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**Photo-Texts: Critical Intersections in History**

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## Photo-Texts: Critical Intersections in History



Fig 1 Les Krims, *Spitting Out the Word P-h-o-t-o-g-r-a-p-h-y*. Selenium toned Kodalith print, 13 x 18 cm, 1970, courtesy the artist

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the object 'photo-text', a hybrid body of work composed of photographic images and words that share equal importance and are purposefully presented together as one work. Identified as a distinct genre more than 30 years ago, yet taken for granted, the photo-text is here formulated both theoretically and historically for the first time. The thesis is structured in two parts: 'Understanding Photo-Texts' and 'Case Studies'.

'Understanding Photo-Texts' defines what they are in chapter one and clarifies the taxonomical confusion that haunts them; it provides a classification of the different types of photo-texts and identifies the ones that need further scrutiny in chapter two; lastly, it maps out the components of this genre from a theoretical perspective in chapters three and four. 'Case Studies' proposes possible ways to advance the historical and theoretical discourse around photo-texts through the analysis of examples that range from the nineteenth century to the 1980s and are clustered around three main themes and historical moments: sophistication of nineteenth-century photo-texts, post-war photo-poems and 'conceptual photo-texts' in patriarchal society.

Chapter five shows the complexity of a selection of nineteenth-century photo-texts, countering the idea of a chronological evolution in photo-text dynamics from early alleged embryo to later adroitness. Chapter six and seven challenge Roland Barthes' seminal functions of 'anchorage' and 'relay' that he introduced in relation to the linguistic message juxtaposed with press and advertising pictures, in his fundamental essay 'Rhetoric of the Image' (1964). Through the comparative analysis of two post-war collections of photo-poems, Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau's *La mort et les statues* (1946) and Bertolt Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* (1955), chapter six subverts the traditional connotational charge attributed to 'anchorage' as a repressive function and to 'relay' as a liberating one. Chapter seven demonstrates that 'anchorage' and 'relay' can co-exist within the same photo-text in such an enmeshed manner that it becomes difficult to establish a dominance of one over the other, through the close and comparative examination of a number of Victor Burgin and Barbara Kruger's 'conceptual photo-texts' on patriarchal society from the 1970s and 1980s.

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I dedicate this thesis to my Tuscan family: my brother Alberto, my mamma Giovanna and my babbo Fre(u)diano.

They say you cannot choose your family, but, if I could choose it, I would actually beg for these very three people.

## Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the Centre for Research and Education in Art and Media (CREAM) at the University of Westminster, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is entirely the author's own work, except where noted, and has not been previously submitted for this or any other awards.

Date \_\_\_\_\_29/09/2020\_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Glossary of Key Terms

**Anchorage:** A function introduced by Roland Barthes in 1964 that the linguistic message (text) can exert when associated to an image, and which entails directing the reader/viewer through the possible readings of the image 'causing [them] to avoid some and receive others' (1977, pp 39-40). Anchorage 'remote-controls' the reader/viewer towards a meaning of the image (Barthes, 1977, pp 39-40). A means of holding or fixing something in place; something which provides a secure hold or support (OED, 2020).

**Anchorelay:** A term I introduce in this thesis to indicate when Barthes' two functions of anchorage and relay coexist within the same photo-text in such an enmeshed way that it is difficult to distinguish them.

**Bimedial:** When two media are simultaneously exploited in a body of work (Lagerwall, 2006).

**Caption:** A short text that accompanies an image originally introduced to provide basic and allegedly objective information about the context of the photographic image – such as place, year and eventual identity of the subjects portrayed – when it is reproduced in the press or other printed matter (Newhall, 1952). Nancy Newhall (1952) and Giselle Freund (1980) showed how captions have been 'slanted' by the press for ideological purposes. Joan Fontcuberta (1985 and 1988) and Ugo Mulas (1969-72) show how the caption has become fertile soil for artistic intervention and subversion.

**Conceptual Photo-Texts:** A term I introduce in this thesis to indicate a type of photo-text in which the relation and dynamics between images and words is conceptual, emphasising the notion of art as idea and de-prioritising aesthetic values (Marzona, 2006, pp 6-8).

**Connotational Charge:** Connotation means 'the signifying in addition; inclusion of something in the meaning of a word besides what it primarily denotes; implication'. Charge is used in this thesis in the sense of load, burden, weight (OED, 2020).

**Disavowal:** The action of refusing to acknowledge or accept something despite the fact that we are aware of it, as expressed in Octave Mannoni's (1969) famous sentence 'Je sais bien, mais quand-même', translated as: 'I know very well, but nevertheless' and elaborated in relation to Sigmund Freud's (1927) theory of

fetishism. In this thesis I use it to explain the viewer's contradictory relationship to the realist/anti-realist conundrum in photography. As Lucy Soutter put it, 'photography's physical, chemical link to patterns of light and shade in the world has too often fooled viewers into thinking that it was a medium of transcription rather than construction' (2013, p 66). Even if, as Umberto Eco (1982, p 33) wrote, 'the theory of the photo as an *analogue* to reality has been abandoned', people interact with photographs as if they were portions of reality, because they nonetheless 'reproduce some of the conditions of perception', and due to their psychopathological everyday omnipresence in their lives.

**Ekphrasis:** A literary device in which a painting, sculpture or other work of visual art is described in detail in a literary text (OED, 2020).

**Fiction:** A slippery concept that has multiple meanings, such as invention as opposed to fact, lie, but also literature – as I wrote in the essay 'On the Uses and Abuses of Fiction in Contemporary Photography' (Chiocchetti, 2014). In this thesis it is intended as imaginary, departing from reality, fake (OED, 2020).

**Genre:** A particular category or style of works of art; commonly a type of literary work characterised by a particular form, style or purpose, such as science fiction (OED, 2020). David Bate (2009, pp 3-5) considers the value of genre theory for the study of photography.

**Hijacking:** To seize (an aeroplane) in flight and force the pilot to fly to a new destination. In this thesis it refers to the dangerous potential of Barthes' function of the relay text to drift the reader/viewer towards political unconcern.

**Iconotext:** Originally introduced by Michael Nerlich (1990, pp 255-302) to describe the fusion of his poetry with the photographs of his partner Evelyne Sinnassamy in *La femme se découvre*, it was then recovered and altered by scholars such as Peter Wagner (1995) and Liliane Louvel (1998) to 'include also artworks in which one medium is only implied' (Lagerwall, 2006, pp 119-20). I disagree with this inclusion, as the co-presence of both media is indispensable in bringing about the 'third something' – one of the three fundamental components of photo-texts, typographically represented by the hyphen. That is why I define photo-texts as 'bimedial iconotexts'.

**Image-Text:** For W.J.T. Mitchell, image-text spelled with a hyphen 'designates relations of the visual and verbal' (2012, p 1). In this thesis it is a synonym for 'iconotext' and it means a work composed of both words and images.

**Photobook:** A book in which the principal narrative is told in photographic images, and text, besides the title and author's name (if available), is only present as preface, postface, introduction or critical essay about the photoworks – or, in other words, it does not constitute the body of work.

**Photo-Essay:** A non-fiction photo-text with documentary purposes that explores in words and photographic images a specific subject, both in the shorter form of a feature within a magazine or as a whole book.

**Photo-Literature:** A photo-text that mingles fiction (literature), such as novels and short stories, with photographic images.

**Photo-Poetry:** A photo-text that mingles poems (including prose poems) and photographic images.

**Photo-Text:** A 'bimedial iconotext', namely a hybrid compound work in which both photographic images and words co-exist and constitute the body of work within the pages of the book or the gallery wall (Lagerwall, 2006, p 119). They must 'simultaneously be read and viewed' together, to form new meanings, while preserving equal and separate ontological dignity – and at times distance – to 'shoot some tensions' or trigger dynamics that juxtapose the two systems of signs without confusing them (Hunter, 1987, p 2, and Montandon, 1990, p 6). In photo-texts, photographs and words are partners in crime that create a 'dialogue to which neither of the two media can, even for a moment, escape' (Cometa, 2018, p 2). This dialogue or 'interpenetration of images and words' enhances each medium's narrative potential and expands the fictionality – intended here as the imaginary latent quotient – of the work as a whole, since in the constant back and forth and tension between looking at the images and reading the words, a third unattainable object or 'third something' develops only in the viewer's and reader's mind, 'the one who ultimately always "makes sense" of' photo-texts (Bryson, 1988, p 185, Eisenstein, 2004, p 12, and Wagner, 1995, p 12). Before the 'third something' can develop in the mind of the reader/viewer, images and texts have to be incorporated or devoured by the 'mediating organ of the eye', which 'swallows everything, obliterating the difference between the written and the visual' (Richon, 1991, pp 32-33).

**Photo-Texts:** Plural, the genre of the photo-text.

**Phototext:** A photo-text where photographs and words occupy the same surface as the words invade the space of the photographic image.

**Roman-Photo or Photo-Novel:** A codified type of photo-text introduced in 1947 in Italy, where photographs and texts are presented like comic strips under the conventions of sequential storytelling: images create a visual support to the word balloons containing dialogue between the portrayed characters. It is usually published as a shorter story within a magazine or as a whole magazine. The term differs from country to country – it is also referred to in English as a ‘photo-comic’. The term roman-photo is mostly used in Catholic countries where the stories would be primarily romantic (Deschamps, 2017).

**Relay:** Within telecommunications the term relay means an ‘installation, device, or satellite which receives, amplifies, and retransmits radio signals so that they can be received over a larger area’ (OED, 2020). Relay is a function introduced by Roland Barthes (1977, p 40) in 1964 to describe an effect that the linguistic message (text) can exert when associated with an image. It entails a complementary relationship with the image, as it contains information that is not to be found in the image.

**Rescuing:** To set free (a hostage, a person captured by an enemy) (OED, 2020). In the context of this thesis, a text-photo relation in which the text aims at deconstructing, dismantling and denouncing the ideological surface of the photographic image, to rescue the viewer/reader from ‘the ravages of modishness’, as in the case of Bertolt Brecht’s *Kriegsfibel (War Primer)* (1955) (Benjamin, 1998, p 95).

**Taxonomy:** A classification of something (OED, 2020).

**Third something:** A concept borrowed from Sergei Eisenstein’s (1939) essay on montage in film to indicate a fundamental component of the photo-text: the third object that develops only in the reader/viewer’s mind as their eyes move back and forth from looking at the photographs and reading the words. It can only be brought about if both photographs and texts co-exist – hence the importance of ‘bimediality’ in photo-texts – and it can be typographically associated with the hyphen (Di Bello and Zamir, 2012, p 2).

**Title:** An identifying tag with which authors and artists label their works. Even *Untitled* is a title.

**Type:** A kind or class, as distinguished by a particular characteristic (OED, 2020).

## Preface

This thesis originally started as an attempt to elucidate the conundrum revolving around the relationship between photography and the slippery concept of 'fiction'. The research interest was a natural development from my MA dissertation in Comparative Literature at University College London in 2012, entitled 'Implausibility and Disbelief in Fin-de-siècle Spirit Photography and Ghost Literature'. Through the research for this thesis, and particularly thanks to the opportunity to organise and take part in a symposium on 'Fiction and Photography' with my Director of Studies and a number of international experts and artists at the Media Space at the Science Museum in London in 2014, I realised the importance of the operation of language on images, and images on language, in formulating meaning and verisimilitude. The relational dynamic known as image-text relations is what often informs the fictive/realistic dimension of images. This shift in emphasis encouraged me to re-focus the thesis towards the examination of photo-text relations and works.

As a part-time PhD student, I have had the chance to accompany my academic research with editorial and curatorial work in the field of photography and writing, collaborating with a number of international public and private institutions. This created a virtuous circle of reciprocal influences between work and research. In preparation for an exhibition and symposium on Peter Henry Emerson that I organised at Nottingham Castle Museum, while I was Art Fund curatorial fellow of photographs at London's V&A in 2015, I conducted archival research on a number of nineteenth-century photographers. This was fundamental for the development of chapter five on nineteenth-century photo-texts.

The collaboration with the Archive of Modern Conflict for the book and exhibition *Amore e Piombo: The Photography of Extremes in 1970s Italy*, on the political imagery of paparazzi photographers during the Italian Years of Lead in the 1970s, and for the online exhibition *Amateur Unconcern*, on photography, George Bernard Shaw and political unconcern during the Great War, further nurtured my interest in conflict and committed photo-texts. This becomes manifest in the chapter on post-war photo-poetry. The symposium 'Photography and Gender Dynamics Post #MeToo' that I co-organised at The Photographers' Gallery, the paper *Linguivore Species*, on two photo-text books about violence against women, presented at the Parisian conference 'the Committed Photo-Text' and reworked for the Image-Text-Data cluster of Fotomuseum Winterthur's Situations, together with curating a show on gender dynamics for the



London Art Fair and investigating Italian feminist photobooks from the 1970s for an article in *Photoworks*, were instrumental for the chapter on patriarchy.

The opportunity to guest-edit issue 16 of *Aperture's PhotoBook Review* on photo-text books in 2019 was the ideal project to work on towards the end of this research, as it allowed me to revise and clarify theoretical and historical aspects of Part I, as well as discover new books with eccentric photo-text dynamics.

Last but not least, thanks to my photo-literary platform Photocaptionist, entirely devoted to the photo-text relationship, I have also commissioned a few English translations of foreign scholarship on the topic, which has allowed me to be up to date with the international research in the field. However, as a first attempt to dissect the genre of photo-texts, I am aware of the Western-centric selection presented here, which is mainly due to limited funding, time and linguistic skills. I intend to expand the geographical and linguistic scope of this research on the occasion of its publication as a book and its presentation as an exhibition.

## Introduction

This section illustrates the rationale and main themes of the thesis, and the research questions it aims to answer. It also presents the perspective, methodology and structure with which the research has been designed, including the logic behind the selection of the case studies.

The history of photography became an established academic discipline, of the same importance as the history of art, in the 1970s, when a number of North American universities appointed the first history of photography professors in their art history departments (Burgin, 2019, no pagination and Gervais, 2014, no pagination).<sup>1</sup> Such chairs have increased significantly, ‘in photography and visual culture as well as art history departments, and the discipline of photography history has never stopped rethinking and redefining its boundaries, its methods and corpuses’ (Gervais, 2014, no pagination). As pointed out by Victor Burgin (2019, no pagination), although it is not possible to write a history of photography without a set of more or less explicit assumptions about what photography is, how it contributes to the production and dissemination of meaning and how it is received, ‘a self-conscious “theory of photography” – one capable of questioning some of the suppositions made by photo historians and critics – did not enter the university until about a decade later’. In the opening sentence of his 1980 introduction to *Thinking Photography*, Burgin (1982, p 1) writes: ‘the essays in this book are contributions towards photography theory. I say “towards” rather than “to” as the theory does not yet exist; nevertheless, as these essays indicate, some of its components may already be identified’. This sentence is important for two reasons. Firstly, for its visionary power, since both the history and the theory of photography are now established academic disciplines, recognised as offering their own systematic ‘contribution to knowledge’. And secondly, it inspired the subject and aim of this thesis: to contribute ‘towards’ the history and theory of the photo-text, by which I mean a hybrid work composed of photographic images and words that mingle in multiple ways, in between independence and interdependence, generating a third imaginary object, the ‘third something’ that develops only in the

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<sup>1</sup> This also includes the critique of traditional approaches to the history of photography advanced, albeit differently, by professors such as Geoffrey Batchen, Allan Sekula and John Tagg in North America and Marta Braun in Canada.

reader/viewer's mind as their eyes move back and forth from looking at the photographs and reading the words.<sup>2</sup>

Within the broadly established field of the history and theory of photography, as well as within what are known as 'word and image' or 'image-text studies'<sup>3</sup>, visual studies and comparative literature, indeed, there is an object – the 'photo-text' – that is as old as photography itself, if we consider Hippolyte Bayard's *Le Noyé (Self Portrait as a Drowned Man)* (1840), accompanied by his 'suicide note' on the verso, and that continues to exist to the present day, if we think about Sophie Calle's book and installation *Parce que (Because)* (2018-20).<sup>4</sup>

The photo-text object also circulates heavily in everyday life. Since 'the photographic image remains a central and most dominant form of visual image across contemporary culture [...] the distinction between art and non-art photography' is hard to maintain (Bate, 2015, pp 7-8). Photography, like words, has invaded every aspect of ordinary life – for example to support or replace human memory by registering information (Bate, 2015, p 119) – so much so that, unlike with painting or sculpture, we can have a picture of a gas meter reading, taken with our camera embedded in our phone, rather than annotated in numbers on a piece of paper, and 'a Jeff Wall', both

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<sup>2</sup> As I shall discuss in chapter one, the expression 'third something' comes from Sergei Eisenstein's essay on montage in film (1939). Robert Crawford and Norman McBeath (2016, p 68) wrote a photo-poetry manifesto – to which I shall return in chapter two – and among its conditions they include the necessity to have 'both independence and interdependence between poems and photographs in order to obtain a successful pairing'. I believe this condition should be extended to all types of photo-texts.

<sup>3</sup> It appears logical to me to consider the field of word and image studies conceptually as a spin-off from comparative literature, namely 'the study of literature and other cultural expressions across linguistic and cultural boundaries', and as a spin-off from visual studies or culture, a field that 'resists definition' as it 'deconstructs established disciplinary boundaries' (Hejmej, 2019, Brown University, no date, and Brunet, 2013, no pagination). However, as we learn from W.J.T. Mitchell (2003, p 51), in the 'Word and Image' entry he writes for Nelson and Shiff's *Critical Terms for Art History*: 'more broadly, "word and image" designates the relation of art history to literary history, textual studies, linguistics, and other disciplines that deal primarily with verbal expression'. On the challenges that visual studies have posed to comparative literature in multifarious ways, 'far beyond the canonical comparison between literature and art', see Fusillo (2013). In our mixed-media culture, the borders between academic disciplines' are inevitably blurred.

<sup>4</sup> The human eye has been exposed to image-text associations since at least 868 AD, the date of *The Diamond Sutra*, the oldest dated printed book in existence (Daley, 2016, no pagination). See also *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria* by Zainab Bahrani (2003). In Western Christendom, images started to be permitted as 'accessible and palatable' substitutes, 'only on condition that they fulfill the office of communicating the Word to the unlettered', as pointed out by Bryson (1983, p 1). In 1842 the world's first illustrated newspaper was published, *The Illustrated London News*, which was immediately extremely popular (in Wells, 2004, p 70). When photographs first appeared in newspapers, magazines and books, in the second half of the nineteenth century, first as photomechanical reproductions of photographs rather than actual photographs – with the *Daily Graphic* on 4 March 1880 in the US for example – the public's retinas were not 'image-text virgins' (Library of Congress, n.d.).

technically photographs, in the same way as we can have a shopping list and a novel, both made of words. Intriguingly, photo-texts are as ubiquitous. Advertising constantly mingles images and words to persuade people to buy products. The Internet and social media are deeply built on text-image mechanisms and, more commercially, algorithms, not only from the way in which almost every website mixes pictures and words, but also to the logic and layout of Google Images, Instagram, Facebook and memes. The Internet is such a malleable and mysterious space that not surprisingly it has also provided a fertile soil for artists. Advertising too can be 'artistic' and has indeed inspired many artists, such as Victor Burgin and Barbara Kruger, that I shall analyse in the last case study chapter. However, due to advertising's commercial nature and the Internet's uncontainable broadness, they are beyond the purpose of this research. Hence my choice to consider photo-texts that have circulated within an artistic context, including those works whose original purpose was not artistic, but underwent at a later stage the process of re-contextualisation within what Rosalind Krauss calls the 'space of exhibition' and art (1982, pp 311-19).<sup>5</sup>

Despite its ubiquity, the photo-text has been comparatively neglected as a specific independent object of art, research and knowledge, and there are as yet neither comprehensive histories of photo-texts, nor of photo-text theory.

There have been occasional, scattered and fragmented writings, within the theory of photography, that take text-photo relations as their more or less explicit object. Walter Benjamin (1980, p 215, and 1998, p 95) praises the political role of captions in his groundbreaking essays 'A Short History of Photography' (1931) and 'The Author as Producer' (1934). Roland Barthes (1977, p 40) discusses the effects of the linguistic message when associated with press photographs and advertisements in his fundamental essays 'The Photographic Message' (1961) and 'Rhetoric of the Image' (1964), introducing, in the latter, the two functions of 'anchorage' ('the text *directs* the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others') and 'relay' (text sets out 'meanings that are not to be found in the image itself'). Victor Burgin (1986, p 58) introduces the concept of 'scripto-visual' forms, indicating that 'photographs predominantly tend to prompt a complex of

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<sup>5</sup> This happened for instance to spirit photography in the nineteenth century, which was born out of commercial purposes of dubious ethics – as the famous trial against William H. Mumler confirms – and entered the art gallery and museum space much later (Chéroux, 2005, Fineman, 2012, and Chiocchetti, 2012).

exchanges between the visual and the verbal registers', in the chapter 'Seeing Sense' in his 1986 book *The End of Art Theory*.

Within word and image studies, which inevitably precede photo-text studies – dating back to Horace's famous Latin verse '*ut pictura poesis*' ('as is painting so is poetry'), in his poem *Ars Poetica (The Art of Poetry)* (c19 BC) – W.J.T. Mitchell (1994, pp 284-86) criticises Burgin's position, proposing that the invasion of language into photographs 'might well provoke a resistance', as the relation of photography and language is a 'paradox: photography both is and is not a language', in the chapter dedicated to 'The Photographic Essay' in his *Picture Theory* book (Golden, 2010, p 400).<sup>6</sup>

From the field of comparative literature, Michele Cometa's (2017) recent essay attempts to respond to the question: 'What Do Phototexts Want?', inspired by Mitchell's title for his book *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (2005).<sup>7</sup> Giuseppe Carrara's ambitious book, *Storie a vista: Retorica e poetiche del fototesto (Stories at Sight: Rhetoric and Poetics of the Phototext)*, available in Italian only, claims to be 'the first historical and literary systematic study' that also proposes 'methodological-interpretative theoretical categories' for 'phototexts' (2020, p 9). The book has the merit of posing the right research questions, such as what is a photo-text, how can we trace a possible history for it, and how can we examine it in theoretical perspective (2020, pp 53-216).<sup>8</sup> However, when it comes to the answers unfortunately, I find the book somewhat disappointing as too skewed towards literature. Its refusal to consider photo-texts as a genre, its focus on one type of photo-text only, namely photo-literature, and the number of neglected yet fundamental photo-text thinkers, such as Jefferson Hunter and Victor Burgin, or photo-text theories, such as the ones proposed

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<sup>6</sup> See Pedri and Petit (2013, pp 1-8) for a succinct history of the different approaches to word and image studies – from the historical tradition of comparing the 'sister arts' (painting and poetry) as they resemble each other (Horace), compete with each other (their equally well-known rivalry, or Leonardo da Vinci's '*paragone*' between poetry and painting), or 'illuminate' each other (Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocoön*), to structuralist and post-structuralist theorists who challenged these views with a semiotic approach, such as Wendy Steiner, Marianna Torgovnick, Norman Bryson, and W.J.T. Mitchell, and more recent theories proposed by Liliane Louvel and Mieke Bal beyond the word-image opposition.

<sup>7</sup> I am beyond grateful to Michele Cometa for letting me read and quote from his unpublished essay 'What Do Phototexts Want?', since his books on iconotexts and photo-texts are only available in Italian. The essay will appear on the *Photocaptionist* website in 2021.

<sup>8</sup> The book was published in Italy in fall 2020, after the first submission of this thesis, so the fact that Carrara poses a number of research questions that are similar to mine is a coincidence and reflects the fact that they are fundamental questions long overdue in the field of photo-textual studies.

by Barthes in his indispensable essay 'Rhetoric of the Image' (1964), makes its scope limited.

There have been some occasional groundbreaking publications on photo-texts. Jefferson Hunter's seminal *Image and Word: The Interaction of Twentieth-Century Photographs and Texts* (1987) has the merit of establishing that photo-texts are a genre and paves the way for its deserved specific analysis. Being the first account on photo-poetic collaborations, as a specific type of photo-text, so far included in the broader type of photo-literature, Michael Nott's *Photopoetry 1845-2015: A Critical History* sheds new light on the diverse and challenging realm of photo-texts (Nott, 2018). Both Hunter and Nott focus on Anglo-American works.

There have been some other interesting, yet taxonomically confusing, publications. Although there is still a long way to go in terms of more gender- and geographically-balanced photo-text research, Andy Stafford's *Photo-texts: Contemporary French Writing of the Photographic Image* (2010) blissfully takes us outside the Anglo-American context and engages in a stimulating theoretical debate on photo-text dynamics. However, by adding unnecessary and vague nomenclatures such as 'photo-essaysm' and 'photo-stories' without defining them clearly, and mingling them indistinctly with other existing denominations such as 'photo-essay' and 'picture-story', as well as including works in the wrong category, Stafford appears to complexify for its own sake, hence contributing to taxonomical confusion (Stafford, 2010).

Caroline Blinder's *The American Photo-Text: 1930-1960* (2019) is even more surprising.<sup>9</sup> In her introduction Blinder dismisses any attempt at providing 'a cohesive explanation of what the photo-text is exactly', as she believes that 'we can only compare some of the many discourses that the interaction between text and photography has offered', while somewhat misleadingly the book's back cover states that Blinder's volume 'establishes the photo-text as a genre related to and yet distinct from other documentary efforts'. Blinder never discusses photo-text dynamics from a theoretical perspective, which is quite an omission for a publication that allegedly 'establishes the photo-text as a genre'. Also, given that Blinder mainly focuses on North American practices, it is strange that she never mentions Hunter's seminal study (1987), as they often examine the same photo-text books.

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<sup>9</sup> As I consulted Blinder as an e-book there is no pagination.

Lastly, there have been some curatorial projects on the relationship between photography and the written word, such as the 1965 exhibition *The Photo Essay* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, the 1976 exhibition *Photography and Language* at La Mamelle gallery in San Francisco, curated by Lew Thomas – who also curated *Photographs and Words* at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) in 1981 – the 1982 *Phototextes* in Geneva’s Musée d’Art Moderne, the 1991 show *Neither Speech Nor Language* at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu, California, the 1996 exhibition *Photo Text Text Photo* at Museum fur Moderne Kunst Bozen, Frankfurten Kunstverein and Fotomuseum Winterthur, and, more recently, the 2016 *Photolittérature* show at the Jan Michalski Foundation in Switzerland, curated by Jean-Pierre Montier and Marta Caraion, as well as *La cámara de hacer poemas (The Camera To Make Poems)*, curated by Juan Bonilla and Horacio Fernández, on Spanish and Latin American photo-poetry at the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid in 2019.

All these diverse scholars writing about photo-texts from their different perspectives confirm that the photo-text is a hybrid object of study contested among different disciplines that are not always in dialogue with each other, despite their proximity. None of them has so far agreed on a convincing definition, classification and theory on how they behave as ‘bimedial’ objects, which inevitably entails that photo-texts are floating in ontological, taxonomical and theoretical limbo (Lagerwall, 2006, p 119). That is why the thesis is structured in two parts.

To overcome this situation, I shall first build a transversal interdisciplinary literature review that works also as a foundational analysis, and then proceed to the case studies. So, Part I contains this unavoidable preliminary investigation, which is instrumental in constructing an efficient methodology to select and examine the case studies in Part II, which have been chosen from across the history of photography as a result of the partial findings in Part I.

This thesis contributes to the critical history of photo-texts by answering the following research questions:

- What are photo-texts? How do you write the term and how can it be defined?
- What is the taxonomical confusion that haunts photo-texts and what are the reasons behind it?
- What are the types of photo-texts that can be identified and clarified towards a clearer classification?
- What are the types of photo-texts that need further scrutiny?

- What are the theoretical implications of photo-texts in relation to their components: photographs and words?
- What are the main contributions towards photo-text theory?
- How can photo-text theory be expanded?
- What is the most efficient method for a case studies analysis of photo-texts?

My main objectives are to define and ground photo-texts theoretically at the intersection of photography theory and word and image studies; to reduce taxonomical confusion by presenting a clearer taxonomy; to examine, compare and test the key photo-text theories; and to suggest a possible expansion of photo-text critical history through three thematic case studies.

Part I, 'Understanding Photo-Texts', is methodological and dedicated to the foundations of the object of study. It has four chapters: 1. Photo-Texts: Definition and Affiliation; 2. Types of Photo-Texts; 3. Photographs and Words: Components of a Genre; and 4. Towards Photo-Text Theory. Part II, 'Case Studies', aims to test and advance photo-text theory and critical history by focusing on a number of specific case studies, ranging from the nineteenth century to more contemporary examples. The case studies are clustered around three main themes in three chapters: 5. Sophistication in Nineteenth-Century Photo-Texts; 6. Conflicting Dynamics in Two Post-War Photo-Poems; and 7. 'Anchorelay' in Conceptual Photo-Texts on Patriarchal Society.

Chapter one has two sections. The first one, 'What's in a Spelling and in a Name', discusses how to write and how to define photo-texts by scrutinising the available scholarship in the different disciplines that deal with them. The second, 'Taxonomical Matters: Confused Designation of Origin', sets out to sort out the taxonomical confusion around photo-texts, elaborating possible reasons behind it. Andy Stafford is not the only scholar to present a problematic classification and nomenclature of photo-texts. Charles Grivel, the first proponent of the term '*photolittérature*' in France when he edited issue 210 of the *Revue des Sciences Humaines* in 1988, did not provide a clear definition of its meaning and scope and assembled a corpus of essays that mingled photography theory, photography criticism and artists' interviews. Jean-Pierre Montier in his essay 'Photoliterature: Trading Gazes' (2018) introduces three categories of what he calls 'photoliterature' that are



overlapping and not convincing. These are just a few examples that among others will be discussed in chapter one.

Chapter two continues the taxonomical clarification by proposing a classification in which I present and define the six different existing types of photo-text: 1. photo-captions and titles; 2. scientific/knowledge-based photo-texts; 3. photo-essays; 4. photo-literature; 5. photo-poetry; and 6. photo-novels or *roman-photo*. I also introduce a new one: 7. 'conceptual photo-texts'.<sup>10</sup> An organisation of knowledge around different types of photo-texts is instrumental in identifying the ones that need further analysis.

Chapter three discusses the necessary preliminary theoretical steps to examine photo-text intersections – namely the importance of dissecting the components that constitute the genre: photographic images and words. It has two sections. 1. 'Photo-', which considers photo-texts in relation to the wider family of image-texts, arguing for photography's peculiar character compared with other types of non-mechanical images, such as painting and sculpture; and 2. '-Text', which aims at granting text the prominence it deserves within the canon of photography theory, by tracing those occasional writings that highlighted text's importance and by arguing for its fundamental role in allowing us to go beyond the realist/anti-realist conundrum within photography theory.

Chapter four explores the occasional contributions towards photo-text theory and tests the key theory presented by Barthes (1977, pp 37-41) through a selection of artworks. By interspersing examples from twentieth-century photo-text practitioners, artists and thinkers, such as Barthes and Duane Michals, as well as more recent names such as Roni Horn and Jane Tormey, chapter four aims to explore whether and how it is possible to advance our thinking of photo-text relations beyond Barthes' (1977) theory, by far the one that dealt specifically and structurally with the linking of text and photographs. The chapter also delineates the methodology for expanding the critical history of photo-texts through the thematic case studies in Part II, which starts with chapter five.

Chapter five examines the complexities and sophistication of a selection of nineteenth-century photo-texts, such as William Henry Fox Talbot's *Copy of a Stanza from the Ode to Napoleon in Lord Byron's hand*, made prior to April 1840, Hippolyte

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<sup>10</sup> As mentioned above, what I would call Internet-based photo-texts are beyond the purpose of this research.

Bayard's *Le Noyé (Self-portrait as a Drowned Man)* (1840), and Alexander Gardner's *Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War* (1865-66). In doing so it maps out a critical history that questions the idea of a chronological evolution within photo-text relations put forward by European Literature Professor Clive Scott.

To introduce the next two chapters, I need a preamble.

'In every society', writes Roland Barthes in his 1964 essay 'The Rhetoric of the Image', 'various techniques are developed intended to fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to *counter the terror of uncertain signs*' (1977, p 39). That is the function of 'the linguistic message in the (advertising) image, whose polysemy would produce otherwise a *traumatic* suspension of meaning' (de Lauretis, 2008, p 117, my emphasis). 'The specificity of the iconotext', writes Alain Montandon (1990, p 6, my emphasis) is 'to preserve the distance between the visual and the verbal in order to shoot some tensions in a *vibrating fight*, a dynamic that *opposes* and juxtaposes two systems of signs without confusing them'. Such an oppositional view of the function of text in relation to the photographic image inspired the selection of equally conflictual themes for the following case studies: photo-poetry and war in chapter six and conceptual photo-texts and patriarchal society in chapter seven, as they provide fertile soil to explore and expand photo-text theory. Indeed, Italian literary critic Andrea Cortellessa (2020, no pagination) draws the interesting parallel between Mitchell's (2017) idea of the clash, rather than the peaceful meeting, between images and words and the peculiar frequency with which image-text works represent conflict. Rather than constituting the main focus of the analysis, the themes of war and patriarchy, respectively, work more as a 'connective tissue' that allows me to compare and contrast photo-text dynamics in different bodies of work that deal with similar subject matter, through the filter/objective of expanding photo-text theory beyond Barthes' categories of 'anchorage' and 'relay'.

I chose to focus on these two types of photo-texts, photo-poetry and conceptual photo-texts, for two reasons. Firstly, because the acknowledgment of photo-poetry as a separate and specific type of photo-text is relatively recent – Nott's (2018) book was the first study on the subject, and hence there is more need to expand the scholarship about it. Cortellessa (2020, no pagination) also points out that little attention is given to poetry, unlike the other types of photo-essay or photo-literature that have already been analysed by many scholars, such as Hunter (1987), Mitchell (1994), Blinder (2019), Montier (2018), Edwards (2008) and Rabb (1995 and 1998). In chapter one I

write about how to overcome their shortcomings. Secondly, as I propose the introduction of a new type – conceptual photo-texts – it was necessary to elaborate further.

Chapter six compares two photo-poetry books initially conceived during the Second World War and published afterwards. *La Mort et les statues*, published in 1946, combines Pierre Jahan's dramatic photographs of the demolition and meltdown of bronze statues – shot secretly to denounce the measures undertaken by the Vichy government during the Nazi occupation of Paris, 'to meet German demands for the supply of raw materials to support their munitions programme' – with prose poems by Jean Cocteau, which transform 'documentary realism into surreal effect' (Brown, 2013, p 286). Bertolt Brecht's *Kriegsfibel (War Primer)* (1955) is a collection of press photographs that the author cut out of mainstream magazines and newspapers. For each photograph he composed a poem of four lines to unmask the ideological values lurking behind the photographic surface of war images that circulated in the bourgeois press. The horrors of the Second World War conflict lie at the root of these two only apparently similar photo-poetry works that are discussed together in this thesis for the first time, to dissect their different photo-text strategies through Barthes' categories of anchorage and relay. Anchorage and relay are terms that, due to the way in which Barthes described them, come with a connotational charge, as anchorage is associated with the negative idea of closure and repression, while relay appears more as a liberating concept (Barthes, 1977, pp 37-41). Chapter six aims to show how the allegedly positive connotation of the word relay, in contrast to the presumed negative connotation of anchorage, does not always hold. Through the comparative analysis of the photo-text dynamics of these two photo-poetry works on the Second World War, I discuss the more dangerous hidden potential of relay, while defusing anchorage's supposed 'dictatorial' connotation.

Chapter seven explores how anchorage and relay can co-exist in the same photo-text through a selection of works from Barbara Kruger's appropriated phototexts of the 1980s, and from Victor Burgin's phototext series *US77*, that address the theme of patriarchy.<sup>11</sup> Barthes himself envisages this possibility, when he writes that 'obviously, the two functions of the linguistic message [anchorage and relay] can co-

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<sup>11</sup> As I shall discuss in the first chapter, I distinguish the spelling of 'photo-texts' with a hyphen from 'phototexts' without a hyphen, as the latter are works in which words invade the photographic surface, while the former are works that present images and words typographically separated.

exist in the one iconic whole' (1977, p 41). And he goes one step further by adding the adversative sentence 'but the dominance of the one or the other is of consequence for the general economy of a work' (1977, p 41). However, as I shall illustrate, in both Kruger and Burgin anchorage and relay's co-presence is so blended, with the same text at times exerting both functions simultaneously, that it is difficult to establish a 'dominance'. The selected phototexts by Burgin and Kruger show how Barthes' categories can be 'consciously' and endlessly problematised, hence questioning their very function (Hutcheon, 2002, p 121).

In the last chapter, after discussing the research methodology, I draw together the findings of the different chapters for a conclusion of the thesis, by reviewing how it sets out to respond to the research questions and presenting the main contributions to knowledge.

**Part I Understanding Photo-Texts**

*L'iconosphère, ce monde calme et silencieux de l'image, entreposée dans les musées, galeries et cabinets de collectionneurs, est toujours menacée d'asphyxie. Il lui faut impérativement l'apport pétillant d'un branchement sur la logosphère. C'est ainsi qu'elle parvient à essaimer les esprits, comme l'arbre prisonnier de ses racines profite du vent murmurant pour répandre son pollen et ses grains volantes sur tout la plaine.*

Michel Tournier, *Le Tabor et le Sinai*, 1988<sup>12</sup>

## **Chapter 1 Photo-Texts: Definition and Affiliation**

Combining photographic images and words, photo-texts are contested objects of study between the different disciplines of word and image studies, comparative literature and photography theory, which have all failed to agree on a definition in their rare attempts to find one, as I shall discuss in this chapter. The chapter is structured in two sections: the first aims to clarify the name, spelling and definition of photo-texts, and the second sets out to discuss and sort out the taxonomical confusion that haunts photo-texts.

I shall present my definition here, and in 1.1 take the reader through the steps that led me to develop this definition, which combines my own ideas with the most convincing elements of other scholars' definitions. Photo-texts are 'bimedial iconotexts', namely hybrid compound works in which both photographic images and words co-exist and constitute the 'body of work' within the pages of the book or the gallery wall (Lagerwall, 2006, p 119). They must 'simultaneously be read and viewed' together, to form new meanings, while preserving equal and separate ontological dignity – and at times distance – to 'shoot some tensions' or trigger dynamics that juxtapose the two systems of signs without confusing them (Hunter, 1987, p 2, and Montandon, 1990, p 6). In photo-texts, photographs and words are partners in crime that create a 'dialogue to which neither of the two media can, even for a moment, escape' (Cometa, 2018, p 2). This dialogue or 'interpenetration of images and words' enhances each medium's narrative potential and expands the fictionality – intended here as the imaginary latent

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<sup>12</sup> 'The iconosphere, that silent and calm world of the image, stored in museums galleries and private collections, is continuously threatened by asphyxia. It absolutely needs the sparkling contribution of a connection with the logosphere. That's how she manages to boost the morale, like the tree that, imprisoned in its roots enjoys the whispering wind to spread its pollen and its flying seeds on the whole marshland' (Tournier, 1988, p 16, my translation).

quotient – of the work as a whole, since in the constant back and forth and tension, between looking at the images and reading the words, a third unattainable object or ‘third something’ develops only in the viewer’s and reader’s mind, ‘the one who ultimately always “makes sense” of’ photo-texts (Bryson, 1988, p 185, Eisenstein, 2004, p 12, and Wagner, 1995, p 12). Before the ‘third something’ can develop in the mind of the reader/viewer, images and texts have to be incorporated or devoured by the ‘mediating organ of the eye’, which ‘swallows everything, obliterating the difference between the written and the visual’ (Richon, 1991, pp 32-33).

After providing a definition with the aim of limiting what should and should not be considered a photo-text, it is important to acknowledge that it is a diverse object. There are different types of photo-texts, each of them with their own idiosyncrasies. A non-fictional journalistic piece, accompanied by a series of photographs commissioned or produced specifically to document a topic, known as the photo-essay – and that can exist either as a feature within a magazine, such as Eugene Smith’s ‘Country Doctor’ published in *Life* magazine, as shown in Figure 15 (Smith, 1948), or as a book, such as *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937), by Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell – is different from a work that combines photographs by different authors with a novel, namely fiction writing, such as André Breton’s *Nadja*, as shown in Figure 19 (Breton, 1928). The difference is not ontological, as all photo-texts are made of the same components (photographs and words), but stylistic.

The diversity of photo-texts contributes to – and partly explains – the fact that they are contested objects of study between different disciplines. In the process of developing my definition of the photo-text, I discovered the lack of a systematic study dedicated to exploring the problematics of the photo-text as a genre. Most of the scholarship published on the topic takes the genre for granted and moves immediately to the analysis of case studies. This has inevitably produced taxonomical confusion around the photo-text, with works included under the wrong type or category, as I shall discuss in 1.2. Let’s consider the term ‘photo-text’.

### **1.1 What’s in a Spelling and in a Name**

I would like to start with Hunter’s important point about the relationship between photography and writing: ‘the complementariness of the two arts, has often been

taken for granted and often produced collaborations, and the no less interesting antipathy between them' (1987, p 1).

Allow me a digression on this 'interesting antipathy' between photographs and texts. It makes me think that photo-texts can be described as the ultimate nightmare for all the iconophobic writers and 'textophobic' photographers out there (Chiocchetti, 2019). Let's consider two examples within the book form: the 24-volume New York edition of Henry James' fiction (1907-09), published by Charles Scribner's Sons, with a photogravure frontispiece for each volume by Alvin Langdon Coburn; and the first edition of Robert Frank's photobook *Les Américains*, published by Robert Delpire in 1958. James' fear that a too-detailed image would overwhelm the retinas of the reader, killing their imagination and disturbing his own literary picture, led him to give the then-young Coburn strict instructions (Chiocchetti, 2014). Human figures were forbidden.

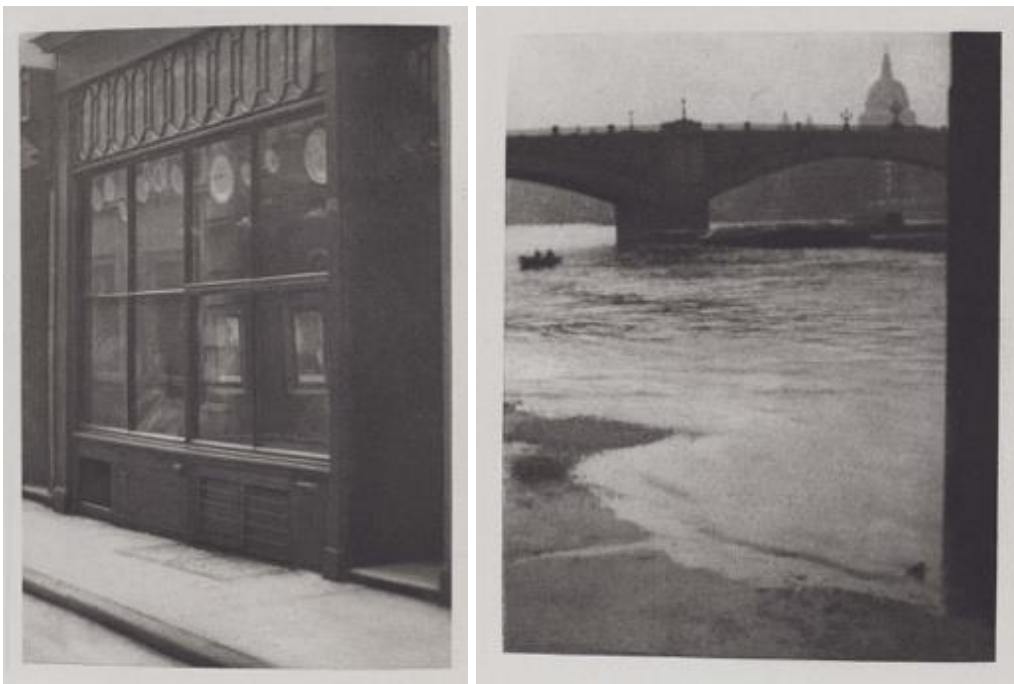


Fig 2 Left: Alvin Langdon Coburn, *The Curiosity Shop*. Photogravure to illustrate vol. XXIII, *The Golden Bowl*, of *The Novels and Tales of Henry James*, 10.1 x 8.8 cm, 1922, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Right: Alvin Langdon Coburn, *The Dome of Saint Paul's*. Photogravure to illustrate vol. V, *The Princess Casamassima*, of *The Novels and Tales of Henry James*, 10.1 x 8.8 cm, 1922, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

James wanted the pictures to be 'not competitive and obvious', but ambiguous and general, 'to shroud their documentary quality', in the words of Ralph F. Bogardus (1984, p 182). James desired them to work well as 'mere optical symbols or echoes, expressions of no particular thing in the text', serving as



‘empty’ images that ‘the reader must fill out through their own imaginative and interpretive activity’, Bogardus notes (1984, p 182).

