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AFTERWARDS / PHOTOGRAPHIER L'APRÈS

DOCUMENTAIRE CONTEMPORAIN

Support de cours
Nassim Daghighian

Afterwards. Late Photography / Photography after the Fact / La photographie de l'après

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Photographes

(liste en cours)

Eric Baudelaire (1973, Salt Lake City, USA ; vit à Paris, FR)

Adam Broomberg, Oliver Chanarin
(A.B. 1970, Johannesburg, Afrique du Sud ; O.C., 1971, Londres, GB ; vivent à Londres)

Raphaël Dallaporta (1980, FR)

Guillaume Herbaut (1970, FR)

Pieter Hugo (1976, Johannesburg ; vit au Cap, Afrique du Sud)

Simon Norfolk (1963, Lagos Nigeria ; vit à Brighton, GB)

Sara Terry, fondatrice detheaftermathproject.org

Photographes dans *Jours d'après* :

Adam Broomberg et Oliver Chanarin
Raphaël Dallaporta
Léa Eouzan
Ashley Gilbertson
Gustavo Germano
Peter Hebeisen
Guillaume Herbaut
Juul Hondius
Pieter Hugo
Steven Laxton
Paula Luttringer
Maziar Moradi
Jim Naughten
Simon Norfolk
Suzanne Opton
Robert Polidori
Dana Popa
Sarah Pickering
Ivor Prickett
Frédéric Sautereau
Christoph Schütz
Frank Schwere
Indre Serpytyte
Anna Shteynshleyger
Taryn Simon
Franziska Vu
Henk Wildschut.

Jours d'après. Quand les photographes reviennent sur les lieux du drame
Nathalie Herschdorfer. Thames & Hudson, Paris, 2011, 192 pages, 189 photographies

Les événements dramatiques ont toujours fasciné les photographes avides de moments clés, d'instants décisifs. Dans un monde saturé d'images, où photographes professionnels et amateurs enregistrent et diffusent désormais en temps réel des scènes de violence ou de drame dans le monde entier, nous ne sommes devenus que trop familiers avec les images de guerres et de catastrophes naturelles. Refusant cette immédiateté, des photographes ont choisi au contraire de prendre du recul par rapport à l'actualité dont se nourrissent les médias et de diriger leur regard sur ce qui se passe après. Grâce à leurs photographies, nous pouvons mieux mesurer la réelle étendue d'un drame, comprendre les séquelles, visibles et invisibles, laissées sur les personnes, les paysages et les villes. Leurs clichés incitent à la réflexion, suscitent l'empathie et font naître une prise de conscience, lente et profonde, à laquelle nulle image choc ne peut prétendre.
Jours d'après présente les œuvres de plus d'une trentaine de photographes contemporains majeurs, dont Robert Polidori, Suzanne Opton, Raphaël Dallaporta, Taryn Simon, Guillaume Herbaut, Guy Tillim et Pieter Hugo. Chaque série photographique, présentée de manière autonome, invite le lecteur à percevoir autrement certains événements survenus depuis plus d'un demi-siècle – l'Holocauste, Hiroshima, la dictature argentine, les massacres de Srebrenica, le génocide rwandais, la guerre en Irak, l'ouragan Katrina... – en nous donnant à voir les cicatrices, physiques ou psychiques, qui marquent à jamais ceux qui restent. Chambres à coucher de jeunes soldats américains morts sur le front, murs de prisons autrefois témoins de tortures, visages fermés, énigmatiques de ceux qui ont connu la guerre, hommes et femmes ayant passé de nombreuses années en prison pour des crimes qu'ils n'ont pas commis, façades trompeusement paisibles d'immeubles parisiens derrière lesquelles des employées furent réduites à l'esclavage, voilà quelques-uns des sujets des photographies contemplatives, émouvantes et toujours pudiques regroupées dans le présent volume. En fin d'ouvrage, plusieurs chercheurs proposent des textes qui nous aident à mieux comprendre les problématiques soulevées par ces images, qu'il s'agisse des réactions cognitives face à une photographie, du phénomène de l'empathie ou encore du processus de stigmatisation. En montrant comment la photographie contemporaine interroge notre monde et participe à sa meilleure compréhension, Jours d'après constitue paradoxalement un ouvrage d'une grande actualité.

Images après la catastrophe : «C'est de l'anti-photojournalisme»
Caroline Stevan, Le Temps, 10.10.2011

Le livre «Jours d'après» présente le travail de photographes qui traitent après coup les drames et les conflits. Une perspective passionnante. Interview de Nathalie Herschdorfer.

Des paysages paisibles qui furent des champs de bataille, en Crimée, à Verdun ou dans le Golfe. Des visages impassibles qui furent victimes, témoins ou peut-être auteurs d'atrocités. Survivants de la Shoah, réfugiés serbes, soldats américains de retour d'Irak. Des lieux dévastés ou désertés. Des ruines. Dans Jours d'après, Nathalie Herschdorfer, directrice du festival Alt + 1000 et longtemps conservatrice au Musée de l'Elysée, rassemble les images de trente «photographes des conséquences» (Taryn Simon, Raphaël Dallaporta, Simon Norfolk…). Un courant baptisé l'aftermath photography, qui préfère se concentrer sur ce qui se passe après le drame. Loin de l'instantané, du spectaculaire et de l'effroyable.

Le Temps: Pourquoi ce projet?
Nathalie Herschdorfer: En 2008, le Musée international de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge m'a invitée à concevoir une exposition de photographie liée à ses problématiques. Je voulais sortir des images habituelles de guerres et de victimes et je me suis orientée vers les conséquences des conflits et des catastrophes. J'ai constaté que ce thème, en quelque sorte de l'anti-photojournalisme, était important dans la photographie contemporaine et j'ai eu envie de le creuser plus encore. L'exposition *Stigmates* présentait sept photographes, il y en a une trentaine dans le livre.

– Vous parlez d'anti-photojournalisme. Pourquoi?
– Nous sommes toujours dans la photographie documentaire mais plus dans la photographie de news. Or notre société est celle de l'instant. Nous avons l'impression et le besoin de pouvoir vivre les

événements en direct. Le 11-Septembre en a été l'exemple type. C'est l'idée du photojournalisme défendue par *Paris Match*, le choc des photos. Il est cependant important de continuer à parler des événements après coup, de la question des réfugiés par exemple.

– Cette photographie des conséquences est-elle vraiment nouvelle? Les ruines furent largement photographiées au XIX siècle.
– En effet et c'était imposé par la technique. Le matériel photographique ne permettait pas de prendre des personnes en mouvement. Les images de Roger Fenton durant la guerre de Crimée suscitèrent d'ailleurs la polémique: avait-il disposé lui-même les boulets de canon dans ces paysages désolés après les batailles ou les avait-il trouvés en l'état? Avec les progrès techniques, l'âge d'or du photojournalisme et de la photographie de guerre s'étale de la guerre d'Espagne à celle du Vietnam. C'est l'époque où il fallait être au cœur de l'action, la figure du reporter de guerre lancée par Capa. Durant la guerre des Malouines et le premier conflit du Golfe, l'information est verrouillée. Aujourd'hui, les reporters sont parfois emmenés par les troupes mais ils se sentent manipulés. On a très peu de véritables photos de guerre. A cela s'ajoute l'arrivée de la photo amateure et des téléphones portables qui oblige les professionnels à se repositionner, à trouver d'autres stratégies. James Nachtwey, par exemple, est désormais exposé dans les galeries.

– L'«aftermath photography» a-t-elle une esthétique propre?
– Il y a une volonté de prise de distance, à l'opposé des «trucs» utilisés pour montrer que l'on est au cœur de l'action comme être très proche des gens et laisser le mouvement apparaître dans l'image. Là, tout est beaucoup plus contemplatif, l'auteur est en retrait. Cela dit, c'est l'esthétique de la photographie contemporaine en général. La couleur est également très présente, alors que le photojournaliste travaille souvent en noir et blanc et avec un gros grain.

– Dans votre livre, l'après se lit aussi bien dans les paysages que sur les visages.
– Je ne voulais pas me cantonner à un genre et tous parlent de la même souffrance. Nous vivons à une époque où l'on parle beaucoup des victimes. Quant aux ruines, elles ont une beauté terrible, qui n'avait d'ailleurs pas échappé aux peintres avant la photographie. La société occidentale y prête une grande attention et les conserve avec soin, ce qui n'est pas le cas partout.

– Il y a un contraste saisissant entre un joli paysage et les horreurs qui s'y passèrent.
– Ce travail fonctionne beaucoup sur les légendes. Certains, en photographie, estiment qu'une bonne image se passe de commentaire. Là, ils sont essentiels, sans quoi l'on voit tout autre chose. Ce livre pose aussi la question de comment l'on crée une émotion à partir d'une image, même si elle ne montre rien. Nous avons tous une mémoire visuelle. Le spectateur comble les absences de la photographie à partir de ses connaissances et reconstruit les événements. Gaza m'évoque par exemple une femme en pleurs devant sa maison détruite.

– Quelques-uns des artistes sélectionnés mettent en scène leurs personnages. Peut-on encore parler de photographie documentaire?
– Il s'agit de fiction, d'un processus quasi cinématographique, mais sur la base d'histoires réelles. Maziar Moradi comme Gustavo Germano mettent en scène les vrais protagonistes des événements, plusieurs années après. Juul Hondius, lui, utilise des acteurs. J'ai été fascinée par la force de ses images, j'ai d'abord cru que c'était vrai. Il y a une légitimité à aborder le sujet des réfugiés de cette manière-là. Je trouve intéressant de répertorier les stratégies utilisées par les jeunes photographes ayant envie de se positionner sur ce type de sujets. Le livre est un bon catalogue et le Printemps arabe, sans doute, va apporter de nouveaux éléments.

Source au 2013 08 21 :
http://www.letemps.ch/Page/Uuid/9e2c25f2-f2b6-11e0-ab44-c34bd9db4685/Images_après_la_catastrophe_Cest_de_lanti-photojournalisme

Retour sur les lieux de l'événement : l'image " en creux "

Raphaële Bertho, in " L'image-événement ", *Images Re-vues*, n°5, 2008
(voir les illustrations sur http://journals.openedition.org/imagesrevues/336)

Résumé : L'événement ne semble pas pouvoir exister s'il n'en existe pas d'images. Face à ce débordement, à ce " trop plein " visuel, on observe l'apparition d'une posture nouvelle dans le champ de la photographie contemporaine. Comme " en creux " du phénomène médiatique, ces images travaillent à l'évocation des grands évènements contemporains tout en étant vides de leur représentation explicite. Elles proposent un retour sur l'événement, un retour sur les lieux, pour tenter d'ouvrir un espace de réflexion sur, par, et dans l'image. Le " creux " n'est pas une représentation de l'absence ou de la disparition, mais du manque, celui de traces visibles de l'événement. Ces œuvres posent la question de la transmission de l'expérience tout en découvrant la puissance de l'anodin dans notre rapport au passé.

" Pour qu'il y ait événement, il faut qu'il soit connu "[1] . Mais aussi qu'il soit vu. Si c'est effectivement aux mass médias que l'événement doit de nos jours son existence, c'est désormais par l'image qu'il prend corps. L'événement ne semble pas pouvoir exister s'il n'en existe pas d'images. Nos concitoyens sont comme l'apôtre, ils doivent le voir pour le croire. Cette hégémonie du visible transforme les images du photojournalisme en " icônes ". Largement diffusées dans le temps et dans l'espace sur différents supports, elles sont sorties de leur contexte et dépouillées de leur signification historique pour devenir des représentations emblématiques. Au-delà de leur fonction informative ou factuelle, elles deviennent des " images monuments "[2] et intègrent la mémoire collective[3].
Une " actualité-mémoire " qui conduit à une forme d'asphyxie du regard, du fait de la production en flux continu des mass médias d'images sur-significatives. Des images de remplissage, de surface, à consommer sur le mode du " zapping mental "[4] . Face à ce débordement, à ce " trop plein ", on observe l'apparition d'une posture nouvelle dans le champ de la photographie contemporaine. Comme " en creux " du phénomène médiatique, elles travaillent à l'évocation des grands évènements contemporains tout en étant vides de leur représentation explicite. Des images qui tentent d'interroger la mémoire collective iconologique construite par les médias. L'événement n'investit pas l'image elle-même, mais reste dans une présence latente. Elles ne sont donc pas " creuses ", au sens d'absence de sens, mais leur signification est perceptible en " creux ", en filigrane. Les auteurs invitent le spectateur à l'investir de sens, à venir compléter la représentation par l'interprétation, à percevoir " une image par-devers l'image "[5].
Ces images proposent un retour sur l'événement, au sens propre comme au figuré. Un retour sur les lieux, pour tenter d'ouvrir un espace de réflexion sur, par, et dans l'image. On observe ici le passage d'une stratégie de représentation de l'événement à une stratégie d'évocation du passé. Face à ces images " en creux ", il ne s'agit pas seulement d'imaginer, de se figurer un " irréel ", selon les mots de Sartre[6], mais de se représenter un " réel antérieur ". Acte de remémoration qui peut sembler impossible, si l'on n'a jamais connu ce réel antérieur. Mais les images qui circulent autour de nous, issues des mass médias, journaux ou télévision, interfèrent nécessairement avec nos images mentales. " La mémoire n'est pas un écran vierge susceptible de donner naissance à des images purement mentales "[7], comme le remarque Arno Gisinger. Il s'agit, afin de se figurer l'événement, de fouiller dans notre mémoire collective iconologique. Les images " en creux " sont donc intrinsèquement liées aux images " monuments ".
Si les images " en creux " font fréquemment référence aux drames humains qui ont marqué le siècle, cela tient au fait que les guerres et les catastrophes catalysent une double problématique. Ces événements favorisent la " mise en spectacle " par les médias de masse, tout en étant au cœur de la problématique du devoir de mémoire. Ainsi lorsque Christophe Draeger dans son *Voyage Apocalyptique* revient sur les lieux de la catastrophe, c'est pour en détourner le potentiel spectaculaire. D'une autre manière, Sophie Ristelhueber dans *Fait* travaille à attester de la réalité d'un conflit que la médiatisation a rendu presque abstrait, allant presque jusqu'à l'invisibilité. Un voyage sur les traces du passé qui conduit Stéphane Duroy et Arno Gisinger à parcourir l'Europe, vieux continent marqué par les deux Guerres Mondiales. En dehors du spectaculaire, c'est dans les lieux du quotidien que les deux photographes ancrent leur appel à la mémoire. D'autres lieux sont porteurs d'un passé encore plus chargé, comme Hiroshima et Nagasaki, Auschwitz, Tchernobyl. Ce sont ces lieux " trauma " que Hiromi Tsuchida, Marie-Jeanne Musiol et Guillaume Herbault reviennent arpenter. Les photographes réactivent l'expérience vécue, dans une volonté d'aller au-delà d'un devoir de mémoire paralysant, afin d'intégrer de nouveau ces évènements à notre mémoire collective.

Le résultat photographique est " distancié, quasiment déconstruit, afin que chacun puisse imaginer, en fonction de son expérience, ce que l'on ne voit pas "[8]. Une distance qui n'est pas sans rappeler la stratégie du retrait évoquée par Dominique Baqué[9] à propos des travaux de Jacqueline Salmon ou de Raymond Depardon. Les images " en creux " n'échappent pas totalement à cette notion, sans pour autant y adhérer dans leur ensemble. La stratégie du retrait analysée par Dominique Baqué répond tout autant à une volonté d'" échanger du visible contre de la pensée " qu'à celle de se démarquer du " voyeurisme " propre à l'image de presse[10]. S'agissant des images " en creux ", elles tendent effectivement à interpeller le spectateur, à susciter une réflexion, une remémoration. Mais il n'est pas question de pudeur comme chez Jacqueline Salmon, ou de promouvoir une photographie des temps faibles à l'instar de Raymond Depardon. Les photographes qui réalisent ces images " en creux " ne présentent aucune velléité de défocaliser la vision de l'événement. Au contraire, ils reviennent sur les lieux, ils réorientent le regard vers ces lieux, théâtres d'événements tragiques. Il ne s'agit pas de critiquer l'affect ou le sensationnalisme liés aux représentations de presse, mais d'opérer un retour au présent. Ils ne se retirent pas, mais font une photographie de l'après. Le " creux " n'est pas une représentation de l'absence ou de la disparition, mais du manque, celui de traces visibles de l'événement. Ce manque est identifié par la mise sous tension de l'image à travers le texte qui lui est associé. Une tension entre le visible, le figuré, " ce qui est là ", et l'invisible, ici le passé, " ce qui a été là ", voire " ce qui aurait dû être là ". Les images " en creux " s'analysent donc comme un courant de la photographie contemporaine, non pas autonome, mais spécifique.
À rebours du poids des mots et du choc des photos, pour reprendre le célèbre slogan d'un magazine à grand tirage, le corpus présenté ici, loin d'être exhaustif, permet néanmoins de cerner les différentes facettes de cette stratégie de l'image " en creux ", dont les éléments fondamentaux peuvent s'analyser comme étant le retour sur les lieux et la mise sous tension de l'image par le texte.

Le retour sur les lieux

Le retour ne s'apparente pas à un pèlerinage, mais plutôt à un arpentage curieux de ce que ces lieux de mémoire recèlent en réalité. Les photographes reviennent sur les lieux comme on va sur le terrain, pour se rendre compte, et se confrontent parfois à une véritable forclusion du paysage.
Sophie Ristelhueber, pour réaliser sa série *Fait*, parcourt durant quatre semaines le désert du Koweït, encore brûlant de la Guerre du Golfe. Cet engagement physique fait, selon elle, partie intégrante de son travail, sans lequel l'œuvre ne peut être pensée. En plus des vols au-dessus du désert, elle tient à marcher au milieu des tranchées, des douilles, des mines, des traces de tanks et des effets personnels abandonnés, dans un investissement physique que Jerôme Sans considère comme " proche de la performance "[11]. De la même manière, l'expérience du lieu est au fondement de l'œuvre de Marie-Jeanne Musiol qui se rend à huit reprises à Auschwitz-Birkenau pour réaliser la série *Dans l'ombre de la forêt (Auschwitz-Birkenau)*. Sa connaissance du site lui permet de s'écarter des lieux balisés, pour aller vers d'autres lieux, sans doute moins éculés. Elle choisit délibérément de photographier, non pas les installations concentrationnaires, mais leur périphérie.
Quand ces deux photographes décident de taire le déroulement exact de leur expédition, afin que la dimension narrative ne prenne pas le pas sur la puissance évocatrice de l'image, Hiromi Tsuchida adopte le parti pris inverse. Il réalise, entre 1979 et 1983, *Hiroshima Monument*, en revenant sur le lieu où la bombe atomique a explosé trente-quatre ans plus tôt. L'œuvre se décompose en trois parties, l'une étant consacrée à la recherche des lieux restés intacts lors de l'impact dans la ville de Hiroshima, la seconde dressant le portrait de survivants, et la dernière étant constituée de photographies d'objets rescapés de la bombe. On peut remarquer que cette œuvre, tout comme celle de Marie-Jeanne Musiol, occulte le foyer même de la catastrophe, lequel n'est jamais représenté. On prendra ici le parti de n'étudier que la première partie de *Hiroshima Monument*, consacrée à l'arpentage de la ville, cette démarche étant la plus pertinente du point de vue de notre étude[12]. Elle se compose d'une série de quarante diptyques constitués d'une photographie et d'un plan de la ville. Sur le plan apparaît une étoile, qui marque le point d'impact de la bombe atomique. Autour de ce centre, des points indiquent les lieux photographiés par Hiromi Tsuschida. Et la carte, identique dans chaque diptyque, s'alimente au fur et à mesure de ces points marquant l'endroit des prises de vues. Ainsi le photographe donne à voir au sein même de l'œuvre ses déplacements dans la ville, quand bien même le déroulement chronologique des déplacements reste fictionnel.

Cette dimension topographique est tout aussi présente dans le travail d'Arno Gisinger consacré à deux camps d'internement ouverts près du Mans pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, *Courdecieux et Mulsanne* (2006). Il ne reste que peu de traces de ces structures, et ce n'est pas par les mots mais par les plans que le photographe atteste de leur existence. Arno Gisinger imprime des plans d'époque au verso des tirages afin de " démontrer la présence de l'histoire par son absence "[13], faisant de la topographie la " clé " de cet espace de mémoire.
S'il photographie au cœur même d'une ville, Hiromi Tsuchida évite pour autant toute présence humaine sur ses images. Les seuls personnages représentés sont presque invisibles, tapis dans l'ombre de l'image, ou pris dans le flou de leur vitesse. Cette quasi-absence de tout signe de vie, loin d'être une négation de la dimension humaine de l'évènement, semble correspondre à une volonté d'atteindre une certaine intemporalité. Cette représentation des rémanences de l'événement n'est pas sans faire penser à d'anciennes écritures photographiques de l'histoire, quand l'opérateur ne pouvait pas photographier l'événement lui-même du fait d'impératifs techniques. Il représentait alors seulement les preuves de l'événement, ce qui résistait le plus à la perte : les façades noircies par l'incendie, les carcasses laissées à l'abandon, les décombres des bâtiments détruits… Une absence de tout signe de vie qui, éloignant toute possibilité de compassion ou d'identification de la part du spectateur, favorise un retour réflexif sur l'image. En l'absence de toute théâtralité, entendue dans le sens de Fried[14], qui capte le spectateur, la relation de ce dernier à l'image reste alors ouverte.
Retour sur les lieux, décalage chronologique par rapport à l'événement… Les auteurs de ces images " en creux " pourraient être ici qualifiés d'" archéologues photographes ". Dans ce sens, Arno Gisinger affirme, sans être le seul, mener des recherches en amont de ses prises de vue. L'ensemble des travaux de ce photographe, qui a aussi une formation d'historien, concerne d'une manière plus ou moins lointaine un seul événement : la Seconde Guerre Mondiale. Après s'être intéressé, de manière critique, aux formes de commémoration, le photographe tend aujourd'hui, à travers différentes séries, à rendre visibles les vestiges de l'histoire. Une enquête dans les archives lui permet ainsi de redécouvrir des traces enfouies ou ignorées. Dans ses récents travaux sur la ville de Nuremberg en 2004, *Nuremberg, les coulisses du pouvoir* et *Nuremberg, la scène du procès*, Arno Gisinger souhaite " exhumer des lieux, des traces qui ne sont pas forcément visibles, ou qui sont totalement oubliées aujourd'hui "[15]. Il ne faut pourtant pas s'y tromper, il ne s'agit pas d'une reconstitution, le photographe ne cherche pas à rendre une atmosphère d'époque dans ses images. Ce retour vers le passé ne s'apparente pas à un voyage dans le temps.
Au contraire, l'image " en creux " s'ancre délibérément dans le présent, et c'est à partir de là qu'elle nous propose de regarder en arrière, mesurant dans le " creux " de la représentation toute la distance qui nous sépare de l'événement. Les photographes se confrontent aux lieux, en évitant toute dramatisation. Le titre choisi par Sophie Ristelhueber, *Fait*, apparaît comme révélateur.
" Il me fallait un titre laconique […]. Ce que j'ai vu – la guerre – c'est un fait. Les formes que j'ai saisies ont été 'faites' par la guerre, puis par moi. La guerre – et ses formes – ne dit rien d'autre que 'c'est comme ça'[16]. "
À l'origine des photographies présentées dans *Fait*, une image aérienne parue dans le *Time* le 25 février 1991, représente des traces noires d'impact de bombes sur le sol du désert strié de lignes indéfinies. Sophie Ristelhueber décide alors de réaliser des images du désert koweitien, en allant y rechercher les vestiges de cette Guerre du Golfe rendue presque virtuelle par les médias. La photographe alterne vues aériennes et vues au sol et organise une perturbation volontaire de la vision en supprimant pratiquement tout repère d'échelle. Les images se présentent comme des *all over*, sans horizons, sans limites repérables. Elles ne semblent pas être des photographies de guerre au sens attendu du terme, mais seulement la représentation de longues et profondes blessures gravées dans le sable, évoquant, selon un écho indirect, le conflit et ses conséquences**.** Et pourtant, les vestiges de la bataille sont bien là, au cœur de l'image. Les photographies représentent des tranchées, des traces de bombardement, des carcasses d'engins, et des objets plus personnels, des chaussures ou des couvertures. Ces traces, bien que présentes, sont rendues presque indiscernables par le jeu des échelles, qui empêchent le regard d'adopter un point de vue, et par ce désert au ton ocre qui emplit la photographie et la sature.
" L'artillerie comme les divers accessoires de guerre laissés par l'armée lors de son repli sont mués par la caméra en simples objets banals […][17]. "
Ironie du travail, les vestiges sont sous nos yeux, mais d'une telle manière que nous ne savons les voir. Ce glissement perceptif requiert de la part du spectateur une attention accrue, puisqu'il ne peut se contenter de passer rapidement son regard sur les images pour en saisir le sens.

