are drawn to the ridges of the lace, the perforations throughout, and the gaps between the fingers. With this cyanotype (a photographic process we elaborate on in Chapter 1), we are also presented with abstract images within a larger abstracted image—namely the diamond pattern that runs along the wrist and the representation of a flower with its leafy stem woven into the center. In alluding to the deep and sometimes contentious connection between objects, images, and representation in photographic terms, Bayard's work turns our attention to the **ontology** of photography, or in other words, the recurring question of *what* is photography?

Bayard is perhaps best known for his staged death for the camera in 1840, a dramatic portrait of himself as a drowned body accompanied by the caption, "The corpse which you see here is that of M.



**Figure 7.7** Hippolyte Bayard, *Lace Glove*, c. 1843–7. Digital image courtesy of Getty's Open Content Program.

Bayard, inventor of the process that has just been shown to you. As far as I know this indefatigable experimenter has been occupied for about three years with his discovery. The Government, which has been only too generous to Monsieur Daguerre, has said it can do nothing for Monsieur Bayard, and the poor wretch has drowned himself. Oh the vagaries of human life . . .!" Bayard in fact made and exhibited positive paper prints as early as June 24, 1839, and while his claims to the invention of photography itself in his lifetime were not recognized, his oeuvre of nearly fifty years of photographs demonstrates his careful attention to the "art" of photography. For one thing, Bayard's earliest photographs include still-life images of plaster casts of Greek and Roman sculpture, pictured with tonal variation, remarkable texture, and attention to detail. The answer to the question of whether photography was art seems obvious to Bayard, and his creative energies and dedication to the medium evidence as much. By the same token, it is notable that Bayard's work with photography also reflects careful sensitivity to the fragility of photographic meaning.

Photography's inherent multiplicity contributes to its poignancy as an art form and had been one of its many gravitational pulls for artists. According to the contemporary artist **Liz Deschenes** (b. 1966), the medium is never quite what it seems; in fact, "photography has always been a hybrid."<sup>32</sup> Deschenes's practice frequently returns to analog and camera-less processes in order to think about the physicality of form and the generosity of photography as a material medium. For Deschenes, photography is indeed akin to sculpture. Deschenes' immersive *Tilt/Swing (360° field of vision, version 1)* (2009), for example, is a formal manifestation of a concept illustrated in a 1935 drawing by the influential designer Herbert Bayer, "Diagram of 360 Degrees Field of Vision" (see Fig. 7.8). Like Florence Henri, Bayer studied and taught at the Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany, training in graphic design, architecture, and sculpture, and like many avant-garde artists of his time believed in the power of form to influence society. In Bayer's "extended-field-of-vision" scheme, images would be hung on all six walls of a gallery space, including the



**Figure 7.8** Liz Deschenes, *Tilt/Swing (360° field of vision, version 1)*, 2009. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

floor and the ceiling, thereby breaking with established conventions of exhibition display. In this new environment, the viewer would feel much more interactively involved in the work and in the space, creating a lineage between this early avant-garde mode of installation and Felix Gonzalez-Torres's interventions in space through photography decades later.

Using six photograms (a photographic process we discuss at length in Chapter 1)—each made by exposing photosensitive paper to the night sky and then fixing with silver toner—Deschenes' camera-less panels contain traces of subtly varying light from the moon, stars, and surrounding buildings, literally and figuratively bringing Bayer's proposal to life. The resulting photograms are suspended in a 360-degree aperture formation around the room. Due to their mirrored surfaces, the photograms reflect fragments of the changing environment back into the work itself and onto the architecture in which it is displayed. Strikingly, their cloudy surfaces are left untreated, and thus continue to be open to change over time, as they oxidize in response to shifting atmospheric conditions. In this way, Deschenes photograms and their specific installation in a circuit around the room reframe the aesthetic experience of the art exhibition space as well as the formal and conceptual expectations of what a photograph is. Furthermore, their reflective surfaces mirror the viewers in the space, making them all the more aware of the complicit relation between their physical selves and the ways that the meaning of the work of art depends upon their collective and performative roles.

Calling attention to the objecthood of images by using three-dimensional form is a tactic that many contemporary artists around the globe have turned to. Crucial to such interventions is a consideration of physicality, both of the image as well as the viewer's bodily experience. For the artist **Graciela Sacco** (1956–2017), the involvement between the viewer's body and the photographic image posed a visceral concern. And ultimately, at the heart of this preoccupation was form. According to Sacco, "Any reading of a work radiates from the form. It's a search for form, for a way to *materialize* our questions, conflicts, quests, and discoveries."<sup>33</sup> Moreover, this artistic search demonstrates some of the ways that the life of images is intricately tied to the lives of people.

Having lived through the Dirty War in Argentina during the 1970s and early 1980s, under a brutal military dictatorship, Sacco was attuned to the dynamics of repression and memory during and after conflict. Over the course of her long career, she engaged with this dynamic explicitly within many contexts. Always fascinated with the transfer of images from one surface to another, she began transferring images to various objects, either by placing them on a chemically treated surface exposed to sunlight or by imprinting thrown shadows on transparent acrylic sheets. Sacco used these techniques to adhere images to various, and often surprising, objects from everyday life, including spoons, suitcases, a table, and a window blind. These inventive photographic images have appeared as installations in outdoor sites in Havana, Jerusalem, Cairo, Petra, Venice, and São Paulo, as well as in Rosario and Buenos Aires. In an interview with literature scholar and translator Marguerite Feitlowitz, Sacco revealed how she was "influenced by what is commonly called *arte popular*: Mexican *corridos*, the Guadalupe de Posada, the Brazilian practice of decorating town squares with sheets of drawings or poetry set to hang like laundry drying in the sun. When you walk into a chapel covered with objects and offerings, you are caught up in a dialogue where art is totally entwined with daily life. I think that from a conceptual standpoint, my work has a lot to do with this."<sup>34</sup>

The unexpectedness of Sacco's material conjunctions raises powerful conceptual connections. For the series *Cuerpo a cuerpo* (Body to body) (2011), an edition of multiple works though each is individually hand printed, Sacco appropriated photographs of the student protests from May 1968 in Paris. The photos show crowds of enraged demonstrators, shouting with fists raised, some carrying placards,



some hurling stones in the direction of the viewer. These photographs were transferred onto jagged wooden posts and gathered into a fence-like formation. Leaning against one another, the assembled wood construction references the barricades and the crowd in tandem. The fluctuating sizes of the panels echoes the volatility and momentum of the throng moving forward. The title's evocation of bodies, and the relations between bodies, emphasizes the point further. Here we have the coming together of objects and photographs as statements regarding the mobilization of dissent.

The location of the scene in these images is not immediately clear—it would be difficult to determine that this is Paris, 1968. This uncertainty of location adds to the impact of the artwork. Sacco has used similar images from many disparate uprisings, including the Prague Spring (1968) and First Palestinian Intifada (1987–93). Despite the specificity of each of these conflicts, it is striking that viewers are frequently drawn to associating them with events in the cities in which they see the work installed. Sacco relates how, when shown in Rosario, Argentina, the food riots of 1989 and 1999 came to mind, while in Córdoba, Argentina, people believed they were from the *Cordobazo* (the uprising in 1969 which sparked socio-political risings all over Argentina).<sup>35</sup> The unlocatable quality of these photographs allows for the possibility of drawing shared connections across conflicts and cultures. Their form summons ideas about how actions and histories captured by photographic form are never static. Indeed, more poignantly, it shows how photography's potential and ever-changing form continue to animate and reanimate social, political, and aesthetic realities more broadly.

## FOCUS BOX 7

### Abstract labor

*Drew Sawyer*

How can photography adequately give form to human labor when its absence is already prefigured in modernity? Or, how does a medium wedded to realism and stasis capture the formal complexities of the body in motion through time and space? These are questions that have haunted photography since its invention, itself a culmination of a period, known as the Industrial Revolution, that witnessed the mechanization of human production. Consider, for example, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre's 1839 photograph of the Boulevard du Temple in Paris. Often presented as the first photograph of a human figure, the picture is also a scene of labor and economic exchange. In his essay "An Eternal Esthetics of Laborious Gestures," artist and critic Allan Sekula points out that the daguerreotype depicts not just one figure having his shoes shined, as commonly held, but at least two, if the bootblack also is included.<sup>1</sup> The figure, however, is abstracted, registered as an amorphous shape and shadow, precisely through the very activity and motion demanded of his labor, which the camera was unable to capture due to the necessarily long exposure time. For Sekula, the blur from the shoe shiner's motion can then be seen as a cipher of abstract labor power—another version of the

<sup>1</sup>Allan Sekula, "An Eternal Esthetics of Laborious Gestures," *Grey Room* 55 (Spring 2014): 24.

human under erasure, demonstrating “an instance of *average labor*, eminently replaceable, eminently forgettable, vaporizing in the flux of the *moving throng*.”<sup>2</sup>

Daguerre’s picture anticipates the fraught history of labor’s representation as well as Karl Marx’s formulation, several decades later in *Capital* (1867), of capitalism’s reduction of people and their labor to abstract and homogenous bodies, in other words, to pure form. This early photograph also demonstrates how forms of abstraction in fact belong to the medium from its very beginning, complicating the conventional oppositions between abstraction and realism posited in most histories of photography. Labor, in particular, has been a key subject for exploring the limits of naturalism long before the early twentieth-century avant-garde. How, then, has photography been essential not only to representing labor but also to shaping and transforming the understanding of it in modernity? And conversely, how has labor challenged photography as a medium to be able to capture movement and time in a single image?

Throughout the nineteenth century, labor and sites of production became popular subjects for photographers, from the construction of modern engineering feats to the development of large-scale agriculture. Due to the required exposure times of the medium, these scenes almost always included posed figures, either standing at rest or performing an arrested gesture. One of the first attempts to more fully visualize laboring bodies comes at the end of the century, in one of Étienne-Jules Marey’s chronophotographs from 1894. Charles Fremont, a civil engineer who assisted Marey in his laboratory, used multiple exposures to study blacksmiths at the anvil. The most conspicuous aspect of the image is not the worker but the tool. As the historian Anson Rabinbach observes:

Fremont’s forgers perform before a dark field with only the chromometer visible in the foreground ... These fifteen super-imposed shots completely blur the body of the man, while only the hammer is visible. In order to capture the successive positions of the hammer and the hands, the chronophotographer must obliterate the worker.<sup>3</sup>

Fremont’s photographic investigations into the conservation and expenditure of energy during human labor established principles that laid the foundation for modern industrial production. Yet, in order to do so, the human figure is rendered as an abstract form, a smudged bright shape against a field of black.

Fremont and Marey’s photographic studies coincided with the development of “scientific management” by Frederick Winslow Taylor in the United States during the 1880s. While Taylor had used photographs in his book *On the Art of Cutting Metals* (1906), it was Frank Bunker Gilbreth and Lillian Moller Gilbreth, followers of so-called “Taylorism,” who used photography to study the body of the worker and what they

<sup>2</sup>Sekula, “An Eternal Esthetics of Laborious Gestures,” 25.

<sup>3</sup>Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 116.

called “motion economy” during the first decades of the twentieth century. Building on the motion studies of Marey and Eadweard Muybridge, as well as the work of Taylor, Frank Gilbreth used photography to demonstrate to industrial laborers the most efficient way to work with a minimum of fatigue. He recorded an array of activities, from typing to surgery. To produce the photographs, which he called “chronocyclegraphs,” he used a clock, blinking lights attached to their subjects’ hands, a grid to measure distance, and stereo cameras. Using the images of light tracings, the Gilbreths created wire models of train workers. As historian Elspeth H. Brown has shown, Gilbreth’s attempt to rationalize and industrialize the working body resulted in the formal abstraction of the human figure and labor.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that labor unions protested against the camera’s reduction of humans into standardized actions and units. Shortly after Gilbreth’s death in 1924, the Worker Photography Movement arose, which offered a mode of self-representation that countered both the Taylorists and documentarians.<sup>5</sup>

In the postwar period, artists continued to use photography to explore the representation of labor, but often avoided depictions of the human figure. Instead, many focused on abstract forms as meditations on both the medium and labor. In 1959, for example, German artists Bernd and Hilla Becher began a collaborative project that lasted nearly fifty years: the systematic documentation of architectural structures of an industrial era in Europe and the United States that were already on the verge of extinction. Like the Taylorists before them, the duo pursued a scientific and objective approach to photography that privileged the sequence and the grid. While their extensive series provides in-depth studies of water towers, blast furnaces, coal mine tipples, and other industrial facades, their black-and-white photographs do not consider the workers and others involved with the structures they represent. For art historian Benjamin Buchloh, the Bechers’ project is one instance in the broader challenge issued by conceptual photography to traditional forms of portraiture that had privileged subjectivity at the expense of larger social and material relations.<sup>6</sup> Such a conception of subjectivity was simply not possible in the years following the atrocities of World War II, when the traditional laborer of the industrial age was, not unlike the factory itself, marked for erasure.

More recently, Berlin-based artist Viktoria Binshtok produced a series of seemingly abstract photographs at the employment center in Germany’s capital city. The resulting works are called *Die Abwesenheit der Antragsteller* or “the absence of the claimants.” Instead of people, they depict the smudges and marks that “claimants” left on the wall,

<sup>4</sup>See Elspeth H. Brown, *The Corporate Eye: Photography and the Rationalization of American Commercial Culture, 1884–1929* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup>See Jorge Ribalta, ed., *The Worker Photography Movement (1926–1939): Essays and Documents* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro De Arte Reina Sofía, 2011).

<sup>6</sup>See Benjamin Buchloh, “Residual Resemblance: Three Notes on the End of Portraiture,” in Melissa E Feldman (ed.), *Face-off: The Portrait in Recent Art* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 53–69.

leaning against it as they waited to be interviewed about their eligibility for benefits. According to literary historian and critic Walter Benn Michaels, “What the photograph shows instead is not a class but a mechanism—the ‘pivot’—that helps make the class system work. Which means that the effect of replacing the people with the marks they leave is less that of de-individualization than it is of de-personification; the marks represent, without personifying, not a group but a structural element.”<sup>7</sup> Binschtok’s gesture toward painterly abstraction attempts to picture the system, using photography to give form to what economists have called the “natural rate of unemployment,” itself based on abstract mathematical models.

Using a similar method, Los Angeles-based artist Walead Beshty has made a series of polished copper sculptures that record, like a photograph, art world labor and its economies, while also being preoccupied foremost with the formal aspects of the medium. In 2014, Beshty replaced the desktops at New York’s Petzel Gallery with polished copper. As dealers and their assistants worked at their computers, bodily oils, spilled coffees and other office corrosives tarnished the bright metal, leaving a record of these workers’ labors. The altered copper sheets were then hung in Petzel’s nearby gallery spaces, making the path between production, display, and sale shorter than it has ever been. The artist has always worked in photography’s most expanded field. Like conventional photographs, they provide a direct, indexical trace of the world around them. They also expand the reach of that trace so that it records the economic activity that makes their own existence possible, while erasing or avoiding the depiction of the actual humans.

The works of contemporary photographers such as Binschtok and Beshty force us into a renewed engagement with the historical implication of photography in modernity’s regimentation of time, space, and bodies. The instances where workers’ actions or inactions are registered on surfaces suggest analogies to the individual articulations of the hammer and hand in Fremont’s image. In both cases, the paradigm of “work” is made legible through a process that either abstracts or totally effaces the body and its labor.

## Summary

- One of the early claims to understand photography as art was through an analogy with painting.
- A formal approach emphasizes the way an object looks.

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<sup>7</sup>Walter Benn Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem: Photography, Autonomy, Economy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 39.

- The early avant-garde believed that photography could be a revolutionary tool due in part to its ability to formally reorient vision.
- Formal decisions, including whether a photograph is black and white or in color, or whether a photograph is hung on the wall or installed as a sculptural form, affect the meaning of the work of art.

## Discussion points

- What reservations have people had about thinking of photography as an art form?
- In what ways have artists emphasized form in photography?
- How did artists conceive of photography as both radical and aesthetic?
- In what ways do formal decisions regarding the photograph and its display affect meaning?

## Additional case studies

Eugene Atget (1857–1927)

Kader Attia (b. 1970)

Manuel Alvarez Bravo (1902–2002)

William Eggleston (b. 1939)

Franck Abd Bakar Fanny (b. 1970)

Leslie Hewitt (b. 1977)

Iman Issa (b. 1979)

Germaine Krull (1897–1985)

Maria Aparicio Puentes (b. 1981)

Christopher Williams (b. 1956)

## Notes

- 1 See Heather Diack, “Clouded Judgment: Conceptual art, photography, and the discourse of doubt,” in Sabine Kriebel and Andres Zervigón (eds), *Photography and Doubt* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 218–36.
- 2 Christopher Bedford, “Catherine Opie: Regen Projects,” *Frieze Magazine* 117 (September 2008): 189.
- 3 Abigail Solomon Godeau, “Armed Vision Disarmed,” in Richard Bolton (ed.), *Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).
- 4 Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 95.
- 5 Heather Diack, *Photography Collected Us* (Toronto: University of Toronto Art Center, 2012), 20. See David Company in “Documents for Artists,” episode 2, *The Genius of Photography* (London: BBC, 2007).
- 6 Maria Antonella Pelizzari, *Photography and Italy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 82.
- 7 Pelizzari, *Photography and Italy*, 82.
- 8 Quoted in Pelizzari, *Photography and Italy*, 82–3.

- 9 Giovanni Lista, "Futurist Photography," *Art Journal* 41, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 358–64; 358.
- 10 Pelizzari, *Photography and Italy*, 83.
- 11 *Fotodinamismo Futurista*, 1911–13. See Anton Giulio Bragaglia, *Fotodinamica Futurista* (Turin: Edizioni Einaudi, 1980).
- 12 Lista, "Futurist Photography," 358.
- 13 Andrea Noble, *Tina Modotti: Image, Texture, Photography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 93.
- 14 Noble, *Tina Modotti*, 93.
- 15 Noble, *Tina Modotti*, 93–4.
- 16 Fabienne Adler, "First, Abandon the World of Seeming Certainty: Theory and Practice of the 'Camera-Generated Image' in Nineteen-Sixties Japan," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2009, 27.
- 17 "Camera Geijutsu no 'atarashii nami' (The New Wave of Camera Geijutsu)—Conversation between Watanabe Tsutomu, Okada Susumu, and Tomatsu Shomei," *Camera Geijutsu* (July 1960): 177. For another instance of discussions between contemporary photographers and filmmakers, see "Wakaki geijutsuka-tachi no kadai (Topics of the Young Artists), a conversation including Abe Kobo, Teshigahara Hiroshi, Tomatsu and Hani," *Ikebana Sogetsu* (July 1960). See Adler, "First, Abandon the World of Seeming Certainty," 117, fn 185.
- 18 Max Kozloff, "Remembering Raghubir Singh," *Aperture* 156 (Summer 1999): 96.
- 19 Mia Fineman, *Modernism on the Ganges: Raghubir Singh Photographs*, trans. Partha Mitter and Amit Chaudhuri (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007).
- 20 Raghubir Singh, *Rajasthan, India's Enchanted Land* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989).
- 21 Ratik Asokan, "Out of Focus: What Raghubir Singh did not see," *The Caravan*, February 1, 2018, <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/reviews-essays/what-raghubir-singh-did-not-see>.
- 22 Germano Celant, *Luigi Ghirri: It's Beautiful Here, Isn't it . . .* (New York: Aperture, 2008), 12.
- 23 Teju Cole, "Luigi Ghirri's Brilliant Photographic Puzzles," *New York Times*, June 28, 2016.
- 24 "Edgar Chagas," *Africana.org*, April 11, 2014, <http://africanah.org/edgar-chagas/>.
- 25 Nicholas J. Cull, "Africa's breakthrough: Art, place branding and Angola's win at the Venice Biennale, 2013," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 10, no. 1 (February 2014): 1–5.
- 26 See Isabelle Alica Zaugg and Emi Nishimura, "Angola and Kenya Pavilions in the 2013 Venice Biennale: African Contemporary Art and Cultural Diplomacy in the 'Olympics of Art,'" *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 45, no. 2 (2015): 134–49.
- 27 Kasten in interview with Leslie Hewitt, "Barbara Kasten by Leslie Hewitt," *BOMB* 131 (March 2015): 143.
- 28 Alex Kitnick, "Use Your Illusion," in *Barbara Kasten: Stages* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2015; Zurich, Switzerland: JRP Ringier, 2015), 72.
- 29 Cited in Kitnick, "Use Your Illusion," 73, fn 15; David Harvey quoted in Reinhold Martin, *Utopia's Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 103.
- 30 "Florence Henri," *International Center of Photography*, <https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/constituents/florence-henri?all/all/all/all/0>.
- 31 Florence Henri, quoted in Micheal Juul Holm, Kirsten Degel, Mette Marcus, and Jeanne Rank (eds.), *Women of the Avant-Garde, 1920–1940* (Humblebæk: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 26.
- 32 Alex Greenberger, "'Photography Has Always Been a Hybrid': Liz Deschenes on Her ICA Boston Survey," *ArtNews*, October 12, 2016, <http://www.artnews.com/2016/10/12/photography-has-always-been-a-hybrid-liz-deschenes-on-her-ica-boston-survey/>.
- 33 Graciela Sacco in interview with Marguerite Feitlowitz, *Bomb* 78 (January 1, 2002), <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/graciela-sacco/>.



34 Sacco in interview with Marguerite Feitlowitz.

35 Sacco in interview with Marguerite Feitlowitz.

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# 8

## APPROPRIATION

A group of artists joined together in the United States during the late 1960s to form the **Art Workers' Coalition** (AWC), mobilizing numerous actions and interventions to push for greater gender and racial diversity in the art world and against the continuing war in Vietnam. The AWC realized that these issues were interrelated, and that local battles carried global significance. Major art institutions, for example the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, were run by powerful boards of trustees, with members such as David and Nelson Rockefeller, who had vested financial interests in companies including Standard Oil and the Chase Manhattan Bank with known connections to the production of napalm, chemical and biological weapons research, and other armaments. Within this context, in what has become recognized as their most legendary action, the AWC used appropriation as its central tactic. They created a lithographic reproduction of one of army photographer Ron Haeberle's ghastly photographs of the notorious My Lai massacre of 1968, which had been published in *Life* magazine in December 1969 (see Fig. 8.1). Shot in color, the intense realism of the image is suffocating, exacerbated further by the close-up view and the tight cropping of the picture to frame dozens of dead bodies, women and children, sprawled along a desolate dirt path. Atop the image, the AWC superimposed large red letters asking: "Q. And babies? A. And babies." In addition to the photograph, the text was also an appropriation, a quote drawn from a television interview by the journalist Mike Wallace with the army



**Figure 8.1** Jan van Raay, Art Workers' Coalition and Guerrilla Art Action Group members protest in front of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, with the *Q. And babies? poster*, January 8, 1970. © Jan van Raay. Courtesy of the artist.

officer Paul Meadlo.<sup>1</sup> The choice to reproduce this unsettling matter-of-fact exchange in red was effective. As one art critic has described it, “The red ink does not have the shrill tone of advertising graphics. It is transparent, but dark and tinged with brown, like oxidized blood.”<sup>2</sup>

Overlaying text on image was a recognizable strategy of **conceptual art** practices of the time, in part motivated by the realization that an image’s meaning depends heavily on the caption that accompanies it. Acts of appropriation often extend this logic, questioning how chains of signification are prompted by the associations that are stirred between originals and copies, between initial utterances and their repetitions. In this regard, *And babies* resonates on manifold levels, using appropriation and its accumulated meanings as a strategy for critique. One famed photograph by Jan van Raay shows members of the AWC protesting at MoMA in January 1970, holding up multiple copies of their *And babies* poster in front of Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937), a renowned artwork about the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War, thus linking instances of systemic violence on a broader scale, across geopolitical borders. Calling attention to the power of photographic meaning and the impact of the circulation of images was crucial to the AWC protest and to the influence of the *And babies* project. This example also points to how photography has long been bound to histories of appropriation in ways that can be productive as well as controversial.

In one sense, photography is at base an act of taking. As opposed to traditional notions of making that are associated with mediums such as painting and drawing, for example, photography appropriates images directly from the fabric of everyday life, capturing what is before the camera, and thereby calling the image its own. Moreover, photography is an explicitly reproducible medium, meaning that the possibility of proliferating “copies” is built in from the outset. Within the wider field of visual art, appropriation refers predominantly to the intentional borrowing, copying, and alteration of already existing images and objects. Depending on the context of creation or the content of the image, however, appropriation can be extremely murky territory, engaging complex debates regarding representation and power structures. This chapter examines a range of appropriation strategies in relation to photography and asks how recent changes in the access and availability of images have shifted the nature of appropriation, and moreover, what the implications are for appropriation as an artistic device.

In so doing, the chapter explores both the nature and complexity of the so-called Pictures Generation artists of the 1980s such as Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince, who used purloined images (often from the art world and advertising, among other sources) to question commonly held ideas around authorship and originality, as well as examining appropriation’s larger role within the history of photography that extends back from the recent search-generated images of Zhang Dali, to the images of American “para-photographer” Robert Heinecken, to the photomontages of Berlin Dadaists such as Hannah Höch, and beyond.

## Iconic images

Czech photographer **Pavel Maria Smejkal** (b. 1957) creates haunting images by appropriating iconic photographs and then digitally removing all humans from the picture. His *Fatescapes* series (2009–10) includes instantly recognizable and widely-circulated news photographs, such as Jeff Widener’s *Tank Man* from the protests in Tiananmen Square, Beijing (1989), Joe Rosenthal’s *Flag Raising on Iwo Jima*, Japan (1945), Nick Ut’s *Terror of War* (popularly known as “Napalm Girl, Vietnam”) (1972), Kevin Carter’s *Starving Child and Vulture*, Sudan (1993), and John Paul Filo’s *Kent State, Ohio Shootings* (1970), among

others. Despite the absence of faces and bodies from these scenes, these ghostly images nevertheless connect to deep-seated, culturally constructed memories, shaped not only by historically significant events, but also by historically significant (and often traumatic) photographs. Smejkal's artistic act of appropriation highlights this fact, while simultaneously questioning the indelible meanings accrued by the original photographs, challenging the author status of the associated photographers, and engaging with the technological interventions made possible via the internet and its extensive capacity for sharing and altering images.

Consider Smejkal's *Saigon (1968)* (see Fig. 8.2). At first glance, we see a dusty, vacated street. Blurred shadows of a cropping of trees smatter across the left foreground and the right side of the image shows a receding line of low-rise buildings. The photograph's aspect is nearly tranquil. And yet, this seemingly unremarkable landscape is in fact the site of Eddie Adam's famous *Saigon Execution*, taken February 1, 1968, during the Tet Offensive. Adam's original photograph depicts the moment Brigadier General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, chief of the national police, shot Nguyen Van Lem at point-blank range through the head. Startling, disturbing, and impossible to reconcile with the otherwise plainness of the scene, Adam's Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph increased the anti-war sentiment in the U.S. by reinforcing the futility and brutality of this war. What does it mean, then, for Smejkal to erase this event in his appropriated version?

According to Smejkal, the gesture is in part about registering the weight and significance of the original pictures, encouraging viewers to think about the importance of photographic representation and the ways its recordings shape the collective memory of history. In an interview with the *New York Times*, the artist explained, "I remove the central motifs from historical documentary photographs. I use images that have become our cultural heritage, that constitute the memory of nations, serve as symbols or tools of propaganda and exemplify a specific approach to photography." Moreover, he continues, "by



**Figure 8.2** Pavel Maria Smejkal, *Saigon (1968)*, from the series *Fatescapes*, 2009–10. © Pavel Maria Smejkal.

manipulating their content I explore their purpose, function, and future.”<sup>3</sup> Recognizing disjunctures between what has been and what may be is a recurrent theme in the history of photography. Smejkal's tactic of appropriation also seems to ask whether photographs of critical world events are able to remain relevant with the passing of time, and what the stakes might be if they were to be forgotten.

Conceiving of the future as predicated on how we understand the past has been an intrinsic theme of Chilean artist **Alfredo Jaar's** (b. 1956) practice. Throughout his career he has returned repeatedly to issues surrounding the public's desensitization to images and the representational limits of art in the face of severe social plights, including genocides, epidemics, and famines. After moving to the United States in 1982, Jaar was disturbed to see how racial tensions continued to be an ordinary part of everyday American life, in spite of the extensively chronicled and celebrated accomplishments of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s that he had witnessed through news media abroad. In 1995, as a means of highlighting this troubling disconnect, Jaar appropriated an iconic photograph by Gordon Parks, taken at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s funeral procession, in order to create *Life Magazine, April 19, 1968* (see Plate 15). Presented as a triptych, the work alludes to the traditional format of Christian altarpieces, thereby identifying King as revered martyr. In Jaar's piece, three versions of Parks' photograph appear: a nearly indistinguishable reproduction of the original that ran in *Life*, one in which all of the African American faces participating in the funeral march are identified with black dots, and a third frame, in which the white people present are marked with red dots. Jaar's act of graphic accounting via appropriation reveals thousands of black dots by contrast to only a few dozen red ones, thus making visible the stark disparity between the number of black and white mourners. Jaar received little interest in this work until 2013, when the content seemed to hold new relevance in light of the growing Black Lives Matter movement and was acquired by the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Perhaps *Life Magazine, April 19, 1968* could more aptly be considered an “alter-piece” than an altarpiece, in that it calls attention to an historical memory that is frequently repressed, namely the segregated status of King and the nation at large at the time of his assassination. As Civil Rights historian David Garrow recounts, “People in the Democratic Party thought King had self-marginalized. His murder alters his historical status hugely. What people now remember is his post-assassination enshrinement.”<sup>4</sup> In this case, photographic appropriation takes collective memory to task and prompts us to think critically about how historical narratives are told, and when they gain or lose salience.

More than “How?” and “When?” it is the multivalent question of “Where?” that preoccupies **Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin's** (b. 1957) artistic practice. For example, Alptekin's *Capacity/Capacities* (1998) addresses the implications of ubiquity and globalization (see Fig. 8.3). Punning on the idea of “city/cities” by embedding these words within his title, Alptekin's project asks what it might mean to have unique places around the world lose their iconic specificity, and instead become simulated clichés, interchangeable and homogenous. Consisting of thirty-six appropriated photographs mounted on a single panel and topped with an LED sign that reads “Capacity” in red, the piece reflects Alptekin's fascination with “the difference between the promise of something and its banal reality.”<sup>5</sup> The work is busy with a multitude of images arranged in a grid. The installation is crowded, nearly filling the space, or at “capacity,” so to speak. A play of semiotic signifiers, their circulation and their exchange, the photographs show cheap signs marking hotels, bars, and corner stores named after places far-flung from their actual geographic locations. Nearly all of Alptekin's photographs for this piece were taken in Istanbul, by the artist himself. Yet, the photographs are nevertheless evidence of appropriation. Hotel and restaurant signs heralding cities such as Tibet, Lima, Libya, Dallas, Berlin, Firenze, and Rio, to name a few, appear uncannily out of place in this collection of photographs of Istanbul businesses. Here, place is reduced to a concept, with





**Figure 8.3** Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin, *Capacity/Capacities*, 1998. SALT Research, Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin Archive. Courtesy of the artist.

notions of imagined distinction or exoticism emptied out and at a remove. Instead, each place, like each photograph, seems to be substitutable and leveled. In this way, Alptekin uses the appropriating mechanism of photography to critique the appropriating tendencies of global capitalism more broadly. Relating his profound sense of exasperation, Alptekin once told the curator Vasif Kortun that the main themes of his art practice were borders and boredom. On the one hand, *Capacity/Capacities* is about excess and tourism, and the loss of site-specific cultural meaning. On the other hand, it is about diaspora and the yearning for the comforts of home, by any provisional means possible.

Collective memory in tension with appropriation is also a central theme in the work of **Wang Youshen** (b. 1964). His 2017 installation *Washing* was prominently included in the group exhibition *Working on History* at the Museum für Fotografie (Museum for Photography) in Berlin, a project that brought together artists whose work reflects back on the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–76). *Washing* is an interactive piece, which (like Oscar Munoz's work discussed in Chapter 5) asks the viewer to consider the physicality involved in photography's developing process. Tables topped with developing trays lined the perimeter of the gallery, filled with photographs bathing in developing chemicals, simulating an exposed darkroom. Viewers were invited to move and stir the submerged pictures thereby contributing to the process of not simply their development, but in fact their eventual erasure through over-development. For this version of *Washing*, Wang used archival photographs culled from the Prussian Heritage Image Archive, directing attention to the unsettled histories of both Germany and China. Previous iterations of *Washing* have dealt with subjects both deeply personal and troubling. In 1994, *Washing* figured in Wang's work *Before and After my Grandmother Passed Away*, which consisted of black-and-white photographs made by the artist between 1989 and 1994 as his grandmother's health waned. In 1995, one version of *Washing* was subtitled *1941—Datong, Ten Thousand Men in a Ditch* and featured two enlarged photos documenting the brutality of the Japanese invasion and the reported live burial of tens of thousands of Chinese. Within



the photographic bath each of these images is washed away with the assistance of the viewer, amplifying the title's allusion to *Washing* to imply both catharsis and amnesia in relation to history and memory. The eventual disappearance of the photographic image summons the viewer's ethical imperative to remember, even in the face of absence.

## Altered histories

Understanding the power of photography has been instrumental to political regimes since the medium's invention. During the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–76), didactic images of communist leader Mao Zedong were crucial to promoting and maintaining the credibility of the Great Leader, even though it is now clear that many of these state-produced images were in fact highly manipulated. In part for this reason, the omnipresence of Mao's face in popular culture has provided fodder for numerous artists using photography since then, many of whom used appropriation as their key technique. Andy Warhol's flamboyantly silkscreened versions of Mao from 1973, for example, reproduce his portrait at a towering scale of fifteen feet tall, emphasizing his dominance, the ubiquity of his image, and the ways his "communist" use of photography and reproduction techniques had (somewhat ironically) much in common with the language of advertising and capitalist mass reproduction. Famously, even acts staged specifically for the camera were not always idealized enough for Mao. Citing Stalin's Soviet Union as a prime example, in which the falsification of photographs was notorious, curator and historian Mia Fineman explains, "The temptation to 'rectify' photographic documents has proved irresistible to modern demagogues of all stripes, from Adolf Hitler to Mao Zedong to Joseph McCarthy."<sup>6</sup> This deep history of appropriation and alteration, using the photograph's presumed indexicality to disguise its fraudulence, is at the heart of Beijing-based artist **Zhang Dali's** (b. 1963) explorations. Zhang's *Second History* (2003–ongoing) is a result of extensive archival research, in order to assemble an appropriated body of photographs that examine the widespread use of photographic manipulation carried out by the Chinese government during the regime of Mao Zedong (Tse-tung) from 1949 to 1976.

Compiled in book form in 2012, the project uses juxtaposition to present a chronological sequence of ninety original, unmodified images together with their doctored doppelgangers, which were manipulated in party-run photo labs between the 1950s and 1970s for the state-run Chinese propaganda market. Stark and subtle changes are noticeable, including editing out particular figures, adjusting brightness and adding color, as well as maintaining Mao's appearance as being perpetually youthful in spite of aging, via retouching. As noted by Zhang, "people will naturally fix what they consider ugly, and touch those objects that are visible to them." In *Chairman Mao at the Xiyuan Airport in Beijing, 1949*, from 1978, the weaponry and military men that surround Mao, protecting him at the airport, are removed from the original photograph in order to demonstrate the remarkable fearlessness of the leader (see Fig. 8.4). *For the Great Achievements in Agriculture (original black and white paste up photos)* (1959) reveals the manipulations of Mao's gaze and hand wave as he walks through a cheering crowd. Seeing these alterations in this way seems to function nearly as parody, for it is difficult not to detect some degree of humor in the regime's obsession with minutiae of detail and idealized representations. Far from simple vanity, however, such modifications have far-reaching ramifications when orchestrated by the state. Moreover, these photographs represent a critical part of Chinese history; as Zhang explains, "they have guided our lives, studies, work, and family values." Zhang's appropriated examples of artistic and political censorship make the viewer aware of the "second" history, a gesture, which in effect questions the integrity of any original or "first."



**Figure 8.4** Zhang Dali, *Chairman Mao at the Xiyuan Airport in Beijing 1949, 1978*. © Zhang Dali. Courtesy of the artist.

Art historian Atreyyee Gupta's research into the temporality of photography in India offers an excellent case study of how appropriation can be used as a tactic to produce counter-discourses and challenge dominant power dynamics. Gupta evokes the example of the Bengali artist Abanindranath Tagore as someone who thoughtfully selected photographs from their mainstream circulation in the colonies and modified their context in order to critique their original imperialist meanings. Known primarily for his

paintings, Tagore was the leading artist of the early twentieth-century art movement called the Bengal School of Art. For his artist's book *Khuddur Ramayana* (1934–42), Tagore created a handwritten version of the Indian epic *Ramayana* (a Sanskrit epic dating back to seventh century BCE, and one of the largest in world literature), layered with montages of photographs from early twentieth-century newspapers, prints, and advertisements. In meshing times—ancient history with his present—Tagore also challenged the perception of progressive or linear time. Instead the past, present, and future were seen simultaneously, thus questioning any presumption of inevitability and proposing an opening for dynamic change.