At the other end of the spectrum, as Roger Hargreaves recounts in his contribution to my platform Photocaptionist, the true first edition of Frank’s *The Americans* was swarming with text, in French, edited by poet Alain Bosquet and showing ‘a decidedly European take on contemporary America’ (2015, no pagination).

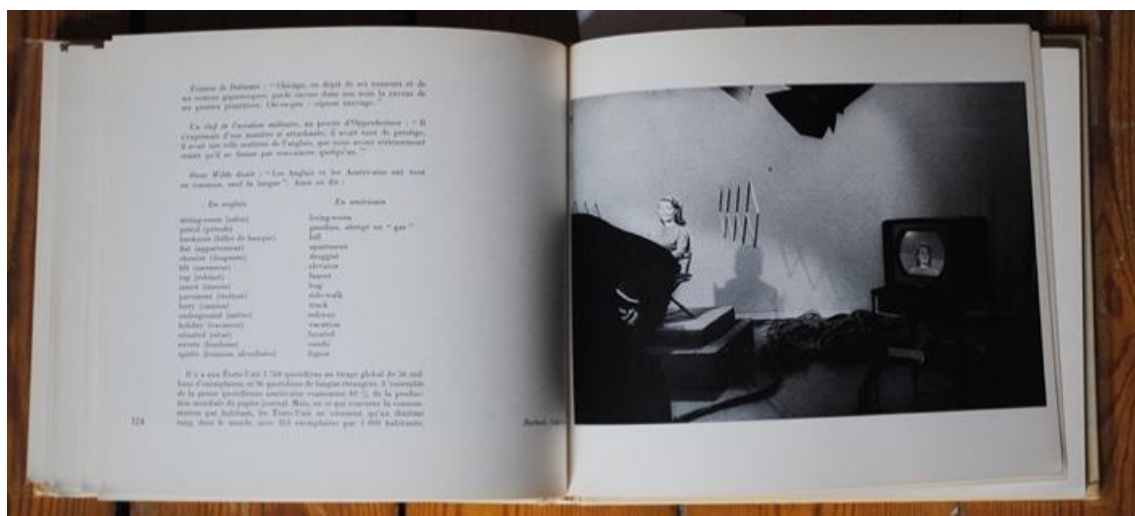
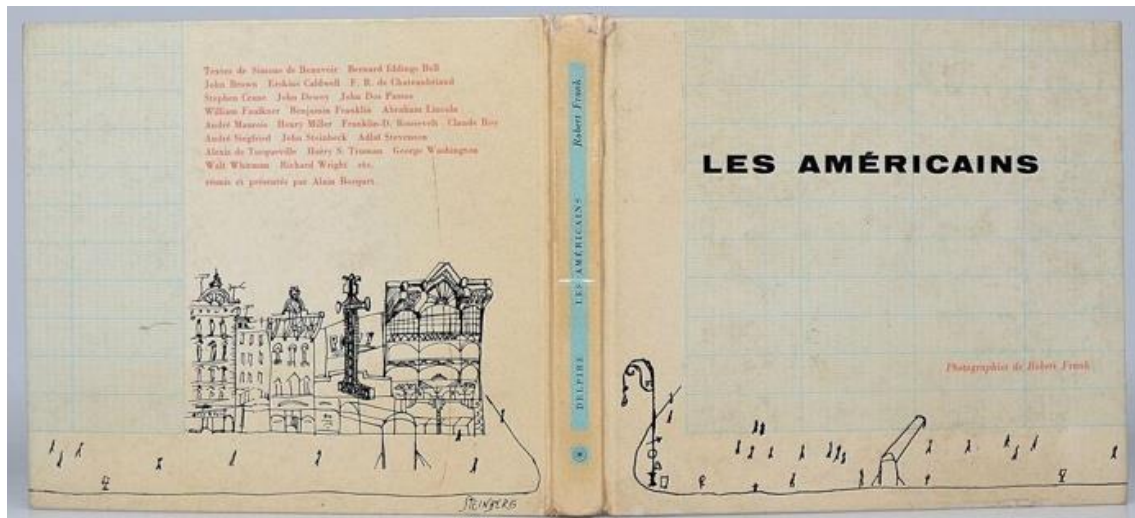


Fig 3 Robert Frank, *Les Américains*. Book, 21 x 19 cm, 1958, Paris: Delpire, courtesy Roger Hargreaves  
 Hargreaves describes the heavily textual first edition as ‘a rare example of a photobook buried inside another book’ and as ‘a cautionary tale of the potential failure of text to work with images’ (2015, no pagination). Hargreaves praises the replacement of the texts, for him clearly an awkward presence, with a dedicated

Jack Kerouac essay as a happy solution when *The Americans* was printed stateside a year later.

Another sign of ‘textophobia’ was identified by Patrizia Di Bello and Shamoan Zamir in their seminal book *The Photobook: From Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond* (2012).<sup>13</sup> In particular, they shed light on the curious contradiction between Martin Parr and Gerry Badger’s (2004, p 6) definition of the photobook as ‘a book – with or without text – where the work’s primary message is carried by photographs’, presented in their acclaimed trilogy *The Photobook: A History*, and their inclusion, nonetheless, of ‘too many examples’ of books where text plays a fundamental role, such as Walker Evans and James Agee’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor’s *An American Exodus* (1939), and Bertolt Brecht’s *Kriegsfiibel (War Primer)* (1955) (Di Bello and Zamir, 2012, p 4). ‘Photography and text always interact, even if the text is mostly elsewhere,’ write Di Bello and Zamir, ‘They work within a dialectical relationship’ (2012, p 4).

As pointed out by Lesley A. Martin in her essay for the *Photobook Phenomenon* exhibition catalogue, ‘Invitation to a Taxonomy of the Contemporary Photobook’, ‘the seeds are currently being sown for the “genre-fication” of the photobook’ (2017, no pagination). Martin elaborates on a number of taxonomical pathways or tracks for the photobook, based on themes such as the archive, to which I proposed adding the ‘photo-text book’ as a specific track that offers the opportunity to expand the audience of the photobook beyond its own bubble, reflecting the current trends in the photography world such as the Photo-Text Book award within Les Rencontres d’Arles introduced in 2015 (Chiocchetti, 2019, p 9). After all, already in the 1940s, the great Elizabeth McCausland wrote in what is believed to be one of the first critical essays on the photobook: ‘a book with words and photographs complementing each can be extremely potent if well planned and executed’ (1942, p 2783). This track is by no means new. Nor it is limited to the book form. On the contrary, it is deeply rooted in the origins of photography, if we consider William Henry Fox Talbot’s *The Pencil of Nature* (1844-46), as I shall illustrate in chapter five, dedicated to the sophistication of nineteenth-century photo-texts. Photo-texts are also recurrent throughout the history of photography, inevitably following cycles of

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<sup>13</sup> For the term ‘photobook’ see Company, 2014.

trends. The experimental writer and photographer Wright Morris, believed to be the first to use the term 'photo-text', writes in a lecture he gave in 1978: 'my commitment to the promise of photo-text burned with a gemlike flame for the decade between 1940 and 1950, when it became apparent that the public did not share my enthusiasm' (1989, p 30).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Wright Morris is a key figure who experimented with the genre of the photo-text, at times hybridising the photo-essay with photo-literature. He is considered to be the first to use the term 'photo-text', in the preface to the second edition of his book *The Inhabitants* (1972) (Trachtenberg, 1996 and Carrara, 2020, p 8 and 53). Hunter (1987) dedicates a whole section in his chapter 'Collaborations' to Wright Morris, analysing his four photo-texts: *The Inhabitants* (1946), *The Home Place* (1948), 'recognizably' an illustrated 'novel', a combination of 'fictional words and apparently nonfictional photographs', *God's Country and My People* (1968), for Hunter his most successful in terms of making images and words 'co-operate', and lastly *Love Affair: A Venetian Journey* (1972), 'an unexceptional memoir and exercise in sensitivity' (Hunter, 1987, pp 57-63). See also Morris, 1982 and 1989.

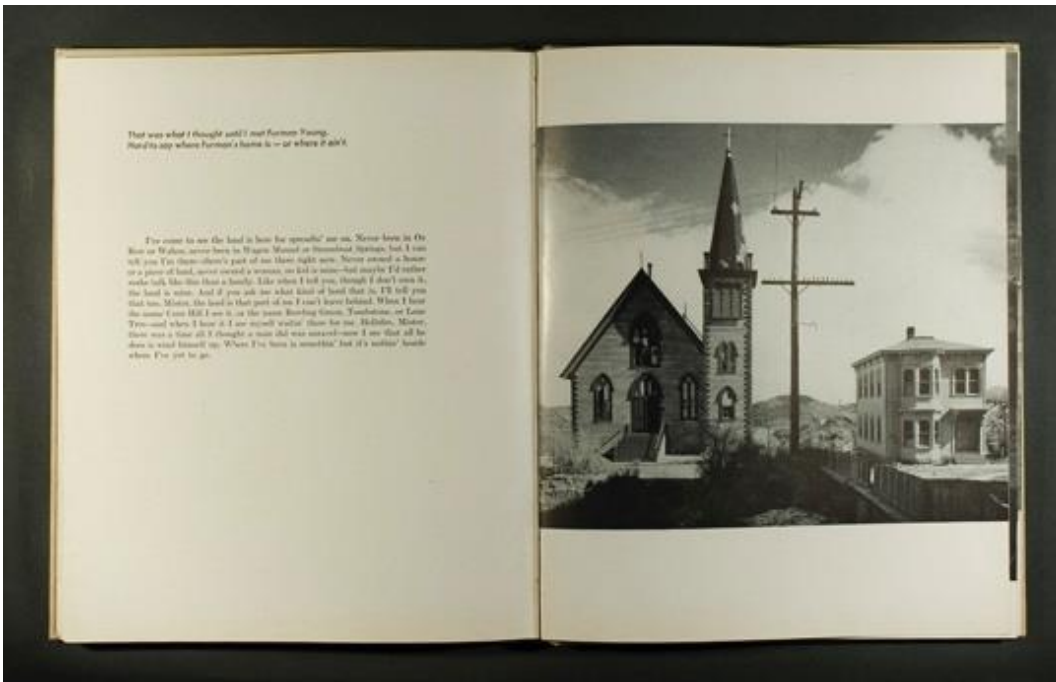
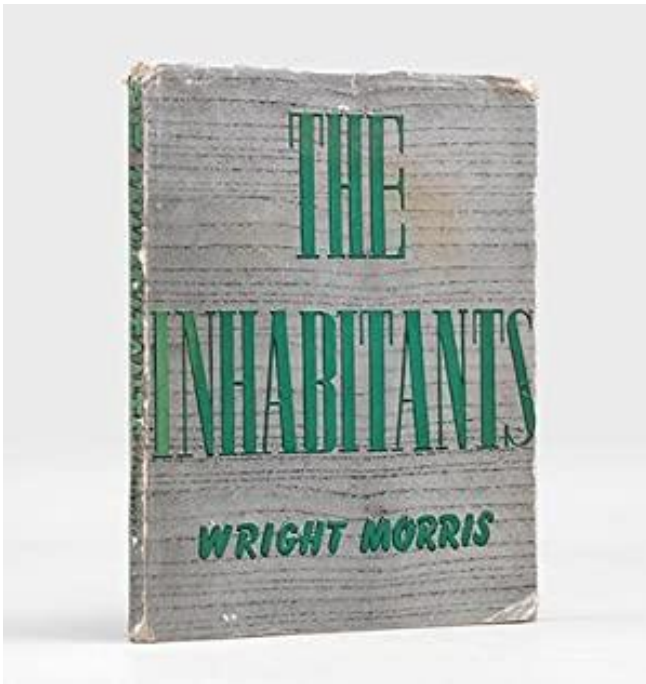


Fig 4 Wright Morris, *The Inhabitants*. Book, 11 1/4 x 9 1/4 inches, 1946, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, my photograph

So, photo-texts are a distinct and diverse genre that deserves proper scrutiny, precisely to transform the above phobias into philias.

Jefferson Hunter was the first to write about photo-texts as a specific genre, in his seminal book *Image and Word: The Interaction of Twentieth-Century Photographs and Texts* (1987, pp 1-2). I include here the whole passage as it is quite relevant for my discussion towards a definition of photo-texts.

*The most obvious thing about words and pictures is that they routinely appear together, and even the simplest joint appearances – words supplying credit lines or captions, pictures supplying illustrations – suggest how each art works, how the shown is never exactly the same as the spoken. A caption may provide mere information, or a context altogether altering the significance of the photograph it accompanies, or an untruth for the photograph to mock. In practice, the most ambitious writers and photographers have not been content with captions and illustrations but have put their works together in “photo texts” – composite publications evoking a landscape or recording a history, celebrating a community or mourning a loss. The words and photographs of photo texts contribute equally to their meaning; that is how the genre is defined. They must simultaneously be read and viewed (Hunter, 1987, pp 1-2, my emphasis).*

It appears quite clearly to Hunter that ‘photo texts’ – written without a hyphen, yet not as one word – are a genre.<sup>15</sup> His definition, based on the equal contribution of words and photographs to a work’s meaning, goes in parallel with what only apparently seems a minor issue: how do we write ‘photo texts’? As two separate words? With or without a hyphen? Or as one word?

W.J.T. Mitchell, considered among the main experts on image-text studies, inevitably comes to mind, when he writes in his introduction to the 2012 collection of essays *The Future of Text and Image: Collected Essays on Literary and Visual Conjunctions*:

*What is the “imagetext”? We might begin not by asking what it means, but how can it be written down. In a footnote to Picture Theory (1994) I took a stab at a notational answer:*

*The term “imagetext” designates composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text. “Image-text,” with a hyphen, designates relations of the visual and verbal (2012, p 1).*

Mitchell’s spelling distinction does not appear convincing when it comes to photo-texts. Let me elaborate why.

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<sup>15</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term ‘genre’ as ‘a particular style or category of works of art; especially a type of literary work characterized by a particular form, style, or purpose’ (OED, 2020). David Bate wrote about the challenges of applying genre studies to photography in his book *Photography: The Key Concepts* (2009 and 2016).

Mitchell discusses spatial distancing of photographs and texts in what he describes as the ‘aggressively modernist experimental deviation’ of James Agee and Walker Evans’ 1939 photo-essay *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, writing that words are ‘physically and symbolically separated’ from the images (1994, p 94). However, if we followed his spelling solution for ‘imagetext’, and we used the term ‘phototext’ as one word indistinctly for all typographical solutions of photo-texts, we would not give enough prominence to an important aspect within photo-texts: the location of the text in relation to the image. As pointed out by Stafford, ‘text and image are in a typographical, graphic, relationship, with all the dialectical implications of an inter-art phenomenon that this entails’ (2010, p 184).

The text could constitute the image, as shown in *Blank*, Figure 29 (Kosuth, 1967) or *Copy of a stanza from the ‘Ode to Napoleon’ in Lord Byron’s hand*, Figure 60 (Talbot, before 1840). Text could also be inside the image, as in the case of artists such as Barbara Kruger and Victor Burgin that I shall discuss in chapter six. Alternatively, words could be in very close proximity to the images, at times presented on the same surface but outside the image, like the handwriting in Duane Michals’ photo-texts shown in Figures 47 and 48 (Michals, 1977 and 1976); or appear elsewhere, such as in the preceding or following page if we are thinking about the book form, like Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau’s *La Mort et les Statues* (1946) as shown in Figure 68 (Jahan and Cocteau, 2008); or in a different frame, such as Martha Rosler’s installation of her project *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, as shown in Figure 5 (Rosler, 1974-75).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Handwriting makes the text ‘an artisanal production as opposed to the industrial multiplication of discourses printed on a stereotype plate,’ explains Alain Montandon. ‘It inscribes the singular gesture of the subject in his individual trace, unique, inalienable, image of body and spirit of its creator, given to see, to read in its singular aspect upon completing its deconceptualisation’ (Montandon, 1990, pp 7-8, my translation).



Fig 5 Martha Rosler, *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*. Installation view, 2012 [1974-75], Adam Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand, courtesy Eyecontact

As a result, I argue that the term ‘phototext’ as one word can – but not necessarily must – be employed only in those cases in which the text is either *the* image or located inside the image, invading its surface. On the contrary, ‘photo-text’, with a hyphen, appears more accurate to designate those works in which the text does not invade the photographic surface. And when the term ‘photo-text’ is used to designate ‘relations of the visual and verbal’, it is always followed precisely by the word ‘relations’ or ‘dynamics’ or ‘intersections’ anyway, so that there should not be any confusion. The term ‘photo-texts’, plural and hyphenated, should be employed to refer to the genre in general, as in the majority of cases images and words do not occupy the same surface.<sup>17</sup> The hyphen is important because as a punctuation mark it is employed both to join words and to separate syllables of a single word, which metaphorically maintains a critical distance between the two separate components or identities of ‘photo’ and ‘text’, so that they are neither completely collapsed together, nor (without the hyphen, as Hunter writes it) seen as entirely separate (OED, 2020).

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<sup>17</sup> The catalogue *Photo Text Text Photo: The Synthesis of Photography and Text in Contemporary Art* of the eponymous exhibition in 1996 at MUSEION in Bolzano, Italy, and Frankfurter Kunstverein, published by Edition Stemmler, is the best place to find these differences in terms of text’s location.

Ari Blatt explains that Marsha Bryant also prefers the term 'photo-text' with a hyphen, 'joining the two constituents together to avoid the "hidden bias" inherent in the term "text", itself' (2009b, p 54). Bryant argues that 'the double sense of text as written language and the site of interpretation makes Hunter's term [without a hyphen] a slippery one' (1996, p 11). However, Blatt also ignores the location of the text in relation to the photographic image and proposes the one word spelling of the term 'phototext', considering the photographic specificity of Mitchell's notion of 'imagetext', to highlight his acceptance, and even embrace, of that inherent 'slipperiness', and to refer, more generally, to 'those cultural artefacts (explicitly hybrid) that enable us to explore the reciprocity of the two media under consideration from within one, singular work' (2009a, p 54).

I disagree, because the hyphen is also important in relation to the third component of photo-texts: the 'third something' that the association of photograph and text produces in the mind of the reader/viewer while they move back and forth from looking at the image and reading the words. Di Bello and Zamir, in their brilliant introduction to *The Photobook: From Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond* (2012), considered Sergei Eisenstein's notion of the 'third something' in relation to the photobook:

*As Sergei Eisenstein noted in his seminal 1939 essay on the principle of montage in film, literature and art, the juxtaposition of two separate elements 'resembles a creation – rather than a sum of its part – from the circumstance that in every such juxtaposition the result is qualitatively distinguishable from each component element reviewed separately'. Juxtaposition 'engenders a "third something" which is 'not fixed or ready-made, but arises – is born' because it demands that 'the emotions and mind of the spectator' or reader not remain passive but become actively engaged in the creative process (Di Bello and Zamir, 2012, p 2).*

Burgin also writes about the 'phenomenon of the "third effect": two images side by side tend to generate meanings not produced by either image on its own' (2018, p 21). Not only does the concept of the 'third something' work perfectly in discussing the photo-text juxtapositions, but also the above passage by Di Bello and Zamir (2012, p 2) confirms the typographic importance of the hyphen as a reminder of the creative generation of the 'third something' in the mind of the reader/viewer, which is triggered by juxtaposing photographs and words. Distinguishing the spelling 'phototexts', where 'words actually infiltrate the



image's frame', from photo-texts, where words are graphically separate from the image, is useful from a theoretical point of view, as it acknowledges and signals the text's location in relation to the image, which inevitably impacts on photo-text dynamics as I shall discuss in relation to Victor Burgin and Barbara Kruger's work in chapter six (Blatt, 2009a, p 46).<sup>18</sup> However, practically speaking, in terms of 'receivership', to borrow from Lawrence Weiner's *Statement of Intent* (1969), before the third something can take shape in the reader/viewer's mind, images and texts have to go through the 'mediating organ of the eye', which 'swallows everything, obliterating the difference between the written and the visual', and, I would like to add, neglecting the presence or absence of a hyphen (Richon, 1991, pp 32-33). That is why I wrote that the hyphen is useful and important mainly from a theoretical point of view. Now that I have clarified my choice of how to spell photo-texts, I shall propose a definition of what they are, by first examining how they have been defined by other scholars and then presenting my viewpoint.

The founding essay on photo-text relations is believed to be German scholar and image maker Michael Nerlich's paper 'Qu'est-ce un iconotexte? Réflexions sur le rapport texte-image photographique dans *La Femme se découvre* d'Evelyne Sinnassamy' (1990, pp 255-302). However, instead of using the term photo-text he introduces the concept of 'iconotexts', which employs the word 'icon' that refers to an image, figure or representation in general rather than to the specificities of photographic images.<sup>19</sup> This has meant that the term 'iconotext' has later been recycled and modified by scholars such as Liliane Louvel (1998) to indicate image-text works, including 'also artworks in which one medium is only implied' (Lagerwall, 2006, pp 119-120). This recycling of the term 'iconotext' is also mentioned by Michele Cometa, who refers to the works of Peter Wagner, Thomas von Steinaecker and Gottfried Willelms, 'all stressing the

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<sup>18</sup> As I shall discuss in chapter two when presenting my taxonomy of photo-texts, it was Joseph Kosuth's label for his 1967 artwork *Blank*, which describes the materiality of the artwork as 'phototext', all one word, as you would read 'oil on canvas' for a painting, to inspire me to use 'phototext' to identify those photo-texts where images and words are presented on the same surface, like in Victor Burgin's and Barbara Kruger's socio-political phototexts from the 1970s and 1980s that constitute the last case study in chapter seven.

<sup>19</sup> Nerlich's paper 'What is an iconotext? Reflections on the text-image relations in *The Woman Uncovers Herself* by Evelyne Sinnassamy' was presented at the University Blaise Pascal's 1988 symposium dedicated to the interactive relations between text and image within 'iconotexts' and later published by Alain Montandon in the 1990 volume *Iconotextes* (Nerlich, 1990, pp 255-302). It has not been translated into English yet, so all the translations are my own.

“irreducibility of a difference”, which the phototext stages, creating a tension between the two media, or a “dialogue” to which neither of the two media can, even for a moment, escape’ (Cometa, 2018, p 2, and Wagner, 1995, p 12).<sup>20</sup> I shall return to why I disagree with this inclusion in relation to photo-texts later in this chapter.

*The Woman Uncovers* is a photo-poetic collaboration structured like a calendar, where Nerlich’s nudes of his partner Sinnassamy are paired with her short poems. The collaboration was born in reaction to the fact that Nerlich was refused to attend the opening at Berlin feminist gallery *Andere Zeichen* of Kate Millett’s female nudes, because he was a man (Nerlich, 1990, p 275). The poems were composed before the images at times, and at others after, with the pairings crafted at a later stage, so that each element co-existed in a sort of ‘simultaneous or parallel interdependence’ (Nerlich, 1990, p 278). The idea was to ‘articulate female sexuality visually and textually in all its magnitude throughout the months with no mention whatsoever to maternity’ and with the male presence only appearing in a ‘non-dominant and non-phallic’ manner (Nerlich, 1990, p 275). The work has only been published in fragments and was not very well received (Nerlich, 1990, p 255).

Regardless of the quality of their photo-poems, Nerlich’s paper contains some important reflections on the definition of the term ‘iconotext’, which are useful for the definition of ‘photo-texts’. Drawing from his scientific reflection and artistic practice he defines the ‘iconotext’ as an ‘indissoluble unity of text(s) and image(s) in which *neither the text nor the image exerts an illustrative function* and that normally, but not necessarily, has a book form’ (Nerlich, 1990, p 268, my emphasis).

No matter how fascinating it sounds to go beyond the illustrative function, and, as pointed out by Stafford, via Robert Pujade, ‘the suspicion of description’ could be an interesting ‘approach to photo-textual studies’, in practice it appears a difficult criterion to apply, especially if we consider a few exceptions, in which ‘illustration’ or ‘description’ are intentional photo-literary devices to explore more complex dynamics (Stafford, 2010, p 52). I am thinking about Annie Ernaux’s

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<sup>20</sup> Alongside the already mentioned texts, Cometa also refers to Gottfried Willelms (1988) and to Thomas von Steinaecker (2017), which unfortunately are not available in English.

work, particularly her 2005 collaboration with Marc Marie, *L'usage de la photo*, a visual juxtaposition of photographic images and commentaries about them which deal with an important year in her life, when 'she had to undergo treatment for breast cancer and simultaneously experienced her passionate love for young writer and journalist Marc Marie' (Sykora, 2019, p 9).



Fig 6 Annie Ernaux and Marc Marie, *L'usage de la photo*. Book, 14 x 20.5 cm, 2005, Paris: Gallimard

Photographs and written interpretations of them 'directly collide with one another', intentionally, and behind her only apparently illustrative iconotextual approach lurks a more sophisticated photo-literary '*dispositif*' of '*entre deux*', which 'vouches for the past existence of what is depicted, but cements the temporal distance to it at the same time', oscillating between 'the author's I' and 'not-I' (Sykora, 2019, p 14).

Stafford also provides a definition of the photo-text which incorporates this rule, namely that 'the photograph must not be a simple illustration of text, and the text not a simple description of the image(s)', only to admit that it was more a procedural rule for him to compile his book, because it does not solve 'the question of the relation(s) between written text and photographic image' (2010, p 41). On the theoretical challenges of Nerlich's definition of iconotexts, Alain Montandon, the editor of the *Iconotexts* conference's proceedings, also mentioned the complexity of the 'illustrative function' between text and image, and in his introduction nuanced the definition, expanding it: 'the specificity of the

iconotext is to preserve the distance between the visual and the verbal in order to shoot some tensions in a vibrating fight, a dynamic that opposes and juxtaposes two systems of signs without confusing them' (1990, p 6).

Although, as mentioned in the introduction, such an oppositional view of the text-image relationship inspired my selection of equally conflictual themes for some of the case studies, in relation to Montandon's combative metaphor of iconotext's 'vibrating fight', I prefer to describe photo-texts in less conflictual terms. Or, in other words, I believe that as far as photo-texts are concerned even conflict is a form of collaboration. In them images and words are partners in crime that do not resolve one in the other too quickly, but rather enhance each other's ambiguity and expand the latent imaginary potential of the whole work – since through what I described, via Eisenstein and Di Bello, as the 'third something' they create a subtle, sophisticated and open narrative for the reader and viewer not only to savour, but also to imagine. The 'third something' could be understood as a 'bridge' to cover the space between 'the silence of the image and the blindness of language' (Taylor and Muellner, 2016, pp 40-45). Of course, this is an idealistic definition of photo-texts, as not all of them behave in this manner. And particularly, not all of them produce a successful or interesting result in terms of the reader/viewer's reception.

So, in my view, photo-texts are works of collaboration between photographic images and writing that are presented together on the page or the gallery wall for the reader and viewer to contemplate. They are 'bimedial iconotexts', since the two media have to be simultaneously exploited to show the 'interpenetration of words and images in a concrete sense' (Lagerwall, 2006, pp 119-120). They come together to form new meanings, yet maintaining equal and separate ontological dignity or prominence, with hierarchy – namely supremacy of text over image or vice versa – only allowed to happen at the level of content and quality, not quantity.

However, it is anything but straightforward to establish how to determine the 'equal ontological dignity' between images and words, beside a superficial first look at quantity, text's location or layout. After acknowledging that a history of photo-texts where words and images share equal importance is not easy to trace, as their authors 'rarely mention antecedents', preferring to present them as a 'brand-new phenomenon' under the vague umbrella term of 'collaborations',

Hunter argues that they originated from the 'tendency to give mere captions an expanded role, thereby turning pictorial works into photo-textual ones' (1987, p 36). Cases in which, no matter if both images and words constitute the body of work, their dynamics might not be 'democratic' but rather hierarchical or ancillary are frequent, including the 'illustrative function' discussed earlier. Would they still be considered photo-texts? Yes, but perhaps not so 'successful' or 'exciting' in terms of word and image dynamics. Intriguingly, Hunter mentions as the aim of his book to 'identify representative techniques of layout and captioning', and 'representative reasons for success or failure' (1987, p 2). But how to define a successful photo-text work? Perhaps 'success' is not necessarily among the best criteria to discuss photo-texts. I agree with Peter Wagner's emphasis on the reader/viewer (1995, p 171), via Umberto Eco's idea, presented in his *The Open Work* (1989), that it is 'a participating reader who actively formulates the meaning of the work', by 'completing it'. The reader Wagner refers to is not the 'transhistorical' idealised and implied reader proposed by Wolfgang Iser (1974), but an observer with an interdisciplinary background who, by 're-activating the *dejà vu* and *dejà lu* and *dejà vecu*' is 'the one who ultimately makes sense of a work of art' (1995, p 171). To this I would like to add that if, with unimedial works of art, this active formulation of meaning by the reader is spatially freer, with bimedral iconotexts, such as photo-texts, this formulation of meaning, this completing operation of the work, is localisable in the third something – which is quintessentially a creation of the receivership.

In this section, after suggesting a logic behind the spelling of photo-texts, I proposed my definition, which partly combines the most convincing elements of other theorists' definitions. The next section looks at the effects of the absence of an agreed definition of the genre of photo-texts – namely the taxonomical chaos that haunts photo-texts.

## **1.2 Taxonomical Matters: Confused Designation of Origin**

There has been a degree of confusion when it comes to tracing a taxonomical map of photo-texts, not only with scholars including within the genre works that clearly belong elsewhere, but also with mixing different types of photo-texts up. Let us look at a number of examples.

Unlike most scholars that have written on 'iconotexts' and photo-texts, such as Michele Cometa (2017), Jean-Pierre Montier (2018), Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble (2003), Liliane Louvel (2002) and Peter Wagner (1996), I do not consider photo-texts as those unimedial iconotexts in which one of the two elements is completely missing, such as a novel or non-fiction text about a photograph, or photography in general, or where a photographer is among the characters, but there are no images. The detailed description of a work of visual art in a literary text, whose image is not reproduced but can only be imagined from the descriptive words, is known as ekphrasis. It has become a literary device, and a separate genre, or trope, as pointed out by Ruth Webb in her essay 'Ekphrasis Ancient and Modern: The Invention of a Genre' (1999, pp 7-18). Hence, if in a written work a photograph is conveyed by the verbal medium alone, I do not consider the work a photo-text. Equally, a book that only contains photographs and no texts, apart from minimal descriptive captions for the images and an introductory or critical text about the photoworks, namely a text of photo-criticism, belongs to the genre of the photobook rather than the photo-text.

An example of a book of photo-criticism that has a somewhat misleading title is *Photo Texts* by Peter Turner and Gerry Badger (1988). Just by reading the title *Photo Texts* and seeing that there are two authors, I thought I was going to open a book about a collaborative work of photographs and texts, with either Turner as photographer and Badger as writer or the other way around – something along the lines of the Berger/Mohr collaborations (1995, 2010 and 2015). To my disappointment I realised it was in fact a collection of essays on photography, such as reviews of photography exhibitions and books, as well as essays for exhibition catalogues, and it features only one photograph, by Brian Griffin. It is, namely, a book of photo-criticism. Of course this is not a crime against humanity, it is simply that it adds to the confusing cloud around photo-texts.

Hunter's volume *Image and Word* (1987) is one of the most compelling books about photo-text studies. There are two chapters, however, that drift from the concept of photo-texts defined in this thesis as 'bimedial iconotexts', in which the co-presence of images and words is essential – as otherwise the 'third something' effect is completely lost. The first chapter is 'Varieties of Portraiture' (pp 115-160), and Hunter's explanation (via photographer Arnold Newman) that 'the portrait is a form of biography' appears to me a too loose justification for its inclusion in the

genre of photo-texts. The second chapter is 'Photographs Line by Line' (pp 161-196), dedicated to poems about photography that do not include any images. These are works that do not belong to the realm of photo-texts but rather ekphrasis.<sup>21</sup> This is a crucial point, because if we don't impose the co-presence of visual and verbal elements as a *condicio sine qua non* to define photo-texts, we lose one of the indispensable components of photo-texts: the 'third something' that is generated during the constant back and forth from looking at the images and reading the words, and without which the whole tripartite scaffolding of the photo-text object collapses.

Within the different types of photo-texts that I shall discuss in the next chapter, photo-literature is the one that presents a significant degree of taxonomical confusion. Instead of being defined in a straightforward way as the combination of fiction (novels and short stories) and photographs, existing mainly, yet not exclusively, in the book form – which is the definition adopted in this thesis – scholars have used the term 'photo-literature' to signify other things. This is due to two main reasons. Firstly, the word 'literature' is often intended as a synonym for 'scholarship', meaning a body of written texts on a particular subject – hence the confusion in considering any kind of writing about, on and with photography a form of photo-literature. Secondly, 'photo-literature' has been used as a term to indicate a whole academic field of research, within comparative literature but also within national literature departments, that studies the relationship between photography and literature, such as the impact of photography in fiction writing, as well as the photographic depiction of literary works and authors, regardless of the actual co-presence of both images and words.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, traditional scholarship on the relationship between photography and literature reflects an anthologising approach, with mostly a geographical and chronological methodology, that often reduces interdisciplinarity to a mere cataloguing within rigid reciprocal categories, namely 'photography in literature' and 'literature in

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<sup>21</sup> Ekphrasis is a fascinating topic that has a rich scholarship. See for example Emily Bilman's book *Modern Ekphrasis* (2013) and James A.W. Heffernan's volume *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (2004).

<sup>22</sup> Examples include Silvia Albertazzi and Ferdinando Amigoni (2008), Nancy Armstrong (2000), Jean Arrouye (2005), François Brunet (2009), Remo Ceserani (2011), Kate Flint (2009), Daniel Grojnowski (2002), Danièle Méaux (2006), Jean-Pierre Montier (2007, 2008, 2015 and 2017), Diego Mormorio (1988), Daniel Novak (2008), Philippe Ortel (2001), Jane Rabb (1995 and 1998), Dan Russek (2015) and Carol Loeb Shloss (1987).

photography'. A failure in interdisciplinarity is also alluded to in David Cunningham, Andrew Fisher and Sas Mays' book *Photography and Literature in the XX Century* (2005).<sup>23</sup>

In Jacques Clayssen's brilliant 1981 essay 'La photographie pré-texte' ('The Pretext Photography'), published in issue 2 of *Les Cahiers de la photographie* – perhaps one of the first publications dedicated to photography and literature in France – he blissfully reminds the reader, at the very beginning, that the 'literature/photography' field is neither about writers that also took photographs (Emile Zola or Juan Rulfo), nor about portraits of writers (Nadar) (pp 33-36). For Clayssen, the more interesting relations of photography to literature are the ones envisaged by André Breton and Salvador Elizondo: photography either supplants description (Breton) or it serves as a pretext and starting point for the development of the story (Elizondo).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Less attention has been paid to the analysis and comparison of both disciplines' autonomous relationship to a specific theoretical concept, without obliging literature to engage with the photographic discourse and vice versa (Chiocchetti, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> To my knowledge, the 1981 issue two of the French magazine *Les cahiers de la photographie* is the first one in France dedicated to 'Littérature/Photographie', featuring pioneering essays by Jean Arrouye, Arnaud Claass, Jacques Clayssen, Alain Fleig, Gilles Mora, Nancy Newhall, Claude Nori, François Soulages, and Michel Wiedemann.





Fig 7 Left: Nadar, *George Sand*. Woodburytype, 12.1 × 10 cm, 1864, Paris: Bibliothèque de la Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, public domain

Fig 8 Right: Juan Rulfo, *Jinete cayendo durante la filmacion de La Escondida*. Photograph, size unknown, 1955, courtesy Editorial RM

Marsha Bryant's *Photo-Textualities: Reading Photographs and Literature* (1996) and Paul Edwards' *Soleil noir: Photographie et littérature* (2008) are the most interesting contributions as they focus on actual examples of photo-literature where both photographs and literary language appear together as one work.

The term 'photo-literature' was first proposed in French as one word, '*photolittérature*', by Charles Grivel, professor of nineteenth-century French literature at the University of Mannheim, as the title of issue 210 of the *Revue des Sciences Humaines* (1988). Instead of providing a clear definition of what he meant by '*photolittérature*' and what its scope was, Grivel assembled a different range of texts that explored topics as diverse as melancholy and photography in Walter Benjamin or the collector's point of view on photography, including critical essays on the works of Hervé Guibert, Raymond Depardon, Sophie Calle and Marguerite Duras, interviews with artists such as Jochen Gerz, Dorothee von Windheim, Marie-Françoise Plissart and Benoît Peeters, and an excerpt of Denis Roche's abandoned novel *Le gambit de la reine* (*The Gambit of the Queen*) thrown into the mix.<sup>25</sup> Quite a chaotic start for photo-literature.

Contributing to the taxonomical chaos, the scope of the bibliography assembled by Eric Lambrechts and Luc Salu in two volumes entitled *Photography and Literature: An International Bibliography of Monographs* (1992 and 2000), included any book that dealt with photography and contained any kind of accompanying texts. From their 'Subject Index' one can see very clearly that their notion of 'photography and literature' is as broad as it could possibly be, given that subjects range from 'Anthologies of writings on photography' – which they bizarrely distinguish from 'Criticism' – to 'Semiotics' and 'Portraits of writers'.

Jean-Pierre Montier, considered one of the main experts on the relationship between photography and literature in France, shows in his most recent and only essay available in English, 'Photoliterature: Trading Gazes', an 'all-encompassing' approach when he presents his 'unified and unifying' concept of what he believes 'photoliterature' – as one word – must mean and investigate (2018, p 6).<sup>26</sup> He argues that photography 'penetrates [literature] deeply – from the graphic dimension to the question of its metaphysical force, including the very

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<sup>25</sup> The term 'photoliterature' as one word curiously appeared earlier in North America, in a 1977 text entitled 'The Participatory Process: Producing Photoliterature', a sort of manual on how to develop a photo-novel (Cain and Comings, 1977).

<sup>26</sup> He is indeed very active in the field of photography and literature, considering all the books he has published, the conferences he has organised, such as *L'écrivain vu par la photographie* (*The Writer Seen by Photography*) in 2016 at Cerisy-la-Salle, the website (phlit.org) he launched with a number of colleagues to make an inventory of the corpus, and the international review he co-founded, dedicated to the knowledge of 'photoliterature', exploring a wide range of theoretical and historical questions (Montier, 2018). He is also behind the 2016 exhibition and catalogue *Photolittérature* at the Fondation Jan Michalski in Switzerland, co-curated with Marta Caraion.

notion of fiction' – hence, according to him, 'we should refer to the pairing photograph/literature not as though they were parallel monads' (p 6). Montier presents his repertoire of 'photoliterature' in three sections that are as vast and overlapping as to incorporate extremely different works under the same category.

The first section of Montier's essay includes 'writers who collaborate with photographers, in various configurations (editor's order, personal friendship, etc.), to produce a single book or a single digital project', under which he also somewhat surprisingly mentions "artists" who cannot be defined as either photographers who write or writers who take photos, like Sophie Calle' (p 7), whose work belongs more to the sphere of 'conceptual photo-texts', as I shall discuss in the next chapter. The second section of Montier's essay comprises 'photographers who publish images by inserting them in a literary narrative model, for example in a report; or who seek out writers to write captions or a preface for a book of photographs; or who enter the world of writing, becoming critics, poetry experts or diarists/biographers' (p 8).<sup>27</sup> When he reaches his third section, his list appears never to end, as he incorporates 'writers whose works do not overtly feature photographs but in which they are omnipresent, in the construction of the fiction, or even in the style, in the Proustian sense of what is imagined as an absolute manner of seeing' (p 8). There he mentions Winfried Georg Sebald as a writer who often embeds photographs in his fiction that are 'purposely mediocre in quality, almost illegible, which only serves to make them more valuable in terms of authenticity', concluding that in those works in which 'photographs are simply absent', it is precisely their absence that 'renders their aura even greater, if we take the example of the photograph of Roland Barthes's mother in *La Chambre claire (Camera Lucida)*' (p 10). And, as a matter of fact, Montier included *Camera Lucida* in the exhibition and catalogue *Photolittérature* (2016) at the Fondation Jan Michalski.

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<sup>27</sup> Later, somewhat obliviously to his own writing, Montier adds as 'another point of contact or "bridge" between photographers and writers [...] the area of prefaces to books by photographers, which are sometimes veritable essays on the photographic poetic, like Yves Bonnefoy's preface to the book *Henri Cartier-Bresson Photographer*, published by Delpire in 1979, or the preface Jean-Paul Sartre wrote for *D'une Chine à l'autre (From One China to Another)* (1954)' (Montier, 2018, p 10). But should they not be included in the second group, which he said includes 'photographers who seek out writers to write captions or a preface for a book of photographs' (Montier, 2018, p 8)?

The term literature is slippery. If we consider literature in its broader Oxford English Dictionary notion of ‘written work valued for superior or lasting artistic merit’ (OED, 2020), then *Camera Lucida*, regardless of its fictional or non-fictional nature, might as well belong to literature. However, it is undeniable that the text is predominantly non-fictional – it has been described as a ‘phenomenological essay’ – and that it has entered the canon of photography theory, as well as every syllabus on a BA-level course on photography.<sup>28</sup> As one of the aims of this thesis is to clarify taxonomical confusion and reduce overlap, the term ‘photo-literature’ makes more sense if employed to describe the types of photo-text where fictional writings and photographs mingle, given that the more literal – and explicitly related to fictional writings – term of ‘photo novel’ has already been taken to designate the *roman photo*, one of the most codified types of photo-texts, as I shall illustrate in the next chapter.

Also, if photographs are ‘omnipresent’ in a literary text, because they are *mentioned* but absent, not shown as images, their ‘aura’ might as well increase, as pointed out by Montier, but the photo-text dynamic is lost and we are in the realm of ekphrasis rather than photo-literature, as discussed earlier for Hunter in relation to poetry. Let’s compare a page of Italo Calvino’s short story *The Adventure of a Photographer* (1955), an example of ekphrasis, with a page of the photo-literary work *Austerlitz* by Sebald (2001).

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<sup>28</sup> Michele Cometa more convincingly includes *Camera Lucida* among what he calls ‘theoretical phototexts’ (he does not use the hyphen), together with the original layout of Walter Benjamin’s ‘A Short History of Photography’, Marshall McLuhan’s *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (1952), André Malraux’s *Le Musée Imaginaire* (1947-51), certain ‘epochal combinations’ in Georges Bataille’s *Documents* (1929-30) and *Les Larmes d’Eros* (1961). However, the first two books could also be considered as simply illustrated photography theory books. Also, including *Les Larmes d’Eros* – where the only ‘real’ photographs Bataille responded to, among other photographic reproductions of other types of images, are the ones he owned of a Chinese prisoner being executed by dismemberment – within this proposed category of ‘theoretical phototexts’, very interesting in principle, opens up a further debate on whether a book with only a limited number of spreads where ‘real’ photographs and words interact is a photo-text work or not.

Almost every time I went to London in the years that followed I visited Austerlitz where he worked in Bloomsbury, not far from the British Museum. I would usually spend an hour or so sitting with him in his crowded study, which was like a stockroom of books and papers with hardly any space left for himself, let alone



his students, among the stacks piled high on the floor and the overloaded shelves. When I began my own studies in Germany I had learnt almost nothing from the scholars then lecturing in the humanities there, most of them academics who had built their ca-

Con la primavera, a centinaia di migliaia, i cittadini escono la domenica con l'astuccio a tracolla. E si fotografano. Tornano contenti come cacciatori dal carnere ricolmo, passano i giorni aspettando con dolce ansia di vedere le foto sviluppate (ansia a cui alcuni aggiungono il sottile piacere delle manipolazioni alchimistiche nella stanza oscura, vietata alle intrusioni dei familiari e acce d'acidi all'olfatto), e solo quando hanno le foto sotto gli occhi sembrano prendere tangibile possesso della giornata trascorsa, solo allora quel torrente alpino, quella mossa del bambino col secchiello, quel riflesso di sole sulle gambe della moglie acquistano l'irrevocabilità di ciò che è stato e non può esser più messo in dubbio. Il resto anneghi pure nell'ombra incisa del ricordo.