De la même façon, les vestiges du drame nucléaire de Hiroshima sont au cœur des images de Hiromi Tsuchida, sans être perceptibles en tant que tels. Paradoxalement intacts pour la plupart, des cerisiers, des pins ou des camphriers, une banque ou une ancienne gare de triage, des ponts de pierre ou d'acier, autant de sites d'incarnation de la mémoire collective. Ils sont noyés dans la ville contemporaine, indiscernables comme l'étaient ceux du désert koweitien. Marie-Jeanne Musiol, au contraire, en revenant sur les lieux du camp d'extermination et de concentration d'Auschwitz-Birkenau, prend le parti de totalement détourner le regard. Dans son œuvre intitulée *Dans l'ombre de la forêt (Auschwitz Birkenau),* elle se situe à la périphérie du site, mais aussi à la périphérie du visible. Elle photographie les arbres de la forêt de Birkenau à la base de l'arbre, adoptant alors un point de vue qui n'est pas celui du promeneur mais celui du chercheur. On ne voit qu'une partie du tronc et le sol à sa base, en gros plan. Or quoi de plus banal qu'un arbre dans une forêt ? Quoi de plus identique à un arbre qu'un autre arbre ? C'est à une même difficulté à interpréter la trace, à la considérer comme telle, qu'est confronté le spectateur face au travail de Guillaume Herbault. Les objets ne sont plus ici dissimulés au regard, ou dépouillés de leur sens par le choix de l'angle de vue. Dans sa série au titre énigmatique " 5/7 "[18] le photographe affirme s'intéresser à " notre rapport à l'événement dramatique passé dans l'étude de ses effets présents "[19]. Il explore ainsi différents territoires, dont *Oswiecim*, la ville qui abritait le camp de Birkenau en Pologne, où il ne photographie qu'une seule fois les structures du camp et s'intéresse surtout à la vie de cette ville aujourd'hui. Dans sa série *Urakami,* il va à la rencontre des survivants de la bombe de Nagasaki. Avec *Slavoutich*, il parcourt cette ville reconstruite après la catastrophe nucléaire de Tchernobyl afin de reloger les habitants de Pipriat, qui se trouve elle aussi contaminée. La catastrophe de Tchernobyl inspire d'ailleurs un livre au photographe, *Tchernobylsky***.** L'ouvrage mêle les vues des lieux et des portraits. Ces portraits sont ceux des " condamnés à mort ", ces personnes encore vivantes mais irradiées, en sursis. En l'absence de séquelles flagrantes, évidentes de l'explosion, le photographe explore des espaces à l'abandon. L'événement est là, en filigrane, dont les seules traces sont ces objets qui ne disent rien en eux-mêmes, qui ne montrent rien de ce passé dramatique. Un mystère des lieux[20] dû au fait qu'ils ne présentent pas le caractère visible de ruines, bien qu'ils en soient.
Certains lieux résonnent d'un écho encore plus faible. Ainsi en témoignent les photographies réalisées par Christophe Draeger, lequel revient sur les lieux de ces faits d'actualité qui ont occupé la une des journaux. Dans sa série *Voyage apocalyptique,* il s'attache tout particulièrement aux actes terroristes, aux catastrophes naturelles ou aux crashes aériens. Autant d'événements qui semblent surgir de nulle part, qui frappent aveuglément. Le photographe se rend sur les lieux des désastres, comme Three Miles Island, Lockerbie ou Kobe, et les photographie plusieurs années après les événements. Ce ne sont plus alors que des endroits communs, sans traces de dévastation. La gare de Bologne, par exemple, pourtant théâtre d'attentats terroristes sanglants, est à nouveau un lieu tout à fait ordinaire, avec des voies, des trains et des quais couverts. De l'incompréhensible violence, rien n'est conservé. La mémoire est comme effacée, on est face à une sorte de forclusion du paysage, qui se refuse comme lieu de résonance de la mémoire. Un camouflage du temps que constate Stéphane Duroy en parcourant *L'Europe du silence*[21] à la recherche de traces des deux guerres mondiales qui ont déchiré le continent. Sa pérégrination le mène de la Pologne à l'Est de la France, en passant par Berlin. Mais il semble que cette recherche des stigmates des conflits reste infructueuse. C'est ce que la première image de son livre, représentant un paysage boisé baigné d'une lumière bleutée, nous laisse supposer. Le lieu quelconque, ou du moins non reconnaissable, semble annoncer que l'on ne verra rien d'extraordinaire. Reliant les lieux et les époques, Stéphane Duroy découvre des monuments commémoratifs qui semblent incongrus, voire incompréhensibles. Littéralement, on ne sait pas quel événement cette statue de cet ange de la mort commémore, comme on ne peut déchiffrer cette stèle photographiée plein cadre. Les inscriptions sont devenues illisibles, recouvertes d'une mousse noire, avec au centre une photographie presque effacée. Les autres images de la série représentent des rails vides de tout train, une femme se maquillant devant une fenêtre aux rideaux tirés, un angle de rue enneigé, une route par temps de brouillard, un intérieur baigné de rouge… Les lieux du drame nous paraissent pour la plupart quelconques.
Arno Gisinger insiste d'ailleurs sur ce point, affirmant que dans la " recherche du vide, le banal est de plus en plus important pour [lui] "[22]. La violence de ces images se révèle seulement dans le texte qui les accompagne.

La " mise sous tension " de l'image

La puissance évocatrice des images " en creux " semble contenue dans l'établissement d'une relation entre représentation iconographique et représentation linguistique. Le texte, en effet, n'ancre pas seulement le sens de l'image, mais se présente comme un élément de sa mise sous tension. Face à un certain mutisme de l'image, laquelle ne donne rien à voir en soi, le langage se fait moteur de l'acte de remémoration. Le texte nous renvoie à ce qui n'est pas visible, à " ce qui a été ", mais qui n'est plus. C'est dans l'association du texte et de l'image que l'actualité du drame refait surface. Le texte plonge le spectateur dans le théâtre de sa mémoire, soit par l'établissement d'un écart entre les deux formes du discours, linguistique et iconographique, soit à travers une identification du visuel par l'écrit.
Certains photographes jouent sur la distance, en établissant une relation distendue entre le texte et l'image. Stéphane Duroy et Sophie Ristelhueber, par exemple, travaillent sur ce double langage des mots et de l'image. Ni commentaires, ni descriptions des images, les textes formulent un écart signifiant, ils ouvrent une possibilité de sens sans être prescriptifs. Stéphane Duroy ponctue *L'Europe du Silence* de trois extraits, placés en ouverture, en milieu, et en conclusion de l'ouvrage.

" Leurs visages, pointus, duveteux et morts ont cette épouvantable absence d'expression de cadavres d'enfants. On se sent la gorge serrée quand on les voit bondir, courir et tomber. On voudrait les battre, parce qu'ils sont si bêtes, – et aussi les prendre dans ses bras et les éloigner de là où ce n'est pas leur place. "
Erich Maria Remarque, *À L'Ouest rien de nouveau*.

" Leur vie est courte mais leur nombre infini. Ce sont eux, les Muselmänner, les damnés, le nerf du camp ; eux, la masse anonyme, continuellement renouvelée et toujours identique, des nonhommes en qui l'étincelle divine s'est éteinte, et qui marchent et peinent en silence, trop vides pour souffrir vraiment. On hésite à les appeler des vivants : on hésite à appeler mort une mort qu'ils ne craignent pas parce qu'ils sont trop épuisés pour la comprendre. "
Primo Levi, *Si c'est un homme*.

" La plupart des hommes et des femmes évolués du dix-neuvième siècle aurait rangé parmi les plaisanteries sinistres la prédiction selon laquelle la torture et le massacre n'allaient pas tarder à proliférer une fois encore dans l'Europe 'civilisée'. Il n'est rien de *naturel* dans notre condition présente. Il n'y a rien de particulièrement convaincant ou de digne dans le fait que nous admettons que 'tout est possible'. En fait, semblable état d'esprit abaisse et déforme le seuil d'indignation. […]. Amorphe, envahissante, notre familiarité avec l'horreur représente pour l'humanité une défaite absolue. "
George Steiner, *Dans le château de Barbe-Bleue*.

Les extraits de *À L'Ouest rien de nouveau*, roman d'Erich Maria Remarque et de*Dans le château de Barbe-Bleue*, livre de George Steiner, sont imprimés en bas de pages restées vierges d'images. Ils prennent donc formellement la forme de légendes, sans être pourtant mis en relation avec une image en particulier. Le deuxième texte, en revanche, extrait du livre *Si c'est un homme* de Primo Levi, encadre littéralement une image en grande partie floutée, prise sur le site d'un camp de concentration datant de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale. Sans ancrer véritablement le sens des images, ces textes donnent à voir le contexte de compréhension, orientent le sens de la lecture. Ils encadrent le livre, comme celui de Primo Levi encadre l'image du camp. On remarque d'ailleurs que la chronologie des textes respecte parfaitement celle de l'histoire, *À l'Ouest rien de nouveau* étant un roman allemand écrit sur la guerre de 1914, celui de Primo Levi traitant de la déportation qui a eu lieu pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, le livre de Steiner étant un essai plus généraliste sur la question de la violence guerrière, proposant une vision rétrospective de notre siècle, sorte de conclusion après l'exposé des faits.
De la même manière, Sophie Ristelhueber ne mêle pas ostensiblement texte et image, mais encadre son ouvrage avec deux citations. *Fait* s'ouvre et se termine sur deux doubles pages, deux textes de Clausewitz qui se présentent sous la forme de*ready-mades* littéraires. Tout comme ses images en forme de *all over*, les textes semblent se continuer de part et d'autre de la page. Ainsi publiés, ces textes ne peuvent être considérés comme des extraits. Ce sont des fragments, arbitrairement extraits du corps du texte, au milieu d'une phrase.
" … ne trouve d'ailleurs aucune difficulté à séparer l'une de l'autre, les diverses activités, lorsqu'on considère les forces armées et équipées comme des moyens donnés, dont il suffit pour s'en servir efficacement de connaître les principaux effets. Au sens strict, l'art de la guerre est donc l'art de savoir se servir au combat de moyens déterminés, et nous ne saurions mieux le désigner qu'en le

nommant conduite de la guerre. Il est vrai, d'autre part, que l'art de la guerre, au sens plus large, englobe toutes les activités que suscite la guerre, par conséquent toute la création des forces armées, c'est-à-dire le recrutement, l'armement, l'équipement et l'entraînement. Pour que la théorie recouvre la réalité, il importe essentiellement de séparer ces deux activités, car on conçoit sans peine, si tout art de la guerre devait commencer par l'organisation des forces armées et leur coordination selon ses règles, que cet art ne serait applicable qu'aux rares occasions où les forces armées existantes correspondraient exactement à ces règles. Mais si l'on veut disposer d'une théorie qui s'applique à la grande majorité des cas sans être jamais tout à fait inutilisable, celle-ci doit se fonder sur le plus grand nombre de moyens de combat ordinaires et sur leurs effets essentiels. La conduite de la guerre est donc l'ordonnance et la conduite du combat. Si le combat consistait en une seule action, toute division supplémentaire n'aurait aucun sens. Mais le combat consiste en un plus ou moins grand nombre d'actions distinctes qui forment un tout et que… "
La contiguïté de ces tranches d'un texte consacré à l'art de la guerre avec ces images arrêtées, figées sur ses effets, impose au spectateur un mode d'appréhension dédoublé. Les mots, énoncés d'une théorie guerrière, font échos aux images, représentations des ruines de l'après. Mais quand tout semble ordonné et précis à la lettre, le paysage est ravagé en profondeur. Sophie Ristelhueber donne ainsi au spectateur à lire et à voir, se démarquant ainsi d'une économie visuelle médiatique caractérisée par le précepte du voir sans lire. La photographe ici " tente de faire ressurgir des images permanentes "[23], attribuant par là une dimension universaliste à ses images, tout en s'éloignant de la commémoration ou même de la dénonciation.
Ainsi, par la déliaison du texte et de l'image, Sophie Ristelhueber comme Stéphane Duroy proposent au spectateur un axe de réflexion. Le spectateur est libre de tirer ses propres conclusions. Les images " en creux " restent latentes, en suspens. Néanmoins, cette dimension d'énigme est relativisée par la présence d'indications plus précises quant aux circonstances des prises de vues : Sophie Ristelhueber laisse apparaître la mention " Koweit, 1991 ", quand Stéphane Duroy ajoute en conclusion de son livre *L'Europe du Silence* un texte retraçant les différentes étapes de son voyage, et rappelant sa motivation première de revenir sur les traces de deux conflits européens.
L'identification du visuel par l'écrit est le mode le plus utilisé par les auteurs. Christophe Draeger légende de manière laconique les photographies, tranquilles en apparence, de son *Voyage Apocalytique* : Three Miles Island, Lockerbie, Kobe, Gare de Bologne… La relation entre l'image et sa légende est plus évidente : elle désigne les lieux de la prise de vue. Les noms de ces lieux, théâtres des événements tragiques résonnent immédiatement dans la mémoire collective. Le " creux " de l'image devient flagrant, notre mémoire étant chargée d'images, images de violences, de désastres ou de guerres.
Cette mention se fait discrète chez Marie-Jeanne Musiol. La photographe ne nomme le lieu qu'en seconde partie d'un titre appartement anodin : *Dans l'ombre de la forêt*. Mais lorsque le terme " Auschwitz-Birkenau " est énoncé, même entre parenthèses, la tragédie revient au cœur de l'image et plus aucun détail ne lui échappe. La mention du nom entraîne une transformation radicale du sens de la représentation.
Dans *Hiroshima monument,* Hiromi Tsuchida surajoute à cette détermination géographique des données consignées dans un ensemble de cartes et de plans. Le plan de la ville qui accompagne chaque photographie, est complété par la légende, qui mentionne systématiquement la nature du vestige photographié, arbre ou bâtiment, et sa distance par rapport à l'épicentre. Marquant ainsi une distance constatée, mesurable, le photographe donne à voir une autre distance, symbolique celle-ci, entre le silence de la représentation et la sourde mémoire dont elle est porteuse. Guillaume Herbault " mesure " lui aussi les effets de la catastrophe, d'une manière plus sibylline. Sur chaque image de son livre *Tchernobylssty*[24] apparaît un chiffre, sans d'autre explication. Il s'agit en fait de la dose de radiation mesurée sur le lieu à l'époque de la prise de vue. Mais, cela, le spectateur n'a les moyens de le comprendre qu'à la fin, quand l'auteur rappelle qu'un niveau normal de radiation se situe entre 10 et 20 microrems. Chaque photographie doit donc être lue à l'aune du niveau enregistré au moment de la prise de vue, qui va jusqu'à 1250 microrems pour la zone interdite de Pipriat. Les images muettes dévoilent derrière ce chiffre éloquent le silence lourd et oppressant d'une catastrophe omniprésente bien qu'invisible. Guillaume Herbault arrive ainsi à faire sentir la présence de l'impalpable, les effets de la radiation. Le regard n'est pas confisqué, tout au plus dirigé. L'image reste ouverte, le spectateur ne doit pas s'indigner, ou s'attendrir. La réflexion n'est pas de l'ordre du pathos, mais de l'ordre de la pensée.

Retour sur l'événement, retour sur les lieux de l'événement : les photographes posent ici la question cruciale de la transmission de l'expérience. Une problématique de la mémoire qui se dédouble, puisqu'il s'agit à la fois du lieu de l'image et de l'image du lieu. Dans les deux cas, selon que l'on considère de manière autonome la représentation en tant qu'objet, soit que l'on se concentre sur le lieu sujet de la représentation, la question reste celle de leur qualification en tant que " lieux de mémoire ".

Les lieux de mémoire naissent, selon Pierre Nora[25], du sentiment de la perte d'une mémoire collective. C'est la dissolution de notre rapport au passé et la mise à distance de l'histoire qui rendent nécessaire la désignation de lieux porteurs de cette mémoire. Tant matériels qu'immatériels, physiques que symboliques, ces espaces de commémoration ne constituent pas la mémoire collective mais sont les instruments de sa réactivation. Tout comme les images " en creux " seraient les instruments de remémoration d'une mémoire collective constituée par les " images monuments ". Si d'un point de vue historique on peut analyser l'apparition des images " en creux " dans le champ de l'art contemporain comme une réaction à la prolifération des icônes de la presse, elles n'en sont donc pas l'antithèse, au contraire. L'image " en creux " n'est donc pas une fin en soi, elle est le passage, l'intermédiaire entre le présent et le passé, entre le spectateur et la mémoire collective.

Il semble que le fait même suscite un engagement intellectuel et sentimental du spectateur, les disqualifie du point de vue du processus de transmission de la mémoire. Car alors la mémoire n'est plus vécue comme une évidence, elle n'est plus naturelle mais " outrageusement arquée par l'aliénation "[26] selon Philippe Dagen.

Un appel à la mémoire collective qui conserve toutefois une part d'aléatoire, du fait de la nature de la mémoire collective elle-même. Car bien qu'elle soit partagée, elle n'est pas uniforme. Si chaque individu construit effectivement sa perception du passé à partir d'images communes, il les intègre à sa propre mémoire et la forme de la remémoration est à chaque fois différente. Ainsi, on peut se demander dans quelle mesure cette forme de remémoration quelque peu aléatoire ne conduit pas à une trahison des faits, une mystification inconsciente. D'autre part, dans quelle mesure ces œuvres " fonctionnent-elles " si la mémoire collective change ou si elle se perd ? Il s'agit là d'une problématique commune à tout lieu de mémoire, qui n'existe que " si l'imagination l'investit d'une aura symbolique "[27]. Sans écho dans la mémoire collective, ces images sonnent creux.

Enfin l'image " en creux " n'opère pas seulement un retour sur la représentation de l'évènement, mais sur les lieux-mêmes de l'événement. À rebours du principe de simultanéité qui régit l'enregistrement photographique de l'événement, elles proclament non plus " j'y étais ", mais " j'y suis allé ". Les photographes se détachent des lieux de commémoration attendus, organisés, pour aller à la recherche de la présence de ce passé dans notre quotidien. En photographiant des espaces vides de toute marque du passé, ils poussent le spectateur à s'interroger. Le regard balaie l'image à la recherche d'un signe, d'une trace, d'un symbole. Et il ne trouve que le trivial, le banal, le quotidien. Les images " en creux " tentent ainsi d'initier, à travers le sujet de la représentation, un mouvement de retour vers les milieux de mémoire. Le passé n'existe plus seulement dans le monument, lieux ou image, physique ou symbolique. Il n'est plus visible, mais invisible et ressenti seulement à travers l'expérience, à travers le vécu. Ces œuvres questionnent ainsi notre capacité à faire exister cet événement dans notre présent en découvrant la puissance de l'anodin dans notre rapport au passé.

Notes

1 Pierre Nora, " Le Retour de l'événement " , in *Faire l'Histoire, Nouveaux Problèmes*, Jacques Le Goff et Pierre Nora, Paris, Gallimard, 1986, p. 212.

2 Vincent Lavoie, *L'Instant-monument. Du fait divers à l'humanitaire*, Montréal, Dazibao, 2001.

3 Le terme de " mémoire collective " est ici entendu au sens, très large, de mémoire collective occidentale. Il convient de considérer dans ce texte la notion de mémoire collective non comme une notion complète, en référence aux textes de Maurice Halbwachs, *La Mémoire collective*, Paris, PUF, 1950, mais plutôt comme un outil conceptuel. La mémoire collective, ou partagée, désigne ainsi la mémoire d'un ensemble d'individus.

4 Paul Ardenne, " L'Image d'art contemporain : impossible définition et stratégies de recomposition " , *L'Art même* n° 27, 2005.
http://www2.cfwb.be/lartmeme/no027/pages/page4.htm.

5 Paul Ardenne, *L'Image corps, Figures de l'humain dans l'art du XX*e *siècle*, Paris, Éditions du Regard, 2001, p. 471.