Tagore's reinvention of the *Ramayana* narrative speaks to the contradictions, ironies, and tensions of the colonial world. Using advertising photos from European jewelers, images of new technologies including airplanes and automobiles, news photographs of military parades in Moscow's Red Square, and images that referred to Japan's plans for territorial expansion, Tagore brought the story of Rama, the legendary prince of the Kosala Kingdom, versus the demon Ravana into the context of colonial modernity.<sup>7</sup> All of the photographs were strategically appropriated from British newspapers during the 1930s, each having been circulated through the vast network of the Reuters news service. Reuters possessed a monopoly over news media across the British Empire due to their ownership of undersea cables. The news they published was explicitly empire-centric, but also offered graphic material for artists like Tagore to contest those versions of reality. In this way, according to Gupta, the raw visual material of British newspapers "connected a vast anti-imperial network that cut across the colonial worlds of Shanghai, Kolkata, and Cairo," pointing to the realization that "the world was distant, yet already very close."<sup>8</sup>

The battle between Rama and Ravana, as characterized by Tagore, reflected and anticipated the impending World War II and the divisions that were already in place in the interwar period. References to the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935 and the Spanish Civil War linked Mussolini's invasion and Franco's Army of Africa (or Spanish Moroccan army corps) to the deep-seated racial politics involved in these conflicts. Moreover, as Gupta explains, these connections point to the emergence of new networks of solidarity, especially between people of color separated geographically, yet sharing experiences of the imperialist violation of their respective sovereignties. From these connections, an Afro-Asian solidarity grew, and would eventually be consolidated under the **Non-Aligned Movement** during the Cold War. The Non-Aligned Movement is an organization of 120 member nations that sought alternatives to the bipolar politics that dominated the Cold War era. Members of the movement avoided formally aligning themselves with either the United States or the Soviet Union, seeking instead to remain independent or neutral. The basic concept for the group originated in 1955 during discussions that took place at the Asia-Africa Bandung Conference held in Indonesia. This complex and tumultuous geopolitical history finds correspondence in the shifts in photographic technologies. As anthropologist and art historian Christopher Pinney writes:

With photography we engage a fantastically protean technology, and a fluid and revolutionary medium engaged in an endless series of transformations: from daguerreotype to calotype, wet collodion to dry plate, glass to nitrate, bulky wooden and brass cameras to box brownies, to nearly invisible spycams. And we will see it used by amateurs and professionals, British colonials and Indians, rulers and subalterns.<sup>9</sup>

Photography was never simply a way of depicting the world. More than this, photography offered an unwieldy means of discovering new, sometimes antagonistic and always multivalent, ways into the future.

During the Weimar period in Germany, numerous artists used appropriation as a critique of the legitimacy of state propaganda and to make their disillusionment with the status quo known. Using images that were already in mass-media circulation and creating montaged works as counter-narratives, John Heartfield, who is also discussed in Chapter 5, presents a compelling example. **Hannah Höch** (1889–1978) was another radical pioneer in this regard. Splicing together images and typeface appropriated from a multitude of sources within the broad field of visual culture, including popular magazines, illustrated journals, and fashion publications, Hoch's photomontages deal with a constellation of social issues. Her subject matter frequently addresses gender issues and celebrates the emergence of the *Neue Frau* or New Woman in the interwar period, while humorously and cuttingly (both literally and figuratively) deriding political and social institutions, including the government, the military, and economic financiers. *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (*Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands*) (1919–20), *Da-Dandy* (1919), and *Hochfinanz* (*High Finance*) (1923) are among her most celebrated, dynamic, and incisive pieces. In *Dada-Review* (1919), Hoch appropriates a newspaper photograph of German President Friedrich Ebert on holiday, wearing bathing trunks, hands on his hips, smiling proudly (see Fig. 8.5). While the German leader was vacationing at the beach, however, the nation itself was falling to pieces, with numerous citizens out of work and starving, certainly unable to partake in the relaxation that Ebert revels in. The inequity and chaos of the times provide inspiration for the fragmentary arrangement of Hoch's montage, as she points to the contemptible and casual disregard Ebert has for the everyday realities of the German people. Hoch further ridicules Ebert's self-indulgence by inserting a small pansy down the front of his shorts. Other caricatures using appropriated photographs appear throughout, including American President Woodrow Wilson dressed as an angel of peace, and soldiers lined up with their heads floating absurdly and disquietingly above their bodies.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 8.5** Hannah Höch, *Dada-Review*, 1919. © DACS 2019.

As with Hoch's larger body of the work, the piece plays on Dada irrationality. Historian Graham Clarke explains that "it cannot be read in literal or narrative terms; nor can it be reduced to the sum of its parts."<sup>11</sup> Moreover, its use of appropriation, with "its fragmented structure and underlying cynicism, reflects the mood in Europe one year after the end of the First World War."<sup>12</sup> In effect, Hoch's montage functions almost like a code that the viewer needs to decipher. The reference points in the work might appear obscure to viewers in the present, but certainly, if we were encountering these pieces in 1919, and living within the context of Weimar Germany, the resonances and criticism would be quite stark. The references would be recognizable and easily traceable, and thus less cryptic. The critique embedded in acts of appropriation using visual culture and photography depends heavily on the ability of the viewer to recognize the content and by association, the meaning. In Hoch's case, appropriation is envisioned as an act of contempt, for bourgeois art and aesthetics, as well as their attendant notions of originality, preciousness, and genius.

Figural decapitations and folly often appeared in Victorian photocollage during the nineteenth century. Playful assemblages were made for private pleasure rather than public consumption; yet notably, from the vantage of the present, these works by aristocratic women reveal themselves as incredibly creative, often beguiling, and sometimes derisively witty, as in the work of Lady Mary Georgina Caroline Filmer. Combining cut and pasted photographs, frequently decorated with painting and drawing, these photocollages necessarily involved the appropriation and assemblage of various photographic materials. A precursor to Surrealist montage, dating back to the phenomenon of album-making begun in the 1850s with the "cartomania" fad in England, the French photographer André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri's invention of *carte de visites* can in part be credited to the collectible format of Victorian photocollage. Art critic Peter Plagens characterizes such practices as prototypes for both baseball trading cards and Facebook.<sup>13</sup> We see a clever coming together of these impulses in a page of the English aristocrat **Georgina Berkeley's** (1831–1919) album of 1867 to 1871, in which individuals snipped from personal photographs are montaged atop playing cards in the place of kings, queens, and jacks.

Berkeley was the daughter of a non-titled branch of the Berkeleys of Berkeley Square, London. Her inventive and extensive mixed-media photocollage album, now housed by the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, is at turns fantastical and humorous.<sup>14</sup> She pasted photographs of friends and family atop numerous objects, from jewelry and luggage, to the posters and sandwich boards crowding London streets, making obscure statements about contemporary life, class, and mobility in ways that might only be decipherable to her intimates. These hybrid inventions suggest, as art historian Patrizia Di Bello has argued, "narratives of social and affective connections, as played out through a range of objects and locations," ultimately questioning the "realism of the photographic space."<sup>15</sup> Not simply a product of domestic seclusion, such albums were concerned, however subtly, with social structures and even the possibility of disrupting conventional expectations around class and gender.

Under the banner of socialism in the Soviet Union, appropriation and photographic montage were used for strikingly different purposes, explicitly for politics as opposed to play. The Latvian propagandist **Gustav Klutcis** (1895–1938), for example, was instrumental to the visual promotion of the communist cause and support for the state. Deeply committed to both communism and aesthetic innovation, Klutcis in fact saw the two as closely entwined. A member of the Communist Party and a soldier in the Latvian Red Rifles Regiment, Klutcis came to Russia during the 1917 Revolution as part of a volunteer machine-gun unit that helped topple the Provisional Government. He then attended the state-run art school VKhUTEMAS and went on to produce photomontages celebrating Lenin's Plan of Monumental Propaganda (1920), Lenin's life (1924), and the First Five-Year Plan (1928–32), often with the help of his

wife and collaborator Valentina Kulagina.<sup>16</sup> Rather than seeing photographs as individual works, he took them primarily as material for photomontage and poster designs, emphasizing collectivity and modernization through agitprop. Klutcis's practice was aligned with the tenets of Constructivism, an avant-garde movement that included practitioners such as Aleksandr Rodchenko and El Lissitzky, among others, who were dedicated to a rigorous exploration of elemental shapes and basic materials in the service of agitational propaganda. Klutcis turned to photography specifically as a means of including subject matter that a mass audience would find accessible, identifiable, and compelling. His desire to emphasize his participatory view of photomontage as a practice is evidenced by works in which he includes his own image, for example, montaged symbolically on the body of a communist worker. Klutcis's face appears atop the central muscular figure of a shock worker, marching forward with two others alongside him, in *We Shall Pay Back Our Coal Debt to This Country*, from 1930. Set against a stark red background, all three figures are abstracted, and yet they are employed here for the realistic effect of their photographic representations (see Fig. 8.6). Again, in *The Struggle for Heat and Metal* (1933) Klutcis inserts himself as laborer into the photographic image, clearly asserting his vision of artist-as-worker.



**Figure 8.6** Gustav Klutcis, *We Shall Pay Back Our Coal Debt to This Country*, 1930. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.



In *Let Us Fulfill the Plan of the Great Projects* (1930), Klutcis summarized the idea of work in the iconic image of a hand, specifically aligning the hand of the artist with that of the masses. Scholar and curator Margarita Tupitsyn eloquently describes the dynamism of the composition: “An arm (actually Klutcis’s) stretches from the lower right to the upper left and confronts the viewer with an open palm, pushing the whole image toward the viewer.” Further, slogans written in white on both sides of the hand and crowds of workers packed into the lower right underscore the logic of a “codified metaphor” that runs through this poster.<sup>17</sup> Like many examples of photographic appropriation, it relies on the power of associative meaning for its impact.

## Ownership, authorship, and originality

Among the influential examples of artists and photographers self-consciously using techniques of appropriation for varying ends, including engaging the power and multiplicity of the image in society, the Pictures Generation remains a touchstone. Distinguished by a tone of cool indifference, these artists were primarily preoccupied with the role of representation in a media-saturated culture. During the late 1970s and 1980s, this loosely affiliated group of American artists were in part defined by Douglas Crimp’s *Pictures* exhibition at Artists Space, New York, in the fall of 1977, and further by his essay of 1979 on the subject. Regarding his curatorial decision to conceptually focus on “pictures,” Crimp has explained the postmodern impetus of his project: “I hoped to convey not only the work’s most salient characteristic—recognizable images—but also and importantly the ambiguities it sustains.”<sup>18</sup> Under this rubric, approaches such as Richard Prince’s brazen remediation of advertising images, Louise Lawler’s reframing of the way artwork by other artists is displayed within various institutions (discussed further in Chapter 9), Cindy Sherman’s chameleon performance of cinematic stereotypes, and Barbara Kruger’s play on mass media tropes and graphic design used photography and appropriation as their key devices.

**Sherrie Levine** (b. 1947) poses an interesting case study of “pictures” production. Renowned as a Pictures artist, in 1979 Levine notoriously rephotographed Edward Weston’s photographs of his son young Neil in the nude from 1926, without any detectable alterations, and presented the appropriated picture as her own artwork. In many ways, Weston represented the establishment of photography as art. As a canonical modernist photographer in the U.S., he was a Pictorialist photographer in the 1910s, and an exponent of straight photography in the 1920s (two styles of photography we discuss further in Chapter 9). Levine’s “undisguised theft of already existing images,” returning to Crimp, does not adhere to the conventional expectations of traditional artistic production.<sup>19</sup> Rather, Levine’s clever artistic appropriations recontextualize the “originals” and thereby ask the viewers to re-evaluate them and the cultural assumptions they depend upon.

Among other canonical male modernist artists whose work Levine has appropriated, and rephotographed, are Aleksandr Rodchenko and, famously, Walker Evans’s Depression Era photographs for the Farm Security Administration. According to Levine, her use of photographic appropriation is akin to “a regenerative act of collaboration, transforming the considered extraordinary masterpiece into something organic and continually renewable.”<sup>20</sup> Levine’s series, *After Walker Evans* (1981), became a landmark of postmodernism, as well as a feminist critique of patriarchal authority. “Like Melville’s *Bartleby the Scrivener*,” in art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau’s assessment, “Levine’s critical stance is manifested as an act of refusal: refusal of authorship, uncompromising rejection of all notions of self-expression, originality, or subjectivity.”<sup>21</sup>

Inspired by Levine's blatant approach to appropriation, many contemporary artists have turned to her work as the basis for creating their own. Using Google for source material, Hermann Zschiegner, for example, entered the words "+walker evans +sherrie levine" into the search engine, which then became the eponymous title of his own exhibited artwork. Whereas Levine photographed Evans's photographs of the Burroughs family directly from an exhibition catalogue and presented them as her own, Zschieger appropriated twenty-six found versions of Levine's and Evans's Allie Mae Burroughs portrait. These copies of copies, are each different in their ratios of black and white or sepia, pixel clarity, and image size, and speak to the expanded and immeasurable field of image accumulation and dispersal, along with the ways authorship is ever cloudier with the proliferation of new technologies.

Notably, in 2014, Levine also revisited her own work, by returning to Evans's photography yet again, this time in the form of *African Masks After Walker Evans: 1–24* (see Fig. 8.7), re-presenting a set of twenty-four images drawn from more than 600 that Evans was commissioned to photograph by MoMA during their 1935 exhibition *African Negro Art*. Because these were initially photographs for hire, there have been debates on whether to place them within Evans's larger oeuvre as works of art rather than objective documents. Levine calls attention to the assumptions that underlie these categorical differences, art and document, and the slippage between the two. With this project she also expands upon her well-established investigations into the implications of appropriation. In connecting Evans's work to the institution of the museum and its appropriative and colonialist tendencies with regards to African art, Levine posits a long chain of cultural appropriations, and questions the position of Evans, MoMA, and



**Figure 8.7** Sherrie Levine, *African Masks After Walker Evans: 1–24*, 2014. Twenty-four giclée inkjet prints. Overall dimensions: 45½ x 221 x 1½ in., 115.6 x 561.3 x 3.8 cm. © Sherrie Levine. Courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner, New York.

herself within that circuit, while continuing to trouble notions of authenticity, authorship, and commodification. Evans's photographic framing of works of African art in MoMA's collection contributed to the reception of African art within the Western canon of art history, extending the ways by which African art had been used as an aesthetic model by European modernist artists such as Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso.

Evans's photographs of *African Negro Art* were stored in portfolios at the museum for educational purposes, yet despite their pretense of documentary objectivity, these photographs are far from neutral. For one thing, the standardized frame of the photograph subsumes their uniqueness. Pictured in stark black and white against plain monochromatic backgrounds, they are further decontextualized. By virtue of being photographed in this way, the objects pictured ostensibly transform from ritual artifacts to modern sculptures, removed from their origins and repurposed and recontextualized as art. In other words, they are appropriated. Levine's decision to select only photographs of masks from Evans's larger collection further underscores this project's troubling status in terms of identity and its relationship to appropriation.

Edward Curtis's staged and romanticized vision of the indigenous peoples of North America, discussed in Chapter 2, functions in an analogous way. Though Curtis did not employ appropriation techniques in ways described so far in the present chapter, they nevertheless participate in cultural appropriation, using the camera as the means to do so. Curtis has been repeatedly accused of appropriating subject matter, or more precisely people and their histories, from the Piegan of the Great Plains to Kwakiutl of Vancouver Island, among others, and, through his photographs, not simply misleading viewers and perpetuating stereotypes, but also occupying a position of authorship and authority to which he was not entitled. As Teju Cole has eloquently observed, "Photography is particularly treacherous . . . Capturing how things look fools us into thinking that we've captured their truth."<sup>22</sup> Cole contrasts Curtis's photographs with those of Horace Poolaw, a Kiowa native, born and raised in Oklahoma. Noting the undeniable beauty of Curtis's depictions of Native Americans in "traditional" regalia, including feathered headdresses, for example, in contrast to Poolaw's pictures of his own family dressed in contemporary clothes within ordinary scenes, Cole casts suspicion on the value and guise of "beauty" as instrumentalized in Curtis's images, and the ways it might artfully mislead. Offering a further conundrum in his analysis of appropriation, Cole asks, "Is the lesson here that the truth of a given community can only be delivered by an insider?" This question reaches back to the work of Levine and Evans, and many other photographers, especially since, as we established at the outset, photography is inherently a medium predicated on "taking," or put another way, on the logic of appropriation.

In a project focusing on redressing the long history of appropriation of indigenous culture in North America, **Daniella Zalcman** (b. 1986) created *Signs of Your Identity* (2014) to further investigate the complicated legacy of forced assimilation of First Nations people in Canada. Using double exposures, Zalcman superimposes landscapes and still lives with portraits of survivors. Beginning in the nineteenth century, more than 150,000 indigenous children were taken from their families, often kidnapped, and forced to attend Canada's Indian Residential Schools, the last of which closed in 1996. According to Zalcman:

These portraits are my attempt to get to the root of historical trauma. Each of these double exposures layers a former residential school student with something related to his or her experience: the sites where schools once stood, the cemeteries where over 6,000 indigenous children are buried, the documents that enforced strategic assimilation.<sup>23</sup>

Allowing her subjects to have a voice in the artwork, including written excerpts from her interviews with First Nations members, was crucial.

One image shows a profile portrait of a man in a hat. In place of his face we can discern a village, a line of teepee tents, and a man on a horse. The montage here is suggestive of the thoughts occupying the mind of the person in the image. The photographic montage alone is difficult to read, but then the attendant caption poignantly directs the viewer's attention:

Mike Pinay, who attended the Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School from 1953 to 1963: "It was the worst 10 years of my life. I was away from my family from the age of 6 to 16. How do you learn about family? I didn't know what love was. We weren't even known by names back then. I was a number." "Do you remember your number?" "73." (see Fig. 8.8)

Zalcman's use of photography in this project and Cole's writing on appropriation raise the rife ethical dilemmas of appropriation and speaking on behalf of others more broadly. "It is not about taking something that belongs to someone else and making it serve you," Cole explains, "but rather [it is] about recognizing that history is brutal and unfinished and finding some way, within that recognition, to serve the dispossessed."<sup>24</sup> This observation raises yet another crucial dynamic in the matrix of photography both as a medium and as an historical agent. Beyond, photography's tendency towards appropriation



**Figure 8.8** Daniella Zalcman, *Signs of Your Identity*, 2014. Mike Pinay, who attended the Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School from 1953 to 1963: "It was the worst 10 years of my life. I was away from my family from the age of 6 to 16. How do you learn about family? I didn't know what love was. We weren't even known by names back then. I was a number." "Do you remember your number?" "73." © Daniella Zalcman. Courtesy of the artist.

as one of its central operating principles, photography also provides the viewer with an illusory sense of possessing, and even knowing, the subject within the image. Of course, there are inevitable limits to any visual representation, so many ways that the subject of an image remains unknowable, and one must be careful of the seductive impression of possession that photography suggests.

In an unforgettable passage in his “Short History of Photography” from 1931, literary theorist Walter Benjamin writes, “Today, people have as passionate an inclination to bring things close to themselves or even more to the masses, as to overcome uniqueness in every situation by reproducing it. Every day the need grows more urgent to possess an object in the closest proximity, through a picture or, better, a reproduction.” Echoing Benjamin in her 1977 publication *On Photography*, writer Susan Sontag expands on this idea and the desire Benjamin described. Sontag explains the phenomenon in the following way: “To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed.” According to Sontag, photography is always an ethical encounter between the photographer and the subject. Inevitably, the viewer’s role in this dynamic must also be taken into account.

Artist **Joan Fontcuberta’s** (b. 1955) fascination with the history of photography and the possibilities of possession connoted by photographs culminated in a project entitled *Googlegram: Niepce* (2005). The work begins with an appropriation of the earliest known photograph, namely Joseph Nicéphore Niepce’s *View from the Window at Le Gras* (c. 1826). Fontcuberta aggregated the results of a Google image search for the words “photo” and “foto,” which he then processed through photomosaic software and used to create a composite recreation of Niepce’s image, using 10,000 images. The artist has referred to these as “archive noise,” pointing to how they emblemize the continuous and ultimately uncontrollable movement of photographs across time and within endless contexts. Characterizing this work as exemplifying the “itinerancy of images,” scholar Eduardo Cadava posits “that images can never remain identical to themselves, precisely because the memories and traces they bear are always multiple.”<sup>25</sup> Only from a distance is Niepce’s photograph recognizable amidst the multitude of disconnected, pixelated thumbnails. Though enabled by digital technologies, *Googlegram* also seems to be a meditation on photography’s powerful capacity for appropriation and transformation, and, moreover, how these elements have existed since its very beginnings.

## FOCUS BOX 8

*The following is an excerpt from an interview between Juan David Laserna Montoya, Gina McDaniel Tarver, and Erina Duganne, conducted on March 13, 2017 and originally published in *photographies 10*, no. 3 (September 2017). It focuses on *Extracción publicitaria* (Advertisement Extraction), an ongoing series, currently comprising about 130 “extracted” magazine pages, that Laserna began in 2012. The artist alters the pages through a meticulous process of erasure, using sandpaper. The resulting artifacts are fragile and the delicacy of the leaves contrasts with the boldness of their isolated images. Images of protest, political power, and the economy float free of their specific contexts, generating ambiguity and even mystery. The artist encourages viewers to engage with the pages as cultural objects and to think about their force as symbols of our consumerism.*

## Advertisement extraction: an interview with Juan David Laserna Montoya

*Juan David Laserna Montoya, Gina McDaniel Tarver, and Erina Duganne*

**Gina McDaniel Tarver (GMT):** Can you tell us about your process of finding images for the series?

**Juan David Laserna Montoya (JDM):** What I do is go to second-hand bookstores, and I look through piles of old magazines. I'll buy groups of them after reviewing the contents, twenty to thirty magazines at a time. At first I was looking for political imagery, like protests, but there were also economic magazines that had a lot of charts and advertisements with graphs and numbers, and I knew that there was something there, and as the project opened into broader iconography, I knew those images were there to be worked on, so that constituted the second "movement" of the series, and then the third movement was perhaps text, and right now there are images showing up that are about representations of nature; I think there is also gender there somewhere. But the idea is that, when the theme is clear in my mind, when I have a group of maybe twenty pages that I can see as a potential part of the series, then I will start with that.

**Erina Duganne (ED):** And were the magazines old, or were they recent, as well?

**JDM:** I'd say I work with magazines from the 1980s, 1990s. There were a lot of magazines from 2008, that had to do with the economic collapse, a lot of coverage of the Palestinian–Israeli struggle, and also, I started finding *Time* magazine [New York], *Der Spiegel* [Hamburg], European magazines that were using the same kind of imagery but related, for example, to the Middle East, and it was the same imagery that is used in Latin America. There is the idea that if you want to express or depict these situations of protest, it doesn't matter where you are, Europe, the United States, it's going to be the same kind of icons.

**GMT:** You work a lot with repeated images, not just of protest. That seems to be a big part of your work. How much do you think that has to do with the photographic condition in which we live, where we are inundated with repeated images? It's not just print or television, as it was when we three were growing up. It's the internet. It's this infinite possibility of repetition. Do you think of your work as very linked to that certain visual condition?

**JDM:** Yes, absolutely. The current visual condition is one of extreme production and circulation. Everyone is aware of that phenomenon. I guess my work aims to play with certain products that were prior to today's digital logics, and though I haven't included any digital media, I'm sure that it's the same territory.



**GMT:** It's the repetition of images that makes them so recognizable, but then their meanings become generalized from use in widely varying contexts, and often they begin to drift further and further away from any original significance.

**JDM:** The raised fist is really interesting, because it is one of those icons that can't really be traced to an origin (see Fig. 8.9). With Che Guevara, it's really easy, because someone took a picture, and it became a leitmotif. It's used everywhere now, perhaps because of the look in his eyes. The entire story of the Cuban Revolution seems condensed in that symbol, so there's an entire myth behind the simple portrait that's well known. Perhaps the fist comes from Socialist Realism, and therefore it has everything to do with class struggles, and from there it is related to any given promise of victory. When you find it in magazines, it is often in relation not to photojournalism but to advertisements, usually of some product that promises you prosperity. I'm pretty sure that many of the raised fists in the series come from football propaganda, but also later from journalistic coverage of miners in Bolivia, and definitely some from ads that had to do with bank loans.



**Figure 8.9** Juan David Laserna Montoya, *Untitled*, from the series *Extracción publicitaria*, 2012–17. © Juan David Laserna Montoya. Courtesy of the artist.

Repetition is a resource that comes from the mass production of images, from a great network of circulation. It is a heritage, a tradition of visual depiction that gets refreshed by the media but never absolutely rebuilt. Repetition in this series is not just about accumulation in a single moment or place, but rather about the everlasting return of archetypes. Thus, it is not solely about how imagery repeats. It's about how advertisements use the same kind of imagery as political protest in order to create or confirm an idea or a product. The series insists on certain images—like the fist, or like the police wearing the crowd control outfits—because they are frequently used. Not necessarily because they are present in many situations registered by the media, but because every time you think about social tension, violence is a variable and, in that context, you need to depict the players of that violence, usually crowd control is one of them.

**GMT:** When these images are on the pages of a magazine, they might seem non-problematic: you just look at them and pass them by. But your art practice extracts fragments, makes them more ambiguous, and asks the viewer to look for complexity, it seems to me. You appropriate the images and alter them in a way that problematizes their packaging.

**JDM:** That's the whole point. Magazines have a lot of noise, a lot of information. You can easily consume them because they are designed like that; they are designed so that you can see a guy dead here and then you can see a piece of cake on the next page, and it's okay. It's almost like when you're surfing on the TV or when you're scrolling down the page on Facebook. Looking at a magazine is like scrolling down. You can move forward, or backward, it doesn't matter; you stop somewhere and then go on. But there's something within the lines that could be traced, isolated through erasure.

**ED:** Gina used the term appropriation. Do you think of your work as appropriation? It's such a loaded term, especially here in the U.S.

**JDM:** I'm not really sure if the word appropriation contains the whole operation of this work, that of reaching something hiding behind the narrative of communication. Maybe appropriation takes on a lot of issues that are different than what I'm doing. You are a consumer of these images. If you're not a consumer, then maybe you can be a producer. So, how do you become a producer, instead of a consumer? I try to think of it as a differentiated action toward something that is not supposed to allow your interaction. At least, it is about being an active consumer.

The idea is taking the narrative apart, so that the pieces, by themselves, can perhaps tell you something about the system that brought them to life in the first place. I'm not

trying to make a judgment, whether the system of representation is good or bad. I'm just trying, maybe, to reveal that, for example, it repeats itself, that it takes into itself the same icons, over and over, to talk about different topics. That images, without a context, become a common ground, and that's, in a way, a political approach. It's without the context that you can find images that relate to everyone. It's the system of quotations and context that magazines place, that media places on imagery that you get judgmental about, but if you take the context away, what is there to judge? Can the spectator make a judgment about an image that has no context? Maybe he can forget about the structure that gives meaning to the visual information and read the image when it's naked, when it's alone, and I guess that's what has seduced me about the work. Finding images and taking them apart reveals them as extremely interesting and mysterious, in a way, really significant, because even if stripped from their factual meaning, they leave something behind that echoes as visual experience. Therefore, you are not entirely lost. There is an effort to relate and remember something that can bring rational meaning to whatever you are seeing. In my own experience, there was an opening during that process, and the possible relationships between yourself and the object in front of you is also surrounded with ambiguity, humor, and a critical understanding of your own visual background.

**ED:** It seems to me also crucial that the works in the series have real materiality to them, which is very different than eighties appropriation, in which images are appropriated but then a photograph is taken of it, that takes away that materiality.

**JDM:** But they're really cheap, and fragile, and in a way close to disappearing. *Extracción publicitaria* came to life at a time when I had no budget to make big things, and yet it turned out to be a huge project, so this series had a very humble beginning. Its success derives from the fact that inexpensive materials tend to be dismissed easily, and old magazines are at the bottom of the barrel, even though many times they are the result of very expensive and complex processes of production. It's as if they carry along something of that in their DNA, and a simple archaeology can claim their power as symbols of our consumerism.

## Summary

- Appropriation has been used as a conceptual tactic to intervene in dominant narratives and expose complex histories.
- Acts of appropriation call attention to the relationship between originals and copies, as well as the ways meaning is altered by context.

- The global circulation of images offers the possibility of a multiplicity of iterations and significations.
- Photomontage can serve as a dynamic form of propaganda.

## Discussion points

- In what ways can appropriation be mobilized as a politicized art practice?
- Considering that photography is an inherently reproducible medium, how do “copies” challenge traditional notions of art?
- What role might photography play in cultural appropriation?
- In what ways can appropriated photographs reconfigure notions of authorship?

## Additional case studies

Florencia Blanco (b. 1971)

Claude Cahun (1894–1954)

Nermine Hammam (b. 1967)

Raoul Hausmann (1886–1971)

Robert Heinecken (1931–2006)

Jason Lazarus (b. 1975)

Dora Maar (1907–97)

Youssef Nabil (b. 1972)

Sabah Naim (b. 1967)

Joachim Schmid (b. 1955)

## Notes

- 1 Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 20.
- 2 Elena Volpato, “The Art Workers’ Coalition,” *Mousse 25* (2010), <http://moussemagazine.it/art-workers-coalition-elena-volpato-2010/>.
- 3 James Estrin, “Iconic Scenes, Revisited and Reimagined,” *New York Times*, January 4, 2012.
- 4 Krissah Thompson, “This powerful image perfectly captures how divided America was when MLK died,” *Washington Post*, January 18, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/this-powerful-image-perfectly-captures-how-divided-america-was-when-mlk-died/2015/01/16/602b271c-9d94-11e4-a7ee-526210d665b4\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.5ef60e1333aa](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/this-powerful-image-perfectly-captures-how-divided-america-was-when-mlk-died/2015/01/16/602b271c-9d94-11e4-a7ee-526210d665b4_story.html?utm_term=.5ef60e1333aa).
- 5 “Hüseyin Bahir Alptekin,” Tate Modern, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/huseyin-bahri-alptekin-10753>.
- 6 Mia Fineman, *Faking It: Manipulated Photography before Photoshop* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), 91.
- 7 Atreyee Gupta, “Belatedness and Simultaneity: A Short History of Photography from India,” in Jodi Throckmorton (ed.), *Postdate: Photography and Inherited History in India* (San Jose and Berkeley: San Jose Museum of Art and University of California Press, 2015), 28.

- 8 Gupta, "Belatedness and Simultaneity," 30.
- 9 Christopher Pinney, *The Coming of Photography in India* (London: British Library, 2008), 7.
- 10 "Hannah Höch: Dada-Rundschau [Dada Review], 1919," Berlinische Galerie Museum of Modern Art, <https://www.berlinischegalerie.de/en/collection/prints-and-drawings/highlights/hannah-hoech/>.
- 11 Graham Clarke, *The Photograph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 197.
- 12 Clarke, *The Photograph*, 199.
- 13 Peter Plagens, "Eye Level: Cut Me Up, Paste Me Down," *Art in America* (March 2010).
- 14 See Francoise Heilbrun and Michael Pantazzi, *Album de collages de l'Angleterre Victorienne* (Paris: Musée d'Orsay, 1997).
- 15 Patrizia Di Bello, "Photographs, Fun and Flirtations," in *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (London: Routledge, 2007), 181.
- 16 Christina Lodder, "Revolutionary Photography," in Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hamburg (eds.), *Object: Photo. Modern Photographs: The Thomas Walther Collection 1909–1949. An Online Project of The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 8, <https://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/assets/essays/Lodder.pdf>.
- 17 Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph, 1924–1937* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 119.
- 18 Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (Spring, 1979): 75–88.
- 19 Douglas Crimp, "Appropriating Appropriation," originally 1983, reprinted in *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 129.
- 20 Renske van Leeuwen, "Sherrie Levine," International Center of Photography, 2010, <https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/constituents/sherrie-levine?all/all/all/0>.
- 21 Abigail Solomon Godeau, "Winning the Game When the Rules Have Changed: Art Photography and Postmodernism" (1985), in Liz Heron and Val Williams (eds.), *Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850s to the Present* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 307–18; 309.
- 22 Teju Cole, "Getting Others Right," *New York Times*, June 13, 2017.
- 23 "Signs of your Identity: Photojournalist Daniella Zalzman Discusses Residential Schools," Institute for the Study of Human Rights, April 24, 2017, <http://www.humanrightscolumbia.org/news/signs-your-identity>.
- 24 Cole, "Getting Others Right."
- 25 Eduardo Cadava, "The Itinerant Languages of Photography," in *The Itinerant Languages of Photography* (New Haven, CT: Princeton Art Museum and Yale University Press, 2013), 29.

## Selected further reading

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- Ellegood, Anne and Johanna Burton, eds. *Take It Or Leave It: Institution, Image, Ideology*. Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2014.
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- Makholm, Kristin. "Strange Beauty: Hannah Höch and the Photomontage." *MoMA* 24 (Winter–Spring 1997): 19–23.
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# PART FIVE

# COLLECTIONS

For his 2011 installation *Photography in Abundance*, **Erik Kessels** (b. 1966) filled a gallery with close to a million photographs that he downloaded from the image-sharing site Flickr during a single twenty-four-hour period. Many have read the excess of images in this installation as making palpable the image “overload” brought about by camera-equipped smartphones and social media sites, which allow individuals to share their photographs almost instantaneously across the globe. Others discuss Kessels’s glut of images, which viewers were encouraged to “wade through, touch and examine,”<sup>1</sup> as provoking anxiety, including the “feeling of drowning in representations of other people’s experiences.”<sup>2</sup> Our interest in Kessels’s installation, which was commissioned by Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam, or Foam, for an exhibition on the future of the photography museum, is slightly different. We use his demonstration of a single day’s digital demand to signal challenges that the recent digital explosion of images poses to both the collecting and collections of photography.

As artists like Kessels have mined photography’s digital profusion for their artworks, so too have museums used the influx of digital technologies to transform the structures and processes through which their art collections are curated and consumed. Museums now regularly stream their collections through image-sharing sites such as Flickr and Instagram and use online cataloguing systems and touch-screen technologies to give wider access to them. For photography collections, however, this digital turn has not always been beneficial. Because of their inherent reproducibility, photographs occupy an uncertain position within what photography historians Elizabeth Edwards and Sigrid Lien call the “ecosystem” of a museum. Unlike other museum objects, photographs hold multiple, even divergent, uses: they function, as Edwards and Lien explain, at once as “a recording technique, as objects in the collections, [and] as display techniques, on websites and for commercial and marketing purposes.”<sup>3</sup> This fluidity has rendered photographs both fundamental to the collecting practices of museums and other cultural institutions and, at times, unseen.

To explore the collections history of photographs and by extension their history as collected objects, the chapters in this unit look at two distinct institutional sites of photography collections and collecting: museums and archives. The chapters are divided in this manner for several reasons. First, though photographs are called on to serve documentary purposes in both museums and archives, their role as fine art objects that can be curated and exhibited is fundamentally different in museums. Second, the considerable theorization of photography and the archive necessitates discussing this more conceptually

driven use of the medium separately. The chapters come together, however, in their inclusion of photographers, curators, and exhibitions, both contemporary and historical, which engage with and raise questions around photography's broader collections history.

## Notes

- 1 Alexandra Genova, "Exploring the Power of One Tragic Photograph," *Time*, January 3, 2017, <http://time.com/4595565/erik-kessels-one-image/>.
- 2 Eliza Williams, "24 hours in photo," *Creative Review*, November 11, 2011, <https://www.creativereview.co.uk/24-hours-in-photos/?nocache=true&adfesuccess=1>.
- 3 Elizabeth Edwards and Sigrid Lien, "Museums and the Work of Photographs," in Elizabeth Edwards and Sigrid Lien (eds.), *Uncertain Image: Museums and the Work of Photographs* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 5.

# 9

## MUSEUMS

In 2013, Alexis Fabry and María Wills co-curated the exhibition ***Urbes Mutantes: Latin American Photography 1944–2013***, a major survey of street photography from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. First shown at the Museo de Arte del Banco de la República in Bogotá, Colombia, the exhibition subsequently traveled to the International Center of Photography (ICP) in New York, where, alongside exhibitions such as *América Latina 1960–2013*, co-produced by the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris, and Museo Amparo, Mexico, it brought renewed interest in and attention to Latin America's underrepresented photographic history and influence. But while *Urbes Mutantes* served to propel the careers of a number of Latin American photographers as well as the market value of Latin American photography, more broadly, it also perpetuated certain biases, including the privileging of photography from wealthier Latin American nations and the notable absence of photography from the less examined countries of the Caribbean and Central America as well as Paraguay, Bolivia, and others in South America, or the “extreme periphery,”<sup>1</sup> as art historian Gustavo Buntinx calls them.