Frequentando gli amici e i colleghi, Antonino Paraggi, non-fotografo, avvertiva un crescente isolamento. Ogni settimana scopriva che alle conversazioni di coloro che magnificano la sensibilità d'un diaframma o discettano sul numero dei dia s'univa la voce di qualcuno cui fino a ieri egli aveva confidato, sicuro che li condivideva, i suoi sarcasmi verso un'attività per lui così poco eccitante e così priva d'imprevisti.

Come professione, Antonino Paraggi esplicava mansioni esecutive nei servizi distributivi d'un'impresa produttiva, ma la sua vera passione era quella di commentare con gli amici gli avvenimenti piccoli e grandi sdipanando il filo delle ragioni generali dai garbugli particolari; egli era insomma, per atteggiamento mentale, un filosofo, e nel riuscire a spiegarsi anche i fatti più lontani dalla sua esperienza metteva tutto il suo puntiglio. Ora sentiva che qualcosa nell'essenza dell'uomo fotografico gli sfuggiva: il segreto anello per cui nuovi silenzi

Fig 9 Left: Winfried Georg Sebald, *Austerlitz*. Book, 13 x 20.5 cm, 2001, London: Hamish Hamilton, my photograph

Fig 10 Right: Italo Calvino, *The adventure of a photographer*. Short story published in *Difficult Loves*, Book, 19.5 x 11.5 cm, 1970, Turin: Einaudi, my photograph

Indeed, within ekphrasis readers are deprived of the photographic image. They have to imagine it, as they are only offered the textual element. Hence, they will not be able to create in their minds, which are busy imagining the missing photograph, one of the essential components of photo-texts: the 'third-something'. That is why ekphrasis and photo-texts are two different entities that should not be confused.

Another volume that appears very promising but then contributes to taxonomical confusion is Andy Stafford's *Photo-texts: Contemporary French Writing of the Photographic Image*, which starts by offering to Mitchell's question 'What do pictures want?' the simple answer 'language' (2010, p 1). The book aims to 'postulate the existence of a third term between photographic image and written word, [...] the photo-text', by reformulating Mitchell's question as 'why does written language want to be appended to photographic images?' and exploring 'what happens when equal and autonomous media, photograph and written text, come together in dialogue?' (p 1). The book is very ambitious in its 'attempt to set out what a photo-text is, does and does not', including its focus on contemporary French photo-texts, which definitely fills an editorial gap (p 2). Also, as I shall mention in chapter three, 'Towards Photo-Text Theory', Stafford has

the merit of presenting a theoretical survey entitled 'Text-Image Studies: The Pioneers and the New Assessors', which contains illuminating passages on Barthes' photo-text theory, and I agree on a number of claims he makes about photo-texts' radical provisionality in relation to language, as well as political potential, the latter influenced by Mitchell (Stafford, 2010, pp 39, 42-47 and 50).

However, his own theoretical infrastructure and taxonomical stance of introducing the term 'photo-essaysm' as the 'anonymous counterpart' of the essay, which he believes 'allows to go beyond the simple essay or commentary alongside photography, to consider other "non-fictional" form of text such as the poem and the caption' is rather dubious (Stafford, 2010, p 3). First of all, Terry Eagleton's famous dreary-sounding definition of poetry comes to mind: 'a poem is a *fictional*, verbally inventive moral statement in which it is the author, rather than the printer or word processor, who decides where the lines should end' (2007, p 25), and I struggle to see how a poem could possibly be a 'non-fictional' form of text, as suggested by Stafford. Also, isn't a caption a 'commentary alongside photography' too (Stafford, 2010, p 3)?

Unfortunately, the taxonomical confusion continues in the section 'Photo-Story Versus Photo-Text'. I was hoping to read a clear distinction between whatever he means by 'photo-story' and 'photo-text', but to my surprise, his very first sentence reads:

*Photo-essaysm may be defined negatively, then, in relation to the photo-novel, say, which is anything but a direct engagement of text and image since the narrative necessarily intervenes; naturally, there can be narratives within collections of photographs, but these come from the photographs themselves* (Stafford, 2010, p 3).

To this already cryptic sentence Stafford adds a footnote where he quotes Eugene Smith, from a passage he found in Mitchell's *Picture Theory*, where Mitchell argues that for Smith the 'photographic series or sequence, even without text, can be regarded as a photo-essay'. Stafford re-interprets this as 'Eugene Smith has argued that photo-journalism is more akin to narratives, producing "picture stories": "that's a form of its own, not an essay"', without including what Smith actually considers to be a photo essay (Mitchell, 1994, p 292, and Stafford, 2010, p 195). The actual words uttered by Smith are:

*You can take a group of pictures all in the same place, on the same subject, and lay them out to make a powerful visual statement, but if they*

*don't reinforce each other – if they don't show those interrelationships that make the whole more than the sum of its parts – you've got what I'd call a portfolio. [...] "That's okay, but I would not allow myself to call it an essay." I'd call most of the fine Life photographers – of the caliber of Margaret Bourke-White and Alfred Eisenstaedt – wonderful photojournalists who did mostly picture stories, narrative reporting. Again, that's a form of its own, not an essay (Moran, 1974, p 15).*

Apart from the fact that Stafford seems not to take into account John Berger's (1995 and 2013) and Peter Wollen's (2006) views that photographs do not narrate, he does not explain clearly the difference between photo-text, picture-story, photo-story, photo-essay and his proposed photo-essaysm. Also, by ignoring Smith's distinction between 'photo essay' and 'picture story' and introducing, somewhat out of the blue, the further term 'photo-story', without defining it but only referring to it in pejorative terms – when he writes that 'text and photograph in the photo-story seem rarely to be given a chance to achieve an equality', and later relating it to the work of Sophie Calle, whose 'success' according to him 'suggests a critical engagement by the *photo-roman* readership' – he leaves the readers in a sort of taxonomical chaos (Stafford, 2010, p 3).

The aim of a taxonomy is orderly classification. The classification may follow different criteria and Stafford has adopted the authorship criteria within his proposed category of photo-essaysm, inspired by François Soulages' tripartition of photo-text interactions that he presented in his 1998 book *Esthétique de la photographie* (Stafford, 2010, pp 6 and 42). Stafford himself admits that it is a 'problematical division', and it clearly does not help the fact that at times he continues to use the term 'photo essay' as a synonym for 'photo essaysm' (p 6).

Stafford (pp 6 and 182) suggests three distinct types of photo-texts based on different types of authorships: '*collaborative*', in which 'contemporaneously a writer works with a photographer'; '*retrospective*', in which 'a writer (or set of writers) "essay" (often well-known or iconic) photographic images from the past'; and '*self-collaborative*', or 'introspective', in which 'writer and photographer are one and the same person', possibly inspired by Hunter's section title 'Collaborating with Oneself' in his *Image and Word* (1987, p 46), although Stafford does not credit him explicitly. In particular, when Stafford gives examples of his suggested '*retrospective*' type of 'photo-essaysm', he mentions 'the photo-anthology writings of two well-known photography critics' – Denis Roche's *Le*

*Boîtier de mélancolie: La photographie en 100 photographies* (*The Melancholy Box: Photography in 100 Photographs*) (1999) and Régis Debray's *L'Oeil naïf* (*The Naïf Eye*) (1994), an 'eclectic album', as described by its author, of 24 topics and lead images (plus more thumbnail pictures per theme) within the history of photography, which he compares as case studies with John Szarkowski's *The Photographer's Eye* (1966), a selection of 172 photographs drawn from the entire history and range of the medium (Stafford, 2010, pp 6 and 71-83). A very simple question arises naturally: aren't these types of photo-anthologies works that belong to the category of photo-criticism or history of photography rather than photo-texts? Stafford himself admits that his definition of 'photo-text' is 'being used both widely and narrowly in [his] book', which does not help a taxonomical intent (p 71).

While of course authorship is an important aspect, rather than an authorship-based taxonomy I find more useful a classification of types of photo-texts based on the different nature of texts that accompany the photographic image, as I shall propose in the next chapter, which acknowledges the already existing types of photo-text encounters – also because the distinction based on authorship, although very useful, is transversal to all types of photo-texts, as at least in principle you can find collaborative, retrospective or self-collaborative photo-essays, photo-literary works, photo-poetry, scientific or knowledge-based photo-texts and even photo-novels.<sup>29</sup> By presenting a list of compound terms such as photo-essayism, photo essay, photo-fictions, photo-story and picture story, without clearly defining the different nature of their textual component – indeed words such as essayism, fiction and story are already ambiguous enough in their own right – and rather than acknowledging accepted scholarly classification within the photo-text discourse (such as the photo-essay, introducing the unnecessarily ambiguous variant of photo-essayism and including in it extremely different types of works, such as photo-captions, works of photo-criticism, photo-poetry etc.), it is inevitable that Stafford does not contribute to clarification.

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<sup>29</sup> One might argue that there are different types of photographs too, but their genre is less codified than within writing, so it would be odd to label photo-texts according to the type of photos – for example, 'candid-photo-text' versus 'staged-photo-text' (typically the photographs in a photo-novel are staged to form a visual background for the characters' dialogues), or portrait-essay versus landscape-poetry.



To complicate things even further, he criticises ‘the limited and limiting notion of what has been called the “pictorialist” photo-essay’, which he describes as ‘any text alongside a photograph or photography that consciously and explicitly referred to the photographic medium’, and he declares that his study aims to go beyond this notion (Stafford, 2010, p 8). He does not provide further sources regarding who has introduced this notion of the ‘pictorialist’ photo-essay other than mentioning in a footnote two other essays that he wrote, which makes me think that he introduced it. I also wonder if, given the definition Stafford provides is based on their self-reflectivity, ‘meta-photo-texts’ would be a more appropriate name. Borrowing Luigi Pirandello and Lionel Abel’s concept of ‘metatheatre’, namely theatre that draws attention to its own unreality, especially by the use of a play within a play, and from Mitchell’s notion of ‘metapicture’ (1994, pp 35-82), namely ‘a picture about picturing’, a meta-photo-text is a photo-text that reflects on the text-photo relation (Pérez-Simón, 2011, p 2, and Manghani, p 78).<sup>30</sup> Also, while I agree with him that a photo-text does not need to talk about the photographic medium in order to be considered one, but by including among his case studies photo-anthological works on the history of the medium, which ‘consciously and explicitly referred to the photographic medium’, is he really going beyond ‘the limited and limiting notion’ of this dubious term ‘pictorialist’ photo-essay (Stafford, 2010, p 8)?

Another common source of confusion in classifying photo-texts derives from the fact that, as the genre proliferates, new and more specific labels for types of photo-texts emerge, like in the case of ‘photo-poetry’, seminally examined by Michael Nott (2018) as a distinct and idiosyncratic type of photo-text, rather than one merely belonging to the broader notion of photo-literature. An additional problem encountered while researching this field is that, in order to do it justice, it needs the researcher’s competence in the history and theory of both disciplines, photography and writing, which is very rarely the case. Hence it is common to find studies that excel in terms of photographic analysis but lack in-depth scrutiny in terms of linguistic or literary studies and vice versa. Given the ‘promiscuous’ nature of the field, as it combines visual and verbal languages, it is not surprising

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<sup>30</sup> I shall show how ‘meta-photo-texts’ are frequent among ‘conceptual photo-texts’ in the next chapter.

that a diverse range of authors and practitioners have occasionally contributed to it and that is why the thesis has an inevitably interdisciplinary approach that draws on photo-artistic practice, semiotics, photography and literary theory, as well as criticism.<sup>31</sup> Cometa also stressed that:

*The use of photography instead of what was formerly a picture made through drawing, engraving and printing, makes the difference and constitutes, by its very nature, not just a media novelty with implications that upset the story of images, but forces the theoretician of literature to deepen the ultimate essence of the photographic image according to an itinerary that is still evolving (2017, p 3).<sup>32</sup>*

That is why photo-texts are particularly intriguing and liberating hybrids, if we consider Marshall McLuhan's explanation for his interest in mixed forms, in which he saw, as pointed out by Cometa, 'the future of mediality':

*The hybrid or the meeting of two media is a moment of truth and revelation from which new form is born. For the parallel between two media holds us on the frontiers between forms that snap us out of the Narcissus-narcosis. The moment of the meeting of media is a moment of freedom and release from the ordinary trance and numbness imposed by them on our senses (1964, p 55, and quoted in Cometa, 2017, no pagination).*

McLuhan's numbness reminds me of Tournier's asphyxiation, at the beginning of this chapter, that threatens the iconosphere, who 'absolutely needs the sparkling contribution of a connection with the logosphere [...] to boost the morale' (1988, p 16).

This chapter examined the spelling and definition of the term photo-text. It also navigated through the taxonomical confusion that shrouds photo-texts, by showing the contradictions and shortcomings of the main photo-text interdisciplinary scholarship.

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<sup>31</sup> This is the challenge of the field, that in order to produce plausible and interesting knowledge/research about its twofold self it requires knowledge and competence in both subjects individually. Given that most research has been produced by comparative or pure literary scholars who have a very limited or obsolete knowledge of the history and theory of photography, it is not surprising that when it comes to analysing case studies their choices are either very predictable (Henri Cartier-Bresson) or their comments somewhat unsophisticated, as they often neglect to incorporate photography theory in their research. That is why it is important for photography, history and theory to acknowledge and study the photo-text as a specific and peculiar object, to return to the photographic side of the coin the dignity, complexity and sophistication it deserves.

<sup>32</sup> Within photography theory the debate has mainly focused on photography's ontology in relation to the notion of truth and authenticity and, more recently, to that of fiction, rather than on photography's relation with other types of images. See the interesting paper 'Trace-Image to Fiction-Image: The unfolding of Theories of Photography from the '80s to the Present', by Philippe Dubois (2016).

To overcome this confusion, the next chapter proposes a clearer taxonomy by listing and exploring the different existing types of photo-texts – 1. photo-captions and titles; 2. scientific or knowledge-based photo-texts; 3. photo-essays; 4. photo-literature; 5. photo-poetry; and 6. *roman-photo* or the photo-novel – and by introducing a new one: 7. ‘conceptual photo-texts’. The classification of photo-texts is instrumental in understanding the different characteristics of each type and finding the types that need further analysis, which, in turn, informs the development of the case studies presented in Part II.

*If a thing appears which is neither one thing nor another within an established classification, it should not therefore be suppressed as it may prove to be the seed from which an alternative and instructive classification can be grown.*

Victor Burgin, 'Situational Aesthetics', 1969

## **Chapter 2 Types of Photo-Texts**

Now that I have illustrated taxonomical chaos in the previous chapter, it is important to introduce some order within the photo-text. This chapter draws up a list of existing and recognisable types of photo-texts that can be identified within an artistic context, including those works whose original purpose was not artistic, but underwent at a later stage the process of re-contextualisation within what Rosalind Krauss calls the 'space of exhibition' and art, as discussed in the introduction (1982, pp 311-19).<sup>33</sup> This list aims to gather the specificities of each type and the differences between them. I shall refer to the main academic and curatorial research, if available, that has been published specifically on each type, show some classic examples, as well as more unusual and eccentric ones that are exceptions to the 'rule' of the type. Compiling this list is fundamental, not only because it allows me to realise that a whole new type, 'conceptual photo-texts', exists and only needs to be given a name, but also because this list is instrumental, together with the theoretical reflections in the next chapter, in indicating directions for the development of the case studies, in terms of what still needs to be investigated and how.

Based on the various observable photo-text encounters, I have identified the following types: 1. photo-captions and titles; 2. scientific/knowledge-based photo-texts; 3. photo-essays; 4. photo-literature; 5. photo-novels or *roman-photo*; 6. photo-poetry; and 7. conceptual photo-texts, a category that I am introducing, or rather labelling as such for the first time – where photoworks by visual artists incorporate text in multiple ways.<sup>34</sup> In identifying this conceptual type, I initially experienced what Barthes describes as a certain 'unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation', as he writes in his essay 'From Work to Text' (1977, p 155). Thinking about my taxonomy as a whole, it was also a process of

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<sup>33</sup> For example, while the photo-essay was conceived with the journalistic purpose of documenting a topic or event, its early manifestations have over the years acquired the artistic aura of classic masterpieces, and it is common to see them in the 'space of exhibitions', especially after the show *The Photo Essay* (1965) at MoMA in New York.

<sup>34</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, what I would call Internet-based photo-texts are beyond the purpose of this research.

exclusion that helped me demarcate conceptual photo-texts, as they all share similarities in mutating the essence of photo-text intersections and could not quite fit in any of the other types.<sup>35</sup> As Burgin argued in his 1969 essay ‘Situational Aesthetics’, along the lines of Barthes, but more clearly, ‘if a thing appears which is neither one thing nor another within an established classification, it should not therefore be suppressed as it may prove to be the seed from which an alternative and instructive classification can be grown’ (2009, p 40). When I saw that Lew Thomas quoted that same passage by Burgin in the introduction to his book *Photography and Language* (1976), with which Thomas and his peers ‘probed the confusion between “conceptual art” and the sometimes-maligned genre “conceptual photography”’ (Diehl, 2016, no pagination), I realised I had found the name I was looking for.

Let’s begin with the first type.

**1. Photo-captions and titles.** Barthes confesses that there is a job he absolutely loves doing: to ‘build a relation between text and image by captioning pictures’ (Schwarz and Mandery, 1985, p 936). While a title ‘does not belong to discourse’, as it is ‘no more than an identifying tag’, a caption consists instead of ‘no more than four short lines’ of text that normally appears below the published image it refers to, and has the role of seizing, accompanying, describing, instructing the meaning and reading of the image (Scott, 1999, p 49).<sup>36</sup> Nancy Newhall, in her seminal essay ‘The Caption: The Mutual Relation of Words / Photographs’ (1952), outlines the difference between caption and title in North American photo-journalism. For Newhall, while a title merely states ‘whom or what, where and when a photograph was made’, it is ‘static’ and ‘has no significance apart from its photograph’, a caption is instead ‘dynamic’, ‘develops title information into why and how along a line of action’ and ‘it loses half of its significance when divorced from its photograph’, yet ‘influencing what we think of it’ (p 67). Newhall highlights the caption’s impact over the image in the viewer’s memory, citing John Whiting’s fascinatingly obsolete book *Photography Is A Language*: ‘it is very often the *caption* you remember when you think you are telling someone about a *picture* in a magazine’ (1946, p 98). Jefferson Hunter considers captions ‘a lowly genre

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<sup>35</sup> ‘Mutation’ is a more appropriate term than ‘evolution’, as I shall discuss in chapter five.

<sup>36</sup> In magazine editing, captions are sometimes distinguished from ‘cutlines’, a longer prose block that is usually placed under the caption, to describe the photograph, giving context, or relating it to the article (Evans, 2004, p 285). Captions and titles can of course be encountered also beyond the printed pages of magazines and books, such as in museums and galleries as well as on the screens of televisions and cinemas to accompany the circulation of photographs.

of written art', but 'not for that reason negligible': 'informative or poetic, concise or expansive, they place next to the photographer's partially managed reality the form of partial management we are all capable of: language' (1987, p 6). Hence captions have a delicate and dangerous role, confirmed by the fact that they can be '*slanted*' very easily – also because it is not obvious that the author of the picture and of the caption or title coincide in the editorial context, as I shall show with Eugene Smith in the photo-essay section of this chapter (Newhall, 1952, p 69).

Examples of traditional uses of titles and captions are Anna Atkins' Latin titles of her botanical study *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* (1843-53) and Francis Frith's *Egypt and Palestine. Photographed and Described* (1858-60), where texts exert mainly a classificatory and descriptive function. Lewis Hine's famous motto 'If I could tell the story in words I wouldn't need to lug around a camera' partly explains his predilection for accompanying his photographs with extended captions (Kaplan, 1992). For plate 18 of his 'photo-study' *Ellis Island* (1905) he intriguingly went beyond traditional captioning as he juxtaposed an excerpt of Walt Whitman's poem *Leaves of Grass* (1881-82) with a portrait of a '[Young Russian Jewess](#)'. Captions and titles can also be a subversive and conceptual territory, where artists contradict, expand or complement the visual elements of their images. In Ugo Mulas' *Le Verifiche* (*Verifications*) (1968-72), he entitled his image number 12 *La didascalìa. A Man Ray* (*The caption. To Man Ray*), and it portrays Man Ray pointing at a simulated frame on a wall with his joke written inside: 'This is my last painting'.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Mulas accompanies the image with the following explanation:

*The image does not say anything, or it says too many things. I shot when Man Ray made the joke [...]. The image does not reveal any of the sort, because the photograph was suggested not by the visual situation of Man Ray's gesture or attitude, but by the joke. Namely I photographed a sentence. But this is impossible to see unless I introduce the sentence into the picture, or in other words by inserting its caption in it. This is confirmed by Man Ray, who does not point at a painting but utters a sentence that is his painting: the sentence is both the artwork of Man Ray and my photograph* (1968-72, no pagination).



Fig 11 Left: Ugo Mulas, *Verifica 12. La didascalìa. A Man Ray*, from the series *Le Verifiche*. Photograph, 42 x 52 cm, 1968-72, Ugo Mulas Archive

Fig 12 Right: Lieko Shiga, from the series *Piano*. Photograph, size unknown, 1998, courtesy the artist

Joan Fontcuberta challenges the audience's disbelief in his book of imaginary plants, *Herbarium* (1985), by giving his botanical specimens made-up Latin names that only apparently suggest a notion of scientific rigour, since, once translated, are actually ironic names in relation to the imagery – as shown in Figure 40 and discussed in chapter three. Lieko Shiga's *Piano* series, a trypic of a young boy playing an imaginary

piano, shows how titles can complete images, by containing precisely the missing element in them, as shown in Figure 12 (Shiga, 1998).

**2. Scientific/knowledge-based photo-texts.** ‘Every work of photographic art has its lurking, objectifying inverse in the archives of the police’ (Sekula, 1981, p 16). This type comprises those photo-text combinations in which photographs are used as illustrations for didactic, expository, instructive and evidentiary purposes and accompany non-fiction texts, such as scientific publications and instruction manuals. These ‘photographically illustrated books’ technically evolved from what Helmut Gernsheim (1984) called ‘photography incunabula’, with original photographs pasted or bound into the text, to having photographs directly printed onto their pages in much closer relation with the text, thanks to the halftone process, and are far from innocent (Armstrong, 1998, Knazook, n.d., and Goldschmidt and Naef, 1980).<sup>38</sup> Allan Sekula, while exploring ‘the traffic in photographs’, inspired by early criminological and psychiatric photography in the work of Cesare Lombroso and Alphonse Bertillon, as well as by Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, introduced the concept of ‘instrumental realism’ (1981, p 16).

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<sup>38</sup> With the term ‘incunabula’, Gernsheim (1984) was referring to the pre-1500 printed books published within the first decades after the invention of printing by Gutenberg. Other important projects on the subject of photographically illustrated books are Van Deren Coke (1977), Rolf H. Krauss (1978) and, for the French market, Laureline Meziel’s chapter ‘Répertoire des livres illustrés par la photographie publiés en France entre 1867 et 1901, d’après la Bibliographie de la France et quelques autres sources’, in her thesis *Inventer le livre illustré par la photographie en France 1867-1897*. Although it should be entitled *The Photobook: A Collection* rather than *A History*, Martin Parr and Gerry Badger’s three volume anthology on the photobook also contains some precious examples of these types of photo-texts. Among the institutions that have a dedicated digitised section on ‘photographically illustrated books’, there are the websites of the Library of Congress, the British Library, the Bodleian Library, the Getty Research Institute and the BnF. For a good bibliography on this subject, see Knazook, n.d., pp 21 and 34-37.



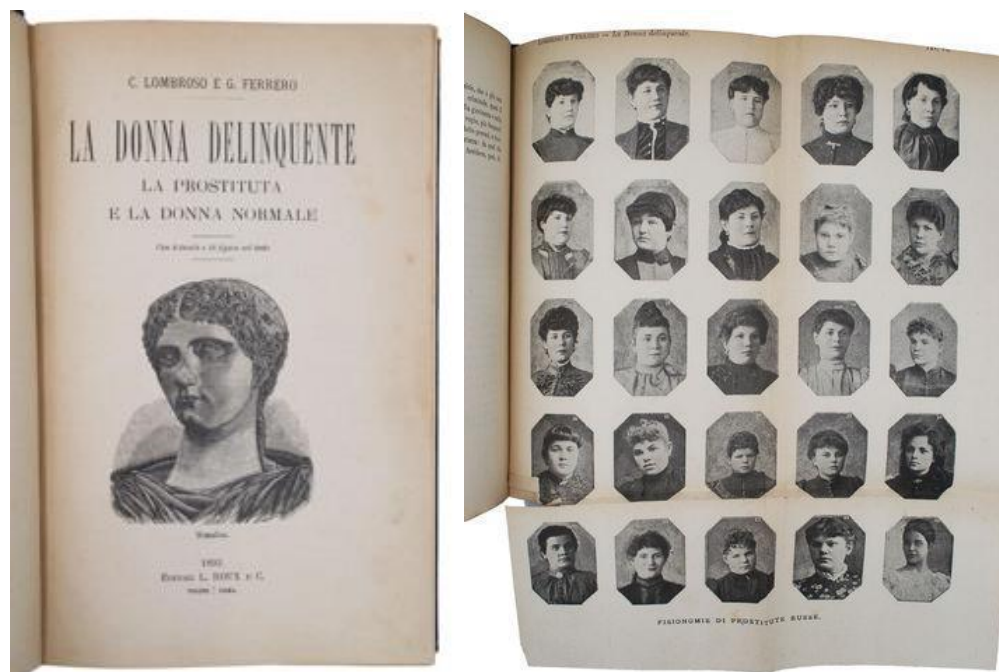


Fig 13 Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *La donna delinquente. La prostituta e la donna normale*. Book, 24 x 15 cm, 1893, Turin-Rome: L. Roux, public domain

Brought about by the ‘social-scientific appropriation of photography’, ‘instrumental realism’ consists of ‘representational projects’ dedicated to ‘new techniques of social diagnosis and control, to the systematic naming, categorization, and *isolation of an otherness* thought to be determined by biology and manifested through the “language” of the body itself’ (Sekula, 1981, p 16, my emphasis). These representational projects predominantly circulate in book form, whose main aim is to divulgate knowledge about a subject and where photographs are recruited as part of the formation of institutional discourses of ‘truth’, ‘inextricably linking language and power’ through the text-photo relation (Sekula, 1981, p 15).<sup>39</sup> John Tagg also applies the Foucauldian framework in his seminal works to examine institutional uses of photography in producing ‘disciplinary knowledge’ through these types of photo-texts (1988 and 2009, pp xxx-xxxi). However, I agree with David Phillips (1989, pp 119 and 131) that Tagg’s view reduces photography’s diversity ‘under the generalised gaze of surveillance’. Tagg

<sup>39</sup> Even in their re-evaluation in the 1970s, the debate on photographically illustrated books continues, somewhat uncritically, around notions of ‘truth’, as the title of New York’s Grolier Club exhibition in 1974 confirms: *The Truthful Lens: A survey of the photographically illustrated book 1844-1914*. Curated by Lucien Goldschmidt and Weston Naef (1980, p 3), they praise the photographic illustrations as works of art and, despite their remarkable attempt to classify the vast range of books, they come up with somewhat confusing thematic sections, since what they write under the category ‘technical illustrations’ could be applied to all the other categories they introduce: ‘portraits; trades, industries, occupations; still life; technical illustrations; art works; transportation; cities and ruins; landscape’ (Goldschmidt and Naef, 1980).

appears not to have faith in the reaction of the spectator and to underestimate the unintentional subversive power of photo-text dynamics in terms of awakening consciences, over time, against ideological, colonial and Orwellian mechanisms, as his very own reaction shows. In terms of nineteenth-century examples, the 1872 collaboration between Charles Darwin and Oscar Gustave Rejlander, who contributed portraits to Darwin's treatise on *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, shall be discussed in chapter four.



Fig 14 Kathleen Clara Clark, *Positioning in Radiography*. Book, 30 x 24.5 cm, 1942, Science Museum Group Collection © The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum

Kathleen Clara Clark's classic book *Positioning in Radiography* (1939), which later inspired artists of the likes of Francis Bacon, is one of the few cases in which the author of the text and of the imagery coincide (Kevles, 1997). In 1988 Joan Fontcuberta and Pere Formiguera published the book *Dr. Ameisenhaufen's Fauna*, of imaginary and implausible beings: a perfect example of how an artistic intervention that mocks the excess of credibility towards photographs to produce authentic scientific knowledge can subvert this type by 'infecting' it with what Fontcuberta (2014) calls 'the virus of fiction'.

**3. Photo-essay.** The 'long-form photographic essay should not be confused [...] with [...] the picture stories popularized by magazines such as *Life*, *Look*, and *National Geographic* in the early half of the twentieth century', which 'rely far more on visual impact than on an equal balance of images and writing' (Klingensmith, 2016, p 2). In

Eugene W. Smith's 1948 classic *Life* magazine photo-essay, 'Country Doctor' – on the 'challenges faced by an indefatigable general practitioner named Dr. Ernest Ceriani' – while photographs are accompanied by fragments of texts, which is fundamental for grasping the information that the images alone do not reveal, no specific author appears, and it is indeed rather the editing, sequencing and layout of the images that predominantly create the dramatic effects (Cosgrove, 2017, no pagination).<sup>40</sup>

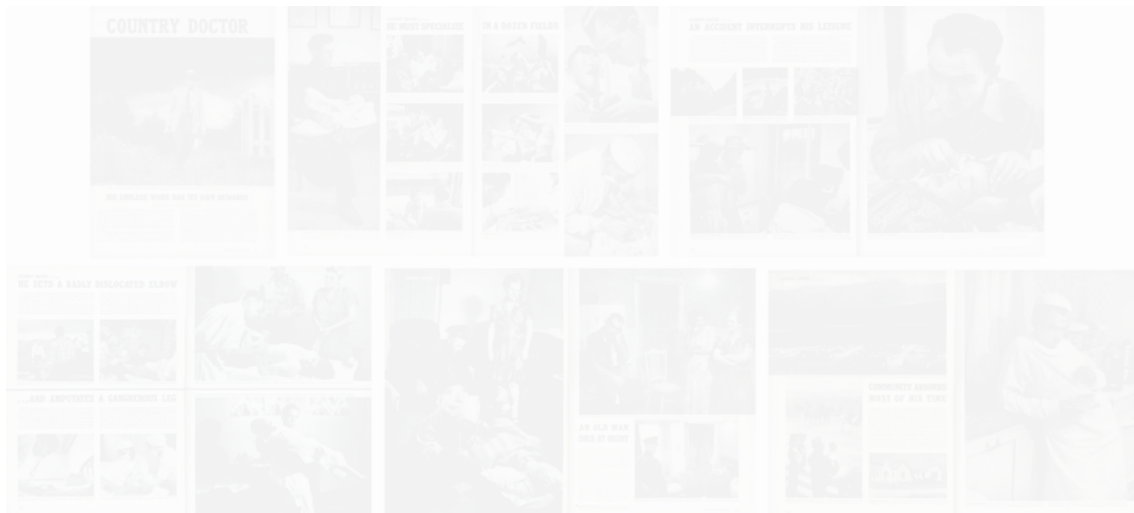


Fig 15 Eugene Smith, *Country Doctor*. Photo-essay, *Life* magazine, 27 x 33.5 cm, 20 September 1948, Life Magazine Archive

Smith, known to have coined the term 'photo essay' (without a hyphen), was almost excluded from the process of editing his photographs and writing the text, which provoked several disagreements between the photographer and *Life's* editorial staff (Moran, 1974, p 14, Cosgrove, 2017, no pagination, and Willumson, 1992).<sup>41</sup> On a more conceptual note, Italian artist and designer Bruno Munari's *Fotocronache (Photo-reportage)* (1944) is a witty lesson on how mischievous words and images can become when pushed to irreverent and puzzling combinations.

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<sup>40</sup> As brilliantly recounted by Tagg, the 'scopic drive', the 'overriding compulsion to see' is behind the 'reader's identification with the picture magazine' (2009, p 100).

<sup>41</sup> A subversive example of a magazine photo-essay is mentioned by Freund (1980, p 170), when she narrates the construction of a staged photo-essay, published in issue 897 of *Paris Match* (18 June 1966), with a swastika on the cover, which referred to an eight-page article entitled 'With the Nazis in 1966', and whose accompanying photographs were 'frauds' made up to frighten readers in the hope they would not vote for the extreme right party.

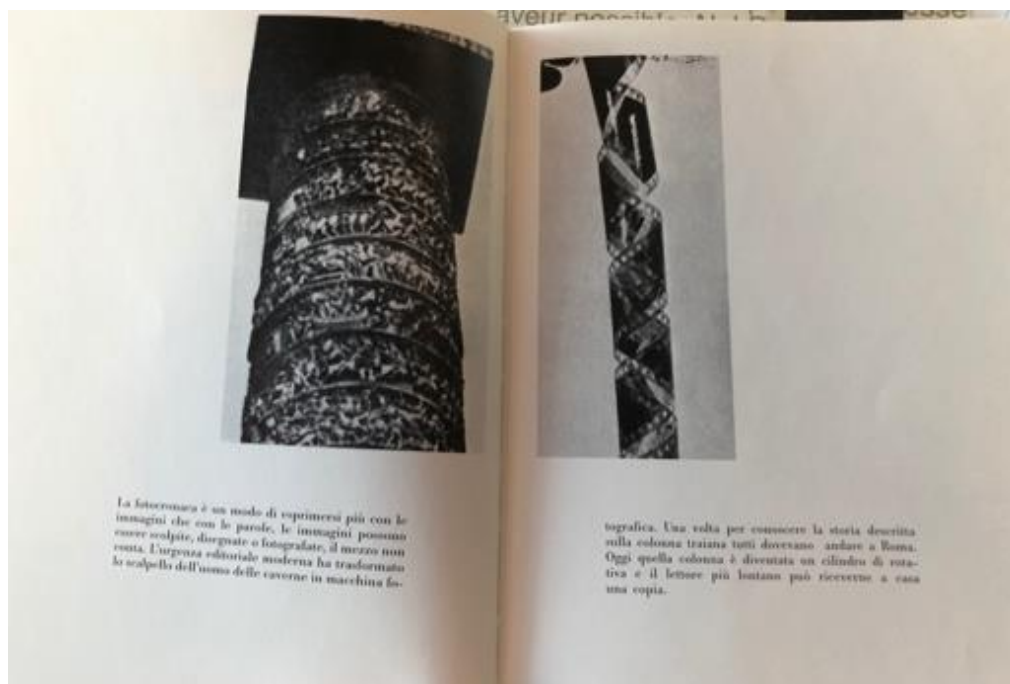
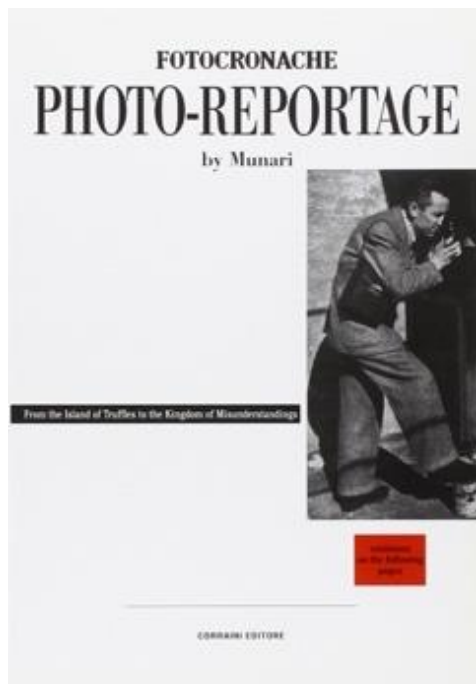


Fig 16 Bruno Munari, *Photo-Reportage*. Book, 18 x 24 cm, 2008, Mantua: Corraini Edizioni, my photograph

From the very beginning, on the cover, as shown in Figure 16 (Munari, 2008), a photo-text sets the ironic tone, since the image of a photographer holding his camera is cleverly placed on the extreme right, with the sentence ‘continues in the following pages’ addressed to the reader and placed below the image in a red rectangle – as if

to see what the photographer is capturing, the reader must open the book.<sup>42</sup> The first spread pairs an image of the Trajan Column with one of a roll of film captured while being unrolled to form a metaphorical column that resembles the image on the left. Munari's text that accompanies this pairing extends over the two pages and reads:

*Photo-reportage is a means of expressing oneself more through images than words. The images can be sculpted, drawn or photographed, the medium isn't important. Any camera can be used for photo-reportage. The urgent needs of modern publication have turned the caveman's chisel into a camera. In the past, to see the story narrated on the Trajan Column, everyone had to go to Rome. Nowadays that column has become a roll of negative of which the most distant reader can receive a copy at home (2008, no pagination).*

Munari's last sentence reminds me of John Berger's daring act of physically cropping a painting to show how images are reproduced and can be consumed by the viewer in their homes, in his BBC series *Ways of Seeing* (1972).<sup>43</sup> Very different are the collaborations for the long-form photo-essay, described by Mitchell as 'a century old hybrid medium that relies equally on photographs and writing to represent its subject' and where 'neither medium dominates' (1989, p 8). Hunter describes the 'range of authorial situations': 'writer and photographer working together and so literally collaborating; writer and photographer brought together by an editor; writer captioning, introducing, linking, or otherwise mediating on already published photographs; and photographer illustrating an already published text' (1987, pp 33-64). On the twentieth-century long-form photo-essay there is a good amount of scholarship: Hunter (1987) and Klingensmith (2016), Mitchell (1994), Moran (1974), Weinberg (2001), Entin (2007) and Crain (2009), which focus not only on photo-text dynamics but also on ethical issues.

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<sup>42</sup> The image is preceded by the cryptic subtitle 'From the Island of Truffles to the Kingdom of Misunderstandings', printed in white on a black rectangle, which is placed at the same height as the shadow of the photographer's 'b-side'.

<sup>43</sup> John Berger's ideas on photo-text relations shall be discussed in chapter four.

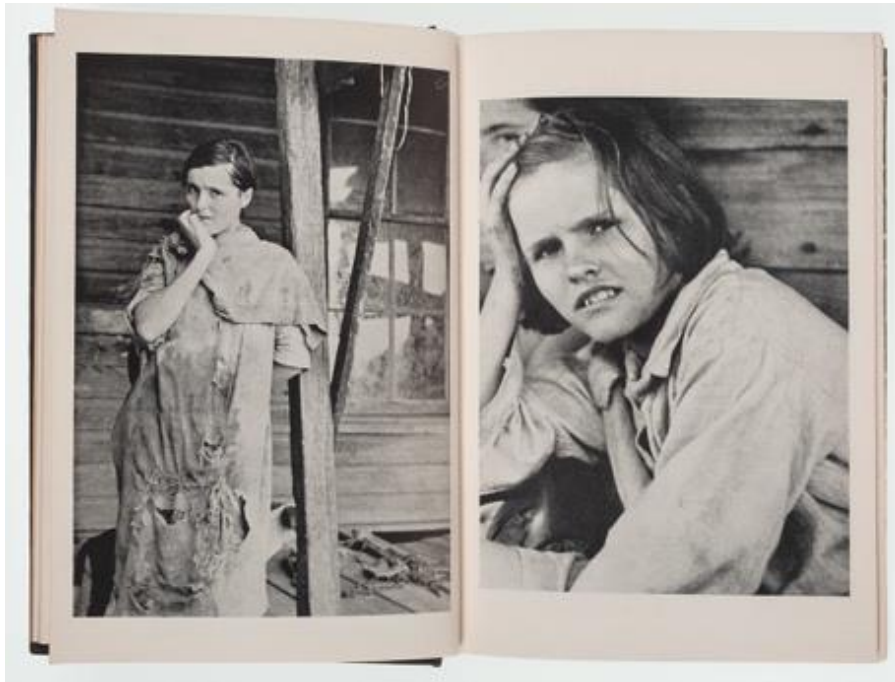
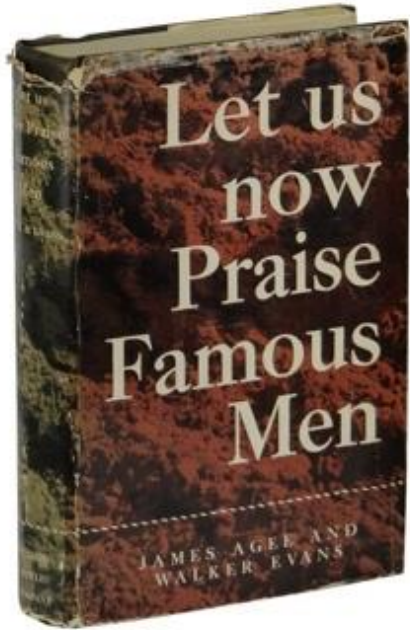


Fig 17 James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Book, 5.75 x 8.5 inches, 1941, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, my photograph

The acclaimed American book by James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), on the difficult lives of white sharecroppers in the South, is the most written about photo-essay (Maharidge, 1989, Mitchell, 1994, Crescimanno in Cometa, 2016, Blinder, 2010 and 2019). Hence it is beyond the purpose of this thesis to elaborate further on this type, besides discussing the sophistication of some neglected nineteenth-century predecessors in chapter four.

**4. Photo-literature.** By photo-literature I mean those photo-texts where fictional writings and photographic images are presented together as one work, namely novels or short stories with photographs embedded in them. Among the earliest examples, where photographic images and 'literary language' are juxtaposed with a 'more equal division of labour', is the 1892 short novel *Bruges La Morte* by the Belgian author Georges Rodenbach, notable for being the first work of fiction conceived to be illustrated with photographs in its first apparition as a book (Bryant, 1996, p 11, Montier, 2018, p 5, and Baetens, 2019).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> It was first published in episodes without accompanying images in the newspaper *Figaro*, between 4 and 14 February 1892 (Grojnowski, in Rodenbach, 1998).



Fig 18 Georges Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-morte*. Book, 11.5 x 18 cm, 1892, Paris: Marpon & Flammarion, my photograph

The photographs were included ‘to offer a visual echo chamber to the story of a widower overcome with grief, incapable of surmounting the trauma of his wife’s death’ (Edwards, 2000, p 71, and Baetens, 2019, p 10). I shall discuss *Bruges La Morte* further in chapter five, on nineteenth-century photo-texts. What matters here is to highlight one peculiarity of the work that Paul Edwards pointed out: *Bruges La Morte*’s photographs, in their relationship with the text, become ‘both realist and unreal’ at the same time (2000, p 83). This marks a first step towards writers’ play with the ‘unstable



and malleable' character of photography that will reach its apex with novels such as Winfried Georg Sebald's *The Emigrants* (1992), as they go beyond 'the traditional view of photography as a reliable, transparent, and natural medium' (Pedri and Petit, 2013, p 6). Intriguingly, it is precisely starting from Sebald's 'subversive, ambiguous, and destabilizing' use of photographs, which, 'far from being tokens of authenticity, foreground rupture and absence', that Tagg (2009, pp xxxi, xxxviii and 13) constructs his reflection on the 'violence of meaning' in photography, continuing his initial discourse on the 'disciplinary knowledge' produced by the institutional appropriation of photography that I mentioned earlier within the scientific/knowledge-based photo-text type (Pedri and Petit, 2013, p 6). Like *Bruges La Morte*, André Breton's novel *Nadja* (1928, 1960 and 1963) can be considered another cornerstone of the photo-literary canon in terms of non-conventional image-text relations, as the included photographs mingle their role of 'evidence and enigma', when considered in association with the text (Elkins, 2015, no pagination).



Fig 19 André Breton, *Nadja*. Book, 12 x 19 cm, 1963, Paris : Gallimard, courtesy Fondation Jan Michalski pour l'écriture et la littérature

*Nadja's* accompanying photographs are as diverse as one can possibly imagine, since they are 'indifferently lit, composed, and framed', with and without people, showing 'only the shop or café or person described in the text', or showing much more, bearing 'traces of the time of day or season', or not (Elkins, 2015, no pagination). It is Breton himself who wished to simplify the role of the images, as stated in the introduction to the 1963 revised edition, where he says that he wanted the photographs

published in *Nadja* to have the ‘anti-literary’ purpose of ‘eliminating all descriptions’, in radical contrast with earlier novelists, such as Henry James, who imagined that photographs would ‘compete with their descriptive abilities’ (Elkins, 2015, no pagination, Dow Adams, 2008, p 179, Clayssen, 1981, p 33, and Chiocchetti, 2014).<sup>45</sup> In his interesting comparison between nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels that incorporated photographs, Timothy Dow Adams argues that postmodernist novelists have come to incorporate photographs into their texts, together with ‘medical forms, drawings, and other forms of documentation, resulting in a sort of literary trick in which invented, fictive material pretends to be merely reproduced, nonfictive documentary’ (2008, 180). Peculiar is the case of Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), where photographic images are included as literary devices through the protagonist’s scrapbook entitled *Stuff That Happened to Me*, in which he gives an account of his quest in New York City for ‘a lock to the key he found in his father’s closet, right after the latter died in the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers’ (Lezana, 2017, p 2).<sup>46</sup> In terms of images incorporating literature, Eric Rondepierre’s series *Loupe/Dormeurs* stands out as he composed his images using the 156,000 keystrokes of his novel *Dormeurs* to bitmap each of the 11 photographs, which all contain the whole book, as shown in Figure 20 (Rondepierre, 1999-2002).