6 Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Imaginaire, Psychologie phénoménologique de l'imagination*, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p. 239.
7 Arno Gisinger, " La Photographie : de la mémoire communicative à la mémoire culturelle " , in *Mémoire des camps, Photographies des camps de concentration et d'extermination nazi (1933-1999)*, éd. Clément Cheroux, Paris, Marval, 2001, p. 182.
8 Michel Guerrin, " Mathieu Pernot, une vision en creux " , *Le Monde*, 29 janvier 2005.
9 Dominique Baqué, " La Stratégie du retrait " , in *Photographie plasticienne, L'Extrême contemporain*, Paris, Editions du Regard, 2004, p. 237-264.
10 Dominique Baqué, " L'ère du soupçon " , *Art Press* n° 273, novembre 2001, p. 42.
11 Jérôme Sans, " Une Œuvre de terrain " , conférence prononcée le 22 novembre 1995 à partir de Fait de Sophie Ristelhueber, Caen, FRAC Basse-Normandie, 1995, p. 3.
12 On peut noter que Hiromi Tsuchida tend lui-même à lui donner une importance particulière. En effet, lorsqu'il édite Hiroshima Monument II en 1990, sorte de deuxième opus de l'œuvre, celui-ci ne comporte plus que des vues de la ville. Elles sont organisées en diptyques comparatifs, mettant en relation deux vues d'un même endroit : l'image réalisée en 1979, dont certaines publiées dans la première partie de Hiroshima Monument, et une vue prise en 1990.
13 Étienne Hatt, " Regardez avec moi… " , un entretien avec Arno Gisinger, Vite vu, Le Blog de la société française de photographie, mercredi 8 mars 2006.
www.sfp.asso.fr/vitevu/index.php/Entretiens.
14 Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, 1980, tr. fr. *La Place du spectateur, Esthétique et origines de la peinture moderne,* Paris, Gallimard, 1990.
15 Étienne Hatt, " Regardez avec moi… " , un entretien avec Arno Gisinger, op .cit.
16 Michel Guerrin, " Les Obsessions de Sophie Ristelhueber ", *Le Monde*, 27-28 septembre 1992.
17 Jérôme Sans, " Une Oeuvre de terrain " , op. cit., p. 7.
18 Le titre de " 5/7 " , donné à ces séries lors de l'exposition " Croiser des Mondes " au Jeu de Paume à Paris en 2006, est en fait un titre provisoire. Il désigne une œuvre en sept parties, dont cinq seulement étaient réalisées à l'époque.
19 Guillaume Herbault, entretien avec Michel Poivert, *Croiser des mondes, Document 2*, Paris, éditions du Jeu de Paume, 2005, p. 46.
20 Ibidem, p. 46.
21 Stéphane Duroy, *L'Europe du silence*, Paris, Filigranes, 2000.
22 Etienne Hatt, " Regardez avec moi… " , un entretien avec Arno Gisinger, op. cit.
23 Jérôme Sans, " Une Oeuvre de terrain " , op. cit., p. 9.
24 Guillaume Herbault, *Tchernobylsty*, Toulouse, Le Petit Camarguais/Privat, 2003.
25 Pierre Nora, " Entre Mémoire et Histoire, La problématique des lieux " in *Les Lieux de la mémoire, La République, La Nation, Les Frances*, éd. Pierre Nora, Paris, Gallimard, 1997.
26 Philippe Dagen*, De Mémoires*, Tourcoing, Le Fresnoy, Studio national des arts contemporains, Paris, Hazan, 2003, p. 9.
27 Pierre Nora, " Entre Mémoire et Histoire, La problématique des lieux " , op. cit., p. 37.

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David Campany, " Pour une politique des ruines : quelques réflexions sur la " photographie de l'après " ", in *L'image-document, entre réalité et fiction*, Paris, Le Bal / Images en manœuvres, coll. Les carnets du Bal 01, 2010, p.48-67 ; traduction de : "Safety in Numbness", in *Where Is the Photograph?* David Green éd., Brighton, Photoworks/Photoforum, 2003

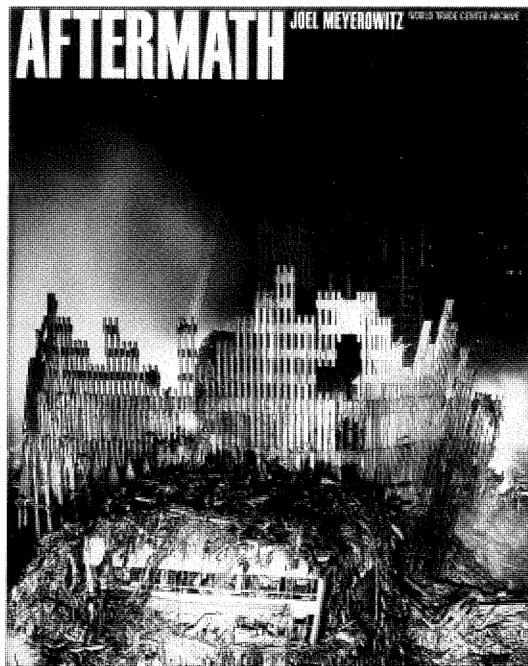
POUR UNE POLITIQUE DES RUINES : QUELQUES RÉFLEXIONS SUR LA « PHOTOGRAPHIE DE L'APRÈS »

DAVID CAMPANY

L'ÉVÉNEMENT ET SES CONSÉQUENCES faisaient encore l'objet d'une couverture médiatique intensive lorsque, plusieurs semaines après l'effondrement du World Trade Center, la chaîne britannique Four News diffusa un reportage spécial de trente minutes intitulé « Reflections of Ground Zero » (Reflets de Ground Zero). On y voyait le photographe new-yorkais Joel Meyerowitz opérer minutieusement aux abords des décombres fumants et des grues avec sa chambre photographique. Unique photographe autorisé à accéder librement au site et à assister aux travaux de déblaiement, Meyerowitz produisit un corpus substantiel de photographies en couleurs qui furent exposées à New York (l'exposition circula ensuite dans d'autres pays) puis publiées dans un livre grand format : *Aftermath.*

Partout dans le monde, chacun ou presque a pu voir, pour peu qu'il eût accès à un poste de télévision, la frappe aérienne des deux tours. S'ensuivit une quantité de reportages, retransmis instantanément et à l'échelle planétaire sur internet. Le bas de Manhattan devint alors le point de mire universel, et le centre d'une vaste production d'informations aux outils ultramodernes. Dans « Reflections of Ground Zero », pourtant, apparaissait un homme seul, muni d'une lourde chambre Deardorff vieille de soixante ans. De ce documentaire lent et méditatif, ponctué par un air de piano en mode mineur, émanait un sentiment de mélancolie. Il donnait aussi l'impression d'assister à un rituel – fonction, parmi d'autres, que l'émission et les photographies entendaient du reste assumer. Toutefois, *« Reflections of Ground Zero »* mettait mieux encore en lumière le contraste entre la complexité de la situation géopolitique et la simplicité de la méthode de travail de Meyerowitz. S'y profilait l'idée que la photographie, plutôt que la télévision, constituerait le support idoine de l' « histoire officielle » et des « images d'archives ». Les photographies y étaient situées sur un plan supérieur à celui de l'émission dans laquelle elles étaient présentées.

Bien qu'il comportât des séquences vidéo au moins aussi descriptives et instructives que les photographies, ce reportage entérinait l'incapacité de la



Couverture du livre *Aftermath*, de Joel Meyerowitz, Londres, Phaïdon Press, 2006.

télévision à accomplir la tâche ici endossée par le photographe. À un moment donné, Meyerowitz y déclare : *J'ai pensé que si aucun enregistrement photographique n'était autorisé, l'histoire serait effacée*[1]. Nul doute que le statut particulier conféré à ses images structura symboliquement le regard porté sur elles au fil des expositions et des publications – même s'il y a lieu de penser que ce statut s'émoussera avec le temps et qu'elles finiront par rejoindre l'ensemble des images appelées à construire l'histoire. Seul les distinguera *peut-être*, aux yeux de la postérité, le fait qu'elles ne se prévalent que d'elles-mêmes et qu'elles procèdent de la nécessité, du désir de proposer un corpus officiel d'images expressément constitué de photographies.

1. Je précise ici d'emblée que, afin de mieux mesurer et explorer l'écart entre la photographie et les supports technologiques auxquels elle est intégrée, j'ai réexaminé de près les images de Meyerowitz sur internet après les avoir vues tout d'abord à la télévision, puis lors de l'exposition « After September 11 : Images from Ground Zero », présentée à Londres au Museum of London. Cette exposition était le fruit d'une collaboration entre le Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs du département d'État américain et le Museum of the City of New York.

Les images de Meyerowitz restituent moins la trace d'un événement que la *trace de la trace* d'un événement. Sa photographie « de l'après » (« *late* » *photography*) est exemplaire d'une approche et d'un usage du médium aujourd'hui en voie de généralisation. Mais que penser de cette propension criante à photographier les séquelles – traces, fragments, bâtiments vides, rues désertes, corps meurtris, lieux dévastés – des événements ? Ces images revêtent un aspect statique, souvent morne et passablement « plat ». Leur esthétique fonctionnelle les apparente plus au cliché médico-légal qu'au photojournalisme traditionnel. Elles relèvent de ce que Peter Wollen a appelé la « photographie à froid (*cool photography*) », par opposition à celle, autrement spectaculaire, qui saisit les événements « à chaud [*hot*][2] ». Si, dans certains cas, nous voyons qu'il s'est passé quelque chose, il nous faut, dans d'autres, imaginer l'événement, le projeter, ou bien s'informer à son sujet par d'autres biais – généralement un titre ou une légende. Elles montrent souvent des sites déserts où abondent les vestiges de l'activité humaine. De telles images ne se rencontreraient-elles que dans l'art contemporain, il serait loisible de n'y voir qu'une vogue passagère (de tous les médiums artistiques, la photographie est celui qui se prête le mieux aux caprices des conservateurs). Or, elles sont de plus en plus présentes dans le nouveau photojournalisme, le documentaire, les campagnes de communication, et jusque dans les informations, la publicité et la mode. Ceci laisse penser que la photographie a depuis peu hérité d'un rôle de croque-mort, de greffier, ou de comptable. Elle intervient après-coup, sillonne les lieux où les choses se sont produites, et dresse l'inventaire des

2. Peter Wollen, « Vectors of Melancholy », in Ralph Rugoff, dir., *The Scene of the Crime*, Cambridge (Mass)/Londres, MIT Press, 1997. Voir aussi l'essai de Thierry de Duve « Time Exposure and Snapshot : The Photograph as Paradox », *October*, n° 5, 1978 (repris en français, sous le titre « Pose et instantané, ou le paradoxe photographique », dans *Thierry de Duve, Essais datés, I*, 1974-1986, Paris, La Différence, 1987, qui établit une opposition similaire.

conséquences de l'activité du monde. En renonçant à représenter le cours des événements, elle les abandonne aux autres médias. Très différent de l'instantané pris sur le vif, ce type de photographie entretient aussi une relation particulière avec la mémoire et avec l'histoire.

Quoiqu'ils s'inscrivent dans un cadre théorique établi, les rapports entre la photographie et la mémoire collective n'en sont pas moins complexes. La photographie peut être l'auxiliaire de la mémoire, mais aussi faire obstacle à la compréhension du passé. Toujours vive chez l'individu, la soif de remémoration peut paralyser sa faculté d'élaborer une réflexion politique au-delà de l'image[3]. Pourtant, l'image fixe est souvent utilisée par les mass media et la culture grand public comme un simple signifiant du souvenir, comme s'il existait un rapport direct entre le fonctionnement de la mémoire et la capacité de « figer » propre à l'appareil photographique. De fait, cette hypothèse est si solidement ancrée que sa mise en question apparaît d'emblée quelque peu retorse. C'est pourquoi, plutôt que de nous pencher sur ce rapport direct entre photographie et mémoire, nous réfléchirons aux rapports qu'elles entretiennent toutes deux avec les autres médias.

À la télévision et au cinéma, l'image photographique et l'arrêt sur image servent couramment à introduire des sortes d' « instantanés » d'histoire ou de mémoire dans un flux d'images par définition en mouvement. Tout porte à croire, d'ailleurs, que cet usage de l'image fixe a consolidé le lien communément établi entre photographie et mémoire – bien plus que le rapport intrinsèque qui existerait entre elles. Rien de tel en effet que le

3. Voir notamment Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire. Note sur la photographie*, Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma/Gallimard/Le Seuil, 1980 ; et Walter Benjamin, « L'œuvre d'art à l'ère de sa reproductibilité technique », in *Œuvres, III*, trad. Maurice de Gandillac, Rainer Rochlitz et Pierre Rusch, Paris, Gallimard, 2000. Pour une étude plus approfondie de cette question, voir Celia Lury, *Prosthetic Culture : Photography, Memory, Identity*, Londres, Routledge, 1997 ; Scott McQuire, *Visions of Modernity : Representation, Memory, Time and Space in the Age of Camera*, Londres, Sage, 1998 ; et Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light : Theses on the Photography of History*, Princeton (N.J.), Princeton University Press, 1997.

« présent » de l'image en mouvement pour souligner le « passé » de la photographie. Ce « présent » s'impose même plus fortement dans l'image en mouvement que dans le continuum de la vie, car si l'image fixe est partie intégrante de l'image en mouvement, elle en est aussi le fantôme – la mémoire, l'ancêtre primitif. Reste que prêter à l'image fixe et à l'arrêt sur image une qualité proche de celle du souvenir, une proximité naturelle avec la mémoire, c'est oublier que le fonctionnement de cette mémoire est sujet au changement. La mémoire est façonnée par l'image du monde qui nous entoure. Sa structure est, dans une large mesure, déterminée culturellement par les moyens de représentation dont nous disposons. Et les modifications qui affectent notre image du monde modifient à leur tour les conditions d'élaboration de notre souvenir[4]. Il se pourrait bien que le statut particulier accordé à l'image fixe, à l'ère de la télévision et de ses récents avatars technologiques, soit moins le fruit d'une reconnaissance de sa supériorité mnémonique que celui du désir de lui conférer un tel « pouvoir » ; un désir dont l'utilisation de l'image fixe à l'intérieur de l'image en mouvement serait l'aire privilégiée d'actualisation. Autrement dit, on s'en remet au caractère relativement primitif de la photographie pour porter secours à un processus de mémorisation que l'afflux des informations véhiculées par des supports technologiques très divers a rendu excessivement complexe.

Pour la conscience collective (par opposition à l'*inconscience* collective), l'image fixe demeure plus propice à la mémorisation que l'image en mouvement. Mais si la photographie, en tant qu'image figée, conserve ce caractère mémorisable dans la sphère médiatique contemporaine, c'est sans doute aussi parce qu'elle *dit* très peu. À cet égard, le flot d'information audiovisuelle qui sature notre espace culturel constitue son meilleur allié. En raison même de son mutisme, la photographie paraît en quelque sorte non

4. Voir l'étude de Laura Mulvey sur la manière dont les nouvelles technologies reconfigurent la mémoire du spectateur. Laura Mulvey « The pensive spectator » in David Green (dir.), *Where is the photograph ?*, Brighton, Photoworks/Photoforum, 2004, p. 113-122.

contaminée par la rumeur télévisuelle[5]. À supposer que son statut privilégié résulte de sa capacité naturelle à condenser et à simplifier les choses, ses effets découlent surtout de sa capacité à demeurer radicalement ouverte, radicalement laconique. Non qu'une photographie « vaille mille mots » ; en revanche, mille mots *peuvent* être dits à son sujet. C'est pourquoi la télévision et le film tendent à exploiter l'image fixe sur un mode purement rhétorique, à seule fin de ménager des moments de pathos, de tension, de nostalgie ou de mélancolie.

Ceci étant dit, la photographie statique prise après l'événement représente, plus encore que l'image figée *de* l'événement, l'image radicalement ouverte par excellence. La fixité de cette image « pré-congelée » vient compléter et souligner la fixité de l'après-événement. Ces photographies ne sont pas celles utilisées d'ordinaire par la télévision et le film pour susciter la mémorisation. De fait, la télévision se montre très réticente vis-à-vis de ce type d'images, car leur fixité prête à confusion – « S'agit-il là d'une photographie de l'immobilité ou bien d'un plan vidéo filmé de manière immobile ? ». Lorsque la photographie y est introduite, ainsi dans l'émission consacrée au projet de Meyerowitz, le spectateur perçoit d'autant plus nettement sa fixité que le recours au banc-titre permet d'en scruter les détails moyennant des zooms et des déplacements dans le cadre de l'image.

Afin de comprendre l'intérêt actuel pour la « photographie de l'après », il y a lieu de considérer les images prises avant, durant et après les événements. Et ceci de deux manières : il s'agit, d'une part, de revenir littéralement sur les photographies prises aux différents stades d'un événement particulier ; d'autre part, il s'agit d'élargir le cadre de cette réflexion à l'histoire sociale de la photographie. Cette histoire vieille de cent soixante-dix ans est divisible en trois phases. Il y eut tout d'abord une période limitée durant laquelle la photographie porta le poids des événements et en définit les contours. Au cours de ces premières décennies, le médium était lent et d'un maniement peu aisé, tant du point de vue technique que de ses moyens de diffusion à travers l'édifice social. Les mass media ne connurent un essor spectaculaire qu'à partir des années vingt, grâce à la multiplication des organes de presse et aux progrès de la technique photographique ; la photographie devint dès lors le médium de référence, et l'instant fixé par l'image le module à partir duquel l'événement pouvait être appréhendé. Le bon photoreporter se devait alors de suivre l'action ; son but était de se trouver au bon endroit au bon moment, là où « les choses se passent ». Ceci perdura jusqu'au moment où, vers la fin des années soixante et le début des années soixante-dix, l'ensemble des journalistes adopta la caméra vidéo portable. Au cours des dernières décennies, l'image vidéo, aujourd'hui relayée par diverses autres technologies, s'empara de l'événement et frappa d'obsolescence l'idée que l'on s'en faisait jusqu'alors. Aujourd'hui, les photographes attendent souvent que le bruit s'apaise et que l'événement soit clos. Ils rechargent leurs appareils au moment où les vidéastes remballent leurs caméras. De sorte que leurs photographies ne succèdent pas tant à l'événement qu'elles ne succèdent à la vidéo. L'événement auquel nous assistons dans un premier temps en « direct » – ou tout au moins en temps réel – à la télévision ou sur internet, peut être ensuite revisité par le biais d'une photographie qui rend compte d'une immobilité plus encore qu'elle ne « fige » les choses. Les photojournalistes plongèrent au cœur de l'événement tant que la photographie fut au centre de la culture. Désormais, ils se situent plus volontiers sur la scène de l' « après », car la photographie elle-même se situe dans l'« après » de la culture contemporaine. La saisie de l'événement ne passe plus, ou dans une bien moindre mesure, par la photographie. Nous attendons plus d'un reportage que d'une image fixe (même si, dans le climat émotionnel où baigne l'information télévisuelle, l'image fixe nous est parfois offerte

5. Dans « Reflections of Ground Zero » un new-yorkais anonyme déclare : *Les gens reviendront vers les photographies de Joel (Meyerowitz). Elles s'imposent par leur silence. Par leur fixité.*

Roger Fenton, *La vallée de l'ombre de la Mort*, 1855, épreuve sur papier salé à partir d'un négatif verre. © RMN-Musée d'Orsay

Alexander Gardner (Matthew Brady studio), *Refuge d'un rebelle tireur d'élite*, Gettysburg, 1863, New York, Museum of Modern Art. © The Museum of Modern Art, New York / Scala, Florence

en guise de « distillat » idéologique ou de résumé mythique). La vidéo nous restitue les choses comme elles arrivent. Ces choses peuvent être manipulées, mal présentées, mal décantées, mais elles surviennent dans le temps présent. Il est très rare aujourd'hui que les photographies annoncent les nouvelles. Le journal imprimé ne rapporte qu'une seconde vague d'information, sous forme d'interprétations ou de commentaires. Et quand les « photographies de l'après » émergent à leur tour à la faveur d'une publication dans un magazine ou d'une exposition dans une galerie, la distance qui les sépare de l'événement est plus grande encore[6].

Visuellement, la photographie de la fin du XXe et du début du XXIe siècles évoque certaines célèbres images prises au XIXe siècle sur les champs de bataille – ainsi celles de Roger Fenton montrant les reliefs désolés de la Crimée dans les années 1850, ou celles de Mathew Brady, datées de la décennie suivante, montrant les dépouilles de victimes de la guerre civile américaine. Cette ressemblance risque toutefois de masquer des différences essentielles, dues notamment aux bouleversements intervenus depuis lors dans notre culture de l'image. Considérons, par exemple, la question de la fixité. Dire que les photographies sont « fixes » semble relever du truisme scientifique ; or, ce mot recouvre différentes réalités selon le contexte historique et culturel. En effet, les photographies du XIXe siècle mentionnées ci-dessus ne sont pas fixès au sens où nous l'entendons aujourd'hui. Je ne parle pas ici du fait que les objets bougeaient durant le temps de pose, dont personne n'ignore combien il était long. En réalité, ces images n'étaient ni plus ni moins fixes que la quasi-totalité des photographies de cette époque : l'immobilité de la photographie était alors une donnée si évidente qu'elle allait de soi. La fixité des images photographiques ne se manifesta et ne s'imposa définitivement qu'en regard de l'image en mouvement. C'est à l'ère du cinéma que la photographie, se muant en instrument de précision, entrepris d'arrêter le

6. On pourra toutefois objecter que, dans ces circonstances, il devient possible de prêter attention à ce qui a été négligé ou omis par l'information télévisuelle.

temps et de figer l'action ; de sorte que le cinéma inventa non seulement l'image en mouvement, mais aussi la fixité de la photographie. Et c'est à l'ère du cinéma que le figement opéré par l'instantané fut reconnu – tant chez les professionnels du photojournalisme que dans la pratique amateur – comme l'essence du photographique. Au milieu du XXe siècle, cette démarche fut associée à la notion cardinale d' « instant décisif » – l'instant où, muni d'un appareil rapide et compact, le photographe saisissait, pour peu qu'il disposât de réflexes aiguisés, la dynamique d'un monde moderne désormais « cinématisé » (*cinematized*).

L'arrivée de la vidéo mit un terme au monopole de la fixité et de l'immédiateté exercé par la photographie. L'introduction de cette nouvelle technologie eut des conséquences matérielles (rapide et bon marché, la vidéo permet de stopper et de repasser les images indéfiniment) ainsi qu'un impact social (elle s'arrogea nombre des missions institutionnelles confiées auparavant à la photographie). Un récent ouvrage consacré à l'histoire du photojournalisme s'achève du reste significativement sur le milieu des années soixante-dix – seule façon, sans doute, de le faire mourir en beauté[7]. Il est vrai que l'influence du photojournalisme n'a cessé ensuite de décliner. Son âge d'or fait aujourd'hui l'objet de publications luxueuses – un *revival* aux modalités discutables –, tandis que ses traces résiduelles, pastiches d'un glorieux passé, occupent les pages des suppléments magazines goûtés par un public attaché à un certain classicisme esthétique. Au demeurant, annoncer la « mort du photojournalisme » semble prématuré. Si celle-ci se profila dans les années soixante-dix, c'est parce que la portée du photojournalisme ne se mesurait alors – à tort – qu'à l'aune de son monopole sur la fixité et sur notre approche des événements. Durant les trente dernières années, de nombreux photographes et écrivains ont su s'adapter à la nouvelle situation du médium. Le photojournalisme est en train de redéfinir ses perspectives et ses contextes d'intervention ; ce faisant, il rejoint le type de démarche que j'évoque ici. Mais revenons un instant sur son histoire.

7. Sur le travail des photographes de presse durant la Guerre du Golfe, voir John Taylor, « The Gulf War in the Press », *Portfolio Magazine*, n° 11, été 1991. Sur la représentation virtuelle de ce conflit, voir Jean Baudrillard, *La Guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu*, Paris, Galilée, 1991, et Tim Druckrey, « Deadly Representations or Apocalypse Now », *Ten/8*, vol. 2, n° 2, 1991.