This chapter investigates the critical and at times controversial role that museum exhibitions have played (and continue to play) in defining and controlling photography's meaning and value. It takes as its premise that museums are never neutral. Instead, how and what they collect, organize, and display form the basis of particular narratives and interests, which become, as art historian Salah Hassan notes in his introduction to the Third African Photography Festival in Bamako, Mali, “the very basis for the history of art.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, because photographs are objects that are both collected by a museum and a means to collect or document a museum's artifacts, they share a long and complex relationship with this institution. This chapter explores the interdependency between museums and photography by taking up a selection of exhibitions that have shaped our understanding of photography's identity, most especially as art, and what these institutional histories in turn have overlooked or excluded about the medium.

### The judgment seat

In 2015, ***Ocean of Images*** opened at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) to much acclaim. Organized as part of “New Photography,” MoMA's annual showcase of recent work in photography, the exhibition marked a departure for the thirty-year-old series. Rather than highlight two to six photographers, as had been the standard since MoMA's former chief curator of photography, John Szarkowski, began “New Photography” in 1985, curators Quentin Bajac, Roxana Marcoci, and Lucy Gallun changed the format to a biannual one and increased the number of artists to nineteen. They also, more significantly, altered the tendency of “New Photography” to feature framed pictures on the wall. *Ocean of Images*, in contrast, included “images that are born digitally, made with scanners or lenses in the studio or the real world,

presented as still or moving pictures, distributed as zines, morphed into three-dimensional objects, or remixed online.”<sup>3</sup> Through these modifications, the curators emphasized photography’s expanded field (a subject we turn to in more detail in the following unit), a term that art historian George Baker, building on Rosalind Krauss’s seminal 1979 essay, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” employed to signal the medium’s “multiple sets of oppositions and conjugations, rather than any singular operation.”<sup>4</sup> But, whereas Baker used this term to address artworks that operate in between photography and cinema, *Ocean of Images* navigated photography’s place within the connectivity, circularity, and liquidity of the internet.

**Katja Novitskova’s** (b. 1984) *Approximation (peacock spider)*, from 2015 (see Fig. 9.1), exemplifies this so-called post-internet sensibility. For this work, Novitskova first blew up the jpeg of a recently discovered species of spider that she sourced online from an image-sharing website. Next, she pasted the appropriated image onto a cut aluminum carrier, normally used for advertising displays, to create a menacing spider of gargantuan size. Through this transformation from digital image to human-sized sculpture, Novitskova points to the ease with which online images both proliferate and materialize as well as their capacity to both threaten and seduce. Novitskova’s photo-based sculpture also signaled for MoMA, at least, the willingness of its photography department to forgo the medium’s autonomy,



**Figure 9.1** Installation view, *Ocean of Images: New Photography 2015*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2015, with Katja Novitskova’s *Approximation (peacock spider)*. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

or idea that it is self-contained, which many of its previous curators had so painstakingly worked to secure.

Since its opening in 1929, photography was of interest to MoMA's curators and especially its director, Alfred H. Barr. But it was not until 1940, when Beaumont Newhall was named the museum's first curator of photography (the first time any museum created such a post) that the medium received any sustained consideration. During his tenure at MoMA, Newhall curated nearly thirty exhibitions, most of which centered on historical surveys, the canonization of masters, and the promotion of a select group of younger photographers. For these exhibitions, Newhall famously treated photographs in the same manner as other fine art prints or drawings within the museum: they were carefully matted, framed behind glass, and hung at eye level so that they could be admired and appreciated as autonomous works of art. This approach, as curator Christopher Phillips notes in his influential 1982 essay, "The Judgment Seat of Photography," established photography's "**cult value**."

Phillips borrows the term "cult value" from literary theorist Walter Benjamin's important 1936 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In this essay, Benjamin uses cult value alongside its binary, "**exhibition value**," to distinguish two different modes of experiencing works of art. According to Benjamin, cult value, which is rooted in ritual, refers to a work of art's unique presence and aura, while exhibition value, which develops out of a work of art's portability and reproducibility, signifies its accessibility and universality. In his essay, Phillips uses these two terms to trace shifts in the reception of photography at MoMA. But whereas Benjamin believed photography's reproducibility could dispel the aura of traditional art, Phillips shows how through MoMA's "judgment seat," this cult value was (ironically) restored to photography, most especially during the tenure of John Szarkowski, who used his exhibitions to position the medium within a distinctly autonomous aesthetic realm.

With its focus on photography's "connectivity, the circulation of images, information networks, and communication models," *Ocean of Images* therefore seems to trouble MoMA's long-standing judgment seat. But, while the exhibition's focus on **post-internet art** certainly "compromised photography's autonomy, the curators," as critic Colby Chamberlain explains, "never abandoned Szarkowski's criteria."<sup>5</sup> Here Chamberlain alludes to the formalist criteria for evaluating photography that Szarkowski put in place during his tenure at MoMA from 1962 to 1991. Laid out in his influential 1964 exhibition and subsequent book, *The Photographer's Eye*, Szarkowski uses the categories of "The Thing Itself," "The Detail," "The Frame," "Time," and "Vantage Point" to construct the discourse of photography as one that is predominately concerned with issues of form. **Lucas Blalock's** (b. 1978) digitally manipulated photographs in *Ocean of Images* upholds this formalist agenda. In his works, Blalock uses a scanner and Photoshop not to alter or improve his analog images but to purposely draw attention to the mechanics of their digital production. In *Strawberries (Fresh Forever)* from 2014, for instance, Blalock arranges real strawberries on a field of bubble wrap and then uses the clone stamp to clumsily duplicate strawberry candies over them. Through this approach, Blalock at once reveals the digital contrivances behind his work and explores the interplay between their illusionism and flatness. In so doing, the **internet** becomes less a site of community or connectivity, as explored, for example, by Blalock's contemporary, Penelope Umbrico, whose work, often appropriated from such image-sharing websites as Flickr, Craigslist, and eBay, is notably absent in *Ocean of Images*. Instead, Blalock turns to the digital, much like Szarkowski before him, as a self-reflexive tool through which to examine issues of form and its depiction.

While MoMA's judgment seat remained relatively unscathed in *Ocean of Images*, since the late 1970s, Louise Lawler (b. 1947) has used her photographs and installations to ask probing questions around





**Figure 9.2** Louise Lawler, *Arrangements of Pictures*, 1982. © 2018 Louise Lawler. Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York.

how museums and other cultural institutions create value through their display of works of art. Lawler is particularly well known for her “arrangements,” which were first exhibited in the 1982 exhibition ***Arrangements of Pictures*** at New York’s Metro Pictures (see Fig. 9.2). The exhibition consisted of two parts. In this first section, Lawler exhibited an “arrangement” of works that the gallery had on hand by “gallery artists” Robert Longo, Cindy Sherman, Jack Goldstein, Laurie Simmons, and James Welling. For visitors entering the gallery, the room looked like a routine group show of Metro Pictures’s appropriation artists (or Pictures Generation, as they are more commonly called today), with whom Lawler is often associated. But upon reading the label, “Arranged by Louise Lawler,” or remembering that this exhibition was a one-person show, these assumptions about what was “on view” quickly dissipated. Likewise, the price attached to Lawler’s “arrangement”—the combined price of all the individual works plus 10 percent for the artist (the fee usually charged by art consultants)—was also unexpected and encouraged visitors to rethink long-standing ideas about art’s autonomy and the institutional apparatuses in which artists and their artworks circulate and accrue value.

In addition to her arrangement of artworks by Metro artists, for the second part of *Arrangements of Pictures*, Lawler hung a series of photographs in the main gallery that she took of Metro artists’s works in the contexts of the private collections to which they had been sold. To these images, she appended the label “Arranged by” and the name of the collector. Lawler has continued to pursue this approach in her own practice by photographing artworks in corporate and museum collections as well as in storage

spaces and auction houses. What is most significant about all of these “arrangements” is that the art is secondary and the contexts of its display—architecture, labels, vitrines, pedestals, guards, staff members, security systems, among others—are foregrounded. In *Arranged by Donald Marron, Susan Brundage, and Cheryl Bishop at Paine Webber, Inc., NYC*, from 1982, for instance, Lawler pictures two Lichtenstein silkscreen prints that adorn the wall of an office copy room, while in *Arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine, New York*, from 1984, she photographs a Robert Delaunay painting partially obscured by a television set, next to which sits a Lichtenstein sculpture head that has been converted into a lamp base. At once biting and humorous, these juxtapositions lay bare both the presentational apparatuses and cultural and economic systems that underpin the circulation and reception of art. They also, as art historian Douglas Crimp explains, “undermine our sense of a photograph’s autonomy . . . presenting them as always impinged on by something else within our frame of vision.”<sup>6</sup>

While Lawler’s practice is indebted to photography’s indeterminacy, or its ability to function as both art and information, museums have long sought not only to separate photography from these more documentary functions of the medium but also to differentiate certain types of photography as “art.” The preferential treatment of “straight photography” is a case in point. In his 1993 memoir *Focus*, Beaumont Newhall recounts that when he began to make his “selection of photographs for the 1937 retrospective exhibition” at MoMA, he “treated soft-focus work as an aberration that should be eliminated.” In its place, he gave preference to straight photography, or images that emphasize and engage with the camera’s own technical capability to produce images sharp in focus and rich in detail, through the “nineteenth-century work of Nadar, the Brady school, Hill and Adamson . . . and in the twentieth-century work of Eugène Atget, Alfred Stieglitz, and later Ansel Adams, Paul Strand, and Edward Weston.”<sup>7</sup> This privileging of straight photography was not only championed by curators at MoMA. In his 1940 exhibition, **A Pageant of Photography**, organized for the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco, California, photographer Ansel Adams (1902–84) likewise sought to distinguish straight or pure photography as superior, since these images were not supposed to be manipulated in the darkroom.

The term “**straight photography**” was popularized in the early twentieth century by critic and poet Sadakichi Hartmann. In a 1904 article titled “A Plea for Straight Photography,” Hartmann took issue with the painterly and expressive qualities of Pictorialism, the then dominant mode of “art photography,” arguing that, if “We expect an etching to look like an etching, and a lithograph to look like a lithograph, why then should not a photographic print look like a photographic print?”<sup>8</sup> Adams adopted a similar position in his practice. In 1934, on the pages of *Camera Craft*, he boldly stated, “I have nothing in common with ‘Pictorial’ aims and means . . . Photography, as a pure medium of art, does not admit conceptions that are reminiscent of other mediums.”<sup>9</sup> In distinguishing his own “purer” use of photography, Adams sought to distance his work from Pictorialism, whose darkroom manipulations and soft-focus compositions he considered out of date, imitative, and theatrical.

Adams used a similar line of argumentation for *A Pageant of Photography*. In the exhibition, he positioned the historical legacy of straight photography not in terms of Pictorialism, out of which it in fact had developed, but rather the nineteenth-century United States survey photography of Carleton Watkins, Timothy O’Sullivan, and Eadweard Muybridge. For Pictorialist photographers such as William Mortensen (1897–1965), whose theatrical manipulations Adams detested and so deliberately omitted from *A Pageant of Photography*, this curatorial decision was devastating. At the time of Adams’s exhibition, Mortensen’s photographs were widely exhibited, published, and collected. Moreover, he also oversaw the Mortensen School of Photography in Laguna Beach, California, and wrote a series of bestselling instructional books as well as a weekly photography column in the *Los Angeles Times*. Despite these

accomplishments, because of Adams's "purist purge,"<sup>10</sup> to quote photography critic A. D. Coleman, Mortensen's Pictorialist photography was virtually forgotten until the late 1970s, when Coleman revived it as part of his survey book *The Grotesque in Photography*.

For most of the twentieth century, then, museums and especially MoMA played a fundamental role in setting forth the terms of photography's status as art. But, while MoMA may have been the first institution to employ a curator of photography, it was not the first museum to exhibit photography as art. Scholars attribute this title to London's South Kensington Museum, which would eventually become the present-day Victoria and Albert Museum. In 1858, under the directorship of Henry Cole, the museum simultaneously hosted the annual exhibitions of both the **Photographic Society of London** and its French counterpart, the **Société Française de Photographie**. But though art photography was showcased, including works by notable nineteenth-century photographers Roger Fenton, Benjamin Brecknell Turner, and Gustave Le Gray, among many others, it is clear from the 1,009 photographs on view that the terms defining photography's status as art were still quite malleable.



**Figure 9.3** Charles Thurston Thompson, Exhibition of the Photographic Society of London and the Societe Francaise de Photographie at the South Kensington Museum, 1858. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

At the same time, for instance, that the exhibition featured Oscar Gustav Rejlander's allegorical tableau *The Two Ways of Life*, discussed in Chapter 2, it also showcased, as curator Gerry Badger more recently has pointed out, survey photographs "made by soldiers of the Royal Engineers in Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Singapore, and used by the Ordnance Survey to help with map-making."<sup>11</sup> Charles Thurston Thompson's documentation of the exhibition suggests a similar elasticity (see Fig. 9.3). Though singled out today as "the earliest known photograph of a photographic exhibition,"<sup>12</sup> the image is equally significant for what it reveals about the South Kensington Museum's treatment of the medium. With framed images hung from ceiling to floor, the display at first recalls the salon-style installation tactics of the French and British **Royal Academies of Art**. Closer inspection of the images on view, however, reveals a variety of photographic styles and approaches—portraits, landscapes, architectural views, and reproductions of works of art—that did not fit the Academies's strict hierarchy of genres, which favored history above all else. In addition, visible in the center of the room are tables on which sit an abundance of **stereoscopes**, a popular form of three-dimensional vernacular photography that soared after Queen Victoria first encountered these devices at *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* (or *Crystal Palace Exhibition*) in London's Hyde Park in 1851. From Thompson's photograph, it is clear, then, that photography's judgment seat at the South Kensington Museum was far from absolute, a status that would not change until 1977, when the medium finally became a curatorial sub-department within the Department of Prints, Drawings, Paintings, and Photographs at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

## African agency

As photography's aesthetic value was negotiated by museums over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the medium's informational capacity, especially as a way of knowing and representing racial difference, remained largely steadfast. This power structure is especially evident in the display of African photography. Historically when museums have exhibited such images, they have most often been "assigned," as art historian and curator Okwui Enwezor explains, "to the terrain of the ethnography, as documents providing secondary information to more primary information observed in the field."<sup>13</sup> This ethnographic focus has meant that, until recently, African photographers have been largely absent from the history of photography. The exhibition of the photographs of Malian studio photographer Seydou Keïta (1921–2001) is a case in point. Even though a stamp with Keïta's name was clearly visible on the front of his photographs when they were exhibited in 1991, as part of the exhibition *Africa Explores: 20th-Century African Art*, curated by Susan Vogel at the Center for African Art in New York, the didactic labels identified the images as produced by an unknown photographer from Bamko, Mali.

To restore agency to African photographers as well as counter the kinds of disparaging misrepresentations about Africa promoted by this documentary lens, beginning in the early 1990s, a group of African curators, writers, and thinkers initiated a series of exhibitions to explore "the way Africans pictured themselves."<sup>14</sup> Two of the most notable of these exhibitions took place in New York: ***Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography***, on view at the ICP, and ***In/Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present***, on view at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. In both exhibitions, the curators positioned African photography within **postcolonialism**, which is a theoretical framework that seeks to reclaim and rethink the history and agency of people subordinated under colonialism and its imperialist power structures. For the curators, this meant that,

instead of depicting Africans in terms of exotic and pathological stereotypes, or “the terrain of **Afro-pessimism**,” as Enwezor calls it, their exhibitions foregrounded African agency.<sup>15</sup>

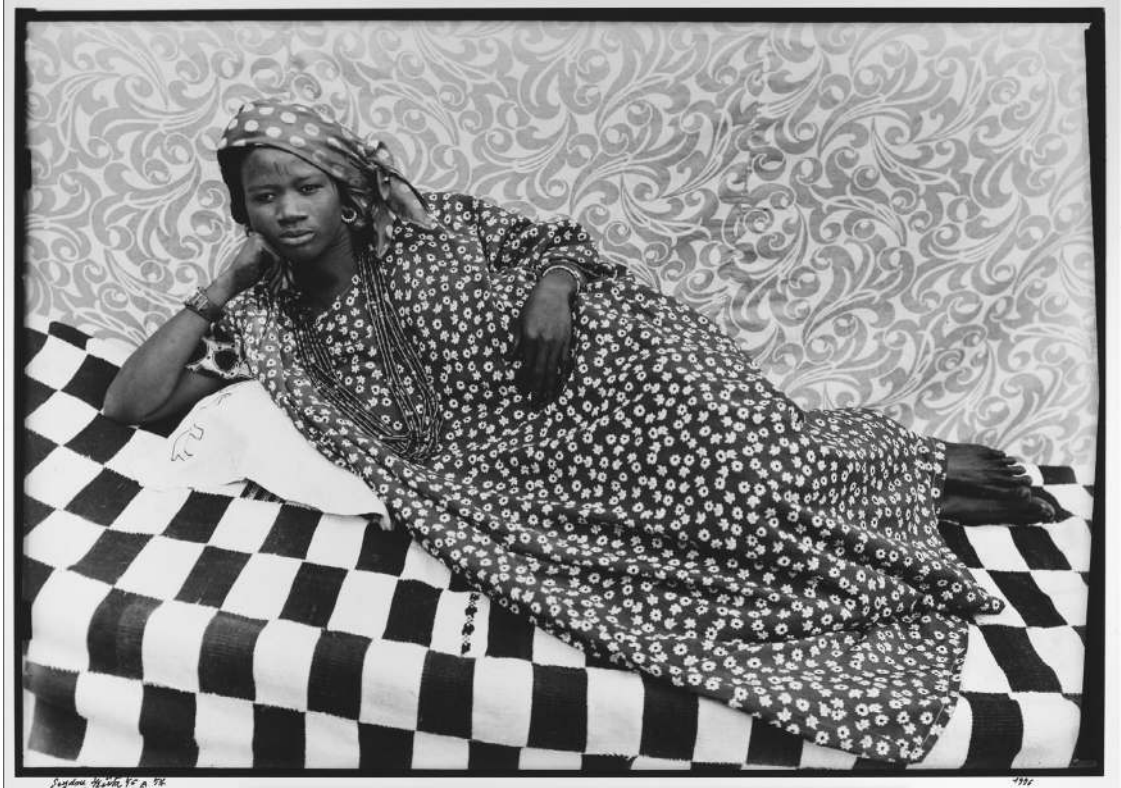
Curated by Enwezor in 2006, *Snap Judgments* featured over 250 works—ranging in scope from photographs and performance documentation to videos and installations—by thirty artists from across the African continent. Through these varied formats, the exhibition challenged both photography’s mimetic capabilities, or documentary status, and long-standing narratives about gender and sexuality in Africa as well as race and identity, more broadly. This approach is especially evident in *Lucie’s Fur*, a photographic and video series by South African Tracey Rose (b. 1974) included in *Snap Judgments* (see Plate 16). Filmed and photographed in her studio and on location in Johannesburg, South Africa, Rose constructed the work as a “tableau vivant,” or “living picture” (a term we discuss in more depth in Chapter 2), in which actors, including herself, perform scenes taken from works of art and literature. For her source material, Rose turned to biblical and literary narratives about the origin of humankind as well as archaeological and scientific research about “Lucy,” the extinct species *Australopithecus Afarensis* discovered at the site of Hadar in Ethiopia in 1974. Rose used this material to retell the Christian origin story of Adam and Eve through the allegorical characters of two black gay lovers named Adam and Yves. Through these and other characters, Rose weaves together an alternate African allegory of creation that at once troubles racial typologies and biblical imagery and serves to interrogate established religious ideas about gender, sexuality, and the nuclear family.

In contrast to *Snap Judgments*’s more recent, varied, and globalized photographic works, *In/Sight*, curated ten years earlier by Enwezor in conjunction with Clare Bell, Danielle Tilkin, and Octavio Zaya, was more traditional in scope. To this end, much of the work in the exhibition was portraiture, produced during the period in which African nations gained their independence. But though the photographers in *In/Sight* did not approach the medium with the same conceptual and self-reflexive frames of reference as the artists in *Snap Judgments*, they nonetheless represented a crucial shift from a colonial to a distinctly modern African photography. Among the thirty artists represented in the exhibition, commercial studio photographers Seydou Keita and Malick Sidibé stand out (see Fig. 9.4). Working at slightly different times in Mali, both photographers pose their fashionably dressed subjects, who gaze assertively out at the viewer, as distinctly self-determined and modern. In so doing, they serve as historical precursors to the “analytical, postdocumentary photographic work” of the artists in *Snap Judgments*.<sup>16</sup>

Together *In/Sight* and *Snap Judgments* established a historical lineage of African photography that until then had been entirely absent in the history of photography. At the same time, the exhibitions also set forth certain ideas about which types of photography constituted an African tradition. Most critics, for instance, lauded *In/Sight* for its portraiture; yet, the exhibition also included documentary forms, most notably a large section dedicated to the mid-century photojournalism of *Drum* magazine as well as the photography of South African David Goldblatt (whose practice we take up in Chapter 4). This embrace of documentary photography, however, ended there. As photo historian Darren Newbury laments, “*In/Sight* appears in retrospect to have been an obituary for the documentary tradition in Africa.” Here Newbury comments on how, after its inclusion in *In/Sight*, documentary photography not only “disappears from view” but, more detrimentally, becomes that against which Enwezor defines a “genuinely African” photography in *Snap Judgments*.<sup>17</sup>

For Enwezor, the documentary tradition, though bound historically and geographically to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, ultimately cannot offer a path forward for the “depiction of a social self, more specifically, the African self.” This is because, as a tool of “the primitivizing apparatus of colonialism” and, more recently, “the global media industry,” the informational capacity of documentary photography





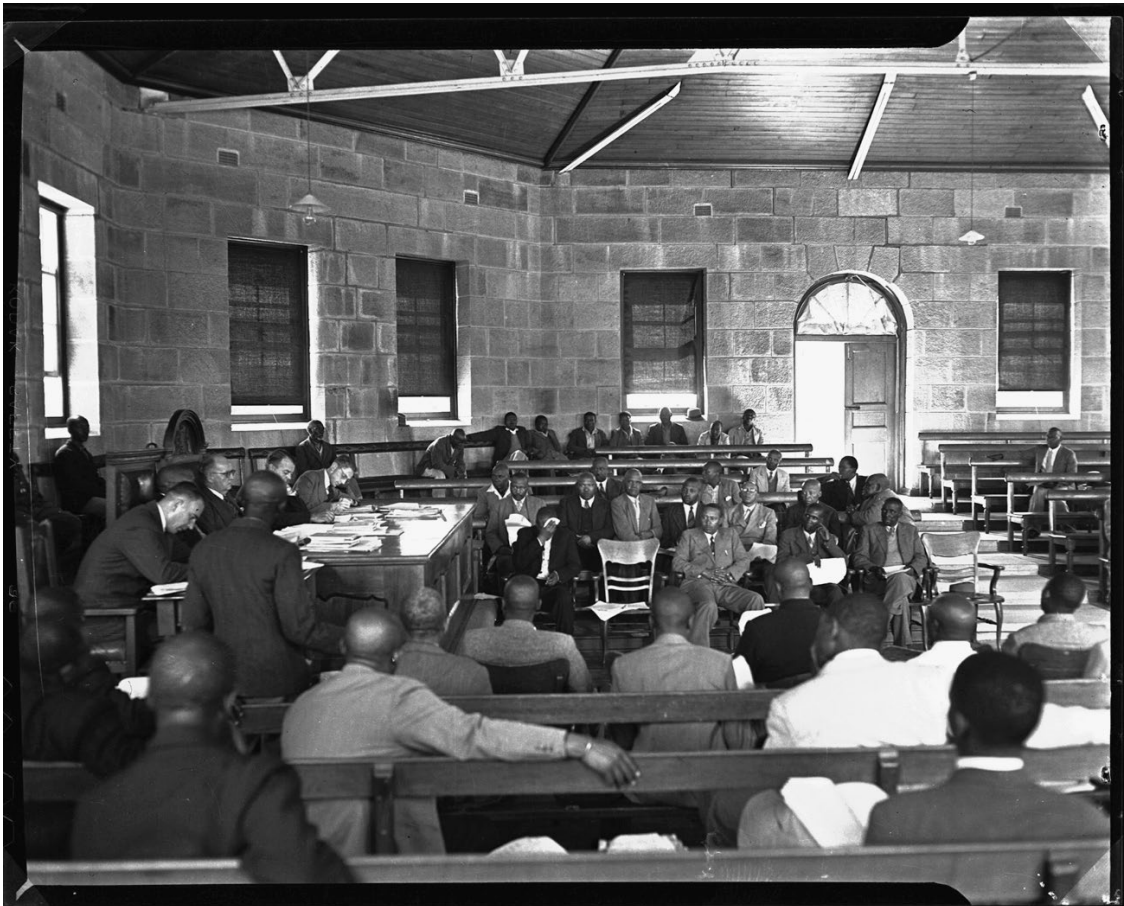
**Figure 9.4** Seydou Keita, *Untitled*, 1956–7, printed 1995. Digital image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

has “yielded a huge archive of visual tropes about Africa that have persisted in the popular imagination.”<sup>18</sup> Even worse, Enwezor claimed that within Africa, these documentary images perpetuated ideas of **anomie**—or the absence of clear social norms and values and a lack of sense of social regulation—which are at odds with how Africans see themselves photographically. But though Enwezor correctly notes how the assumed truth-value of documentary photography has historically been used in support of Afro-pessimism, the potential of this tradition to function as a tool of resistance and transformation, prior to the struggle against apartheid, likewise cannot be overlooked.

Since the nineteenth century, photography has been used within Africa, as Enwezor rightly argues, “to perpetuate a uniform, fixed, and singular approach to the study of Africa.”<sup>19</sup> Within the context of South Africa, idealized images of indigenous African life, produced by turn-of-the-century British photographer Sir Benjamin Stone and Irish-born South African photographer Alfred Duggan-Cronin, support this reading. Yet, by the 1940s this primitivizing and aestheticization of black South Africa was not the only model, especially as images of black urban life began to emerge alongside more dominant representations of indigenous black South Africans. The photographs of black South Africans by Lithuania-born Leon Levson (1883–1968) belong to this shift and, as Darren Newbury contends, signal the “tentative emergence of the social documentary paradigm in South Africa.”<sup>20</sup>



Levson's photographs of black South Africa gained notoriety through a series of exhibitions that took place in both England and South Africa in the late 1940s and early 1950s. With small differences, the exhibitions—whose titles ranged from *Meet the Bantu* (1947) and *Where Are We Going* (1948) to *Whither Now?* (1950) and *The Native Way of Life* (1950)—were all structured the same. Each was divided into nine sections whose images progressed from depictions of traditional black South African ways of life and styles of dress to representations of Western contact and urban employment. Through this organization, as the opening text to London's Royal African Society's *Meet the Bantu* states, Levson's photographs provided "an introduction to the Bantu people of South Africa at this crucial time in their development, as they strive to pass from their old primitive way of life into the stream of the Western World."<sup>21</sup> Given the paternalism of this approach, it seems counterintuitive that Newbury reads Levson's photographs as precursors to an oppositional documentary practice in South Africa. Indeed, this is the criticism leveled at Levson in 2005 by historians Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool. Borrowing from the **critique of documentary photography** initiated in the late 1970s and early 1980s by artists and critics such as Allan Sekula, Martha Rosler, and Abigail Solomon-Godeau (which we discuss in more detail in



**Figure 9.5** Leon Levson, *Basutoland National Council*, 1947. Courtesy of the artist and UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives.

Chapter 5), Minkley and Rassool argue that Levson's subjects were victims, turning to the words of Solomon-Godeau, of "a double act of subjugation: first in the social world that has produced its victims and second in the regime of the image produced within and for the same system that engenders the conditions it then re-presents."<sup>22</sup>

Without a doubt, Levson's exhibitions supported Afro-pessimism. The stereotypes about black South Africa perpetuated by his photographs denied Africans the very agency and self-determination that Enwezor and his fellow curators sought to reinstate through *Snap Judgments* and *In/Sight*. At the same time, in dismissing exhibitions of documentary photography such as Levson's outright, the more complex readings that they also engendered are adversely overlooked. For instance, while the introductory text and organizing framework of Levson's exhibitions promoted a white paternalist view of South Africans, they also pointed out, as Newbury explains, "the need for a more sophisticated appreciation of the African perspective." The concluding section of Levson's exhibitions, which sought to present a positive future for black urban South Africans, makes this point most forcibly. The concluding image for each exhibition was Levson's photograph of the Basutoland National Council (see Fig. 9.5). This image is important because it documented the means through which the Basuto people administered their own affairs. Even if still under the indirect guidance of British legislative rule, the self-determination represented in Levson's photograph was in direct conflict with the South African's government's "ambition," as Newbury continues, "to incorporate British protectorates, and from 1948, the Nationalists's ideological hostility to black involvement in any form of government."<sup>23</sup> It is such instances of African agency that subsequently led the anti-apartheid movement in the late 1980s to situate Levson's photographs, alongside those of Ernest Cole, Bob Gosani, Willie de Klerk, Ranjith Kally, and Kli Weinberg, as foundational to subsequent South African resistance photography. While not without ambiguity, and even, controversy, these exhibitions of Levson's documentary photography belong as much to the complexity of African photography's historical lineage as *Snap Judgments* and *In/Sight*.

## FOCUS BOX 9

*This text is an edited excerpt from curator Amy L. Powell's conversation with Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta of Raqs Media Collective on the occasion of the group exhibition Time/Image at Krannert Art Museum and Kinkead Pavilion at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in 2016.*

### **Correspondence and annotation: an interview with Raqs Media Collective**

*Monica Narula, Shuddhabrata Sengupta, and Amy L. Powell*

**Amy L. Powell (ALP):** I'm grateful for this opportunity to talk with Raqs about photography, because it could be perceived as a focused question—how do photographs appear in your work? But the history and theory of photography gives us questions that you put into play in many forms: performance, theatre, film, a full range of things. Photography for you is not medium-specific, but expansive. You

have said that you think of photography as encounter. Whether it's between Raqs and the archive, between text and image, presence and absence, the present with memory and history—how does the photographic encounter inform your work?

**Shuddhabrata Sengupta (SS):** We are interested in the sensation of thinking itself and the photograph as bearer of that sensation. That has partly to do with the tension between the indexical function that a photograph performs, which is that it is telling us that *here is a picture of this*, and its other iconic functions, which have to do with photography as a bearer of memory, as a possible purveyor of memories and dreams. Our initial interest in the status of the photograph stemmed from a curiosity about the nature of anthropological photography, where photographs were taken as objective instruments of the measure of human bodies. But we realized very quickly that these objective instruments—all these photographs of bodies against grids in prisons or hospitals or against anthropometric backgrounds—had their own poetics, which they sought to disguise.

**Monica Narula (MN):** And a politics.

**SS:** And a politics. But also that there is a rhetoric to this photography, there is a performance of facticity of truth that is actually a performance. And the nature of the photograph, because it is a condensation of light on a surface at a given point of time makes for the most perfect disguise for this performance. The performance of the photograph is sort of like hiding in plain sight. Our interest in the photographic has always been to ask questions of this performance, to be critical audiences of the performances made by photography.

**MN:** The word encounter has many stories in the sense that the encounter can be a romantic encounter, for example, but also in our parts of the world the word encounter implies an extrajudicial assassination by police, an encounter killing. Because the three of us are coming from a history of documentary, the idea of the encounter for us first comes from stepping in with the camera to allow a certain other kind of encounter in a public situation, in the midst of and yet protected by or sheltered by, or sharpened by the fact that you have the camera. And the camera has its own weight and heft and history there at every moment of the encounter. What is the quality of this encounter, what is the poetics and politics of this encounter that we are making? But at the same time, for us to *make* an encounter, not just to have an encounter, has become an interesting proposition. When the apparatus is no longer what's defining the encounter, then what is the nature of the photographic image when you're paying attention to its fictional aspect more than its fact aspect?

**ALP:** You think a lot about photographic archives and the performance of truth—you often use historical images in your work.

**MN:** The future is open, right, we don't know the future. But we're saying, okay, it's the same about the past; the past is also open. If we're acknowledging that both sides of this non-arrow of time or constructed arrow of time are to be left open, then you start finding tools to ask that question, and the archival image is that. There may be images that one has seen or one remembers but it's not that one is driven by the photograph first. So the encounter is really, okay, let's open this pipe out between past, present, and future, see what emerges from that. And then images are found that may help in the making of the riddle and the answering of it at the same time.

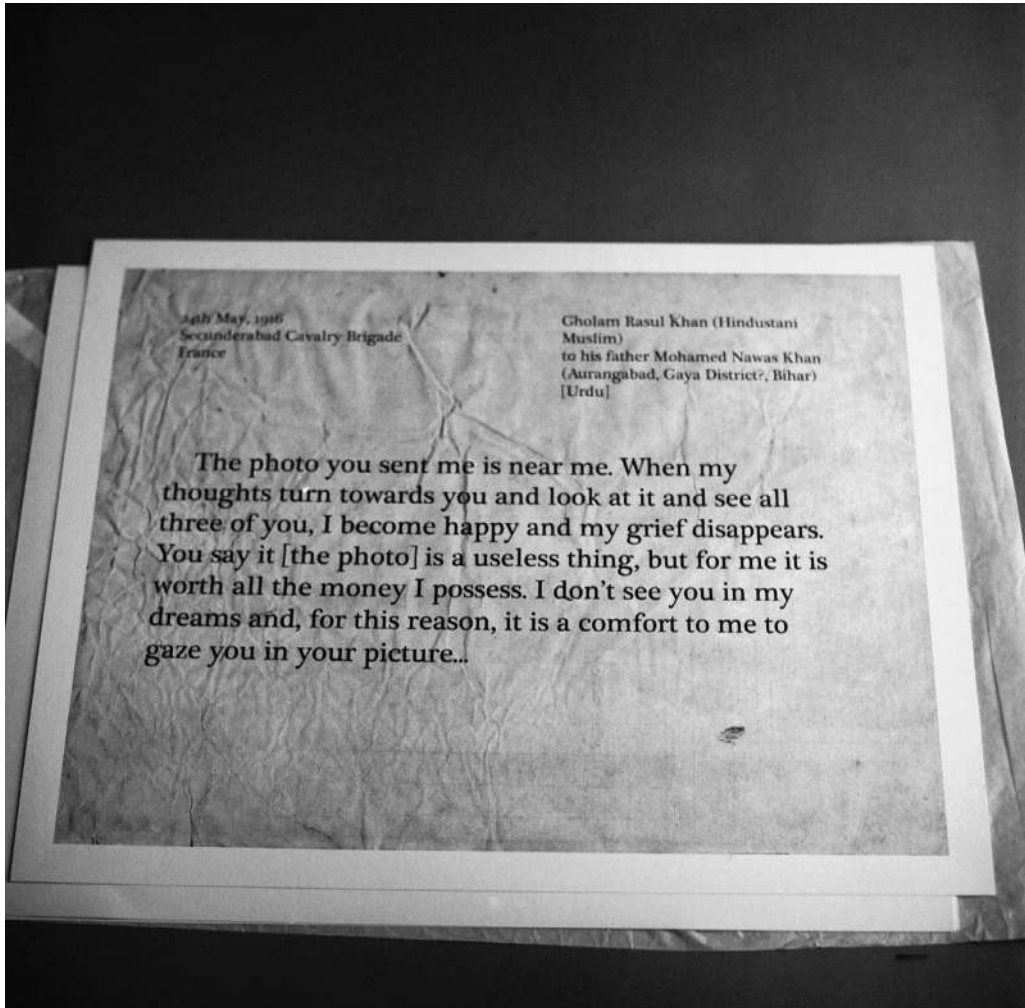
The idea of "Indra Jaal" or "Indra's Net," a metaphor used in Mahayana Buddhism to elucidate the idea of "dependent origination," suggests that everything in the world is inter-connected, and that everything reflects everything else at the same time. This is the concept that Tim Berners-Lee had in mind when he thought of the world wide web as a way of describing the domain created through hyperlinking. It also denotes the notion of going beyond personhood, how there is no such thing as a self that comes outside of the reflections that constitute each of us.

This line of thinking takes us beyond causes, effects and the indices of these relations. If one were to go beyond the arrow of time that connects an event and its trace, then we could begin to see not in terms of causes and consequences, but also as reflections and connections, as fully reflective nodes. We sometimes think about what would happen to the way we thought about photography if we were to think about time and consciousness in this way. The photograph reflects everything; it's a surface that throws things back at you. This is something we've thought a lot about. It means one is free not to obsess about the specific points of origin of an image, because maybe one can hold in suspension the question of whether or not there are such origins. How does our thinking about photography change if we say that instead of an arrow there is a boomerang of time? What is the relation between form, part, and idea, and where does this take you? This question is a tough one, but it's a productive one, I think.

**ALP:** A primary mode of encounter as well is among Raqs yourselves. An encounter with the archival image is that much more complicated, or at least shaped, because it's through the three of you that things happen.