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<sup>45</sup> For further information on *Nadja*, see Jean Arrouye’s article ‘La photographie dans *Nadja*’, in *Mélusine IV, Le livre surréaliste*; Marja Warehime’s chapter ‘Photography, Time, and the Surrealist Sensibility’ in Marsha Bryant’s *Photo-Textualities*; Daniel Grojnowski’s ‘Promenades photographiques: *Nadja* d’André Breton’, in *Photographie et Langage*; David Bate’s *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent*; and Paul Edwards’ *Soleil Noir* (Bryant, 1996, pp 43-56, Grojnowski, 2002, pp 147-76, Bate, 2004, and Edwards, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> Curiously, the book won the Book Illustration Award and was named Overall Winner at the Victoria and Albert Illustration Awards in 2005 (Sadokierski, 2013, pp 177-98).

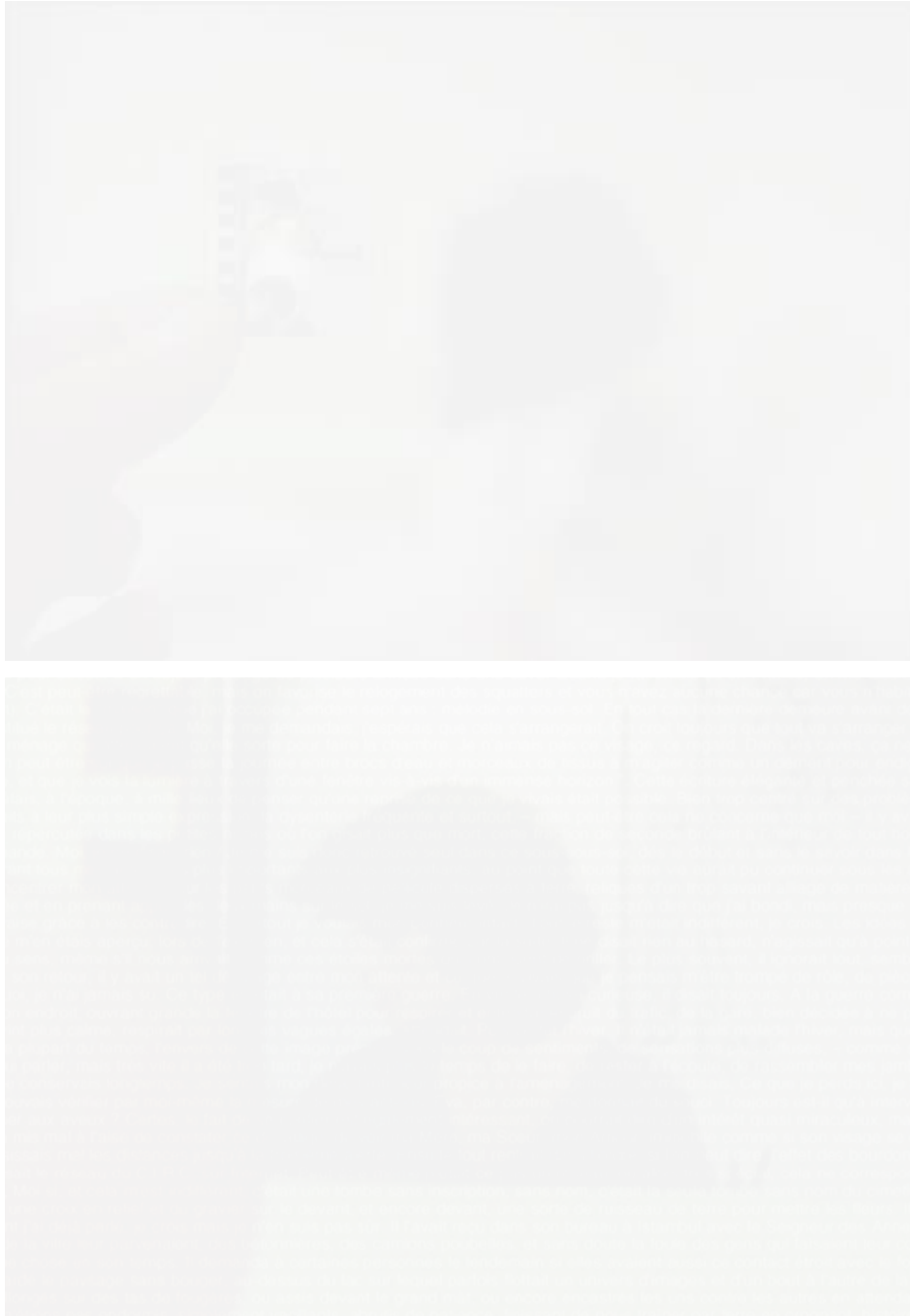


Fig 20 Eric Rondepierre, from the series *Loupe/Dormeurs*. Silver print on aluminium, 42 x 56 cm, 1999-2002, courtesy the artist

The research on these types of photo-texts is quite substantial, as all the publications mentioned so far show; hence my choice to focus later in Part II, dedicated to the case studies, on another type that was considered by scholars to belong to photo-literature and has recently started to be treated as a separate type: photo-poetry.

**5. Photo-poetry.** As a 'peculiarly privileged species of literature', poetry deserves specific attention and so do those works in which photographic images and verses are presented together as one work (Eagleton, 2007, p 12). After Michal Nott's important

book *Photopoetry 1845-2015: A Critical History* (2018a), it can no longer be ignored that, since poetry and literature are too far away from each other to be included under the same category, photo-poetry deserves to be investigated as a type of photo-text in its own right. Nott (2018a) focuses on Anglo-American photo-poetic collaborations from their origins in the nineteenth century to the present day.<sup>47</sup> I shall discuss a selection of nineteenth-century photo-poems in chapter five, and compare two photo-poetic works, Bertolt Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* (1955) and Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau's *La Mort et les statues* (1946), in chapter six; here I examine the type more in general terms.<sup>48</sup>

Rather than considering actual photo-poems, a number of scholars have written about the relationship between photography and poetry. Yves Bonnefoy argues in *Poetry and Photography* (2015) that the invention and dissemination of photography impacted on human awareness and therefore on poetry, by for the first time allowing something into photographic images that cannot be seen in any other kind of image – chance, that ‘tiny element that threatens beliefs and certainties with collapse’ and leaves us aware of ‘the emptiness within’ (pp 78-79). His notion of chance embedded in photographic images reminds me of Benjamin's ‘optical unconscious’, although Benjamin did not have such an apocalyptic view (cited in Trachtenberg, 1980, p 203). Poetry for Bonnefoy (2015, p 73) is the antidote to this blinding awareness of nothingness imposed by photography, as poetry's ‘role is to examine, in a critical or supportive spirit, the ways in which the men or women of our time combat the alienation they undergo’ (in Thélot, 2009).

Barthes compared ‘certain photographs’ to haiku, as they are both ‘undevelopable’: in photography ‘an essence (of a wound)’ cannot be developed ‘but only repeated under the instances of insistence (of the insistent gaze)’ – equally in a haiku ‘everything is given, without provoking the desire for or even the possibility of a rhetorical

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<sup>47</sup> Nott opts for writing ‘photopoetry’ as one word without explaining the reason for his choice. Also, as with the other types of photo-texts, I do not consider a work of photo-poetry a poem about photography or a photograph if no image appears associated with it, as, again, we are in the realm of ekphrasis – as I mentioned in the previous chapter in relation to Hunter's chapter ‘Photographs Line by Line’, where his ‘dismissive attitude towards the potential connections between poetry and photography’ emerges (1987, pp 161-96), without elaborating his position in a sophisticated manner, as pointed out also by Nott (2018a, p 9). Andrew Miller dedicated a book to the ‘lyrical ekphrasis of photographs’, entitled *Poetry, Photography, Ekphrasis* (2015), and Heinrich Schwarz reveals his discovery of ‘An Eighteenth Century English Poem on the Camera Obscura’, in the book *One Hundred Years of Photographic History: Essays in Honor of Beaumont Newhall* (1975, pp 127-38).

<sup>48</sup> Since photo-poetry is among the types I decided to focus on with the case studies in Part II, this section is longer than those for the other types.

expansion' and both share an '*intense immobility*' that does not make us 'dream' (2000, p 49). Adolfo Montejo Navas (2017) explores photography and poetry's elective affinities in the way they construct an image. He argues that the photographic series, like poetry, can be elliptical, going from one image to the other, or from one line or stanza to the other in the case of poetry. The links between poetry and photography are fascinating, but they rarely deal with poems and photographs 'in conjunction' and, as pointed out by Nott, 'we must ask what happens to the "intense immobility"' proposed by Barthes, when verses and photographic images 'engage in dialogue'.

*Even in seemingly illustrative connections, for example, a poem may draw the reader/viewer beyond the frame of the photograph. A photograph, likewise, may challenge or confirm the reader/viewer's impression of a landscape found in the poem. Such challenges and difficulties, to paraphrase Barthes, only increase the desire for and possibility, of imagination, revelation and rhetorical expansion (Nott, 2018a, p 5).*

Although Nott mainly refers to *Camera Lucida* and does not mention Barthes' photo-text theory that he proposed in his 1964 essay 'Rhetoric of the Image', the challenges Nott mentions in the above passage echo precisely the categories of 'anchorage' and 'relay' that Barthes introduced to describe the opposite effects, of seizure or expansion respectively, that a linguistic message can have when associated to photography (Barthes, 1977, p 38). I shall return to this issue in the next chapter.

Thanks to Nott's (2018a, p 2) research we learn that, although pairings of photographs and poems have been made quite soon after the official invention of photography, the first use of the word 'photopoem' in English dates back to 1936 – as the title of the anthology *Photopoems: A Group of Interpretations through Photographs*, photographed and compiled by Constance Phillips.

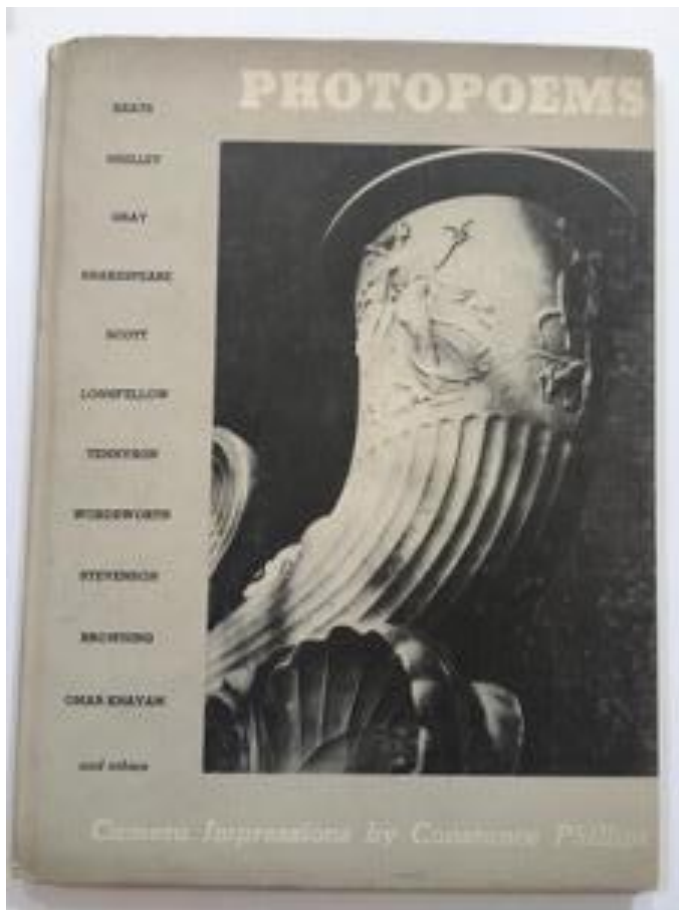


Fig 21 Constance Phillips, *Photopoems: A Group of Interpretations through Photographs*. Book, unknown size, 1936, New York: Covici Friede Publishers, my photograph

The book has been neglected possibly because it created a too significant spatio-temporal distance in terms of photo-text dynamics, since she 'interprets', as the title suggests, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century poets – such as William Wordsworth and Walter Scott, but also William Shakespeare, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Emily Dickinson – mainly through her urban photography, while these poets' 'ideas of the metropolis were obviously much different to Phillips's scenes of New York in the 1930s' (Nott, 2018a, p 139). Another reason could be that in her foreword her photo-poem dynamics sound more promising than they are (Phillips, 1936, no pagination). After explaining her attempt to 're-sight' 'some famous lines [...] written centuries ago', 'through the lens', Phillips asks the reader 'not to look for too literal illustration', for she has tried 'more to convey the mood of the poem than to reproduce the actual imagery of the poet'. It is a request that inevitably creates expectations in the reader, who looks forward to being hooked by more sophisticated photo-text dynamics that go beyond simple illustration. With the last sentence she plays it safe and somewhat weakens the enthusiasm. Her 'impressions', she

concludes, 'must necessarily be personal, and if they are not shared by all [her] readers it is because great poetry will always signify different things to different people'. This sentence prompts the somewhat rhetorical question: why bother in the first place to anchor or interpret, to paraphrase Phillips, these eternal and differently perceivable verses by masters of the past with a personal visual response by an amateur of the present, which is equally polysemic, if the basis of any image-text pairing – namely the awareness to create, by combining two different media, a 'third something' that is only produced in the mind of the reader, and hence is inevitably different in each reader – is not understood by the author of the pairings? Furthermore, despite her declaration not to be literal, Phillips did respond to many of the poetic excerpts in a literal way, for example pairing an image of footprints in the sand with the following two quatrains from Longfellow's *A Psalm of Life* (1838):

*Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time;*

*Footprints, that perhaps another,  
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,  
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,  
Seeing, shall take heart again  
(Phillips, 1936, no pagination).*

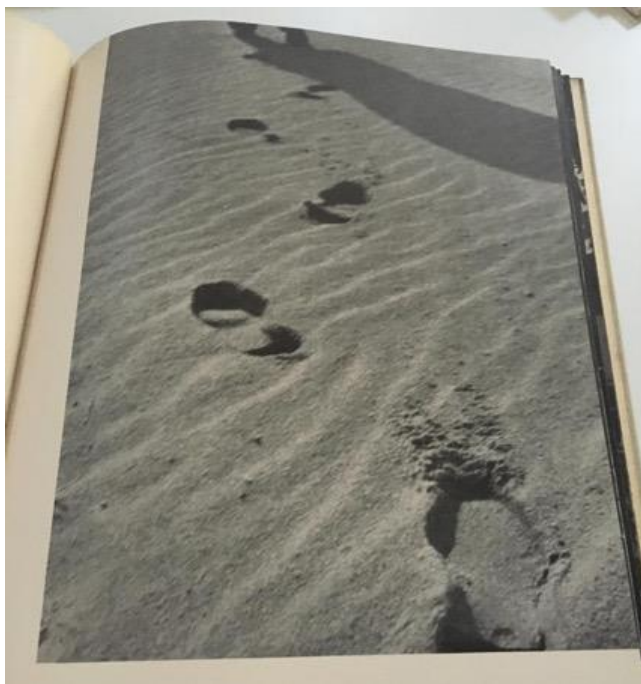


Fig 22 Constance Phillips, *Photopoems: A Group of Interpretations through Photographs*. Book, unknown size, 1936, New York: Covici Friede Publishers, my photograph

Despite all of its shortcomings, Phillips' *Photopoems* has the merit to have given a specific name and recognition to a type of photo-text that deserved it. I agree with Nott (2018a, p 2) that critiques and theories of photo-poetry are scarce – hence with photo-poetry collector David Solo I am in the process of assembling them, by deducing them from the available photo-poetry titles in his collection, which often contain, as in the case of Phillips, reflections on photo-text dynamics in their paratexts, such as prefaces, editor's notes, back covers or jacket sleeves.<sup>49</sup>

An interesting anthological example of pairings of poems and photographs that contains photo-text reflections in the editor's note is Brian Holme and Thomas Forman's *A Poet's Camera* (1946, no pagination), described by them as 'a collection of artistic photographs with accompanying poetry that interpret the mood or meaning of each', surprisingly not mentioned in Nott (2018a). Conceived to go beyond photography's 'appreciation for its practical function of accurate visual record' and celebrate its 'elusive qualities' that photography shares with other arts such as painting or sculpture, Holme and Forman write, somewhat contradictorily, that they have tried 'to interpret the mood or meaning of each picture directly or by inflection, rather than to match pictorial with literary subjects, to the end that one should enhance the other in clarity, significance and form'. How elusiveness can produce clarity does not appear so clear to me, but their editor's note is nonetheless a precious document for the history and theory of photo-poetic works.

Nicole Boulestreau (1983), in her seminal article on Paul Éluard and Man Ray's *Facile (Easy)* (1935), most likely unaware of Phillips' preceding use, coined the French term '*photopoème*' to describe the thin publication mingling Éluard's poems and Man Ray's photographs, which has become a classic within photo-poetry – although the book is far from conventional (Montier, 2013 and 2018, and Destribats, 2019). Éluard's wife, Nusch, and poet, typographer and publisher Guy Lévis-Mano also collaborated in the creation of the book, which presented Éluard's love lyrics and Man Ray's 11 photographs of Nusch's body deeply graphically enmeshed. It is precisely this graphic

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<sup>49</sup> Our collaborative research project on Solo's photo-poetry collection is ongoing but currently (April 2021) on hold due to the travelling restrictions and library closures caused by the pandemic. So far it was presented on the pages of issue 12 of YET magazine (2020), at Temple Books at Les Rencontres d'Arles in July 2019, within the panel 'What is a Photo-Text Book?', at the PhotoBook Week at Shakespeare and Company in Paris, guest curated by my platform Photocaptionist, within the panel 'A Love Affair Between Photographs and Words', on 6 November 2018, and will be published in 2021. For this thesis I have gathered a selection of the most interesting findings so far.



fusion of the verbal and visual 'surfaces' that constitutes for Boulestreau the originality of the work and makes her declare the 'apparition of a new type of illustrated book, [the photopoem] in which photographs and texts answer each other more tightly than in the past on both symbolic and pictorial level simultaneously' (1983, pp 163-64).



Fig 23 Man Ray and Paul Éluard, *Facile*. Book, 18 x 24 cm, 1935, Paris: G.L.M., courtesy David Solo

Boulestreau first compares *Facile* with Maxime du Camp's *Egypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* (1852), in which she finds the relation of the image to its commentary 'unilateral' from a symbolic point of view, and then to *Narcisse (Narcissus)* by Paul Valéry (1936), illustrated with 13 photographs by Laure-Albin Guillot, in which the images are isolated onto a separate page and act more as a 'visual background' (1983, pp 163-64). Boulestreau praises *Facile* for creating a new experience for the reader/viewer:

In the photopoem, meaning progresses in accordance with the reciprocity of writing and figures: reading becomes interwoven through alternating restitchings of the signifier into text and image. At the pictorial level the relations text-photo occur beyond the distinction readable/visible (p 164).

Although the text does not invade the image's surface, there are spreads that almost suggest the fantasy that the female body is escaping from the text or is framing it and erotically playing with it. Hence the term 'photopoem' without hyphen in this case seems to me appropriate.

A rare and pioneering book is Penelope Slinger's *50% The Visible Woman* (1971), with its psychoanalytic, feminist and confrontational photo-collages and tissue

overlays; a disturbingly fascinating book that introduces a different language for the feminine psyche to express itself and peeps into what can be described as 'photo-concrete-poetry', a sub-type I am exploring within the David Solo collection.

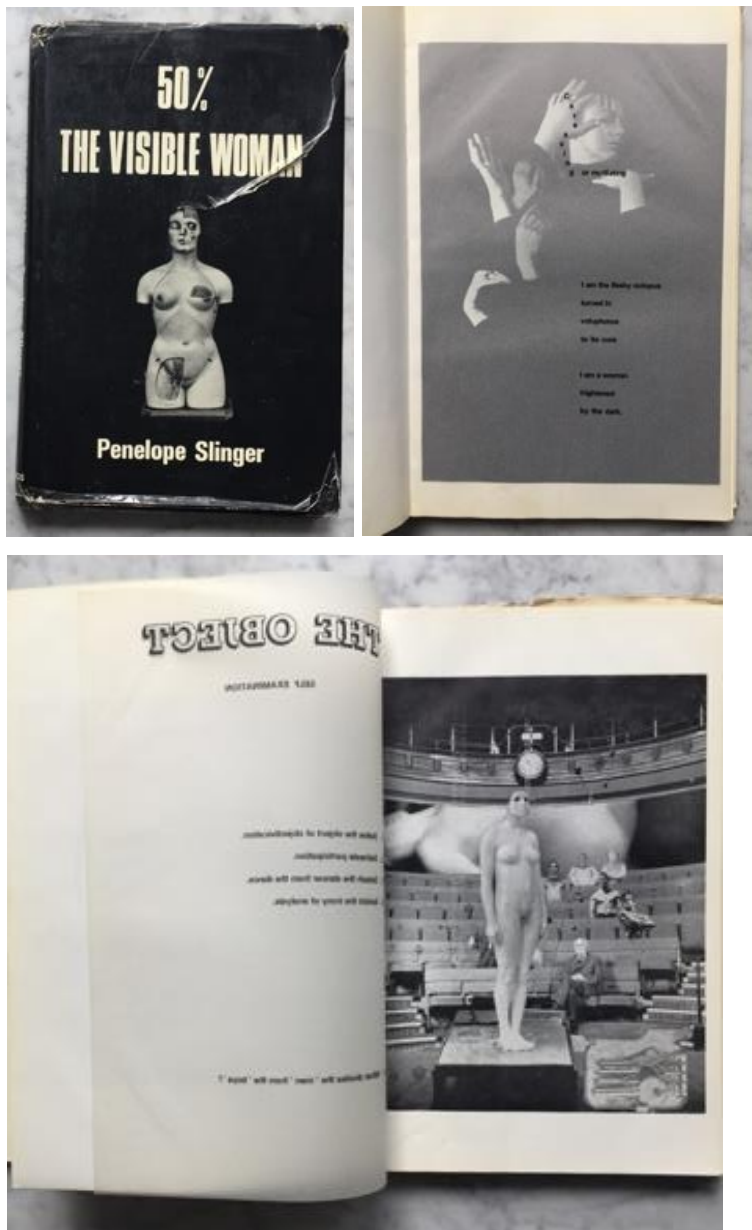


Fig 24 Penelope Slinger, *50% The Visible Woman*. Book, size unknown, 1971, London: Narcis Publishing, courtesy Susan Lipper

The poems, printed on semi-transparent paper, are interleaved with feminist critique/erotic photomontages and at times they behave like visual poetry, appearing in typographical dialogue with the image underneath the vellum, such as the first verse 'caressing or mutilating' as it follows the curved movement of the woman's hands along the edges of her face, 'enacting the action they describe' (Liberty, 2019, no pagination). This typographical dialogue becomes also conceptual and political, hence pushing the photo-poetic possibilities even further than *Facile*.

I would like to conclude this type by mentioning two 'events' that made 2016 a particularly prosperous year for photo-poetry. Photo-poetry's first manifesto was published by Robert Crawford and Norman McBeath in their collaboration *Chinese Makars* (2016, pp 68-69), a multi-layered book where 'Scots versions by Robert Crawford of work by four poets or "makars" from the classic era of Chinese poetry are paired with black and white duotone photographs by Norman McBeath and the pioneering Victorian photographer John Thomson (1837-1921)' (Nott, 2018b, no pagination). Their manifesto comprises 12 points that touch upon a number of ideas, from the somewhat cryptic claim that 'poems and photographs encourage each other's obliquity', to the condition of having both independence and interdependence between poems and photographs in order to obtain a 'successful pairing' (Crawford and McBeath, 2016, p 68). Literal illustration is to be avoided, and 'revealing' is to be preferred to 'explaining' to activate 'the reader's imagination'; a multiplicity of connective strands between text and image are necessary and 'the pairing should allow for serendipity' (pp 68-69). Intriguingly, they also outline more pragmatic issues such as the fact that the 'dynamic' between a short poem and a photograph 'works best at exhibitions' and the need to make sure that the only language in the proximity of the photograph is that of the poem (p 69). Despite people's curiosity towards titles and captions that often indicate when and where an image was taken, to include such information in photo-poetry provokes a loss of 'imaginative engagement' in people as soon as viewers/readers are exposed to the factual information about the image (p 69).

The second important event of 2016 was that Clare Strand published the innovative photo-poetry book *Girl Plays with Snake*, in which archival images of one of the artist's obsessions – images of girls and snakes interacting – mingle with computer-generated poetry, which opens up the discussion on the impact of algorithmic randomness in photo-text dynamics.<sup>50</sup>

**6. Photo-novel or roman-photo.** 'I myself experience this slight trauma of failure once faced with certain photo-novels: "*their stupidity touches me*", wrote Barthes about the *roman-photo* (1977, p 66). Fascinated and repulsed, he compared the French photo-novel *Nous Deux* with the writings of Marquise de Sade (Chougnat in Deschamps, 2017, p 41). Translated in English as photo-novel or photo-

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<sup>50</sup> This is another subject that I am exploring as a continuation of this research, as it is beyond its purposes.

comic, the *roman-photo* entails quite a codified relationship between photographs and texts – mainly staged images to support dialogues between the portrayed characters. Although the story is primarily narrated through the texts, images and texts have to collaborate to create the maximum dramatic effect, conveying action and dynamism within the static realm of the printed page and the still photograph. Instruction manuals on how to make a successful photo-novel have circulated since the 1950s, such as this rare one by Ennio Jacobelli rediscovered by Jan Baetens, as shown in Figure 25 (Jacobelli, 1956).



Fig 25 Ennio Jacobelli, *Sulle Istruzioni pratiche per la realizzazione del fotoromanzo*. Instruction manual, size unknown, 1956, Rome: Editrice Politecnica Italiana, courtesy Jan Baetens

A product conceived with a specific female target audience in mind, it entailed all sorts of patriarchal and paternalistic implications in 1940s Italy, where it was born on 8 May

1947 with the publication of the first issue of *Il mio Sogno* (*My Dream*) (Baetens, 1988).



Fig 26 Left: Advertisement for *Il mio Sogno* in *Rivista 8 Otto* of 4 September 1947  
 Right: *Il mio Sogno*, *Settimanale di romanzi d'amore e fotogrammi*. Photo-novel, size unknown, Rome: Editrice Novissima, 4 January 1948, courtesy92ailure92e.it

Curiously, the photo-novel achieved incredible commercial success mostly in Catholic and southern countries, less so in Anglo-Saxon culture (Deschamps, 2017).

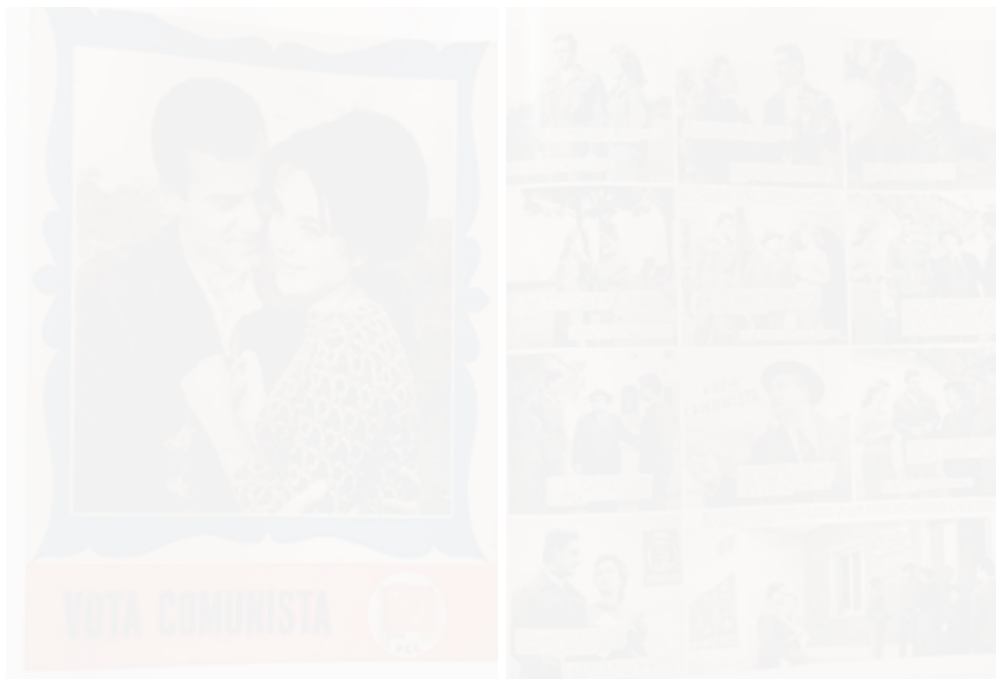


Fig 27 Franco Albani, *Diritto di amare*. Photo-novel of the Italian Communist Party, size unknown, 1964, Rome: stampa e propaganda del Comitato centrale del Partito comunista italiano, courtesy Fondazione Gramsci

Intriguingly, it was also used for political propaganda by the Italian Communist Party to attract female votes (Bonifazio, 2017). Due to its focus on romance, it took a while

before scholars examined it seriously without snobbery, but once they started they never stopped (Blatt, 2009a). Thanks to the thorough research conducted by Evelyne Sullerot (1963 and 1966), Arturo Carlo Quintavalle (1972), Bernardes Habert (1974), Serge Saint-Michel (1979), Jan Baetens (1988, 1991, 2010, 2013 and 2017), the major retrospective at MUCEM Marseille curated by Frederique Deschamps (2017) and numerous artists who have been inspired by it, the photo-novel is a lively field of academic and curatorial exploration.

**7. ‘Conceptual photo-texts’.** One could provocatively argue that any photo-text might be intrinsically conceptual, given that it incorporates language and therefore thought. However, I would like to introduce this type to cluster and label those photo-texts in which, as the adjective suggests, it is the relationship and dynamics between images and words that is conceptual, rather than descriptive, literary, poetic, journalistic, scientific or instructive – in other words it emphasises the notion of ‘art as idea’, de-prioritising aesthetic values (Marzona, 2006, pp 6-8). In conceptual photo-texts images can be made by the artist or appropriated. They rarely circulate without the texts in other contexts, as often, but not always, the text is embedded in them. They can belong to any photographic genre, and when they intentionally echo a particular genre’s style it is mainly in order to deconstruct it and unmask it from its own stereotypes. Their textual component can be authored by the artist, partly or entirely appropriated from other thinkers, and is not classifiable as literature or poetry – and, as with their visual component, in those cases in which it is assimilable to a specific genre it is mainly in order to imitate or ‘mock’ it. On most occasions the text is succinct and its style echoes the notion of ‘pamphlet’, at times drifting to provocative minimalism, where the beholder is urged to take part actively, through the use of direct address. Conceptual photo-texts exist both as printed matter, such as books or artistic interventions in magazines, and as installations in galleries, museums or the public space. They can deal with socio-political issues as well as containing ‘scripto-visual’ reflections, and therefore be ‘meta-photo-textual’, borrowing from Luigi Pirandello and Lionel Abel’s concept of ‘metatheatre’, and from Mitchell’s notion of ‘metapicture’ (1994, pp 35-82), as discussed earlier in chapter one (Pérez-Simón, 2011, p 2, and Manghani, p 78).<sup>51</sup> In terms of the dynamics and hierarchies of photo-texts, conceptual

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<sup>51</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, it was Victor Burgin who introduced the expression ‘scripto-visual’ in the chapter ‘Seeing Sense’ of his 1986 book *The End of Art Theory*, where he claims that ‘the greater part of photographic practice is, *de facto*, “scripto-visual”’ (p 58). For Burgin, a conceptual artwork is

photo-texts usually encapsulate the most accomplished democratic intersections with both visual and textual elements sharing equal importance in contributing to the meaning – or, at times, the ambiguity – of the artwork.

Indeed my choice of the adjective ‘conceptual’ is inevitably related to the ‘linguistic turn’ of the heterogeneous ‘movement’ of Conceptual Art in the 1960s that stressed the importance of ‘art as idea’ and ‘as a special form of information, which was often presented as a combination of photography and text’, and for which the aesthetic of the finished art object was less important than the concept behind it (Marzona, 2006, pp 6-8).<sup>52</sup> As pointed out by David Bate, ‘the role and look of photography in Conceptual Art has varied enormously, depending on the skill, inclinations, interests and values of the artists involved’, from simply a ‘handy tool’ to becoming the very ‘allegorical’ focus of the work (2015, p 93).<sup>53</sup> Often believed to be too complex or abstruse, it was instead the desire to ‘make art appeal to those who had found the reductive forms of modernism incomprehensible’ that influenced conceptual artists to incorporate words and ‘render the artwork “legible” in the most obvious sense’ (Morley, 2003, p 142). This decision was also partly inspired by Pop Art’s attention on the ‘receivership’, to use Lawrence Weiner’s expression, with the idea of renegotiating ‘the

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theoretically expressive, and ‘the art has transferred into theory and criticism, so it follows that art theory has reached to an end and now it is declared through artworks’ (Tahoori, 2013, no pagination). See also ‘Text-Image-Form: Federica Chiochetti in conversation with Victor Burgin’, published in *Aperture’s PhotoBook Review*, issue 16, Spring 2019.

<sup>52</sup> It is ‘essentially a substitution of text [...] for work that is carried out by conceptual artists’ (Alberro, 2003, p 181). Playing devil’s advocate, one could also ask why I chose the adjective ‘conceptual’ over ‘postmodern’, since a number of the artists such as Burgin and Kruger are labelled, against their wishes, as ‘postmodern’ – for example by Linda Hutcheon in the chapter ‘Text/image border tensions’ of her book *The Politics of Postmodernism* and, as Kotz points out, the photo-text’s ‘perennial pairing later resurfaced in so much “postmodern” art of the 1980s’ (Hutcheon, 2002, pp 114-29, and Kotz, 2010, p 217). As an art movement that emerged in the 1970s, Postmodernism is quite difficult to define. Grounded in scepticism and irony, ‘parody – often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality – is usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders’ (Hutcheon, 2002, p 89). Among its detractors, Burgin for example considers Postmodernism a journalistic ‘tag’ that was used to support a wholesale ‘return to painting’, as he wrote in ‘The Absence of Presence: Conceptualism and Postmodernisms’ within his *The End of Art Theory* book (1986, pp 29-50). On the other hand, ‘one of the things conceptual art attempted was the dismantling of the hierarchy of media according to which painting (sculpture trailing slightly behind) is assumed inherently superior to, most notably, photography’ (Burgin, 1986, p 34). So, although conceptual photo-texts partly show some postmodernist elements, such as parodic commentary on social discourse, combining mass media and high art, they deal less with what Abigail Solomon-Godeau described as ‘postmodernism’s “already made”’ and focus more on the intrusion and disruption of language into the visual realm (Hutcheon, 2002, p 115, Solomon-Godeau, 1984, p 76, and Thomas, 1976, no pagination). Also, while the adjective ‘postmodern’ would have unequivocally linked the type to the specific art movement, by using ‘conceptual’ with lowercase I refer more to the adjective in its broader sense, loosely inspired by the Conceptual Art movement, but going beyond it by including photo-texts that deal with socio-political issues in a conceptual manner.

<sup>53</sup> See also Soutter, 1999 and 2012, and Fogle, 2003.

nature of the transaction between the work and the audience', considered as 'active readers and involved participants in the generation of the work' (Morley, 2003, p 142).

A good example is Mel Bochner's *Misunderstandings (A Theory of Photography)* (1970), which was conceived as part of the limited-edition boxed set of artists' books entitled *Artists & Photographs*.



Fig 28 Mel Bochner, *Misunderstandings (A Theory of Photography)*, from the series *Artists & Photographs*. Offset envelope, containing ten offset cards, from a portfolio of 19 printed objects, card (each): 12.7 x 20.3 cm; envelope: 15.2 x 22.9 cm, 1970, New York: Multiples, Inc., in association with Colorcraft, Inc., courtesy Bibliothèque Kandinsky

After digging into the medium's history, he believed that the theoretical material of value he found was very little. This encouraged him to collect quotations of misunderstandings about photography and design an unbound artist book, which consisted of a plain brown envelope containing ten loose individual sheets. Nine of them are facsimiles of index cards with handwritten quotations. To add to the confusion of the misunderstandings, Bochner crafted three fake quotes which are mingled among the authentic ones, and it is up to audience to spot them. The tenth element is a black and white image, taken from above, of a supposedly male arm lying on a surface with rolled-up sleeves, next to a tape measure marking 12" and entitled, somewhat tautologically, *Actual Size (Hand)*, as shown in Figure 28 (Bochner, 1970).

Martha Rosler's *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, as shown in Figure 5 (Rosler, 1974-75) in chapter one, is another perfect example of a conceptual photo-text that also offers a 'meta-photo-text' reflection, as it shows the fragility of both



visual and verbal languages (Chiocchetti, 2019c, and Morley, 2003). In her presentation of the work, Rosler allows images and words to share equal dignity in thei96ailurere to document reality.<sup>54</sup> By pairing images of the social reality of New York's Bowery district, at the time an infamous haunt of alcoholics and vagabonds, with photos of 'colloquial terms' related to drunkenness in playful and metaphorical ways, Rosler offers a conceptual and deadpan critique of the poverty of representation in political documentary and the 'impotency of language to convey reality' (Fisher, 1983, no pagination).

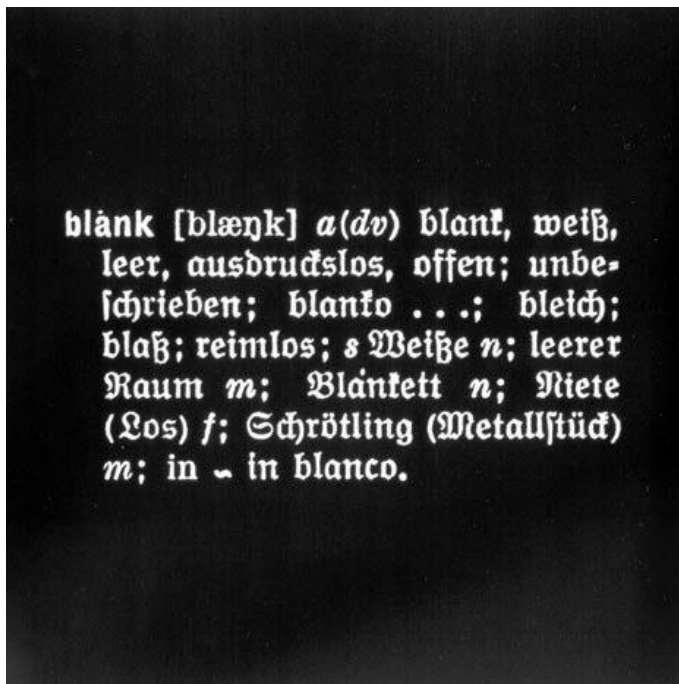


Fig 29 Joseph Kosuth, *Blank*. Phototext, 125 x 125 cm, 1967, Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Nationalgalerie, Marzona collection

As mentioned in chapter one, Joseph Kosuth's label for his 1967 conceptual artwork *Blank*, which describes the materiality of the artwork as 'phototext', all one word, as you would read 'oil on canvas' for a painting, inspired me to use it to identify those photo-texts where images and words are presented on the same surface, as in Victor Burgin's and Barbara Kruger's socio-political phototexts from the 1970s and 1980s that constitute the last case study in chapter six.<sup>55</sup> Duane Michals' *A Failed Attempt to Photograph Reality* is an extreme example of a conceptual photo-text: a

<sup>54</sup> See also Edwards, S. (2012). *Martha Rosler: The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*. London: Afterall Books, pp 32-38.

<sup>55</sup> The linguistic nature of Kosuth's work 'transforms the seen into the said turning the viewer into a reader' (Morley, 2003, p 145). Alternatively, Kosuth's labels also say 'Photostat', an early projection photocopying machine that he used to reproduce enlarged definitions of words he clipped from the dictionary.

photograph of his handwriting where he concludes quite apocalyptically that 'to photograph reality is to photograph nothing', as shown in Figure 48 (Michals, 1976) in the next chapter.

The makers of conceptual photo-texts par excellence are Lew Thomas, Donna-Lee Phillips and their peers Hal Fischer and Peter D'Agostino, who, in the early 1970s, 'set out to disrupt photography in San Francisco', exploring the relationship between photography and language, which they did through an open call exhibition and book, *Photography and Language*, published in 1976 under their own imprint NFS Press. It intended to 'neutralize the fetishistic values of the [photographic] object' and to 'equate an exhibition with theory' (O'Toole, 2020, pp 5-12, and Thomas, 1976, no pagination).<sup>56</sup>

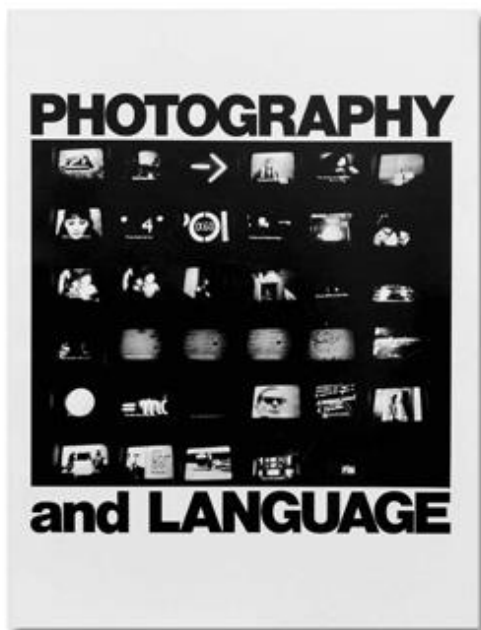


Fig 30 Lew Thomas, *Photography and Language*. Book, size unknown, 1976, San Francisco: NFS Press, my photograph

In the introduction Thomas elaborates on the emergence of a new genre as follows:

*Once linguistic structuring is integrated with photographic procedures genres are subjected to reinterpretation and expansion. Unexpected formats emerge enabling artists to handle content that no longer can be contained within a pictorial tradition. Some of the material selected for this book utilizes familiar territory of photography like landscape, portraiture and documentary in which the application of language provides an objective tension to the imagery. Works implying feminist ideology have found an accessible methodology within photography and language to express their views. This dialectical approach to photography is further reflected in the book by work that confines its meaning*

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<sup>56</sup> A partial re-enactment of the exhibition *Photography and Language* was presented at Cherry and Martin gallery in Los Angeles in 2016, and the exhibition *Thought Pieces: 1970s Photographs by Lew Thomas, Donna-Lee Phillips, and Hal Fischer* was at at SFMOMA from 4 January to 9 August 2020.

*to measuring, locating, limiting or defining the boundaries of the medium* (Thomas, 1976, no pagination).

Although the artists included were not part of an official movement, they mingled photographs with text in a way that ‘expanded, reinterpreted, or contradicted the imagery’ (SFMOMA, 2020). In a letter to Minor White, who had requested samples of his work, Thomas described his vision in such a way that inspired my definition of the conceptual photo-text:

*The work may appear oddly simple. It relies on a non-visceral content deprived of sex and sympathy. [...] The expression of imagery is secondary to an insistence on ideas and their release through the agency of photography. The work is formulated by language and not by a reading of nature* (Thomas, no date, no pagination).<sup>57</sup>



Fig 31 Hal Fischer, *Signifiers for a Male Response*, from the series *Gay Semiotics: A Photographic Study of Coding Among Homosexual Men*. Pigmented inkjet print, printed 2014, 47 x 31.4 cm, 1977 © 2020 Hal Fischer

Among the works included in *Photography and Language*, Hal Fischer’s 1977 series *Gay Semiotics: A Photographic Study of Coding Among Homosexual Men* introduced principles of semiotics, ‘the study of how meaning is created and communicated through signs’, on gay culture in some of San Francisco’s districts, through a ‘lexicon of attraction’ that considered gay signifiers in fashion, media and BDSM culture

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<sup>57</sup> The letter is available online from the Photography Criticism CyberArchive website <https://www.nearbycafe.com/photocriticism/members/archivetexts/phototheory/thomas/thomasother.html>

(SFMOMA, 2020, and Diehl, 2016, no pagination). The case of Sophie Calle is particularly interesting, as she has been producing conceptual photo-texts throughout her career, both in book form and as installations for galleries and museum spaces, at times using her personal stories as points of departure, at other times dealing with other people's issues, such as blindness (1983 and 2012).