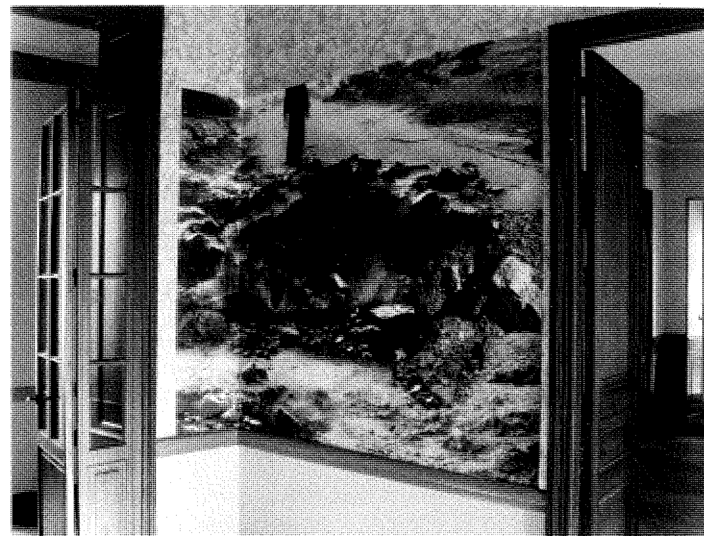
Depuis la guerre du Vietnam – qui offrit à la « photographie de guerre » son dernier champ d'opération –, les conflits et leur traitement par les médias ont subi d'importantes transformations. La guerre du Vietnam engendra le chaos à deux niveaux : le pays était en proie à un désordre total (or, le désordre est hautement photogénique) et les États-Unis y déployèrent une stratégie politique et militaire erratique. Son prolongement multiplia les opportunités d'effectuer des prises de vues. Il en fut tout autrement de la « Guerre du Golfe ». De cette guerre, qui éclata en 1990, on dit souvent qu'elle fut la première à avoir été traitée et perçue par le biais d'images de simulation. Ce que nous en vîmes se résuma à une poignée d'images satellites, quelques séquences émanant de l'armée et des graphiques explicatifs diffusés à la télévision. Faute d'autorisations, très peu de photographes couvrirent ce conflit[8]. Ils furent nombreux, en revanche, à se rendre au Koweït *après* la guerre afin d'en photographier les séquelles – tanks démantelés, cadavres, désert ravagé, gisements de pétrole en feu. Évocatrices d'un état post-traumatique proche de la paralysie, ces lugubres images s'accompagnaient souvent de textes tout aussi mélancoliques. Le photojournalisme se fit alors élégiaque, sourdement poétique, comme s'il se situait hors du temps de l'histoire, hors des événements, et même hors de la politique. Nous pûmes donc voir après-coup les dégâts causés par cette guerre, mais au prix d'un sentiment d'exclusion. La photographie s'était efforcée de se repositionner au-delà de l'événement. On découvrit alors que la mélancolie la plus sombre seyait à l'image fixe.

8. Sur cette question, on se reportera utilement à Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (édition augmentée), Harvard, University Press, 1979 (éd. française, *La Projection du monde : réflexions sur l'ontologie du cinéma*, trad. Christian Fournier, Paris, Belin, 1999).

Paul Seawright, *Vallée, Afganistan*, 2002. © Paul Seawright
➘ p. 228

Aujourd'hui, plus de la moitié des « photographies » destinées à l'information sont extraites de vidéos et de sources digitales. Et cette proportion s'accroît dès qu'il s'agit de couvrir un conflit international. À ceci, deux conséquences :

tout d'abord, la distinction entre les diverses technologies de l'image s'en trouve partiellement brouillée (ce qui affecte en outre profondément notre perception de la photographie, de sa valeur et de son objet) ; par ailleurs, la photographie se cherche de nouvelles missions – ou plus exactement, la culture visuelle contemporaine lui abandonne certaines tâches et certains thèmes, tel l'après-coup des événements. Dès lors, l'idéal photographique absolu au nom duquel on captait l'« instant décisif » peut être réinscrit dans un temps spécifique de l'histoire. Aucun médium, et moins encore la photographie, ne se gouverne de manière autonome, souveraine ; tous sont hétéronymes, se définissent les uns par rapport aux autres, et les facteurs qui régissent ces rapports sont moins *technologiques* que *culturels*.



Sophie Ristelhueber, installation *Eleven Blowups*, appartement privé, Arles, 2006.
© Sophie Ristelhueber
➘ p. 229

La photographie est ce que nous en faisons. Or, ce que nous en faisons dépend de plus en plus de ce que nous faisons des autres technologies de l'image[9]. À l'ère de l'instantanéité et de la globalisation de l'image en mouvement, la chambre photographique de 1942 de Meyerowitz se voit confier un rôle inédit[10].

L'art contemporain nourrit une évidente prédilection pour la « photographie de l'après », et celle-ci alimente de manière récurrente le dialogue actuel entre l'art et le documentaire. Les œuvres de Willie Doherty, Paul Seawright, Sophie Ristelhueber, Robert Polidori et Richard Misrach en proposent des exemples parmi les plus intéressants (difficile toutefois, à

9. *Ibid.* **10.** Il est intéressant de rappeler que Meyerowitz se fit d'abord connaître en traquant l'« instant décisif » dans les rues de New York. Si sa démarche était alors profondément influencée par Cartier-Bresson, son parcours ultérieur dénote un net changement de direction ; à la fugacité du geste instantané, il substituera, avec son imposant appareil, une méthode de travail plus lente ; en délaissant la saisie de l'« événement », il privilégiera une photographie inscrite dans la durée.

l'heure où j'écris, d'éviter les images glauques et médiocres d'immeubles en ruines et de terrains vagues montrées dans bien des galeries d'Europe et d'Amérique du Nord). Du fait de leur silencieuse réserve, ces images restent ouvertes à l'interprétation. Un écart s'y creuse entre la force probatoire du témoignage et la cause absente de ce dont il témoigne. Cette faille allégorique met le regardeur en demeure de prendre part à un travail actif d'interprétation, afin de combler les vides d'un récit désormais elliptique. Par ailleurs, les *traces de traces* que sont ces images satisfont aux critères de l'analyse moderniste de l'art concernant le caractère indiciel du médium. Elles peuvent également favoriser une réflexion distanciée sur la photographie en tant que preuve et sur les prétentions dans ce domaine de la photographie documentaire conventionnelle[11]. À cet égard, un parallèle s'impose entre la « photographie de l'après » et les stratégies plus ouvertement fictionnelles (mise en scène de tableaux vivants, reconstitution, photo d'illustration) qui caractérisent aujourd'hui tout un pan de la photographie contemporaine. L'ambition documentaire du médium est mise en question, voire en suspens, par le regard que nous portons sur ses faiblesses et ses limites dans l'exercice de la représentation.

L'attrait qu'exercent sur nous ces photographies si statiques et riches de détails réside en partie dans le fait qu'elles incarnent à nos yeux une nouvelle sorte de photographie « pure », dont aucun autre type d'images n'offre l'équivalent (ceci explique sans doute pourquoi elles investissent les musées et les galeries). Ces photographies de traces semblent en effet ne partager leur caractère éminemment *photographique* – même si, rappelons-le, la notion de « photographique » est très sujette à variation – avec aucun autre médium. Dans le même temps, elles rejettent toute visée ouvertement « créative » ; l'image s'y présente telle quelle, posément, avec un détachement qui entre en résonance avec le goût de l'art contemporain pour la lenteur,

11. Concernant l'allégorie dans la pratique documentaire la plus récente, voir le passionnant article de Justin Carville, « Re-negotiating Territory : The Politics of Place, Space and Landscape in Irish Photography », in *Afterimage*, vol. 29, n° 1, juillet/août 2001.

le retrait, l'anonymat. Dans « Reflections of Ground Zero », Meyerowitz décrit son travail de photographe comme un processus automatique d'où toute créativité est exclue : *Je suis juste venu là en qualité de témoin, et j'ai photographié cela pour ce que c'était, sans essayer d'y appliquer une conception formelle de la photographie. Ce sont les choses elles-mêmes qui m'ont dicté la manière de les photographier.* Si, dans de telles circonstances, tourner le dos à l' « originalité » relève d'une démarche admirable, nous devons aussi nous souvenir qu'il n'existe pas de « degré zéro » de la photographie – fût-ce à Ground Zero. Mêlant scènes épiques, portraits et détails des excavations, les images de Meyerowitz attestent toutes l'attention notoire qu'il porte à la lumière et à l'atmosphère. Et ses compétences de photographe n'ont cessé de s'affiner au fil du temps. Peut-être est-ce devenu chez lui une seconde nature, mais il sait de quoi est faite une bonne photo et il ne peut échapper à la beauté. Il possède *indiscutablement* une puissante esthétique formelle – quand bien même celle-ci s'accorde à la façon dont le grand public se représente un document photographique montrant des ruines[12].

Comme je l'ai dit, la photographie « de l'après » a une longue histoire. L'intérêt que lui portent l'art et la littérature remonte au moins à l'engouement des surréalistes pour l'inaltérable simplicité des photographies de rues d'Eugène Atget. Revenant sur cette histoire, l'écrivain et photographe Allan Sekula nous prévient néanmoins contre le risque politique encouru

12. En remontant le fil de la carrière de Meyerowitz, j'ai retrouvé un ouvrage intitulé *Annie on Camera* (1982). Meyerowitz fut l'un des neuf photographes chargés de photographier le tournage du film de John Huston *Annie*, un pudding musical ayant pour toile de fond New York à l'époque de la dépression. L'une des photographies de Meyerowitz montre des tas de gravats et de minces fragments de murs gisant au pied de contreforts architecturaux inclinés. Il s'agissait là d'éléments du décor mis au rebut par les décorateurs. Une des photos prises par le même Meyerowitz à Ground Zero présente avec cette image une ressemblance frappante. Les photographes tendent à transporter en tout lieu leurs modèles visuels, quelle que soit la façon dont le sujet détermine formellement leurs images. Je me demande si Meyerowitz se souvint de cette image délibérément factice prise sur le tournage d'*Annie* quand il fut confronté, vingt ans plus tard, à une scène similaire dans un contexte qui, quoique tout autre, n'en revêtait pas moins des aspects indéniablement cinématographiques. *Cf.* Nancy Grubb (dir.), *Annie on Camera*, New York, Abbeville Press, 1982.

Simon Norfolk, *Impacts de balles sur le cinéma de plein air du Palais de la culture dans le district de Karte Char à Kaboul*, décembre 2001, de la série Chronotopia. © Simon Norfolk ➘ p. 230

lorsqu'on isole un document de son contexte afin de le rendre énigmatique, mélancolique, ou simplement beau :

Walter Benjamin a repris la remarque selon laquelle Eugène Atget aurait représenté les rues de Paris comme s'il s'agissait de scènes de crime. Cette remarque concourut à la poétisation d'un style impassible, dénué d'expressionnisme, et introduisit de la nostalgie dans la démarche froidement instrumentale du détective. Ici, le crime devient une affaire de cœur autant qu'une affaire de faits. Lorsqu'on regarde en arrière, vers Atget via Benjamin, la perte du passé occasionnée par les continuelles perturbations du présent urbain nous apparaît comme une forme de violence à l'encontre de la mémoire, à laquelle le bohème nostalgique résiste par des actes d'appropriation solipsistes, passifs [...]. Je cite cet exemple à seule fin de soulever le problème de la dimension affective du documentaire. Le documentaire a amassé des montagnes de preuves. Et pourtant, ce genre, cette représentation scientifique, légaliste du « fait » a dans le même temps largement contribué à alimenter le spectacle, l'excitation rétinienne, le voyeurisme, la terreur, la jalousie et la nostalgie, et contribué dans une bien moindre mesure à l'appréhension critique du monde social [...]. S'il veut avoir une portée véritablement sociale, le documentaire doit exposer le crime, le procès, le système judiciaire et ses mythes officiels [...]. La vérité sociale se joue ailleurs que dans un style convaincant[13].

Il conviendrait de se demander pourquoi, dans la culture contemporaine, la « photographie de l'après » est devenue synonyme de « style convaincant ». Son recul vis-à-vis de l'événement n'est en rien garant d'un point de vue éclairé ou critique. Et ni sa rigueur ni sa sobriété visuelles ne sauraient à elles seules en tenir lieu. Rien d'étonnant toutefois à ce que, dans un monde perpétuellement reconfiguré à partir d'images fragmentaires disséminées sur des écrans, un cadre rectangulaire détaillé, statique et résolument perspectiviste *apparaisse* comme une sorte d'image supérieure.

Certes, la « photographie de l'après » offre souvent un support utile au travail de deuil collectif et de dépassement du trauma (le projet « Ground Zero » de Meyerowitz s'adressait en premier lieu aux habitants de New York). Mais elle peut aussi dangereusement conforter, sous couvert de sollicitude, l'indifférence et le désengagement vis-à-vis du politique. Cette prise de deuil par contumace se réduit alors à une réponse esthétisée. En ce sens, le silence de la « photographie de l'après » flatte l'inertie idéologique de ses contemplateurs peu soucieux d'en déchiffrer l'arrière-plan politique et social. Aussi sa finitude et son mutisme patents risquent-

13. Allan Sekula, « Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation) », in Terry Dennett et Jo Spence (dirs.), *Photography/Politics : One*, Londres, Photography Workshop, 1980.

ils de nous maintenir dans un état d'irrésolution permanente, et même d'abolir en nous toute *nécessité* d'analyse – en encourageant une forme de mélancolie libérale qui porte à fuir l'explication politique au même titre que le vampire fuit l'ail[14]. Si la « photographie de l'après », aussi banale et factuelle soit-elle, parvient à nous inspirer un sentiment de sublime, il nous revient impérativement de réfléchir à ce qui induit un tel sentiment. Du banal au sublime, il n'y a qu'un pas – et ce pas est politique. Or, si l'expérience contemporaine du sublime procède d'une situation géopolitique qui nous submerge et à laquelle nous n'entendons rien, alors cette expérience est politiquement vouée à la réification et esthétiquement vouée à l'appauvrissement.

Traduit de l'anglais par Catherine Vasseur

14. Cette comparaison, ainsi que la critique globale de la passivité propre à l'idéologie libérale, sont empruntées à Slavoj Zizek. *Cf.* « Self-Interview », in *The Metastases of Enjoyment. Six Essays on Woman and Causality*, Londres, Verso, 1994.

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Safety in Numbness: Some Remarks on Problems of "Late Photography"

David Campany, in *Where Is the Photograph?* David Green éd., Brighton, Photoworks/Photoforum, 2003.
Réédité in *The Cinematic: Documents of Contemporary Art,* CAMPANY, David, ed., London, Whitechapel and Cambridge Massachusetts, MIT Press, 2007, 185-94

Several weeks into the intensive coverage of the aftermath of the collapse of the World Trade Center, Britain's Channel Four News screened a thirty-minute special report entitled "Reflections on Ground Zero." It followed New York photographer Joel Meyerowitz as he maneuvered diligently around the smoking rubble and cranes with his large format camera. He had been commissioned by the Museum of the City of New York to make for posterity the "official" images of the scene and the clean-up operation. He was granted exclusive photographic access to the site and produced a substantial body of color photographs, exhibited in the city and later internationally. Just about everyone worldwide with access to a television had seen the fall of the towers and the ensuing news reports through electronic images transmitted globally and instantaneously. Lower Manhattan became the most imaged and visible of places, the epicenter of a vast amount of state-of-the-art digital and video news production. Yet here was a report beamed to Britain featuring a solitary man, his tripod and his forty-five pound, sixty-year-old Deardorff camera. It was a slow and deliberating half-hour, imbued throughout with a sense of melancholy by the constant tinkling of a piano in a minor key. There was an air of ritual too, since this was at least part of the function of both the program and the photographs. In being about photography the report almost managed to draw attention to the medium of television. It made much play of the contrast between the complexity of the geopolitical situation and the simplicity of Meyerowitz's camera and working method. The suggestion that photography, rather than television, is the better medium for official history was unusual. Television was deeming itself unable to perform an image task given over to photography, even while it was showing us images at least as informative as the ones being taken by the photographer. The photographs were positioned as superior to the program in which they were presented. Meyerowitz was filmed telling us at one point, "I felt if there was no photographic record allowed, then it was history erased." [1] No doubt the special sanctioning will symbolically structure how his pictures are seen as they tour. Even so this status will probably become less secure in the future—they will probably take up a place alongside so many other images in the constructions of history. What may mark them out in posterity is the very act of sanctioning itself, the idea that there was a need, a desire, to nominate an official body of images, and that these should be photographs. [2]
Meyerowitz's imagery is not so much the trace of an event as the trace of the trace of an event. This "late" photography is a particularly clear instance of a strategy I sense is becoming quite a prevalent use of the medium. What I want to do here is think through what is at stake in the rise of this kind of photograph in contemporary visual culture.
What are we to make of the highly visible turn toward photographing the aftermath of events—traces, fragments, empty buildings, empty streets, damage to the body and damage to the world? It comes to us as a particularly static, often somber and quite "straight" kind of picture, which assumes an aesthetic of utility closer to forensic photography than traditional photojournalism. It is a form of what Peter Wollen recently called "cool photography" as opposing to the "hot" photography of events. [3] Sometimes we can see that something has happened, sometimes we are left to imagine or project it, or to be informed about it by other means. The images often contain no people, but a lot of remnants of activity. If this type of image was only present in contemporary art it might be overlooked as a passing trend (of all art's media, photography is still the most subject to curatorial whim). But we see it increasingly in new photojournalism, documentary, campaign work and even news, advertising and fashion. One might easily surmise that photography has of late inherited a major role as an undertaker, summariser, or accountant. It turns up late, wanders through the places where things have happened, totting up the effects of the world's activity. This is a kind of photograph that either foregoes or cannot represent events and so cedes them to other media. As a result it is quite different from the spontaneous snapshot and has a different relation to memory and to history.
The theoretical framework connecting the photograph to collective memory is as well established as it is complex. The photograph can be an aid to memory, but it can also become an obstacle that blocks access to the understanding of the past. It can paralyze the personal and political ability to think beyond the image. Proper knowledge depends not just on the photograph itself but on the place it is afforded in the always fraught project of remembrance. [4] However, in the popular culture of mass media, the frozen image is often used as a simple signifier of the memorable, as if there were a straightforward connection between the functions of memory and the "freezing"

capabilities of the still camera. Indeed this is such a well established assumption about photographs that to even question it seems a little perverse. So rather than thinking about a direct relation between the photograph and memory, let us think about the two of them in relation to other media.

Television and cinema make regular use of photographic snapshots and freeze-frames as a kind of instant history or memory that they as moving images are not. Indeed it seems plausible that it is primarily this use of the still photograph by television and film that has cemented the popular connection of photography with memory, rather than there being some intrinsic relation. There is nothing like the "presentness" of the moving image to emphasize the "pastness" of the photograph it shows us. It can do it even better than the continuum of life itself, for when the moving image presents the still, it evokes the memorable because as a technology the still is a part or a ghost of it. To presume that the still image or the freeze-frame is inherently more memorable, or closer to the nature of memory, is to overlook the fact that the very operation of our memory is changing. It is shaped by the image world around us. The structure of memory is in large measure culturally determined by the means of representation at our disposal. As our image world shifts in character, so do our conditions of remembrance. [5] It may well be that the special status granted the still photograph in the era of television and newer technologies is not so much a recognition of its mnemonic superiority as a nostalgic wish that it still has such "power." This is to say there is an investment in the idea that the relative primitivism of photography will somehow rescue the processes of our memory that have been made so complicated by the sheer amount of information we assimilate from a diversity of technologies.

In popular consciousness (as opposed to popular unconsciousness) the still image continues to be thought of as being more memorable than those that move. Yet if the frozen photograph is memorable in the contemporary mediasphere it is because it says very little itself, while allowing all that audio-visual information to support it from the wings, so to speak. Its very muteness allows it to appear somehow uncontaminated by the noise of the televisual upon which it relies. [6] While its privileged status may be imagined to stem from a natural capacity to condense and simplify things, the effects of the still image derived much more from its capacity to remain radically open. It is not that a photograph naturally says a thousand words, rather that a thousand words can be said about it. This is why television and film tend to use the still only for contrived and highly rhetorical moments of pathos, tension and melancholy which limit and condition its ambiguities.

That said, the static photograph taken after an event, rather than the frozen image made of it is the radically open image par excellence. It is "pre-frozen"—the stillness of the image complementing the stillness of the aftermath. So of course it isn't the kind of o photograph used ordinarily by television and film to evoke the memorable. Indeed television is usually very wary of this kind of image as it confuses the character of stillness…. "Is this a photograph or is this a continuous shot of an immobile scene?" When it is used, as in the case of the program on Meyerowitz's images, it is announced and defined for us as a photograph by restless rostrum zooms into details. It has to be made to reveal its static character.

To approach the "late" image it is instructive to think about photographs taken before, during and after events. I mean this in two senses. The first is the usual one—literally, photographs taken before, during and after a particular occurrence. But we could also think more broadly, of three phases of the social history of photography where only in the middle phase does photography shape our notion of "event": Over its 160-year history, photography only had a finite period in which it carried the weight of events. During the first several decades the medium was slow and cumbersome both in technical procedure and social dissemination. Only from the 1920s, with the beginning of mass media, the dominance of print journalism and fast shutter speeds, was photography the definitive medium of the day and the modulator of events. It defined implicitly what an event was: a moment, an instant, something that could be frozen and examined. Good photo-reporters were thought to be those who followed the action. The goal was to be in the right place at the right time, "as things happened." This lasted until the standardized introduction of portable video cameras in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Over the last few decades, it has become clear that the definition of events was taken over first by video and then dispersed in recent years across a varied platform of media technologies. Now photographers often prefer to wait until the noise has died down and the events are over. The still cameras are loaded as the video cameras are packed away. The photographs taken come not just in the aftermath of the event, but in the aftermath of video. What we see first "live" or at least in real time on television might be revisited by a photography that depicts stillness rather than freezing things. Photojournalists used to be at the center of the event because photography was at the center of culture. Today they are as likely to

be at its aftermath because photograph is, in relative terms, at the aftermath of culture. The result is that photography is much less the means by which the event is grasped. We have learned to expect more from a situation than a frozen image (even though in the climate of emotive news television we might be offered the static image as an ideological "distillation"). Video gives us things as they happen. They may be manipulated, they may be misrepresented and undigested but they happen in the present tense. Today it is very rare that photographs actually break the news. The newspaper is a second wave of interpreted information or commentary. The illustrated magazine or gallery exhibit constitutes a third wave. More important, they might also be an opportunity to look at the overlooked or unreported.