**SS:** It's a practice of correspondence and annotation. It's interesting to think of a work we made called *A History of Photography* (2014) as an instance of what you mention because what we do between ourselves is a correspondence practice, we write to each other all the time (see Fig. 9.6). *A History of Photography* is also a correspondence

showing text from letters written by soldiers from sub continental India in the First World War in the battlefields of Europe. And each of these letters—there are several of them in the work—are actually letters about photographs.



**Figure 9.6** Raqs Media Collective, *A History of Photography*, 2014. Courtesy of the artists and Frith Street Gallery, London.

**SS:** Yes, fragments from letters about photographs, because these are young men who are encountering photography for the first time. Photography has an interesting history in South Asia. It comes primarily as a means to record mortality. It starts in Bengal as a field of mortuary photography, as commemorative photography of deceased people with their relatives. And there is another history of photography, which is a military



history. So, because we've been interested in photography as a marker of the threshold between life and death and as a kind of marker of signs of life, both the military history of photography and the photography of the moment.

**MN:** Of passing.

**SS:** Of the threshold of being alive and not alive are of interest to us. We have also used a photograph by Felice Beato [in a work called *Seen at Secundrabagh*] dated to the early spring of 1858. It is part of a suite of photographs which, we conjecture, are the first records of human presence in war as bodies. Felice Beato is a photographer from Italy and he ends up being a roving war correspondent in the Crimean War. But the photographic apparatus he is using is not sophisticated enough to register the presence of moving bodies. So there are battle scenes, quite ghostly, you see cannon balls and tents and weapons, but there are no human beings, not even bodies in those photographs. Then he comes to India in 1858, barely one and a half years later, and he starts taking photographs in the wake of the war of 1857, which is called the Sepoy mutiny. And then he moves to China, where he records the Opium War, so he's in a sense the first war photographer to show you human bodies in battlefields. Then there is an explosion of photography, and there is photography of the American Civil War, which actually becomes the largest body of images of human beings in battle at that time. But the canons of war photography and the consequences of conflict are more or less set in place by the 1857 photographs, which have immense circulation. They are produced as albums and postcards, they are circulated and become the basis for lithographic prints. So we were very interested in this conjunction of the photographic image, military encounters, what happens to bodies in battle, and what happens to bodies facing battle. By the time we get to the First World War, which is what *A History of Photography* is referring to, there are soldiers looking at photographs in Europe, and they're actually writing back to their relatives, their friends, their brothers, their lovers, about photographs. One of them, for instance, is, "with this letter I'm enclosing a picture card showing the death of an English girl. You will notice the man in the picture and the young woman lying senseless on the ground in front of him. She was a nurse in Belgium and used to attend to the wounded. Nowadays Belgium is in the hands of the Germans. The name of the young girl is Miss Kavell. She was charged with the crime of helping English soldiers escape to England via the Netherlands and was sentenced to death. She fainted, and the soldiers refused to fire on her body and then the officer blew her brains out with his revolver." So it's this strange episode of an Indian soldier describing the death of an English nurse who was helping people desert. And there are other such photographs; there are other such accounts. There are all of these annotations to the photograph as a bearer of stories and memories.



**MN:** This was a response to an invitation to make a photographic work, and it was interesting to us what form it should take, playing with the status that text, image and photograph can have formally. It is a digital print of the text from the letters shot on medium format film.

**SS:** Of letters about photographs.

**MN:** There is also that heightening of affect that happens in the situation of crisis and trauma and fear, and we wanted to talk about that aspect as well. This is *A History of Photography* in that sense, this is very much a story of the image itself.

**SS:** Speaking of the annotative process, here is a photograph by Henri Cartier-Bresson. *Run on a Bank* is taken in Shanghai in 1948 when the People's Liberation Army, which is the Chinese Red Army, is moving into Shanghai. Everything is in flux. Shanghai is a commercial center, people are very afraid of what's going to happen to money and capital, so there's a run on a bank. We thought in 2013 that this was a very interesting moment to revisit this image and its history. Initially we thought we would work with the fabric of the image itself, with the material of the image. So we wrote a letter to the Cartier-Bresson estate asking for permission and there was no reply. So the only way to annotate this moment was to actually make it happen again, which is what happens in *Re-run* (2013). This is a video work at the threshold of movement and stillness because it's a video work that barely moves.

**MN:** And yet the movement is essential to it.

**SS:** There is a character in the video who lifts his head and looks straight at you. As in *La jetée* by Chris Marker, it's that kind of moment where something happens and a glance is exchanged. We have sometimes said that Cartier-Bresson took that photograph so that we could do this. Or that he's taking that photograph as the world financial crisis is happening in 2013 because of what was going to happen in 1948, except that 1948 is the future of 2013. Annotated possibilities create these wormholes in time and space, which make you think about connected but different moments of history. It also makes the claim that 1948 and 2013 are contemporaneous moments, so they become interlocutors to each other through the making of an image.

## Everyday pictures

Photography's status as art within the museum has not only been at the expense of documentary photography but also so-called **vernacular photography**. Also referred to as amateur or everyday

photography, vernacular photography is frequently defined as connected to or originating from the people. It is produced, in short, by ordinary individuals with no professional training or schooling and mostly for utilitarian purposes. With little monetary or seeming artistic value, a resistance to categorization, and a tendency to have multiple authors, these largely banal and ubiquitous images “don’t easily fit into a historical narrative still anxiously, insecurely, focused on originality, innovation, and individualism,” as photography historian Geoffrey Batchen argues.<sup>24</sup> For this reason, vernacular photography has historically been neglected in traditional art historical accounts of the medium and, most especially, the art museum.

While these characteristics of the genre ring true, as photography historian Catherine Zuromskis reminds us, this does not mean that vernacular photography has gone unnoticed by art museums, especially recently. Beginning in 1998, with the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition *Snapshots: The Photography of Everyday Life, 1888 to the Present* and continuing with the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s *Other Pictures: Vernacular Photographs from the Thomas Walther Collection* in 2000 and the J. Paul Getty Museum’s exhibition *Close to Home: An American Album* in 2004, vernacular photography, Zuromskis explains, has repeatedly been the subject of numerous significant museum exhibitions. Yet, the problem is that when vernacular photography is recognized by these museums, it is generally at the expense of its social and cultural functions. The Metropolitan’s exhibition *Other Pictures* is a case in point. Rather than focus on how its exhibited snapshots were initially used, the curators emphasized their status as “successful failures,” chosen by the discerning eye of collector Thomas Walther, whose name appeared prominently within the exhibition’s title. One notable exception to this aestheticizing tendency of the exhibition of vernacular photography is ***The Family Camera***, on view concurrently in 2017 at Canada’s Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) and the Art Gallery of Mississauga.

Organized by the curatorial team of Deepali Dewan (lead), Jennifer Orpana, Thy Phu, Julie Crooks, and Sarah Bassnett, with the assistance of Sarah Parsons and Silvia Forni, as part of a larger collaborative research partnership called the Family Camera Network, *The Family Camera* differs from previous exhibitions of vernacular photography in several notable ways. First, rather than use more general terms such as “vernacular photography,” “snapshots,” “popular photography,” or even “amateur,” the curators deliberately chose the phrase “family photography.” They justify this shift in terminology on the basis that, as “visual evidence of the imbrication of the state and sexuality in everyday life,” family photographs are already “broad and complex” and therefore do not need to be replaced by these seemingly more capacious categories. Another significant feature of the exhibition is that its more than 200 objects were acquired not through dealers or collector donors, as is the case with most exhibitions of vernacular photography, but from actual families who had migrated in the near or distant past, either to or within Canada. To ensure that the “thick histories and private networks of signification that gave these images meaning in the first place” were not lost, members of the Family Camera Network conducted oral histories with fifty narrators about their relationships to the donated materials, including how these items “were produced, circulated, and acquired meanings over time.”<sup>25</sup> Finally, unlike other collections of vernacular photography, which typically end at the digital age, the Family Camera Network actively collected **born-digital** images. The curators presented these images within the exhibition on digital screens and also preserved the digital files, alongside other donated analog materials, as part of the permanent collections of the ROM as well as the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, its partner organization in the project.

Through these collected visual and auditory materials, *The Family Camera* positioned family photography first and foremost as a social and cultural practice. This means that rather than assume a universal definition of the family or invest in the art of family photography, the exhibition considered how



**Figure 9.7** THE FAMILY CAMERA, INSTALLATION VIEW, 2017. Photo Credit- Brian Boyle, MPA, FPPO. With permission of the Royal Ontario Museum © ROM.

this genre both visually represents and structures a sense of self, family, community, and nation across time and space. The exhibition's introductory image speaks to this goal. After passing through a mirrored hallway that includes a series of digital reproductions depicting family photographs of people with cameras, viewers encountered a wall-sized enlargement of a young boy posing with a small doll in front of the family luggage (see Fig. 9.7). The boy depicted in the image is five-year-old Hon Lu. Visitors know this because Hon's family donated materials to Family Camera Network. From the family's oral history, visitors learn that the photograph was taken in 1979 by Hon's mother, Luong Lu-Thai, during a stop-over at Japan's Narita International Airport on the Lu-Thai family's way to Canada from Hong Kong. After the fall of Saigon in 1975, the family fled Vietnam in a wooden boat, leaving behind everything, including the family's photographs. While waiting for their resettlement application to be processed, Luong sent a letter to her parents, who were still in Vietnam, asking them to mail the abandoned photographs to the family's temporary residence in Hong Kong. The large green and white box in the snapshot next to the family's luggage is the box of family photography sent by Hon's grandparents.

To further emphasize this history of displacement and recovery, next to the photograph of Hon, the curators placed a framed letter from Hon's grandfather. In the letter, the last one he sent, Hon's grandfather confirms that he mailed the family photographs as Luong had requested. While this letter arrived safely, the boat carrying Hon's grandparents from Vietnam, which they took shortly after posting this letter, sunk and they did not survive. In pairing this letter with the enlarged snapshot, the curators not only poignantly

preserve the story behind this image but, more crucially, suggest how the movement of family photographs across great distances serves to visually assemble families that cannot otherwise be together. As such, the photograph of Hon “pushes back against a narrow idea of Canada and of Canadian family photographs being produced only within the geographic terms of the Canadian state, thus de-provincializing our understanding of Canada” and, as the curators continue, “illuminates the transnational dimensions of visual kinship.”<sup>26</sup>

Because most family photographs, returning to Batchen, “are cloyingly sentimental in content and repetitively uncreative as pictures,”<sup>27</sup> their ability to establish familial and national identity across time and space is often overlooked. One of the ways that *The Family Camera* sought to overcome this problem was through enlarging the snapshot of Hon as well as another image in the exhibition. In so doing, the curators compel visitors to engage with family photographs, usually quite small in size, on different, even unfamiliar terms. The practice of displaying enlarged and, sometimes even, recropped photographs was not new to *The Family Camera*. Many associate this practice with the mass media approach employed by Edward Steichen for his much discussed 1955 exhibition *The Family of Man* at MoMA, which would go on to travel to over 150 museums worldwide before becoming permanently installed in 1994 in Clervaux Castle in Luxembourg. For Steichen, however, the practice of enlarging and recropping the 503 images on display in *The Family of Man* was more about creating an immersive viewing experience than defamiliarizing viewing habits. Likewise, for the 1944 exhibition ***The American Snapshot: An Exhibition of the Folk Art of the Camera***, also on view at MoMA, Willard D. Morgan, director of the museum’s department of photography, enlarged and recropped many of the featured images. But whereas Steichen hoped to use this display strategy to create a more unified, global family, Morgan, in fact, employed it to make the pictures better or, in short, to make them more like art.

For *The American Snapshot*, Willard selected 350 photographs from thousands that had been submitted to contests sponsored by the **Eastman Kodak Company** and subsequently purchased by the company (see Fig. 9.8). Such contests were part of Kodak’s larger marketing strategy to “cultivate a sense among Americans that their ‘amateur’ photographs,” as scholar Nancy Martha West argues, “could in fact attain a quality high enough to sell the practice of photography to other Americans.”<sup>28</sup> It was precisely their status as commodities that troubled Nancy Newhall, who at the time was serving as acting curator of the photography department at MoMA, while her husband Beaumont Newhall was away on military service. For Nancy, what was most problematic about this exhibition was its “low” standards. Two years earlier she had proposed an exhibition on the origins of the snapshot aesthetic, which was to include the photography of Paul Martin, Alfred Stieglitz, Helen Levitt, and Henri Cartier-Bresson. She tried in vain to convince Morgan to supplement the exhibition with these kinds of *quality* images “which have really broadened and influenced man’s vision, and whose impact is felt throughout the art of this century.”<sup>29</sup> For Morgan, however, the import of the snapshot, which he likened to folk art, was that it was “spontaneous, almost effortless” or, as he continues, “unself-conscious.”<sup>30</sup> Here Morgan seems to value the snapshot for its unmediated or accidental nature. Paradoxically, however, the photographs that he selected to include in *The American Snapshot* were not so-called successful failures. Rather, as art historian Erin O’Toole points out, they were “photographic tripe—literally pictures of babies and puppies—antiseptic, uninteresting, and aggressively cheerful pictures,”<sup>31</sup> which Morgan in turn enlarged and recropped in an effort to make them more visually compelling, or like art.

*The American Snapshot* suggests that the difficulty of aligning the ubiquity and banality of family photography with the aestheticizing function of the art museum is not a recent issue. In fact, this problem extends back to the nineteenth century. In 1897, British pictorial photographer George Davison, who in



**Figure 9.8** Joe May, *L'Allegro* in *The American Snapshot: An Exhibition of the Folk Art of the Camera* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1944). Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

1889 became the director of the Eastman Photographic Materials Company in England, organized the **Eastman Photographic Exhibition** (see Fig. 9.9). On view at the New Gallery, in London's Regent Street, the exhibition, like *The American Snapshot*, was the product of a Kodak-sponsored competition. In this instance, two British art photographers, Henry Peach Robinson and Andrew Pringle, as well as painter George Adolphus Storey, an associate member of the Royal Academy, were tasked with selecting images from over 25,000 entries that came from across the globe. For Eastman, this exhibition again functioned as a form of advertisement. As he pointed out, "the exhibit is going to dispose of the idea that Kodaks cannot be used for the highest class of work." But though Eastman reported that "[e]veryone is astonished at its size and extent as well as its beauty,"<sup>32</sup> there remained some uncertainty about the exhibition's aesthetic value. To this end, Davison convinced several of his art photography friends, including Robinson, Eustace Calland, J. Craig Annan, Frank Meadow Sutcliffe, Francis Benjamin Johnson, and other prominent pictorial photographers, to try out Kodak rollfilm cameras. Their resulting





**Figure 9.9** Installation view, Kodak exhibition interior, 1897. Printing out paper print of a Kodak exhibition interior designed by George Walton (1867–1933), at the New Gallery, Regent Street, London. Courtesy of Getty Images.

images were in turn printed as hand-pulled photogravure plates in a thirty-paged exhibition catalogue titled *Kodak Portfolio—Souvenir of the Eastman Photographic Exhibition 1897, a Collection of Kodak Film Pictures by Eminent Photographers*. Today, this collectible portfolio, printed on heavy antique, deckle-edged paper, is more well known than the exhibition.

In their attempt to justify Kodak snapshots as art, both *The American Snapshot* and the *Eastman Photographic Exhibition* failed to fully appreciate the breadth and allure of the company's marketing strategies and, most crucially, how Kodak attempted to use the judgment seat of the museum to legitimize (and sell) their products. Returning once again to *The Family Camera* helps to clarify this point. In the exhibition's thematic section "Snapshots don't grow up," the curators included family photographs that make use of popular visual tropes to represent childhood: the baby photo, the birthday photo, photos of girls with their dolls, and Christmas snapshots, among others. But rather than attempt to legitimize the aesthetic value of these photographs, the curators instead juxtaposed them with reproductions of similar Kodak advertisements. Through these comparisons, they encouraged viewers to think not only about the visual conventions of the snapshot genre but, more significantly, how Kodak's



marketing strategies normalized certain representations of the family, which consumers, in turn, incorporated into their own family photography collections. At the same time that the photographs in this section unmasked Kodak's commodification of family photography, they also pointed to moments of resistance, such as when a child refuses to cooperate for the camera, when those conventions begin to break down. The photograph of Hon ostensibly belongs here as well. Though he is a willing subject and thus the product of convention and sentimentality, the kinds of intrafamilial and transnational identities that his picture so movingly evokes demonstrate that Kodak's commodification of the snapshot, in which *The American Snapshot* and the *Eastman Photographic Exhibition* are irrevocably intertwined, could be put to different ends and that the museum's judgment seat could be deployed for something beyond legitimizing photography as art.

## Summary

- How and what museums collect, organize, and display form the basis of particular narratives and interests about photography.
- The Museum of Modern Art in New York has played a fundamental role in setting forth the terms of photography's status as art.
- Beginning in the early 1990s, a group of African curators, writers, and thinkers initiated a series of exhibitions to restore agency to African photographers as well as counter the kinds of disparaging misrepresentations about Africa promoted by a documentary lens.
- Many curators have found vernacular photography's ubiquity and banality difficult to align with the aestheticizing function of the art museum.

## Discussion points

- Why are museum exhibitions never neutral?
- What are some of the ways in which curators at the Museum of Modern Art have sanctioned photography as art?
- What role does documentary photography play in the exhibitions *Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography* and *In/Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present*?
- What makes *The Family Camera* different from other exhibitions of vernacular photography?

## Additional case studies

*The Family of Man* (1955)

*For a New World to Come: Experiments in Japanese Art and Photography, 1968–1979* (2015)

*The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* (1851)

NADOC '86 *Exhibition of Aboriginal and Islander Photographers* (1986)

*Universal Archive: The Condition of the Document and the Modern Photographic Utopia* (2009)

Bente Geving (b. 1952)

Rosalind Nashashibi (b. 1973) and Lucy Skaer (b. 1975)

Charles Sheeler (1883–1965)

Giorgio Sommer (1834–1914)

Thomas Struth (b. 1954)

## Notes

- 1 See Gustavo Buntinx, "Communities of Sense/Communities of Sentiment: Globalization and the Museum Void in an Extreme Periphery," in Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaia, and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (eds.), *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 219–46.
- 2 Salah Hassan, "Vers une renaissance," in *Ja Taa, Prendre l'image, Illes Rencontres Africaines de la Photographie, Bamako* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1998), 9.
- 3 "Ocean of Images: New Photography 2015," Museum of Modern Art, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1539>.
- 4 George Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field," *October* 114 (Fall 2005): 124.
- 5 Colby Chamberlain, "Ocean of Images: Museum of Modern Art," *Artforum* 54, no. 7 (March 2016): 277.
- 6 Douglas Crimp, "Close-Up: Indirect Answers—Douglas Crimp on Louise Lawler's *Why Pictures Now*, 1981," *Artforum* 51, no. 1 (September 2012): 505.
- 7 Beaumont Newhall, *Focus: Memoirs of a Life in Photography* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1993), 46.
- 8 Sadakichi Hartmann, "A Plea for Straight Photography," *American Amateur Photographer* 16 (March 1904): 101–9; reprinted in Beaumont Newhall, ed., *Photography: Essays and Images* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1980), 186.
- 9 Ansel Adams, "An Exposition of My Photographic Technique," *Camera Craft* 41, no. 1 (January 1934): 19.
- 10 A. D. Coleman, "Conspicuous by His Absence: Concerning the Mysterious Disappearance of William Mortensen," in Larry Lytle and Michael Moynihan (eds.), *American Grotesque: The Life and Art of William Mortensen* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2014), 279.
- 11 Gerry Badger, "'The Most Remarkable Discovery of Modern Times': Three Photographic Exhibitions in 1850s London," in Alessandra Mauro (ed.), *Photoshow: Landmark Exhibitions That Defined the History of Photography* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2014), 50.
- 12 Julius Bryant, ed., *Art and Design for All: The Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), 207.
- 13 Okwui Enwezor, "Okwui Enwezor and Artur Waltherr: A Conversation," in *Recent Histories: Contemporary African Photography and Video Art* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2017), 13.
- 14 Carol Squiers, "Seeing Africa Through African Eyes," *New York Times*, May 26, 1996, H30.
- 15 Okwui Enwezor, *Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2006), 11.
- 16 Enwezor, *Snap Judgments*, 25.
- 17 Darren Newbury, *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa* (Unisa, South Africa: Unisa Press, 2009), 2–3.
- 18 Enwezor, *Snap Judgments*, 12–13, 25–6.
- 19 Enwezor, *Snap Judgments*, 11.

- 20** Newbury, *Defiant Images*, 18.
- 21** Introduction to *Meet the Bantu: A Story in Changing Cultures*, reproduced in André Odendaal (ed.), *The Leon Levson Photographic Collection: Catalogue and Background Material* (Bellville, South Africa: University of the Western Cape, 1990), 75.
- 22** Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Who Is Speaking Thus? Some Questions about Documentary Photography," in *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 176, cited in Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, "Photography with a difference: Leon Levson's camera studies and photographic exhibitions of native life in South Africa, 1947–1950," *Kronos* 31 (November 2005): 213.
- 23** Newbury, *Defiant Images*, 52, 55.
- 24** Geoffrey Batchen, "Snapshots," *photographies* 1, no. 2 (September 2008): 124.
- 25** Thy Phu, Elspeth H. Brown, and Deepali Dewan, "The Family Camera Network," *Photography and Culture* 10, no. 2 (July 2017): 149–52.
- 26** Phu, Brown, and Dewan, "The Family Camera Network," 159.
- 27** Batchen, "Snapshots," 123.
- 28** Nancy Martha West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 27.
- 29** Nancy Newhall, *Enduring Moment*, unpublished manuscript, 248, cited in Erin O'Toole, "No Democracy in Quality: Ansel Adams, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall, and the Founding of the Department of Photographs at the Museum of Modern Art," Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 2010, 252.
- 30** Willard D. Morgan, *The American Snapshot: An Exhibition of the Folk Art of the Camera* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1944), n.p.
- 31** O'Toole, "No Democracy in Quality," 257.
- 32** Elizabeth Brayer, *George Eastman: A Biography* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 172.

## Selected further reading

- Caraffa, Costanza, ed. *Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History*. Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2011.
- Edwards, Elizabeth. *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2001.
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# 10

## ARCHIVES

**Archives** are often thought of as repositories, where public records, historical documents, and photographs are classified, stored, and preserved. But, though frequently delineated by these contents, archives are not passive receptacles. Instead, taking a cue from photography historian Elizabeth Edwards, they are “actively resourceful” sites, in which history, memory, and knowledge are continually produced, negotiated, and contested.<sup>1</sup> This conceptualization of archives also extends to photography, which, as art historian Ernst van Alphen notes, “is not only an archival record, it is also an archive in itself.”<sup>2</sup> This reciprocity between photography and archives depends in part on the medium’s assumed indexicality. Because a photograph is thought to hold not only a similarity with or a resemblance to what it depicts but also to have been directly caused by this referent, many delineate photographic archives as reliable and truthful. Yet, this causal relationship between a photograph and its referent, as Chapter 1 points out, is anything but stable. The meanings of photographs are elusive; they shift over time and vary according to the contexts in which they are used and produced. This contingency also extends to photographic archives, which “compel us,” as archivist Tim Schlak writes, “with their capacity to evoke rather than tell, to suggest rather than explain, so that they simultaneously allure and frustrate us with what we naively perceive in their content to be history and fact.”<sup>3</sup>

**Thomas Demand** (b. 1964) references this uncertainty in the construction of his 1995 photograph *Archive*. To make this image, Demand first turned to a photograph of the archive of Nazi propagandist and filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl. From this image, he meticulously built, using colored paper and cardboard, a life-size model of Riefenstahl’s archive. Next, he photographed the reproduction and then destroyed it, leading to, among other things, a meditation about the uneasy relationship that photographic archives share with history and vice versa. The subject matter of *Archive* further advances this contingency. The photograph depicts a room from Riefenstahl’s film archive with what appears to be endless rows of shelves containing identical gray, unlabeled boxes that spill onto the floor in neatly arranged stacks. Yet, while these boxes appear neutral, orderly, and anonymous, they are not passive receptacles. Instead, returning to Edwards, their very organization and character are part and parcel of the archive’s “constitution and meaning.” In other words, what may appear as a seemingly unexceptional space is not happenchance; instead, the very organization and construction of archives “elicit responses, stimulate affects, which would not have existed in that form if the photograph, its card, its box had not existed in that way.”<sup>4</sup>

It is this conceptualization of photographic archives as not only institutions and instruments of history, memory, and knowledge, but also as having agency, affect, and materiality, that is the focus of this chapter. To take up some of these complexities and contradictions, each section considers a single material and affective quality of the archive: its function as a collection, its connection to memory, and its relationship to time. Each section begins by situating these qualities in terms of the archival tendencies of recent photographers. At the same time, each section also historically situates this so-called archival turn in relation to photography’s own distinctive archival potential, including its use throughout history to

document the past, impose order, and mediate identity and social relations. By looking at these two narratives simultaneously, the chapter foregrounds the ways in which photography and archives both depend upon each other and are dynamically interwoven.

## Collections

In *Archive Fever*, first published in French in 1995 as *Mal d'archive: une impression freudienne*, philosopher Jacques Derrida theorizes the archive in terms of two conflicting forces: the death drive (Thanatos) and the pleasure principle (Eros). Through these antithetical terms, he suggests that archives are defined by a struggle over what they preserve or save and what they destroy or exclude. This leads Derrida to define the “archivization” process as that which “produces as much as it records the event.”<sup>5</sup> This contingency of the archive, or the notion that the social, political, and technological forces that go into producing an archive shape history, memory, and knowledge as much as its contents, including what is left out, is central to the practice of **Akram Zaatari** (b. 1966) and, most notably, his work with the Arab Image Foundation (AIF). Founded in 1997 by Zaatari, Fouad Elkoury, and Samer Mohdad, the AIF initially grew out of a desire by these artists to acquire and preserve photography in the Arab region that was being lost to both natural disasters and the destruction of war. The AIF, however, quickly exceeded this more traditional collecting function to also become a site for staging contemporary art projects that explore the archivization process itself.

Zaatari’s ongoing project based on the archive of Lebanese commercial photographer Hashem el Madani addresses this distinction. Zaatari met el Madani in his hometown of Saïda (Sidon) in 1998 and promptly became interested not only in his individual photographs but, more significantly, his working process. To foreground, as Zaatari explains, “*how* Madani worked and how he made his choices,” Zaatari turned to a number of artistic strategies—restoration, collection, research, restaging, exhibition, filming, among others—to highlight aspects of el Madani’s archive and Lebanese society, more broadly, that had otherwise remained hidden or unseen. For his series, *Objects of study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices*, Zaatari compiled photographs that el Madani took between 1948 and 1982, including a 1957 portrait of Mrs. Baqari (see Fig. 10.1). For this image, el Madani, upon the insistence of the subject’s jealous husband, made deep scratches in the negative so that Mrs. Baqari’s face would be forever mutilated. Zaatari revitalizes this damaged photograph by mounting it on white paper and displaying it in a plain white frame with el Madani’s signature on the back. Presented on the gallery or museum wall, the disfigured image speaks to gender expectations in 1950s Lebanon at the same time as it “expose[s],” as art historian Hannah Feldman explains, “something of photography’s economy, conventions, and even conflicting relationship with the social and political.”<sup>6</sup> In this way, Zaatari uses el Madani’s archive both as a collection of images and a platform from which to study photography, history, and desire.

Like Zaatari, **Joachim Schmid** (b. 1955) also operates as a collector and curator. But, where Zaatari’s interest focuses on the story, gesture, or performance constructed around archives, Schmid, guided by the principle that basically everything in the world is worth looking at, is more concerned with resuscitating that which has been omitted, scorned, or neglected. This approach forms the basis of his project *Archiv*. Produced between 1986 and 1999, *Archiv* consists of 725 panels, with each panel containing anywhere from two to sixty images that Schmid mostly found—postcards, baseball cards, commercial photographs, snapshots, photographs of missing people, newspaper images, to name but a few—and organized into



**Figure 10.1** Akram Zaatari, *Objects of Study/Hashem el Madami/Studio Practices/Scratched portrait of Mrs. Baqari Saida (Lebanon) 1957, 2004*. Courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg.

groups (see Fig. 10.2). While some of the categories employed by Schmid are organized around familiar visual tropes—people with dogs, wedding couples, new cars, sports celebrities—overall, the collections are largely arbitrary and depend as much on content and type as form and pattern. Some panels, for instance, are arranged according to technical characteristics, such as cropped heads, a finger in front of the lens, and double exposure. The result of this cool indifference on the part of Schmid, however, is not only a leveling of visual culture. What Schmid’s archivization, itself carefully choreographed, enables is for a heretofore “buried past,” as curator John S. Weber explains using the metaphor of Frankenstein’s monster, “to rise and walk again.”<sup>7</sup>

Schmid’s determination to give that which has been excluded or excised from the archive an opportunity to live again also informs his series *Pictures from the Street*, which he began in 1982 and concluded in 2012. For this series, made up of 1,000 photographs that he found discarded on streets across the world, Schmid amassed an archive of anonymous images that are identified and subsequently displayed only by the time and location of when and where he discovered them. For Schmid, what is





**Figure 10.2** Joachim Schmid, *Archiv 28*, 1988. © Joachim Schmid. Courtesy of the artist.

most “interesting” about these images is not who or what they depict but rather their “destructive energy.” Here he refers to the energy that was expended when these images, with their tears, scratches, and missing parts, were damaged and discarded. It is this “destructive energy” that Schmid maintains transforms the photographs from images to be looked at into objects that have an affective and social function in the world.

While Schmid’s *Pictures* evoke the loss and pathos of the archivization process, their collection as “interesting” objects, as Schmid refers to them, also points to the contradictory position that so-called vernacular photographs occupy within the history of photography and, most especially, as is detailed in Chapter 9, the art museum. Schmid argues that his projects work against the aestheticizing function of the museum’s judgment seat. Nonetheless, his recuperation efforts have the unforeseen effect of facilitating the recognition of these hitherto discarded images as art. They also raise the question about whether vernacular photography can ever truly be dislodged from the marketplace and the extent to which archival collections remain, therefore, irrevocably intertwined with capital. Returning again to Akram Zaatari and the AIF may offer a way out of this conundrum. Though the AIF was initially begun as a site of preservation, over time Zaatari has increasingly questioned what exactly it is that requires safeguarding. He extrapolates: “If emotions can be preserved with pictures, then maybe returning a picture to the album from which it was taken, to the bedroom where it was found, to the configuration it once belonged to, would constitute an act of preservation in its most radical form.”<sup>8</sup> It is this understanding of the value of the “archivization” process in and of itself that is most lacking in Schmid’s practice.

Just as archival collections can be subjected to loss, destruction, and decay, they can likewise be sites of proliferation, plethora, and excess. For artists associated with the German **New Vision** (*neues Sehen*) and **New Objectivity** (*neue Sachlichkeit*) movements of the 1920s, the logic of archival inexhaustibility was especially compelling. Beginning around 1925, artists associated with these movements began to refute efforts by the then dominant Pictorialist photographers (who we also discuss in Chapters 2 and 9) to elevate photography as art by foregrounding the medium’s rarity, even non-reproducibility. In contrast to the Pictorialists, who sought to mark their images as special and unique through strategies such as retouching and manipulations to the plate, New Vision artists like László Moholy-Nagy argued that “the value of photography,” as photography historian Olivier Lugon notes, “would henceforth reside not in rarity, but in quantity.”<sup>9</sup>

The landmark exhibition **Film und Foto**, or *Fifo*, organized by the German Werkbund association in Stuttgart in 1929, and which subsequently traveled to Zurich, Berlin, Vienna, Danzig (today Gdansk), Zagreb, and Japan, exemplified this shift. With over a thousand images, the exhibition was marked

by abundance and plethora apparent not only in its contents but very organization. *Fifo* did not limit its contents to art photography but rather exhibited images from fields that ranged from science, design, and industry to advertising and the press. The organizers intended this variety to signal a transformation of human vision, or a new vision, as Moholy-Nagy called it, that would not only broaden what the eyes could see but the very ways in which the world was seen (for more on New Vision, see Chapter 1). In other words, a New Vision belonged to the infinite number of subjects recorded in these photographs and to the multiplicity of viewpoints from which the images were taken and viewed—from above and below or as partial and complete, to name but a few—as well as to their endless reproducibility.

**Albert Renger-Patzsch's** (1897–1966) book *The World is Beautiful* (*Die Welt ist schön*), published in 1928, was likewise informed by the logic of abundance. Though Renger-Patzsch adopts a relatively unified style throughout his book—extreme clarity and the close-up—his subjects, which range from details of plants and animals to machines and factories, was truly copious. Printed full-page and numbering exactly 100, the photographs, as art historian Carl Georg Heise notes in the book's preface, “recognize the inexhaustible life itself in all its parts.” This is because, as Heise continues in reference to Renger-Patzsch's 1927 close-up of a grass snake (see Fig. 10.3), upon seeing “the head of the adder . . . so integrated in the coils of the snake's body . . . the picture appears to be filled with ornaments composed of scales and the viewer's imagination is expanded—uncannily—into infinity.”<sup>10</sup>

But despite the success of Renger-Patzsch's book, the boundlessness of New Vision and New Objectivity photography was relatively short-lived. In addition to literary theorist Walter Benjamin's well-



**Figure 10.3** Albert Renger-Patzsch, *Snake Head*, 1927. Gilman Collection. Purchase, Ann Tenenbaum and Thomas H. Lee Gift, 2005. 2005.100.147. © Albert Renger-Patzsch Archiv/Ann and Jürgen Wilde/DACS 2019.

rehearsed 1931 critique of *The World is Beautiful* as turning his subjects into objects of aesthetic consumption and pleasure, in the aftermath of *Fifo*, there was a general weariness about photography's abundance and a desire to somehow curb its excess, which Benjamin's contemporary Siegfried Kracauer and others likened to the waste of capitalism. Ironically, it is the logic of the archive that provided an antidote. As a system of classification and categorization, the archive allowed the "infinity" of Renger-Patzsch's photographic collection to become both manageable and controllable. August Sander's 1929 book *Face of Our Time* (*Antlitz der Zeit*), part of the *Citizens* project discussed in Chapter 3, best epitomizes this archival turn. A collection of sixty typological portraits, arranged together according to social profession, this volume, according to Benjamin, provided a radical counterpoint to the fetishized commodities of Renger-Patzsch's *The World is Beautiful*. Yet, as artist and critic Allan Sekula later cautions in his 1981 essay "The Traffic of Photography," the systematic arranging and sorting of Sander's archive is equally problematic for how it, like the National Socialist German Workers's Party, or Nazi Party, which grew into a mass movement and ruled Germany through totalitarian means from 1933 to 1945, not only organizes but controls representations of the body and asserts power over them.

While interwar Germany grappled with questions over the perceived threat of image profusion, other nations have struggled with "archival loss," a term that international archivists and UNESCO use to designate the destruction, decay, and outright disappearance of entire archive collections. Archival loss is especially tangible in the coastal countries of West Africa, where the legacy of colonialism has contributed to, as photography historian Jennifer Bajorek writes, "whole swaths of archives [going] missing because they have been sold to European collectors." Likewise, due to shifts in economics and geopolitics during the postcolonial period, many African studios have had to close their doors outright or discard their negatives entirely. To counter and prevent these instances of loss, countries in the Global North have made efforts to create and fund archives as well as their digitization. Yet, though much needed, these projects blatantly overlook, continues Bajorek, "the ephemerality of the photographic image"<sup>11</sup> and, most especially, the ways in which the logic of archive and its collecting and preservationist tendencies disregard, in the words of visual anthropologist Liam Buckley, "the right to allow for decay."<sup>12</sup>

In the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana), the practice of writing, drawing, and painting on photographs as well as their replication across generations speaks to the power of ephemerality and decay of photographic collections. A portrait of Effuah Nicol of the Cape Coast, which hangs prominently in the hallway of the home of her grandchildren Augustine, Francis, and Katherine Abraham, is a case in point (see Fig. 10.4). Taken initially around 1890, the image, according to photography historian Erin Haney, "is visibly a photograph of a photograph." Evidence of this rephotography is found on the right side of the portrait, which itself is a replication, taken after 1961, the year, as the text on the picture's mat explains, of Nicol's death. There, clearly noticeable within the visual frame, are the crumpled, darkened, and torn edges of the first portrait, which due to local conditions or the harsh climate had deteriorated over the course of its seventy-year life. For Nicol's family members, however, this remaking of their grandmother's portrait, which itself had been enhanced by the photographer or a studio retoucher at the time of its making, was entirely commonplace and utterly unremarkable. What mattered most was not the saving of the original or the safeguarding of its duration over time, but, in Haney's words, its "flexibility and mutability," or ability to be modified and made new again.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to rephotography, within Ghana, alterations to the surface of prints are also a pervasive practice. Faces will often be outlined or outright redrawn with charcoal and hair as well as other features



**Figure 10.4** Unidentified photographers, *Portrait of Effuah Nicol*, after 1961, based on photograph c. 1890. Courtesy of the Abraham family.

darkened with ink so as to overcome fading or deterioration. It is likewise common to carefully cut out certain individuals from a picture, to replace them entirely with new ones, and to mark an “X” above the head of someone who was deceased. Together these additive practices call attention to photography’s materiality and suggest that within Ghana, impermanence, deterioration, and loss are established aspects of photographic archives that demand not prevention or eradication but rather imaginative engagement.