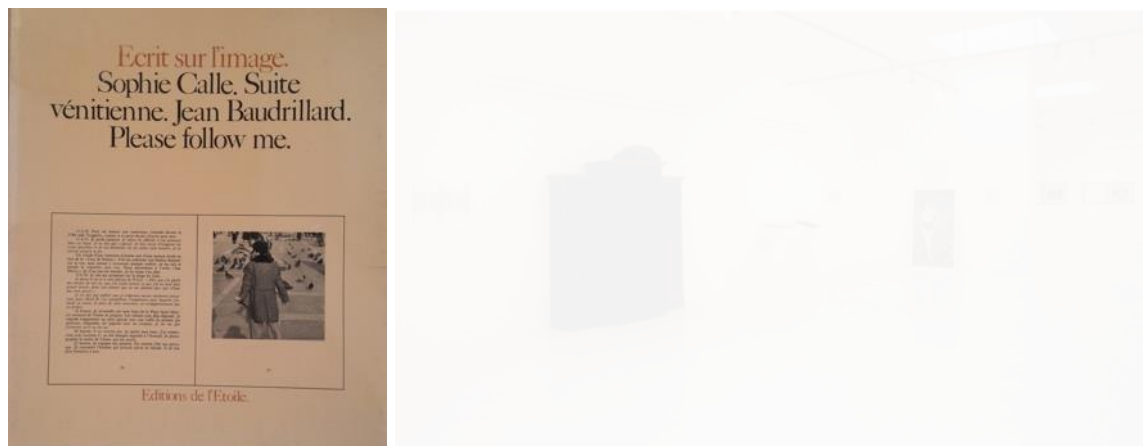


Fig 32 Left: Sophie Calle and Jean Baudrillard, *Suite Venitienne: Please Follow Me*. Book, 18 x 21 cm, 1983, Paris: Editions de l'Etoile, *Ecrit Sur L'image*, my photograph  
 Right: Sophie Calle, *Double Game*. Installation view, London: Camden Art Centre, 12 February – 28 March 1999

Her first piece was the 1979-80 performative project *Suite Vénitienne (Please Follow Me)*, where Calle, while attending an opening in Paris, is introduced to a mysterious man – the same one that she saw on the street that same day and whom she decides to follow on his imminent trip to Venice. In between conceptual street photography and voyeuristic reportage, *Suite Vénitienne* mingles black and white photographs with a meticulous and parodic travel log of Calle's (1983 and 2015) stalking mission around Venice (Bate, 2015, p 115). As a book the project underwent multiple editions, with the first one, in 1983, accompanied by a text by Jean Baudrillard (Calle, 1983, 1988 and 1998). As an installation it has also been reworked multiple times, such as a version with sound for her Camden Art Centre show, as shown in Figure 32 (Calle, 1999). It is fascinating how she confesses that the texts she has written to accompany her photographs have always been crafted with the wall in mind rather than the printed page, when she narrates the development of her career as an artist (Indrisek, 2019, no pagination). Her most recent body of work is the 2018-20 book and exhibition *Parce que (Because)*, where she first reveals, for each image, the reason that prompted her 'to press the shutter', to only reveal later the photograph, hidden in the 'interstices of the Japanese binding' of her book, or behind framed felt curtains embroidered with Calle's writing in her gallery display, as an 'ironic puzzle' (2018, no pagination). In

particular with this project, by reversing the order of appearance between an image and the words that accompany it, Calle questions the relationship of supposed 'natural primacy' of photographs over texts, emphasising 'the influence that the latter may have on our reception of a photograph' (2018, no pagination). Her scripto-visual work has been described as a complex form of *roman-photo* by Ari Blatt (2009a, p 46), and Andy Stafford argued that the success of her 'photo-stories' during the 1980s and 1990s 'suggests a critical engagement by the *photo-roman* readership', while it is quite adamant that it possesses all the characteristics described above of the conceptual photo-text rather than those of the photo-novel (Stafford, 2010, p 3). A pioneering installation example of conceptual photo-texts is Larry Sultan's seminal 1983 collaboration with Mike Mandel, *Newsroom*, for which they acted as news editors and placed in Berkeley's University Art Museum an evolving installation that they changed twice weekly with functioning electronic news and Wirephoto machines that produced the same visual and verbal information of around 200 photographs and 1,000 stories per day, from which daily newspapers draw their news, to question the objectivity of photographs and explore the altering effect of text that accompanies them (Lewallen, 1983, no pagination).



Fig 33 Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel, *Newsroom*. Installation detail, 1983, Berkeley: University Art Museum

As Constance Lewallen pointed out, 'as artists, they were freed from journalistic restraints, to pair texts that were unrelated to the images they accompanied, or to juxtapose images that together took on symbolic or lyrical meaning', including images

that were neglected by the media, to then compare their choices with the official ones that were actually published (2009, no pagination).<sup>58</sup>

Besides the already mentioned texts, the main academic and curatorial research that informed my proposition of this typology consists of Liz Kotz's chapter 'Text and Image: Rereading Conceptual Art', in her book *Words to Be Looked At* (2010, p 213-54), the catalogue of the exhibition *photo text text photo*, curated by Andreas Hapkemeyer and Peter Weiremair at Bozen's MUSEION, Frankfurter Kunstverein and Fotomuseum Winterthur (1996), and Simon Morley's chapters 'Art as Idea as Idea: Conceptual Words I' and 'A Heap of Language: Conceptual Words II' in his book *Writing on the Wall* (2003, pp 139-170). In particular, Kotz compellingly illustrates how it is the 'linking of photography to language that marks the crucial innovation of Conceptual art' and elaborates why, although the photo-text dyad is central to 1960s art, its complexity has not been fully explored (2010, pp 217-18). With photography believed to be structured 'like a language', and language often treated 'like photography', they both became 'tools for other types of projects', which 'helped to dislodge both media from their conventional functions and genres, and set them into new types of relations with each other', grounded on indifference to aesthetic qualities, paradoxical transparency and indexical uses (Kotz, 2010, p 218). Through Rosalind Krauss' reflection in her 1977 essay 'Notes on the Index', where she argues that 'the reduction of the conventional sign to a trace [...] then produces the need for a supplemental discourse', Kotz suggests that it was the extensive turn to indexical uses of both photography and text that made them become so intertwined and in need of each other (2010, pp 222-23). Kotz's chapter was crucial for me in defining the amplitude and flexibility of the typology's territory, which goes beyond the Conceptual Art movement as such to also encompass works that deal with socio-political issues. And indeed, as noted by Kotz, also within the Conceptual Art movement itself there was a 'gradual reformulation', such as Burgin's efforts in Britain in the 1970s, precisely 'to go "beyond conceptual art"', which 'led him and other artists to participate in more avowedly political projects of feminist critique and media activism, and embrace the semiotic and psychoanalytic modes of "film theory" that would come to be associated with the London-based *Screen* magazine' (2010, pp 218-19). Morley emphasised that

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<sup>58</sup> 'It was as if the news of the day found its way into the poetry section (if only newspapers had such a thing) – wrote Sultan to Lewallen – fragments of time and the real world were woven into something more mythic or allegorical' (Lewallen, 2009, no pagination).

'a pledge like this to the anti-aesthetic and conceptual approach could also be motivated by the desire to use art to overtly political ends and convey information about the sad state of the contemporary world' (2003, p 147). Hence, 'in order to oppose what was perceived as a crisis situation, some artists sought to use the forum set aside for art viewing as a site for various kinds of institutional and social critique' (Morley, 2003, p 148).



Fig 34 Andreas Hapkemeyer and Peter Weiermair, *Photo text text photo: The Synthesis of Photography and Text in Contemporary Art*. Exhibition catalogue, 24 x 24 cm, 1996, Zurich: Edition Stemmler,

I had the confirmation that 'conceptual' was the right adjective choice for this photo-text typology while reading the catalogue of the exhibition *photo text text photo*, curated by Andreas Hapkemeyer and Peter Weiermair (1996), which was the first 'comprehensive comparative presentation devoted to the phenomenon' of 'The Synthesis of Photography and Text in Contemporary Art', also the subtitle of the show and book. When they elaborate on the rationale and criteria of their 'representative survey' in the preface, they declare that they selected 'only those artists for whom both media are of crucial importance' over the period from 1967 to 1996, specifying that within that period 'artists of diverse *conceptual* provenance have practiced the artistic strategy of combining photos and texts' (Hapkemeyer and Weiermair, 1996, p 7, my emphasis). By including both established names within the Conceptual Art movement, such as Joseph Kosuth and Joseph Beuys, and more recent artists, such as Karen Knorr, Duane Michals and Olivier Richon, they not only showed the 'wealth of aesthetic strategies applied to the simultaneous use of text and photography in art since the



1960s', but they also demonstrated that 'conceptual strategies with roots in the works of the radical Conceptual Artists today once again form an essential core segment of what is more interesting in contemporary practice' (Hapkemeyer and Weiremair, 1996, p 33). Of course their 'today' was 1996, but what is most fascinating is that a conceptual approach of mingling photographs and texts continues today and has recently even regained momentum, also in light of what has been described as the 'photobook phenomenon', within which I have identified the specific category of 'photo-text books' (Chiocchetti, 2019, p 9).<sup>59</sup> The work of American photoartist Jason Fulford, particularly *The Mushroom's Collector* and *Contains 3 Books*, as well as *The Looking Game* and *How Things Dream* by Italian collective Discipula, and Lorenzo Tricoli's open work *The Archive You Deserve*, are clear examples of this contemporary conceptual 'photo-text vague', which deserves further scrutiny, and whose exploration that I have presented elsewhere is beyond the purpose of this thesis.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Photobook Phenomenon* is the title of a 2017 exhibition and catalogue that took place at CCCB and Fundació Foto Colectania in Barcelona, curated by a collective of experts such as Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, among others.

<sup>60</sup> On Jason Fulford's *Contains 3 Books* see Chiocchetti, 2017, and on Lorenzo Tricoli's work see Marani, 2018. In 2019, as guest editor of issue 16 of *Aperture's The PhotoBook Review*, I chose to dedicate it to the theme of 'photo-text' books and collaborate with a number of experts to put together a selective and unfinished bibliography of photo-text books, from the nineteenth century to today, which includes Discipula's *The Looking Game*, reviewed by Andrea Cortellessa, and Lorenzo Tricoli's *(Other) Adventures of Pinocchio*, reviewed by Pino Musi (Cortellessa and Musi, 2019, pp 18-20). See also 'Editor's Note' and 'What Is a Photo-Text Book' (Chiocchetti, 2019, pp 3-4 and 9). The column 'Image-Text PhotoBooks In A Nutshell' on my photo-literary platform *Photocaptionist* is available online at <https://photocaptionist.com/cornucopia/>.



Fig 35 Lorenzo Tricoli, *The Archive You Deserve*. Open work, 2002-17, courtesy Lorenzo Tricoli Archive

Before analysing contemporary conceptual photo-texts it is important to look at their forefathers. On the photo-text works of early conceptual artists there is already a certain amount of scholarship, such as the aforementioned works by Kotz and Morley, through which I realised that photography and texts have often not been given equal prominence. So, for a first exploration of the photo-text dynamics of this typology, in chapter five I chose as case studies a selection of Burgin's phototexts from his *US77* series with Kruger's phototexts, because they give equal prominence to images and texts.

In this chapter I responded to the taxonomical confusion that shrouds photo-texts by presenting a classification of types of photo-texts: 1. photo-captions and titles; 2. scientific/knowledge-based photo-texts; 3. Photo-literature; 4. Photo-poetry; 5. Photo-essays; 6. photo-novel or *roman-photo*; and 7. conceptual photo-texts.<sup>61</sup>

Mapping out this classification and examining each type's idiosyncrasies allowed me to acquire a better understanding in light of the photo-text theory discussed in the

<sup>61</sup> See the thesis conclusions for a summary of the different types of photo-texts.

next chapter and to identify the types that need further scrutiny – photo-poetry and conceptual photo-texts – that will be discussed through the case studies in Part II.

*The documentary photograph of human corpses in a pit does not tell us if they are victims of fascism or deservedly shot Nazis, or victims of a natural catastrophe, etc.: 'this' has approximately been like that, somewhere, at some given point in history.*

Michael Nerlich, 'What Is an Iconotext?', 1990

### **Chapter 3 Photographs and Words: Components of a Genre**

This chapter dissects the components of photo-texts from a theoretical point of view, namely photographs and words. Hence it is structured in two sections: 1. 'Photo-', on the relationship between photo-texts and the wider realm of image-texts, which inevitably implies investigating the relationship of photographs to other types of non-mechanical images, such as drawings and painting, and 2. '-Text', on granting the neglected role of text the attention it deserves within the canon of photography theory.

#### **3.1 'Photo-'**

It appears logical to discuss photo-texts in relation to the broader realm of image-texts that inevitably preceded them, as photography was only officially invented in 1839, while relationships between the verbal and the visual date back to Horace's famous Latin phrase *ut pictura poesis* (*as is painting so is poetry*), in his c19 BC poem *Ars Poetica* (*The Art of Poetry*) – as mentioned in the introduction (Golden, 2010, p 400). Since the difference between photo-texts and image-texts lies in the visual component, 'photo-' versus 'image-', this inevitably implies investigating what kind of position photography holds in relation to 'other, older, kinds of pictures' (Mitchell, 1994, p 21). Within word and image studies, W.J.T. Mitchell (1986, 1989, 1992, 1994, 2005 and 2015) – considered among the biggest experts on the relationship between visual and verbal representations – is the one who has written about photography the most. However, as I shall illustrate in the following pages, he has a contradictory position on photography, which is helpful to get a sense of how challenging, yet fascinating, it is to discuss photo-texts, as they lie, inevitably, at the intersection of word and image studies and photography theory. So, the next three pages examine Mitchell's controversial position on the relationship between photography and other types of non-mechanical images in detail.

Does Mitchell believe that the photographic image has 'a special "ontology"' and does he hence consider photo-texts as a 'special' type of image-texts (1986, p 181)? Mitchell lists 'photo texts' (2012, p 1), writing them somewhat contradictorily as two

separate words without a hyphen, among “literal” manifestations of imagetext’. The term ‘literal’, without an explanation, appears too vague. In attempting to infer his opinion on photography in relation to other types of images from his writings, I encountered some difficulties as he discusses it mostly vicariously and tangentially by criticising other theorists’ positions on the word and image conundrum, where photography only makes sporadic appearances.

For example, in Mitchell’s book *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* photography is discussed among other types of images in the chapter ‘What Is an Image?’, where he explores the ‘family of images’ and describes as ‘questionable’ the assumption that ‘there are certain kinds of images (photographs, mirror images) that provide a direct, unmediated copy of what they represent’ (1986, p 12). In the chapter ‘Pictures and Paragraphs: Nelson Goodman and the Grammar of Difference’, Mitchell calls ‘mystique of automatism’ Charles Sanders Peirce’s account of photographs as ‘composites of iconic and indexical signs’, ‘produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature’ (pp 59-60).

Mitchell then considers ‘accurate’ Barthes’ theory of photography being an ‘absolutely analogical message without a code’ (pp 60-61). ‘The photograph does, as Barthes claims, seem to involve a different sort of “ethic” from that associated with drawings and paintings’ (p 61), he writes, without further elaborating on its alleged different ethic.

Later, Mitchell presents Goodman’s ideas about photographs: they ‘do not have any special status as replicas of visual experience or as “uncoded messages”’, because “a likeness lost in a photograph may be caught in a caricature” (p 64). For Goodman, ‘realistic representation [...] depends not upon imitation or illusion or information’, namely ‘resemblance to the way things look’, but ‘upon inculcation’, and he cites ‘as evidence for this culturally relative view of realistic imagery’ the familiar observation of ethnographers that ‘peoples who have never seen photographs have to learn how to see, that is, how to read what is depicted’ (Mitchell, 1986, p 65). And Mitchell concludes that Goodman ‘is guilty of just about every possible crime against common sense’ (p 65).

In the chapter where he unpacks Ernst Gombrich’s view on images as natural signs and words as conventional ones, a distinction that Gombrich himself later admits to be misleading, Mitchell wonders whether the camera provides a material incarnation of objective, scientific representation by mechanising the system of perspective or not

(pp 75-94 and 181). Mitchell's focus is on highlighting Gombrich's paradoxical claims on photographs, first described as 'the paradigmatic "objective, non-conventional" image', and then depicted – specifically black and white photographs – as 'not a replica of what is seen' but a 'transformation which has to be re-translated to yield up the required information' (pp 86 and 83). Yet, Gombrich continues, this transformation 'does not justify our seeing them as conventional representations', because 'at any rate it appears that learning to read an ordinary photograph is very unlike learning to master an arbitrary code' (Mitchell, 1986, p 84). Later, a couple of paragraphs below, I encounter a sentence that, although I am not sure if it's Mitchell's or Gombrich's opinion, could be read as a claim for photographs' peculiar ontology in relation to other images. It says: 'photographs just look like the world: we can see what a picture is of without having to learn any codes' (p 87).

Finally, in his last chapter of *Iconology*, entitled 'The Rhetoric of Iconoclasm: Marxism, Ideology and Fetishism', Mitchell scrutinises the 'ambivalent' role of the camera obscura and photography in Marx and Benjamin's works as both 'the material incarnation of ideology' and the 'symbol of the "historical life-process" that would bring an end to ideology' (pp 180-81). He elaborates the reasons behind the 'celebrated [inherent] "realism"' of photography in Marxist criticism neither, however, as 'an optical, scientific reconstruction of vision', nor as a "'historical" [one] in the sense of traditional history painting [...], but an image of real history, of flesh-and-blood creatures in their material circumstances', as the camera 'seems to come equipped with a historical, documentary claim built into its mechanism' (p 180).

In Mitchell's 1994 book *Picture Theory*, he appears to counter the peculiar nature of photography in his chapter 'The Pictorial Turn', where he criticises Jonathan Crary's 1990 book *Techniques of the Observer* for being too conventional when Crary discusses 'systemic ruptures' such as photography as, according to Mitchell, he only apparently resists 'homogeneity' and 'totality', producing arguments that end up reinforcing 'what they want to avoid' (Mitchell, 1994, p 21). In particular it is this passage that Mitchell finds contradictory in Crary: 'the vast systemic rupture of which photography is part renders similarities between photography and other images insignificant. Photography is an element of a new and homogeneous terrain [...] in which an observer becomes lodged' (Mitchell, 1994, p 21).

Later, in 'The Photographic Essay' chapter, he argues that it is getting 'increasingly hard to find anyone who will defend the view (variously labelled

“positivistic,” “naturalistic,” or “superstitious and naïve”) that photographs have a special causal and structural relationship with the reality that they present’ (Mitchell, 1994, p 282). He returns to Barthes’ ‘photographic paradox’, the ‘co-existence of two messages, the one without a code’, the ‘denotation’ or the ‘nonverbal status of the photograph “in the perfection and plenitude of its analogy”’, ‘the other with a code’, the ‘connotation’, or ‘the readability and textuality of the photograph’ (Mitchell, 1994, p 284). But the paradox, claims Barthes, ‘is clearly not the collusion of a denoted message and a connoted message... it is that the connoted (or coded) message develops on the basis of a message *without a code*’, which for Mitchell implies that ‘one connotation always present in the photograph is that it is a pure denotation; this is simply what it means to recognize it is a photograph rather than some other sort of image’ (p 284). This last sentence suggests that Mitchell believes that photographs are different from other types of images.

In *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Love of Images*, Mitchell addresses American photography and its development as a sort of ‘self-evident inevitability’, such as ‘Dutch paintings’ or ‘Egyptian hieroglyphs’, and he stresses photography’s contradictory ‘true nature’ as ‘found in its automatic realism and naturalism, or in its tendency to aestheticize or idealize by rendering things pictorial’, as ‘independent of language, or riddled with language’ (2005, pp 272-74).

In his most recent book *Image Science* he is more preoccupied in countering the misleading belief that digital photographs have a quite different ontology from chemically based ones, which ‘dictates a different relation to the referent, one based on information, coding and signage, rather than the iconic and indexical realms of older forms of photography’ (Mitchell, 2015, p 51). He also describes as ‘very dubious’ the notion of “ontology”, as for him it ‘isolates the being of photography from the social world in which it operates, and reifies a single aspect of its technical processes’, and argues that issues such as ‘authenticity, truth value, authority and legitimacy are quite independent of their character as “digital” or “chemical analog” productions’ (p 51).

This overview of Mitchell’s ambiguous treatment of photographs in comparison to other images among his writings shows that it is difficult to infer how he is contextualising photo-texts within the broader realm of ‘imagetexts’. The point with Mitchell is that while his research is fascinating, he appears neither to have a clear opinion on the peculiar nature of photography in relation to other types of images, nor does he propose a photo-text theory. To my surprise, Mitchell is not the only scholar

within image-text studies to have neglected a theoretical definition of photo-texts that considers photography's peculiar nature in relation to other kinds of images. Indeed, it appears that the whole field of word and image studies has neglected it.

In the 1980s, Word and Image Studies emerged as a dynamic and contested field of enquiry with two important events. First, the still-running *Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry* – dedicated to the analysis of 'any interesting encounter, dialogue, and mutual collaboration (or antagonism) between verbal and visual languages', from all historical periods and perspectives, both theoretical and practical – filled an important editorial gap when it launched in 1985.<sup>62</sup> Then, the International Association of Word and Image Studies (IAWIS) was founded in 1987 to foster the study of 'word and image relations in a general cultural context, and especially in the arts in the broadest sense'.<sup>63</sup>

Apart from an essay on modern advertising in issue 4 of the *Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry's* first year of life, photography was first addressed three years after the start of the periodical. The first essays on photo-texts appear in 1988. 'Satire in Word and Image: Satirical Techniques of John Heartfield and Kurt Tucholsky in *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*', by H.W. am Zehnhoff (1988, pp 157-62) explores the structural parallelism between satire in literary composition and the organisation of visual satire. David E. Nye's "'Negative capability" in Wright Morris' *The Home Place*' wrongly defines Morris' photo-text book as a 'photo-novel' (1988, pp 163-69), which, as Jan Baetens demonstrates in another essay published in the same issue, 'Texte et image dans le roman-photo' ('Text and Image within the Photo-Novel'), is a different and specific type of photo-text (1988, pp 170-76). Rather than dwelling on what a photo-text is, Nye focuses directly on Morris to then criticise documentary collaborations between writers and photographers as exploitative of their rural subjects, often reduced to illustrations of social problems (1988, pp 163-69). Eric Romberger's article, 'Can we say absolutely anything we like about photography?', reflects on how what we call 'vernacular photography' is the result of the fading away

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<sup>62</sup> The mission of the journal is presented in its first 1985 editorial, which, together with its entire archive can be consulted online at <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/twim20/current>. Another similar journal was founded in 2000: *Image [&] Narrative*, 'a peer-reviewed e-journal on visual narratology and word and image studies in the broadest sense of the term', available online at <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/index.php/imagenarrative/index>. *Antigone, revue littéraire de photo* was also published in Arles between 1984 and 1995 (Stafford, 2010, p 204).

<sup>63</sup> Similarly, the association's website can be found online at <https://iawis.org>.



of the original meaning of the photographic image, 'until the object is only of aesthetic interest, until it has been absorbed into the discourse of art' (1988, pp 732-38). Researching the publication's archive until the present day, I was surprised not to find any introductory theoretical paper on the specificity of photo-text relations within the broader context of word and image intersections, but only sporadic articles on a number of specific case studies that take for granted what photo-texts are.

So, I searched in the writings of the first proponent of the term 'iconotext', Michael Nerlich, as discussed in chapter one. Nerlich sustains that Jean-Paul Sartre's ideas on pictorial representations and Barthes' ideas on photography are similar, which makes him claim that we should 'verify if the alleged specifications demanded by photography aren't qualities shared by many if not all the arts' (1990, p 298). I disagree because photographs are not like any other image, since their relationship with what we tend to call 'reality' is much more problematic than in paintings and sculpture.

The much-needed contextualisation of photo-texts within the larger category of image-texts, entails to identify the peculiarities of photography compared with other types of images, which are rooted in the conundrum between photography and authenticity. The peculiarity of photographs is more complex than it seems, as it goes beyond the simple agreeing with or rejecting realist claims that have been made about photography.

Siegfried Kracauer, in the section dedicated to photography in his book *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, concludes that, unlike its techniques and contents,

*the views and trends that marked the beginnings of photography have not changed much in the course of its evolution. Throughout the history of photography there is on the one side a tendency toward realism culminating in records of nature, and on the other a formative tendency aiming at artistic creations. Often enough, formative aspirations clash with the desire to render reality, overwhelming it in the process. Photography, then, is the arena of two tendencies which may well conflict with each other* (1960, pp 11-12).

Indeed, after the Second World War the discourse surrounding photography theory continued to be shaped around the same two factions of theorists, as suggested by Bate (2007, p 253): the realists and the anti-realists. Roland Barthes, André Bazin, Susan Sontag and Rosalind Krauss believed in photography's 'objective access to the real', and more or less explicitly referred to the concept of the 'index', while Allan

Sekula, Victor Burgin, Peter Wollen and John Tagg sustained that between the referent and the picture a transformation occurred (Kriebel, 2007, p 17, and Bate, 2007, p 253).<sup>64</sup>

To elaborate photography's peculiarities, it is important to clarify the key misunderstanding within the theories of photography: indexicality, which lies at the heart of the realist/anti-realist conundrum. Among the realists, Susan Sontag famously argued that to photograph is to 'appropriate the thing photographed' and that while both texts and 'handmade visual statements', such as paintings and drawings, are interpretations, 'photographed images', on the contrary, are 'pieces' rather than statements of the world, a 'miniature of reality that anyone can make or acquire' (2010, pp 3-4).<sup>65</sup> Equally, yet more simplistically, Hughes and Noble believe that 'what distinguished the photo-image from any other form of representation is its inextricable, material link to reality' (2003, p 4), which brings us to the abused concept of indexicality discussed by Rosalind Krauss in her 1977 essay 'Notes on the Index'.

Krauss defines the photograph as a 'type of icon or visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object' and concludes that photographs are 'empty signs', 'bound to the world itself rather than to cultural systems' (1986, pp 203 and 212, and cited in Elkins, 2007, p 27). The obsession of the majority of critical theorists in discussing photography through the concept of indexicality confirms their almost exclusive interest in developing what Bate calls a 'dominant ontological definition of photography' grounded in the realist position (2004, p 24). As noted by Martin Lefebvre, the concept of the index has been employed in isolation from the other two essential elements of Peirce's complex semiotics, the icon and the symbol, producing an inevitable misreading of his theory (2007, pp 220-44). Bate unmasks the '*illusion of photographic realism*' of this 'dominant ontological definition of photography', underlining how it is a common mistake to 'confuse the mimetic verisimilitude of "realism" with indexicality' (2004, p 24). Photographs – he claims – 'are mainly iconic,

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<sup>64</sup> It is beyond the purpose of this thesis to examine in detail all the realist and anti-realist positions, which are summarised in James Elkins' book *Photography Theory* by Sabine Kriebel's essay (cited in Elkins, 2007, pp 3-50), 'Theories of Photography: A Short History'.

<sup>65</sup> However, Sontag's position, as presented in her famous book *On Photography* (1977), appears somewhat contradictory. When she discusses surrealism, she claims that 'no activity is better equipped to exercise the Surrealist way of looking than photography, and eventually we look at all photographs surrealistically' (Sontag, 2010, p 74). Even if she poses the attention on the act of looking rather than the photographic image per se, her claim appears to undermine her own view on photography's traditional role as 'realistic', making her position somewhat ambiguous.

as they have a relation of resemblance with their referent'; a photogram is an indexical trace of the 'objects used to create the shapes in the image, but there is no automatic guarantee of "realism", since the image produced does not necessarily resembles the objects used' (2004, p 24).<sup>66</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum, Philippe Dubois, in his recent paper 'Trace-Image to Fiction-Image: The Unfolding of Theories of Photography from the '80s to the Present', proposes that, thanks to the advent of what he calls 'post-photographic digital photographs', it is time to replace the idea of the 'image as trace' with the 'image as fiction', as the 'representation of a possible world and not as a necessarily real having-been-there' (2016, pp 161-63). While the idea of applying the philosophical and literary theories of possible worlds to photography is fascinating, Dubois curiously omits to acknowledge all the seminal anti-realist theories proposed by Sekula, Tagg and Burgin. Even more surprisingly, Dubois suggests the idea that 'fiction', intended as departing from reality, started to infiltrate photography only from the advent of digital photography, while we know very well that this happened way earlier, at the very inception of photography, and, as this thesis argues, photography was born equally as a realist and fictional medium.

I agree with Schröter on the idea that the digital image is 'by virtue of [its] digital nature (and the fact that [it] can be manipulated mathematically, and hence more easily), further removed from the reality recorded and therefore somehow "more fictional"', has no basis in either principle or history (2013, no pagination). The 2012 exhibition *Faking It: Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art has also shown how 'fictional processes' are historically rooted in the tradition of photographic techniques (Fineman, 2012). Instead of making photographs intrinsically more 'fictional', as a few scholars have suggested, the digital revolution or computerisation made 'fiction' within photography more accepted by the public and a highly fashionable theme, as the plethora of books and exhibitions about this topic show (Chiocchetti, 2014).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Also, one of the curators of the 1996 *photo text text photo* exhibition, Weiremaier, has a position which is in line with Bate, as he writes: 'the particular property of the photographic image lies in the illusion of authenticity it produces and its ability to refer to actual reality' (Hapkemeyer and Weiremaier, 1996, p 35).

<sup>67</sup> Surprisingly, Geoffrey Batchen in his 'Ectoplasm: Photography in the Digital Age' seems to agree with the typical prejudice that digital photographs are intrinsically further distant from the reality recorded and, as Schröter (2013) pointed out, therefore somehow 'more fictional' (2000, pp 9-23).

Stafford defines the notion of an ontology of photography as 'elusive' (2010, pp 8-9). However, a reflection on the medium's specificity is unavoidable and in fact, although Stafford claims that his book goes beyond exploring this elusive notion, he ends up discussing the medium specificity at the end, by mentioning Michel Bouvard's concept of the photograph as '*faux texte*', namely that it looks like text but it is not, which, according to Stafford, 'reminds us – via Man Ray's game of words, "Je suis fautographe" – that photography has no more purchase on the real than any other medium or art form' (pp 8-9). Perhaps one of the most interesting observations in Stafford's books is precisely how he connects the 'elusive' notion of the ontology of photography with photo-texts:

*A photograph (or set of photographs) can be infinitely rewritten. All photo-texts – by virtue of photography's 'hijackability' and of a viewer's suggestibility – are 'unstable'. This instability of the photo-text merely adds to the ontological instabilities of photography itself* (2010, p 53).<sup>68</sup>

I shall illustrate in a moment that what Stafford describes as the 'ontological instabilities' of photography (2010, p 53) are linked with the impasse that the realist/anti-realist conundrum imposes and impact on photo-texts' fruition in comparison with other types of image-texts. To get closer to the argument I want to make, namely that the point is not to decide on which side of the realist/anti-realist conundrum to stand, but rather to elaborate *how* photographs are not like any other images and how this impacts on photo-texts' fruition, I need to mingle Victor Burgin with Umberto Eco, Sigmund Freud and Octave Mannoni. Let me elaborate on why.

Among the anti-realists, Burgin fundamentally reminds us that photography is a 'visual medium' that 'does not replicate our act of perception, nor does our act of perception replicate the world "as it is"' (1984, p 62). Umberto Eco, in 'Critique of the Image', argues that 'the theory of the photo as an *analogue* to reality has been abandoned [...] – we know that it is necessary to be trained to recognise the photographic image' (1982, p 33). He explains that while 'the image which takes shape on celluloid is analogous to the retinal image' it is 'not to that which we perceive':

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<sup>68</sup> As I shall explain in chapter six, after I introduced the notion of the 'hijacking photo-text' – in relation to the dynamics of Jean Cocteau and Pierre Jahan's *La Mort et les statues* (1946) – I found the adjective 'hijacked' in a list of effects that the use of 'non-fictional' writing alongside a photograph can provoke, in Stafford's introduction, as a translation of Gisèle Freund's term 'détourner' (Stafford, 2010, p 23). However, I got the idea for this term from Johan Grimonprez's *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1997), the hijacking film that uncannily presaged 9/11, and, as I will clarify, I use it in a different way.

*We know that sensory phenomena are transcribed, in the photographic emulsion, in such a way that even if there is a causal link with the real phenomena, the graphic images formed can be considered as wholly arbitrary with respect to these phenomena (1982, p 33).*

The point is that with photographs we are confronted with the contradictory logic of disavowal that Octave Mannoni (1969, pp 9-33) elaborated in relation to Freud's theory of fetishism, which I summarise below to fully grasp the connection with photography.

Freud, in his 1927 essay on 'Fetishism', explained that the fetishist, who displaces fantasy and desire onto surrogate objects or body parts in order to forestall a subject's confrontation with the castration complex, is capable at one and the same time of believing in his fantasy and acknowledging that it is nothing but a fantasy (1924-50, pp 198-204). And yet, the fact of recognising the fantasy as fantasy in no way diminishes its power over the individual. It is what Octave Mannoni has described as 'Je sais bien, mais quand-même', translated as: 'I know very well, but nevertheless' (1969, pp 9-33).

Photographs, due to their resemblance to the objects they represent, are misleading and 'arbitrary', 'iconic' signs that, even if 'a simple phenomenological inspection' shows us that they possess none of the properties of the object represented, because they nonetheless 'reproduce some of the conditions of perception', appearing analogous to the retinal image, they create the illusory belief that a photograph is a portion of reality (Eco, 1982, p 33). This phenomenon of disavowal does not happen with paintings or sculptures for example, where their only connection with reality would be if they have a style that belongs to the genre of 'realism', in the sense of 'mimesis' – namely if they offer an imitative representation of the real world (OED, 2019). And my proposition does not sound so outlandish since I found out that I was not the only one to believe in the key effect of disavowal when it comes to the relationship between photography and reality. Corey K. Creekmur, in his seminal chapter 'Lost Objects: Photography, Fiction, and Mourning', within Marsha Bryant's book *Photo-Textualities*, writes:

*Might the realist belief in photographic truth be at times a conscious, even if desperate, fantasy of the sort acknowledged by disavowal: "I know [a photograph doesn't guarantee a pre-photographic referent], but..." (1996, p 75).*

For Creekmur, what triggers the ‘but...’ is the ‘psychopathology of everyday use of photographs, specifically as a medium (here allowing the term’s mystical connotations and recalling the short history of “spirit photography”) bridging reality and fantasy, the living and the dead, and history and fiction’ (1996, p 75). Also, within the psychopathology of the everyday use of photographs, I would include the ideological aspects of photography within a capitalist society critiqued by Sontag, when she laments that the medium has become a mass art form as ubiquitous ‘as sex and dancing’, and therefore not being practised by most people as an art but rather as a ‘social rite, a defence against anxiety, and a tool of power’ (2010, p 8).

Photography’s very own problematic relationship to truth, authenticity and realism contaminates any photo-text juxtaposition, since, before its text-image dynamics can be explored or savoured, the photographic element will inevitably be tested against a sort of ‘reality’ and plausibility principle. We might enjoy, dislike or study the realist features of a painting, but we do not ask ourselves if a painting is true. Nor do we expect a painting to have any indexical relationship with the real world. This difference has important consequences on photo-texts as it delays their reception. To Hubert Damisch’s concept of ‘*denivelée*’ (2001, p 54) – literally, difference in level, between writing and photograph, namely the inevitable temporal precedence of one of the two over the other, in the production phase, given their ‘simultaneity is probably a utopian and avant-garde dream’ (Stafford, 2010, p 41), which is a common feature to every image-text work – I propose to add the specific feature of ‘delayed reception’ of photo-texts, which, unlike other image-texts, will have their visual component (photographs) tested against a sort of ‘reality’ and plausibility principle before the compound photo-text work can be savoured.

In this section I focused on the first component of photo-texts, photographs, to understand their relationship to the larger family of image-texts. As the verbal or scriptural aspect, in other words the ‘-text’ component, stays identical in both compound forms of photo-texts and image-texts, and a photograph is, after all, a type of image, the focus inevitably shifted towards a reflection on the specificity of photographs in relation to other types of non-mechanical images such as paintings, drawings and sculptures. This reflection is part of the classic debate within photography theory, which has mainly focused on two crucial points: 1. what is the ‘ontology’ of photography (realist versus anti-realist positions), and 2. whether photography can be considered an art, like painting, or not (Trachtenberg, 1980). While

the second point has been positively resolved over history, and is beyond the purpose of this research, the first has struggled more to find a definitive answer. An important element within photography theory has been neglected – the crucial role text plays in allowing us to go beyond the realist/anti-realist conundrum, to which the next section is dedicated.

### 3.2 ‘-Text’

This section aims at re-evaluating the prominence that text deserves within the canon of photography theory, by tracing historically those occasional writings that highlight the role text plays in advancing our understanding of photography.

Believed to have been coined by Sir John Frederick William Herschel in 1839, who, independently of Fox Talbot, also discovered a photographic process using sensitised paper, the term ‘photography’ was actually also used by Hercule Florence in Brazil around 1833 (Eder, 1945, p 258, and Fregni Nagler, 2017). Regardless of who coined the term, it is fascinating to notice how etymologically ‘photo-graphy’, meaning ‘something written with light’, already contains the two identities that link it both with nature, or whatever we believe ‘reality’ to be, via ‘*phos/phot*’, which means light in Greek, and with creation, but also artifice and construction, via ‘*graphos*’, which means ‘something written’ (Lusty and West Brett, 2019). In photo-texts, ‘-text’ replaces ‘-graph’ and it is thanks to text that we can go beyond the realist/anti-realist conundrum within photography theory, and accept once and for all photography’s double soul, rather than paradox, of being *both* a realist and fictional medium, easily subvertable by text. To discuss photography theory by only looking at photographs’ relation to truth, without considering their relationship to the opposite concept of fiction and the fundamental transformative power of text, is like looking at a negative image and ignoring that it can be turned into a positive print.<sup>69</sup>

I would like to start with one of the most shocking photo-text books ever published: *Krieg dem Kriege! (War against War!)* by ‘anarchist, socialist, internationalist and peace worker’ Ernst Friedrich, who released it in 1924 in four languages simultaneously, to denounce the horrors of the First World War, before opening a

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<sup>69</sup> Fiction is a slippery concept that has multiple meanings, as I wrote in the essay ‘On the Uses and Abuses of Fiction in Contemporary Photography’ (Chiocchetti, 2014). Here it is intended as imaginary, departing from reality, fake.

peace museum in Berlin that was not surprisingly looted by the Nazis (Kent, 2014, no pagination).

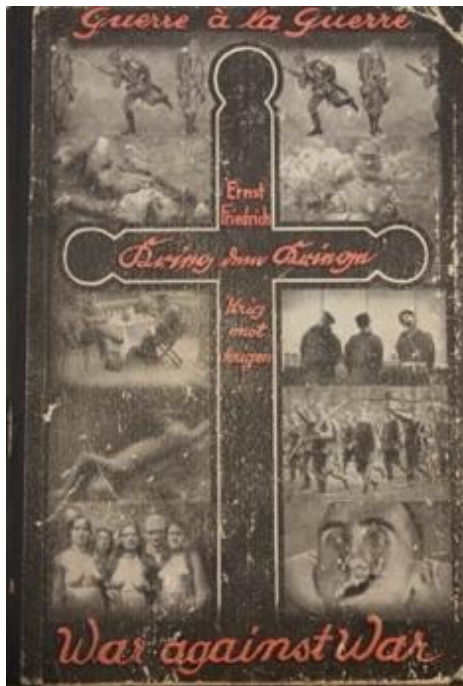


Fig 36 Ernst Friedrich, *Krieg Dem Kriege, Guerre à la Guerre, War against War*. Book, 23 x 16 cm, 1924, Berlin: Freie Jugend, my photograph

The book, praised by Brecht, is a merciless juxtaposition of gruesome photographs and tragicomic captions, from ruins to injuries and corpses through to executions and a brothel (Didi-Huberman, 2018, p 18). In his vehement introduction 'To Human Beings in All Lands', Friedrich affirms the power of pictures over words



*In many books have many words been written for and against this most diabolical, this meanest and lowest of all crimes of the State. The bourgeois poet in his strength glorified this War in verse and the proletarian writer wrote in glowing wrath against this mass murder. But all the treasury of words of all men of all lands suffices not, in the present and in the future, to paint correctly this butchery of human beings. Here, however, in the present book – partly by accident, partly intentionally – a picture of war, objectively true and faithful to nature, has been photographically recorded for all time. The pictures in this book [...] show records obtained by the inexorable, incorruptible photographic lens, of the trenches and the mass graves, of “military lies”, of the “field of honour” and of other “idylls” of the “Great Epoch”. And not one single man of any country whatsoever can arise and bear witness against these photographs, that they are untrue and that they do not correspond to reality. And no one comes and says: “O how frightful that such pictures should be shown!” But he says rather: “At last, at last the mask has been torn away from this ‘field of honour’, from this lie of an ‘heroic death’, and from all the other beautiful phrases, from all this international swindle the mask has at last, yea, been torn away!!” (1924, pp 20-21, my emphasis).*

For Friedrich, the lies about the war contained in the words are finally unmasked by the ‘inexorable, incorruptible photographic lens’. However, it is only through photo-text dynamics and witty juxtapositions of photographs and captions that he excels at his unmasking mission, with a single caption at times extending over the double-page spread of the book as a sort of enjambement referring to both images in the facing pages.<sup>70</sup> As shown in Figure 36 (Friedrich, 1924, pp 188-89), the double spread juxtaposes an image of King George of England on the left page, with a caption that reads ‘After the war: King George of England goes in for sailing...’. The caption continues on the left page with a question ‘... but the proletarian???’ which is paired with a crude and sad image of a relatively young man – presumably a proletarian man – that has lost his arm and is struggling to wear a socket with his prosthesis (Friedrich, 1924, pp 188-89). I say presumably because we cannot infer from the image whether the man is actually a proletarian or not, looking with today’s eyes at his clothes and at the only element of decoration, the chair – an important point to which I shall return via Jacques Rancière later in this section. Hence, although he argues for the superiority of the picture over the word, the actual power of the double spread above, and the book in general, lies in the photo-text dynamics that Friedrich adroitly creates to denounce both war and social class injustice.

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<sup>70</sup> Within prosody, namely the theory and practice of versification, ‘enjambement’ means ‘the continuation of a sentence beyond the second line of a couplet’ (OED, 2020).

Holding an antithetical position to Friedrich's belief in photographs to rescue the war propaganda expressed through words, Walter Benjamin was among the first theorists in the twentieth century to argue for the political importance of text, namely the caption, in fixing the instability of the photograph. In his 1931 essay 'A Little History of Photography', Benjamin starts by acknowledging the importance of Brecht's bafflements about photography's ability to portray immaterial aspects of reality, such as the hopelessness of the unemployed (1980, pp 213-14).<sup>71</sup> This is Brecht's famous passage quoted in Benjamin:

*Brecht says: "The situation is complicated by the fact that less than ever does the mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG tells us next to nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations – the factory, say – means that they are no longer explicit [or 'makes the latter no longer revealing']. So something must in fact be built up, something artificial [or 'artistic'], posed" (1980, pp 213-14).<sup>72</sup>*

To return the property of 'revealing' to photography and 'to avoid this masking of underlying social relations', Brecht stresses the need for something 'artificial', 'built up' with regard to the image (Van Gelder and Westgeest, 2011, p 164). And indeed Brecht's need to unmask the dangerously fictitious and misleading messages lurking behind news photographs of war in a capitalist society, disseminated like viruses by the press, brought about the creation of a new literary genre, a photo-poetic one, which he called *fotogramm*, 'photo-epigram' in English, in his journal notes on 20 June 1944 (Brecht, 1993, p 319). A collection of Brecht's photo-epigrams, literally press clippings to which he responded with epigrams – in Ancient Greece poems inscribed on votive offerings at sanctuaries – culminated in his *Kriegsfibel (War Primer)*, published in 1955, which confirms once and for all his doubts around photography's ability to represent 'reality' and the fundamental role of text to deconstruct the picture from its ideological surface, as I shall further discuss in chapter six (Didi-Huberman, 2018, pp 30-40).