It is not uncommon, then, for late twentieth- and twenty-first-century photography to take on the visual character of those celebrated nineteenth-century images of battlefields. Think of Roger Fenton's photography of the exhausted terrains of the Crimea from the 1850s, or Matthew Brady's images of the scarred earth and corpses of the American Civil War from the following decade. Yet this is a false homology in key respects. The similarity masks the radical changes that have taken place in our image culture since then. Consider for example the question of stillness. Although it might be a scientific truism that photographs are still, the fact is always subject to cultural specifics. Those mid-nineteenth-century photographs were not still. I don't mean this in the sense that things moved during long exposures, which we all know they did. They weren't still because virtually all images of that time were still. Their immobility would be almost too obvious to mention. Stillness in images only became apparent, understandable and truly desirable in the presence of the moving image. This is why stillness only became the defining characteristic of photography with the coming of mass cinema and its newsreels. Cinema, we could say, wasn't just the invention of the moving image, it was also the invention of stillness as a sort of by-product. In the era of cinema, the frozenness of the snapshot—professionalized in photojournalism, democratized in amateurism—came to be understood as the essence of the photographic. Or as Jeff Wall has put it, "Reportage evolves in the pursuit of the blurred parts of the pictures." [7] All of this finds its exemplary instance in the middle of the twentieth century with the notion of the Decisive Moment (a term we owe to a publisher's very rough translation of Henri Cartier-Bresson's book and essay Images à la sauvette, issued in 1952 but drawing on two decades of his work). The speedy modernity of the now cinematized world is arrested by the speedy modernity of the handheld, high-speed still camera.

In the presence of video, photography began to lose this monopoly on stillness and immediacy. This is both a material circumstance and a social one: as a technology video was stoppable, repeatable, cheap and quick; and institutionally it was put to use in many of the roles formerly held by photography. It is interesting that a recent book on the history of photojournalism opts to conclude in the mid-1970s, in an attempt to contrive a clean and dignified end. [8] To be sure the influence of photojournalism has declined since then. Images from its heyday now find a questionable afterlife in the coffee-table book, while many of its vestigial forms have turned into pastiches of a glorious past for Sunday supplements and audiences who prefer their catastrophes with an air of aesthetic classicism. Yet announcements of the death of photojournalism are quite premature. If it met its demise in the 1970s it was only in so far as it was mistakenly assumed that its only possible significance could derive from the monopoly over stillness and over our comprehension of events. It needn't. The last couple of decades has also seen a coming to terms with its situation by many photographers and writers. Redefinitions of the possibilities of photojournalism are beginning to emerge which seek out new contexts and touch on the kinds of photographic approach I'm discussing here. But allow me to sketch in a little more of its past.

If the war in Vietnam is regarded as the last "photographer's war," this is as much a function of the shifting nature of warfare as its media coverage. Vietnam was chaotic on two levels. Literally, in that the environment was messy (and mess is highly photogenic), and metaphorically in that US policy was erratic. This prolonged the conflict and increased the photographer's picture-making opportunities. By contrast the Gulf War is often described as the first war experienced as an image simulation. What few images we saw were satellite images from news journalists along with US military footage. Very few photographers covered the war. [9] They weren't allowed in. After the war many photographers went to Kuwait to document the leftovers—destroyed tanks, bodies, scarred desert and burning oil fields. Their images often had a post-traumatic disposition, and a sense of mourning and paralysis. And they were often accompanied by similarly melancholic writing. Photojournalism became elegiac, poetic and muted. No longer was it campaigning writing accompanying campaigning images. It was picking up pieces like the shell-shocked Iraqi conscripts we were never allowed to see. It gave the feeling of being outside the time of history and politics. We may have been able to see the damage we were denied seeing done, but the

sense of removal was not in and of itself an actively critical position. Photography was struggling to find a way to reconcile itself with a new position beyond events and was finding that somber melancholia was a seductive mode.

Almost a third of all news "photographs" are frame grabs from video and digital sources. The proportion grows far larger in the coverage of conflict. This has two related consequences. There is a partial blurring of the distinction between different image technologies, and there is a radical shift in the understanding of what photography is, what it is good at and what it is for. Photography is having to find other roles. Or more accurately visual culture is leaving it certain tasks. Far from being its ultimate incarnation, the decisive moment should now be grasped as a historically specific ideal. The definition of a medium, particularly photography, is not autonomous or self-governing, but heteronomous, dependent on other media. It derives less from what it is technologically than what it is culturally. Photography is what we do with it. [10] If we do new things with it we generate a new definition for it, even when those new things are actually older things, like Joel Meyerowitz's choice of a camera made in 1942. (Interestingly, this is a photographer who first came to prominence shooting "decisive moments" on the streets of New York, deeply influenced by Henri Cartier-Bresson. As his career moved on there was a general shift from those fleeting snapshots to a slower way of working with a large camera, and from a photography of "events" to a photography of longer duration.)

It seems clear that contemporary art has a predilection for the "late photograph." It has become a central trope in its current dialogue with documentary. The works of Willie Doherty, Paul Seawright, Sophie Ristelhueber, and Richard Misrach are some of the more interesting examples, but as I write it is hard to avoid the cheaper moodiness of images of derelict buildings and urban wastelands on display in London's galleries. There is a reticent muteness in these images that leaves them open to interpretation. Moreover their status as traces of traces fulfils for art a certain modernist reflection on the indexicality of the medium. They can also offer an allegorical, distanced reflection on the photograph as evidence and the claims of mainstream documentary photography. [11] Tellingly, the best known images made of Kuwait after the Gulf War were made by the artist Sophie Ristelhueber in her series Aftermath exhibited in galleries and museums, and published in weekend newspapers and book form. [12]

In forfeiting any immediate relation to the event and taking up a slower relation to time, "late" photographs appear to separate themselves out from the constant visual bit stream emitted by the convergence of modern electronic image technologies. Part of the appeal then, of these static, slow and detailed photographs is that they strike us now as being somehow a new kind of "pure" photography that can't be confused with other kinds of images. This is no doubt another reason for their profile in museums and galleries. It looks like a very photographic kind of photography. They seem to do something no other medium does, although as I have said what strikes us as particularly photographic is very much subject to change. At the same time they refuse to be overtly "creative," deploying the straight image with a mood of deliberation and detachment that chimes with a general preference in contemporary art for the slow and withdrawn. [13] It is telling that in the television program "Reflections on Ground Zero," Meyerowitz opts to describe his photography as an automatic process in which creativity is avoidable: "I was just going to be there as a witness and photograph it for what it was, without trying to put on it some formal idea of how to photograph it. I was told how to photograph it by the thing itself." Avoiding overt "originality" in such circumstances is an admirable aim, but we would do well to bear in mind that there really is no "ground zero" mode of taking photographs, not even of Ground Zero. Meyerowitz's images are a mixture of epic scenes, portraits and details of excavation work, all illuminated by his celebrated attention to light and atmosphere. These are skills he has honed over several decades of photography. It may be second nature to him now, but he knows what makes a good photo and can't avoid the beautiful. He certainly does have a very strong formal idea even though it clearly overlaps with a popular sense of what a photograph as document should look like. [14]

As I have remarked the late photograph has a long history, and art and literature have had an interest in it at least as far back as the Surrealists' appropriation of the work of the street photographs of Eugène Atget for their stoic artlessness. Looking back over this history, writer and photographer Allan Sekula warned of the political pitfalls of decontextualizing a document in order to make it enigmatic, or melancholic, or merely beautiful:

" Walter Benjamin recalled the remark that Eugène Atget depicted the streets of Paris as though they were scenes of crime. That remark serves to poeticize a rather deadpan, non-expressionist style, to conflate nostalgia and the affectless instrumentality of the detective. Crime here becomes a matter of the heart as well as a matter of fact. Looking back, through Benjamin to Atget, we see

the loss of the past through the continual disruptions of the urban present as a form of violence against memory, resisted by the nostalgic bohemian through acts of solipsistic, passive acquisition […] I cite this example merely to raise the question of the affective character of documentary. Documentary has massed mountains of evidence. And yet, in this pictorial presentation of scientific and legalistic "fact," the genre has simultaneously contributed much to spectacle, to retinal excitation, to voyeurism, to terror, envy and nostalgia, and only a little to the critical understanding of the social world […] A truly social documentary will frame the crime, the trial, the system of justice and its official myths […] Social truth is something other than a matter of convincing style. "[15]
Given Sekula's closing remark it is worth considering why it is that the "late photograph" has become a "convincing style" in contemporary culture. Its retreat from the event cannot be automatically taken as an enlightening position or critical stance. Its formality and visual sobriety are no guarantee of anything in and of themselves. Yet it is easy to see how, in an image world dispersed across screens and reconfigured in pieces, a detailed, static and resolutely perspectival rectangle may appear to be some kind of superior image.
Certainly the late photograph is often used as a kind of vehicle for mass mourning or working through (as is the case with Meyerowitz's Ground Zero project). The danger is that it can also foster an indifference and political withdrawal that masquerades as concern. Mourning by association becomes merely an aestheticized response. There is a sense in which the late photograph, in all its silence, can easily flatter the ideological paralysis of those who gaze at it without the social and political will to make sense of its circumstance. In its apparent finitude and muteness it can leave us in permanent limbo, suspending even the need for analysis and bolstering a kind of liberal melancholy that shuns political explanation, like a vampire shuns garlic. [16]
If the banal matter-of-factness of the late photograph can fill us with a sense of the sublime, it is imperative that we think through why this might be. There is a fine line between the banal and the sublime, and it is a political line. If an experience of the contemporary sublime derives from our experience of being in a world beyond our own incomprehension, then it is a reified as much as a rarefied response.

Notes

1. To further extend and deepen the tension between photography and other technologies that incorporate it, let me say right away that I have had my closest look at Meyerowitz's images via the internet, having seen them firstly on television and secondly in exhibition at The Museum of London (After September 11: Images from Ground Zero. Photographs by Joel Meyerowitz. An Exhibition by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State in conjunction with the Museum of the City of New York).
2. Meyerowitz says at another point in the program, "I had to do this so that people in future generations could look at this site and see the wound that was received here, the aftermath of the blow, and to see what it took to repair it, what it looked like everywhere in this sixteen-acre site. Somebody had to have the consciousness to do it." I shall say a little more about his consciousness later on.
3. Peter Woolen, "Vectors of Melancholy," in Ralph Rugoff, ed., The Scene of the Crime (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997). See also Thierry de Duve's "Time Exposure and Snapshot: The Photograph as Paradox," October, no 5, 1978, which makes a similar opposition.
4. See in particular Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida, Reflections on Photography (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1981) and Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) in Benjamin, ed. Hannah Arendt, Illuminations (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970). For broader discussions of the subject see Celia Lury, Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory, Identity (London: Routledge, 1997); Scott McQuire, Visions of Modernity (London: Sage, 1998) and Eduardo Cadva, Worlds of Light: Theses on the Photography of History (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997).
5. See Laura Mulvey's discussion of the reconfiguration of memory by the new technologies of spectatorship in CITE.
6. An unnamed New Yorker in the TV program I'm discussing declares at one point, "People will come back to Joel's [Meyerowitz's] photographs. They have a very powerful silence in them. They are very still."
7. Jeff Wall, "'Marks of Indifference':Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art," in Anne Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, eds., Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975 (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles/Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995).
8. Robert Lebeck and Bodo von Dewitz, eds., Kiosk: A History of Photojournalism (Gottingen: Steidl verlag, 2002).
9. For an account of those press photographs that were made during the Gulf War see John Taylor's "The Gulf War in the Press," Portfolio Magazine, no 11., Summer 1991. For an account of the more virtual representation see Jean Baudrillard, The Gulf War Did Not Take Place (Power Publications, 1995) and Tim Druckery, "Deadly Representations, or Apocalypse Now," in Ten8, vol. 2, no. 2, 1991.
10. For a useful discussion of this see Stanley Cavell, The World Viewed. Enlarged Edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Universtiy Press, 1979).
11. For a rich discussion of allegory in recent documentary work see Justin Carville's "Re-negotiated Territory: The Politics of Place, Space and Landscape in Irish Photography," Afterimage, vol. 9, no. 1 (July-August 2001).
12. Sophie Ristelhueber, Aftermath (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992). The original French title was Fait. The artist had made a similar book in the previous decade entitled Beirut (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984).
13. Even the moving images in today's art don't move very much. For a more detailed discussion of this see Peter Osborne's paper in Where Is the Photograph? ed. David Green (Brighton: Photoworks/Photoforum, 2003).
14. Looking back over Meyerowitz's career I found myself returning to a book called Annie on Camera from 1982. He was one of nine photographers commissioned to make images during the production of John Huston's film Annie, the cheesecake musical, set in depression-era New York. Meyerowitz's folio includes an image of piles of concrete rubble and broken paper-thin walls lying at the foot of slanted architectural buttresses. It was refuse discarded by set builders. He made a strikingly similar image at Ground Zero. As photographers we tend to carry visual templates around with us wherever we go, however much we feel subject matter dictates the form of our images. I wonder if Meyerowitz had the form of his knowingly fake image from Annie in mind when he came across the same scene twenty years later in a very different situation. See Nancy Grubb, ed., Annie on Camera (New York: Abbeville, 1982.)
15. I borrow the simile and the general critique of the passivity of liberal ideology from Slavoj Zizek's "Self-Interview," in The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality (London: Verso, 1994).

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Photography after the Photograph: Event, Archive, and the Non-Symbolic1
John Roberts, in *Oxford Journal of Art*, volume 32, n° 2, juin 2009, p. 281-298

The 'Singular Event' and the Non-Symbolic
What has distinguished the claims for photography's distinctiveness across its fields of practice and ideological domains over the last 100 years has been the photograph's connection to what was once commonly known as the 'decisive moment',[2] or here, what I will call, for my purposes, 'singular event'. In bringing a reflective stillness to the contingencies of a passing scene or to the movement of bodies, the photograph exercises, what we might call, hidden or spontaneous powers of convergence. Indeed, these powers of convergence represent the veridical core of reportage and the photo document since the 1900s, shaping photography's public emergence as a 'truth-telling' medium. In this respect Henri Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment' has the virtue of identifying what is crucial to photography's powers of convergence: the photographer's existential proximity to the world. But for my purposes here, by 'singular event' I mean something quite different, or more conceptually capacious, than Cartier-Bresson's notion. For Cartier-Bresson, the 'decisive moment' has a precise formal content. The 'decisive moment' does not represent the imagined moment of temporal intensity of the pre-photographic event – its peak – but, rather more circumspectly, the moment of temporal conjunction, the moment when the internal elements of an observed scene appear, subjectively, to *cohere* pictorially. In this way photography's powers of reflective stillness are subject to a highly subjectivised account of convergence. The 'good' photograph lies in getting the 'decisive moment' right. This is why the 'decisive moment' was so favoured by Modernist critics of photography: it allowed photography's spontaneous powers of convergence to be fetishised as evidence of the 'photographer's eye'. My understanding of 'event' here refers, more generally, to what happens to the 'decisive moment' – as the moment of imagined convergence – as a space of *historical* disclosure. That is, how the 'event' of the photographic …

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Photography after the Photograph: Event, Archive, and the Non-Symbolic

John Roberts

Photography after the Photograph: Event, Archive, and the Non-Symbolic[1]

John Roberts

1. A version of this article was presented as a keynote address at the conference, 'Estranged Realities', University of Wales, Newport, 29 June 2006. Thanks to John Timberlake for his comments on an early draft of the address, and to Robert Grose for picture research.

2. See Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Henri Cartier-Bresson* (Museum of Modern: New York, 1947), and Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1952).

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What has distinguished the claims for photography's distinctiveness across its fields of practice and ideological domains over the last 100 years has been the photograph's connection to what was once commonly known as the 'decisive moment',[2] or here, what I will call, for my purposes, 'singular event'. In bringing a reflective stillness to the contingencies of a passing scene or to the movement of bodies, the photograph exercises, what we might call, hidden or spontaneous powers of convergence. Indeed, these powers of convergence represent the veridical core of reportage and the photo document since the 1900s, shaping photography's public emergence as a 'truth-telling' medium. In this respect Henri Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment' has the virtue of identifying what is crucial to photography's powers of convergence: the photographer's existential proximity to the world. But for my purposes here, by 'singular event' I mean something quite different, or more conceptually capacious, than Cartier-Bresson's notion. For Cartier-Bresson, the 'decisive moment' has a precise formal content. The 'decisive moment' does not represent the imagined moment of temporal intensity of the pre-photographic event – its peak – but, rather more circumspectly, the moment of temporal conjunction, the moment when the internal elements of an observed scene appear, subjectively, to *cohere* pictorially. In this way photography's powers of reflective stillness are subject to a highly subjectivised account of convergence. The 'good' photograph lies in getting the 'decisive moment' right. This is why the 'decisive moment' was so favoured by Modernist critics of photography: it allowed photography's spontaneous powers of convergence to be fetishised as evidence of the 'photographer's eye'. My understanding of 'event' here refers, more generally, to what happens to the 'decisive moment' – as the moment of imagined convergence – as a space of *historical* disclosure. That is, how the 'event' of the photographic process – photography's cut into the continuum of experience; its temporal 'pulls', so to speak – constitute the 'event' of the photograph, and how these 'pulls' constitute the syntax of photography's historicity. In other words, the photograph's essential contingency and contemporaneity recover for us the 'pastness' of the past, and as such – as the discursive life of the image unfolds in time – the moment's historical textuality. This is why the historical particulars of the photograph have always had a privileged relationship to the representation of the event as a form of historical knowledge. Once edited and cropped or transformed by text or by juxtaposition with other images, the 'singular event' is open to systematic meaning.

Today, though, this sense of the event for photography – or the notion of photography *as* an event – no longer appears to be available to photography in quite the same way. This is reflected most immediately in photography's

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transformed relationship to its own critical history, in particular documentary practice. Much of the debate on reportage, realism, the photodocument, and photojournalism now take place in the art world, which has been the key site of photographic production and theory over the last 25 years. Currently, there is little critical theorisation of the photographic image as a form of historical practice outside of this context. However, this is not to say: that documentary photographers or photojournalists, or reportorial image-makers, have all become artists (although some have, as I discuss below); or that they do not still work according to (some of) the critical demands of realism; or that significant numbers of photographs within these traditions are not being produced and being seen in commercial and non-art contexts (for instance, the revival of Mass Observation strategies through the Internet); or that interesting work is being done in the area of 'scientific' imaging. But, rather, that these images, overall, have no public circulation as part of what we might call, customarily, a *documentary-image culture*. My contention here, then, is that in the wake of the demise of documentary image culture and the theoretical extension of art-as-photography, there has been an intellectual regression within photography's division of labour. Not only is it the case that few professional photojournalists and documentarists write seriously and ambitiously about photography (this role being taken mostly by university-based photo-theorists and by a small group of writer-photographers), but also the social implications and possibilities of new imaging techniques in various sciences rarely move from the realm of specialist technical discourse into the broader field of critical theories of photography.[3]

From the 1920s to 1980s this documentary-image culture was the outcome of progressive triangulation of cultural and political forces: (i) the link between photographic truth and the power of photography to wrest some symbolic space from the specularity of capitalist culture; (ii) the link between photography and the democratic dispersal of counter-knowledge as part of working-class struggle and other struggles from below; and (iii) the link between access to photographic form and access to a common world of artistic skill.[4] Today, these connections are in retreat, as the documentary photograph loses its organising function as site of *distinction and distance* from within the working class movement, and from within radical culture generally, to be replaced by a multitude of photographic stylisms internal to artistic tradition.

This loss of symbolic space, of distance and distinction, is of course, at one level, a consequence of long-term political and social transformations: with the decomposition of (an older) class politics since the 1980s, documentary culture is no longer available, so confidently, to speak to collective working-class interests or the interests of the dominated. But, perhaps more significantly, this process of decomposition has been ideologically overdetermined by the extensive penetration of the commodity form (through photography) into everyday experience, and, as such, the increasing cultural valourisation of the photodocument as blank 'information'. As Vilém Flusser puts it – in many ways summarising the general argument – the imagined transparency of photography under the universal expansion and dominance of the commodity form lies in the fact that its naturalism is held to be 'non-symbolic'[5] – that is, as being without any discernible, embedded, 'textuality', or connection to external social and historical forces. The image, in its perceived neutrality or functionality (in illustrated magazines, technical journals, pornography, etc.), appears to be free of the demands of conceptualisation, of the need for interpretation and judgement. The resilience of the non-symbolic, therefore,

3. Interestingly, one of the intermittent (if *sotto voce*) calls from contributors to James Elkins' recent extensive round-table discussion on contemporary photography, *Photography Theory* (Routledge: Milton Park, Abingdon and New York, 2007), is the need for photographers and theorists to reconnect again to the 'full range of photography's applications' (p 349) (Beth E. Wilson, 'The Elephant in the Room', pp. 346–350.). As Jan Baetens argues ('Conceptual Limitations of Our Reflection on Photography: The Question of Interdisciplinarity', pp. 53–73.), there is a fundamental disjunction between the 'practical knowledge of the... nonacademics' (p. 61) and contemporary (artistic) photographic theory.

4. See, in particular, Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary* (Verso: London and New York, 1994).

5. Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (Reaktion: London, 1983).

despite the successful critique of this naturalism in the 1970s and 1980s within photographic culture and the institutions of higher education,[6] expresses one of the binding actions of late capitalist reification: the convergence between an increasingly depoliticised public culture, and the functional requirement of commodity culture to continually displace and overrun (non-functional) spaces of reflection and engagement; in other words, in mass culture the non-symbolic tends to *crowd out* the symbolic.

However, if the naturalising force of the non-symbolic is residual, it is not simply exclusionary. In many instances it is actually inclusionary and productive, insofar as the photograph interpellates the viewer as one who is presumed to know historically, on the basis of what is already commonly known historically. In this respect, the naturalisation of the popular photograph also operates, on another level, through a process of circular confirmation. The photographic referent is assumed, isomorphically, to be an index of the historical event or narrative that the photograph is taken to be an exemplary representation of. This, of course, is the outcome of the place of pre-formatting within the non-symbolic functions of the photograph: the tendency for our experience of the historicity of the photograph (and as such the historical process) to be based on a limited and normative set of generic categories: 'the horrors of war', 'ethnic conflict', 'national identity', and 'the community'. These generic conditions of meaning are very powerful, and now have become largely invisible, operating as the 'vanishing mediators' of ruling editorial interests and perceptions. This, in turn, generates a further process of generic pre-selection when the photograph is 'called-up' from the archives as part of historical narration. The production of historical narrative or historical 'sense' is formed through a given hierarchy of key photographically mediated moments, for instance: the construction of '1960s-ness' from such elements as the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, hippies and yippies, Pop culture, the moon landing, etc. This generic (and US-led) mortification of history, then, is subsumed by the general ideological conditions of the non-symbolic. The reduction of the historical to the pre-selection of these events is held to be self-evident and non-contentious – the history 'of our times' – and, therefore, without need of any further comment or support.[7]

This naturalising of photography's 'history effect' is precisely that which defines Roland Barthes's early account of myth.[8] But today the naturalisation of the photograph is brought to a further pitch of intensity with the vast expansion of the non-symbolic functions of photograph and the concomitant narrowing of photography's channels of distribution. This has produced a culture of the image in which the naturalising apparatuses of dominant ideology (that is, presently neo-liberalism) reproduce and extend the non-symbolic across all domains of image-production. Furthermore, this is articulated and reinforced by the extensive technical transformations that have overtaken photography since the 1990s. One of the most obvious of these transformations is the vastly increased diffusion and mutability of the image under the network flow of video-fication and digitalisation. This has resulted, crucially, in the severe narrowing of reportage and documentary photography within the circulation of social meaning, placing a further strain on the idea of the photograph as the place where the flow of non-symbolic 'information' stops and critical exchange begins. Where documentary practice could claim, even up to the late-1970s, some residual connection to political praxis and the social process (certainly in South Africa, Northern Ireland, and Latin America) this has been eroded by the depoliticised formatting of

6. Indeed, the penetration of this professional critique into higher education is one of the few real interdisciplinary successes in the academy in Europe and North America over the last 30 years, generating numerous sites of counter-symbolic practice and thinking during its height in the 1980s and early-to-mid-1990s. Of particular pedagogic note, see Victor Burgin, (ed.), *Thinking Photography* (Macmillan: London, 1980); Martha Rosler, *3 Works* (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design Press: Halifax, 1981); Allan Sekula, *Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973–83* (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design Press: Halifax, 1984); Stevie Bezencenet and Philip Corrigan, *Photographic Practices: Towards a Different Image* (Comedia: London, 1986); Jo Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political Personal and Photographic Autobiography* (Camden Press: London 1986); John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Macmillan: London, 1988); Richard Bolton (ed.), *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (MIT: Cambridge, MA, 1989); Carol Squiers (ed.), *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography* (Bay Press: Seattle, 1990); David Hevey, *The Creatures Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery* (Routledge: London, 1992); Sunil Gupta (ed.), *Disrupted Borders: An Intervention in Definitions of Boundaries* (Rivers Oram Press: London, 1993); Martin Lister (ed.), *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture* (Routledge: London, 1993), Jessica Evans (ed.), *The Camerawork Essays: Context and Meaning in Photography* (Rivers Oram Press: London, 1997).