## FOCUS BOX 10

### The surface of things: a history of photography from the Swahili coast

*Prita Meier*

The Swahili coast of eastern Africa figures prominently in the pictorial remains of European colonization and empire-making in Africa. Today photo archives across the world continue to catalogue, disseminate, and display thousands of images of this African littoral society. Pictures and descriptions of Swahili men and women have long ignited the imagination of Europeans and Americans, because they evoke a much-loved phantasm of ruthless slavers, languid harem girls, adventuring seamen, and mysterious “hybrid races.” This trope has its beginnings in the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese empire colonized key ports on the Swahili coast, but it reached unprecedented heights in the nineteenth century, as new machineries of representation, mass-production, and telecommunication created a modern visual economy around the bodies and faces of Swahili coast people. Especially studio prints and postcards depicting local women circulated all across the western world during the colonial period, when the coast was part of the British Protectorate (1890–1963). Most show young girls in contrived poses, meeting the eye of the viewer either with a suggestive stare or a bright smile of welcoming warmth. Photographic profiles of the human face were also common. In such mass-produced postcards, voyeuristic pleasure is conveniently coupled with “scientific” data about humankind and the head and planes of women’s necks and shoulders were often bared to document their physiognomy.

Of course, all photographs are in a sense reductive, turning people, their bodies, and experiences into static representations. The evidentiary efficacy of photography was exactly why it was consistently deployed as a technology of exploration, propaganda, and bureaucracy in the colonization of Africa. Photography endowed racist discourse with the power of the “real,” and claims about the essential difference between the colonizer and colonized were anchored in photographic representation. But the representational protocols of photography can of course be deployed for diverse ends. While photography was and is a technology of empire, it is also a technology of self—a site of embodied performance. That is, photographs are very much connected to bodies; they can work as images that hold people’s lived experiences and memories. After all, the reality effect of photography can materialize a person’s presence, however mediated or even displaced. Especially if one focuses on the sitter *in* the photograph, then photography’s documentary and social aspects come into focus.

Research on African photography, often focused on west and central Africa studio photography from the 1940s to the 1960s, has been at the forefront of exploring issues



of identity formation, selfhood, political struggle, and class aspiration. Clearly a focus on issues of portraiture and its social dimensions has been immensely generative, but other aspects of photography in Africa remain largely unexplored. By delving into the early history of photography on the Swahili coast I began to see that photography, including studio pictures of individuals, were sometimes not primarily about bodies or the people *in* the photographs. Instead, especially before independence from Britain in the 1960s, the photograph was primarily understood as an itinerant thing that expressed opaque, even intractable meanings that exist at the intersection of objectification and haptic experience. Even locally commissioned photographs, although seemingly about the sitter's desire to express some essential aspect of his or her being, were often about quite the opposite. Surprisingly, it was about the one thing scholars are usually trying to move beyond: the surface of things.

Photographs first became available locally in the 1860s or 1870s, arriving as exotic imports via the mercantile networks that connected Swahili port cities to other trade hubs across the western Indian Ocean. In fact, before European colonization, Swahili coast residents avidly collected photographs, especially in the form of *cartes de visite*, in their homes. The first carte de visite and pictorial chromolithographs likely arrived from Bombay and were sold in Zanzibari markets with other South Asian imports, such as textiles, housewares, and decorative ornament destined for the realm of bodily display or to beautify interiors.

On the Swahili coast, photography did not connect to pre-existing picture-making practices (although low-relief, semi-abstract zoomorphic carvings were not uncommon). Despite the absence of such traditions, the pleasure of looking at, touching, and sharing photographs was a pastime instantly embraced by locals, the majority of whom were Muslims. Swahili coast residents certainly knew how to look beyond the surface, so to speak, into the perspectival depths of the photograph, but they very much enjoyed the haptics of engaging the photograph as an object. While older residents perhaps found photography's realist illusionism unnerving or even uncouth, local reservations about photography were mainly concerned with preserving a proper separation between male and female bodies and gazes in the photographic encounter. Many likely felt that unrelated men and women should not be photographed together, an opinion certainly expressed by many locals today. Yet it must be emphasized that no evidence suggests that they considered the making of or looking at photographic likenesses as something fundamentally un-Islamic. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sources suggest instead that consuming photographs was considered a tasteful pastime, one that was intimately connected to homemaking. Displaying photographs was part of one's ability to craft spaces of tasteful sophistication, international connectedness, and hospitality in one's home. For example, Zanzibaris enjoyed inviting Westerners to their homes, offering them "Arab style" coffee and almond-infused sweetmeats, and showing them their fashionable



collections of imported objets d'art, which included boxes and albums filled with cartes de visites of European princes, princesses, and other famous personages.

This interest in overseas things was not a recent phenomenon or simply a result of capitalist globalization. Rather, collecting and displaying imported objects expressed the ability to make the exotic one's own. It was a local tradition for women to stage elaborate assemblages of imported exotica, giving material form to memories and even fantasies of long-distance travel and mobility. During the height of the nineteenth-century economic boom, cheaper and new commodities flooded the market, which also, in part, gave new life to old ways of consuming "the world."

Studio portraits commissioned by local elites also suggest that people of means very much enjoyed simply playing with photographed bodies of fashionably dressed distant others. Converted into an image, bodily surfaces became tangible and stylized forms that could be "tried on" for one's own appearance in front of the camera. Young men connected to powerful Omani families likewise enjoyed engaging the pictured appearances of Europeans in photographic portraits. These photographs present young men as stylish and carefree dandies, cosmopolitan *flâneurs* par excellence. The sitters in these examples are embracing the performative aspects of sitting for one's picture; they are temporarily masquerading in the clothes and postures of distant places. They are also in part signaling their familiarity and engagement with European cultures and fashions, although it should be noted that these outfits were not necessarily read as "Western" but also associated with Ottoman imperial modernity, because wearing tailored suits in combination with a fez as a head covering was popular in Egypt and other parts of the Ottoman Middle East among the elite at that time.

Photography also gave material force to local practices of turning the body into objects of "good taste," which was in many respects an expression of the cultural dimensions of nineteenth-century capitalist globalization. A culture of refinement and social distinction developed on the Swahili coast that revolved around the ability to force others to act as ornaments, as pleasing *tableaux vivant* of worldliness and wealth. It is unclear when exactly the display of bodies became essential to public performances of urbane sophistication and social power, but it was common among plantation owners, the ruling classes, and rich city dwellers by the 1830s.

Women especially had to act as ornaments, their owners reducing them to assemblages of wealth. Photographs that once belonged to the Busaidi family reveal the local logic of objectifying people into photographic things. Such women were chosen for their beauty and amassed as retinues by powerful men and women. Patricians had the privilege not only to ornament themselves but also took pleasure in dressing up enslaved women. Women had to don identical or matching textiles and ornaments to create pleasing multi-sensorial events. There even existed a category of bonded or servant women, called *wapambe* (the ornamented ones), whose role during

festivals was to signify the wealth and influence of their owners. Sumptuously dressed in the most expensive silks and cottons, they would accompany patricians at various public festivals and processions, the mass of their bedecked and bejeweled bodies transforming the spaces of the city into a spectacle of wealth and luxury. Their owners began to photograph them, creating collections of their bodies for display in their palaces. Such photographs, although also likenesses, primarily have the effect of intensifying the surface qualities of their bodies. Forced to pose for the photograph, their bodies act as a kind of ornamental screen. These young women had objecthood imposed on them, and through the photograph they are forever giving material form to other people's concepts of the beautiful, aesthetic, and exotic. In a sense, then, these photographs reveal how photography was used to heighten the ornamental effect of bodies, creating a series of striking surface equivalences between bodies, objects, and ornament.

Like elsewhere in the world, on the Swahili coast the uses and meanings of photography changed rapidly over the years, always working in tandem with a range of old and new media cultures. Around the 1940s the aesthetics and local significance of photography had been radically transformed, reflecting, in part, the social and political landscape of life during the high colonial period. Photography and sitting for one's picture were increasingly associated with modern portraiture, middle-class respectability, and cosmopolitan city life. By the 1960s, going to a commercial studio was a popular leisure activity, and teenagers often went with their friends to sit for group portraits for the fun of it and to celebrate their consumption and production of global youth cultures. By then, how one chose to pose for one's portrait signaled the growing interest in international mass media, including films and lifestyle magazines.

Yet during the second half of the nineteenth century, photography was still very much linked to older cultural practices that had much to do with practices of display and collecting. The Swahili coast therefore offers a different genealogy for understanding the early history of photography, one that emphasizes its role as an object in the world. Locals often emphasized photography's shape-shifting qualities, its work as a mobile artifact, instead of its abilities as a picture. At this time, photographs worked as relational things, colliding with other things—such as bodies, commodities, and heirlooms—creating a landscape of transoceanic materiality. As a traveling object, the photograph often provoked viewers and users to understand it as a thing *in* the world rather than a representation *of* the world. Furthermore, looking at, displaying, and posing for photographs was often very much about exteriority. People knowingly played with photography's ability to create a contingent—even objectified—and superficial self.

## Memory

Just as photographic archives are structured by what they preserve or save as well as by what they destroy or exclude, they are equally formed by both remembrance and forgetting. This is the paradox of the archivization process for Derrida: the desire to archive or remember is driven as much by the possibility, even fear, of forgetting. Because human memory is partial and limited, photographs, which like archives store information, are often called up to “memorize” things for us. But though we may want, even *desire*, using Derrida’s term from *Archive Fever*, photographs to serve as memories, they are necessarily contingent and incomplete. This means that photographs produce memory as much as they are structured by memories. Put differently, they are informed as much by what is remembered as what is forgotten.

**Dinh Q. Lê’s** (b. 1968) *Erasure* from 2011, composed of thousands and thousands of found family photographs collected by Lê, speaks to this paradoxical relationship between photography, memory, and the archive (see Fig. 10.5). After the fall of Saigon in 1975, Lê and his family fled Vietnam as “boat people” refugees and settled in Los Angeles, where he stayed for just under twenty years. When Lê returned to Ho Chi Minh City in 1996, he went searching in antique stores and second-hand shops for his family’s personal photographs, which had been lost in his family’s hasty departure from Vietnam. What Lê discovered in these shops, however, was not his own family photographs but rather thousands of personal photographs of other South Vietnamese families, including images of loved ones, couples on



**Figure 10.5** Dinh Q. Lê, *Erasure*, 2011. © Dinh Q. Lê. Courtesy of the artist and P•P•O•W, New York.

vacation, scenic vistas, weddings, birthdays, and family gatherings. For Lê, these orphaned images, which he began to collect and use in his multimedia installation works, became a kind of “surrogate” family album.

In amassing these lost photographs, certain ethical questions arise. Because many of these orphaned images, or “orphan works,” as they are often referred to in legal debates, have been removed from family photography albums, little is known about who they depict or to whom they belong. This situation has led a number of archives to act like surrogate orphanages in their effort to recoup and preserve these abandoned photographs. Lê’s *Erasure*, originally commissioned by the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation in Sydney, Australia, in response to the tragic deaths of asylum seekers whose boat crashed on the shores off Christmas Island, an Australian territory, on December 15, 2010, belongs, in part, to such reclamation efforts. Upon entering the darkened gallery, visitors encountered both a video of an eighteenth-century wooden ship, beached on an isolated coastline with its hull and sails rapidly consumed by flames, as well as an actual boat wrecked amid a sea of orphaned images that Lê had collected upon his return to Vietnam. Walking along wooden blanks through this sea of memories, as Lê likens the thousands of discarded photographs lying face down on the floor, visitors were encouraged to bend down, turn over, and pick up photographs with the hope that they would think about the families who abandoned them and perhaps even find lost family members of their own. To facilitate this reclamation process, the exhibition housed a computer and digital scanner to which, during the course of the exhibition, visitors could bring photographs they “rescued” to be scanned, catalogued, stored, and uploaded to a digital archive ([www.erasurearchive.net](http://www.erasurearchive.net)), thereby creating an online collection of *oan hon* (lost souls) for others to likewise access as well as to add to over time.

Through this collective reclamation process, Lê gives these orphaned images, or lost memories, a home. In her book on the black diaspora in Europe, scholar Tina M. Campt takes exception to recovery efforts such as these. She argues that in becoming so-called orphanages for lost images, archives, like the one created by Lê, “leave out an inclination, will, or desire for *fugitivity*, that is, the orphan’s capacity to reveal not the cultural memory, history, or heritage we believe he or she should tell or reveal to us . . . but that which we neither want to see nor necessarily recognize when it is shown to us.”<sup>14</sup> In making this argument about the importance of loss and the waywardness of orphaned images, Campt, writing from the perspective of the black diaspora, overlooks the specificity of the transnational experiences of the Vietnamese diaspora, which, as photography historian Thy Phu deftly argues, “is shaped not by the specter of slavery” but rather in defiance of official state histories that make “the very preservation of kinship ties a suspicious and punishable act.” In becoming a surrogate family to these orphaned images or erased memories, Lê’s installation and accompanying archive becomes part of a family that is not structured by biology and can thereby, through its gesture of repatriation, begin to heal “treacherous political bifurcations that persist beyond the war’s end and despite the nation’s reunification.”<sup>15</sup>

Like Lê, **Christian Boltanski** (b. 1944) also believes in the power of archives to act as sites of memory and remembrance, even as he remains more skeptical about how photography itself aids in this process. Since the late 1960s, Boltanski has worked with photographs that he finds, including passport photographs, school portraits, newspaper pictures, and family albums. For his 1988 installation, *Chases High School*, for instance, he turned to photographs of the graduating class of a private Jewish high school that he discovered in a book on the Jews of Vienna. For the installation, Boltanski rephotographed eighteen portraits of students from this book. Yet, rather than merely duplicate the image, he enlarged each portrait to such a degree that the students lost their individual features, including their eyes, which, most notably, no longer hold any personality but instead appear like the darkened sockets of a corpse.

Boltanski further emphasizes death through his installation of the photographs. Hung on the wall above stacks of rusting biscuit tins that recall both the preciousness of childhood containers and funerary urns, the enlarged, close-up features of the students are aggressively illuminated by the glaring light of desk lamps that hang above each portrait. Obscured by these lights and by Boltanski's own manipulation, the "empty, blinded faces," as Ernst van Alphen calls them, have been figuratively objectified and killed.<sup>16</sup>

The featureless students, who attended Chases High School in Vienna in 1931, also recall photographs of emaciated **Holocaust** survivors widely published after World War II, and the installation itself references lists of the deceased put together by the Red Cross after the war. But, while the subjects of *Chases High School* are likely Jewish students who were killed in the Holocaust, Boltanski has always been clear that his installations are more about the fact of dying than the Holocaust itself. The illegibility and anonymity of Boltanski's manipulated photographs further indicate that his interest is not in creating an archive of the Holocaust or its victims per se. Rather, what concerns him is how our expectations, even desires, for archives to remember and memorialize might be used to re-enact, or "perform," using van Alphen's terminology, the Holocaust and its archival tendencies. Photography is central to that re-enactment.

Though Boltanski's archival installations are framed as monuments, shrines, and altars (and many are even titled as such) that seek to remember and memorialize, the photographs they contain are dead. This is because the portraits do not function in the traditional way we expect: their subjects are featureless and exchangeable, and they evoke absence, not presence. In other words, through photography, Boltanski has created an archive of depletion and failure that objectifies its subjects, much in the same way that, as van Alphen cautions, the Nazis classified, sorted, and objectified those who entered into the camps (new detainees would get a number tattooed on their arm, for instance) as a means of killing their memories. In foregrounding this connection between Boltanski's installations and the archival potential of the extermination practices of the Nazis, van Alphen argues, in a manner that recalls the criticism of the archival principles of New Objectivity artists, that installations like *Chase High School*—and by extension archives, more broadly—"do not by definition preserve memories or the past" but, more gravely, can be used for the "murder or depletion of memory."<sup>17</sup>

Despite Boltanski's deep-seated suspicion of photography and the archivization process, might photographic archives also be sites of joy and pleasure rather than just pain? The rediscovery of **Bryan Heseltine's** (1923–2008) photographs of Cape Town, South Africa, from the 1950s, speaks to that possibility as well as to how photographic archives, like memory, returning to the language of Walter Benjamin, act not as "an instrument for exploring [the] past, but rather a medium."<sup>18</sup> This idea is especially useful for approaching the images of black townships that Heseltine took during the early years of apartheid and which re-emerged half a century later during the post-apartheid era. This legacy demands that Heseltine's South African photographs be taken up not only for their historical value, or what they tell us as visual records of black urban settlements during apartheid, but as a photographic archive of memory that has the potential to open up new and sometimes unexpected dialogues between the present and the past.

Heseltine, as photography historian Darren Newbury explains, most likely began photographing the black townships of Windermere, Langa, and Nyanga as a personal undertaking but soon thereafter received funding for the project from the South African Institute for Race Relations. It was the staff at this institute who both helped him, as a white South African-born, English-educated photographer, to gain access and permission to photograph black subjects in these townships and sponsored the first exhibition of his work in 1952, under the title *African Dilemma: A Survey of Urban Conditions*. Taking place on the fourth floor of Stuttafords, a department store in Cape Town, the Institute used Heseltine's

photographs largely in the service of their white liberal social reformist agenda of promoting better housing and by extension good health in Cape Town's black townships. A subsequent exhibition of Heseltine's photographs took place three years later. Titled *A People Apart*, this exhibition, on view in the crypt of St. Martin in the Fields Church in London, was used by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to support an emerging anti-apartheid movement. Yet, while *A People Apart* marked the beginning of an important tradition of anti-apartheid exhibitions in Great Britain, following a provincial tour, Heseltine's photographs were rapidly forgotten. This disappearance, as Newbury elaborates, was a product of its historical moment: the "essentially humanist and paternalist message" of Heseltine's Cape Town photographs was "drowned out by the uncompromising ideology and brutality of apartheid."<sup>19</sup>

So why return to them now? For Newbury, at least, Heseltine's photographs offer a way "to fold time back on itself, bringing the present face-to-face with the past." Here Newbury references the memorial potential of Heseltine's photographic archive, or the ways in which it is "unusually open to the present."<sup>20</sup> Put another way, Heseltine's photographs hold not only historical value regarding the postwar and early apartheid years, but more crucially, as images of black townships, they are places where black urban identities were formed, unfolded, and took shape in relation to local, national, and international concerns. The care and visual attention that Heseltine bestowed upon his subjects and their surroundings attest to this concern (see Fig. 10.6). Though initially presented within a paternalistic framework, Heseltine's photographs are ultimately not about "lack" or "desperation." They depict moments of encounter



**Figure 10.6** Bryan Heseltine, *Cape Town*, c. 1949–52. Courtesy of Gail Thorpe.



between photographer and subject that extend beyond a white liberal discourse of poverty and suffering to explore issues around desire, reciprocity, and defiance. They are images of black urban identities and, as such, they “provide a site of dialogue about the past and a space for imagination in the present, as all South Africans must remake their identities in an urban geography that has both continuities and discontinuities with the apartheid period.”<sup>21</sup> It is this “openness” to the present that renders Heseltine’s photographs an archive of memory.

## Time

For Derrida, the fundamental question about the archive deals not with the past but the future. He writes in *Archive Fever*, “It is not the question of a concept dealing with the past that might *already* be at our disposal or not at our disposal . . . [I]f we want to know what that will have meant, we will only know in times to come.”<sup>22</sup> **Rosângela Rennó** (b. 1962) takes up this temporal dimension of photographic archives in her project *Rio Montevideo* (see Plate 17). In 2011, the Centro de Fotografía in Montevideo, Uruguay, invited Rennó to respond to a photographic archive that had remained hidden for over three decades. In 1973, the communist Uruguayan newspaper *El Popular* was forced to shut down when an authoritarian military dictatorship took power. Anticipating the closure, chief photographer Aurelio Gonzalez hid almost 50,000 photographic negatives from the newspaper within a wall cavity in his office building. In 2006, the negatives were rediscovered and, from these, Rennó selected thirty-two images to reproduce as digital slides for her project. In selecting the images, Rennó was cognizant of the impossibility of using the photographs to represent, in any sort of totality, the years of economic and social unrest leading up to the coup in Uruguay. Likewise, she was equally aware of the limited understanding of her perspective as a Brazilian who, though she had experienced a similar repressive military rule within her own country, nonetheless came to this history as an outsider, albeit a sympathetic one.

To foreground the fragmentary nature of these relationships that both she and the *El Popular* archive share with the past, Rennó chose to present only a small selection of images, many of which defy expectations of what Uruguay looked like during this period of intense civil conflict. This meant that while some of the images depict the violent confrontations that occurred, including the murder of a student five years before the coup, an equal number of images represent scenes from daily urban and rural life, such as a young girl taking her first communion. In so doing, the series at once links the particular and the universal, the personal and the shared. To further emphasize this kind of exchange, Rennó projected the selected photographs onto the gallery walls using twenty slide projectors of various formats and eras that she purchased in flea markets in Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo. To view the images, visitors had to actively participate by manually pressing a button to turn on the projectors, which in turn illuminated the photographs on the gallery walls. Through this action, or possible inaction, viewers became implicated in an ever-changing making and remaking of the past as it meanders through time, sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly, and sometimes not at all, all the while asking them to consider their relationship to it as potential bystanders, spectators, and, occasionally, even performers.

Time is also central to the photographic practice of **Craigie Horsfield** (b. 1949). Like Rennó, he holds a deep-seated fascination with “the relationship between things of the world, the way things are told and our understandings of them.” But, whereas Rennó appropriates and reconfigures archival images, Horsfield takes photographs, mostly in cities in which he has lived. Together these images form an archive of his daily and seemingly ordinary encounters with people and things in the world. But, unlike

other photographers who have approached the quotidian through photography's instantaneity, Horsfield differs in the slowness of his approach.

From 1972 to 1979, Horsfield lived in Krakow, Poland, a place that he describes as filled with “desires, confused and distant memory, the subterranean movements of cultures, of people and the land.”<sup>23</sup> For Horsfield, in other words, Krakow, which at the time was in the midst of a period of economic depression and social unrest, existed in what he refers to as “slow time.” Borrowed from historian Fernand Braudel's notion of “slow history,” Horsfield uses slow time to reference both the “temporal register in which the work is made and received”<sup>24</sup> and the stillness, even anachronism, of the work itself. Horsfield's *Klub Pod Jaszczurami, Rynek Glowny, Krakow, February 1976* exemplifies this idea of slow time (see Fig. 10.7). Horsfield took the image in the mid-1970s but did not print the negative until fifteen years later. This delay is standard practice for Horsfield, who waits to print his images anywhere from a few months to several decades. The images themselves also bear witness to photography's uneasy relationship to time both in their contents and making. Horsfield prints his negatives with great attention to the tonal contrasts between the inky blacks and soft whites that form the “skin” of his images, as he calls them. In addition, he prints his negatives in a large-scale format (around 8 x 8 feet) as single images or in very small editions. With these large sizes and matted surfaces, the photographs have a vulnerability and stillness that is mirrored in his subjects who likewise appear, through their delayed viewing, to exist outside of time. It is during these moments of lapsed time that, as art historian Carol Armstrong poignantly explains, Horsfield's photographs become “something that comes between, something that is at once



**Figure 10.7** Craigie Horsfield, *Klub Pod Jaszczurami, Rynek Glowny, Krakow, February 1976*, 1991. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London. 2019. Courtesy of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis Rollwagen/Cray Research Photography Fund, 1991.21.1–3.

boundary and threshold, that both limits and permits communication and relation, something that is as inherently social as it is inescapably corporeal.”<sup>25</sup> One could also say that it is during these in-between moments that the archival logic of Horsfield’s photographs becomes most palpably materialized.

Like the “lapses” of time embodied in the production and reception of Horsfield’s photographs, the images produced by **Provoke**, a group of postwar Japanese avant-garde photographers, designers, and writers, also represent a kind of gap or “lacuna” in archival time. In the 1960s, members of this group discovered, in various libraries and museums, archival photographs of Hokkaido, a northern island colonized by the Japanese Empire in 1869. But, whereas these photographs had been initially used in the nineteenth century by the Meiji government in support of their nation-building and modernizing efforts in the north, for Provoke artists such as **Moriyama Daidō** (b. 1938), their “spontaneous, non-manipulated, and non-staged characteristics,” as photography historian Gyewon Kim explains, provided the means to establish a new form of art photography. These formal features provided a model from which these artists could construct a form of art photography that would depart from traditional photojournalism and documentary photography and thereby “liberate” the history of Japanese photography from “political agendas that had weighed down the medium in the past.” Yet, in using Hokkaido photography as the basis of this new style of avant-garde photography, the Provoke artists elevated the aesthetic properties of these historical images at the expense of their colonialist function, which included the elimination of Hokkaido’s indigenous people, the Ainu. In short, in establishing a stylistic legacy with these images from the past, this group of artists “eradicated another origin—that is, the modern and imperial origin of northern photography” in Japan.<sup>26</sup>

To counter this kind of undoing of indigenous history, the Māori people of New Zealand have insisted that they must be consulted and grant permission prior to photographs of their ancestors being used in publications and exhibitions. This restriction comes from Māori belief in *tapu* or photography’s spiritual power. For the Māori, photographic images of their ancestors are *taonga* (cultural treasures). This means that they are considered “living” objects imbued with *mauri* (life force) and *mana* (prestige, reputation) of the people depicted in them. Thus, photographs for the Māori are not just material objects, but rather a “medium,” as curator Arapata Hakiwai explains, that links “present generations to an umbilical cord of genealogy, history, and identity.”<sup>27</sup>

The “Mana Taonga” policy of the **Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa** (Te Papa) embodies this Māori understanding of the connection between the past and the present. Located in Wellington, New Zealand, Te Papa is a bicultural museum that houses a substantial collection of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs of the Māori. Many of the images in this collection were amassed by the museum’s nineteenth-century predecessor, the Colonial Museum, whose staff members classified them according to such categories as dress or activity (see Fig. 10.8). Over time, however, the meanings of these photographs have shifted away from these ethnographic and colonialist imperatives. In parallel with New Zealand’s decolonialization process, in the early 1990s, as the Māori began to gain increased agency and become stakeholders in their country’s resources, Te Papa established the “Mana Taonga” policy. This policy recognized the vital role of *whakapapa* (genealogical connections) for the Māori and how photography served as a living link to this past. This shift also brought about a reclassification of Te Papa’s photography collection to include the names of subjects and tribal affiliations so that present generations could search for photographs connected to their *iwi* (tribes). Recognizing these photographs as *taonga* has meant that Te Papa’s photographic archive no longer relegates the Māori to the past but instead offers a space in which their past can connect both to the present and to a yet to be determined future.



**Figure 10.8** James Bragge, *Colonial Museum*, c. 1880. Purchased 1955. Courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (D.000014).

Photography, as this chapter details, is not only an archival record but an archive itself. This interdependence between photography and the archive extends to the very beginnings of the medium. **William Henry Fox Talbot's** (1800–77) *Articles of China* is one of several photographs of collections or taxonomies that Talbot includes in his seminal publication, *The Pencil of Nature* (1844–6). In this book, Talbot notes that “the whole cabinet of a Virtuoso and collector of old China might be depicted on paper in little more time than it would take him to make a written inventory.”<sup>28</sup> Here we see Talbot’s understanding of photography’s archival potential: it is a repository or a collection that can remember things for us. But, beyond this memorizing capability, Talbot also recognizes its ability to anticipate a future.

Talbot’s *Nelson’s Column under Construction, Trafalgar Square, London* from 1844 addresses this temporal disjunction of the photographic archive (see Fig. 10.9). In the image, taken almost four decades after the death of Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson, Talbot constructs, as photography historian David Bate argues, “the memory of Nelson . . . quite literally, being constructed and re-presented.” This is because, though Nelson’s column was erected in London’s Trafalgar Square to the “memory” of Nelson’s defeat of the French and Spanish navies at the Battle of Trafalgar, Talbot depicts not the monument in its finished state but rather during the process of its construction. In electing to photograph at this moment, he emphasizes how the memory of this war hero, and by extension the patriotism of the British imperial



**Figure 10.9** William Henry Fox Talbot, *Nelson's Column under Construction in Trafalgar Square, London*, April 1844. Digital image courtesy of Getty's Open Content Program.

nation-state, is constructed. Bate continues, "At the heart of Talbot's image is not only a 'record' of the retroactive remembering of Nelson, whose historical purpose is forming a national identity but also an interpretation of it."<sup>29</sup>

Crucial to Bate's argument is the angle from which Talbot photographs the monument so that only the unfinished base and part of the shaft of the column are visible within the frame. In electing to exclude the top part of the column, including its seventeen-foot-high statue of Nelson, Talbot calls attention to contemporary debates about the monument as an oversized intrusion. His camera position also brings into view the early eighteenth-century St. Martin in the Fields Church (where Heseltine's Cape Town photographs would subsequently be exhibited), whose steeple is framed by the edge of the picture. Dwarfed by the enormity of this nationalist monument that dominates the foreground of the composition, this mirroring of church and national monument (or state) brings the past into dialogue with the present and thereby raises questions about the role of religion within the current-day Victorian nation-state. Likewise, Talbot's photograph also anticipates a future. In electing to crop out Nelson's statue, Talbot opens up the image not only to the past, or "that-has-been," but also to the future, or "this-will-be," using literary critic Roland Barthes's terminology from his influential book *Camera Lucida*. This future potential includes the protests, riots, rallies, and celebrations that Nelson's column has yet to see, including, in 2017, when controversy over whether or not, like the confederate statues in the United States, Nelson's statue should be removed on the basis that he was a white supremacist. As a photographic archive,



then, Talbot's image is not a passive receptacle for the storage of memory. Returning to Elizabeth Edwards, it is an "actively resourceful" site, in which history, memory, and knowledge are as much imagined as they are activated, produced, and reconfigured.

## Summary

- Photography is not only an archival record but an archive itself.
- Photographic archives are defined by a struggle over what they preserve or save and what they destroy or exclude.
- Photographic archives are "actively resourceful" sites in which memory is as much imagined as it is activated and produced.
- In photographic archives, the past is continually assembled and reassembled as its contents shift and change in and through time.

## Discussion points

- How are photographs and archives related to each other?
- How are photographic archives structured by both loss and abundance?
- What role does memory play within photographic archives?
- How is time figured within photographic archives?

## Additional case studies

Eugene Atget (1857–1927)

Sophie Calle (b. 1953)

Park Chan-kyong (b. 1965)

Hanne Darboven (1941–2009)

DATAR Photographic Mission (est. 1983)

French Mission of Heliographique (est. 1851)

Anri Sala (b. 1974)

Taryn Simon (b. 1975)

Vivan Sundaram (b. 1943)

Fiona Tan (b. 1966)

## Notes

- 1 Elizabeth Edwards, "Photographs: Material Form and the Dynamic Archive," in Costanza Caraffa (ed.), *Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2011), 47.



- 2 Ernst van Alphen, *Staging the Archive: Art and Photography in the Age of New Media* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 22.
- 3 Tim Schlak, "Framing Photographs, Denying Archives: The Difficulty of Focusing on Archival Photographs," *Archival Science* 8, no. 2 (2008): 85.
- 4 Edwards, "Photographs: Material Form and the Dynamic Archive," 52.
- 5 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 11, 17.
- 6 Hannah Feldman, "Excavating Images on the Border," *Third Text* 23, no. 3 (May 2009): 317.
- 7 John S. Weber, "Joachim Schmid and Photography: The accidental artist," in Gordon MacDonald and John S. Weber (eds), *Joachim Schmid, Photoworks 1982–2007* (Brighton: Photoworks, 2007), 12.
- 8 Akram Zaatar, "Against Photography: Conversation with Mark Westmoreland," *Aperture* 210 (Spring 2013): 63.
- 9 Olivier Lugon, "'Photo-Inflation': Image Profusion in German Photography, 1925–1945," *History of Photography* 32, no. 3 (Autumn 2008): 220.
- 10 Carl Georg Heise, preface to Albert Renger-Patzsch, *Die Welt ist schön*, reprinted in David Mellor (ed.), *Germany: The New Photography, 1927–1933* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 10, 14.
- 11 Jennifer Bajorek, "Decolonizing the Archive: The View from West Africa," *Aperture* 210 (Spring 2013): 66, 67.
- 12 Liam Buckley, "Objects of Love and Decay: Colonial Photographs in a Postcolonial Archive," *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (2005): 150.
- 13 Erin Haney, "Film Charcoal, Time: Contemporaneities in Gold Coast Photographs," *History of Photography* 34, no. 2 (May 2010): 123, 126.
- 14 Tina M. Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 90.
- 15 Thy Phu, "Diasporic Vietnamese Family Photographs, Orphan Images, and the Art of Recollection," *Trans-Asia Photography Review* 5, no. 1 (Fall 2014), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7977573.0005.102>.
- 16 Van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*, 198.
- 17 Van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*, 211.
- 18 Walter Benjamin, "Excavation and Memory," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927–1934* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 576.
- 19 Darren Newbury, "Photographs of Windermere: The Bryan Heseltine Collection," *Photography & Culture* 3, no. 2 (2010): 227.
- 20 Darren Newbury, *People Apart: 1950s Cape Town Revisited* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2013), 36, 37.
- 21 Newbury, *People Apart*, 37.
- 22 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 36.
- 23 Craigie Horsfield, interview with Jean-François Chevrier and James Lingwood, in Jean-François Chevrier and James Lingwood (eds.), *Craigie Horsfield* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1991), 8.
- 24 Nancy Princenthal, "Slow Time," *Art in America* 95, no. 2 (May 2007): 165.
- 25 Carol Armstrong, "The Dilation of Attention," *Artforum* 42, no. 5 (January 2004): 119.
- 26 Gyewon Kim, "Reframing 'Hokkaido Photography': Style, Politics, and Documentary Photography in 1960s Japan," *History of Photography* 39, no. 4 (November 2015): 356, 364.
- 27 Arapata Hakiwai, "The Meaning of Ancestral Photographs in Māori Culture," in Wulf Köpke and Bernd Schmelz (eds.), *A Glimpse into Paradise: Historical Photographs of Polynesia* (Hamburg: Museum für Völkerkunde, 2014), 145.
- 28 William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1844–6), n.p.
- 29 David Bate, "The Memory of Photography," *photographies* 3, no. 2 (September 2010): 255.

## Selected further reading

- Alphen, Ernst van. *Staging the Archive: Art and Photography in the Age of New Media*. London: Reaktion Books, 2014.
- Davidson, Kathleen. *Photography, Natural History, and the Nineteenth-Century Museum: Exchanging Views of Empire*. New York: Routledge, 2017.
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- Edwards, Elizabeth and Christopher Morton, eds. *Photographs, Museums, Collections: Between Art and Information*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.
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## PART SIX

# EXPANDED FIELD

In 1993, art historian and curator Douglas Crimp, musing about the photographic activity of postmodernism wrote:

The centrality of photography within the current range of practices makes it crucial to a theoretical distinction between modernism and postmodernism. Not only has photography so thoroughly saturated our visual environment as to make the invention of visual images seem archaic, but it is also clear that photography is too multiple, too useful to other discourses, ever to be wholly contained within traditional definitions of art. Photography will always exceed the institutions of art, will always participate in nonart practices, will always threaten the insularity of art's discourse.<sup>1</sup>

This section on the expanded field focuses on photography's excess, that is, its discursive promiscuity, or ability to operate across academic fields, what Crimp explained as beyond the institutions of art. Photography's unwillingness to rest solidly within one field has always caused some consternation among scholars of photography. But more recently, as artists increasingly mix photography with other media, such as film, or borrow strategies from other disciplines, such as fashion or medicine, anxiety about photography's future viability, or possible end, has increased. The chapters in this unit address such concerns. Yet they also, more pertinently, conceptualize "photography in the expanded field" in terms of the globalization of the image. This involves opening up photography's history to new narratives and different interpretative approaches more than it does looking at the medium's ability to disrupt already established discourses of art.