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<sup>71</sup> Nineteenth century authors that more or less explicitly discussed the text-photo relationship, such as Oscar Gustave Rejlander, H.P. Robinson and P.H. Emerson, have been given dedicated attention in chapter five, as sophistication in nineteenth-century photo-texts is the first case study.

<sup>72</sup> See also the different translation in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume II, 1927-1934* (Benjamin, 2005, pp 507-30). When necessary, I combined what seemed to be the best of the two translations. On Brecht and photography, I wrote the essay 'Realism and Photography in Brecht's *War Primer*', published in the MAPP digital edition of the book *War Primer 2* by Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, published by MACK. Brecht's *Kriegsfibel (War Primer)* will be the second case study in chapter six.



Fig 37 Left: Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfibel*. Dummy presented to Lion Feuchtwanger, 1944, University of Southern California Library. Available from <https://libraries.usc.edu/collection/kriegsfibel-bertolt-brecht> [Accessed 2 May 2020].

Right: Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfibel*. Book, 25 x 30 cm, 1955, Berlin: Eulenspiegel Verlag, my photograph

Going back to Benjamin, after quoting Brecht he concludes, looking at ‘the direction implicit in the *authenticity* of the photograph’, that ‘it will not always be possible to link this authenticity with reportage, whose clichés merely establish *verbal* associations in the viewer’ (1980, p 215, my emphasis).

*The camera will become smaller and smaller, ever readier to capture fleeting and secret images whose shock effect will paralyze the mechanism of association in the viewer. This is where captions must come into play, which understand the photography which turns all the relations of life into literature,*

*and without which all photographic construction must remain bound in the approximate* (1980, p 215, my emphasis).

‘Won’t captions become the essential component of the photograph?’ Benjamin also asks towards the end of ‘A Little History of Photography’, a topic to which he will return in his 1934 essay ‘The Author as Producer’ – where, in light of using photography for the purpose of social change, he stresses the importance of the caption to rescue the picture from ‘the ravages of modishness and confer upon it a revolutionary use value’ (1998, p 95). So, the caption as ‘mobilizing language’ is the political revolutionary solution that Benjamin offers to the problem of reportage, which ‘reproduces the values of capitalist society’ (Elkins, 2007, p 11).

In between Benjamin’s essays, another photo-text book appeared in Germany in 1933, *Die Veränderte Welt (The Transformed World)* by Ernst Jünger, whose introduction contains important considerations on photographs as political weapons.<sup>73</sup> Like Benjamin, Jünger regards photography ‘not as an art form but as a machine form, whose real significance lies in the way that it extends the productive force of technology into the realm of perception and consciousness’ (Werneburg and Phillips, 1992, p 64). For Jünger, it is incontestable that ‘the appeal to immediate appearances works more powerfully than the acuteness of ideas’ (2017, p viii). However, for him, until quite recently the photograph was ‘naturally excluded from the political sphere’, because it was ‘considered as no more than a neutral or “objective” medium’, which lacked the ‘tendentiousness’ of the caricature, perfect for politically denigratory purposes (p viii). Jünger believes ‘newspapers will all end up being illustrated by the same images’, which inevitably ‘implies that the same image can be employed for extremely opposite purposes, for example an image of arms can be used both by those in favour of them and by those against them, who will try to slant it to their own advantages’ (p ix). While Jünger does not explicitly mention that this subversive operation can only happen through the text with which the image circulates, I believe it is implicit.

We need Nancy Newhall to fully understand how ‘the caption does influence the photograph’, as she wrote in her seminal essay, ‘The Caption’, that appeared in the first issue of *Aperture* (1952, p 69). Being the ‘verbal finger pointing at the picture’

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<sup>73</sup> An English edition of this book does not appear to exist, so I have been translating from the Italian version published by Mimesis in 2017.

(Whiting, 1946, p 99), the caption can 'call our attention to one detail and cause us to ignore others' (Newhall, 1952, p 69). And more dangerously, the caption

*can be so slanted that different captions can cause us to feel rage, tenderness, amusement, or disgust towards one and the same photograph. We all remember how photographs from the files of the Farm Security Administration, made to arouse our active sympathy towards a huge tragedy happening among us, were slanted by the Nazis to convince Europeans that all Americans were or would be as destitute as the Okies* (Newhall, 1952, p 69).<sup>74</sup>

The mischievous potential of captions to alter the meaning of a photograph, and hence the illusion that a photograph can be objective, was a major experience for Gisèle Freund (1980, pp 162-63) – a hard one to forget, as she recounts in her seminal 1974 book *Photographie et Société (Photography and Society)*.<sup>75</sup> Intriguingly, four years after Newhall's reflection on the danger of photographs being *slanted* by captions in the press, Freund also tells us that:

*in December 1956, under the headline 'Information or Propaganda?' the weekly L'Express published a double series of identical photographs taken during the Hungarian rebellion. The pictures are identical, but their order had been changed and the captions had been modified by the editor. The idea was to show how various government-run television stations could have used the same pictures to give absolutely contradictory but apparently truthful versions of the same event* (1980, p 163).

Freund's experience reveals that what Alan Trachtenberg writes about captions, namely that 'authority for meaning resides in the caption', which 'authenticates the

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<sup>74</sup> This is also recounted by Hunter (1987, p 170). 'Okies', as Californians labelled them, were refugee farm families from the Southern Plains who migrated to California in the 1930s to escape the ruin of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. It is interesting that she used the term 'slanted' in italics and I wonder if she referred to Emily Dickinson's notion of the slant rhyme as Aaron Schuman adapted it to create his photo-text strategy, but sadly I can only speculate it as she is no longer with us.

<sup>75</sup> The story goes:

*One day I took a series of photographs there, using a certain stockbroker as my principal target. Sometimes smiling, sometimes distressed, he was always mopping the sweat from his round face and urging the crowd with sweeping gestures. I sent these photographs to several European magazines with the harmless title, 'Snapshots of the Paris Stock Exchange'. Sometime later, I received clippings from a Belgian newspaper which, to my surprise, had printed my photographs with a headline reading: 'Rise in the Paris Stock Exchange: stocks reach fabulous prices'. Thanks to some clever captions, my innocent little story took on the air of a financial event. My astonishment bordered on shock when I discovered the same photographs sometime later in a German newspaper with yet another caption: 'Panic at the Paris Stock Exchange: fortunes collapse, thousands are ruined'. My photographs illustrated perfectly the stockbroker's despair and the speculator's panic as stock value dropped* (Freund, 1980, pp 162-63).

Freund's memories show that in terms of authorship, captions and titles are normally given by magazine and newspaper editors in the editorial context, not always in agreement with the author, who is more likely to be consulted if she/he is famous or in more artistic contexts, for example for exhibitions' labels.

image – captures it for a specific revelation’, is only partially true (1978, p 851). Dino A. Brugioni was one of the founders of the CIA’s National Photographic Interpretation Centre and, as an expert on the subject, he published a book entitled *Photo Fakery: A History of Deception and Manipulation*, where, in the chapter ‘Types of Photo-Fakery’, he dedicates a section to ‘False Captioning’, which consists of falsifying ‘the context of what the photograph purportedly conveys’ (1999, p 22).

But why can captions be used to *slant* photographs? And why are the implications behind *slanted* captions so important within photography theory? I shall return to the second question in a moment, but I would like to reply to the first one through Newhall’s crucial observation that ‘the most explicit photograph may not reveal to the most omniscient eye of editor or historian the precise place and day it was made’ (1952, p 67). So, it appears quite easy to implement ‘False Captioning’ (Brugioni, 1999, p 22). Photographs need words, otherwise for their viewer ‘the context of a picture can only be a subject of speculation’, writes John Upton, curator of the almost forgotten 1978 exhibition *The Photograph as Artifice* – to my knowledge the first one to explore the fictional character of the medium.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> The exhibition, organised by Constance W. Glenn at the Art Galleries of the California State University in Long Beach (3-30 April 1978), featured photographers often associated with the notion of ‘artifice’, such as Henry Peach Robinson, Jerry Uelsmann and Robert Cumming, among others, but also a selection of more ambiguous images by the likes of Henri Cartier-Bresson, Paul Strand, Ansel Adams and Walker Evans, more commonly referred to in the documentary tradition. The curator John Upton was interested in showing a variety of intentions, from ‘records of overt effort to deceive’, to images where the ‘distortions are ancillary to the photographers’ statements’ (Upton, 1978, no pagination).



Fig 38 John Upton, *The Photograph As Artifice*. Exhibition catalogue, 23 x 27 cm, 1978, Long Beach: Art Galleries, California State University, my photograph

In the essay that Upton wrote for the catalogue, he makes an important remark about the viewer:

*a picture of a person laughing describes only the particular distortion of features that for him signify laughter; but without knowing the joke the viewer is left to invent the meaning of the image. Photographs require the context of words in order to participate in a narrative discourse. Their meaning is acquired within a verbal context and with a change of context the meaning of the image will change (1978, p 13, my emphasis).*

However, while I agree with Upton that the addition of words allows photographs to participate in a narrative discourse, it does not guarantee anything at the level of authenticity, as I shall return to later in this section. It is difficult to know how widely Upton's exhibition and essay circulated at the time. Intriguingly, Upton's passage above is not only reminiscent of the post-structuralist anti-realist positions on photography, particularly Allan Sekula's idea of the 'invention of photographic meaning' (1982, pp 84-109), but also anticipates one of the main points made by Rancière in his seminal book *Le spectateur émancipé (The Emancipated Spectator)*

(2009), which continues to gradually take us towards my argument for the fundamental role of text in photography theory.

Rancière criticises Barthes' two concepts of *studium* and *punctum*, introduced in his 1980 book *La chambre claire (Camera Lucida)* to 'categorize the effects that photographs can have upon viewers' (Grundberg, 1981, p 11).<sup>77</sup> Rancière mentions an image that I intentionally include here uncaptioned. Let us look at Figure 39 for a moment.



Fig 39 Intentionally uncaptioned

Now let us consider Rancière's passage, from his chapter 'The Pensive Image':

*Barthes tells us this: 'The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the studium. But the punctum is: He is going to die. I read at the same time: This will be and this has been...'*<sup>78</sup>

Yet nothing in the photo tells us that the young man is going to die. *To be affected by his death, we need to know that the photograph represents Lewis Payne, condemned to death in 1865 for trying to assassinate the US secretary of state. And we also need to know that it was the first time a photographer – Alexander Gardner – had been allowed in to photograph an execution. To make the effect of the photo and the affect of death coincide, Barthes has had to create a short-circuit between historical knowledge of the subject represented and the material texture of the photograph (Rancière, 2009, p 112, my emphasis).*

The point for this thesis is not whether the categories of *studium* and *punctum* make sense or not, as here the focus is on two other categories of Barthes – 'anchorage'

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<sup>77</sup> In particular, the *studium* is 'a kind of enthusiastic commitment [...] without special acuity', and the *punctum*, the point, or the small detail, or even an off-frame, that triggers an impulsive and strong emotion, a small trauma in the viewer (Barthes, 2000, p 26). In the chapter 'The Pensive Image', Rancière questions the presumed distinction in Barthes' concepts of the *studium* and *punctum*, which according to him share the same logic and whose 'opposition' becomes 'blurred in what should confirm it: the materiality of the image with which Barthes endeavours to illustrate it' (2009, pp 110-11).

<sup>78</sup> Barthes, 1982, p 96.



and 'relay' – but the key sentence is 'nothing in the photo tells us the young man is going to die' (Rancière, 2009, p 112). Almost 20 years before Rancière, also the proponent of the term 'iconotext', Nerlich stressed the fundamental role of text in relation to documentary photography and reformulated Barthes' concept of 'this has been' as follows:

*Even sadder is the destiny of documentary photos of unknown people or non-textualised events outside the picture, without an accompanying text or a history book for example. The documentary photograph of human corpses in a pit does not tell us if they are victims of fascism or deservedly shot Nazis, or victims of a natural catastrophe, etc.: "this" has approximately been like that, somewhere, at some given point in history (1990, pp 262-63, my translation).*

As shown with Newhall (1952), Upton (1978) and here Nerlich (1990), the photograph alone cannot tell us its place and time, the joke behind an expression of laughter portrayed, if the human corpses are victims of fascism or of a natural catastrophe or, as Rancière puts it, if the gentleman portrayed is going to die. We can only learn all these pieces of information through text, intended here as the non-photographic verbal knowledge that circulates with the photograph, even when it is not explicitly presented to accompany the image as written words.

To fully grasp the fundamental role of text within photography theory, we need to go one step further and consider the nuances behind the concept of 'photographic fictions', and their different 'degrees of fictionality', which I discussed at the 'Fiction and Photography' symposium in 2014 – where I tested if literary theory could be a useful analytical tool to look at photographs.<sup>79</sup> Through Tzvetan Todorov's definitions of 'verisimilitude' and 'hesitation' (1975 and 1977), I distinguished between 'implausible' and 'plausible' photographic fictions. With implausible photographic fictions I mean those photographs that show supernatural content, which is not observable in nature, and on whose fictionality the viewer does not hesitate. With plausible photographic fictions I refer to those images whose content is imagined and staged but does not challenge the category of verisimilitude, making it impossible for the viewer to learn about the imaginary origin and character of the photograph just by looking at it (Chiocchetti, 2014).<sup>80</sup> Joan Fontcuberta (2014), who has focused his research on the

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<sup>79</sup> See preface pp 25-26. The whole symposium is available on [Soundcloud](#) and my paper was partially published in the 2014 special issue of *Café Crème* magazine (Chiocchetti, 2014).

<sup>80</sup> Todorov, in the chapter 'Introduction to Verisimilitude' in his book *The Poetics of Prose*, explains how the term means 'consistent with reality': 'certain actions', certain events are said to 'lack verisimilitude'

concept of the lie within photography – inserting what he calls the ‘virus of fiction’ in supposedly authoritative realms, such as the natural sciences, to question how scientific knowledge is produced and presented by public institutions – is a good example for implausible photographic fictions, as shown in Figure 40 (Fontcuberta, 1984).



Fig 40 Joan Fontcuberta, *Lavandula angustifolia*, from the series *Herbarium*. Gelatin silver on baryta-coated paper, 1984, Barcelona: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, courtesy the artist

The image selected here, *Lavandula angustifolia*, depicts an alleged plant that is composed of the head of what appears to be an ostrich, surrounded by leaves. We can even discern its stem. The title, which is the Latin name of a real plant, lavender, plays with the adjective *angustifolia*, meaning ‘narrow leaf’. Indeed the head of the ostrich seems to be struggling in the narrow space it occupies between the leaves. Do we need to read the title of the image to learn that it is an implausible photographic fiction and that such a plant does not exist in nature? I believe not.

On the contrary, a plausible fictional photograph is shown in Figure 41 (Broomberg and Chanarin, 2011) from the series *Dora Fobert* – a believable character that could have existed, but was simply imagined and staged by the artists, does not reveal its

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when they seem ‘unable to occur in reality’ (1977, p 82). The notion of hesitation is instead presented in his seminal book *The Fantastic* (1973). While he uses it to define the literary genre of the fantastic, precisely when the reader hesitates on the verisimilitude of the narrated events, I have borrowed the concept to describe those images that are so patently implausible that the viewer does not hesitate on their fictional character when she/he looks at them.

fictive nature visually (Chiocchetti, 2014).<sup>81</sup> This distinction is important in relation to the aforementioned passages by Newhall, Upton, Nerlich and Rancière on the limits of information that a photograph can reveal. Let me elaborate on why.



Fig 41 Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, *Dora Fobert, Untitled, c. 1942*. From the Archive of Adela K. C-41. Print, 2011, courtesy the artists

In particular, what Rancière describes as the several forms of indeterminacy in a photograph, which constitute its 'pensiveness', namely its lying in a 'zone of indeterminacy between thought and non-thought, activity and passivity, art and non-art', go one step further when we are looking at a plausible photographic fiction (2009, p 107). Nothing in the photograph alone tells us the identity and the story of the subject or the event depicted, as in the case of Gardner's portrait of Lewis Payne, let alone if

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<sup>81</sup> The project tells the story of the imaginary female photographer Dora Fobert. A postgraduate researcher on anti-Semitism, focusing on Sartre's concept of 'beautiful Jewess' in Nazi ideology, is contacted by Adela K., who had survived the Warsaw ghetto as a teenager, and has a very special collection of photographs to show her for her research. The two women meet and Adela K. gives the student a mysterious box with a collection of photographs that are not fully developed, because of the lack of photographic chemicals in the ghetto, hence they can only be looked at in the dark. The author of the photos was Dora Fobert, Adela K.'s best friend, who was working for her family's leading photographic studio in the ghetto. The images portray naked women in 1942 unexpectedly looking quite placid, almost suspended in time and history. Before the war and racism interrupted their lives, they were high school friends, their family knew each other. 'Despite the war – explains Adela K. to the student – we still wanted to spend time together, [...] to play. [...] Some of us even undressed, [...] it just happened naturally. We didn't feel like victims, we weren't scared. We only felt that we were beautiful. [...] We really believed that we would survive the ghetto and all our dreams would come true' (Broomberg and Chanarin, 2011, no pagination).

it tells us whether the story is 'true' or imaginary, invented by the author, as in the case of Broomberg and Chanarin's *Dora Fobert*. Nowhere within the image, and no matter how 'emancipated', to quote Rancière (2009), the spectators will learn about the imaginary or fictive nature of the subject or the event photographed given that they appear verisimilar, which makes the viewers unable to discern this piece of information from the image itself without any further element. So, the pressure to 'authenticate' the image and reveal information about it shifts towards text, which, as I shall discuss in a moment, cannot guarantee much either at the level of authenticity.

Another perfect example of the impossibility of plausible photographic fictions to reveal their fictive nature alone comes from one of the most enigmatic images produced by William Henry Fox Talbot: *A Scene in a Library*, published as plate eight in his 1844 book *The Pencil of Nature*.<sup>82</sup> The books portrayed in the image 'were not in the library as it is claimed, but photographed outside, in Talbot's garden, so that the calotype or talbotype process would have sufficient light to register the objects' (Bate, 2014, p 2). As Bate pointed out: 'it is striking that this knowledge about the "fiction" comes from outside the image, from the literature that pins itself to the picture(s)' (2014, p 2), which, in this case, consists of Talbot's notes and diaries, rather than the text that accompanies plate eight in *The Pencil of Nature*, one of the most 'image-unrelated' pieces of writing that Talbot included in his book.<sup>83</sup>

*We may only know about the fictive nature of the image from information outside the picture. [...] In a sense then, we juxtapose one form of knowledge (the image) against another (a text). This is frequently how we find out an image is not 'true' (Bate, 2014, p 2).*

Only when the photographic fiction is implausible may we know about its fictive nature simply from the image, as it portrays something that is not observable in the real world – otherwise we need some extra-photographic non-visual help. There are two consequences for this.

First in terms of disavowal: I would like to add one layer to Creekmur's argument discussed in 3.1 (p 119). Even if we know that 'the photo as an *analogue* to reality has been abandoned' (Eco, 1982, p 33), *unless* we are exposed to implausible photographic fictions, whose supernatural dimension is blindingly obvious, we

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<sup>82</sup> See Figure 60 in chapter five.

<sup>83</sup> It is indeed Talbot's text for plate eight that creates one of the most mysterious photo-texts of the nineteenth century, as I shall discuss in chapter five (Armstrong, 2002).

'suspend the symbolic efficiency of' photography's anti-realist knowledge and act as if we don't know that photographs are not analogous to reality, because of their psychopathological ubiquitous presence in our everyday life and because they 'reproduce some of the conditions of perception' (Žižek, 2003, p 125). So, only implausibility can 'save us' from disavowal.

Second, the fact that we need words to learn about the fictive nature of the image but also to gain more information in general about it, implies that even when photographs are not intentionally photo-texts, because the text or information that pins to them in their circulation is not part of the body of work, they become 'scripto-visual' in their reception – as pointed out by Burgin when he writes that even 'uncaptioned art photographs' on the gallery wall, are 'invaded by language at the very moment they are looked at' (1986, pp 51-53).<sup>84</sup>

This is what Lucy Soutter described as the 'conceptual subtext of the images' whose loose association with them, as 'it is not directly incorporated in the work and is available only if you read the press release, the catalogue essay, the review, etc.', is crucial in provoking nervousness among people about fictive documents (2014, no pagination).<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> To illustrate how we do not experience only retinal vision, but 'the visual' and 'the verbal' are quite intertwined, Burgin writes:

*Although photography is a 'visual medium', it is not a 'purely visual' medium. I am not alluding simply to the fact that we rarely see a photograph in use which is not accompanied by writing [...]. But the influence of language goes beyond the fact of the physical presence of writing as a deliberate addition to the image. Even the uncaptioned 'art' photograph, framed and isolated on the gallery wall, is invaded by language in the very moment it is looked at: in memory, in association, snatches of words and images continually intermingle and exchange one for the other; what significant elements the subject recognizes 'in' the photograph are inescapably supplemented from elsewhere* (1986, pp 51-53, my emphasis).

Through the concept of *lexical* thought, namely Horowitz's 'thinking in words', Burgin refers to photographs and how they 'predominantly tend to prompt a complex of exchanges between the visual and verbal registers' (1986, p 58). 'The greater part of photographic practice is, *de facto* "scripto-visual"' (p 58); this fact is for Burgin nowhere more apparent than in advertising, where what he calls 'popular pre-conscious', or in other words common knowledge, plays an important role. Even art photographs – he claims – are not immune from such determinations of meaning, which are achieved even where actual writing is absent. However, this 'scripto-visual' form described by Burgin only happens at the level of mental images, as the point of departure is 'uncaptioned art photographs' and not photo-texts.

<sup>85</sup> Soutter underlines the important ethical implications of fictive documents:

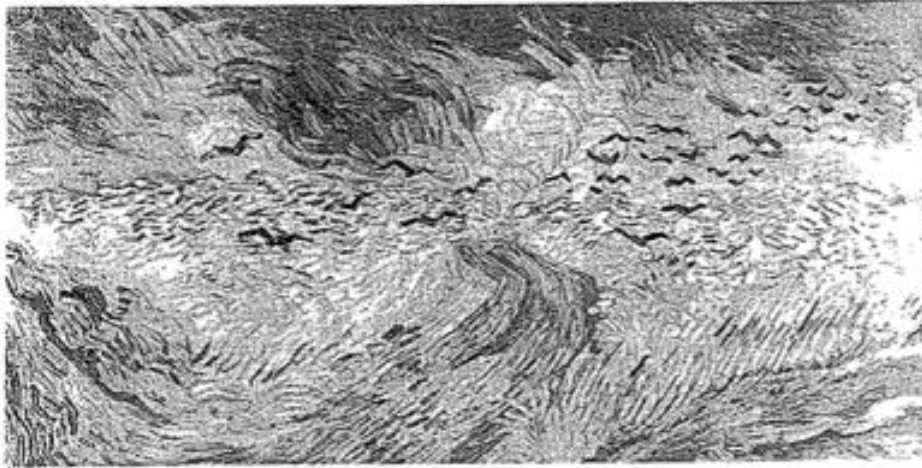
*The loose relationship between image and conceptual subtext is now standard in contemporary photography, and certainly contributes to the murky ethics of the relationship between photographer and sitters. Do these pictures 'document' a collaborative, consensual process, or is the story just a ruse to exploit the subjects and make edgy images? I think there are elements of both* (2014, no pagination).

But what happens, then, when text is present? In his famous passage on the role of words when they accompany paintings in *Ways of Seeing* (1972), John Berger writes:

*Paintings are often reproduced with words around them. This is a landscape of a cornfield with birds flying out of it. Look at it for a moment. Then turn the page. [Handwritten: This is the last picture that Van Gogh painted before he killed himself]. It is hard to define exactly how the words have changed the image but undoubtedly they have (2008, p 28).*

**This is a landscape of a cornfield with birds flying out of it. Look at it for a moment. Then turn the page.**

WHEATFIELD WITH CROWS  
BY VAN GOGH 1853-1890



27

WHEATFIELD WITH CROWS  
BY VAN GOGH 1853-1890



*This is the last picture that Van Gogh painted before he killed himself.*

**It is hard to define exactly how the words have changed the image but undoubtedly they have. The image now illustrates the sentence.**

Fig 42 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*. Book, 1977, London: Penguin, my photograph

It is precisely the transformative power of text, when it purposefully accompanies a photograph, that has been neglected within photography theory and whose importance allows us to go beyond the realist/anti-realist conundrum.

What I find particularly fascinating is that, within photography theory, the ideological battle between photographic realism and anti-realism is linked with another one: the image-word ideological battle, which goes in cycles. In Smith and Lefley's book *Rethinking Photography: Histories, Theories and Education* (2015), they explore the idea of photography 'as "pre-linguistically" related to the world that defines it' and show how the realist position, which understands the photograph as linked with a past reality that produced it, is a sign of photography's resistance to 'linguistic assimilation', which echoes Mitchell (1994). For the realists, language is perceived as an 'intrusion'. Vice versa, anti-realist positions, such as Burgin's, believe that 'we rarely see a photograph in use which is not accompanied by language' (1986, pp 51-53). As pointed out by Mitchell, Burgin resolutely affirms the domination of photography by language with his aforementioned claim that 'even the uncaptioned "art" photograph is invaded by language in the very moment it is looked at' (Mitchell, 1994, p 282-84). By denying photography an independence from language, an authority of its own, theorists such as Burgin or Tagg are also refusing to accept claims of photographic truth. Mitchell rejects Burgin's (1986, p 58) 'fluid' concept of photography as a 'scripto-visual form' and argues instead that 'this invasion [of language] might well provoke a resistance' (1994, p 282-84). However, as I discussed in 3.1, Mitchell neither has a clear position about photography's ontology in relation to other types of non-mechanical images, nor does he propose a specific contribution towards photo-text theory. For Mitchell, the relationship between photography and language seems to be a paradox: 'what if photography both is and is not a language?' he asks, somehow confusingly (1994, p 284).

This parallel only nurtures the realist/anti-realist conundrum further. It is by shifting the attention towards photography's relationship with fiction, here intended as departing from reality, or imaginary – and by acknowledging the importance of the effect of text on photography – that we can go beyond the conundrum and expand photography theory. Text, as a matter of fact, can both authenticate and falsify or, in a less derogatory manner, fictionalise a photographic image, confirming that photography has the double soul of being both a realist and a fictional medium.



A good example to illustrate this point is artist Les Krims. 'I am not a Historian, I create History', writes Krims, explaining how his images are 'anti-decisive moments' and that for him 'the greatest potential source of photographic imagery is the mind' (cited in Coleman, 1998, p 252). Indeed, his image *Spitting Out the Word P-h-o-t-o-g-r-a-p-h-y*, as shown in Figure 1 (Krims, 1970), wittily plays with photo-text relations and reveals the subversive power of text in relation to the image as a source of fiction rather than authentication. The woman portrayed is indeed spitting letters. However, as soon as one starts to look for the letters that compose the word 'photography', written in the title with each letter separated by a hyphen – to capture the viewer's attention, and potentially encourage a cross-reference with the letters in the image – we soon realise that the woman in the image is actually spitting out way more letters than the ones needed to compose the word photography. Hence the title does not authenticate but contradicts the image.<sup>86</sup> Once we realise that even the predominant normative use of text that accompanies the circulation of a photograph to supposedly secure its realism does not hold – as text can also be used to completely dismantle the relationship of photography to realism, and direct the photograph towards fiction, as I discussed through Newhall (1952, p 66) and Freund's (1980) slanted captions and Krims' title – only then we can go beyond the realist/anti-realist conundrum and accept the fact that photography can be both a realistic medium (yet not a portion or analogue to reality), gifted with 'uncanny accuracy', and a fictional one that makes us depart from reality and which produces the psychoanalytic effect of disavowal in its reception.<sup>87</sup> Now that I have clarified the crucial role of text within photography theory, I continue this analysis towards 'photo-text theory', in the next chapter, by exploring the occasional and fragmented contributions – here represented by the hyphen '-', which is also the typographical reminder of the 'third something', the imaginary third object that develops precisely in the viewer/reader's mind – to text-photo dynamics through looking at the images and reading the words. So, the next chapter maps out a selective critical history of ideas towards photo-text theory.

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<sup>86</sup> In response to a critique that Krims received about his title *Idiosyncratic Pictures*, which accused him of using texts that are 'idiomatic; not easily understood', Krims punchily said: 'texts and pictures are the mainstays of fiction and propaganda. How could propaganda be revealed and criticised without using a similar method?' (Goysdotter, 2013, no pagination).

<sup>87</sup> The case study of Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau's 1946 book *La Mort et les statues* examined in chapter six also offers a good example of text that dismantles photographs' relation to realism, by 'hijacking' them.

*The absence of words always covers an enigmatic intention.*

Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', 1964

#### **Chapter 4 Towards Photo-Text Theory**

This section is entitled 'Towards Photo-Text Theory' because it proposes a rethink of photography, by revisiting the most significant contributions towards what I propose calling 'photo-text theory' – namely the analysis of the effects produced by juxtaposing photographs and words. By examining the most significant contributions towards 'photo-text theory', I mean tracing historically those occasional writings that take text-photo relations as their explicit object. In doing so, I shall intersperse examples from twentieth-century photo-text practitioners, artists and thinkers, such as Roland Barthes and Duane Michals, as well as more recent names such as Roni Horn and Jane Tormey.<sup>88</sup> While so far ideas about photo-text dynamics and actual photo-texts were scattered around different epochs, disciplines, countries and publications, a selection of them is gathered here for the first time and examined together.<sup>89</sup> This section has two main objectives: to scrutinise the most significant contributions towards 'photo-text theory'; and to explore whether and how it is possible to advance our thinking of photo-text relations beyond Barthes' (1977) theory, by far the one that dealt most specifically and structurally with the linking of text and photographs.

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<sup>88</sup> There are some authors that I mention elsewhere in the thesis as their reflections fit better there and to mention them again here would be a repetition. Other literary scholars, whose contribution is more in the context of taxonomical observations and criticism rather than critical theory, are discussed in chapters one and two. Although he does not provide a theory of photo-text dynamics as such, Jefferson Hunter's 1987 reflections on the genre of photo-texts are discussed in chapter one. André Breton's 'anti-literary' strategy to include photographs in his novel 1928 *Nadja* to eliminate all descriptions is mentioned in the specific section dedicated to photo-literature in chapter two. Robert Crawford and Norman McBeath' 2016 photo-poetry Manifesto, which contains a few theoretical remarks, is discussed in the dedicated section in chapter two. Victor Burgin's 'scripto-visual form' (1986) has been presented in 3.2. Mitchell's (1986, 1994, 2005 and 2015) contradictory views on the peculiarity of photography in relation to other types of images and the fact that he does not really propose a photo-text theory has been discussed in chapter 3.1 and 3.2. I shall mention Jean-Luc Nancy's ideas of images and texts when presented together as attracting and repelling one another, expressed in his *The Ground of the Image* (2005) in relation to Brecht and Jahan/Cocteau's photo-text dynamics in chapter six. Burgin's (2019) concept of the Japanese *ma* – namely the interval, both spatial and temporal, between two successive events – together with his experimental essay 'A Tea With Madelaine', where he compares the binary opposition man/woman to the one of text/image, are introduced in chapter seven. Also, in that chapter I introduce Linda Hutcheon's views on the ways in which Barthes' categories of anchorage and relay are constantly problematised in what she calls 'postmodern photo-graphy', such as Kruger's and Burgin's phototexts.

<sup>89</sup> Andy Stafford does present a succinct historical survey of critical theories on photo-text relations in his sections 'Text-Image Studies: The Pioneers and the New Assessors' and 'Barthes-Image-Text', in his book *Photo-texts: Contemporary French Writing of the Photographic Image*, whose merits and limitations I shall discuss later in this section (2010, pp 36-47).

'The association of words and photographs has grown to a medium with immense influence on what we think', wrote Newhall already in 1952 (p 67), being somewhat prophetic: the 'new photograph-writing — so new we have no word for it', is 'a transition form, perhaps, [...] in embryo and [...] the form through which we shall speak to each other, in many succeeding phases of photography, for a thousand years or more'. This is quite a visionary statement if we consider how photo-texts have invaded everyday life through the press, of course, but also through advertising, cinema and more recently social media, memes, and the Internet in general.<sup>90</sup> The Internet, as underlined by Sunil Manghani, is a multimedia domain heavily dependent on text that 'appears on any given webpage and more crucially underpins the way we search online' (2013, p 60), with the word-image relationship reaching its apex in Google Images.<sup>91</sup>

Before Barthes developed his 'anchorage' and 'relay' theory to describe 'the functions of the linguistic message with regard to the (twofold) iconic message' – for which text is used 'to limit the projective power of the image' in the former, while it contains 'information that the image doesn't' in the latter (1977, p 38) – Newhall already had a clear vision of what a photo-text should be:

*A new language of images is apparently evolving, and with it a new use of words. There are now photographs complete without words as there have for thousands of years been books complete without pictures. Where the two mediums meet, they demand that each complement and complete each other so that they form one medium. They demand also that they shall be arranged so that their visual pattern is clear to the eye, or, when the words are spoken, that what is heard is timed and cadenced with what the eye sees (p 79, my emphasis).*

Besides this general manifesto that fosters pictures' and words' complementarity, Newhall goes as far as to envisage a classification of captions based on their photo-text dynamics. For the purpose of the analysis here, it is important to highlight that what she calls 'additive caption' anticipates Barthes' notion of relay text: 'in the additive caption, the basic principle is independence – and interdependence – of the two

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<sup>90</sup> For further research on word and image within cinema, see the section 'Text and the Moving Image' of the book *Text Into Image: Image Into Text* (Morrison and Krobb, 1997, pp 267-348). See also Mary E. Hocks and Michelle R. Kendrick's *Eloquent Images: Word and Image in the Age of New Media* (2005).

<sup>91</sup> Artists such as Eva and Franco Mattes, David Horvitz, John Yuyi and Pablo Roachat that investigates networked culture and digital aesthetics have been inspired by memes and other internet-based photo-texts.

mediums', writes Newhall, 'the words do not parrot what the photographs say, the photographs are not illustrations' (1952, p 75). As an example, she comments about Wright Morris' first book, *The Inhabitants*, as shown in Figure 4 (Morris, 1946), in which he 'eliminated titles, wrote verbal equivalents for his photographs and tried to tie them together with a thread of narrative in caption form'.

*The book received the critical acclaim the first book genuinely created in two mediums by one man deserved, but it stands as a valiant rather than a successful attempt to weld the two into one. Time and intensity are as much to be reckoned with in a book as a film; you cannot remember a thread of narrative when you have a photograph to understand, a condensed paragraph or two to read, and the relation between them to consider before you turn the page to pick up the next wisp of narrative (Newhall, 1952, p 75, my emphasis).*

Focusing on the viewer/reader's challenges that engaging with such a complex narrative and demanding book entails, she concludes that 'the additive principle at this stage looks like a whole new medium in itself', whose 'potentials seem scarcely explored, like a continent descried from a ship' (p 79).

It is unlikely that Barthes read Newhall's text, which was translated into French for the first time in the 1981 issue two of the magazine *Les cahiers de la photographie*. Barthes first discusses his rigorously semiotic position on 'Text and Image' issues in the eponymous section of his 1961 essay 'The Photographic Message' (1977, pp 25-27). There he focuses on the function of the text that accompanies the press photograph, and his view appears confrontational in that he portrays a sort of battle between image and word.

*The text constitutes a parasitic message designed to connote the image, to 'quicken' it with one or more second-order signifieds. In other words, and this is an important historical reversal, the image no longer illustrates the words; it is now the words which, structurally, are parasitic on the image. The reversal is at a cost: in the traditional modes of illustration the image functioned as an episodic return to denotation from a principal message (the text) which was experienced as connoted since, precisely, it needed an illustration; in the relationship that now holds, it is not the image which comes to elucidate or 'realize' the text, but the latter which comes to sublimate, patheticize or rationalize the image (Barthes, 1977, p 25).*

The accompanying text is for him 'only a kind of secondary vibration, almost without consequence' (p 25). If previously 'the image illustrated the text (made it clearer); today, the text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination' (p 26).

Intriguingly Barthes discusses layout and design matters, dwelling upon the different impact of 'the way in which the text is presented' on 'the effect of connotation' (p 26). 'The closer the text to the image,' he argues, 'the less it seems to connote it' (p 26). Then he discusses the 'less obvious effect of connotation' that the caption has, as compared to the headline or accompanying article: 'headline and article are palpably separate from the image, the former by its emphasis, the latter by its distance; the first because it breaks, the other because it distances the content of the image' (p 26). For Barthes, the caption 'appears to duplicate the image, that is, to be included in its denotation' (p 26). However, he specifies that 'it is impossible that the words "duplicate" the image', because 'in the movement from one structure to the other second signifieds are inevitably developed' (p 26). What I call 'the third something', borrowing from Eisenstein via Di Bello and Zamir, for Barthes are semiotically second signifieds. Barthes envisages multiple photo-text dynamics and not simply the unilateral and political one that Benjamin (1980) and Brecht (1955) envisaged, with text 'rescuing' photographs from propaganda. For Barthes, photo-text intersections can operate in different directions. Text can make explicit and amplify 'a set of connotations already given in the photograph' and it can also 'produce (invent) an entirely new signified which is retroactively projected into the image, so much so as to appear denoted there' (Barthes, 1977, p 27).<sup>92</sup> 'Sometimes too,' Barthes concludes, 'the text can even contradict the image so as to produce a compensatory connotation', giving the example of the contrast between the headlines and the cover images in romance magazines.

*An analysis by Gerbner (The Social Anatomy of the Romance Confession Cover-girl) demonstrated that in certain romance magazines the verbal message of the headlines, gloomy and anguished, on the cover always accompanied the image of a radiant cover-girl; here the two messages enter into a compromise, the connotation having a regulating function, preserving the irrational movement of projection-identification (p 27).*

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<sup>92</sup> "“They were near to death, their faces prove it”, reads the headline to a photograph showing Elizabeth and Philip leaving a plane – but at the moment of the photograph the two still knew nothing of the accident they had just escaped' (Barthes, 1977, p 27).



Fig 43 George Gerbner, *Figure 1: Four of the twelve covers used in the experiment*. Image from his essay 'The Social Anatomy of the Romance Confession Cover-girl', *Journalism Quarterly*, 35 (3), 1958, 299-306, 301

While Barthes already appears to have exhausted the possibilities of image-text relations in 'The Photographic Message' (1977, pp 25-27), it is actually in his subsequent 1964 essay 'The Rhetoric of the Image' where he refines his theory. Reducing the three functions of text discussed in 'The Photographic Message' to two, he introduces the fundamental concepts of 'anchorage' and 'relay' (1977, pp 37-41).

Barthes opens 'The Linguistic Message' section by claiming that 'all images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a "floating chain" of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others' (p 39). In a footnote Barthes makes an important observation: 'Images without words [...] always cover an enigmatic intention' (p 38). 'Uncertain signs' provoke 'terror', 'in every society', so 'various techniques are developed intended to fix the floating chain of signifieds' and 'the linguistic message is one of these techniques' (p 39).

This comment is crucial because it confirms the conflictual relationship that Barthes envisaged between images and words: 'the linguistic message' is employed to 'counter the terror of uncertain signs' (Barthes, 1977, p 39), namely images without words, 'whose polysemy would produce otherwise a traumatic suspension of meaning' (de Lauretis, 2008, p 117). This supposedly conflictual relationship between word and image and my selection of the case studies in Part II, both on conflictual subject matters (war and patriarchy), is not coincidental and partly confirms the point made by

Cortellessa (2020, no pagination) on the frequency with which photo-texts represent conflict in its broad sense.<sup>93</sup>

Going back to Barthes, he distinguishes between the 'literal' and 'symbolic' message (1977, p 39). At the level of the literal message, text carries out the 'denominative function' of 'an *anchorage* of all the possible (denoted) meanings of the object by recourse to a nomenclature' with the aim of identification to '*limit the projective power of the image*' (p 39, my emphasis). As per the 'symbolic message', text 'no longer guides identification but interpretation [...] constituting a kind of vice', as it 'orientates the reading towards' a desired signified (p 39). Barthes initially refers to the manipulative intent of advertising, but then he adds 'of course, elsewhere than in advertising, the anchorage may be ideological and indeed this is its principal function'.

*The text directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; [...] it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance. [...] The text is indeed the creator's (and hence society's) right of inspection over the image; anchorage is a control, bearing a responsibility – in the face of the projective power of pictures – for the use of the message. With respect to the liberty of the signifieds of the image, the text has thus a repressive value and we can see that it is at this level that the morality and ideology of a society are above all invested (p 40, Barthes' and my emphasis).*

It is clear that due to the way in which Barthes describes anchorage, the term acquires the negative connotational charge of ideological repressive control, while relay appears a more liberating concept.<sup>94</sup>

*The function of relay is less common (at least as far as the fixed image is concerned); it can be seen particularly in cartoons and comic strips. Here text (most often a snatch of dialogue) and image stand in a complementary relationship; the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level, that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis (p 41, my emphasis).*

A relay text works as a complement to the image – it contains information that the image doesn't. So, the overall information of the work, 'the unity of the message', comes from the interpolation of both image and text.

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<sup>93</sup> Jovonna Jones also remarks (2019, p 18) that the small photo-text book form 'helped establish a new archive for a black feminist visual practice', in relation to Lorna Simpson's *Untitled 54* (1992) and Carrie Mae Weems's *The Kitchen Table Series* (1996), among others.

<sup>94</sup> In chapter six I will show how the allegedly positive connotation of the relay function in contrast to the presumed negative connotation of anchorage does not always hold.

Later, in his 1967 book *The Fashion System*, Barthes seems to somewhat simplify his theory by writing: 'The image freezes an endless number of possibilities, words determine a single certainty', which makes us think he is focusing on the function of anchorage only (1983, p 13).<sup>95</sup> Van Gelder and Westgeest underline how Barthes in *The Fashion System* warns us that 'the words accompanying a given image can be deceptive in respect to the initial fascination it aroused to our perceiving eye', namely that 'speech can serve to "disappoint" the image' (2011, p 186). They continue by expanding on this idea of the 'possibly disappointing relation between image and caption' to show how socially engaged documentarians, such as Allan Sekula and Chauncey Hare, praise working with 'extended captions' (Van Gelder and Westgeest, 2011, p 187). Intriguingly, they point out how important it is for Sekula to 'always insert a certain degree of "fictionality" into the documentary work, [...] be it through certain images or text fragments, [to] create a distance from the more literal documentary aspects of the piece, which allow for an active reflection to arise in the minds of the spectator' (pp 178-79). Indeed Sekula, while describing photo-textual works from the 1970s by Martha Rosler, Philip Steinmetz and Fred Lonidier wrote in 1978 in 'Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)':

*These artists [...] openly bracket their photographs with language, using texts to anchor, contradict, reinforce, subvert, complement, particularize, or go beyond the meanings offered by the images themselves* (2016, p 60).

It is hard to know whether he got the word 'anchor' from Barthes or not, as the essay does not mention him at all, but it is interesting how the short passage above is a sort of photo-text theory in a nutshell, envisaging multiple types of photo-text dynamics.

Going back to Barthes, clearly, even if his main objects of study are press, fashion and advertising photographs, his photo-text theory – articulated around these two functions of 'anchorage' and 'relay' – has become the point of reference for both theorists and artists, who have attempted to put their wits against it.

Especially it appears that authors and artists, from John Berger and Jean Mohr, to Victor Burgin, Duane Michals and Roni Horn, knowingly or unknowingly, have shown that the traditional negatively connoted 'anchorage' function is not so desirable, as it is

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<sup>95</sup> Even if *The Fashion System* represents Barthes' later words on photography and text from a chronological point of view, by no means does it have to be considered his final or most rigorous analysis of photo-text relations.



considered the more repressive one, with text remote-controlling, directing and fixing the reading of an image; so they have attempted to undermine it and to show that, contrary to what Barthes (1977, p 40) writes, the 'relay' function is not so uncommon or 'rare in the fixed image' and it is much more liberating and interesting.<sup>96</sup> For example, in 1965, Berger – two years before publishing with Jean Mohr, a pioneer of humanist photography in Switzerland, their first photo-textual collaboration, *A Fortunate Man: The Story of a Country Doctor*, on the struggling profession and routine of Dr. John Sassall – wrote for *Typographica* that 'nobody dares to place images as precisely in relation to a text as a quotation would be placed; few writers yet think of using pictures to make their argument' (in Inglis, 2016, no pagination). Indeed, as pointed out by Inglis, *A Fortunate Man* initiates, both conceptually and graphically, this process of complementarity between pictures and words that Barthes defined as relay, and that Berger's 1972 book *Ways of Seeing*, from his famous BBC series about art, and *A Seventh Man* (1975), on the experience of migrant workers in Europe, achieve more deeply (Inglis, 2016, no pagination).