7. For a ground-breaking discussion of the archive, see Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', *October*, 39 Winter, 1986, reprinted in Richard Bolton (ed.), *The Contest of Meaning* (1989). See also Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, translated by Eric Prenowitz (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 1996).

8. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (Paladin: St. Albans, 1973).

documentary and reportage. The would-be democracy of the internet has not changed this, despite the revival of Mass Observation-type practices such as Lomography and Indymedia.[9] On the contrary, the Internet has tended to increase the fetishistic content of formatting and genre in its widespread identification of the real and authentic – in the 'intimate' spaces of the blog – with the sexually transgressive, culturally grotesque, and socially adventitious.

This eradication of photography's critical intimacy with the historical event – the event that is subject to exemplary and sustained political reading – is, of course, not a new phenomenon. Even at the height of the documentary movement in the 1930s photography's relationship to the event was not innocent of formatting and genre and the pressures of the non-symbolic. The public emergence of photography from the 1900s, in fact, is a history of photography's relentless struggle with the agents of distribution over what constitutes the 'event' and therefore how the 'event' is historicised and brought to visibility once it leaves the photographer's hands. The problems encountered by the Farm Security Administration photographers at both production levels, and once the images were in the hands of editors, is a case in point. Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn, and Russell Lee, amongst many others, all suffered at the hands of editorial pre-formatting during the selection process for publication ('too political', 'too black', 'too miserable', etc).[10] The production of historical representation – as the representations of the many – and the state's ratification of the photo-archive are interdependent. 'There is no political power without the control of the archive, if not of memory', to quote Derrida.[11] However, what video-fication and digitalisation have accelerated is the underlying process of this pre-formatting. In other words what video-fication and digitalisation provide for the dominant non-symbolic functions of the photograph is an *easier* passage through to the process of ideological naturalisation (at state level), as the rapid turn over of generic images becomes the sole criterion of newsworthiness, visibility, and profitability. In fact, at the point where photography now meets the horizon of its historic and long-range social and critical commitments (photojournalism, reportage, documentary practice), counter-symbolic practices feel very much incidental to the dominant non-symbolic effects of photography. Where once the symbolic (and counter-symbolic) functions of these traditions exercised some public and critical leverage, they now appear increasingly derailed by these dominant forces. Indeed, it might be said that the critique of naturalism has actually contributed to this displacement. For, although the critique of naturalism has been one of the critical and interdisciplinary successes of the academy over the last 30 years – releasing a huge amount of counter-symbolic energy from below between 1975 and 1995 – paradoxically, it has also allowed the critique of photographic transparency, to ally itself with a prevailing left-liberal critique of realism and documentary culture. That is, if naturalisation had to be expunged from 'thinking on photography' in order to wrest photography from the non-symbolic, then, realism and documentary, as the would-be political and historical 'cognates' of this transparency, had to be excised as unwelcome and atavistic objects of desire – the crisis of photographic truth coming to stand synedochally, in a period of general political retreat for the left, for the failure of the (modern) politicisation of culture.[12] In other words, one of the political consequences of the critique of photographic truth is that it has allowed an unfortunate conflation of realism and documentary with the non-symbolic.

9. See John Roberts 'The Logics of Deflation: The Avant-Garde and the Fate of the Photographic Snapshot', *Cabinet*, vol. 8, Fall, 2002, pp. 59–63, republished in the *Arken Bulletin*, Arken Museum of Modern Art, vol. 1, 2002, pp. 39–48, and in *Copy Work*, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, 2007, pp. 59–77.

10. See James Guimond, *American Photography and the American Dream* (University of North California Press: Chapel Hill, 1991). See also: Andrea Fisher, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Women: Women Photographers for the U.S. Government 1935 to 1944* (Pandora: London, 1987); Jack F. Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade. Roy Stryker and The Development of Documentary Photography in the Thirties* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1974); and Astrid Böger, *People's Lives, Public Images: The New Deal Documentary Aesthetic* (Gunter Narr Verlag: Tübingen, 2001).

11. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (1996), p. 4.

12. The notion of photographic-transparency is obviously crude and inoperative, particularly given the way that it has propped up a mystificatory and reified notion of photographic 'evidence' on the activist left, too busy to notice that photographs are actually discursively constructed (and reconstructible) *pictures*. But this position also became a convenient alibi for those eager to distance themselves from the evident political disappointments of documentary culture, and from the political understanding that photographs are pictures of a *particular kind*. As figural things, photographs' picture-like status is based on the fact that as *figures* they are also traces, moments of existential proximity and social propinquity to the world. Consequently, in the rush to condemn documentary practice as unreflective, the classical ontology of photography – its unique indexicality as a medium – has been made to appear feeble or irrelevant, weakening the primary content of this indexicality: photography's privileged discursive relationship to the historical event. For a recent defence of photographic realism, see Steve Edwards, *Photography: A Very Short Introduction,* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2006).

We are at a particular juncture, therefore, in which the old institutional arrangements are no longer operative. Yet, if the photo document has now effectively been separated from critical notions of realism, documentary culture, and the public sphere, this is not the whole story; and because it is not the whole story we are in a position to ask how photographers might operate in this restricted climate and, moreover, what photography is now as a set of disparate and diffuse practices. In this it requires us to briefly suspend our political narrative (indeed our preconceptions about the centrality of a certain kind of documentary ethos for photography), in order to look closely at photography's relationship to technology and its technical history. Because it is on the basis of a close analysis of how photography's technological and technical history intersects with the categories of realism, documentary, and reportage, that we will be able to assess photography's present and future critical cultural possibilities. In this regard I want to focus on an issue I raised earlier: namely, we mistake the political efficacy of documentary practice if we fail to recognise its relative marginal position within the political economy of culture, even at the height of left-documentary practice in the 1930s. The crisis of documentary culture does not represent an absolute decline from a position of unassailable authority; and photography's transformation and adaptation of its technologies and technics over the last 80 years tells us why this is the case.

The Cultural Form of the Photograph: Photography as a Historically Subordinate Practice

If the history of photography is a history of its struggle over how practitioners have defined and foregrounded the 'event', this struggle is inseparable from photographers' use and adaptation of new photographic techniques. Thus, we can see pretty clearly – with the exception of photography's very early history when it had no technological competitors – that the photographic document has actually been in a *subordinate position* to the dominant photographic technology last century and this – cinema. There is no history of photographic 'realism', 'truth' the 'symbolic' in the twentieth century – and therefore no conception of the 'singular event' – without taking into account how the photographic both mediates, and rises to the challenge of, the moving image.[13] Consequently, photography's claims to 'realism', 'truth' and the 'symbolic' are indivisible from the photodocument's perceived technical inadequacies and *limitations* (which is very different from the assumption, in photographic naturalism, that the photographic document is the gateway to unmediated truth). Modernism in photography is born, therefore, at the point of modern photography's crisis and self-doubt, and not as a re-establishment of the photograph's would-be transparency.

Two things are identifiable from this anti-historicist account of the apparatus. First, that the meanings of 'realism', 'truth', and the 'symbolic' do not *pre-exist* the photographic apparatus, but are produced out of its re-theorisation in relation to an emergent dominant visual apparatus; and secondly, that the cultural functions of technically superseded apparatuses are never superseded *en bloc*; rather, their subordination becomes a mean of reconfiguring what the apparatus is judged capable of accomplishing and what the dominant apparatus, in contrast, is thereby unable to accomplish. A superseded technical apparatus, consequently, does not disappear at all, but repositions itself, relationally, to the dominant apparatus, opening up a space for the reinvention of the cultural possibilities of the subordinate apparatus. This is

13. For a discussion of the cultural impact of Soviet filmic montage and filmic thinking, see Jacques Aumont, *Montage Einsenstein* (Indiana University Press,: Bloomington, 1987).

clear from the history of photography's relationship to cinema in the 1920s and 1930s.

In the 1920s and the 1930s, the photographic document radically reinvented its form and an understanding of its audience in the light of the new Russian and German cinema. Some photography directly mimicked the 'cut' of cinematic form and became diegetic and sequential (as in the Soviet avant-garde), but, generally, photography defined its nascent modern identity in relation to the dominant *sensorium* of cinema. That is, photography opened up its working procedures to the interruptions of cinematic time and space. This is why from the 1920s to the 1980s photographers, whether they adopted a montage model of composite elements (after Dziga Vertov or Sergei Eisenstein), or simply invoked the contingencies of the 'everyday', largely laboured within the cinematic paradigm of 'expanded perception'. In this, Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment' is itself an echo of this cinematic model; the photographer uses the convergent powers of the photograph in order to position the single image within an imaginative and dramatic continuum.

Thus the rise and demise of documentary culture is a profoundly heterodox and Modernist experience. And, therefore, any notion of documentary culture's dissolution has to recognise that the self-definition of the photodocument was, at key points, determined by its reflection on its own cultural subordination. Indeed, it is precisely photography's increasing awareness of its subordination to film and mass culture that provides documentary practice with the intellectual and cognitive driving force of its re-theorisation in the 1930s. Two significant examples of this are Walker Evans and James Agee's book, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), and Aaron Siskind's *Harlem Document: Photographs 1932–40* (1939/1940), first published, in part, in *Fortune* (1939) and *Look* (1940). In the original 1939 preface to *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Agee reflects on the limitations of conventional documentary practice – and on his own weaknesses as a would-be documentarist writer – as a spur to rethinking the formal challenges of documentary practice's ethical commitments. '[T]he effort is to recognise the stature of a portion of unimagined existence, and to contrive techniques proper to its recording, communication, analysis, and defense'.[14] Similarly, Siskind's *Harlem Document* takes the cultural limitations of documentary practice as read, in order to destabilise the conventional documentarist conflict between 'bearing witness' and the making of convincing pictures; filmic and complex in structure, *Harlem Document* was produced from elaborate shooting-scripts.[15] This means that we need to keep the objective demise of documentary culture separate from the more tendentious notion that documentary culture is the place where the truth-telling powers of photography were once secured politically through a commitment to a stable photographic realism, and then later eroded. For, it is precisely the confusion of the latter with the former that fuels much of the confused understanding of the political fate of the photodocument and documentary culture today. Just as documentary culture is separated from modernism in order to render it formally mute and therefore render its political demise more easily digestible, the arrival of digitalisation is assumed to be antithetical to photography as such. This is not surprising, because digitalisation is indeed a profoundly anti-cinematic and 'anti-photographic' apparatus, leaving its effects less open to the kind of appropriation that would enable the photographer to sustain a working relationship with the craft of image making. With its instant powers of diffusion and its immediate retrieval and miniaturisation of the image (its rapid switch from big to small and vice versa) digitalisation, essentially,

14. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* [1941] (Peter Owen: London, 1965), p. 12.

15. The main body of images was not collected and published in book form until 1981, as *Harlem Documents: Photographs 1932–40* (Matrix Publishing: Rhode Island). The collection was republished as *Harlem: Photographs 1932–40*, Foreword, Gordon Parks, Introduction Marcia Battle (Cornerhouse Publications: Manchester, 1991). For a discussion of Siskind and 'modernist documentary' see Joseph Entin, 'Modernist Documentary: Aaron Siskind's *Harlem Document*', *The Yale Journal of Criticism* , vol. 12, no. 2, Fall 1999, pp. 357–82.

destroys the to-be-looked-at-ness of the discrete photodocument, in turn, further reinforcing the general conditions of distracted consumption of the naturalised image. Thus, where cinema and photography shared a cultural space in the first half of the twentieth century, despite photography's subordinate role, photography and digitalisation have, in crucial respects, diverged culturally.

This is expressed through a narrowing of how photography now views its historically subordinate position: on the one side, a defeated documentary culture and erosion of the claims of the 'singular event' that needs to be mourned, and on the other side, an aggressive and intrusive digitalisation that needs to be tamed. One of the effects of this is that the adaptation and articulation of digital form within photography after the legacy of Modernist-documentary practice (and the counter-symbolic work of the 1980s and 1990s) has been highly conflicted and conservative. Thus, digitalisation's most ambitious and successful use has been in the work of artists who have wanted to extend the critique of photographic naturalism into the domain of photographic *illusion* (such as Jeff Wall and Andreas Gursky). Post-production digital effects have become the means by which the real is self-consciously 'put together', transforming naturalism's idea of the photograph as a neutral transcription of appearances into its very opposite: the figural (metaphoric) construction of the real, as in painting. Where this process of digitalisation is less favoured is among those photographers who see the formal ambition of this painterly figuralisation as appropriate to the new culture of the photograph, yet see its reliance on the 'staged' image as a further unwarranted diminishment of photography's relationship to the event. In this they reassert the indexical integrity and authority of the photodocument in an attempt to secure the *realist complexities* of photographic space. But, nevertheless, this process of differentiation remains a highly circumscribed one. This is not a return to documentary practice as traditionally conceived – for all the reasons outlined above. On the contrary, this is a photography of the event in which the event is displaced from its conditions of immediacy from the outset, so to speak. Indeed, we might say that this is a photography of the event, *after-the-event*.

All photographs, of course, are after-the-event: documentary and staged alike. The 'singular event' always comes late, insofar as the singular event is part of a continuum of other 'singular events'. There is no primary 'singular event' to any given event, which defines and identifies that event. But, all the same, in this photography there is clear sense that photography has arrived after the event to record what remains of the event, or what can be reconstructed from evidence that an event of significance or import has taken place. Essentially, this is a photography of the event-as-aftermath; and, as such, it tends to stress the ineluctability of the recent past through emphasising the melancholic allure of photographic stillness. This kind of elegiac and mournful photography has a long history across its pre-Modernist and Modernist-documentary forms: Alexander Gardner, Roger Fenton, Mathew Brady, and Jacques-André Boiffard, through to Richard Misrach, Willie Doherty, and Joel Meyerowitz. But as David Campany has argued recently this is much more than the recodification of one particular branch of reportorial and Modernist-documentary practice, and therefore, much more than the reformulation of a genre. Rather, more broadly, it represents photography trying to reposition its relationship to the event in order to establish a new reportorial role for itself by making a case for the necessary *lateness* of the photograph. In a world of the diffuse and mutable image, of instant digital grabs, of the general crisis of documentary culture,

photography can only arrive – and perhaps more importantly should only arrive – late. 'This is a kind of photograph that foregoes the representation of events in progress and so cedes them to other media'.[16] Lateness, therefore, becomes a kind of virtue, the thing is that digitalisation and video-fication are unable or unwilling to secure, and indeed abhor. As such in the late photograph the subordinate function of the photo-document finds a new cultural function, unifying reportage, photojournalism, and documentary practice in a 'post-traumatic' account of history and the event – as in the 'war' photography of Luc Delahaye and Simon Norfolk. For, in arriving late to the scene of conflict, the bodies have largely gone.

Simon Norfolk and Luc Delahaye: Contemporary 'Late Photography' as the 'Military Sublime'

It would be wrong to emphasise the emergence of this kind of photography as representing a general or systematic position amongst contemporary documentary photographers. In many instances the bodies quite obviously have not gone; and certainly in the case of Delahaye and many other post-combat photographers (such as Lori Grinker), the dead or traumatised body, in many instances, still remains a primary focus of concern.[17] For instance, a residual human presence distinguishes a number of Delahaye's panoramic aftermath-photographs. These landscapes invariably include a figure or even a group of figures, but their presence is absolutely incidental to the evidential force of the photograph, indeed, they are invariably there simply as markers of scale and the 'void' produced by bombing (or the devastating impact of natural disaster, as in *Aftermath at Meulaboh* (2005)). Yet broadly, the notion that the body is not there, or if it is there, cannot or should not be freely assimilated into the space of photography, does point to a significant change in orientation in how recent photography thinks about its connectedness to the temporality of the event, in line with the things I have been saying so far about photography's cultural subordination and the

16. David Campany, 'Safety in Numbness: Some Remarks on Problems of "Late Photography"', in David Green (ed.), *Where is the Photograph?* (Photoworks/Photoforum: Brighton, 2003), pp. 123–32.

17. See 'Lori Grinker: Veterans of War' in Carol Squiers, *The Body at Risk: Photography of Disorder, Illness, and Healing* (International Center of Photography: New York, 2005), pp. 173–91.

Fig. 1. Luc Delahaye, US Bombing on Taliban Positions (2001), C-Print, 239 × 112 cm (94 × 44 in.). Image reproduced by kind permission of the artist.

expansion of the non-symbolic; and this has much to do with the perceived political limitations of documentary practice and photojournalism within the category of 'late photography' (Fig. 1). This is why this kind of 'war' photography, for all its partiality, is particularly exemplary for both a discussion of lateness, and for the politics of photography now. 'War' photography – or more accurately the attempt to produce a photography *of* war – establishes a profound relationship to the conditions under which the production of the image finds itself under capitalism, in as much as the demands for access and hoped-for symbolisation of the 'singular event' highlights the exigencies of truth and realism, and the requirements of the non-symbolic (naturalisation and censorship) within the system as a whole.

As Norfolk has declared in an interview, his former commitment to (leftist) photojournalism (particularly for the antifascist *Searchlight* magazine) entered a political crisis as the pressure to conform to the pre-formatting and genre was diminishing documentary photography's relationship to any sense of cognitive complexity. In this, his turn to large-format, panoramic photographs of war zones, 'post-conflict' (Bosnia, Afghanistan, Palestine), was an attempt to reawaken a certain attentiveness – common in a lot of post-documentary practice – in, what he felt to be, the lost or diminished spectator of photography. And, interestingly, it is the very absence of the human figure for Norfolk that allows him to resecure this spectator, and by extension, re-establish the repoliticisation of the image (Fig. 2).

> I'm trying to stretch [the] idea of what a battlefield *is* . . .. It's partly because of that that people aren't there – but it's also . . . for me, I think people gobble up the photograph. They become what the photograph *is*. For me, people just aren't that important; it's about this panoptic process, it's about this kind of eavesdropping, it's about this ability

Please note that this image could not be reproduced due to restrictions from the rights holder

Fig. 2. Simon Norfolk, Near Deh Mazang in the Karte Char district of Kabul, the scene of fierce fighting in the early 1990's between rival Mujaheddin factions. Red paint on buildings indicates the presence of unexploded ordinance. The white 'tick' means it has been cleared (2001–2002). Image reproduced courtesy of the artist/NB Pictures.

> to look into every aspect of our lives. And I think if you put people into these, I don't know – it would draw viewers away. It would draw viewers into the story *of the people*.[18]

So, the politicisation lies in the conjunction and display of 'inhuman' forces within the scan of the panoramic, which is also characteristic of Delahaye's own move from photojournalism to a similar large-format 'post-conflict' landscape production. As with Norfolk, Delahaye's disappointment in the transformative possibilities of photojournalism, and the demise of photojournalism's critical spectator, led him to a photographic-form, which, like Norfolk was directly, as he says, 'incompatible with the economy of the press'.[19] In this respect what links Delahaye and Norfolk's move to, broadly speaking, art-photography is the way in which large-format photography is able to secure a cognitive-delay in perception or, more precisely, allow the spectator of photography to reconnect their absorption in the photodocument to a rare sublimity. Another kind of politicisation enters the frame. The resecuring of photography's politicisation, far from being the recording of the event in all its intense and conflictual unfolding or instrumental horror – the moment of its heightened critical temporality – is identifiable with those incidents and details that emerge as a result of the *atemporal* recovery of the event.

The Atemporality of the Post-Photography Photograph

Before the advent of the televisualisation of the image in mass culture, photography and cinema functioned, in their respective reportorial roles, as the sites around which collective meaning was formed and challenged. This generated a specific kind of photographic temporality: photographs were produced on the basis that they were able, irrespective of the ambivalence of any given sign, to generate a coherent political effect ('this happened', or more accurately 'this happened, but if you don't believe me, ask him or her, who were also there').[20] As I have stressed, this can no longer be guaranteed as a public act for photography, given the weakening of photography's interventionist role and its dialectic appropriation of the cinematic model. This has lead photography, as a consequence, to draw on that which it has tended to distrust as much as celebrate – its mournful powers of stasis – placing photography's relationship to the event more generally in a pre-cinematic space. A major outcome of this shift is a convergence between what is left of reportorial and documentary practices and the older painterly functions of photography. The late photograph in its elegiac and mournful modes not only tends to remove the body from the picture, but also identifies the political allegorically with the ruin and the remnant. Some aspects of postmodernism in the 1980s made a virtue of this, but here it functions, not as a critique of photographic transparency, but as the place where photography openly declares its public and social limits.[21]

Consequently, in '[foregoing] the process of the event and ceding it to other media',[22] this kind of photography breaks with much of the critical temporal language associated with photography's appropriation of cinema. Gone is the notion of the photograph as an act of interruption, displacement, interrogation, rearticulation – of generalised movement and cognitive disruption: the avant-garde language of denaturalisation – to be replaced by the photograph as a site of 'glacial' contemplation, as if the splendour and beauty of Ansel Adams' Yosemite pictures was the only available model for a workable and satisfying account of the event. The photo document, then,

18. 'War/Photography: An Interview with Simon Norfolk', http://bldgblog.blogspot.com/2006/11/warphotography-interview-with-simon.html. See Simon Norfolk, *Afghanistan Chronotopia* (Dewi Lewis Publishing: Stockport, 2002); and for a critical review of this series, see Julian Stallabrass, 'Simon Norfolk: Afghanistan Chronotopia', www.courtauld.ac.uk/people/stallabrass_julian/essays/simon_norfolk.pdf

19. Luc Delahaye, quoted, in Bill Evans, 'The Real Thing: Photographer Luc Delahaye', http://www.artnet.com/magazine/features/sullivan/sullivan4-10-03.asp

20. See Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (University of Chicago: Chicago and London, 2004).

21. See, for example, Craig Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism', *October* no. 12, Spring, 1980, pp. 67–86.