For example, **Malick Sidibé's** (1936–2016) photographs of nightlife in Bamako, Mali, which he shot from the late 1950s until the mid-1970s, demonstrate how the medium of photography pushed against the boundaries of rigidly defined categories (of gender roles, decorum, tradition, and even religion) in the new global space of post-independence Mali. In graphic, dynamic, black-and-white pictures, Sidibé captured the fashion, energy, and joy that characterized the rapidly changing West African nation. In particular he honed in on the vernaculars of style: the brash suits, the purposefully clashing prints, headdresses paired with cat-eye sunglasses, costumes of all sorts, face paint, and dancers kicking off their shoes. The party, the club, the dance floor—these were Sidibé's settings: the places where people came to be seen and dressed the part. On Friday and Saturday nights, Sidibé roamed the city, party-

hopping, shooting hundreds of frames of film, welcome wherever he went as his presence seemingly granted any party additional significance. Sidibé recalls, “People said if [!] was at a party, it gave it prestige. I would let people know I’d arrived by letting off my flash . . . you could feel the temperature rise right away.”<sup>2</sup> Historical and sociological records of life in post-independence Bamako, Sidibé’s photographs bring together discourses of postcoloniality, fashion, and sexuality and, at the same time, reveal how the country’s youth embraced internationalism and a pan-Africanist ideology.<sup>3</sup> His work embodies the idea of photography’s globalization, and in the two chapters that follow, “Celebrity style, the publicity shot, and the maverick language of fashion” and “Photography and the cinematic,” Sidibé’s example continues to resonate.

## Notes

- 1 Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 134.
- 2 Malick Sidibé, quoted in Aaron Schuman, “Malick Sidibé: Chemises,” *Aperture* 193 (Winter 2008): 12.
- 3 Thanks to Sarah Richter for generously sharing her thoughts on Malick Sidibé.

# 11

## CELEBRITY STYLE, THE PUBLICITY SHOT, AND THE MAVERICK LANGUAGE OF FASHION

The July 1945 cover of *Vogue* magazine (see Fig. 11.1) features a photograph taken by **Erwin Blumenfeld** (1897–1969). The image portrays a woman wearing an elegant gray dress and gloves. She dons a gold belt cinched around her waist and holds a matching gold handbag. Shadows of what seems to be an odd-shaped mobile fill the bottom half of the picture. The image is glamorous, but the shadows make it feel a little bit eerie, and gloomy. Gloomy in that we see the woman through a broken window, and it feels, at least on our side of the glass, as if we might be standing outside in the rain, spying on a woman inside.

This issue of *Vogue*, as the headline at the top of the cover states, includes a series of articles on New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), and the broken glass through which we glimpse the model is not any broken window, but part of Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1915–23). Though a complex piece, *The Large Glass* can essentially be described as an enigmatic dysfunctional machine that diagrams thwarted desire. Divided between female and male halves, the bride resides above; the bachelors, below. The bachelors want to consummate their feelings, but cannot reach the bride above, and so their desire remains unfulfilled. On the cover of *Vogue*, Blumenfeld's model, positioned such that we see her only by looking up and through *The Large Glass*, becomes unavoidably implicated in the tangle of frustrated impulses and unsatisfied desires established by Duchamp's work. But Blumenfeld's gesture, his decision to feature Duchamp's work on *Vogue*'s cover is significant not only for how it positions his model, but also for how it brings together the language of the avant-garde with that of commercial fashion—a relationship largely denied or repressed in past histories of photography for fear of appearing too commercial. Though this fear and the attendant snubbing of fashion by some historians of photography is now largely over (thanks to important work by scholars such as Charlotte Cotton), a new tendency has emerged to conceptualize “fashion” and “art” as adjacent fields, in relation to one another—even interdependent—but still as distinct approaches.<sup>1</sup> While a welcome development, this chapter strives to imagine wholly different terms and alternative frames through which to examine the embeddedness of fashion's maverick language in photography's history.

Japanese photographer **Kimiko Yoshida's** (b. 1963) work is instructive in this regard, for it seamlessly operates across multiple fields. In her series of large-scale color self-portraits, for example, Yoshida photographs herself in costume, sometimes wearing clothes by Spanish designer Paco Rabanne, sometimes wearing outfits that refer to indigenous cultures, or just as likely, to the canon of Western





**Figure 11.1** Erwin Blumenfeld, *Vogue* cover, 1945. © The Estate of Erwin Blumenfeld/Condé Nast Publications.

European painting—as in *Painting (Monna Lisa) Self Portrait* (2010) (see Plate 18). Art critic Jean-Michel Ribettes explains that, although the costumes and colors in Yoshida’s work varies, the underlying conceptual protocol remains the same: “always the same subject (herself), the same point of view (frontal), the same lighting (indirect), the same chromatic principle (the subject is painted the same colour as the ground) and the same format (square). Thus, the same figure is repeated, but never identically: the more it is repeated, the more it differs. The more it is the same, the more it changes.”<sup>2</sup> The work thus imagines the self through a structure of difference in repetition. The self is not taken as a given, but formed through the habit of saying “I,” through dressing, through color, through disguise. Yoshida employs the standard signifiers of high fashion only to unsettle them. This chapter, taking its cue from Yoshida, thinks through the language of fashion by imagining how the normally stable terms associated with the field—here: celebrity, graphic design, and dress—might be undone, transformed, and expanded. Throughout, the significance of collaboration—between the photographers, art directors, and designers; or between photographers and their imaged subjects—will also become apparent.

## Celebrity

Critical theorist Guy Debord wrote his influential book *Society of the Spectacle* in 1967, but the rise of **spectacle culture**—defined either as pure media frenzy or life mediated through and subsumed by images—begins much earlier in the twentieth century. This is particularly true in the United States, as Hollywood was establishing itself as the dominant site of film production in the West. The shift in **Edward Steichen's** (1879–1973) celebrity portraits from a focus on the dancers and actors of the New York stage in the 1920s to the new emerging stars of Hollywood's talking pictures in the 1930s reflects this development. Steichen's 1930 portrait of Gary Cooper epitomizes the new look of the spectacularized celebrity portrait: dapper and in crisp focus, Cooper emerges from a dark light to face the viewer with a direct and captivating stare. Such images, often imaginative and glamorous, without doubt helped the movie industry promote and construct a world of fantasy in which everyday Americans (and others around the world who consumed Hollywood films) might find escape, love, or pleasure—the photographs functioning as a conduit for a viewer's emotional experience.

Though the Hollywood of talking pictures was (and continues to be) particularly adept at dictating and refining the terms of celebrity—and by extension the celebrity portrait—photographs similar in feel and approach to Steichen's earlier portrait work from the 1920s emerged in urban centers throughout the world. In Arequipa, Peru, for instance, the work of **Carlos and Miguel Vargas** (1885–1979 and 1887–1976, respectively), produced at their Estudio de Art Vargas Hermanos, chronicled fashionable high society in the southern Andes with a chic bohemian stylishness. Many of their portraits, like Steichen's, were taken using dramatic artificial lighting and featured single figures in theatrical dress adopting flamboyant poses. This aspect of the Vargas Brothers' practice, however, which had been supported by the area's prosperous bourgeoisie, largely ended after the global economic downturn and Great Depression of the 1930s when the patrons who supported it disappeared.

In contrast to the Vargas Brothers' independent studio work, the industrialized production of cultural goods (such as the “star” or celebrity portrait) survived the Depression and went on to achieve unprecedented hegemony during World War II and the postwar period. Today, the culture industry continues to produce these kinds of celebrity portraits, though now both photographer and photographed subject are hyper-aware of how such portrait images can or will be used in the media and public sphere. **Dan Winters** (b. 1962), who has photographed an enormous number of celebrities in the United States, including musicians and Hollywood stars such as Leonardo DiCaprio, Angelina Jolie, Willie Nelson, Bono, Tupac Shakur, Denzel Washington (and also political star Barak Obama), expresses a keen awareness of his role in creating images for public consumption, and the effect that has on his practice. Asked in an interview what it is like to photograph well-known subjects, Winters states, “I understand that their image is often their commodity so I am very respectful of that when shooting and do everything possible to capture portraits that are mutually agreeable.”<sup>3</sup> Still, Winters' images possess an identifiable style that is his own, independent of the pictured subject. His palette often consists of earthy, toned-down greens and steely grays, and his pictures are always sharp, meticulously framed, and usually shot with dramatic lighting. Winters prefers as well that his subjects disengage the camera in order to avert the viewer's gaze because he feels this creates an opportunity for voyeuristic looking—or as Winters euphemistically claims, “not necessarily voyeuristic, but not feeling shy or reluctant to scrutinize the subject's physical self.”<sup>4</sup> The freedom to inspect another person's physical body or face is key as the construction of many celebrity portraits turns on the photograph's ability to transform the subject into an object to be looked at and a commodity to be consumed.

One image that certainly capitalizes on the viewer's desire to scrutinize the subject is Winters' image from 2003 of rapper, producer, and entrepreneur Shawn Carter, or Jay-Z (see Fig. 11.2). Part of Jay-Z's popularity, and what makes his rise to mogul-dom so fascinating, is the way in which he combines the two seemingly opposed positions of outlaw and businessman. Although American culture embraces both of these roles, rarely are they so thoroughly embodied by one person.<sup>5</sup> Winters' photograph exploits this double fascination by presenting Jay-Z as simultaneously powerful and (emotionally) vulnerable. Positioned solidly in the center, wearing a simple black knit hat and dark overcoat, light bouncing off his face, Jay-Z here seems to declare not only his having-made-it and never-going-back success, but also the stress such success begets. The this-*and*-that-ness of the picture (the outlaw *and* the businessman; the epitome of cool *and* the object of stress) is repeated by Jay-Z's stare, which appears both to engage the viewer *and* look away. The picture's stillness—and its contemplative mood—holds these multiple positions together and adds a sense of internal complexity and narrative texture to Jay-Z and his image. It is the quality which makes the photograph a successful celebrity portrait capable of circulating in a spectacularized media world. Despite any personal or professional ups and downs, the figure of Jay-Z remains intact, present for us to consume.

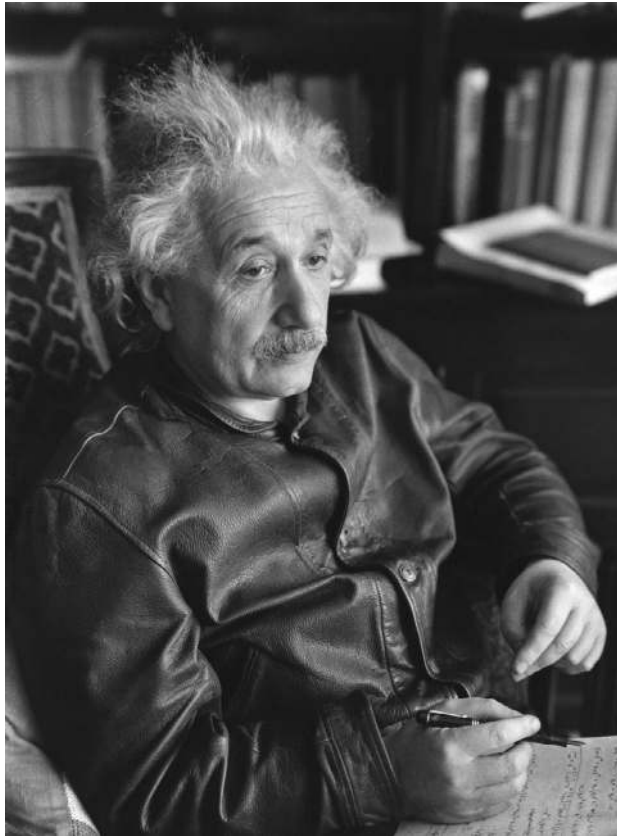
While Jay-Z's image may remain unbroken in Winters' picture, the camera does possess the ability to problematize and reveal the cracks and fissures behind the slick, seamless veneer of a celebrity's façade. **Richard Avedon's** (1923–2004) image of Marilyn Monroe from 1957 is often cited as an example of this kind of unexpected exposure, a moment when celebrity performance disappears to reveal a



**Figure 11.2** Dan Winters, *Jay-Z*, 2003. © Dan Winters. Courtesy of the artist.

glimpse of an individual's actual lived experience underneath. In the case of Avedon's photograph, Monroe's flirty public persona has been replaced with a quiet, disconcerting, almost expressionless stare. Years after that photo-shoot, Avedon talked about making this image: "For hours she danced and sang and flirted," he said; she "did this thing that's—she did Marilyn Monroe. And then there was the inevitable drop . . . she sat in the corner like a child, with everything gone."<sup>6</sup>

Almost two decades before Avedon's Monroe, **Lotte Jacobi** (1896–1990) made portraits of celebrities that similarly defied popular expectation. One of her most well known is of Albert Einstein taken at his home in Princeton in 1938 while Jacobi was on assignment for *Life* (see Fig. 11.3). Jacobi shot the image from the near middle distance, so the viewer sees not only Einstein's famous white tussled hair, but also the upper half of his body, which here, covered in a black leather jacket, seems to droop down in his chair. In this, the picture is a far cry from the highly graphic, glamorous head shots of figures from the German theatre (such as those of Lotte Lenya or Kurt Weill) that Jacobi took when she was still living in her native Germany during the Weimar years. The melancholia of Einstein's slouch, moreover, is matched by his distant stare: eyelids half shut, he appears caught in an unreachable world. At the bottom right of the photograph, we see his hands, which mirror in tonal value and gesture his face and hair. He also holds a pen in his right hand, and though he appears to be working on a document, he does not write. The slouch, the stare into space, the interrupted writing or computation—these qualities, which are



**Figure 11.3** Lotte Jacobi, *Albert Einstein*, 1938. © The University of New Hampshire.

present in so many of Jacobi's portraits, cause the image to look and feel suspended: Einstein, suspended in a moment of thought, but also Einstein—like many of his colleagues who fled Nazi Germany—suspended in time, in a state of exile between two historical moments.

*Life* commissioned this image but never published it. Jacobi reports, “[*Life*] said such a man should not be photographed wearing a leather jacket. It is too casual.”<sup>7</sup> But was it really the image’s *casualness* that made it unfit for *Life*’s pages? When Jacobi moved to the United States from Germany in 1935, she quickly realized that New York, unlike her home city of Berlin, was a place of celebrities, a place where renown had become a matter of recognition rather than reasoned respect. Art historian Benjamin Buchloh explains:

If historical subjectivity within the bourgeois conception was measured—however problematically—by an individual’s achievements in the public interest, by service to the common cause of social and political progress and cultural and scientific enlightenment, spectacular subjectivity in late-capitalist consumer society is measured according to the degree of acquired visibility and public exposure.<sup>8</sup>

Jacobi’s image of Einstein is notable, then, for how it captures the scientist’s unwillingness to become a spectacularized subject, someone famous but without accomplishment, which suggests that it is the picture’s melancholia, not its casual familiarity, that led *Life*’s editors to conclude that the image was unfit for the magazine’s pages. In other words, in Jacobi’s photograph, Einstein’s subjectivity is not easily consumable—unlike Jay-Z, he is not represented in a condition of sufficient object-hood.

Jacobi’s conflict with *Life* shows, among other things, how photography and mass media transformed society’s expectation of what celebrity means, though really one could argue this transformation began in the mid-nineteenth century almost immediately after photography’s introduction. In Western Europe and the United States, along with the continued growth of capitalist economies and the rise of bourgeois individualism, there was an explosion of new media technologies—photography included, but also lithography and mechanized printing—that encouraged the dissemination of names and faces to a growing audience of curious readers and attentive viewers hungry to learn about celebrated individuals. Cultural historian Michael Graval observes that in France “diverse vehicles for fame included: abundant journalistic discourse on renown (e.g., gossip columns, success stories, celebrity obituaries); memoirs, biographies and other popular publications on the famous . . . [as well as] new legal and commercial modalities, like ‘property,’ ‘brand’ names, and paid advertising, that promoted the fame of people and products.”<sup>9</sup> The concept of celebrity was expansive in the nineteenth century, and the division between fame, notoriety, and renown was porous rather than fixed. Images like Winters’ of Jay-Z (a celebrity portrait) and Jacobi’s of Einstein (an image of renown) would not, in short, have been perceived as presenting mutually exclusive positions.

**Augustus Washington’s** (1820–75) images of Liberian government officials from the late 1850s provide one compelling example of how celebrity, fame, and renown overlapped in the nineteenth-century imagination. Raised in the United States by his formerly enslaved father and stepmother, Washington spent years in Hartford, Connecticut, operating a successful daguerreotype studio. But in 1853 he gave up his studio and emigrated with his family to Liberia, the West African nation that began as a settlement created by whites working with the American Colonization Society (ACS). The ACS encouraged free and formerly enslaved black Americans to move to Liberia as an alternative form of emancipation, promoting the idea that only through the separation of the races and removal

of blacks to Africa could equality and prosperity be achieved. Washington notwithstanding, the ACS was unpopular with African Americans and abolitionists, and it proved difficult to convince Americans to move. To allay fears that Liberia was an African wilderness, and combat representations in the abolitionist press that framed a return to Africa as a second middle passage, the ACS hired Washington to take pictures of Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, that portrayed it as a blossoming “city on a hill.”<sup>10</sup>

These pictures, which sought to make Liberia look like a little America on the shores of Africa, constituted just one aspect of Washington’s effort to depict the young country as a place where African Americans could become capable citizens of a black republic.<sup>11</sup> Other images—particularly a series of daguerreotypes taken between 1856 and 1860 of Liberian government officials, including senators, clerks, the vice president, and secretary and sergeant of arms of the legislature—function similarly. Though instead of seeking to make the landscape look or feel “American” (read: “civilized” as opposed to “wild”), these images mobilize a Euro-American fascination with representations of renown, including images of civic prominence, to evidence African Americans’ (now Liberians’) ability to self-govern. They also work to solidify a specific view of Liberia’s state of development.<sup>12</sup> For instance, Washington’s picture of Alfred Francis Russell, a senator who eventually became Liberia’s tenth president, includes all the trappings of the public portrait as it developed in the United States and Europe: dressed in formal clothes—here in satin vest and tie—seated at a desk, holding “official”-looking papers, this three-quarter view offers a distanced rather than emotional view of Russell in order to communicate his elite status and generate support for the young nation of Liberia.

Complicating Washington’s effort to picture Liberia’s leadership was his own growing skepticism about his adopted country’s ability to self-govern. In a series of strongly worded letters to the *New York Tribune*, Washington describes Liberia’s poor living conditions, lack of industry, and oppressive treatment of the local population. That his photographs of the country’s government officials were made precisely at a time when he himself doubted the viability of the Liberian experiment reveals the extent to which the images rely on standard formulas for representation of renown, and on developing conceptions of the publicity shot, to make real that which may not actually exist, or only barely does so. As scholar Mary J. Dinius relatedly argues about Washington’s Liberian work, these images “were meant to strengthen [the Liberian government] by means of the popular idea of daguerreian portraiture’s representational power to make its subject ‘real’—not only to viewers . . . but also and especially to the subjects themselves and even to the daguerreotypist himself, who harbored significant doubts about the government’s efficacy.”<sup>13</sup> With these government portraits, Washington strove to reveal to those pictured their own notoriety and prominence or, put another way, he sought to show to the represented what others see in their representations. In this, Washington’s portraits also uncover the intersection of aesthetic and political representation and ask what justice or ethics in representations of celebrity might look like.

## Design and the editorial layout

The rise of fascism in Europe created one of the greatest transnational migrations of artists and intellectuals in history. Artists, designers, and photographers, along with scientists, authors, and other intellectuals, fled Europe during the 1930s for refuge, mostly in North America, though a significant number of émigrés also settled in South America and South Africa. Russian-born, French-educated



**Alexey Brodovitch** (1898–1971) came to the United States in 1930—shortly before the threat of fascism led so many others to flee—to head a department of design advertising at the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Art (now the University of the Arts) in Philadelphia. Brodovitch’s gig in Philadelphia only lasted a few years, as he moved to New York in 1934 to become the art director at *Harper’s Bazaar*. During his time at *Harper’s*, Brodovitch helped revolutionize magazine design, in part by collaborating with many of the photographers who had fled fascist Europe, which had the double effect of exposing American students to European art and design. Brodovitch remains a revered figure in the histories of design and photography, though the generative and symbiotic relationship he nurtured between graphic design, fashion magazines, and photography is still often overlooked. Yet this is a critical history to tell for when these various discourses are brought together, the objects and images that emerge from their convergence—including magazine covers, tear sheets, editorial layouts, and so on—can be understood more clearly as significant cultural products that move through society with the ability to communicate on a mass scale.

## FOCUS BOX 11

### Owning beauty

*Stephanie Baptist*

I remember the first time I saw the work of J. D. 'Okhai Ojeikere. The image that lay before me was a black-and-white studio portrait of an unknown Yoruba woman, photographed at close range and from behind. Titled *Onile Gogoro/Akaba*, (1975), Ojeikere’s precise lighting highlighted the composition of this subject: a sculptural tower of intricately woven braids (see Fig. 11.4). Further research revealed the extensive legacy of this Nigerian photographer: the image was one of more than 1,000 unique portraits from his *Hairstyles* series, taken shortly after Nigeria gained its independence from Britain in 1960. From 1968 onwards, Ojeikere began documenting a hairstyle called Onile-Gogoro, which translates from Yoruba to mean “skyscraper and/or stand tall.” Each unique sculptural expression would refer to a particular component of Nigerian life, ranging from its diverse ethnic groups to the ever-growing shapes of the Lagos skyline. For example, one image titled *Untitled (Modern Suku)* (1975) shows the graceful curve of a woman’s neck and hair “cornrowed.” The hair is tightly braided to the scalp with an underhand technique of continuous rows, forming a shape mimicking that of a cylindrical turret or cone-shaped dome. Ojeikere’s distinct oeuvre encapsulates the endless possibility of hair as *subject*. Moreover, using photography, pliable lighting, and stark white or black backdrops, Ojeikere formally stages the anthropomorphic and architectural aspects of such coiffure. His full archive of pristine black-and-white prints includes a range of social, cultural, and environmental images of his country’s traditions and daily life. His life’s work embodies the region’s varied cultural and social identities, as well as the independence of a postcolonial Nigeria from the 1960s up until his death in 2014.



**Figure 11.4** J. D. 'Okhai Ojeikere, *Onile Gogoro Or Akaba*, 1975. © J. D. 'Okhai Ojeikere. Courtesy of Amaize Ojeikere.

For example, through his photographs, one can see the evolution of hairstyles in relation to Nigerian status in society. Many royal families often had ownership of particular hairstyles. This fact is highlighted by Ojeikere in *Shangalti* (1971), which portrays a female subject in a profile position against a stark white background. We can see two tribal marks on her right cheek; her gaze looks softly towards the ground. Her hair is micro-braided close to her scalp three-quarters of the way down, while the rest of her hair delicately frames her face. Hair, as Charlotte Lokke-Madsen writes, is often seen as the “crown of the female beauty and represents everything from emotion, age, identity, political or cultural power, marital status, and work position.”<sup>1</sup> For Ojeikere, hairstyles were evanescent works of art and a way to immortalize a society he felt was rapidly changing. In interviews, Ojeikere has described how “hairstyles are an art form: but all these hairstyles are ephemeral. I want my photographs to be noteworthy traces of them. I always wanted to record moments of beauty, moments of knowledge.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Charlotte Løkke-Madsen, “Sculptures for a Day,” in *Artists in Society* (Jutland: Trapholt Museum, 2016), 159.

<sup>2</sup>J. D. 'Okhai Ojeikere, quoted in Brian Wallis, ed., *The Order of Things: Photography from the Walther Collection* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2015), 66–7.

Artist and photography historian Deborah Willis has spent decades documenting and producing publications on the black body, black imagery, and visual representation. For Willis, “the notion of beauty is constructed and or embodied. Photography interests the poetics of a desired and assumed state of mind created by both the photographer and the subject within the frame, and reflects societal issues of the time.”<sup>3</sup> This holds true for Ojeikere, who believed it was important to subjectively reflect the intersectionality of his home country through the topical documentation of diverse hairstyles, gele headdresses, wedding ceremonies, and traditions, to an evolving environmental landscape. Art historian and curator Bisi Silva describes how a large portion of Ojeikere’s work speaks to the sartorial and its relationship to the micro and macro identities of Africans, despite the fact that Ojeikere did not focus on fashion as an explicit category. The work of Ojeikere can be viewed as a corrective to what has not been examined by many mainstream, dominant institutions. The celebration of one’s own cultural experience, lends insight into the nuance of a society and provides a global context, as dress is inevitably tied to culture as well as identity.

Art historian Richard Powell speaks about the democratizing ability of a photograph in *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture* (2008), which examines how people of African descent have been perceived in society and the lasting effects of these perceptions on portraiture. Powell argues that a significant segment of black portraiture is hidden due to historical and societal racism, as well as the relationship between the subject and the photographer, which often includes the conscious and unconscious negotiations that invest black subjects with social capital. Powell and Willis both identify this social capital as tied directly to black photographers and their willingness to turn the lens on their own communities, and for said communities to be willing to engage and participate. This powerful act is directly connected, in the words of Powell, to the “subject’s sense of self—an awareness that through self-adornment, self-composure, and self-imagining upsets the representational paradigm and creates something pictorially exceptional.”<sup>4</sup> Susan Sontag in *On Photography* (1977) describes the premise of fashion photography as built on the belief that something can be more beautiful in a photograph than in real life. Additionally, she asserts that fashion photography can serve as a reaction against the conventionally beautiful, with photography expanding our ideas around that which is aesthetically pleasing. When I look at a photograph that is visually appealing or *exceptional*, I often ask myself what makes this photograph beautiful? Subjectively, I seek out the cultural markers or cues within the image that either speak directly to my own circumstances, lived experience or an aspirational view of life. Our society has a complicated history of what has been deemed beautiful, which is paramount when thinking about the role of fashion photography and its ability to

<sup>3</sup>Deborah Willis, *Out [o] Fashion Photography: Embracing Beauty* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 13.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Powell, *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), xv.

democratize the term “beautiful.” Ojeikere’s vast archive of simple backgrounds, subjects from his own circle of family and friends, all help to portray a unified Nigeria and “[t]hrough the power of photography, he creates possibilities for a sense of belonging and strongly participates in the process of constituting meaning.”<sup>5</sup> More recent contemporary artists like Lakin Ogunbanwo put the milliners of Nigeria centerstage in his ongoing series of obscure portraits which explore identity and what it is that shapes or defines an individual within a larger cultural milieu. His works raises questions such as *Who are they?* and *How do they wish to be perceived?* Ogunbanwo has pared down the communicative aspect of the project to the power of the hat, which speaks directly to masculine identity in Lagos. The series *Are We Good Enough* (2015–17) focuses on the traditional dress of various ethnic groups in Nigeria: the Yoruba, the Ibo, the Hausa-Fulani, and others. Ogunbanwo’s studio portraits present a collection of men photographed from behind, wearing different hats of various colors, shapes, and patterns. These images represent the younger generation of Nigerians creating sartorial hybrids of Western and traditional style, thereby reinventing the visual codes through which they publicly communicate aspects of themselves. One striking image is of a man wearing a colossal red cap, which is of the Igbo tribe and represents “authority, tradition, and culture; and it also represents the entire institution of leadership, authority, and power in Igbo culture.”<sup>6</sup> Ogunbanwo’s images help to create an expanded view of Ojeikere’s Nigerian society, where tradition and the contemporary are presented side by side. Similarly, Moroccan photographer Hassan Hajjaj uses the language of African studio photography and fashion photography to challenge the West’s stereotypes about North African Arabic society. His best-known series, *Kesh Angels* (2010–14), is a juxtaposition of Muslim and Western culture. Women are posed on motorcycles or in odalisque poses wearing hijabs, niqabs, or bouches of Western brands, like Gucci, Louis Vuitton, or Nike. Like Ojeikere, Hajjaj often photographs subjects from his own circle of friends. He incorporates patterns, motifs, or Arab products specific to the region of Morocco as entry points. These graphically bold colors and regional markers help to highlight and redefine a culture that has historically been defined by Hajjaj as “mint tea and camels.”

While one photograph might be unable to encapsulate an entire phenomenon or social construction, the development and exploration of themes by these African photographers help us to feel that pictures and progress are not mutually exclusive. Living in an overtly visual world, within which we consume information about culture and society, the photograph has the ability to redefine paradigms of beauty, provide possibilities for social equity, and solidify our place in the world.

<sup>5</sup>Aura Seikkula and Bisi Silva, “Moments of Beauty: Art of J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere,” in *ARS 11* (Helsinki: Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, 2011), 11.

<sup>6</sup>Immanuel Jannah, “Significance of the ‘Red Cap’ in Igbo Culture,” *Obindigbo*, March 17, 2017, <http://obindigbo.com.ng/2017/03/significance-red-cap-igbo-culture/>.

**Nontsikelelo Mutiti** (b. 1982) is a contemporary artist/designer whose multimedia practice consciously weaves together photography and design with the aim of engaging a broad audience. Working in the early 2000s as a painter in Harare, Zimbabwe, Mutiti recalls feeling frustrated at the closed-off local art scene that mostly catered to expat-owned galleries. As she drove along the roadways and looked at billboards, she thought to herself, “I want my work to be up there . . . Why can’t I be communicating with people in that space?”<sup>14</sup> Eventually Mutiti enrolled in Yale University’s graphic design MFA program and began producing print material, artist books, and posters, as well as videos, web projects, and installations. Among the objects she made shortly after graduating from Yale is an 8.5 x 11-inch spiral-bound booklet titled *African Hair Braiding Salon Reader* (2014). The book’s pages include photographs of combs and clips, video stills from black American films (such as *House Party* and *Poetic Justice* that informed Mutiti’s idea of black aesthetics growing up in Zimbabwe), photocopies of academic essays, drawings of braiding made by Mutiti, and cellphone photographs of salons that the artist took while walking past such spaces when she lived in Harlem in New York City. In addition, the book’s orange glow—all of the pages are bright orange—is meant to evoke the feeling of being in a salon for hours, where color, music, and conversation fill the air.<sup>15</sup>

African hair braiding functions in the *African Hair Braiding Salon Reader* as both a technology and a marker of black African diasporic identity. As a technology, braiding is presented as an ancient system of pattern and repetition. In her essay, “Hair Braiding is Technology,” which is included in the booklet, artist and activist Nettrice Gaskins explains this in mathematical terms: “[T]he braiding of hair shows the formal possibilities of geometric variation. Hair braiding demonstrates an inclination for interrupting the expected line . . . it is not the braid itself but the act of interweaving shapes that form the intricate patterns that unify the design.”<sup>16</sup> But the *African Hair Braiding Salon Reader* also positions African hair braiding as a diasporic historical and cultural tradition that has spread to salons all over the world, as evidenced in part by Mutiti’s cellphone photographs of such sites in Harlem. The presence of film stills from American movies further signals braiding’s globalization and how traditional braiding styles mix with trends in African American culture. Intimately connected to black women’s identity across vast geographic spaces, braiding is presented here as at once sited in an exact time and place and dislocated from any particular locale. Braiding operates as a space of exploration, in part geographic and in part personal or imagined. When the *African Hair Braiding Salon Reader* was released, Mutiti turned the event into a performance, where visitors could pick and collate their own pages and then bind them together with spiral coils—an act the artist likens to the process of braiding itself. Braiding—as a concept, as an action, and as a design theory—thus becomes in the pages of Mutiti’s book a communication tool and programming language of which the photographs, sampled from American movies or taken on a cellphone, are just one component.

**K8 Hardy** (b. 1977), co-founder with several others of the queer feminist art collective LTTR, is another artist whose work explores how photography, in conversation with book and magazine design, can reach broad audiences while addressing issues of identity formation.<sup>17</sup> In her **zine** *FashionFashion* (2002–6), Hardy developed a DIY fashion aesthetic rooted in gender play and multiplicity rather than the heteronormative performance of traditional glamor spreads.<sup>18</sup> Zines might be described as non-commercial, self-published pamphlets, booklets, or journals that exist outside mainstream publishing channels and which are typically put together with tools like tape, sharpies, and xerox machines, though more recently, programs such as illustrator and Photoshop might also be used. In *FashionFashion*, Hardy’s deployment of these kinds of low-tech tools, in conjunction with images that have a self-consciously low production value, undermine—as is typical of many zines—notions of quality and

generate a feeling of insurgent spontaneity. Hardy, and sometimes a friend or her older sister Hallie, appear in *FashionFashion* in various provocative (and at times ridiculous) poses that simultaneously mimic and mock those found in mainstream fashion magazines. To style her subjects, Hardy rummages through thrift shops and then pieces together disparate items into outfits for her models. This is not an ironic process. For Hardy, clothes come to define and shape identities; they are not seen as consumer products for sale, or tools for marketing, or even seductive costumes for imaginative play. Rather, Hardy seeks to take charge of styling, posing, and photographing her models in a manner that encourages experimentation and rejects commercialism and America's conformity-driven culture.

In one two-page spread from *FashionFashion* (see Fig. 11.5), a woman wears bright yellow stilettoes, blue shorts, and a series of multicolored belts fastened across her torso in a manner that mixes a frisky bondage aesthetic with colorful eclecticism—the collaged clothes mirroring the collaged layout. One version of the spread includes three photographs of a figure; in two of them she is posed upside-down in a handstand with her legs splayed against the wall. In the image on the left page, the woman's mouth is open, perhaps in a playful expression of surprise. The only other element depicted is a radiator, which painted sky blue, matches the model's shorts. But the radiator also appears vaguely pathetic, and as an additional character, counters the silliness of the model's clothes and pose. On the right page, in the image farthest to the right, the same model, dressed in the same loopy outfit, sits awkwardly and suggestively on a tripod. The gesture, in both stressing and suppressing the camera's presence combines reticence with extreme extroversion. The figure's self-presentation feels oddly (and authentically) multiple, dissonant, and anti-consumerist. Clearly Hardy rejects constructed categories of beauty, but



**Figure 11.5** K8 Hardy, *FashionFashion 4*, 2006. © K8 Hardy. Courtesy of Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York.



more than this, and in a manner reminiscent of Kimiko Yoshida, her *FashionFashion* spreads disrupt the idea that fashion-related signifiers (clothes, poses, models, “looks”) are necessarily stable communicators of conventional meaning. In this, her work challenges the limits of fashion and our own assumptions about gender politics.

In a review of one of K8 Hardy’s exhibitions for the *New York Times*, author Guy Trebay asserts, as if surprised by his own realization, “Maybe fashion is a stealth tool of cultural critique.”<sup>19</sup> Looking at Hardy’s work, this sentiment certainly rings true. But Hardy, and others such as Nontsikelelo Mutiti, are not alone in this reassessment. Neither are they the first to combine tools from fashion and graphic design in order to introduce a critique—about gender, race, economics, and community—into an area of cultural production—fashion—that has too often been perceived as trite. Two earlier examples appeared in London in 1980, when the independent journals *i-D*, started by former British *Vogue* art director Terry Jones, and *The Face*, created by former *NME* (*New Music Express*) editor Nick Logan, were launched. Both magazines focused on youth culture, emphasized creative self-expression, and embraced a post-punk DIY aesthetic. Both journals also experimented with graphic elements in a manner that announced their opposition to fashion’s perceived excess. Designer Neville Brody defined the look of *The Face* with experimental graphics and what Phil Bicker, *The Face*’s former art director, calls a “classical approach to cool.”<sup>20</sup> *i-D*, especially in its first years—and despite the fact that Jones came from *Vogue*—was less slick and more irreverent.

Among *i-D*’s first features was a series called “Straight Up,” which consisted of full-length portraits of individuals seen on the street and photographed standing against blank urban walls. Many times these images portrayed punks hanging out around London’s King Road. Steven Johnston was among the first photographers to create a spread for “Straight Up,” including for the journal’s inaugural issue in 1980 (see Fig. 11.6). The collaged-together two-page spread includes text written in four different type faces and pasted to the page as if assembled on a dining room table. The word “Wild!” written half in pink and half in black runs across the center, connecting the two sides of the spread. The text’s black letters replicate the magazine’s logo—*i-D*—suggesting in this context that the “straight up” functions like a kind



Figure 11.6 Steven Johnston, “Straight Up,” *i-D* magazine, 1980. Courtesy of *i-D*, London.

of alternative ID card. The figure on the left is identified as “Colin,” and his style as “Mode.” We also learn that he made his own pants and the places he bought his other clothes, and for how much. On the right, the caption simply reads “anonymous girl with spiky hairdo.” Her posture appears less confident than Colin’s, but she still makes herself available to the camera, forcing viewers to confront her attitude as they inspect her style. The pink lines of the “W” and the “L” in the word “WILD,” along with the sharp edge of the exclamation all echo the “straight-up” lines of her spiky hair.