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<sup>96</sup> However, the second case study on Brecht, Jahan and Cocteau is conceived around the purpose of showing that 'anchorage' can be liberating and 'relay' ethically or politically problematic, as I shall discuss in chapter six.

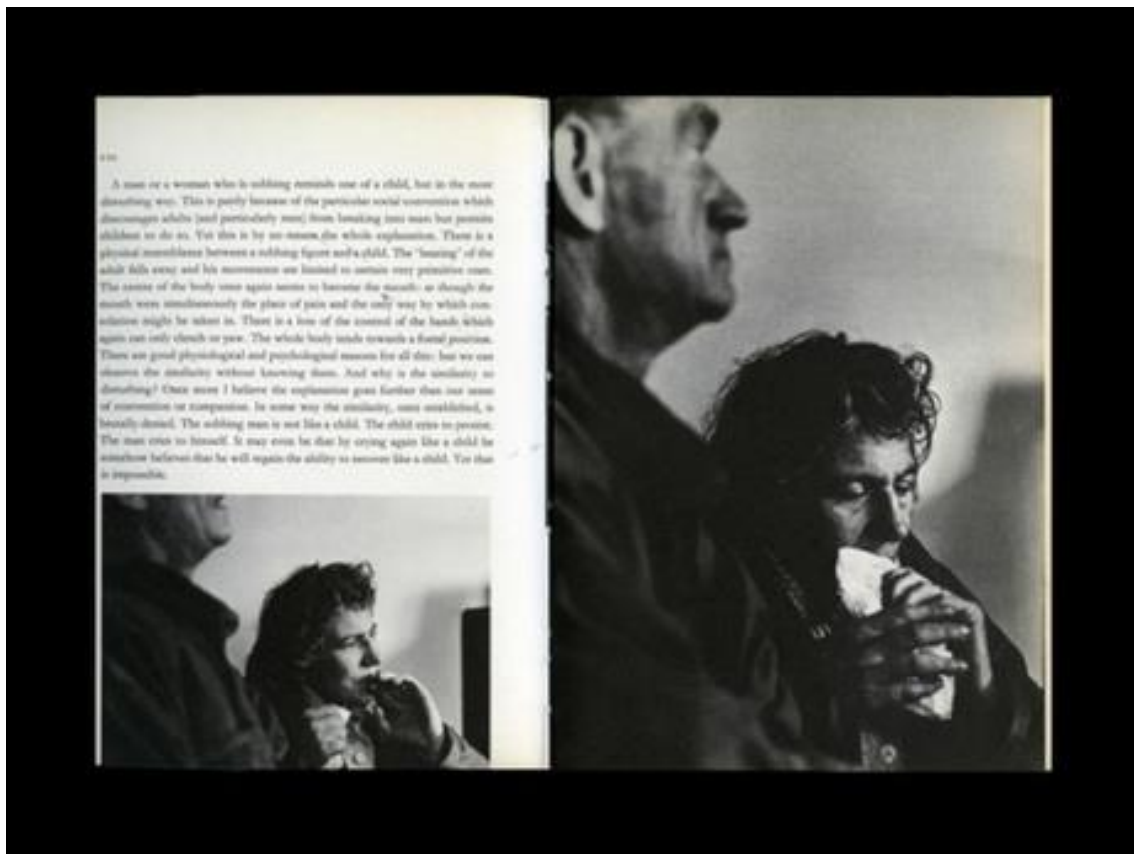
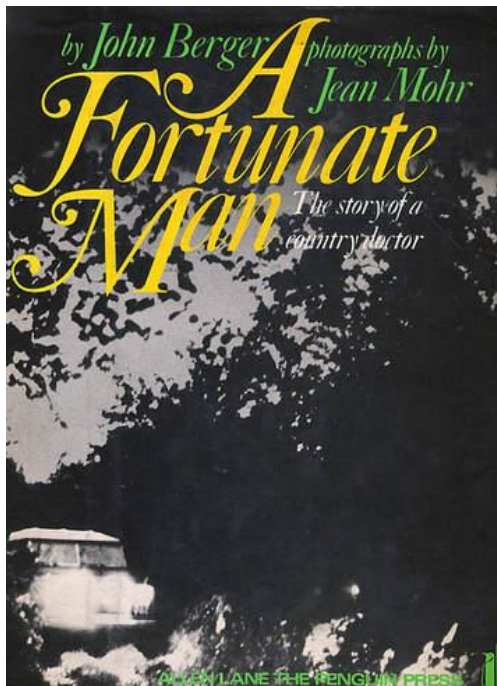


Fig 44 John Berger and Jean Mohr, *A Fortunate Man: The Story of a Country Doctor*. Book, 11 x 22 cm, 1967, London: Allen Lane, the Penguin Press, my photograph

It is Berger himself that describes the mechanism of the photo-text collaboration:

*When we got together again and compared what I'd written with the photographs Jean had chosen, we found we'd replicated one another's work entirely [...]. They were tautologous – as if my text was a series of captions to his images. We had both tried to write the book on our own. That's not what we*

*wanted at all, so we reworked so that the words and pictures were like a conversation; building on, rather than mirroring, one another* (2015, p 11).

The last sentence above appears very similar to Barthes' definition of the relay function. Berger was probably aware of Barthes' essay, as, from a couple of reviews he wrote about Barthes' books, we know that Berger was carefully reading him. However, Berger did not explicitly refer to Barthes' photo-text categories of 'anchorage' and 'relay'.<sup>97</sup> By looking closely at one of the most compelling spreads from Berger and Mohr's book *A Seventh Man*, it is remarkable to note the adroitness with which a relay dynamic is created between the migrant's portrait, which is torn in two halves – as shown in Figure 45 (Berger and Mohr, 1975) – and the text that explains precisely the function that tearing portraits in half had for the migrant: to make sure his family got the other half as a sign of success of the clandestine trip and to avoid being cheated by smugglers, who would take the money and then abandon them in the mountains (Berger, 2010, pp 48-49).

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<sup>97</sup> I am grateful to Tom Overton for pointing me to the following reviews that Berger wrote for the magazine *New Society* about some of Barthes' books: 'Mythical Speech', review of Barthes' *Mythologies* in 1972; 'Working at the Edge', review of Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* in 1976, and 'Inside the Mask', review of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* in 1977.

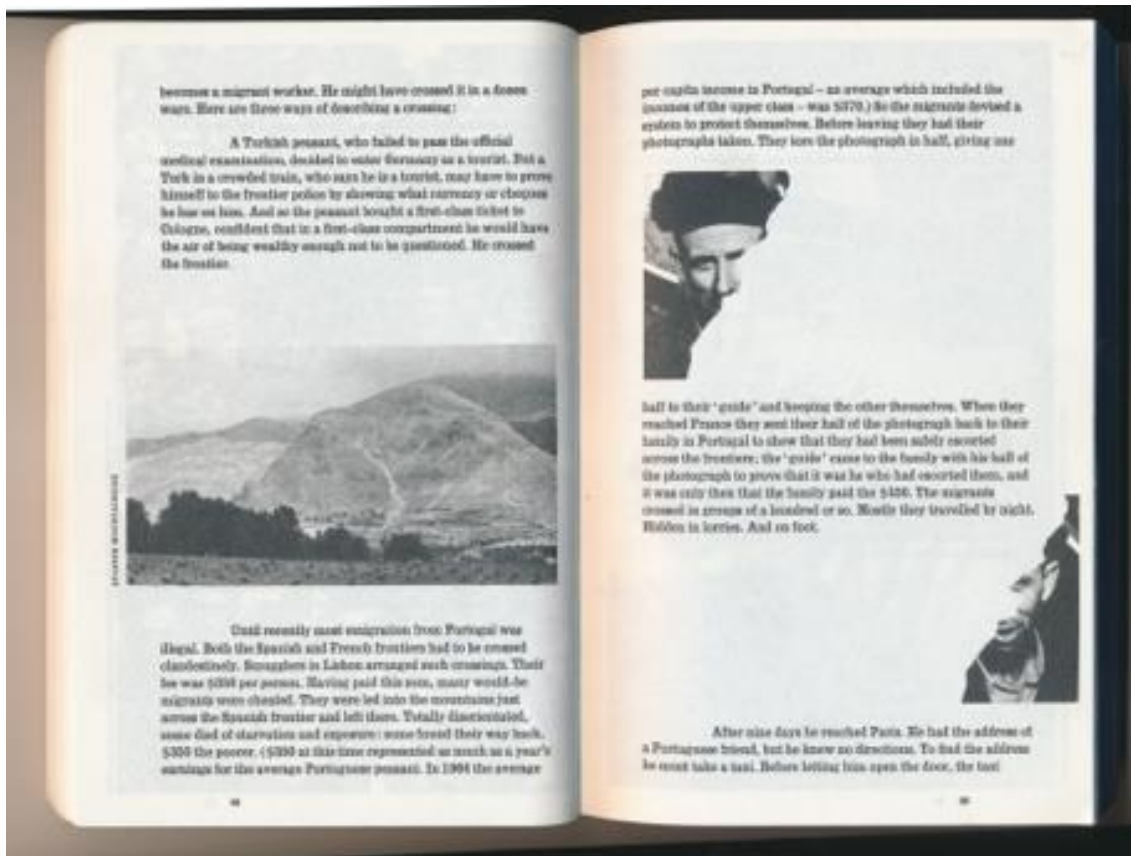
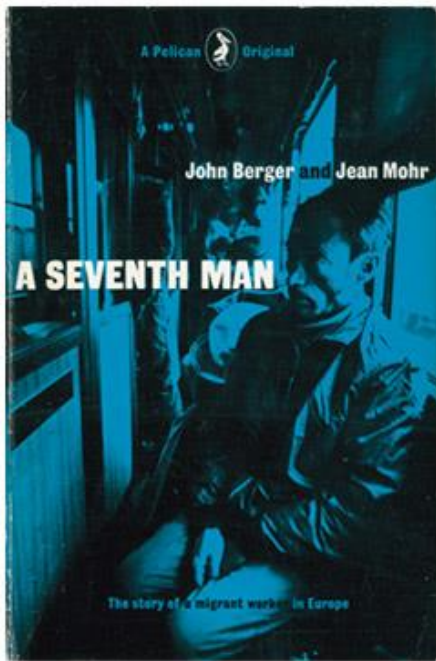


Fig 45 John Berger and Jean Mohr, *A Seventh Man: The Story of a Migrant Worker in Europe*. Book, 13 x 21 cm, 1975, London: Pelican Original, Penguin, my photograph

If one half of the image has an anchorage type of relationship with part of the text, the second half, in relation with the text about the migrant's family impatiently waiting to receive it, teleports us outside the image (relay), obliging us to imagine what's missing in the portrait, besides the other half. This masterpiece of a spread confirms that,

contrary to what Barthes (1977, p 41) thought, the 'relay' function can work well also with the 'fixed image' (Berger, 2010, pp 48-49).

Burgin, in his seminal 1975 essay 'Art, Common Sense and Photography', explicitly discusses Barthes' categories on the 'text/image bond', in the context of dissecting ideology's mechanisms behind the rhetoric of advertising photographs, highlighting the need to 'treat the photographic image as an occasion for scepticism and questioning – not as a source for hypnosis' (2018, pp 25 and 28). Via Jacques Durand, Burgin explains that 'advertising is the most obvious place we might expect to find rhetorical figures', which help reach persuasion, through an 'artful use of language', hence the presence of text in advertising to control the polysemic nature of photography and to persuade (2018, pp 24-25 and 27). In particular, Burgin shows how through a relay text, which 'explains, develops, expands the significance of the image', an effect of 'paradox' can be obtained (2018, pp 26-27).



Fig 46 Victor Burgin, *Figure 1.7*. Image from his essay 'Art, Common Sense and Photography' in *The Camera: Essence and Apparatus*, 2018, London: MACK, courtesy the artist

He analyses an advert in the magazine *Psychology Today*, in which an image of poverty replaces the word 'poverty' and, juxtaposed with the caption 'It's all in the mind', the photo-text they produce together generates the paradoxical statement: 'Poverty. It's all in the mind', whereas 'the poverty depicted in the image is a material' one (Burgin, 2018, pp 27). If Burgin the theorist elaborates the functions of anchorage and relay by showing them in context with extremely helpful examples, rather than

criticising them, Burgin the artist constantly problematises them as I shall illustrate in chapter seven.

It is Barthes himself who envisages the possibility, that ‘obviously, the two functions of the linguistic message [anchorage and relay] can co-exist in the one iconic whole’ (1977, p 41). Co-existence, though, does not necessarily imply overlap. Indeed, he adds the adversative sentence ‘but the dominance of the one or the other is of consequence for the general economy of a work’, somewhat taking for granted that either anchorage or relay will inevitably and clearly prevail over the other (1977, p 41). However, the more I study the differences between them, the more I realise that, despite the fact that they anticipate the ways in which many photo-textual artworks operate, their boundaries are blurred and they can overlap. Both anchorage and relay text can work as complements to the image, containing information that the image doesn’t. As we saw earlier through Newhall (1952), Upton (1978), Rancière (2011) and Bate (2014), the information photographs reveal is quite limited.

Stafford’s section ‘Text-Image Studies: The Pioneers and the New Assessors’ has the merit of initiating such a theoretical discourse in historical perspective, presenting reflections from French scholars besides the usual suspects, such as Hubert Damisch, Jérôme Game and Gilles Mora (2010, pp 36-42). Also, Stafford dedicates a whole illuminating section on ‘Barthes-Image-Text’ theory, highlighting often neglected passages from the author and acknowledging the importance of considering the frequent inseparability of anchorage and relay in a photo-text (2010, pp 42-47). However, Stafford (pp 46-47) neglects the important adversative sentence that Barthes adds after claiming that the two functions of anchorage and relay can co-exist in the same photo-text: ‘but the dominance of the one or the other is of consequence for the general economy of a work’, with which Barthes appears to take for granted that one always inexorably prevails over the other.<sup>98</sup> Also, Stafford omits to look at how photo-text practitioners/artists challenge Barthes’ theory and he does not propose possible ways to expand photo-text theory (pp 46-47).

As pointed out by Manghani in his ‘Image and Text’ chapter (2013, pp 80-83), Barthes says very little about the concept of the term ‘relay’, besides that it is common in comic strips, intended for ‘quick’ reading, as the story is primarily told through the

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<sup>98</sup> The third case study on Burgin and Kruger is conceived precisely around the purpose of showing that anchorage and relay can overlap so deeply as to make their very distinction problematic to identify, as I shall discuss in chapter seven.

text and the images play a role of support, 'so that the hurried reader may be spared the boredom of verbal "descriptions"' (1977, p 41) – which reminds me of Breton's 'anti-literary' use of photographs in *Nadja* with the purpose of 'eliminating all descriptions' (1963, p 8). To consider a more 'expansive set of terms' for the description of image-text dynamics, I agree with Manghani (2013, pp 80-83) that turning to the practitioner cartoonist Scott McCloud (1994, pp 153-55), who, after admitting that 'the different ways in which words and pictures can combine in comics is virtually unlimited', envisages nonetheless seven 'distinct categories' or types of relations, opens up possibilities. McCloud lists and illustrates them as the following:

1. 'Word specific, where pictures illustrate but don't significantly add to a largely complete text'
2. 'Picture specific, where words do little more than add a soundtrack to a visually told sequence'
3. 'Duo-specific, where both words and images send essentially the same message'
4. 'Additive, where words amplify or elaborate on an image and vice versa'
5. 'Parallel, where words and image seem to follow a very different course without intersecting'
6. 'Montage, where words are treated as integral parts of the picture'
7. 'Interdependent, where words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone' (pp 153-55).

For McCloud, 'interdependent combinations' are the most common type of word and image combination and they are rarely in 'equal balance': 'the more is said with words, the more the pictures can be freed to go exploring, and vice versa' (1994, p 155). Although this classification was conceived for comics, it appears applicable for any type of image-text encounter and is blissfully more flexible than Barthes' functions of anchorage and relay. However, before proposing the adoption of McCloud's classification for photo-text intersections in replacement of Barthes', it is important to first 'stress-test' Barthes' functions, which I shall do partly here and through the case studies in Part II of this thesis.

Among the artists that challenge Barthes' functions, I would like to start with Duane Michals. Known for attempting to destabilise the notion of narrative through photographic sequences – and for exploring the relationship between visual and verbal representation – he produced a conceptual photo-text that, with its 'rebus title' and

handwritten text, precisely questions the two categories of photo-text dynamics introduced by Barthes: *There Are Things Here Not Seen In This Photograph* (Scott, 1999 p 47).<sup>99</sup> This photograph of an empty neighbourhood bar exists in two versions: the original one from 1977 and a 1995 version with a clearer handwriting, as shown in Figure 47 (Michals, 1977).



Fig 47 Duane Michals, *There Are Things Here Not Seen In This Photograph*. Gelatin silver print with hand applied text, 24.8 x 27.6 cm, 1977, copyright Duane Michals, courtesy DC Moore Gallery, New York

Michals' handwritten text reads:

*There are things here not seen in this photograph  
 My shirt was wet with perspiration.  
 The beer tasted good, but I was still thirsty.  
 Some drunk was talking loudly to another drunk about Nixon.  
 I watched a roach walk slowly along the edge of a barstool.  
 On the jukebox, Glenn Campbell began to sing about 'Southern Nights'.*

<sup>99</sup> European Literature Professor Clive Scott (1999, p 47) distinguishes, in his book *The Spoken Image*, 'caption' from 'title' and elaborates three different types of titles: as 'destination', the title 'explains and synthesizes the image', such as allegorical or descriptive titles; as 'point of departure', a 'minimal or non-interfering' title, which 'orientates the spectator and then leaves the image to do its work'; and as 'parallel but displaced commentary, set at a distance from the picture, so that the meaning is neither in the picture nor in the title, but in their point of convergence', which Scott defines as the 'rebus' or 'conundrum' title. The 'rebus title' is reminiscent of Barthes' function of 'relay' and Michals' 1977 image is a good example of it.



*I had to go to the men's room. A derelict was walking towards me to ask for money.  
It was time to leave.*

*Duane Michals*

While the title operates as a relay text to the image, the handwritten text works both as relay and anchorage: as relay it contains information which the image doesn't, and in enumerating the things outside the frame it guides the interpretation that the viewer might have of the photograph – it instructs their imagination – reducing other possible things 'not seen in this photograph' to a list of them. The rebus title/caption and the handwritten text of this photo-text also work to destroy the alleged power attributed to photography to represent 'reality', as pointed out by Moa Goysdotter in her *Impure Vision: American Staged Photography of the 1970s* (2013, p 84), which reminds me of another radical work by Duane Michals: *A Failed Attempt to Photograph Reality*.

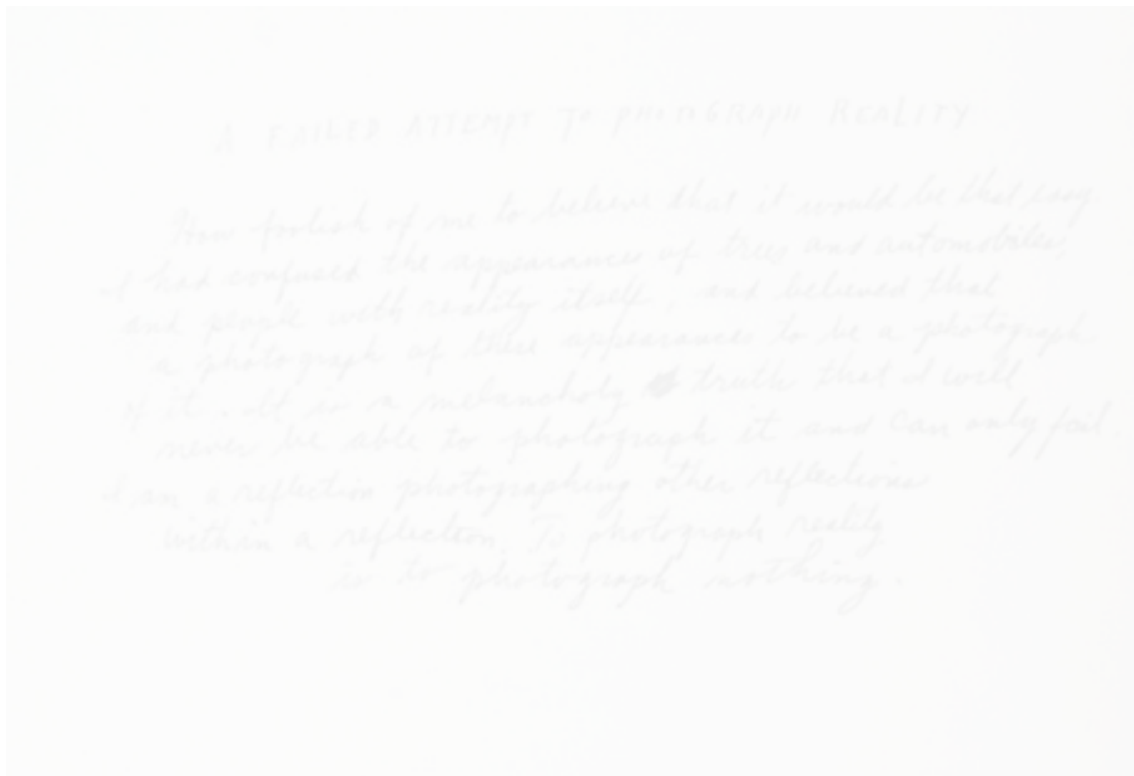


Fig 48 Duane Michals, *A Failed Attempt to Photograph Reality*. Gelatin silver paper with hand applied text, 20.32 x 25.4 cm, 1976, copyright Duane Michals, courtesy DC Moore Gallery

Michals' text reads:

*How foolish of me to believe that it would be that easy.  
I had confused the appearance of trees and automobiles,  
and people with a reality itself, and believed that  
a photograph of these appearances to be a photograph of it.  
It is a melancholy truth that I will*

*never be able to photograph it and can only fail.  
I am a reflection photographing other reflections  
within a reflection. To photograph reality  
is to photograph nothing.*

In 1982 Michals had an exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. In a text written for the accompanying publication, Michel Foucault (1982, p 11) highlighted how the way in which Michals combines image and text – so that they ‘can come closer to an experience of multisensory reality by empowering one another’s narrative elements’ – is quite unique (Goysdotter, 2013, p 84). Unlike other photographers, who employ text to reinforce what is in the picture and ‘make sure it conveys what it is intended to convey’ (Goysdotter, 2013, p 84), for Michals texts serve other purposes, being ‘not there to fix the image, hold it fast, but rather expose it to invisible breezes [...] permit it to sail free. [...] They are there to make the picture circulate in the mind’ (Foucault, 1982, p 11). With Rosler’s *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, as shown in Figure 5 (Rosler, 1974-75), images and words share equal dignity in their failure or, less extremely, inadequacy, to document reality. Rosler believes that ‘combined with the wrong captions or textual context, a photograph can more easily be neutralized than a text that stands on its own’ (Van Gelder and Westgeest, 2011, p 167). In Michals’ *A Failed Attempt to Photograph Reality* there is no image whatsoever to be neutralised, only language – as shown in Figure 48 (Michals, 1976) – and the word ‘failed’, associated with the verb ‘to photograph’ and ‘reality’, makes me think that this work is Michals’ point of departure, his manifesto, in which he declares that since ‘to photograph reality is to photograph nothing’ (Fig 48) he won’t bother doing it, but focus instead on the themes that interest him, mixing visual and verbal codes of representation.<sup>100</sup>

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the power of images over words marks the culmination of the fascinating collaboration between Berger and Mohr – with *Another Way of Telling* (1981) – on the very ambiguity of photography, the meaning of ‘appearances’, and photographic sequencing without words, through exploring the life and work of peasants (Bétrisey, 2019). Scott argues that Berger and Mohr’s effort in their first two photo-essays is to get behind the ‘flatness’ of photographs, ‘to reveal not

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<sup>100</sup> Another conceptual photo-text book that subverts Barthes’ categories is Stephanie Oursler’s *Un Album di Violenza (An Album of Violence)* (1976), on which I wrote the essay ‘Linguivore Species’, for Fotomuseum Winterthur’s SITUATIONS ‘Image-Text-Data’ (Chiocchetti, 2019c).

only a hidden or suppressed life but also a realm of unexploited possibility', as if they believed that 'language alone can open out the constricted, presentative [...] space of the photograph, largely by the resource of metaphor' (1999, p 251). However, by the time Berger and Mohr assembled the photographic sequence of 'If Each Time...' in *Another Way of Telling*, they changed their mind:

*We are far from wanting to mystify. Yet it is impossible for us to give a verbal key or storyline to this sequence of photographs. To do so would be to impose a single verbal meaning upon appearances and thus to inhibit or deny their own language. In themselves appearances are ambiguous, with multiple meanings. This is why the visual is astonishing and why memory, based upon the visual, is freer than reason* (2016, no pagination).

It seems that for them the photograph 'has become the adequate instrument of its own exploration' (Scott, 1999, p 251). However, Berger and Mohr explain their choice to not accompany the sequence of the old peasant woman 'who has lived through two world wars' with words, as, by the very inclusion of the 'Note to the reader' before the sequence they are still resorting to language (1982, p 135). As Olivier Richon puts it, in his introduction 'On Literary Images' to the journal *Photographies*, 'the visual needs language to assert itself':

*Language constructs images as much as images are always immersed in language, from its caption or title to its commentary, even and especially if the commentary advocates silence and contemplation* (2011b, p 5).

A less conflictual example of a photo-text that 'questions the presupposition that ideas must be expressed in language, and that either language or photographs must dominate', is Roni Horn's 1999 work *Another Water (the River Thames, for example)* (Tormey, 2013, p 88). By combining a series of similar yet different photographs of the river Thames – shot from the perspective of someone looking into the water from the riverbank – with words by people interviewed by Horn, whose life develops in the proximity of the river, she intends to show the multifaceted and nuanced qualities, as well as emotional responses, associated with water (Tormey, 2013, p 89).

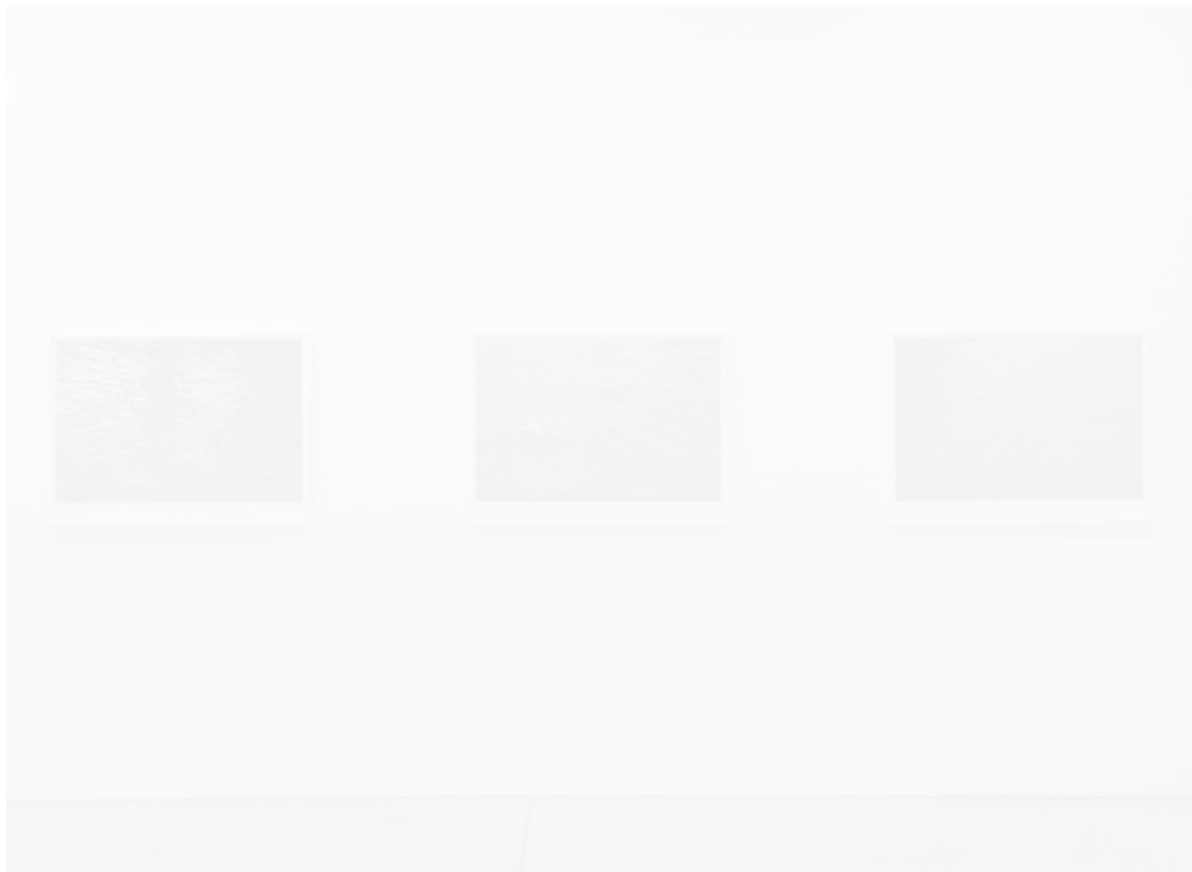


Fig 49 Left: Roni Horn, *Another Water: The River Thames, for example*. Installation view, New York: Andrea Rosen Gallery, 31 March – 30 April 2005

Right: Roni Horn, *Another Water: The River Thames, for example*. Book, 7.75 x 12 inches, 2011, Göttingen: Steidl, my photograph

Although the text is presented as small numbered entries below the images, which visually predominate both on the gallery wall and in her eponymous book, and the

miniscule numbers hidden in the water's images – which locate references to the text below – are barely visible, *Another Water* invites a fluid relationship with the subject matter which goes beyond the hierarchical discourse of image-text relations (Horn, 2001). Also, as noted by Jane Tormey:

*Another Water [...] forces word and photograph to play each with the other. The text 'invades' the photograph. Whilst we cannot digest the words simultaneously with the photograph, we immerse ourselves in the water in order to find the reference that correlates with the words. Another Water makes use of our durational concentration in locating numbers and in reading the words, because we are forced to enter the photograph in order to read the words. Another Water integrates verbal discourse, visual display and figurative reference (2013, p 91).*

From literary references to irrational, factual and at times mystical accounts, the words offer an open range of people's interactions with the water, as open as the range of appearances of water that the images portray. So, according to Tormey, Horn's *Another Water* is an accomplished photo-text work, where both systems, the visual and the verbal, collaborate in a playful way.

On the visual/verbal dichotomy, the cyclical ideological battle between word and image that promoted notions such as the pictorial turn as opposed to the linguistic turn, Michel Foucault introduced 'the possibility of a radical re-adjustment to the way in which we habitually use language when describing images' (Tormey, 2013, p 88).<sup>101</sup>

*It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying (Foucault, 2005, p 10).*

With this fundamental premise Foucault suggests that we should treat the 'incompatibility' of language and vision as 'a starting point for speech' instead of as an obstacle to be avoided (Tormey, 2013, p 88). Influenced by Foucault's ideas – as expressed in his book *This Is Not A Pipe* (1983) – on the principles that ruled Western painting from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries, namely that the relationship between verbal signs and visual representations has always been hierarchical, Tormey argues:

*Words do some things better; images do other things better. Words can explain and clarify and, once articulated, can also inhibit consideration of other possibilities. What I say in words, in attempting to describe what I see in an*

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<sup>101</sup> See 'The Pictorial Turn' in Mitchell, 1994, pp 11-34.

*image, images do by default. Images do not require the order of linguistic procedure (top left proceeding to the right and down the page) that we have when reading texts.<sup>102</sup> Images can open up possibilities. The two systems can exclude each other – or subordinate each other – either the image illustrates the text or the text merely comments on the image or assumes a contradictory role. More often the text is used to explain the image, which is another form of subordination to the text. The text tends to be a ‘linear channel’ for the image’s simultaneous forms so that the image is dominated by the text (2013, p 88).*

We can see how Tormey’s position is also reminiscent of Barthes’ initial ideas on ‘Text and Image’, as presented in ‘The Photographic Message’ (1977, pp 26-27), about captions of press photographs, when he initially identified three main effects that can develop in the movement from image to caption and vice versa, as illustrated earlier in this chapter. Captions, according to Barthes, can amplify or reinforce the content depicted in the image – they can invent or produce a new signified and they can contradict or confront the image (1977, p 27). While Barthes initially avoids being prescriptive and prefers to simply illustrate the impact of text on images without expressing a preference in ‘The Photographic Message’ (1977, pp 25-26), when he returns to the topic in ‘Rhetoric of the Image’, in the way he describes the ‘repressive’ function of anchorage he appears to find ‘relay’ preferable (1977, pp 40-41). Tormey also appears to have a predilection for relay text, as she indicates that ‘language should not limit the possibilities of interpretation’ (2013, p 88). As she writes in her book *Photographic Realism*:

*Foucault signals the possibility that words need not lead interpretation, or be reductive, and that the incompatibility between word and image can initiate dissemination (2013, p 88).*

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<sup>102</sup> As discussed by Nancy Ann Roth (in Durden and Tormey, 2020, pp 398-409) in her chapter ‘Out of Language: Photography as Translating’, the different experience of reading, or rather ‘getting meaning from’, images as opposed to reading alphabetic texts, which have to be ‘decoded in a fixed one-directional order’, was compared by Vilem Flusser to mathematical language, as cognitively visual like photographs. Flusser writes:

*It is impossible for mathematical equations to be integrated smoothly into the flow of a scientific text. A reader whose eyes are scanning across the lines and down a page of text will have to stop at the equation, then cognitively shift into a spacer where the direction of thinking can move equally well in either direction, from one side of the equation to the other. Something similar happens with illustrated texts. The ‘flow’ of thought stops, the eyes moves around the image and usually moves back to the starting point. This difference underpins two very different, in fact mutually incomprehensible, understandings of time, one logical, linear and fixed, the other circular, repetitive, and variable (2011, pp 24-25).*

As discussed in chapter one, in relation to the ‘third something’, when images and texts are incorporated or devoured by the ‘mediating organ of the eye’, I agree with Richon that the eye ‘swallows everything, obliterating the difference between the written and the visual’ (1991, pp 32-33).

It is the challenge and responsibility of artists working with photo-texts to transform this incompatibility into an opportunity for creating compelling, empowering and committed photo-texts. And it is my challenge and responsibility with this thesis to present a useful and original approach to thinking about and discussing photo-texts.

In considering possible ways to expand knowledge about photo-texts and photo-text theory – based on the discussion carried out so far in Part I on photo-texts' definition and affiliation (chapter one), on their classification (chapter one and two) and their theoretical grounding (chapter three and four), together with the findings that derived from them – I realised three main issues that informed the architecture of Part II, dedicated to the in-depth analysis of a selection of case studies. First, the process of presenting a clearer definition and taxonomical map of photo-texts made me realise the efficiency of designing the case studies per type of photo-text and with a thematic filter, so that, rather than constituting the main focus of the analysis, the three selected themes – sophistication in nineteenth-century photo-texts, photo-poems on war and conceptual photo-texts on patriarchy – work more as a 'common ground' or 'connective tissue' between the works under scrutiny that allows me to better compare and contrast their different photo-text dynamics. The advantage of employing a thematic approach, by comparing photo-texts that belong to the same type and deal with the same topic, is that it enables a better focus on their slippery image-text strategies. If we think in mathematical terms, it is like attempting to solve a first-degree equation, where the only unknown element is the photo-text dynamic. For example, if I compare a photo-poem on the beauty of nature, with a photo-essay on war, I would first have to dedicate a lot of energy to explaining and contextualising the different types of photo-texts and the different topics they deal with, before I can focus on their photo-text dynamics. I am not saying it is not possible, but I do not find it efficient. Equally, I find the geographical approach, namely comparing photo-texts that are produced by people that belong to the same country or linguistic region, such as Blinder's *The American Photo-Text: 1930-1960* (2019), more focused on the side of production than reception – as well as feeding national(-istic) narratives. Curiously, as I mentioned in the introduction, the supposedly conflictual relationship between words and images and the frequency with which photo-texts represent conflict, as pointed out by Cortellessa (2020, no pagination), partly informed the selection of the equally conflictual themes of war and patriarchy for the last two case studies.

Second, I noticed an imbalance in scholarship and it was important for me to select the case studies among the more neglected periods and types of photo-texts that needed further analysis. For example, analysing nineteenth-century photo-texts to fill the gap in research highlighted by Hunter (1987, p 3) and show that they are as sophisticated, in terms of diversity and photo-text dynamics, as contemporary ones to counter the idea of a chronological evolution and emancipation of photo-text dynamics, as put forward by Scott (1999, p 53). Also, expanding on the recently labelled photo-poetry type, which has received comparatively less attention than the photo-essay or the broader type of photo-literature, felt a priority, in the same way as elaborating more on a type whose name I was introducing – conceptual photo-texts.

Third, I felt the need to test the available photo-text theory through the case studies, with the aim of advancing it. Hence, the choice to show the limitations of the nevertheless extremely useful categories of anchorage and relay proposed by Barthes (1977, pp 37-41). I have shown, here in chapter four, photo-text works of artists that challenge Barthes' idea that a relay text is not so common in fixed images (1977, p 41). I shall test two further points in the last two case studies. First, I will demonstrate that the idea of the allegedly positively connoted function of relay, in contrast with the presumably negatively connotated one of anchorage, does not always hold. Through the comparative analysis of the photo-text dynamics of two photo-poetry works on the Second World War, namely *Kriegsfibel* (1955) by Brecht and *La Mort et les statues* (1946) by Jahan and Cocteau, I discuss in chapter six the more dangerous hidden potential of relay, while defusing anchorage's supposed 'dictatorial' connotation. Second, I will show that even if Barthes himself envisaged the possibility of a co-existence of both anchorage and relay in the same photo-text (1977, p 41), he took for granted a dominance of one over the other, while there are occasions – such as Burgin and Kruger's 1970s and 80s conceptual phototexts on patriarchy – in which their co-presence is so blended that it is extremely difficult to discern anchorage from relay, questioning their very distinction.

This chapter examined the occasional and fragmented contributions that focus on the text-photo relationship, and discussed possible ways to expand what I propose calling 'photo-text theory'. With the next chapter the thesis moves to Part II, and chapter five presents the first case study: a selection of photo-texts from the nineteenth century, investigated to show their fascinating sophistication and contribution to the critical history of photo-texts.





**Part II Case Studies**

*And the text, far from being illustrated by the photos, is illustrative of and somewhat supplementary to them; sometimes explanatory [...] and depicting in words surroundings and effects which cannot be expressed by pictorial art.*

Peter Henry Emerson and Thomas Frederick Goodall,  
*Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads*, 1886

### **Chapter 5 Case Study One: Sophistication in Nineteenth-Century Photo-Texts**

The research conducted to write Part I of this thesis, together with the archival work at the V&A mentioned in the preface, made me realise that photo-texts are deeply rooted in the history of photography. There is a close connection between the invention of the photographic medium and the presence of text within and around the image – if we consider that among the first images produced by inventor and polymath Antoine Hercule Romuald Florence, there is the ‘impression à la lumière solaire’ (‘sunlight printing’) of a Masonic Diploma (Kossoy, 2018, no pagination), namely a photograph of text, which he made six years before photography was even officially invented by Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, as shown in Figure 50 (Florence, 1833) (Fregni Nagler, 2017, and Rizzuto et al., 2019). Florence was looking for alternative processes for graphic reproduction to print his manuscript with his transcription method that he called *zoophonie*, through which he rendered the sounds of nature found in the Amazon region into musical scores (Brizuela, 2015). In trying to overcome this issue, he was obliged to look for ‘a more accessible and democratic mode of reproduction, one that utilized a resource available to all, sunlight’ (Brizuela, 2015, no pagination), and, almost accidentally, invented photography (Kossoy, 2018, Fregni Nagler, 2017, and Rizzuto et al., 2019). If the European inventors used the medium to reproduce the visible world, Florence employed it to reproduce symbols and written artefacts, such as his photographic copy of wordless pharmacy labels, besides the Masonic Diploma, all made around 1833 and obtained through direct contact with photosensitive paper under the action of sunlight (Brizuela, 2015, Batchen, 2017, and Kossoy, 2018).<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> He also made a photographic copy of one of his own hand-drawn designs for a camera obscura and other equipment needed for the photographic process (Brizuela, 2015, no pagination).



Fig 50 Hercule Florence, *Masonic Diploma*. Photographic copy on photosensitive paper, obtained by contact under sunlight, 20.2 x 29.1 cm, 1833, São Paulo: Instituto Hercule Florence Collection

Equally William Henry Fox Talbot's *Copy of a Stanza from the Ode to Napoleon in Lord Byron's hand*, another photograph of text, a poetic one in this case, was made prior to April 1840 (Schaaf, 1995), his wife Constance Talbot 'composed' in 1843 'a little frame with the four first lines of the *Last Rose of Summer*' by Thomas Moore (1813) (Schaaf, 2016) and Hippolyte Bayard's *Le Noyé (Self-portrait as a drowned man)*, with his paradoxical 'Suicide Note' that he wrote on the verso, appeared in October 1840 (Lo Duca, 1943). However, nineteenth-century photo-texts have been neglected both by image-text and history of photography scholarship, despite Hunter's explicit exhortation:

*To be sure, a book on relations between photography and writing in the nineteenth century would have material of its own to examine: Julia Margaret Cameron's illustrations to Tennyson, Henry Peach Robinson's illustrations to Shelley, Alexander Gardner's pioneering Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War, Peter Henry Emerson's Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads (1987, p 3).*

There are a few exceptions: Carol Armstrong wrote an illuminating chapter on Cameron's album *Illustrations of Tennyson's Idylls of the King and Other Poems* (1875), in which, Cameron, unhappy with the 'commercial diminishing of her large-

plate illustrations' in the trade edition, reveals her process of 'usurpation of Tennyson's authorial voice' by emphasising her reading and choices of excerpts that she wanted to focus on with her images (1998, p 365).<sup>104</sup> Armstrong (2002) also compellingly explored the mystery behind Talbot's famous *Pencil of Nature's* plate eight, *A Scene in a Library* (1844-46), an unexpectedly exceptional photo-text, in which the relationship between image and words is quite ambiguous and enigmatic – almost an episode of fleeting experimentation within an otherwise quite straightforward and hierarchical book in terms of photo-text relations. Ian Jeffrey also discussed the shifts in Peter Henry Emerson's writing from his first book, *Life and Landscape of the Norfolk Broads* (1886), to his last one, *Marsh Leaves* (1895), in his important essay 'Art and Solitude' (1984, pp 154-62). These are nonetheless individual case studies rather than comparisons among multiple practitioners, with the text-photo relationship as the focus of the analysis. Michael Nott dedicates the first two chapters of his seminal book *Photopoetry 1845-2015: A Critical History* (2018, pp 19-117) to Anglo-Saxon photopoetry of the nineteenth-century, concluding that 'early photopoetic practices are more complicated than the label "photographic illustration" implies' (p 112).

With this chapter I aim to bring all types of nineteenth-century photo-texts into focus to show that quite a few of them share the same sophistication as more contemporary ones. By sophistication I mean a number of things. First diversity: almost all the types of photo-texts discussed in chapter two could – *mutatis mutandis* – already be found in the early days of photography and, if not identical for obvious reasons, they were precursors of twentieth-century ones. Second, these case studies were also selected as they reflect the diversity of the ways in which photography and text can encounter each other graphically: letterpress or handwritten text, invading the photographic surface or appearing on the side or the verso, stemming from the same author or not. Third, and most importantly, sophistication is also to be detected in their photo-text dynamics that go beyond the mere descriptive, ancillary or hierarchical relation, but already show signs of complementarity and complexity. To use Barthes' categories discussed in the previous chapter, which, despite their limits, are nonetheless extremely useful labels of photo-text dynamics, sophisticated photo-texts

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<sup>104</sup> Although from a gender-balance point of view it was a difficult decision to make, I did not consider Julia Margaret Cameron's *Illustrations* in detail, because I think that everything that could possibly have been written about them was done so by Armstrong (1998, pp 361-422). Also, Nott dedicates a small yet fascinating section of his first chapter, '... with Photographic Illustrations': The Birth of British Photopoetry, 1845-1875', to Cameron and Tennyson's collaboration (2018, pp 30-36).

present both anchorage and relay dynamics. Last, but this is less common, there have been occasions in which nineteenth-century authors of photo-texts, such as Peter Henry Emerson (1886) and Alexander Black (1895), reflected on the word-image relationship, a clear sign of their awareness of what they were doing by mixing photographs and writing. By sophistication I also mean those photo-texts that, despite image-text strategies that are not so pioneering, nonetheless offer an opportunity to reflect on photography's theoretical issues, such as the case of Henry Peach Robinson.