22. David Campany, 'Safety in Numbness…' (2003), p. 124.

23. Éric Alliez and Antonio Negri, 'Peace and War', *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2003, pp. 109–18.

seems to be clearing a space for itself in the face of innumerable political, cultural, and technological impediments. But if this move is not exactly the final resignation of documentary culture in the face of neo-liberalism and digitalisation, nonetheless it does point to profound reassessment of photography's subordinate cultural form: photography – the work seems to be saying – is at its most perspicacious and relevant when it *foregrounds* its mordant and memorial role. That is, photography is at its most potent and vivid when it claims back an allegiance with the *detemporalising* effects of aesthetic experience (distantiation, 'stepping back'; the precipitousness of the sublime) as against the discontinuities and contingencies, or cuts, of cinematic denaturalisation. (The rise of the studio photograph in the 1980s is yet another, and obviously familiar, indication of this.) This is why it is harder these days to distinguish photojournalism and documentary practice from the artistic appropriation of the photodocument, because both sets of practices are increasingly reliant on this circumscribed notion of the event-as-aftermath.

Where does this assessment of lateness leave the place of the photodocument in the culture? Has photography ceded, in any meaningful sense, all its previous, interrogatory functions? Has the event-before-the-aftermath of photography been lost irrevocably to video-fication and digital televisualisation? Is the photodocument now profoundly internal to the figural functions of art in its mediation of its cultural subordination?

Well, we cannot analyse these questions outside of the current neo-liberal political and cultural settlement. When I talk of the failure or unwillingness of recent photography to revivify and reimagine its subordinate cultural role, this is largely a political question that lies outside of what photography might or might not want to do, or imagines itself to be doing, within the present political economy of photography. Much photography is late photography now, and therefore outside of what we commonly regard as documentary culture, precisely because the critical and cognitive link between the photodocument and the transformation of social experience is suppressed, not just in the wake of the hegemony of the non-symbolic, but as a result of the determination of the state to decouple where necessary the 'singular event' from the political process – what Éric Alliez and Toni Negri have rightly called neo-liberalism's 'state management of nihilism'.[23] The recent Iraq war is the most obvious and latest example of this. (Although, of course, the digital image does not escape this process of censure and exclusion either; the photodocument, is by no means alone in this, just as no war in the twentieth century, even the Vietnam war, has failed to prevent the photographer getting 'close'.) Yet, if the state management of nihilism has no *space* for the photograph – in any constructive and transformative sense – this does not mean that subordinate forms of cultural production, such as the photodocument, are thereby defined by these conditions. For, what the history of Modernist culture under capitalism teaches us is that an experience of cultural subordination can also be a countervailing force for negation, liberation, and self-transformation. And this is something that the lateness of late photography argument tends to miss.

The turn to the event-as-aftermath may relieve photography of some of the burdens of an older and critically over-expectant documentary culture, but there is nothing to prevent photography using the freedom from these burdens to find other routes into the symbolic. This is why the atemporal conditions of the post-photography photodocument represent an instructive moment in the emergence of a new framework for the photodocument. That

is, these new conditions of lateness enable the photographer to work *through* the representation of the event in ways that are internally complex, allowing the photodocument to reconnect with its sequential and diegetic modes of presentation. Thus, instead of opting for a melancholic closure of the event-as-aftermath, the event-as-aftermath can just as equally become a space for the discursive reconstruction and extension of the event. And this process of discursive reconstruction can, of course, be, in principle, infinite. The time-of-the-event, then, lies in the efficacy of the reconstructive process itself – there is no event outside of its symbolic reconstruction – and not in any imagined identification of photographic truth with the immediacy of the 'singular event'. This does not obviate the empirical exclusions of lateness. Veridical content cannot be magicked back into existence. If the bodies are gone, the bodies are gone. If the face is not there to look back at us, the face is not there to look back at us. But, nonetheless, this approach allows the atemporality of the photodocument now to be reconnected to a very different model of artistic practice and historical agency. In this respect another kind of cultural form for photography – for late photography – comes to mind. Instead of recalling the photodocument to a pictorial tradition of painting and (essentially) to the viewing conditions of the museum, the photodocument becomes the sequential and intertextual building block of a practice of reading within the archive.

The Lateness of the Archive

In the 1980s and 1990s, work on the archive emphasised it as a productive machine for meaning. Archives were not simply incurious repositories of things, their neutral contents awaiting redeeming eyes and hands, but intellectually organised form of rationalisation. This is why state and public photographic archives were the objects of extended scrutiny during this period, because in the organisation of their materials state archives made clear how archival referents were produced through the processes of archival accumulation and selection. Allan Sekula analyses this in his work on nineteenth-century police photo-archives: the 'criminal' body – its modes of state recognition – is produced out of an endless accumulation and refinement of a predetermined criminal physiognomy, derived from the pseudo-sciences of phrenology and eugenics.[24] As such, what the positivism of this rationalisation disguises is a doubling of reified truth. The truth of the photograph is produced twice: once as tendentious science and then as tendentious sociology. Sekula, though, is less interested here in the broader archival conditions of our culture itself: that is, how the archive is not just the instrumental expression of state power, but, in a culture given over to the rapid utilisation and turn-over of word and image, the organising commodity condition of image and text.[25] The archive is precisely, then, what lies waiting for all images, particularly those – the majority – that achieve no sustained circulation. However, if Sekula does not formulate a general theory of archivisation, he does highlight one of the constitutive challenges of photography for the early (Modernist) documentators: that the life of the image depended on its ability to *resist or defeat* (however briefly) the inexorable pull of the archive.

Can any connections be traced between the archival mode of photography and the emergence of photographic modernism? To what degree did self-conscious Modernist practice accommodate itself to the model of the archive? To what degree did

24. Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', (1986)

25. For an extended discussion of the archive and reproducibility in Sekula, see his earlier essay 'Photography between Labour and Capital', in Benjamin H. Buchloh and Robert Wilkie (eds), *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures: A Selection from the Negative Archives of Shedden Studio, Glace Bay, Cape Breton, 1948–68*. Photographs by Leslie Shedden (Novia Scotia College of Art and Design Press: Halifax, 1983), pp. 193–268.

> Modernists consciously or unconsciously resist or subvert the model of the archive, which tended to relegate the individual photographer to the status of a detail worker, providing fragmentary images for an apparatus beyond his or her control.[26]

Indeed, such connections *can* be traced – as I have touched on: Modernism, the political demands of documentary culture and the archive are essentially interwoven. Thus, the 'decisive moment' and the 'singular event' are better seen as attempts, precisely, to avoid not only the non-symbolic emptying of mass culture, but also the 'symbolic' void of the archive. 'Expressive high modernism' and Modernist documentary converge on this very point. But as I have demonstrated, the social and political conditions under which the 'singular event' might productively escape or defeat archivisation, and therefore produce new forms of symbolisation, have become highly circumscribed. We need, therefore, in conditions of photography's, inevitable lateness, a different understanding of the relations between the 'event' and the archive. That is, in recognising the interrelationship of 'event' and archive we are able to generate a more productive (political) understanding of lateness (and, as such, the 'singular event').

Photo archives are sites, essentially, where the lateness of the photograph is, made normative. For if the photo archive – state, public, commercial, and domestic – is where 'events' live, so to speak, once photographs are removed from circulation and from immediate use, then the archive is place for sustaining the 'evental' content of the photography. The photographic event is subject to a continuous passage from dormancy in the archive to its 'evental' reinscription outside of the archive. Which is to say, that because the continuing life of the photograph is the result of its recovery from the archive the photographic 'event' is in a permanent and fluid state of relationality between the archive and its extra-archival existence. The non-symbolic roles of photography, however, function to stop or block this relationality and fluidity. This is why the mass cultural photo archive – as a capitalist and imperialist meta-archive – is the most powerful of fixed 'evental' structures. Its enormous distributive power enables the stabilisation and naturalisation of the historical event on a global scale. Thus, if archives are structures of meaning in process, things that are produced through the act of accumulation (the result of prior judgement, decisions, etc.), then the reclamation of photography from the archive always promises a practice of counter-production, of counter-archiving, and of interruption and reordering of the event. Accordingly, we might say that the 'singular event' consigned to the archive is *never late*, or is never subject to lateness, because it is always able, through a continuous process of symbolic construction and reconstruction, to *re*temporalise itself. In this light Derrida's work on the archivisation in the 1990s allows us a more systematic understanding of the archive. For Derrida, under this general reconceptualisation of the archive-as-productive, the archive becomes 'a movement of the promise and the future no less than a recording [of] the past'.[27] This is because the movement from dormancy to reinscription of the 'event' is always linked to the unwritten or underwritten (messianic) content of the event's connection to futures past. Indeed, a spectral messianism is at work in all archives, insofar as the recovery and reinscription of materials always promises a break with the dead continuum of the present (the meta-archive), and therefore, 'what is no longer archived in the same is no longer lived in the same way'.[28] This very Benjaminian formulation points to another possible reading of the crisis of documentary culture and the subordination of the

26. Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', (1986), pp. 374–5.

27. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (1996), p. 29.

28. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (1996), p. 18.

photograph: under the hegemony of the non-symbolic and the state management of nihilism, work with, work on the archive takes on a particular critical productivity, a place of historical defence, as much as a place of critical appropriation, in a period where mnemotechnics are increasingly necessary as a radical and revolutionary resource.[29] There is an important sense, here, therefore, that under the vast archivisation of our culture that 'the politics of the archive is our permanent orientation',[30] promising, if not a new documentary culture, at least new documentary theorisation: not the separation of event and archive, but their interrelational positioning.

This is why one of the key forms of this process of retemporalisation, and any future retheorisation of the documentary work, remains the photo-text book. In the photo-text book not only is the photodocument restored to its literary/historical and narratological conditions of visibility, but also it provides a space of systematic relationality for the reinscription of the photograph. The photo-text book is a place, where 'event' and counter-archive, or the 'event' *as* counter-archive, are made coherent. But, more to the point, the photo-text book allows photography to bring its subordinate cultural form into a possible workable critical alignment with the discursive character of digital-form. The stop-start diffusion of the digital image and the interdependence, and mutability of image and text on the Internet, are no longer the antithesis of the to-be-looked-at-ness of the photograph, but offer a sympathetic and compatible setting for the interruptive and narratological reconstruction of the 'event'.

A Politics of Lateness?

The reassertion of the book-form over painterliness, then, presupposes a tentative response to my reflections on the subordinate cultural role of photography. What kind of model of artisticness does the late photodocument want to ally itself with, in lieu of the demise of an older documentary culture, and the rise of 'lateness'? A model in which the photograph always moves to a default position – the death of the event and mourning for a lost photographic immediacy – or a model in which the event is brought into extended discursive life, as a result not just of its expansion into readerly artistic form, but as a result of the digital transformation and extension of the book-form itself?

One of the virtues of the photo-text book in the Modernist culture of the 1920s and 1930s (as in, for example, Evans and Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, but also importantly in Ernst Friedrich's *Krieg dem Kriege* (1919) (Fig. 3), Alexander Rodchenko's and Vladimir Mayakovsky's *Pro Eto* (1923), and Kurt Tucholsky's and John Heartfield's *Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles (1929)*[31]) was that it allowed photographers and writers to incorporate the veridical demands of the photodocument within the general space of a Modernist spectatorship.[32] And crucially, this was both a political and formal strategy. In refusing to separate the veridical from artistic spectatorship, a realism of the event and a modernism of form were seen as interdependent, and therefore, an exemplary form of cultural politicisation. There was no photography *of* the 'singular event' only a multitude of events that the author was compelled to select from and ascribe singularity and meaning to. This produced a symbolic relationship to the event that was always conscious of the discursive and ironised conditions of visibility and truthfulness of the event. The destruction of this culture of the image and its tentative alliance

29. For a discussion the link between counter-archivisation and mnemotechnics, see Tom Cohen, *Ideology and Inscription: 'Cultural Studies' Afier Benjamin, De Man, and Bakhtin* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998). For an expansion of the theory of the archive-as-production into a discussion of contemporary artistic archival modes, see Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', *October*, 110, Fall 2004, pp. 2–22, and Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (International Center of Photography; New York, 2008).

30. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, (1996), p. 4.

31. Ernst Friedrich, *Krieg dem Kriege* (Zweitausendeins: Frankfurt am Main, 1980); John Heartfield and Kurt Tucholsky, *Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles* (Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag: Hamburg, 1973) (English translation, John Heartfield and Kurt Tucholsky, *Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles*. University of Minnesota Press: Amherst, 1972); Alexander Rodchenko and Vladimir Mayakvosky, *Pro Eto. Ei i Mne* (Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo: Moscow and Petrograd, 1923).

32. For an extended discussion of *Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles* and *Krieg dem Kriege*, see John Roberts 'At last, at last the mask has been torn away': Realism, Modernism and Photography', in Matthew Beaumount (ed.), *Adventures in Realism* (Blackwell: Cambridge, 2007), pp. 158–76.

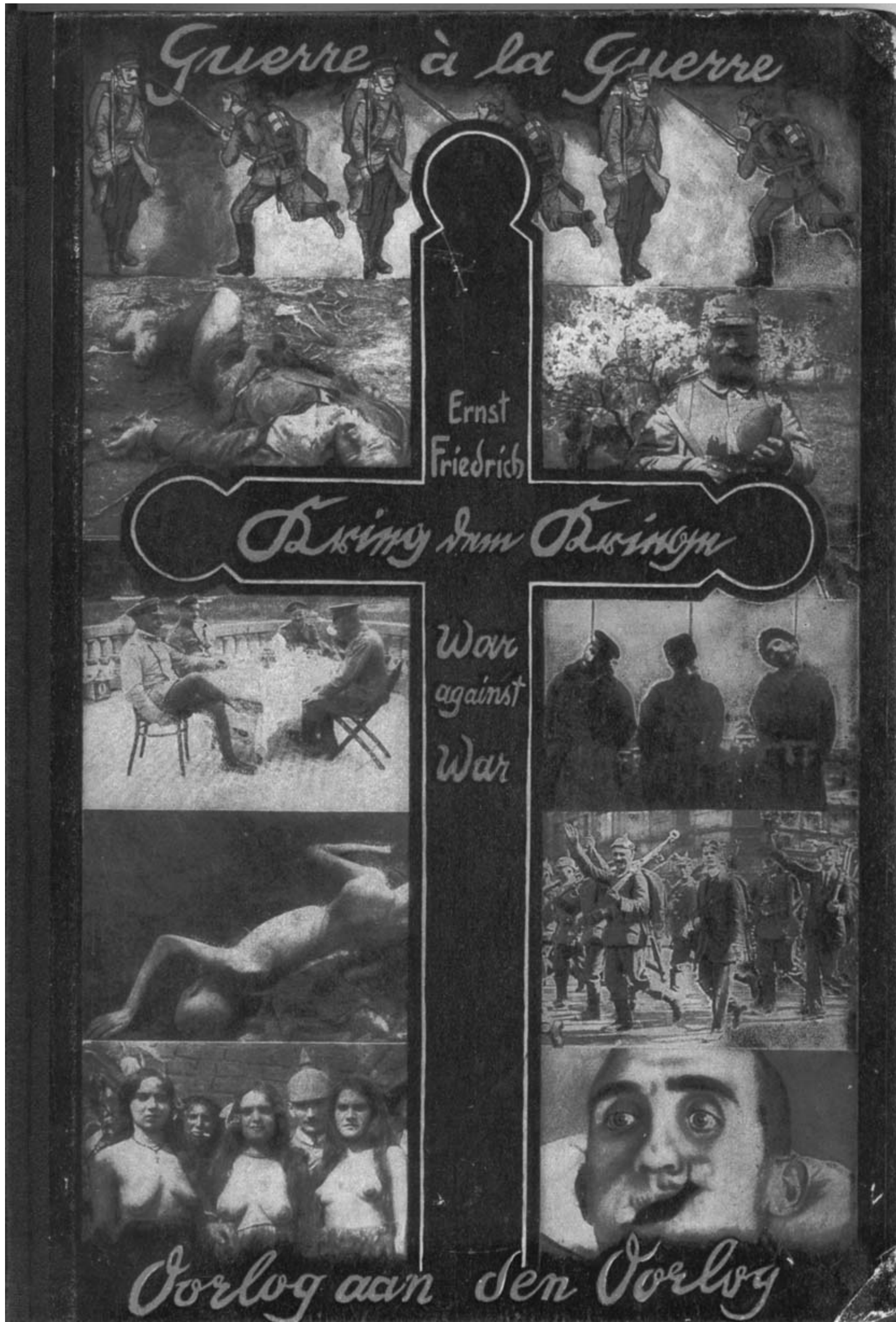

Fig. 3. Ernst Friedrich 'Krieg dem Kriege', publisher: Ernst Friedrich, Anti-Krieg Museum, Berlin, 1924. Cover designer unknown. Image reproduced courtesy of the Anti-Kriegs Museum, Berlin.

of documentary practice with the deflationary modes of modernism, in the late 1930s, is now very familiar. Yet, despite the historical demise of these practices the use of the photo-text book to open up the literary and theoretical rearticulation of the event continues to provide a valuable set of reference points for photography after the photograph after documentary culture. That is, at no point do these forms of photo-book work assume that the veridical content of the photograph can carry its content *unmediated* to its audience, as if the truth of photography lay solely in the immediacy of the photodocument. In political conditions where the mourning for the lost event of photography and the crisis of photography's indexicality are commonly conflated – and as such, are taken to represent the very end of the photodocument – importantly, this needs to be kept in mind. Thus we need, a more nuanced understanding of lateness.

There is the lateness of those, who in missing the conflictual 'event' find solace in the aestheticising tendencies of the photographic sublime; and, as such, use such lateness in conjunction with the critique of realism to 'refictionalise' documentary practice in the manner of recent photography-as-painting. This is a lateness that is essentially trapped in its melancholic attachment to the 'lost' event. But there is the lateness of those who choose to work outside of the temporal constraints of arriving on time, and therefore, at a significant level, have worked through a process of mourning for the lost event. Thus arriving late may also free the photography from the fetishisation of immediacy (without denying that the objective loss of the event for photography is an indisputable political reality, a reality that drives the necessary recourse to mnemotechnics).[33] Hence, arriving on time may not be congruent with arriving on time at all. Arriving on time, in fact, may be the most inauspicious of times, the most premature of times, for what is 'on time', may, in its expectations of 'directness' and 'clarity' and 'truth' (and the 'decisive moment'), conspire with preformatting and the generic and, therefore, with what is already known, with 'dead time', with politics-as-spectacle, with the non-symbolic. But, nevertheless, if lateness is the space in which we stand, this does not, contra Derrida, mean that we should always be content with arriving late; the counter-archive cannot renew itself (and its promise to the future) solely through a process of reinscription. There is no promise of the counter-archive – of the 'event' living in the present – without the risk of 'getting close', and 'getting close, by getting lost' so to speak. No promise of the archive without the renewal and extension of singularity.

33. See, for example, the counter-archival work of the Atlas Group (Walid Raad), which since the 1990s has engaged in an extensive fictive reinscription and re-narrativisation of photographic and textual materials from various Lebanese civil war archives (1970–1990s). For instance, in *My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair* (2001–), the work's documentary premise – the interrogation of the social effects of Lebanese car bombs; around 245 were detonated between 1975 and 1991 – the images are 'rearchived' as the collection of an imaginary Dr Fakhouri, who supposedly 'donated' the file to the group on his death in 1993. In this sense 'lateness' in the form of the fictive reorganisation of materials is built into the group's practice. For a discussion of the group/Raad, see Lee Smith, 'The Art of the Atlas Group/Walid Raad: Missing in Action', *Artforum*, February 2003, pp. 124–9, and Janet A. Kaplan, 'Flirtations with Evidence', *Art in America*, October 2004, pp. 134–8, 169–70.

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War stories, crime stories and ghost stories

Henrik Gustafsson

Abstract

This article considers the practice of photographing the aftermath of crime and conflict. Previously termed 'post-reportage' (Ian Walker) or 'late photography' (David Campany), this strategy has been described as a reaction against the drama and immediacy of mainstream news, and a move towards a more distanced and disengaged process. Late Photography is also riddled with generic ambiguity, combining the clinical attitude of forensic photography and the contemplative mode of landscape art. Extending on these earlier discussions, this article attempts to historicize this double bind within a wider tendency in the visual arts and to contextualize it within a discourse about the non-representable nature of trauma and atrocities. What response does this strange hybrid evoke, considering that it appears to offer so little in terms of information and explanation? How does it relate to the problem of dealing with an event that defies expression, yet demands to be remembered?

"Space is the remains, or corpse, of time, it has dimensions."
—Robert Smithson

What do we mean when we say that 'events take place'? What's the relationship between what has taken place and the place that remains? Or, put another way, what's the relationship between the figure, the historic agent, and the ground, the historic stage? Can a site hold the event in place so that it can be accessed or excavated after the fact?

These questions about place and site-specificity inevitably lead to questions about time and historical discourse. One way to conceptualize the shift from modernity to postmodernity is from temporal succession to spatial dispersion. The former postulated a linear narrative, a trajectory from past to future, connoting progress, goal and direction. To the latter, the historian is a storyteller, shaping the past into a coherent narrative of driving forces and defining events, one leading to the other.

For most part of the 20th century, photography was the privileged medium to capture these 'decisive moments' as they unfolded. However, as

the millennium drew to a close, still photography was outmoded by faster image technologies. Ironically, increased transmission and dissemination of images seemed to make events less accessible. At least, this is an argument that's been made for an ongoing trend of photography picturing the aftermath of political conflict through the traces they leave behind on the ground, a tendency that photographic historian Ian Walker has referred to as 'post-reportage' (Walker, 1995, 239), and that writer and artist David Campany has labelled 'late photography' (Campany, 2003). For convenience I will adopt the latter term, as it has been the more circulated of the two.

Although their critical assessments differ, Walker and Campany agree on the common characteristics of this imagery of aftermath: mute, formal, still, straight and distanced. Instead of pursuing the decisive moment of traditional photojournalism, late photographers turn their cameras to the aftermath of violence. Thus we're also confronted with another paradox: while images of conflicts, atrocities and suffering almost always mean images of the body, these pictures are noticeable for a conspicuous absence of bodies. We see neither perpetrator nor victim, only the bare scene, quotidian, current, and abandoned.