The language of “straight up,” however, applies not only to the magazine’s content and DIY attitude, as in the reader is getting the “straight up” about the style and feel of Britain’s youth culture, but also to the photographic approach. The images in *i-D*’s “straight up” are unembellished, direct, and shot in black and white; they appear, in some ways, closer to documentary than fashion photography. In fact, it could be argued that the “straight up” editorial feature mimicks the conventions and form of documentary photography, a point made in a slightly different context by critic Alistair O’Neill. O’Neill explains that in the late 1940s and 1950s, *Vogue*’s art director, Alexander Liberman, often referred to documentary photographer Walker Evans’s image *Citizen in Downtown Havana* (1933) as an example of the type of picture he was after in *Vogue*, saying “while not a fashion photograph, I believe this is a statement essentially about style.”<sup>21</sup>

Magazines like *i-D* and *The Face* emerged in part as alternatives to Britain’s increasing conservatism under Margaret Thatcher’s government in the 1980s—and to the excesses of the mainstream fashion world that accompanied that conservatism. In New York in the 1960s, a number of design and photography-oriented journals also presented themselves as part of an alternative press, though in this context it was in loose alignment with a developing counterculture focused on Civil Rights and free speech. Billed as a magazine “entirely devoted to Love and Sex,” one such journal, called *Eros*, was launched in 1962 by radical publisher Ralph Ginzburg and art director Herb Lubalin. The magazine’s transgressive subject matter led to its early demise, when Ginzburg was jailed for sending erotic material through the mail, and as a result only four issues were ever published.<sup>22</sup> The issues that do exist, however, show how photographers and graphic designers began to think of the magazine format as a space that allowed for experimentation with scale, white space, and visual flow. For example, *Eros*’s third issue featured a series of photographs of Marilyn Monroe taken by Bert Stern just six weeks before her death in August 1962. Originally intended as fashion reportage for *Vogue*, photographs from this shoot were used on the journal’s front cover and in an editorial spread. Unlike Avedon’s 1957 image, these pictures feature a nude Monroe seducing the camera: she plays with her hair, covers her face, and suggestively bites a necklace of beads. The spread uses unedited strips of film, some of which show the original rejection crosses made by Monroe herself with a transparent yellow marker, including one that is scaled up to fill an entire page.<sup>23</sup>

The effect of scaling up a photograph with Monroe’s transparent “X” scratched across her face is visually and emotionally startling; it also poignantly demonstrates the collaborative nature of fashion work. And in this way, projects like the *African Hair Braiding Salon Reader*, *FashionFashion*, *i-D*, and *Eros*, whether done for a client or as self-generated work, all challenge the idea of a traditional “authorial voice” because none have a lone creator. By contrast, the fashion spread in these books, journals and magazines exists as a cultural product created by multiple imaginations, including those of photographers, editors, stylists, and designers. Sometimes such work is mediated by the fashion industry—as was the case with Alexey Brodovitch during his years at *Harper’s Bazaar* in the early twentieth century or in the case of Blumenfeld’s cover discussed at the beginning of this chapter—but other times fashion spreads offer a distinct cultural critique from an oppositional position and with an activist’s agenda.

## The politics and power of dress

The works of contemporary artists like Nontsikelelo Mutiti and K8 Hardy, or a more historically situated one like Alexey Brodovitch, reveal how fashion editorials in both commercial and self-published journals can challenge mainstream culture. Though these artists also play with dress, for all them, it is the photographic image that, embedded in a cultural object like a magazine, remains open for creative reflection, analysis, and reworking. Anti-capitalist fashion blogger **Hoda Katebi** (b. 1995) is similarly interested in how fashion can create moments of productive cultural friction, though she focuses primarily on dress and secondarily on its representation in photographs. Fashion, Katebi argues, not only engenders self-expression (including in societies deemed repressive by the West), but can also facilitate understanding between cultures that may at first view themselves as oppositional. More than anything, however, Katebi views fashion and clothes as multi-layered “politically dense forms of art” that frame bodies in public space.<sup>24</sup>

Katebi’s Chicago-based blog, *JooJoo Azad*, as well as her book, *Tehran Streetstyle* (2016), use photographic images to demonstrate how individuals can and have taken charge of that framing, and in a variety of geopolitical contexts. The photographs posted to *JooJoo Azad*, characterized by Katebi as an “unapologetic fashion blog written by a Muslim-Iranian,” are a mix: some are taken by Katebi, some are of Katebi (see Fig. 11.7), and still others are sampled from online clothing and political websites. The photographs in *Tehran Streetstyle*, on the other hand, are all taken by Katebi and picture fashionable women and men in Tehran, Iran’s political and fashion capital. Both for the blog and in her book, Katebi gravitates toward images that play with the colors, shapes, and patterns found in Islamic art and architecture in a manner not totally unrelated to the work of Yto Barrada, discussed in Chapter 4. For Katebi, however, the reference is both an assertion of her Iranian identity and part of her refusal to privilege Western style. Even as Katebi embraces elements of Western consumer culture, for example, she rejects the assertion that a hijab represents repression and that somehow the West’s aestheticization of women’s bodies (including the consumption of products like hair dye, lipstick, and nail polish) signals liberation.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, in Katebi’s images, the hijab is depicted as an object in motion—whether blowing in the wind, loosely framing her face, or draping her shoulders, the fabric’s color, pattern, and movement seems simultaneously to indicate intimacy, flux, and freedom more than anything else. In this her work is defiant, as she refuses to cover herself in clothes chosen simply for their ability to make her body intelligible to Western eyes.

Sites like Katebi’s, and others hosted by artists and cultural critics such as **Ruth Ossai** (b. 1990) in Nigeria or **Brian Otieno** (b. 1993) in Kenya, perform the important task of helping to free imaginations from the specter of neoliberal conquest. The sometimes awkward engagement between high fashion and rural life, as depicted in Ossai’s work, or between high fashion and extreme poverty, as depicted in Otieno’s images from Kibera—a vast slum in Nairobi—reveals how localities embrace, play with, and ultimately transform the products of global capital. This kind of co-production of culture is often unstable and risks being coopted by multinational corporations and international fashion brands as evidence of their progressive agenda and global sensitivity. Nevertheless, when the BBC publishes a headline about one of Otieno’s models, “Kenyan fashionista dares to stand out in Kibera Slum,” it is difficult not to see how such practice can be genuinely liberating.<sup>26</sup>

Analogously, **Philip Kwame Apagya** (b. 1958) creates photographs of fashionable Ghanians that resist both Western tropes of self-presentation as well as the West’s attempt to claim ownership over what it means to be modern. Apagya first learned photography in his father’s studio (his father was a



**Figure 11.7** Kevin Serna, *Hoda Ketabi*, 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

crime-scene photographer), went on to study photojournalism at the Ghana Institute of Journalism in Accra, and then in 1982 opened his own studio in the Ghanaian port-city of Shama. Since opening the studio, Apagya has become known for creating photographs of subjects in front of commissioned backgrounds painted specifically to reveal the dreams, aspirations, and humor of his clients. These backdrops might depict big public spaces like Accra International Airport in Ghana or illustrate interiors laden with consumer goods such as TVs, stereos, modern kitchens, and well-stocked refrigerators. Regardless of the imagined setting, clients pose and interact with these painted scenes as if the spaces were real—as if they were actually boarding a plane, turning on a television, or grabbing a product out of a refrigerator. In an essay about photography in southern Ghana, visual anthropologist Tobias Wendl's explanation of the “**truth value**” of studio portraiture in that region of the world provides further context: “[The] idea of exploring and documenting social reality by photographic means seems never to have

been a major concern in Ghana. Ghanaian photographers were rather interested in using the photographic medium for creating and imposing new realities." "Truth," Wendl notes, "is something that is negotiated and agreed on by the community."<sup>27</sup>

Apagya's studio thus functions as a kind of dream chamber in which individuals explore, through the staging of photographs, new identities and fantastical visions of themselves.<sup>28</sup> Apagya's *Come on Board* (2000) is an example of this kind of empowered representation (see Fig. 11.8). In the image, a young woman, wearing an outfit made from Ghanaian cloth, stands in front of a painted backdrop of an airplane at Accra International Airport, as if getting ready to board the plane. She smiles at the viewer, and seems almost to laugh at her own gesture, at her own fantasy of travel and the delicate playful way she touches the painted handrail. Europeans introduced the painted backdrop in Ghanaian photographic portrait studios in the early twentieth century. Those backdrops, however, tended to depict landscapes, clouds, roman columns, and other tropes appropriated from European portrait painting typically commissioned by wealthy patrons. In the 1940s, these colonially inherited representations lost cultural acceptance and new backdrops, depicting spaces such as airports, that is, spaces of modernity, began to appear. As the



**Figure 11.8** Philip Kwame Apagya, *Come on Board*, 2000. Courtesy of CAAC—The Pigozzi Collection.



woman in *Come on Board* embarks on the plane, her fashion choices, her hairstyle, her look at us—all reveal her ability to travel between here and there, between home and overseas. At the airport, she exists in multiple spaces at once: she is local and global, an everyday citizen of Ghana and a modern cosmopolitan citizen of the world.

In the late nineteenth century, Ottoman Arabs, particularly those in the developing middle class, were also keen to establish themselves as “modern” citizens. And, as with Apagya’s clients, they used photography to help them do so. One photographer particularly adept at creating images of the ideal modern subject was **Jurgi “George” Saboungi** (1840–1910) whose practice involved photographing an emerging Arab bourgeoisie, including some of the leading intellectual figures of the *nahdah*. *Nahdah* is Arabic for Renaissance and refers to a period in the Arab world from the mid-nineteenth century until World War I that saw a revitalization of classical Arabic literature and culture in conjunction with a growing attention to Western ideas and texts. Saboungi, who was born in Mardin (now part of Turkey), emigrated to Lebanon in the 1850s and eventually opened one of the first Arab owned and operated photography studios in the region. This fact is significant for it positions Saboungi as the producer and possessor of photographic knowledge, not its colonial recipient. Moreover, as historian Stephen Sheehi explains, in mastering photographic knowledge, local photographers such as Saboungi performed their modernity. Their mastery, Sheehi asserts, was itself “a social and political act, whereby the new *effendiyah* [middle class] owned the cultural capital necessary for the reform of Ottoman Arab societies.”<sup>29</sup>

How Saboungi’s clients dressed was also key to the staging and performance of a modern Arab subject, though there was substantive debate around this question. The *nahdah* was a product of combined native developments and foreign influence, and correspondingly, the debate centered on whether to adopt European-style clothes and accessories or reform-oriented Arabic fashion trends such as the fez (hat) and sirwal pants. Saboungi’s portraits, which depict subjects both in native and Western attire, thus reveal not only the coexistence of these different approaches to self-fashioning, but also how fashion choice was itself part of the visual semiotics of *nahdah* ideology. Saboungi’s images often show anonymous clients in a full-length view wearing native attire—a fez, sirwal pants, and a waistcoat—as if the image is designed at least in part to display his reformist fashion choices. But other portraits by Saboungi picture subjects wearing Western dress, including suit jackets, vests, and ties. Whether donning native or Western garb, Saboungi tends to picture his subjects holding the same gesture: one arm rests on the back of a parlor chair while the other sits atop a thin walking cane. The difference within this repetition suggests that a multitude of forms and sartorial codes coexist in Saboungi’s work, a multitude that speaks to the dynamism of his sitters’ identities and that embodies the *nahdah*’s social formations and cultural desires.

In 2004, *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour wrote, “I’ve long believed that the content of fashion does not materialize spontaneously but in ways both mysterious and uncanny, emerges from the fabric of the times.”<sup>30</sup> How that fashion is pictured and framed, whether glamorous, ugly, humble, or spectacular, similarly reveals the social history of its time.

## Summary

- In the West, spectacle culture and celebrity portraiture developed hand in hand.
- Graphic design and magazine layout are under-analyzed yet critical elements of fashion photography; they contribute to its mass distribution and provide opportunities for disruption.



- In the 1980s, a number of fashion photographers, stylists, and designers rejected the excessive glamor promoted by mainstream fashion, and developed an alternative fashion press.
- Fashion is inherently political, and fashion editorials in both commercial and self-published journals can have (in contrast to popular opinion) an antagonistic relationship with mainstream culture.

## Discussion points

- What is the difference between “celebrity” and “renown”? How does that distinction manifest itself in photographic portraits of famous people?
- How would you characterize the difference between a zine and a commercial magazine? Who is the audience for each?
- How would you characterize the difference between a disguise and haute-couture?
- How does dress, self-fashioning, and self-imaging relate to identity formation?

## Additional case studies

Leonce Raphael Agbodjelou (b. 1965)

Clarence Sinclair Bull (1896–1979)

Corrine Day (1965–2010)

Hassan Hajjaj (b. 1961)

Ruth Harriet Louise (1903–40)

Hein-Kuhn Oh (b. 1963)

Ruth Ossai (b. 1991)

Lisa Reihana (b. 1964)

Collier Schorr (b. 1963)

Manit Sriwanichpoom (b. 1961)

Yelena Yemchuk (b. 1970)

## Notes

- 1 Charlotte Cotton has written a number of significant articles and books on fashion photography, including *Imperfect Beauty: The Making of Contemporary Fashion Photographs* (London: V&A Publications, 2000); and *Fashion Image Revolution* (Munich: Prestel, 2018).
- 2 Cited in Brent Taalur Ramsey, “Kimiko Yoshida Reincarnates in YoshidaRorschach,” *Paste Magazine* (February 2017), <https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2017/02/japanese-photographer-kimiko-yoshida-has.html>.
- 3 Dan Winters interview with Rhaggart, posted May 27, 2016 on *Photo Folio News*, <http://news.photofolio.io/dan-winters-interview/>.
- 4 Dan Winters interviewed by Zack Seckler, edited by Greg Faherty, *The FStop*, September 1, 2010, <http://www.thefstopmag.com/?p=1049>.

- 5 Shawn Cater, or Jay-Z, National Portrait Gallery, [https://npg.si.edu/object/npg\\_NPG.2010.40](https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.2010.40).
- 6 “MoMA Learning: Richard Avedon and Marilyn Monroe,” MoMA, [https://www.moma.org/learn/moma\\_learning/richard-avedon-marilyn-monroe-actress-new-york-may-6-1957](https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/richard-avedon-marilyn-monroe-actress-new-york-may-6-1957). Originally quoted in Maria Morris Hambourg, Mia Fineman, and Richard Avedon, *Portraits: Richard Avedon* (New York: Harry N. Abrams and Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002).
- 7 Gaylen Moore, “Lotte Jacobi: Born with A Photographer’s Eye,” *New York Times*, September 16, 1979: SM11.
- 8 Benjamin Buchloh, “Residual resemblance: three notes on the ends of portraiture,” in Melissa E. Feldman (ed.), *Face-Off, The Portrait in Recent Art* (Philadelphia: Institute of Fine Art, 1994), 62.
- 9 Michael Graval, “‘A Dream of Stone’: Fame, Vision, and the Monument in Nineteenth-Century French Literary Culture,” *College Literature* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 85–6.
- 10 Dalila Scruggs, “‘Photographs to Answer Our Purposes’: Representations of the Liberian Landscape in Colonization Print Culture,” in Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein (eds.), *Early African American Print Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 203–30.
- 11 Scruggs, “Photographs to Answer Our Purposes,” 208.
- 12 Marey J. Dinius, “‘My daguerreotype shall be a true one’: Augustus Washington and the Liberian Colonization Movement,” in *The Camera and the Press: American Visual and Print Culture in the Age of the Daguerreotype* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 154–91.
- 13 Dinius, “My daguerreotype shall be a true one,” 179–80.
- 14 Madeleine Morley, “Nontsikelelo Mutiti’s Book Designs Explore Black African Identity, the Aesthetics of Hair Braiding, and Brooklyn Police Brutality,” *AIGA Eye on Design* (July 2017): 10, <https://eyeondesign.aiga.org/nontsikelelo-mutitis-book-designs-explore-black-african-identity-the-aesthetics-of-hair-braiding-and-harlem-police-brutality/>.
- 15 Morley, “Nontsikelelo Mutiti’s Book Designs Explore Black African Identity.”
- 16 Nettrice Gaskins, “Hair Braiding is Technology.” Written in parallel with Nontsikelelo Mutiti, “Ruka (To Braid/to knit/to weave),” August 2014, <https://www.recessart.org/nettrice-gaskins-critical-writing/>.
- 17 LTTR stands for anything from “Lesbians to the Rescue” to “Lacan Teaches to Repeat.”
- 18 In 2014 Hardy remade parts of the zine in over-scaled editions, so some of the images have a life after and outside of *FashionFashion*.
- 19 Guy Trebay, “Playing Dress Up for Keeps,” *New York Times*, September 30, 2009.
- 20 Phil Bicker, “*i-D*, *Jill* and *The Face*: Fashion’s Maverick Magazines,” *Aperture* 216, “Fashion” (Fall 2014): 107. Bicker was *The Face*’s art director from 1987 to 1991.
- 21 Alistar O’Neill, “Uneasy Bedfellows,” *Aperture* 216, “Fashion” (Fall 2014): 55.
- 22 In fact, *Eros*’s content was deemed so transgressive that Ginzburg was charged and found guilty of distributing obscene material through the mail, and in 1972, after a series of appeals, he served eight months in federal prison.
- 23 See Adrian Shaughnessy, *Herb Lubalin: American Graphic Designer 1918–81* (London: Unit Editions, 2012).
- 24 Hoda Katebi, “On the Political Value of Fashion,” JooJoo Azad, December 26, 2016, <http://www.joojooazad.com/2016/12/on-political-value-of-fashion.html>.
- 25 Ellen McLarney, “The Burqa in Vogue: Fashioning Afghanistan,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 2–3.
- 26 “Kenyan fashionista dares to stand out in Kibera Slum,” BBC, June 16, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-40012435>.
- 27 Tobias Wendl, “Entangled Traditions: Photography and the History of Media in Southern Ghana,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 39 (Spring 2001): 98.
- 28 Wendl, “Entangled Traditions,” 88.

- 29 Stephen Sheehi, *The Arab Imago: A Social History of Portrait Photography 1860–1910* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 32–3.
- 30 Anna Wintour, “Signs of the Times,” *Vogue* 194, no. 7 (July 2004): 30.

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# 12

## PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE CINEMATIC

A little more than a decade after the October Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet Union, film director **Dziga Vertov** (1896–1954) produced the experimental silent film, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). The film begins with a cameraman emerging from the distance, carrying a camera over his shoulder. As he walks toward the viewer, he appears to stop on top of another larger camera in order to adjust his own. He makes some modifications, and then quickly turns around and walks back out of the frame, at which point the film begins its kaleidoscopic tour of Soviet urban life in the 1920s. In the swirl of images that follows, Vertov presents Soviet citizens at work and at play, moving through streets, riding motorcycles, and working in factories. He shows close-ups of faces, park benches, and machines in motion. There too are moments when the screen splits and two different shots of the same object or space, like a building or a street, are projected together at tilted and odd angles, creating for the spectator a viewing experience that both documents and distorts reality (see Fig. 12.1). Throughout the film, Vertov also regularly returns to images of the cameraman filming, and as others have pointed out, if the film could be described as having characters at all, they would be the idea of modern life in the Soviet Union, the cameraman of the title, and the presence or concept of film editing.<sup>1</sup> *Man with a Movie Camera* is thus a film about filmmaking, and how the camera's lens—what Vertov calls the objective cinematic eye—can help build the Soviet Union's new proletarian society.

Part of what continues to interest scholars about this film is the way it straddles the divide between two opposing camps in early- and mid-twentieth-century cinema theory: on one side sit the realists, who advocate for a pure recording of reality, an “as it is”—to use Vertov's words—approach to documenting the world; on the other side reside the anti-realists, the more aesthetically oriented modernist filmmakers who believe that the ability to manipulate reality is film's most significant quality.<sup>2</sup> Vertov sought to balance these two positions by creatively guiding the public's perception of fact, and, as critic Viktor Shklovsky wrote in 1927 in the first issue of the Soviet avant-garde journal *Novyi lef*, showing them how “to see things as they have not been described” before.<sup>3</sup> Some of Vertov's Soviet contemporaries were thus pleased with his results, while others were not. Regardless, *Man with a Movie Camera* does successfully break down cinematic perception. He uses a number of methods to achieve this, but especially effective is the way in which he plays with, and at times inverts, still and moving images. A viewer might see, for instance, a still or frozen shot in one scene, followed by the animation of that exact frozen frame(s) in the next. The impression of motion is thereby exposed, in the words of film historian Malcolm Turvey, “to be a subjective appearance caused in part by the perceptual limitations of the human eye.”<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 12.1** Dziga Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera*, 2009. Album/Almay Stock Photo.

Well before Vertov, however—really since the advent of the cinema in the later part of the nineteenth century—still and moving images have shared an intimate and, at times, fraught relationship. This chapter addresses that history. As it does so, it also situates the photographic object in an expanded field of artistic production, one that freely borrows strategies and methods from other fields and media. But—and this is crucial—the idea of photography’s expanded field is not conceived here exclusively, or even primarily, in the terms posed by a scholar such as George Baker, whose important 2005 essay, “Photography’s Expanded Field,” analyzes how film and cinema have cast the medium of photography in crisis by displacing it—or at the very least, transforming it in radical ways. Rather, here, the “expanded field” is conceived as an extended global space, open to new narratives and interpretative approaches completely outside the terms of debate regarding medium specificity. Of course, one need only consider the fact that this introduction addresses the work of Dziga Vertov, or notice the chapter’s subsection titles—“An uncertain perception: stilled movement and staged stillness,” “Extended time in still and moving images,” and “Projection”—to realize that issues of medium are also addressed. But this address is done with some self-consciousness, and always with a conception of the expanded field as the image’s globalization in mind.

## An uncertain perception: stilled movement and staged stillness

Before digital technology, photography was, in some sense, a finite chemical process. Photographers and artists played with prints and negatives in the darkroom, but there was a limit to the medium's flexibility. The introduction and wide use of digital technologies, especially since the 1990s, has changed this, as we discuss in Chapter 2, and the once finite photographic practice has become more elastic, open to endless adjustment, and in dialogue with other media such as film. As a result, the look and meaning of the "photographic" has also changed. Qualities such as the "**decisive moment**," a concept introduced in 1952 by French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson describing the spontaneous, essential moment captured by photography; or **representational certainty**, a side effect of the medium's indexical status; or even the **moral certainty** that can accompany social observation and reportage practice—these traits no longer seem fitting characterizations of the digital photograph. Granted, to some extent, these attributes are just idealized memories of photography's past (and Chapters 1 and 2 discuss how there has always been an element of uncertainty in photographic imaging); nevertheless, a steadfast faith in representation, the temporal ordering of photographic imagery, and the affect—or feeling—one experiences looking at photographic pictures has been irrevocably altered by digital technology. As much as anything, the acceptance that images exist in a state of constant flux and that perception is uncertain undergird how contemporary viewers now see and understand photographic pictures.

It should be added, however, that such uncertain perception does not necessarily mean the end of photographic legibility or that images can never again be believed or grasped as "real." Consider, for instance, the digital photographs taken by U.S. soldiers during the Iraq War of human rights violations against detainees at Abu Ghraib prison. Some critics claim that when these images first surfaced in 2004 the American public had a relatively passive (or worse, morally blind) response to them. But in fact, the revelation of their existence led to an investigation by the U.S. military and Congress, and arguably contributed to the decline in U.S. support for the war. What these pictures point out, then, is that even digital images, which sometimes get theorized as a kind of fiction, as a "photographic" picture divorced from reality, still present themselves as a legally actionable trace of the real, and retain, to use literary critic Roland Barthes' term, *punctum*, or visual shock capable of striking the viewer with emotional force. The digital image's ability to function in a complex representational and documentary mode—simultaneously to challenge and maintain the norms of photography—might thus be seen as evidence of the continuing (rather than diminishing) power of the photographically based image and its potential to operate not only in an art space, but also with significant ramifications in the political public sphere.<sup>5</sup>

The work of Iranian-British artist **Mitra Tabrizian** exists precisely in this complex space between representation and documentation. Tabrizian, who is both a photographer and a filmmaker, left Iran for Europe in 1977, shortly before the Iranian Revolution. She now lives and works primarily in London, though periodically returns to Iran. Influenced by film noir and the look and style of films by directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Quentin Tarantino, and Japan's Takeshi Kitano, Tabrizian analyzes portrayals of crime, violence, and shady corporate dealings in order to transform that content in her own work into a commentary on the conditions of everyday life in a global economy. From the mid-2000s on, however, Tabrizian's imagery has more explicitly tackled issues of social upheaval and alienation. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall explains that Tabrizian's photographs do not function simply as "illustrations" for these already-constituted and profoundly complex concepts, but act as "'visual concept-spaces' in which



ideas are worked through . . . [and then] expanded and developed in another register—a kind of “thinking with/in the image.”<sup>6</sup> Tabrizian achieves this “thinking/in the image” in part by creating condensed narratives, as if an entire storyline has been fused into a single image.<sup>7</sup> Significant in this way too are her pictures’ obvious staging.

For instance, to make a photograph like *Tehran 2006* (2006), which tells a story about dislocation and social fragmentation in a then-recently developed residential section in the northwestern part of Tehran (see Fig. 12.2), Tabrizian, like a film director, instructed the figures in the photograph on where to stand, what attitude to express, and what gestures to hold. The characters in this story though play themselves: they are ordinary citizens (a taxi driver, a factory worker, a dressmaker, a cleaner, and so on) portrayed in aimless wander through the image’s visual space, trapped by their own circumstance. There is too a disorienting sadness to the picture, which feels like a direct expression of the figures’s social isolation as they are shown stopped mid-step, on an empty plot of land, in front of a billboard displaying Iran’s revolutionary leaders (Khomeini and the current Supreme Leader Khamenei). This giant billboard has been erected next to two high-rise towers, which themselves appear modern, even though the surrounding space looks run-down and suffers from a kind of infrastructural violence: there are no sidewalks, no parks, a car sits on a dirt path and there is no apparent system or plan for future development. The women wear hijabs, and the black cloth of their dresses, especially those figures on the left, has been stilled by the camera, caught mid-gesture, in what feels like a **simulacrum** or imitation of the “decisive moment.” Individuals stand apart, they look askance; the camera has stilled them too. In his book on photography and cinema, photography historian David Company writes, “The indexicality of a photograph combined with its stillness tends to produce not just a fixed record of the world but a fixed pointing at it.”<sup>8</sup> In *Tehran*, the bodies dispersed across the picture’s surface both occupy and point at their unsure social space. Grouped together yet isolated, these figures reveal that Tabrizian’s uncertain perception speaks not only about changes to the photographic medium, but also about a troubled cultural and social landscape.

Like Mitra Tabrizian, Beijing artist **Wang Qingsong** (b. 1966) makes large-scale color photographs of staged scenes that address issues of social upheaval, migration, and shifts in national identity. Sometimes with humor and sometimes with dark seriousness, Wang’s work—especially that made since 2000—asks what kind of future will emerge for Chinese citizens as the country’s communist past confronts



**Figure 12.2** Mitra Tabrizian, *Tehran 2006*, 2006. © Mitra Tabrizian. Courtesy of the artist and Leila Heller Gallery, New York.

today's global capitalist economy. Wang began his career as a painter and graduated from the Sichuan Academy of Fine Art, but in the late 1990s began producing sarcastic photographs depicting scenes of materialistic Buddhas holding objects like beer cans and cellphones. In *Thinker* (1998), Wang posed himself as a Buddha sitting atop three giant cabbage leaves made to look like a lotus, with a McDonald's logo engraved on his chest. About the ridiculousness of this and other similar images, Wang explains that in Europe and America

. . . [it] is well known that McDonald's and Pizza Hut are just fast-food stores . . . nothing more than convenience. However, when [these establishments] came to China, they became the top cuisine and hot rendezvous [spots] for people to have parties, invite friends, celebrate birthdays and meet lovers. On the surface, this phenomenon of going after what is Western style represents an ideal for Euro-American materialistic life. But . . . does this ideal also represent worship that can create a lot of ridiculous contradictions?<sup>9</sup>

*Thinker* reflects this observation: just as the introduction of Western fast food in China generates an uneasy play between the seemingly normal and potentially absurd, this picture is as imaginary and nonsensical as it is clear and rational.

Later photographs by Wang, such as the mural-sized *Competition* (2004), taken with a large format camera, present a more nuanced view of the conflicts and zones of cultural friction embedded in contemporary Chinese culture (see Fig. 12.3). To make this photograph, Wang first built a massive stage set in a Beijing film studio and then covered the walls of the constructed space with over 600 fake advertising posters, all of which were drawn by hand. The posters simulate corporate logos, both domestic and international; some can be read in English, like McDonalds, Shell, and Apple, others are written in Chinese. Wang has said that the wall in this particular image generally refers to a time during the **Cultural Revolution** when different factions of the Red Guard plastered public walls in Chinese cities with their own propaganda. In *Competition*, "the fight for advertising" becomes, in Wang's words, "as fierce as a struggle for military power."<sup>10</sup> *Competition* thus positions politics as an event experienced and expressed with one's eyes as much as through any other kind of civic action. Wang's own presence in the image as a director holding a megaphone and choreographing the scene (he stands on the shortest ladder on the left) reinforces this point. He is both in charge—moving props and people around the constructed reality—and a citizen-spectator—consumed by the overwhelming visual field that he himself manufactured. The picture is lucid and clean, but there is too much to see, too much detail, too many words in too many languages. The clarity becomes uncertainty, and the propaganda wall's reference to the Cultural Revolution, that is, to another moment when truth was hard to identify, is transferred via photography to the contemporary moment and the modern global economy. Estranged by its own extraordinary precision and excessive stillness, *Competition* allows spectatorship to be conceived as political experience, recognizing and pointing to the power dynamics of viewing.

Not all photographers who create narratives in imagined spaces, like Wang Qingsong and Mitra Tabrizian, make pictures that so clearly reveal their own constructed-ness, however. Like Tabrizian and Qingsong, **Tracey Moffatt** (b. 1960) stages her photographs and plays with cinematic visuality, but unlike their work, many of Moffatt's images, especially those from the 1990s, appear at least on some level to be contiguous with the world we live in, rather than manufactured by it. Born in Brisbane, Australia, Moffatt earned a degree in visual communication at the University of Queensland in 1982, and since the 1980s has switched back and forth between making films and making photographs. In both



**Figure 12.3** Wang Qingsong, *Competition*, 2004. © Wang Qingsong. Courtesy of the artist.

media, her work expresses an interest in artifice or the composed scene, and is influenced by cinema, television, and popular culture. *Scarred for Life* (1994), one of Moffatt's best-known series, comprises nine images featuring children and adolescents in suburban settings. Each picture presents, in a documentary-like fashion, the memory or moment of a trauma being enacted on a child by parents or older siblings. A caption based on a true story accompanies each picture. One example, *Useless, 1974* (1994) shows a girl—an actor hired by Moffatt for the photo shoot—wearing shorts and a tank top, crouching down to wash the headlight of a car (see Fig. 12.4). She looks toward the camera with a sideways glance, though it is difficult to know if she is engaging the camera or looking at something else outside the frame. The caption reads, “Her father’s nickname for her was ‘useless.’” The photograph has been shot from an angle that situates the viewer above the girl, and that positioning, combined with the girl’s expression—a mix of anger and woundedness—suggests (though somewhat ambiguously) that the viewer occupies the position of the father. Placed in the narrative this way, what is the spectator to do? Accept the cruel ambiguity of the view? Or, knowing that the image is staged, read and understand it as part of a cinematic experience that thereby relieves the viewer of responsibility?

But it is not just the viewer’s position which confounds in *Useless, 1974*; the image itself exists in a contradictory space characterized by another type of uncertainty. That is, if Tabrizian’s *Tehran* and Wang’s *Competition* play with, and in some sense update, the conventions and expectations associated with photography’s “decisive moment,” then Moffatt’s work, particularly images from her *Scarred for Life* series, undoes and reconstructs those associated with the family snapshot. Instead of providing a family with the typical mythical idealized image of itself, photographs such as *Useless, 1974*, show families wallowing in pain, enabling abuse, and exploiting unequal power relationships—all to suggest that ugly family histories have a way of coming back to haunt us. In Moffatt’s work, this last point could also be



**Figure 12.4** Tracey Moffatt, *Useless*, 1974, 1994. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Gallery, New York.

applied to the nation-state. One might see in *Useless, 1974*, or the *Scarred for Life* series more generally, the chattering ghost of Australia's colonial past recast as traumatic childhood memories, including the country's assimilationist policy, which legally took Aboriginal children from their mothers and fostered them out to white women.

Moffatt's Aboriginal identity, and concern in a number of her films with first Australians' rights, underlies this interpretation, as does her explanation of the title of her 1993 film *beDevil*, a film which repeatedly points to how development has destroyed Aboriginal land and people. "*beDevil*," Moffatt states, "is a very playful, old fashioned word that no one really uses anymore. It means 'to haunt and taunt'. The style of the film is teasing. You're following characters who are haunted by something, and I suggest perhaps we're all a little haunted in a way, and we probably don't ever come to terms with it."<sup>11</sup> In *Useless, 1974*, as in other of Moffatt's work, specters from the past refuse to liberate the present in a manner that

challenges our perception (photographic, cinematic, or even political) and shows that what the camera makes legible offers no guarantee of objectivity.

Moffatt composes narratives and stages documentary-style photographs to comment on colonialism's ugly and violent past, yet in the nineteenth century, colonial photographers employed many of the same strategies for opposite purposes: to dominate colonized bodies and demonstrate control and power over their surroundings. **Felice Beato** (1832–1909)—an Italian-British photographer who traveled extensively, lived in Japan shortly after the country opened itself up to the West, and eventually devoted himself to photographing Asia and the Near East—is one such example. Well known for his war images, including those of the Opium War in China in 1860, and the Sudanese colonial war in 1885, the images of concern here are those he made in partnership with his brother-in-law, James Robertson, of the Indian Mutiny and its aftermath. The Indian Mutiny (1857–8)—also referred to as the Indian Uprising or the First War of Indian Independence—was a popular uprising in India against British rule that saw participation from native soldiers serving in the Indian Army as well as civilians. The rebellion was ultimately unsuccessful, and the British waged a retributive campaign of extraordinary brutality in response. As art historian Sean Willcock describes it, “Indian civilians were terrorized, suspected collaborators or sympathizers were hanged by the dozen from makeshift gallows, and *sepoy* [Indian soldiers employed by the armies of the British East India Company] rebels were blown from the mouths of cannons in grisly spectacles of imperial justice.”<sup>12</sup>

After the British suppressed the rebellion, tourist visits to war memorials and sites of rebel violence, as well as photographic representations of those sites in the form of commercial and amateur images and postcards, became popular among the British. One of the most discussed images memorializing the rebellion is Beato's elaborately titled *Interior of the Secundra Bagh After the Slaughter of 2,000 Rebels by the 93rd Highlanders and the Punjab Regt. First Attack of Sir Colin Campbell in November 1857*, from 1858 (see Fig. 12.5). At first, the image appears to depict a small group of figures standing amidst the architectural debris left from a rebel attack on the villa. As one looks more carefully, however, it becomes clear that the image in fact displays the scattered bones of Indian insurgents who had been massacred by the British when they stormed the site. Skulls, femurs, ribcages are distributed across the picture's surface. The bodies are fully deconstructed, part-objects, detached from any whole. The image is made even more gruesome by the fact that Beato did not arrive at the site until March 1858, many months after the November 1857 massacre he pictures, which means the image is a constructed restaging of dead bodies splayed out in a public space. Sir George Campbell, then judicial commissioner of Lucknow where Secundra Bagh is located, commented on the shock of this dramatization, exclaiming, “The great pile of bodies had been decently covered before the photographer could take them, but he insisted on having them uncovered to be photographed before they were finally disposed of.”<sup>13</sup>

Beato's photograph thus must be seen not as a war image nor a simple staged documentary shot, but as a macabre cinematic tableau (a term we discuss in more detail in Chapter 2). In Moffatt's *Useless*, 1974, the space between the staged scene and the traumatic event to which it gestures (whether that event be personal or political) stimulates some degree of discomfort and uncertainty in the viewer. In Beato's photograph, however, that same contrived space seeks to intimidate the imagined Indian viewer and generate a sense of sadistic dominance for the assumed British one. Restaging the scene of spectatorship, the pose of photography in Beato's image of the slaughtered rebels conforms to colonialism's pictorial demands in which photography's artifice—its structured stillness and disconnection of image from referent—reinscribes rigid categories of racial difference and seeks to control and frame moments of social upheaval.





**Figure 12.5** Felice Beato, *Interior of Secundra Bagh After the Massacre*, 1858. Digital image courtesy of Getty's Open Content Program.

## FOCUS BOX 12

### Moving stills

*Marta Zarzycka*

The relationship between cinema and photography has been culturally fraught since the former's invention. The principle of stillness was inherent to photography from its early days: subjects had to remain immobile for a long time in order for the camera operator to capture the image, often to the point of physical discomfort. Photographs were thought to have no temporal directionality, unless connected to other shots in a sequence. Motion pictures, then, have been widely seen as “liberating” photographs from their stasis, expanding the possibilities for perception, involvement, affective response, and narrative. Animation has been understood as “putting life” in an image that has been long declared dead, facilitating identification with and empathy for characters, as well as bringing about immersion into a projected setting. Additionally,



stillness and movement have been perceived as vital components of our affective response to images. Visual and environmental studies scholar Giuliana Bruno aptly emphasizes the capacity of moving images to move their spectators through her claim that motion produces emotion as much as emotion contains movement. While the Latin root *emovere*, which comprises *movere*, “to move,” and *e*, “out,” is at the heart of both the words “movement” and “emotion,” the Greek word for cinema, *kinema*, likewise encompasses “motion” and “emotion.” Stillness, on the other hand, often signifies the state of retreat, arrest, and contemplation.