Both writers further cite the Gulf War in 1991 as the catalyst for this strategy, when traditional photojournalism was displaced by the digital imagery of high tech warfare supplied by US forces. Cut off from the battlefield, mass media focused instead on the sophisticated new technology of precision hits by cruise missiles and nose-cameras on smart bombs. Framed in this manner, late photography constitutes a response to state-of-the-art information and simulation technology. More broadly, it can also be understood as a reaction against the narratives of victims and aggressors in mainstream news, moving towards a more distanced and disengaged process, positioning itself as a kind of antidote to the spectacle and distraction of commercial media. Thus, it can be circumscribed by a set of structural oppositions: aftermath instead of immediacy; the trace instead of the event; distance instead of proximity; withdrawal instead of immersion, etcetera.

While Walker ultimately credits the disorienting and unsettling effect of post-reportage as productive, arguing that it activates the viewer and stimulates a phenomenological response, Campany is less approving, identifying this numbness as resignation. This has remained a staple critique against late photography, which has been charged with shunning analyses, diminishing urgency and encouraging incomprehension, favouring an aesthetic response before moral responsibility.

This article will expand on Walker's and Campany's notion of the late witness, arguing that a transmedial perspective is helpful to disclose how formal and aesthetic choices interact with problems of spectatorship, site-specificity and memory. Such an approach also allows us to look beyond some of the issues that have informed the critical reception of late photography, whether expressive of "a certain modernist reflection on the indexicality of the medium" (Campany, 2003, 191), or symptomatic of a postmodern resignation content to attest to the limits of representation. For this debated genre is riddled with a generic ambiguity, combining two apparently incompatible modes of looking at a site: the clinical attitude of forensic photography, and the contemplative mode of landscape art. What

effects does this strange hybrid produce, and what response does it evoke? Moreover, lateness is relative. The photographers discussed by Walker and Campany all arrive in the aftermath of recent events – they are still in time to record the traces left in their wake. But how does this strategy pertain to sites where no trace remains?

The next section attempts to historicize late photography within a broader context. Drawing from examples across different media and genres, it will focus on strategies of displacements and deferrals; between figure and ground; body and earth; site and memory. The very muteness and illegibility of these pictures, their resistance to be read and interpreted, solicits a critical exploration that addresses the image in terms of agency, approaching it as an active point of departure or a force that creates meaning on its own. To engage with the image as a formative act also prompts the question: what is it that the image wants us to imagine?

Figure, ground and witness

There is an obvious affinity between late photography and early photography. Few commentators have failed to notice that late photography marks a return to the archaic origins of photojournalism, the desolate killing field in the Crimea photographed in the aftermath of a battle by British War Correspondent Roger Fenton. *The Valley of the Shadow of Death* (1855) shows a road strewn with cannonballs, meandering through a barren ravine and disappearing into the distance.

We find an identical footpath in *Hidden* (2002), a collection of photographs made by Paul Seawright from Afghanistan in the aftermath of the Coalition War. This picture of a sloping dirt road littered with spent casings of artillery shells, leading nowhere and giving up nothing but mud, has simply been labelled *Valley* (2002). Seawright's dead ringer can equally be interpreted as self-reflexive homage or tragic irony. Collapsing the distance between the Crimea in 1855 and Afghanistan in 2002, it suggests that the only thing that has changed is the weaponry. Hence, Seawright's photograph could be targeted for divesting the event of its specificity, removing it from its political context, and thus for misrepresenting the conflict it so obliquely refers to. As a valley in the Crimea looks much like a valley in Afghanistan, the insistence on the specificity of place paradoxically blurs the specificities of historical causes and effects. However, the discussion can be turned around if we ask instead what relationship between historical narration and visual representation that this aesthetics of absence and aftermath promotes. For what Campany refers to as "the highly visible turn towards photographing the aftermath of events – traces, fragments" (Campany, 2003, 186), is also a turn towards photographing the lack of traces, a turn towards the invisible. The earthbound, ground level approach to terrains of violence and atrocity in late photography elicits a temporal sensibility that reframes Fenton's dirt road. Once emblematic for the enlightenment conception of time, and the theological notion that history has a course and a destination, the road has turned into a site of compulsive returns rather than progress. Instead of signifying narrative direction and

linear progression, it has evolved into a master trope for imaging the limits of history, as well as the limits of historical imagination. On these isolated paths and deserted trails, the past and present can't be so easily distinguished.

The fraught relation between historical narrative and site-specificity looms heavily in Mikael Levin's photo-essay *War Story* (Levin, 1997). This is a 'post-reportage' with an autobiographical dimension, retracing a journey undertaken fifty years earlier. Working as a war correspondent with the Overseas News Agency, the photographer's father, Meyer Levin, travelled with the Allied Armies from Paris to Prague, witnessing the first concentration camps to be liberated by American forces on their way east. *War Story* literally bring news reportage and late photography side by side, placing photos from the original journey – populated by soldiers in action, liberated prisoners and stacks of corpses – with the uneventful and oblivious terrain of the present. Returning to where the photographs were originally made while meticulously marking out the date and location of each revisit, a previous scene of carnage and mutilation is placed alongside a contemporary scene of everydayness.

The unifying motif of *War Story* is the road: from city streets, country lanes and the Autobahn, to the overgrown path that leads up a hillside beyond which lies the mass burial pit of Nordlager Ohrdruf. Or, as a variation of this, the photograph of a curve in a cobblestoned forest road, which, the caption informs us, is the *Road to Buchenwald*. There is a gap then, between the image and the title, a distance to be bridged by our knowledge of what's waiting around the corner. We can't see beyond the bend of the road, nor can we see beyond the edges of the photograph. [fig.1]

1. Mikael Levin. Untitled (from *War Story* – Nordlager Ohrdruf). 1995.

The route retraced by Levin in 1995 also offers enchanting views that exude a rich symbolic tradition, passing Lorelei and the Alps. However, as the journey progresses, these woods and waters assume an impenetrable darkness, and the roads are bordered thickly with dense shadows. Levin's re-photographic

survey elicits a consistent double exposure, played out against his father's trip half a century earlier, but also against the Nazi's romantic venerations of soil and scenery and the doctrines of *Heimat*, *Lebensraum* and *Blut und Boden*.

War Story is exemplary of late photography in three regards. First, it makes explicit the inversion of the traditional photojournalism virtues, instantaneity and involvement; second, it invokes a discourse about the late witness and the unrepresentability of human suffering, and, more specifically, the prohibition against making direct representations of the Holocaust; third, it probes the visual double bind that informs late photography, emulating the idealistic tradition of landscape art while at the same time turning this tradition against itself. In this, late photography relates to a much wider tendency in post-war art. The deportation from urban ghetto to forest camp made the pastoral longing that underpins the landscape tradition suspicious, and after the shocking revelations of the camps, landscape came to be regarded as an aesthetically retrograde and ideologically contaminated genre. Inflated with a heritage of national romanticism and ethnic belonging, the impulse has been to rob landscape of its deceptive innocence, marking it instead as a site to interrogate social, political and ecological crimes. Beginning in the late 1960s, landscape has been reinvented as an explicitly non-idealistic and non-empathetic genre, reformed into clinical views, environmental survey and topographics.

In a discussion on the photographs of former German concentration camps by artists like Mikael Levin and Dirk Reinartz, Ulrich Baer describes a structural parity between these images of nondescript sites and the purpose these sites were made to serve, "designed to obliterate the contrast between human beings and their surroundings and thus to level the symbolic distinction between figure and ground" (Baer, 2002, 18). The fraught relationship between figure and ground, or between blood and soil, observed by Baer applies to late photography in a more general sense. However, the argument that Baer makes is heavily invested in the Barthian conception that "[e]ach photograph, by virtue of the medium, inevitably turns the viewer into a latecomer at the depicted site" (Baer, 2002, 181). Rather than conforming to such ontological claims about what the photographic image is, it might be more productive to ask, as W.J.T. Mitchell has advised, what the image wants. So, what does late photography want, considering that it appears to offer so little in terms of information and explanation? How do these views relate to the problem of dealing with an event that on the one hand defies expression, yet on the other demands to be remembered?

Here, a trans-aesthetic approach facilitates a look beyond the issue of indexicality toward the realm of iconography. The paintings of German artist Anselm Kiefer offer a vivid example, working within and against the tradition of landscape, folding it back upon itself along the rusty train tracks and isolated paths that he has made his signature domain. In Kiefer's landscapes, the missing bodies literally emerge out of the woodwork: the ground is sticky and burnt, inscribed with names and stained with blood. The crimes that these woods and fields hide and harbour percolate into the ground, implicating the landscape in a history of atrocities.

More specifically, both Kiefer and Levin stage a clash between the idealism of *blut und boden* and the decree of *Nacht und Nebel*. Not only was

the deportation shrouded in night and fog, voracious nature was complicit in this secrecy, absorbing the ashes of cremated bodies. The *Nacht und Nebel* tactic also provided the title for Alain Resnais' film *Nuit et Brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, 1955), conflating sequences filmed in colour of the peaceful fields and meadows where the camps were built with gritty black and white photographs of the camps when they were in use. "Even a road where cars and peasants and couples pass", the narrator informs us, "can lead to a concentration camp."

Thirty years later, Claude Lanzmann travelled the crumbling rails, roads and wooded paths leading to the Polish death camps for his seminal account of the Nazi genocide in *Shoah* (1985), described by the director as "a film from the ground up, a topographical film" (Liebman, 2007, 39). Spanning nine and a half hours, *Shoah* is famous for its refusal to use archive images. Instead, it shows hours of footage of the locations left behind. The sites reveal few traces that anything ever took place there: we merely see trees ruffled by wind, snow falling, water filling the ditches, weeds covering the rails. Whereas the carnage is absent in the visual register, the narration – the eyewitnesses, perpetrators and survivors interviewed by Lanzmann – speak of nothing but bodies. This is the issue that Lanzmann stubbornly pursues in his interrogations: the handling, detention, deportation and liquidation of bodies, all the practical and logistic problems of making so many bodies disappear into the ground. Unconcerned with the individual fates of his witnesses, they are made to testify on behalf of those who are missing. The shattering effect of *Shoah* emanates from this disjunction between what we see and what we hear, just like Lanzmann's inquiry into logistics, quantities and schedules finally points towards an ultimate lack of scale.

There is a conflict, then, between the finitude of the sites and the magnitude of the crimes committed there. This disproportion between site and event keep referring the viewer back to the limits of knowledge and explanation, just like the film itself is structured like a journey along obstructed roads. Relentlessly circling around its target, it's both a belated arrival and an endless deferral of arriving. In marking out these gaps or voids, these isolated views work like memorials: lingering on the site, invoking silence, and opening up a space for the spectator to contemplate. Along this logic, Lanzmann has violently resisted the label 'documentary,' declaring instead that *Shoah* is a monument.

If the first Gulf War changed the nature of warfare and war correspondence, as Walker and Campany argue, the aesthetics of post-reportage and late photography are vested in a more extensive controversy concerning the political and ethical stakes of representing atrocities. Germinating out of the revelations of the Nazi death camps, a negative aesthetics that defers explanation and clarification has been promoted as a moral imperative. However, this strategy of marking the spot and bearing witness in the aftermath, of probing the gap between quotidian location and disastrous event, has also migrated to other scenes of violence, more recent, and more modest in scale.

Joel Sternfeld's photo book *On This Site: Landscape in Memoriam* (Sternfeld, 1996) tracks down a number of crime scenes across North

America in what the introduction describes as "a memorial revisit to the site of the event" (Sternfeld, 1996, n.p.). We're given the date, place and circumstances of each crime in matter of fact captions on one spread, and the anonymous, generic location where it took place on the other. Putting his chronicle of crime scenes in historical relief, Sternfeld begins with a site where the figure literally obliterates the ground: *Mount Rushmore National Monument, Black Hills National Forest, South Dakota, 1994*. As the caption informs us, this monument was built on land stolen from the Great Sioux Nation after gold was discovered in the area. The 'Shrine of Democracy' is thus turned against itself, becoming instead a monument to racism, neglect and broken treatises. The composition of this image also outlines the strategy for the memorial revisits to follow. Towering against the skyline, the Founding Fathers hover above the land; in the foreground a rack of searchlights used to illuminate these elevated figures; below the drab, broken ground, unadorned and uncared-for. This common ground, receding towards private and public spaces, is the territory charted by Sternfeld. The stony countenances chiselled out of Mount Rushmore are the only faces encountered on this itinerary through fifty American crime scenes. From here, *On This Site* takes us across the countryside, into the suburbs and cities, along boulevards and country lanes, parking lots and motels, street corners and road sides – the scenes for crimes of hate, of domestic and international terrorism, of white collar crime, police brutality and gang violence. The sites are randomly distinguished by the quality of light, season and time of day, located at an intersection of the arbitrary and the specific. Throughout, Sternfeld's camera stays close to the ground, shared yet oddly anonymous. If the topographical approach in *On This Site* formally resembles *War Story* and *Shoah*, it implies something very different. These are not monuments of a unique or singular event but of random, routine, and repetitive crimes. Nonetheless, we can deduce some shared strategies in the ways these images confront and engage us.

First, they make it difficult to tell the difference between crime scenes and the commonplace, between catastrophe and the everyday. They stir an uneasy sensation of common guilt and complicity in the simple fact that life continues in these places. It's not so much that the sites have changed, that the evidence has been washed away and swallowed up by the earth, but rather that they haven't changed, that they have gone back to what they were before the crime was committed. Their effect thus derives from a contradiction between the calm and the violent, between the banality of the site and the monstrosity of the crime committed there.

This contrast is reinforced through the reverent silence, scale and stillness of these prints – or, in the case of *Night and Fog* and *Shoah*, the gravity of the long, uninterrupted pans – and their trivial subject matter, with an emphasis precisely on matter. Bringing history down to a mundane and material level, this attentiveness to the terrestrial, to soil, earth and exteriors, finally invokes the extra-terrestrial; it conveys a sense of non-belonging, or exclusion, which places the spectator firmly outside the picture space, as an observer. We're caught in the act of looking, made aware of ourselves witnessing – though we're witnessing something that is no longer there.

Facts of matter

By grouping together such a diverse corpus of works, none of which was addressed by Walker and Campany, I'm obviously running the risk of making late photography a too flexible and elastic concept. So, it's time to return to the first Gulf War and to an artist that is central to their arguments, and to a work exemplary already in its English title: *Aftermath* (1992). The French artist Sophie Ristelhueber arrived in Kuwait seven months after the war had ended, photographing aerial views and close-ups of the desert after the battle. The original title for this series, *Fait*, has a double meaning, translating both as 'fact' – what the documentary images supposedly contain – and 'what has been done.' The ambiguities multiply, as *Fait* straddles the border between document and artwork, evidence and abstraction. It also insists on a material parallel between the ground and the photographic film. This doubling of the index confirms Campany's characterization of late photography as "an overtly allegorical mode of photography. The images present themselves as fragments not wholes" (Campany, 2006). However, this is not merely a gesture of self-reflexivity, but to acknowledge that events can't be represented in their entirety. Though the traces are evident, their cause remains unexplained. This deferral of knowledge in turn heightens a fact of every image – that it never tells the whole story. Then again, the tendency toward opacity and fragmentation can be criticized for favouring aesthetic gratification before analysis, removing atrocities from their sources and turning them into abstract configurations.

Ristelhueber further provokes this scepticism by citing an iconic work of high modernism as the key influence and inspiration for *Fait*: Man Ray's photograph *Dust Breeding*, taken in Marcel Duchamp's New York studio in 1920. This mysterious and evocative picture resembles an aerial reconnaissance photo of an arid desert. To support this reading, it was captioned *View from an Airplane* when first published in the Surrealist journal *Littérature*. In reality, the photograph was the result of a two-hour long exposure framing a segment of Duchamp's artwork *The Large Glass* (1912–1923) after layers of dust had gathered over many months. Beside Ray's and Ristelhueber's shared fascination with ambiguous subjects and scales, there are also deeper running thematic concerns at work here. Deliberately confusing the surface of the glass pane with an expansive desert landscape, Man Ray's photograph invokes a parallel between the gathering of dust on the glass surface, the photographic exposure, and the forces shaping the earth's crust. Dust accumulates and is swept away, just like the marks of trenches, tank tracks and bomb craters in *Fait* were first inflicted, and then erased, by 'Desert Storm.'

On the one hand, the aloof and distanced viewpoint adopted in *Fait* seems to reduce manmade suffering to the inevitable outcome of an unceasing cycle of eruption and erasure. On the other hand, it encourages us to look at conflicts in other ways. The determination to cover the ground in late photography is also a challenge to the imaginary domains of *Heimat*, Holy Land, and Founding Fathers, confronting these abstractions with matter, with what is overwhelmingly present, with the dust that settles and the rubble and ruins that pile up from day-to-day. As a

response to the media coverage of the war that impelled Jean Baudrillard to make his notorious claim that "the Gulf War did not take place", *Fait* insists that events indeed do take place. Engaging with contemporary war zones through the Surrealist legacy of *dépaysement* – the strategy of displacement and disorientation epitomized by *Dust Breeding* – this taking place occurs on sliding scales in Ristelhueber's record of the collateral damage of history: the earth and the body.

The physical scars in the earth exposed, but not explained in *Fait*, are echoed in the scarred bodies in Paris hospitals that Ristelhueber photographed for her next project, *Every One* (1994). The series consists of large-scale close-ups of fresh surgical stitches. Like the terrestrial images of *Fait*, the framed sections of human flesh remain oddly anonymous and enigmatic. The sheer size of the prints confuses the distinction between figure and ground. Reversing the optics of *Fait*, the wounded tissue assumes a geological dimension. As the split between *Every* and *One* instructs, these images are at once general and singular, at once allegorical and material.[fig.2]

2. Sophie Ristelhueber. *Eleven Blowups* (#1). 2006. © Sophie Ristelhueber/BONO, Oslo 2011

In her more recent work, Ristelhueber has explored this logic of substitution and exchange between the terrestrial and the corporeal in conjunction with the leitmotif of late photography, the path of war that harkens back to Fenton's iconic *The Valley of the Shadow of Death*. *WB* (2005) consists of fifty-four photographs of roads meandering through the gentle hills and groves on the West Bank. Each image is a variation of the same motif: a road deprived of its destination, cutut off by some physical obstacle

– a pile of rocks, a mound of gravel, or concrete blocks. Further amplifying this theme, *WB* was followed by *Eleven Blowups* (2007), a series of digitally manipulated stills drawn from video rushes of roads scarred by bomb craters. In the words of the artist: "What prompted me to make these pictures was the impression that the ground was ripped by the shock, that it was swallowing itself" (Ristelhueber, 2009). In these pictures, the earth appears to react like a body to the violence inflicted upon it, the craters resemble open wounds, the blasted rock and melted asphalt takes on a visceral form.

3. Sophie Ristelhueber. *Eleven Blowups* (#1). 2006. © Sophie Ristelhueber/BONO, Oslo 2011

Repeating the same image over and over again with minor variations, *WB* and *Eleven Blowups* speak of the fraught temporality that informs late photography. These typologies of scattered and impassable roads apparently lack finality. That is the nature of the catalogue or list; it has no beginning or end. This image not only repeats itself, it also recalls other images, like those barren trails in Crimea, Afghanistan and Nordlager Ohrdruf discussed above. It is an image that keeps coming back across vast geographical and historical scales. It keeps coming back because it's a world we can't project ourselves out of.

Roadblocks

In conclusion, we turn to a final site divided by extended conflict: Northern Ireland, which is also the native subject of the most prolific group of artists operating within the mode of late photography. As a reaction to the stock imagery of sectarian violence in Belfast and Derry, they seek out instead the lush countryside of the Emerald Ilse. Paul Graham's *Troubled Land* (1984–1986), Paul Seawright's *Sectarian Murder* (1988), and David Farrell's *Innocent Landscapes* (2001) all revisit sites of abductions, killings and burials within this calm, rural bliss. Another exponent of this strategy is multimedia artist Willie Doherty. Of particular interest in this context are

his photographs of chunks of concrete blocking the roads that straddle the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Like Ristelhueber's record from the West Bank, we're confronted with a crude intervention within the lyrical beauty of a mythologized countryside.

These photographers are at once invested in mapping the crimes back to the commonplace and in turning these nondescript sites into memorials. But the pictures relation to memory remains unstable and uncertain. Campany sums up this paradoxical relation between photography and memory: "The photograph can be an aid to memory, but it can also become an obstacle that blocks access to the understanding of the past" (Campany, 2003, 186). My argument, however, is that blocking access is what these works deliberately set out to do. The recurring image of the road, bent, disrupted and disappearing out of site, is 'overtly allegorical' in a profound sense. These photographs are roadblocks: they look like 'straight' photography – neutral, head on, balanced, in focus – but they take us on a detour. These roads don't provide access; they don't lead us into the past. They're not gateways but obstructions blocking the view.

Along with the pseudo-scientific vocabulary mobilized to define late photography – searching for clues, gathering facts, engaging in forensic reconstruction or a post-mortem examination of the remains – another term comes to mind: 'autopsy,' from the Ancient Greek *autopsia*, meaning 'to see for oneself.' This is what these pictures require from their viewers: that we look for what is not there. They demand an activity that derives from what we don't see; the viewer has to engage in reconstruction, we have to restore what is missing. The emphasis on earthen matter – rocks and boulders, dust and dirt – links us to this other matter that is missing. These are all sites where bodies have disappeared, been displaced, or denied access, just like the roadblocks photographed by Ristelhueber and Doherty denote the regulation and separation of bodies.

Another work by Willie Doherty draws this discussion to its conclusion, his video installation *Ghost Story* from 2007. *Ghost Story* can be read as an extended mediation on the central, yet often oblique, obsessions of late photography. For most of its 15 minutes of screen time, a tracking shot moves down a darkened forest road, occasionally tracking the undergrowth and running fence on its side, drawn towards a vanishing point at the centre of the image but reaching neither end nor resolution. The disembodied narrator travelling down this isolated path describes it as a site of unresolved grief and guilt. Evoking a gothic imagery reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe, the ground is described as porous and slippery, "as if the surface of the road was no longer thick enough to conceal the contents of the tomb that lay beneath" (Doherty, 2009, 58).

In one particularly evocative passage, the voice-over raises a question at the heart of late photography's engagement with the ground. For despite its clinical and disinterested appearance, late photography can't be circumscribed within the parameters of a logocentric or rational discourse. A spectral presence simmers beneath the secular surface of the terrain:

> "I wondered about what had happened to the pain and terror that had taken place there. Had it been absorbed or filtered into the ground, or was it possible for others to sense it as I did? The narrow streets and alleyways that I walked along became places where this invisible matter could no longer be contained." (Doherty, 2009, 57-58)

Stalking a terrain between materiality and immateriality, between perception and memory, between the solid and the spectral, late photography might be described as photojournalism's uncanny other. It doesn't imagine history as a tale of causes and effects where one event leads to the other, but as a ghost story. The past inhabits the present; memory merges with matter.

In this way, late photography compels us to think of history as something similar to dark matter: the invisible mass in the universe that we can only know through its effect. There can only be a negative image of it, we can see its traces and consequences in the visible universe, but we can't see it directly. In a similar way, the aftermath landscape in late photography confronts us with a phantom pain – a pain for all the missing bodies which are the dark matter of history.

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