The stillness–movement divide has had a great impact on practitioners and scholars alike. The “white cube” of the gallery space containing photographs and the “black-box” of cinema space have been perceived as two disconnected realities. To date, scholarship on cinema and photography forms two separate, rarely overlapping disciplines, with different trajectories, methodologies, and intellectual traditions.

The dialectical tension between still and moving images can be a source of particularly fruitful exploration. Various types of physical movement that are involved in the process of production and reception of images—ranging from camera motion, the gesture of a photographer, and the flickering of our eyelids, to the fact that we as contemporary spectators are perpetually on the move—have sparked new and exciting scholarship. Since the invention of the medium, the means of viewing photographs have resisted stillness in the form of ocular inventions: flip books, moving-image automats, panoramas, magic lanterns, the wheel of life, the daedalum, the mutoscope, as well as the Ken Burns effect. Today, photographs—understood not as a material objects to be held, but rather digital images across electronic screens—further defy what once was seen to constitute a fundamental difference between the photographic and the cinematic. YouTube clips that can be paused and unpaused at any given moment, or still shots incorporated into moving footage in various multimedia projects, constitute a hybrid form that is as cinematic as it is photographic, rapidly becoming a part of such photography contests and online news platforms as Magnum in Motion or MediaStorm. Contemporary art projects increasingly explore the threshold that separates cinema and photography—the barely perceptible movement in Andy Warhol’s film showing the Empire State Building, Robert Wilson’s video portraits, or Gillian Wearing’s *Sixty Minute Silence*, an installation in which a group of people dressed as police agents were filmed in such extraordinary slow motion that the video seems to be a photograph, are but a few examples. Surveillance techniques, photographs “animated” by digital effects, biomedical imagery (x-ray, MRI, nanoimages), and photofilmic images generated digitally in programs such as iMovie, photosynth, AutoStitch, and PhantaMorph, and other visual forms also render the once apparently stable wall between cinema and still photography increasingly permeable.

Moreover, still photographs are on the move more than ever before, passing through various distribution channels, assuming different forms, and undergoing mediation by

different technologies and users. The contemporary spectator has splintered: her visual experience is no longer limited to images encountered in one place, but rather consists of endless encounters as images travel across (sometimes overlapping) sites, spaces, and screens. Visual technologies themselves have become more portable and mobile, becoming powerful tools in the hands of social media users, forming new communities of viewers across viewing contexts. A photograph in a Gaza paramedic's Twitter post, for instance, makes the front page of the *Guardian*, while an embedded reporter's snapshot posted to Instagram becomes an exquisite (and expensive) prize-winning print in a professional photography contest. The "stillness" of photography has become an archaic concept.

Another aspect of differentiation between photography and cinema worth rethinking in present mediascapes is the absence/presence of sound. With the invention of cinema (though silent at first), sound, whether diegetic or not, has been seen as integral to the cinematic image, whether in dialogue, voiceovers, music, or in other sounds that accompany the moving image and create sensory experiences beyond the visual. By contrast, the "stillness" that has been ascribed to photography has been implied not only as "immobile" but also "inaudible." Photography has been culturally perceived as being a soundless practice. Yet, still photographs are and have been accompanied by various soundscapes, music, dialogues, or voiceovers—for example, Nan Goldin's slide show, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, in the 1980s (paralleled by popular everyday practices, such as playing music over a slideshow during a wedding or birthday party), or, once again, contemporary multimedia projects such as *Family Love* by Darcy Padrilla (1993–2014). In these projects, "seeing" incorporates listening, either confusing or enhancing our engagement with the images. The aural participates directly in conveying, prolonging, and amplifying the emotional impact of images. The formal qualities of the photographs (texture, contrast, lighting, composition) also interact with the formal and temporal qualities of sounds. Together they create a multisensory experience of unison or discontinuity, one that is radically different from what sight alone could have produced. The relationship between sound and cinema on the one hand, and silence and photography on the other, can no longer be taken for granted.

Undoing the binaries between movement–stillness and sound–silence involves re-educating our comprehensive and receptive skills in an era where media genres become fluid and merge into one another. Such an approach breaks through current discipline-bound debates to examine a media landscape in which stillness and movement are both deeply integrated into our visual experience. Rather than concentrating on the decoding of images as static or mobile, and audible or silent, a renewed interest in "media ecologies," emerging in contemporary cultural studies, offers a chance to theorize the cross-fertilizations of the cinematic and the photographic and tap into the ongoing debate on the politics and ethics of representing the contemporary world.

## Extended time in still and moving images

In 1985, French film theorist Christian Metz sought to map out the connection between photography and film. He described both as sharing certain technical aspects, but noted that the two media have different relationships to time, framing, and object-hood. With regard to time, the photograph, for Metz, was fixed and tied to the past, while film always seemed to unfold in the present.<sup>14</sup> German cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer, in his text *Theory of Film* (1960), similarly argued that the difference between photography and film has to do with temporality, and that photography is limited by always being a fixed representation of the past.<sup>15</sup> Today, as art historians, film theorists, and communications scholars speak more and more about a photographic–filmic hybridity, fewer and fewer would make such all-encompassing pronouncements. Still, the question remains: how can a static photograph produce movement and generate extended time? And relatedly, when does a photographic encounter end? After the shutter clicks? After a photographer prints her or his work? After a viewer engages with an image and then stops looking at it?

The relationship between duration and photography can be thought of in a number of ways. On one level, it might refer to the long-term commitment to recording a process that occurs over a substantial amount of time. For example, U.S. photographer **Susan Meiselas's** photographs of the Nicaraguan revolution (1978–9) and its aftermath took place over a period of more than twenty years. As a result, her images depict the revolution as an ongoing, durational process. Correspondingly, in its commitment to extended moments of looking, observing, documenting, and relating, the work builds a sense of history and community that allows social relations to make sense—to become, in a word, narratable. This point further suggests how photographers might extend time through the production of durational viewing experiences, which might involve creating books, making slide shows, producing films, online sites, or other structures where images move from one to the next such that they become inextricable from a narrative succession. Often guided by an awareness that the present is a dynamic of past and future, such looking might be described as **photo-chronographic** viewing, out of which another kind of durational experience emerges, one characterized by an impossible closure on meaning production.

In 2006, photographer **James Rodríguez** (b. 1972) developed an online venture, MiMundo.org, that aims to engender this type of viewing experience and combat efforts (by governments and multinational corporations) to seal off past political and historical events from the present social world. MiMundo.org is a long-term online project dedicated to recording in image and explanatory text postwar justice processes, human rights abuses, and other kinds of political and social conflicts in Guatemala and the surrounding region.<sup>16</sup> Rodríguez, who was raised in Mexico, came to the United States as a teenager, worked in Japan after graduating from college, and moved to Guatemala in 2004 to join Peace Brigades International. Working with Peace Brigades, he became aware of how Guatemala's civil war, though officially declared over in 1996, continues to grip the country. One legacy involves gang activity; another, violent land struggles between indigenous populations and mining companies. Both cause thousands of Guatemalans to migrate north. But the legacy of the war's disappeared also continues to haunt the country, which has led to the development and use of sophisticated forensic technology labs in hopes of identifying the missing as part of the reconciliation process.

Rodríguez initially started a photo blog, which then morphed into MiMundo.org, as a way to let others know about the forensic work being done in Guatemala. Photographs on his site, including one that depicts a hand-woven blouse recovered from a mass grave and accompanying caption outlining the work of the Forensic Anthropology Foundation of Guatemala, visually disclose how Guatemala's past



**Figure 12.6** James Rodríguez, A traditional Mayan Huipil, or hand-woven blouse, recovered at a mass grave, dries under the sun at the headquarters of the Forensic Anthropology Foundation of Guatemala (FAFG), 2015. © James Rodríguez. Courtesy of the artist/MiMundo.org.

war endures in the present (see Fig. 12.6). Exhumed from a grave, pulled literally from the past, this photograph shows an object in the process of drying in the sun, of, in some way, reconstituting itself and finding a way to retell its story. In this way, Rodríguez's project works against an idea of photographic fixity that forecloses on the past. This is no small point, for representations that give a sense of elapsed time frequently also show the relationship that events, actions, and structures have with their historical contexts. It is also how still photographs can acquire transformative potential in shaping the way political subjects identify and recognize themselves, a vital precondition for the formation of politicized individuals and communities, and for coming to terms with past events as they affect the future. In other words, such durational viewing becomes a way to refuse the temporality of defeat and the temptation of narrative closure.

Yet not all durational viewing results from sequences of text and image, or other types of traditional time-based media that require spectators to spend prolonged moments looking. **Darren Almond's** (b. 1971) series *Fullmoon*, taken of mountains, streams, and other unusual geologic formations in Patagonia and Cape Verde, provide one example of photography's ability to communicate protracted time within a single frame. Almond shot the images from this series in the middle of the night, using light from the full moon as his only source of illumination. The relative darkness of these working conditions necessitated that he use long exposure times ranging from twelve to ninety minutes depending on cloud cover. In this sense, Almond's practice might be thought of as recording duration, and his images look as if stacked

beneath every single photograph—compressed underneath—are thousands more. The effect of this slow-motion exposure is also somewhat disorienting. *Fullmoon@Cerro Chaltén* (2013), for instance, illustrates what at first glance looks like a beautiful, perhaps even **sublime**, view of a river cutting back into a landscape toward mountains (see Plate 19). But the longer one looks at the image, the stranger it gets. The water, which is the Rio Baker, has somehow been stilled and looks almost like petrified lava, while the clouds in the upper left, blurred together, resemble smoke coming out of a chimney. Because the land forms appear both hyper-real and totally fake, the image produces a kind of surreal estrangement. The durational aspect of Almond's process, in other words, exposes the artificiality of photography itself—we see how his method affects and frames our vision.

In 1831, Charles Darwin received an invitation to travel around the world as a naturalist on a small vessel known as the *Beagle*. The trip, originally planned as a two-year journey, ended up lasting almost five years. Much of those five years were spent exploring the southern end of South America, including Patagonia, an area shared by Argentina and Chile, and the region where Almond photographed much of his *Fullmoon* series. Indeed, Almond—who like Darwin is British—used Darwin's earlier trip as a loose reference point for his own, and even read Darwin's *Journal of Researches* (1839) during his journey south. The reference back to Darwin fits well with the durational component of Almond's images: if it is possible to imagine thousands of pictures stacked beneath the surface of *Fullmoon@Cerro Chaltén* then surely one of those is the view glimpsed by nineteenth-century explorers like Darwin. But the citation back to Darwin is important for another reason. When Darwin wrote about this site in the Southern Patagonian Ice Field, he described it as “a country completely unknown” near “the end of the world.”<sup>17</sup> Almond's image, as if in response to Darwin's words, erases the possibility of belief in the untouched “natural” landscape (an idea discussed further in Chapter 4). The *Fullmoon* series, then, via Almond's prolonged photographic process, reveals the artifice of such beliefs and transforms those spaces into a beautiful, dreamy unrealness where nature can only be seen as coterminous with human culture.

Like Darren Almond's *Fullmoon* series, *Island* (2008) by **Fiona Tan** (b. 1966) shows a temporally extended view of a natural landscape (see Fig. 12.7). Tan, who was born in Indonesia, and lives and works in Amsterdam, focuses in this work on Gotland, an island off the east coast of Sweden. Filmed in black and white, *Island* is a twelve-minute video that begins with a still shot of a distant view of a lighthouse and trees. A gently swaying body of water fills the foreground and keeps, for a drawn-out moment, the land at bay. The film eventually cuts to another shot, and the viewer is brought to shore. Once here, however, only a single tree and some scrubby bush is visible. As with the previous views, the camera holds this shot for a long time. It looks like a photograph, except that the wind moves the tree, and it sways, just as the water had in earlier views. The film cuts to another shot. Again, the camera holds the view still; again, it looks like a photograph that moves just slightly in the wind. The soundscape, like the imagery, communicates a mix of stillness and movement: the spectator/listener hears the surf, the wind, birds, the island's natural hums and echoes. These are the sounds one would hear standing still while listening to movement. A voice-over, spoken by British poet and playwright Heathcote Williams, recounts the story of a woman who came to the island as a retreat—as a place to think—and who experiences both insight and restless anxiety. There are a few moments when the camera's view seems to overlap with the unseen woman described by the narrator, and in these moments the camera is disruptive and swerves aimlessly across a grassy field. Such instances feel in some way like a plea to the viewer to listen to their inner voice, and to run.

Tan has identified her work as occupying a “strange twilight zone” between photography and film. About *Island* specifically she has said, “much of the film could almost be called anti-cinematic. It is as if





**Figure 12.7** Fiona Tan, *Island*, 2008. © Fiona Tan. Courtesy of Frith Street Gallery, London.

the images are not moving but are still images but not actual film stills.”<sup>18</sup> Interpreting Tan’s roundabout formulation, scholar Louise Hornby explains that “the anti-cinematic is neither contra-cinema nor simply pro-photographic. Instead, it occupies the suspended area between photography and film: composed of still images but not images that have been stilled completely. The origin of stillness is transferred from photographic technology (the still camera) to the film subject (the still image).”<sup>19</sup> The confrontation, and confusion, staged in this work between photography and film—including the lingering long takes and the absence of a clear narrative—does not generate the surreal estrangement found in Almond’s work, yet it does open up for the viewer a space of agitated calm. In *Island*, the interplay of stasis and motion undoes the terms of opposition between photography and film such that thought—that is, the very idea and experience of stilled contemplation—is represented through the depiction of its opposite. This model of looking at and conceiving images provides a way to think not only about how images behave over time, but also how a certain form of representation itself figures elapsed time.

A number of precedents exist for the kind of photographic–filmic hybridity explored by Tan in *Island*. One of the earliest is **chronophotography** or stop-motion images developed in the nineteenth century by Eadweard Muybridge and Jules Etienne Marey of human and animal bodies in motion. Vertov’s *Man With a Movie Camera*, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, is another. Less expected examples also come to mind, such as the work produced by American **Paul Strand** (1890–1976) in Mexico in the 1930s. Though today best known for creating images such as *Blind Woman* (1916), a brutally frank picture of a blind street peddler in New York City taken without the subject’s knowledge, Strand’s pictures from Mexico reveal how photographers in the early part of the twentieth century already understood photography’s stillness as a quality not necessarily at odds with the durational aspect of cinema.



Strand first traveled to Mexico in 1932, at the invitation of Mexican composer Carlos Chávez. Though it was not initially clear if Strand would take photographs on his visit, once there, he began shooting pictures of people, the Mexican countryside, churches and religious icons known as *bultos* figures, which are small wooden sculptures that frequently depict a suffering Christ. Strand encountered these religious figures in churches where there was minimal natural light. Thus, like Darren Almond photographing Patagonia by the light of the full moon, Strand had to utilize a very slow shutter speed, sometimes using exposure times of an hour or more. As a result, his images of religious objects are also representations of duration, a fact that contributes to the work's meaning. That is, the slowness of Strand's images encourages the viewer to draw a parallel between the suffering *bultos* figures and the people he saw in the street.<sup>20</sup> Or as critic Elizabeth McCausland describes it, Strand's photographs from Mexico operate in a space between stasis and dynamism. In a 1940 essay, McCausland elucidates: "It is possible to look at [Strand's] photographs [from Mexico] as at still lifes executed with consummate skill, or to study them as documents of the culture which created them. But this is a static approach: the terrible stillness of their plastic organization proves that behind the surface representation seethe volcanic forces."<sup>21</sup> For McCausland, part of the power behind Strand's Mexican photographs emerges from the way he inverts stillness and movement—static and "volcanic" forces—with the implication that a similar kind of inversion can drive changes in political consciousness.

Strand's film, *The Wave* (in Spanish, *Redes*) from 1937, also shot in Mexico, further reveals how his work from this period reverses moments of action and stillness in order to highlight moments of dramatic historical possibility. *The Wave* tells the story of how fishermen in a small village in Veracruz, Mexico, struggle to organize a union. When the local businessman, who typically buys the fishermen's catch, refuses to pay them a reasonable amount for their goods, one worker, a man named Miro, calls a meeting to organize. Throughout, Strand's exceedingly slow camera interrupts the general movement of the storyline, creating extended moments of looking, listening, and waiting. This is especially the case at the meeting where the fishermen assemble after Miro's organizing call. At this point in the film, a series of shots appear that seem designed as still pictures: Miro raises his hand to the crowd, the crowd assembles, Miro faces the crowd and turns his back to the viewer, Miro appears in profile with the sea behind him, and so on. These moments have been stilled and animated such that the viewer becomes aware of how one, in this case Miro, sees and thus organizes the world. Looking—seeing—as art historian Stephanie Schwartz has argued, is here denaturalized, understood as helping to produce, not simply reflect, society's structuring.<sup>22</sup> Towards the end of the film, a fight breaks out between the fishermen Miro has successfully unionized and the scabs—a fight that ends in Miro's death. This event, orchestrated by an evil businessman, does not, as the businessmen hoped, further divide the fishermen, but instead unites them. And in this, Miro's death is neither final nor fixed; its stillness unleashes volcanic forces and creates movement—in this case, a political movement.

## Projection

In a passage from his 1973 autobiography, civil rights activist Cleveland Sellers describes what it was like to see a movie in the segregated South of the United States:

We always entered the side door of the theatre, the one reserved for blacks, and invariably sat in the balcony, thus segregated from whites . . . We sat in the same place—the front row of the balcony—

and propped our feet on the banister while watching the movies. When the pictures were boring, we would throw popcorn, empty soft-drink cups and water on the whites seated below. We got a big kick out of that.<sup>23</sup>

This memory, as scholar Elizabeth Abel has described, exposes the material conditions of viewing—what it feels like on your body to sit in a seat, consume beverages, experience boredom. The persistent reality of these conditions challenges much European film theory from the second half of the twentieth century, which situates cinema's viewers inside a hermetically sealed, darkened cave severed from any exterior social relationships, and glued to the flickering images on the screen.<sup>24</sup> A photograph from 1912 of a segregated theatre in Hannibal, Missouri, illustrates this point well (see Fig. 12.8). In the image, rows of white audience members fill the downstairs while above them, in what feels like the way-way back, is a balcony reserved for people of color. One child in the front row covers his ears, but for the most part, the theatergoers appear accommodating, their bodies disciplined by their viewing positions: they are



**Figure 12.8** [Herbert?] Tomlinson, *Opening Night at the Rex Theater Hannibal, MO, 1912*. Courtesy of Hannibal Free Public Library.

prepared to consume whatever appears before them. The same is not so true for the crowd in the balcony, however. Situated beyond the established frame of viewing, the theater's architecture neglects the African American audience. And yet this exclusion uniquely positioned the audience to see the *whole* movie environment outside of any prescribed perspective or predetermined narrative, be that Hollywood's or any other institution connected to the culture industry.<sup>25</sup>

Like Sellers' memory of throwing popcorn and empty cups from the balcony above and behind the white audience, the work of **Saïdou Dicko** (b. 1979) demonstrates how bodies and lived experience can be projected into space without succumbing to the pitfalls of the traditional cinematic setting. Dicko, who was born in Burkina Faso in West Africa and currently lives and works in Paris, began his career as a painter of shadows, inspired by the images he saw on the desert landscape working as a herdsman. In 2005, he switched media and began photographing shadows of people and animals, such as *La Bouilloire* (*Tea Kettle*) from 2014, which shows the shadows of two young boys projected onto a cerulean blue wall. A blue-and-white kettle occupies the foreground along with other shadows projected from an object(s) and/or person(s) that stands outside the image's frame (see Plate 20). Dicko sometimes talks about his pictures in utopic terms, exclaiming that as his cast shadows remove signs of religion, skin color, and ethnic and national identity, they also erase difference. But this abstracts his images too much. In *La Bouilloire*, for instance, we are given an expanded field of vision that reveals a surprising amount about the boys whose shadows we see, as well as their environment. In fact, their likenesses here merge with, and become inseparable from, their lived experience. In almost direct opposition to the kind of spectacular transcendent vision promised by the movie theatre experience, Dicko's *La Bouilloire* re-embodies the projected image and gives it life outside the theatre's determining space.

In a way, this volume has similarly tried to make visible a history of photography that exists outside of any hermetically sealed box. Returning to the Rex Theatre photograph, the orderly rows of the white audience members resemble perspectival lines leading to single viewing point—the film's projection window. They might also be thought of metaphorically as representing various photographic genealogies that all ultimately converge in a stable origin point. And, just as individual faces with different expressions and clothes can be seen in the audience, different artists and different global contexts might be mentioned in these genealogies, but the history still traces back to the same spot. But what of the crowd hovering above the downstairs audience? What kind of story can be told from a position that takes this perspective into account? In this book we hope to initiate a conversation that thinks about photography's history and "expanded field" in a manner that offers new interpretative approaches outside the stable viewing position that is so elegantly, if unwittingly, illustrated in Tomlinson's 1912 photograph.

## Summary

- Digital technology has made photography a more flexible open-ended medium, which sometimes results in an uncertain perception.
- The expression "photography's expanded field" refers not only to changes in the medium, but also to photography's globalization, its openness to new narratives and interpretive approaches.
- The play between still and moving images affects the temporal ordering of the photographic image.

- Photography is a discursively promiscuous media, evidenced in part by recent acknowledgments of a photographic–filmic hybridity.

## Discussion points

- Does it make sense to distinguish film and photography as two distinct media? Why or why not?
- Describe the difference between film’s freeze frame and a photograph’s still picture.
- How does an emphasis on duration in photographic imagery change the way a photograph might be used or circulated?
- Is narratability a quality unique to cinematic viewing, or can a photograph also possess this quality?
- How do the material conditions of viewing affect the way one sees and interprets imagery?

## Additional case studies

Knut Asdam (b. 1968)

Black Audio Film Collective (active 1982–98)

Gregory Crewdson (b. 1962)

Leslie Hewitt (b. 1977)

Steve McQueen (b. 1969)

Juan David Laserna Montoya (Collectivo Nasti) (b. 1980)

Daido Moriyama (b. 1938)

Beatriz Santiago Muñoz (b. 1972)

Mike Osborne (b. 1978)

Hiroshi Sugimoto (b. 1948)

## Notes

- 1 See Annette Michelson’s introduction in Annette Michelson (ed.) and Kevin O’Brien (trans.), *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Also, see the Museum of Modern Art’s description: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/89505>.
- 2 See Dziga Vertov, “On *Kinopravda*,” in Annette Michelson (ed.) and Kevin O’Brien (trans.), *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 45. For a nuanced discussion of Vertov’s place in the realist/anti-realist debate and his ethical positioning, see Malcom Turvey, “Vertov, the View from Nowhere and the Expanding Circle,” *October* 148 (Spring 2014): 79–102.
- 3 Cited in Leah Dickerman, “The Fact and the Photograph,” *October* 118 (Fall 2006): 144.
- 4 Turvey, “Vertov, the View From Nowhere,” 87.
- 5 See Terri Weissman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect*, review by Stephen F. Eisenman, *caa.reviews*, December 18, 2007, <http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/1067#.V9PclFce7ww>.
- 6 Stuart Hall, “The Way We Live Now,” in *Beyond the Limits* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2004), 2.

- 7 Hall, "The Way We Live Now," 9.
- 8 David Company, *Photography and Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 143.
- 9 Wang Qingsong, quoted in Patricia Eichenbaum Karetzky, "Wang Qingsong's Use of Buddhist Imagery (There Must Be a Buddha in a Place Like This)," *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 12, no. 1 (2013): 42–3.
- 10 Wang Qingsong, quoted in Carol Carter, "Contemporary Photomedia in China," 2004, [http://www.chinaphotoeducation.com/Carol\\_China/Wang\\_Qingsong\\_2.html](http://www.chinaphotoeducation.com/Carol_China/Wang_Qingsong_2.html).
- 11 Tracey Moffatt, *Vogue Australia* (June 1993): 57, quoted in Catherine Summerhayes, "Haunting Secrets: Tracey Moffatt's bedevil," *Film Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 14.
- 12 Sean Willcock, "Aesthetic Bodies: Posing on Sites of Violence in India, 1857–1900," *History of Photography* (June 2015): 145.
- 13 Sir George Campbell, *Memoirs of my Indian Career*, quoted in Willcock, "Aesthetic Bodies," 157.
- 14 See Christian Metz, "Photography and Fetish," *October* 34 (Fall 1985): 81–90. Also see David Company's summary of this text in his *Photography and Cinema*, 11.
- 15 See Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).
- 16 MiMundo.org, <http://www.mimundo.org/about>.
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# KEY TERMS

**abstract** a form of representation that uses shapes, colors, forms, and gestural marks rather than accuracy and recognizable imagery to depict the visible world

**Abstract Expressionism** an artistic movement in New York after World War II that used abstraction to convey strong emotional and expressive content

**Afro-pessimism** a term used by Okwui Enwezor to describe the tendency to depict Africans in terms of exotic and pathological stereotypes

**ambrotypes** photographic technology developed in the 1850s using a glass plate treated with light-sensitive chemicals to produce a single image

**American exceptionalism** a belief that the United States is extraordinary in comparison to other nations in terms of culture, economy, and government

**analog photography** non-digital photography relying on light and chemicals to create images

**anomie** developed by sociologists such as Emile Durkheim and Robert K. Merton, the concept refers to the absence of clear social norms and values and a lack of a sense of social regulation

**Anthropocene** refers to the current geological epoch during which human activity on the ecosystem and climate has been dominant

**anthropometric photography** images measuring the physical characteristics of a subject often featuring a grid or yard stick and related to the racist classifying impulse of ethnographic photography

**anti-apartheid movement** a twentieth century international political organization against South African racial segregation

**apartheid** a system of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa that lasted from 1948 until 1994

**appropriation** the intentional borrowing, copying, and alteration of pre-existing images and objects

**Arab Spring** a series of pro-democracy uprisings and protests across the Middle East and North Africa that began on December 18, 2010 in Tunisia with the Jasmine Revolution

**archive** a site where public records, historical documents, and photographs are classified, stored, and preserved and where history, memory, and knowledge are produced, negotiated, and contested

**aura** a term used by Walter Benjamin in his 1936 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," to refer to the authority held by the unique, original work of art

**avant-garde** refers to works of art which are experimental, innovative, or ahead of their time

**Bauhaus** an early twentieth century German art school combining aesthetics, design, and technology

**born-digital** photographic images created through digital means rather than converted from other media

**camera-less photography** photographic technology using light-sensitive surfaces rather than a machine to capture images

**carte de visite** a small portrait photograph mounted on a piece of card patented by the French photographer Andre Adolphe Eugene Disdéri in 1854

**chemogram** a camera-less image created from incidental deposits of water and dirt when light-sensitive paper passes through a photo-developing machine

**chronophotography** stop-motion photography made famous by photographer Eadweard Muybridge in 1872

**colonialism** political and economic control of a nation by a foreign state

- color-field painting** a twentieth century painting style employing blocks of color and flat planes to evoke emotions; closely related to Abstract Expressionism
- combination printing** a technique of combining two or more photographic negatives into a single image
- conceptual art** art in which ideas are paramount and the material form is secondary that often challenges traditional ideals of art making and includes works that are ephemeral, unpretentious, and/or “dematerialized”
- Constructivism** an artistic movement that started in Russia in the 1920s which is noted for its abstract angular and industrial aesthetic
- critique of documentary photography** a critical evaluation of the assumed objectivity and neutrality of documentary photography and the power relationships embedded within it
- Cubism** an early twentieth century artistic movement noted for its use of multiple viewpoints and geometric shapes
- Cultural Revolution** the period in China from 1966 until 1976 marked by mass purges of intellectuals and opposition figures, the rise of the militant youth group known as the Red Guard, and the solidification of the cult of personality of Chairman Mao Zedong
- cult value** a term coined by philosopher Walter Benjamin that refers to a work of art’s unique presence and aura; it is a mode of experiencing art that is rooted in ritual
- Cuzco School of Photography** a Peruvian art movement in the early twentieth century focused on progressive ideas such as indigenismo
- cyanotype** a photographic printing process invented by Sir John Herschel in 1842 that produces a cyan-blue print
- decisive moment** a concept introduced in 1952 by photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson describing the moment in which spontaneity and formal composition align in order to capture the essence of an event in time
- decolonialization** the termination of foreign control of former colonies in favor of local governance, as well as the conscientious reclaiming of what was taken and honoring the histories and peoples that have been repressed and exploited
- dematerialization** the object becomes inconsequential compared to the idea and/or no tangible object exists in the traditional sense
- digital photography** photographic technology which processes images into electronic data without light-sensitive material
- directorial mode** a term coined by critic A. D. Coleman in 1976 to separate photographers who privilege realism from those who stage scenes
- documentary photography** refers in the broadest sense to any use of the photographic medium as visual evidence
- Düsseldorf School of Photography** a photography group founded at the Kunstacademie Düsseldorf under the instruction of Bernd and Hiller Becher in the 1970s and inspired by the New Objectivity movement of the 1920s
- Eastman Kodak Company** a U.S. business established in 1888, known for producing inexpensive cameras and photographic film and bringing photography to the majority of the population
- ethnographic photography** an anthropological approach to documenting diverse cultures and peoples that often emphasizes differences
- ethnography** the scientific study of human cultures
- exhibition value** a term coined by philosopher Walter Benjamin which develops out of a work of art’s portability and reproducibility; it signifies a mode of experiencing art that is accessible and universal
- folk art** work produced by informally trained or self-taught artists and often expressing regional and cultural aesthetics
- formalism** the study of the physical characteristics and visual appearance of works of art
- Futurist** an art movement originating in Italy in the early twentieth century inspired by modern technology such as the airplane and car to express speed, dynamism, and movement
- genre** an art historical category delineating the types of scenes being depicted, such as portraits, landscapes, or still lifes
- globalization** increasingly interconnected individuals and companies throughout the world due to advancements in technology and the international expansion of capitalism
- Holocaust** the systematic state-sponsored killing of six million Jewish men, women, and children and millions of others by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War II
- human exceptionalism** the belief in the supremacy of humans, also known as Humanocentrism

- indexical** the idea that photography holds not only a similarity with or a resemblance to what it depicts—its referent—but is also said to have been directly caused by this referent and thereby could not exist without it
- indigenismo** a progressive political movement in Latin America that focused on the rights of indigenous populations rather than the minority rule of European and European descended elites
- internet** a global computer network used for electronic communication
- large format camera** records images in a format larger than 4 x 5 inches, with the main advantage being their incredible image resolution
- Leica camera** a commercially available, lightweight, handheld 35mm camera, invented by Oskar Barnack of the Leitz Company in 1914, that allowed for instantaneous exposure, fast film advance, and a high degree of image definition under varying lighting conditions
- luminogram** a camera-less photographic process in which photosensitive paper is exposed to a light source and the image is rendered based on the distance between the materials and the light source rather than an object
- Magnum** an international photographic agency established in 1947 by photographers to represent their work
- Manifest Destiny** a nineteenth century belief that the United States was ordained by God to expand westward across the North American continent
- materiality** the physical qualities of an object
- Missions Héliographiques** a nineteenth century government-sponsored project to photograph landmarks and monuments around France so that they could be restored
- modernism** a mid-nineteenth century artistic movement that rejected previous styles in favor of experimentation, innovation, and technology reflecting the reality of modern life
- modernist photography** a tendency within photography to produce images with a sharp focus and an emphasis on formal qualities
- moral certainty** the belief that photography, especially photojournalism, presents the viewer with a truthful and unbiased image
- multispecies ecological being** a theory argued by Donna Haraway that humans are not singular beings, but are comprised of complex sympatric relationships with internal and external species
- nahdah** an Arabic term for awakening, referencing a cultural renaissance during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century across North Africa and the Levant
- neoliberalism** a twentieth century political theory marked by pro-capitalism, deregulation, and free trade
- New Formalism** a term coined by curator Christopher Bedford to describe a group of twenty-first century artists who explore issues around photography's material and physical properties, including its relationship to light and space
- New Indianist movement** a nationalist movement in Peru that elevated indigenous culture to a legitimate, positive element
- New Objectivity** a twentieth century German art movement focused on realistic portraiture in opposition to the romantic subjectivity of Expressionism
- New Vision** a post-World War I photography movement that used inventive and unorthodox techniques, such as extreme close-ups, negative printing, and photograms, to experience and reframe, rather not just depict, the world
- Non-Aligned Movement** an organization of 120 member nations that sought alternatives to the bipolar politics that dominated the Cold War era
- non-productive labor** a theory developed by eighteenth century economist Adam Smith identifying work which does not produce essential goods and therefore does not contribute to economic growth
- objecthood** the condition of being an object
- Old Master paintings** created by European painters between the Renaissance and 1800
- ontology** the philosophical study of the nature of existence; in art, it considers the matter, form, and mode in which art exists
- Orientalism** western representations of the cultures and history of North Africa, the Levant, and Asia relying heavily on stereotypes and focused on themes such as the harem
- panoptic** “all seeing,” or an image that presents a panoramic view
- photo-chronographic** the process of viewing the progression of time through artistic intervention
- photogram** an image created by placing objects on photosensitive material before exposing it to a light source

- photographic humanism** the belief that photography can communicate of “universal” values
- photomontage** an image constructed by merging elements of two or more photographs
- Photoshop** a computer program that allows artists to edit digital images
- Pictorialism** a photographic movement that mimicked the soft and romantic properties of painting
- Pictures Generation** a group formed in New York City in the 1970s dealing with issues of identity, consumerism, and authenticity through the medium of photography, film, and performance
- Polaroid** a camera with internal processing that produces a finished print rapidly after each exposure
- portrait photography** a formal, posed image of an individual or group often taken in a studio with props, furnishings, and backdrops
- postcolonialism** a period of rising nationalism and independence during the early to mid-twentieth century linked to the decline of imperialism
- post-internet art** an artistic movement responding to the influence of the internet and increasing interconnectivity beginning in the late twentieth century
- postmodernism** a late-twentieth century movement founded on the ideas of skepticism and relativism through the dismissal of ideology which questions the very idea of art
- Provoke artists** named after a short-lived 1968–9 Japanese photography magazine promoting progressive imagery and cultural criticism through blurred or grainy photographs
- punctum** term developed in 1980 by philosopher Roland Barthes to describe a visual element or detail which emotionally ties the viewer with the image
- radical ethnography** the practice of using traditional ethnographic imagery to critique globalization and the ongoing effects of imperialism
- rayograph** a camera-less technique developed by artist Man Ray where images were created by placing small everyday items on photosensitive paper
- realism** an attempt to render a truthful image by removing subjectivity, artistic convention, and idealization
- referent** an object, person, action, or idea denoted by a sign or symbol
- representational certainty** the belief that the image faithfully captures the physical reality, related to the indexical nature of photography
- Royal Academy of Art** a professional art society established in 1648 in France and 1768 in England that ran schools of instruction, held annual or semi-annual exhibitions, and provided venues where artists could display their work and cultivate critical notice
- settler colonial state** the governmental practice of moving citizens from the metropole to the periphery to replace the indigenous population such as practiced by England in the United States and France in Algeria
- simulacrum** an imitation or representation of something
- snapshot** a photograph usually taken quickly by an amateur using a handheld camera
- social construction** a theory that understandings of the world are created through shared assumptions about reality
- solarization** photographic process in which an image is reproduced in reverse, such that light tones become dark and dark tones become light
- spectacle culture** a theory developed by Guy Debord in 1967 critiquing the passive and fetishistic consumption of mass media
- staged photography** images that are set up or artificially created
- stereoscope** a nineteenth century viewing device which displays two images of the same object taken at slightly different angles, creating an optical illusion of depth and dimensionality
- stock photography** professional, generic images licensed for commercial use
- straight photography** a term coined by critic Sadakichi Hartmann in 1916 calling for detailed and sharply focused images rather than those that are manipulated to look like paintings
- street photography** images capturing everyday life in public, urban settings, often through random and chance encounters between the photographer and his or her subject/s
- subjective photography** an international movement founded in Germany by the photographer Otto Steinert in 1951, which championed photography that explored the inner psyche and human condition rather than reflecting the outside world
- sublime** the experience of beauty, grandeur, or majesty which creates a sense of awe

**Surrealism** an early twentieth century artistic movement which attempted to tap into the unconscious mind through strange or incongruous images departing from the principles of realism

**tableau photography** a staged image in which the scene and figures are organized to create a narrative and greatly inspired by painting traditions

**tableau vivant** a “living picture” in which costumed figures pose silently within a space, combining theatrical and visual traditions

**taonga** a Māori term for cultural treasures such as images of their ancestors

**topographic photography** a term coined by William Jenkins in 1975 to describe a group of U.S. photographers whose pictures, mostly black-and-white prints of the landscape, had a banal aesthetic

**trap camera** a remotely activated camera which allows an image to be captured without a photographer being present

**truth value** the belief in the veracity of photography

**vanitas** an image containing symbolic representations of death to create a moralizing message for the viewer.

**vernacular photography** photographs made by amateurs, studio practitioners, and itinerant and press photographers unconcerned with the medium’s fine art applications

**zine** an informal, self-published magazine with a small circulation produced by an individual or a small group





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