Photo-text relations within works from the early days of photography have been occasionally discussed by Clive Scott (1999). Even if Scott clarifies that his book *The Spoken Image* does not attempt to trace 'the history of the relationship between the visual and verbal in the world of photography' (1999, p 12), judging by the way he writes about that relationship when referring to nineteenth-century photo-artists, as compared to contemporary ones, I believe he indulges in the somewhat superficial conclusion that photo-text relations have evolved from embryo or clumsiness to emancipation.<sup>105</sup> Scott appears biased and whenever he writes about nineteenth-century photo-text relations he uses pejorative terms such as 'paternalistic' and 'shallow' (1999, p 53). Among the spate of nineteenth-century photographically illustrated books, photographs of words or pictures that circulated with words, the selected examples of pioneering photo-texts, whose word and image dynamics are unconventional and eccentric – works that Scott unfortunately does not analyse in his book – demonstrate that it would be misleading to believe in a lack of adroitness among nineteenth-century photo-texts.

The chapter is structured by type of photo-text to echo chapter two, and within each type I focus on one or two sophisticated examples.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Any book that touches on the relationship of photography to language should at least mention Barthes' categories of anchorage and relay. It is surprising that a book entitled *The Spoken Image: Photography and Language*, which has two chapters dedicated to the behaviour of captions and titles in relation to the photographic image, never refers to anchorage and relay, while dedicating instead a lot of attention to Barthes' two other concepts of *studium* and *punctum*. Even more surprisingly is that Scott (1999) creates his own nomenclature to describe similar linguistic effects on images while he could have used Barthes' existing and more convincing ones. Scott is not the only one. Mitchell (1994) never mentions Barthes' anchorage and relay in his chapter on the photo-essay either, while discussing in detail the concept of the 'message without a code'.

<sup>106</sup> Needless to say, not all types of photo-texts existed in the nineteenth century identically. So, for example, I left out the photo-novel because it is such a specific codified type that emerged in the 1940s, which, among its precursors, are non-photographic illustrated Épinal prints on popular subjects, sold in France in the nineteenth century – such as *Les Amours malheureuses de Pierre Guignolet et Fifine Mistanflûte* (1866), as discussed by Marie-Charlotte Calafat (in Deschamps, 2017, pp 66-83) in the

## Photo-captions and titles

The term 'caption' intended as 'description or title below an illustration' acquired that particular meaning around 1919 and especially in the US (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2021). However, photographic images have almost always circulated accompanied by text, as Anna Atkins' Latin titles of her botanical study *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions 1843-1853* and Francis Frith's images' descriptions in his book *Egypt and Palestine. Photographed and Described 1858-60* demonstrate. In chapter two I showed that contemporary captions and titles can be a complex territory that goes beyond mere description and factual information (date, place, time of the image). This complexity is something that already occurred in the nineteenth century as shown in the following examples, in which the accompanying texts expand or complement the visual elements of their images.

Although it is well known for its literary subject and historical costuming, William Frederick Lake Price's *Don Quixote in His Study* (1857) comes with the oft-neglected text inscribed on the mount in both English and French: 'Nay to such a pass did his curiosity and madness in this particular drive him, that he sold many good Acres of Terra Firma, to purchase books of Knight-errantry', as shown in both versions in Figure 51 (Lake Price, 1857). The size of the font of the sentence is smaller than the title and not easily readable, hinting at a clearly hierarchical relationship between image and text.

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chapter dedicated to the origins of the photo-novel within the MUCEM catalogue of the exhibition *Roman Photo*.

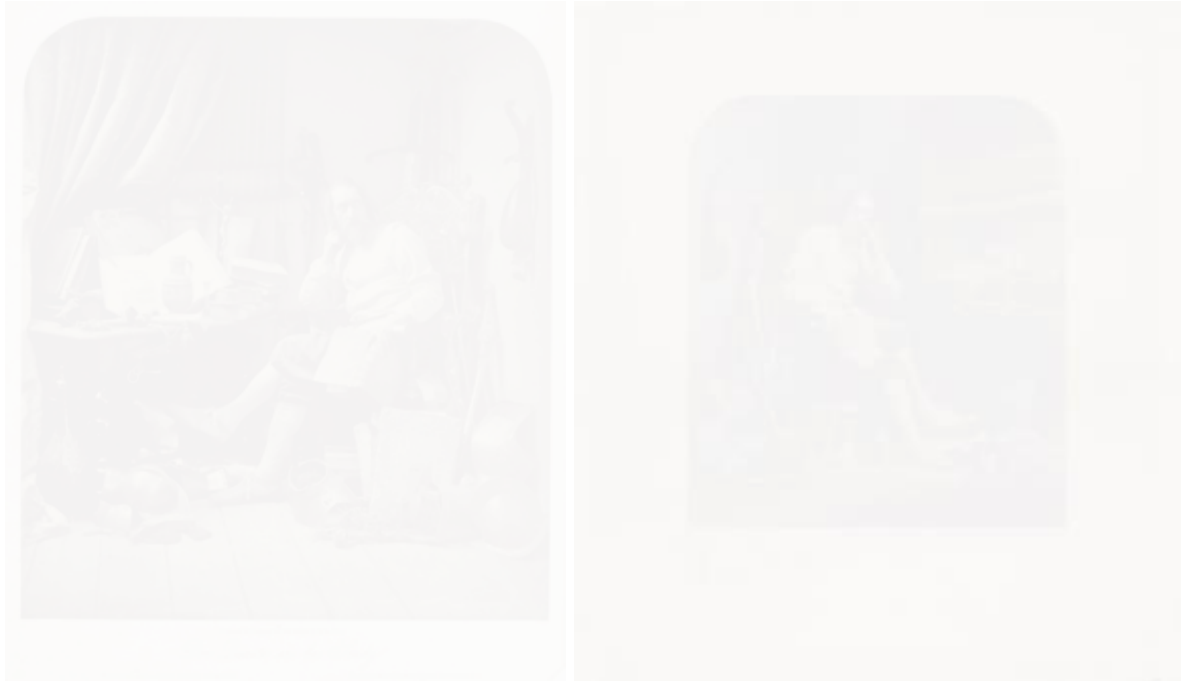


Fig 51 William Frederick Lake Price, *Don Quixote in His Study*. Left: Albumen silver print from glass negative, 42.6 x 33.3 cm incl. mount, 1857, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Right: Hand-coloured photogalvanograph print, 22.7 x 19.7 cm, 1857, J. Paul Getty Museum

Had the photograph not been inscribed with its title, I doubt the viewer would have been able to identify the subject as Don Quixote, let alone to infer that he preferred to own books rather than land, just by looking at the visual elements of the photograph, as discussed in chapter three via Newhall (1952), Upton (1978), Nerlich (1990) and Rancière (2009).

A brilliant artist, Swedish expatriate Oscar Gustave Rejlander, besides his fame for his combination printing skills and for his controversial 1857 image *Two Ways of Life* purchased by Queen Victoria, is also known for introducing humour and satire in photography, both from a visual and verbal point of view (Smith, 1996, and Simpson, 2012). Rejlander was 'delighted in such make-believe as photographing himself as Garibaldi' (Newhall, 2001, p 74) or Democritus (Yoxall Jones, 1973, pp 25, 58 and 95), and excelled at giving witty titles to his images, such as the 1862 image of two men 'gossiping and snickering about some unsuspecting young lady' that he called *Did She?* (Jacobs, in Hannavy, 2008, p 1188) – a title that contains both elements of anchorage and relay and hooks the viewer to look back at the image. From Henry Peach Robinson we learn that Rejlander 'was always brimming over with happy ideas, and would at any time prefer to express himself in a picture than writing' (1890, p 107). However, Rejlander was gifted with verbal imagination and readiness, as we learn from this anecdote narrated by Robinson:



*He once sent home a portrait of a bright little boy dressed in velvet coat and knickerbockers. The boy had one hand in his pocket, and the action bent the figure a little aside. The picture was rejected because the figure was not upright. Rejlander immediately wrote underneath it, 'I've got a pocket too!' and the picture was at once a tremendous success (1890, p 107).*

Instead of considering these examples, Scott (1999, pp 49-52) criticises the image-title dynamics of Henry Peach Robinson's *Gossip on the Beach* (1884). He uses this particular image and its title – or caption, as the two notions blur somewhat confusingly in his nomenclature – to infer the inability of photography to 'use pictorial space to map unfolding time', and the 'absence of duration' in the photograph as a reason for the documentary photographer's 'moral frustration' and a 'justification of the photo-essay, that form of narration not *in* photos, but *with* photos' (Scott, 1999, p 54). Being a combination print, even if *Gossip on the Beach* achieves certain continuity and atmospheric spontaneity, according to Scott, 'the spatial relations between gossiping group and mother and child are unconvincingly represented' (p 54). He writes that the image's caption conveys the 'paternalistic, worldly-wise condescension of the urbanite, the rural tourist, passing the foibles of the naïve and native in review' and concludes that, 'more importantly', the image title reminds us 'how shallow the narrative space created by a caption is – all we are invited to envisage is the just-before and the just-after of the event' (p 53).

To remain within the topic of gossip, let us consider one last surprising example by the more traditional Francis Frith, known for his descriptive captions of Egypt, Syria and Palestine in his successful 1850s albums. Frith made an eccentric book entitled *The Gossiping Photographer at Hastings* (Frith, 1858-59 and 1864, and Armstrong, 1998, p 281). The book combines 16 plates, a ballad about the Battle of Hastings – 'the only section of text that is uninterrupted by plates [...] and marked out as a dreamlike digression from the main narrative' – with Frith's informal words about the behind-the-scenes of the images' production, which create a sense of 'camaraderie' between photographer and viewer (Reeves, 2019, p 12).

These selected examples of nineteenth-century captions and titles expand the image's narrative through Barthes' relay function and are anything but shallow,

### **Scientific/knowledge-based photo-texts**

The polyvalent character of photography emerged since its early days as Talbot's book *The Pencil of Nature* (1844-46) shows. Faster than a 'written inventory' of 'articles of China' and 'of great advantage to the antiquarian', the application of the photographic art immediately seems destined to multiple fields (Talbot, 1844-46, no pagination). Fairly soon technical and scientific publications started to incorporate photographic illustrations to better serve their didactic purposes. Armstrong provides a partial and eclectic list of ten scientific books that contained photographs published in Great Britain between the 1840s and 1880s, 'ranging between the moon and a hip joint; ferns, spectra, spinal disease and animal physiognomy; a south Indian tribe and the birds of Berkshire' (1998, pp 24-25). Equally eclectic were the photographic illustrations' forms: tipped-in albumen prints, photogravures, hand-coloured images, autotypes, heliotypes, Woodburytypes, photographs of models and after drawings, including illustrations done by the author and plates taken from other sources (Armstrong, 1998, pp 24-25).

To further show the sophistication of nineteenth-century photo-texts, I focus here on a fascinatingly complex example: Darwin's classic treatise *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), which includes the collaboration between Charles Darwin and Oscar Gustave Rejlander, who contributed portraits to the book.

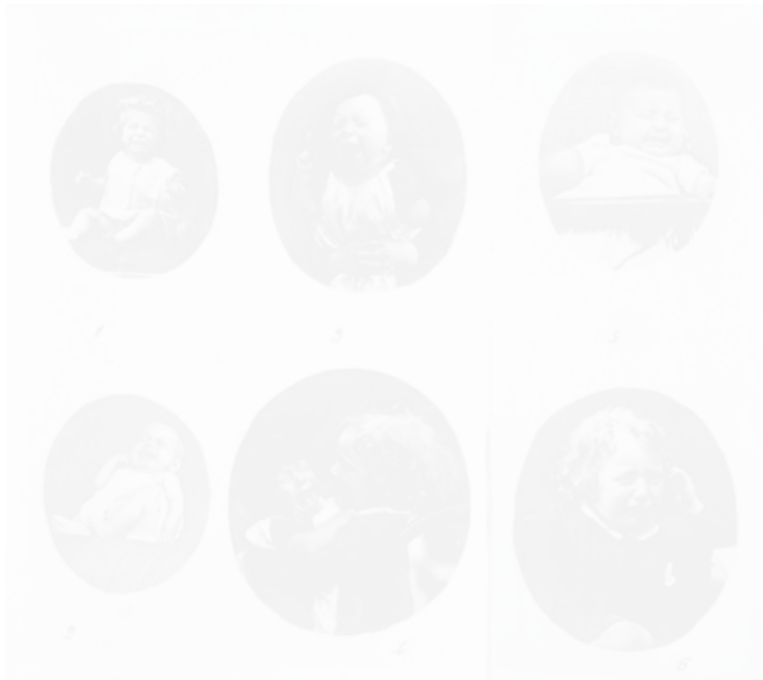


Fig 52 1, 3, 4 and 6 Oscar Gustave Rejlander; 2 and 5: Adolph Diedrich Kindermann. Heliotypes, photographic illustrations for Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, 1872, Helmut Gernsheim Duplicate Collection, the Art Library collection, Nationalmuseum Stockholm

The book contained 21 engraved figures and seven photographic plates in total, including images by French physiognomist Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne, Herr Kindermann and Dr. Wallich 'occasionally thrown into the mix' (Armstrong, 1998, pp 80-106). Rejlander asked his models to act and simulate the emotions that were to be illustrated (Prodger, 2009, p 256). Duchenne expanded Luigi Galvani's research in electrophysiology and applied a 'galvanizing' instrument to the face of a human subject to produce various expressions, which were published in his 1862 treaty *Mecanisme de la Physionomie Humaine ou Analyse électro-physiologique de l'expression des passions* (*The Mechanism of Human Physiognomy or Electro-physiologic Analysis of Passions' Expression*), and he 'generously permitted' Darwin 'to copy as many of his photographs as [he] desired' (Armstrong, 1998, p 91). Darwin's book is noteworthy 'not only for its frank address to its apparatus of illustrations, but also for its open admission of the acts of simulation' behind the 'production of its images as well as of its explanations; and for the candour of its confrontation with the subjective responses of different viewers to its photographic illustrations', which are all concentrated in the second half of the book dedicated to 'Man' (Armstrong, 1998, p 80). In terms of photo-text dynamics it is a pioneering book also because it includes some meta-photo-textual considerations: Darwin discusses the impact that showing the images 'without a word of explanation to above twenty educated persons of various ages and both sexes' had on his research, and because he meticulously refers to them in his writings.

*This exhibition was of use in another way, by convincing me how easily we may be misguided by our imagination; for when I first looked through Dr. Duchenne's photographs, reading at the same time the text, and thus learning what was intended, I was struck with admiration at the truthfulness of all, with only a few exceptions. Nevertheless, if I had examined them without any explanation, no doubt I should have been as much perplexed, in some cases, as other persons have been* (Darwin, 1897, p 14).

Text for Darwin is the bearer of truthfulness to the photographic illustrations which somewhat paradoxically portray an artificial experiment. When he arrives at Rejlander's illustrations of infants he juxtaposes them with detailed descriptions of facial expressions, such as 'mental distress', and praises the photograph's greater adequacy to scrupulous examination than the real life experience: 'it is easy to observe infants whilst screaming; but I have found photographs made by the instantaneous

process the best means for observation, as allowing more deliberation' (Darwin, 1872, p 147).

Perhaps one of the reasons behind the lack of appreciation of nineteenth-century photo-texts is their components' destiny of being neglected as a unitary whole and their subsequent circulation as separate entities. For example, Rejlander's and Duchenne's sensational images, the latter already published before in another book, acquired the aura of works of art over time and have often been exhibited regardless of Darwin's text. A phenomenon that appears quite common among photo-texts of the nineteenth century, as is the case for the two examples of the next section too.

### **Photo-essay**

I will discuss here two precursors of the twentieth-century photo-essay, Alexander Gardner and Peter Henry Emerson, more famous for their images than for their texts, and who published their works before the introduction of the halftone process that allowed photographs to be printed directly onto a page of a magazine or book, and when print runs were significantly lower and circulation reduced (Knazook, n.d., p 20).

Gardner's *Photographic Sketch Book of the War* (1865-66) presents unprecedented imagery and texts on America's Civil War. However, the majority of scholars focused on his visual components, overlooking the verbal ones, especially because the book contains the famously controversial rearranged corpse image, entitled *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg*, that A.D. Coleman mentions to illustrate an example of 'directorial mode' in photography – describing it as a 'falsified document' (1998, p 251).<sup>107</sup> The case is worth a little digression.

The image depicts a dead body, identified as 18-year-old Private Andrew Hoge of the 4th Virginia Infantry, after the American Civil War Battle of Gettysburg, who appears to have been photographed also in a different location, and in a more candid way, as *A Sharpshooter's Last Sleep. Gettysburg, Pennsylvania* – as shown in Figure 54 (Gardner, 1863).<sup>108</sup> To improve the compositional effect of the variant entitled *Home*

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<sup>107</sup> This photograph is titled *The Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg* in the letterpress text that accompanies Alexander Gardner's *Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War*, plate 41 (Gardner, 1865-66, no pagination). While Gardner is credited as the photographer in his *Sketchbook*, his original catalogue, published in September 1863, credits Timothy O'Sullivan as the photographer (Kostine, 2005).

<sup>108</sup> Both images are reproduced in the chapter 'Intention and Artifice' of William J. Mitchell's book *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (1992, pp 42-3). William J. Mitchell was the Alexander W. Dreyfoos, Jr., Professor of Architecture and Media Arts and Sciences who directed

of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg, as shown in Figure 56, the body was pulled into a rocky niche and arranged as a still life.<sup>109</sup> The soldier's head now faces the camera and a rifle, placed next to his corpse, is leaning against the rock, as if to contrast the soldier's 'horizontal' and suggest the reason of his death.<sup>110</sup> William Frassanito reveals that the first person to notice that the body had been moved was Frederic Ray in his 1961 essay 'The Case of the Rearranged Corpse', published in *Civil War Times* (Jones Harvey, 2012, p 252). However, it was Frassanito who first elaborated on the details of the constructed image, in his book *Gettysburg: A Journey in Time* (1975) and in a later work, entitled *Early Photography at Gettysburg* (1995). The images are presented by Gardner one after the other, the allegedly candid version preceding the staged one, in his book (1865-66, no pagination). I am including the two plates with their lesser studied accompanying texts.

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the Smart Cities research group at MIT's Media Lab and is not to be confused with W.J.T. Mitchell, who is the Gaylord Donnelley Distinguished Service Professor of English and Art History at the University of Chicago and editor of *Critical Inquiry*. So, Mitchell (1992, pp 42-43) credits the images in a way that does not seem to be correct, given that he writes *Slain Rebel Sharpshooter* as the title for *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg* and *Fallen Sharpshooter* as the title for *A Sharpshooter's Last Sleep, on Battle-field of Gettysburg*, attributing the latter to the 'International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester' – while in the online catalogue of the Eastman Museum Collections, there is no trace of an image with said title. The only image in their collections that appears to belong to that Gettysburg series is entitled *Dead Union Soldier on the Field at Gettysburg Showing Effect of a Shell*. Sadly, there is no image available for that entry on their online catalogue, but further research confirmed that what Mitchell entitles *Fallen Sharpshooter* corresponds to the Library of Congress image published as *A Sharpshooter's Last Sleep, on Battle-field of Gettysburg* in Alexander Gardner's *Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War*. See also Lester (2016, p 95).

<sup>109</sup> MoMA Learning. *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg* from Gardner's *Photographic Sketchbook of the War* (1865). Available from [https://www.moma.org/learn/moma\\_learning/alexander-gardner-home-of-a-rebel-sharpshooter-gettysburg-from-gardners-photographic-sketchbook-of-the-war-1865](https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/alexander-gardner-home-of-a-rebel-sharpshooter-gettysburg-from-gardners-photographic-sketchbook-of-the-war-1865). [Accessed 7 September 2015].

<sup>110</sup> MoMA Learning.

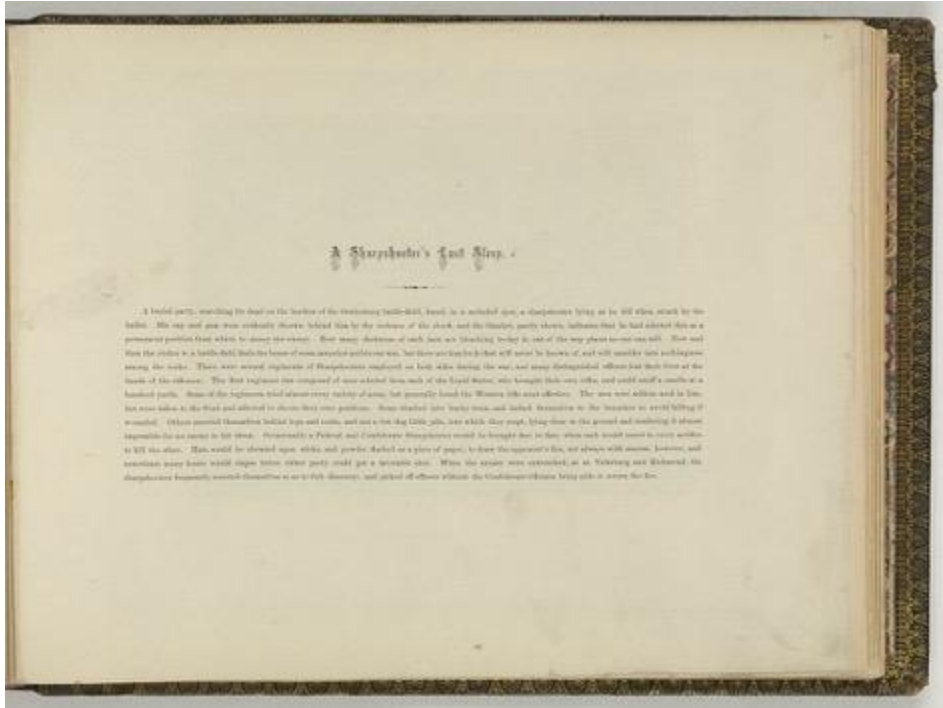


Fig 53 Alexander Gardner, *A Sharpshooter's Last Sleep*, from *Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War*. Letterpress text, plate 40, 1865-66, courtesy Library of Congress, Washington, DC



Fig 54 Alexander Gardner, *A Sharpshooter's Last Sleep. Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1863*, from *Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War*, plate 40. Albumen print, courtesy Library of Congress, Washington, DC

Text:

*A burial party, searching for dead on the borders of the Gettysburg battle-field, found, in a secluded spot, a sharpshooter lying as he fell when struck by the bullet. His cap and gun were evidently thrown behind him by the violence of the*

*shock, and the blanket, partly shown, indicates that he had selected this as a permanent position from which to annoy the enemy. How many skeletons of such men are bleaching to-day in out of the way places no one can tell. Now and then the visitor to a battle-field finds the bones of some man shot as this one was, but there are hundreds that will never be known of, and will moulder into nothingness among the rocks. There were several regiments of Sharpshooters employed on both sides during the war, and many distinguished officers lost their lives at the hands of the riflemen. The first regiment was composed of men selected from each of the Loyal States, who brought their own rifles, and could snuff a candle at a hundred yards. Some of the regiments tried almost every variety of arms, but generally found the Western rifle most effective. The men were seldom used in line, but were taken to the front and allowed to choose their own positions. Some climbed into bushy trees, and lashed themselves to the branches to avoid falling if wounded. Others secreted themselves behind logs and rocks, and not a few dug little pits, into which they crept, lying close to the ground and rendering it almost impossible for an enemy to hit them. Occasionally a Federal and Confederate Sharpshooter would be brought face to face, when each would resort to every artifice to kill the other. Hats would be elevated upon sticks, and powder flashed on a piece of paper, to draw the opponent's fire, not always with success, however, and sometimes many hours would elapse before either party could get a favorable shot. When the armies were entrenched, as at Vicksburg and Richmond, the sharpshooters frequently secreted themselves so as to defy discovery, and picked off officers without the Confederate riflemen being able to return the fire (Gardner, 1865-66, no pagination).*

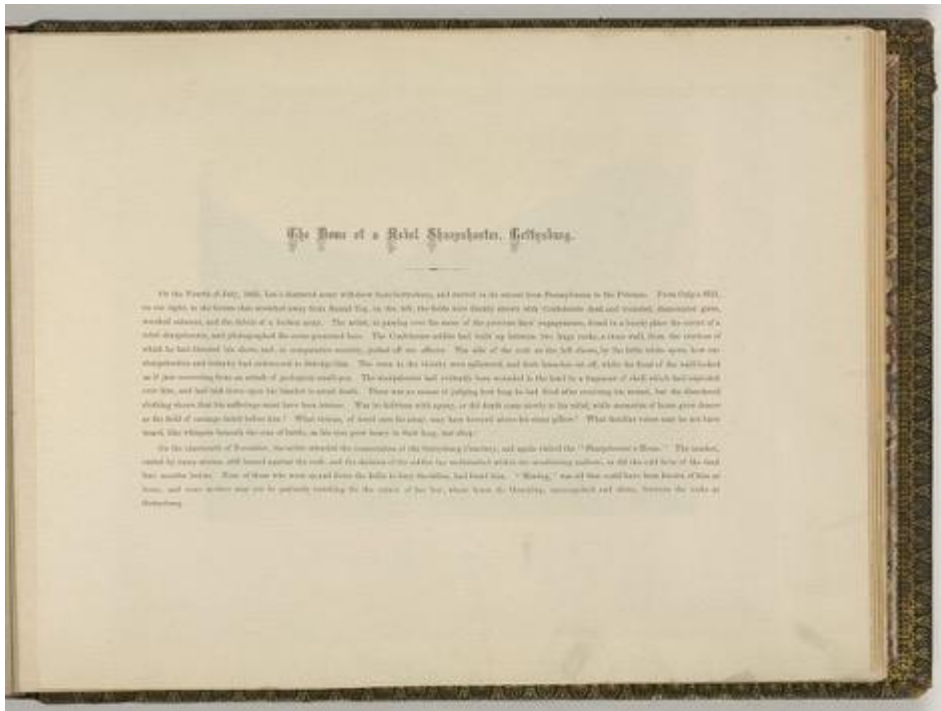


Fig 55 Alexander Gardner, *The Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg*, from *Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War*. Letterpress text for plate 41, 1865-66, courtesy Library of Congress, Washington, DC



Fig 56 Alexander Gardner, *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg, July 1863*, from *Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War*, plate 41. Albumen print, 1865-66, courtesy Library of Congress, Washington, DC

**Text:**

*On the Fourth of July, 1863, Lee's shattered army withdrew from Gettysburg, and started on its retreat from Pennsylvania to the Potomac. From Culp's Hill,*



*on our right, to the forests that stretched away from Round Top, on the left, the fields were thickly strewn with Confederate dead and wounded, dismounted guns, wrecked caissons, and the debris of a broken army. The artist, in passing over the scene of the previous days' engagements, found in a lonely place the covert of a rebel sharpshooter, and photographed the scene presented here. The Confederate soldier had built up between two huge rocks, a stone wall, from the crevices of which he had directed his shots, and, in comparative security, picked off our officers. The side of the rock on the left shows, by the little white spots, how our sharpshooters and infantry had endeavored to dislodge him. The trees in the vicinity were splintered, and their branches cut off, while the front of the wall looked as if just recovering from an attack of geological small-pox. The sharpshooter had evidently been wounded in the head by a fragment of shell which had exploded over him, and had laid down upon his blanket to await death. There was no means of judging how long he had lived after receiving his wound, but the disordered clothing shows that his sufferings must have been intense. Was he delirious with agony, or did death come slowly to his relief, while memories of home grew dearer as the field of carnage faded before him? What visions, of loved ones far away, may have hovered above his stony pillow! What familiar voices may he not have heard, like whispers beneath the roar of battle, as his eyes grew heavy in their long, last sleep!*

*On the nineteenth of November, the artist attended the consecration of the Gettysburg Cemetery, and again visited the 'Sharpshooter's Home'. The musket, rusted by many storms, still leaned against the rock, and the skeleton of the soldier lay undisturbed within the mouldering uniform, as did the cold form of the dead four months before. None of those who went up and down the fields to bury the fallen, had found him. 'Missing', was all that could have been known of him at home, and some mother may yet be patiently watching for the return of her boy, whose bones lie bleaching, unrecognized and alone, between the rocks at Gettysburg (Gardner, 1865-66, no pagination).*

Frassinito's revelation generated a heated debate around the implications of such a construction (Lester, 2016, p 96). Whether nobody else noticed the staged nature of the image at the time of its first limited circulation it is hard to say. Gardner's

*Photographic Sketch Book of the War* was published in two editions, one in 1865 and the other in 1866, both consisting of two volumes of 50 albumen prints, each preceded by a letterpress text, believed to have been composed by Gardner himself (Cornell University Library, 2002). A closer look at the faces of the two corpses, on the website of the Library of Congress, convinces me that the two men of plates 40 and 41 are the same person, as they look quite similar at the level of the beard, eyebrows, eyelids, mouth and hair.<sup>111</sup>



Fig 57 Left: crop of Alexander Gardner, *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg*. Right: crop of *A Sharpshooter's Last Sleep, July 1863*, from *Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War*, plates 40 and 41. Albumen prints, 1865-66, courtesy Library of Congress, Washington, DC, my photograph

If they are the same person, as it appears, it is fascinating that the author carefully crafted two separate texts to introduce the images, as if he was referring to two different men, while he could have opted for editing out the more candid variant and only presenting the rearranged corpse image that has higher dramatic visual impact. In keeping both images one after the other, Gardner offers the clue to identify his *mise en scène*.

What matters here is that Gardner, who had been a journalist, knew how the careful combination of words with pictures could enhance the 'emotional impact on people, especially those who had lost a loved one on the battlefield' (Kostine, 2005, p 3), and 'elevate the photograph to a form of genre painting' (Jones Harvey, 2012, p 88). These

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<sup>111</sup> The images can be downloaded at high resolution for inspection on the Library of Congress website: <https://www.loc.gov/item/01021785/>.

pairings are a good example of nineteenth-century photo-text sophistication, as their word and image dynamics present elements of Barthes' categories of anchorage and relay enmeshed together. Let's examine them more in detail.

In the text that precedes plate 40, *A Sharpshooter's Last Sleep*, Gardner's words – 'a burial party, searching for dead on the borders of the Gettysburg battle-field, found, in a secluded spot, a sharpshooter *lying as he fell when struck by the bullet*' – attempt to underline the candid nature of the photograph, although the spot appears less secluded than the 'stone wall' of plate 41 (1865-66, no pagination, my emphasis). Gardner continues describing the scene, anchoring some elements of the image to explain their meaning: 'His cap and gun were *evidently* thrown behind him by the violence of the shock, and the blanket, partly shown, *indicates* that he had selected this as a permanent position from which to annoy the enemy' (my emphasis). Then we encounter an example of relay text, when he macabrely comments on the skeletons and bones of soldiers that, unlike the subject of his picture, will never be found and will 'moulder into nothingness among the rocks', which opens a parallel with other war victims, invisible in the image and in their real lives as their corpses will disappear before being identified. Gardner's text then drifts towards a more general account on the dynamics of the Civil War's battlefields, with no further reference to any element in the image.

The following plate 41, the famous 'rearranged corpse', is introduced by a dramatic story of how the young sharpshooter 'had evidently been wounded in the head by a fragment of shell which had exploded over him, and had laid down upon his blanket to await death' (Gardner, 1865-66, no pagination). Gardner wondered 'how long he had lived after receiving his wound' and anchors the detail of the 'disordered clothing' to emphasise his intense suffering, which we can only imagine. The following passage contains Gardner's speculations on the soldier's death, whether it found him 'delirious with agony' or arrived 'slowly to his relief', 'while memories of home grew dearer as the field of carnage faded before him' – and on his possible last thoughts, or familiar voices he must have heard like whispers, before his death. Needless to say, this is all information that cannot be found in the image. Gardner goes as far as projecting the image into a miserable future. By mentioning the unidentified skeleton and bones of hundreds of men 'that will never be known of, and will moulder into nothingness among the rocks', as well as 'some mother' who 'may yet be patiently watching for the return of her boy, whose bones lie bleaching, unrecognized and alone, between the rocks at

Gettysburg', he teleports the viewer/reader, through this relay text, away from the scene – in the mother's vain and painful state of mind of the wait – and then back into the scene – between the rocks.

The accompanying text to *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg* is also significant because, there, Gardner identifies himself as the artist, rather than a 'photographic historian' or a 'journalist', that 'in passing over the scene of the previous days' engagements, found in a lonely place the covert of a rebel sharpshooter, and photographed the *scene* presented here' (1865-66, no pagination). Although the etymology of the word 'scene' suggests an idea of 'stage-setting', Gardner is clearly concealing his intervention in constructing the image – but by calling himself an artist, is he attempting to justify it as an artistic intervention, had he been caught 'in flagrante'? Besides the publication of his book – of which historians estimate that no more than 200 copies were produced, 'reaching only a few extremely wealthy individuals' – Gardner also sold copies of his photographs quite successfully, as both stereo-views and Imperial *carte-de-visites*, through a mail-order catalogue and other galleries around the country (Kostine, 2005, pp 3-4). The general public could also see his images exhibited in galleries, such as the New York gallery of well-known Civil War photographer Mathew Brady, with whom Gardner was collaborating at the time (Kostine, 2005, pp 3-4). Presented in a fine art context, and presumably without the same accompanying text of his book, these images of violence and death provoked a reaction of 'horror and fascination' among the public (Kostine, 2005, pp 3-4). Scott (1999) does not consider the work of Gardner, but he denigrates the image-text strategies of another master of nineteenth-century photo-texts: Peter Henry Emerson.

In discussing the photo-text *During the Reap-Harvest* from his 1886 pictorial book *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* – for which Emerson collaborated with painter Thomas Frederick Goodall to document the 'sublime beauty' of the English countryside, among the peasants of the Norfolk Broads – Scott writes:

*The text attempts to turn the images into exemplars and illustrations of cultural givens, to assimilate them into a body of knowledge that already exists, to forestall any anarchy of interpretation, to 'dumb down' the potential visual power of the individual image* (1999, pp 80-82).

Scott wonders 'what is the poor photographer to do', if his authentication as the author of an image lies through the 'intrusion of an explanatory or polemical voice', which according to Scott 'destroys the documentariness of the documentary experience',

rather than through the image itself (1999, p 82). Indeed, Emerson's narrative voice can be described as paternalistic or at times even patronising, as the last sentence of the text that accompanies plate six of his portfolio *Idyls of the Norfolk Broads*, entitled *Water Babies*, confirms – as shown in Figure 58 (Emerson, 1887). Let us consider it.

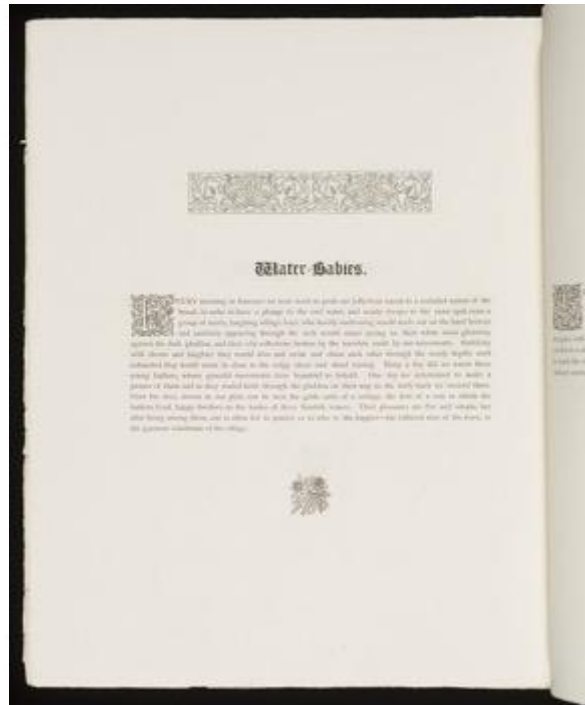


Fig 58 Peter Henry Emerson, *Water Babies*, Plate 6, *Idyls of the Norfolk Broads*. Portfolio with loose plates of photogravures and letterpress text, 1887, courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum

**Text:**

*Every morning in Summer we were wont to push our jolly-boat round to a secluded corner of the broad, in order to have a plunge in the cool water, and nearly always to the same spot came a group of merry, laughing village boys, who hastily undressing would wade out on the hard bottom and suddenly appearing through the rush would stand eyeing us, their white skins gleaming against the dark gladdon, and their oily reflections broken by the wavelets made by our movements. Suddenly with shouts and laughter they would dive and swim and chase each other through the weedy depths until exhausted they would swim in close to the sedgy shore and stand resting. Many a day did we watch these young bathers, whose graceful movements were beautiful to behold. One day we determined to make a picture of them and as they waded forth through the gladdon on their way to the turfy bank we secured them. Over the trees shown in our plate can be seen the gable ends of a cottage, the first of a row in which the bathers lived, happy dwellers on the banks of these Norfolk waters. Their pleasures are few and simple, but after being among them, one is often led to ponder as to who is the happier – the cultured men of the town, or the ignorant inhabitant of the village (Emerson, 1887, no pagination).*

In *Water Babies*, two young, naked bathers are captured while swimming and playing ‘through the weedy depths’ (Emerson, 1887, no pagination). Emerson, who worked in collaboration with the painter Goodall, was mesmerised by the *Water Babies*’ ‘graceful movements’ and the simplicity of their lives. But he couldn’t resist closing his extended caption with his somewhat patronising comparison, setting the cultured man of the town against the ignorant village inhabitant. Perhaps Emerson did not mean to denigrate anyone, but his use of the word ‘ignorant’ jars uncomfortably with the magical atmosphere he has created. Abruptly bringing us back to the harsh reality of the East Anglian people, it disturbs the sense of the idyllic that he has otherwise worked hard to achieve. But it can also be read as a hymn to the positive consequences of ignorance, in its literal sense of ignoring – of being unaware of the circumstances that surround us, and therefore immune to suffering. Indeed Scott himself wrote:

*Much of the value of photography lies not in a documentary showing of the seen, but in an unforeseen, uncontrollable activation of the unseen, the recovery of a privacy through a medium which seems intent on making us public* (1999, p 237).

If we forgive Emerson (1887, no pagination) for his last sentence, his words in *Water Babies* activate nonetheless the unseen in the image. Through the parts where text functions as relay, he recovers the boys’ privacy and creates a multisensory experience that makes us fantasise about the temperature of the water and the laughs of the boys.

Going back to *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads*, another photo-text pairing that is quite intriguing is the platinum print *Gathering Water-Lilies*, one of Emerson’s most famous images, which he accompanies with a text that is very mysterious about the two subjects portrayed – as it ‘contains exclusively a discussion of types of lilies, or nymphaea, their history and their symbolic significance as objects of beauty across cultures’, creating an atmosphere of bucolic peacefulness (Barnes, 1984, p 64). However, elsewhere in the book we gain a more detailed understanding of the subjects, who, although the serene atmosphere of the image encourages us to think that they are enjoying a moment of leisure, are actually at work ‘gathering water-lilies’, among their few sources of livelihood, to sell at the market – as the text accompanying a different photograph, plate two, *Setting the Bow Net*, more realistically hints at (Barnes, 1997, p 64). The authors’ adroitness in balancing the text-image tensions via, for example, moving the information behind a certain image away from it and creating

a game of references, makes the reading and viewing experience of the book a more compelling one that keeps the reader/viewer's attention hooked. *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* is a fundamental photo-text book of the nineteenth century also because it contains a pioneering commentary about image-text relations in its preface, where the authors declare:

*We venture to place before the public a series of plates taken directly from nature. These pictures were carefully studied and executed in one of the most beautiful, interesting and unique districts of England. Our aim has been to produce a book of art for lovers of art; and the text, far from being illustrated by the photos, is illustrative of and somewhat supplementary to them; sometimes explanatory, and containing interesting incidental information or folk-lore intended to bring the scene or phase of life treated of more vividly before the reader, and depicting in words surroundings and effects which cannot be expressed by pictorial art* (Emerson and Goodall, 1887, no pagination).

The adjective 'supplementary' is reminiscent of Barthes' complementarity when he describes the relay text (1977, p 40). For the late nineteenth century to have such a specific idea of the role of text in relation to photographs, the different interactions and hierarchies, as well as the effects that can be achieved, is quite impressive and far from embryonic. In McCausland's precious contribution to 'Photographic Books' she praises Emerson's *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* for having succeeded in creating 'an organic relation between text and pictures', which for her is 'the basic characteristic of the photographic book' (1942, p 2784).<sup>112</sup>

Unlike John Thomson's collaboration with the radical journalist Adolphe Smith, *Street Life in London* (1877) – a book that included 36 Woodburytypes and documented in photographs and articles the everyday poverty suffered by the working class (Ovenden, 1997, p 42) – or Jacob Riis' *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), which both 'utilized the photobook to bring about socio-political change' (Silvia, 2017, no pagination), Emerson, after being criticised by the Tory press for his polemical tone in his *Pictures of East Anglian Life* (1888), moved with his subsequent books more towards poetic meditations on landscape and life, producing nonetheless highly sophisticated photo-text books such as his most mystic one: *Marsh Leaves* (1895), on solitude and isolation (Lemagny and Rouillé, 1987, pp 104-105). Mitchell briefly refers

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<sup>112</sup> Emerson's body of work is quite substantial, as I had the chance to ascertain in preparation for the exhibition and symposium I organised in 2015 at Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery in collaboration with the V&A. It is beyond the purpose of this thesis to analyse all his photo-text strategies in his pictorial books, so I focused on the ones that made more sense for the discussion. Besides Jeffrey (1984), see also Durden (1994) and Taylor (2006).



to Riis' *How the Other Half Lives* as a reformist book on New York tenements (1994, p 286). To make the book Riis employed a new gelatin silver process for his photographs, which the publisher mechanically reproduced as halftones alongside engravings (Mitchell, 1994, p 286). Riis also benefited from the invention of flash powder, which enabled him to photograph informal subjects indoors, not without difficulty, as he recounts in an incident when he almost 'set a tenement on fire' (Mitchell, 1994, p 286), criticising his own competence and questioning 'the violence that accompanies [the images'] production' (Silvia, 2017, no pagination).

Although it is in the first half of the twentieth century when the photo-essay blossomed as a recognised sub-genre of the photo-text, these important early contributions already present all the challenging and compelling elements of their followers.

### **Photo-literature**

The short novel *Bruges La Morte*, as discussed in chapter two and shown in Figure 18 (Rodembach, 1892), is among the best examples of photo-literature, where photographic images and 'literary language', intended as fiction, are juxtaposed in a more democratic way, with the photographs being more than just an illustrative background (Bryant, 1996, p 11). Between the official invention of photography and *Bruges La Morte*, although the typographical integration of photographs into books was a slow process, other works of literature were published illustrated by photographs (Von Amelunxen, 1985). Hubertus von Amelunxen (1985) and Paul Edwards have produced the most interesting research on the photo-illustrated fictions of the nineteenth century, and they both conclude that it is common that photographic images are ancillary to the text, which is the main vehicle of narrative, and that *Bruges La Morte* stands out as a 'cornerstone' of the photo-literary canon (Edwards, 2008 and 2000, p 71).

Even if it was first published in episodes without images in the newspaper *Figaro* between 4 and 14 February 1892, *Bruges La Morte* is notable for being the first novel envisioned to be accompanied by photographs in its first apparition as a book (Grojnowski, 1998, and Baetens, 2019). The 35 half-tone reproductions of anonymous views of the medieval city of Bruges were specifically sourced from the Parisian 'image banks' J. Levy and Co. and Neurdein Frères, to complement the story of a widower overwhelmed by sorrow and unable to overcome the pain of losing his wife (Edwards,

2000, p 71). Indeed, the reader is warned by Rodenbach in the '*Avertissement*' that in his '*étude passionnelle*' ('*study of a passion*') he wanted to evoke a town 'like an essential character, associated to the states of the soul, that advises, dissuades and prompts to act' (1998, no pagination, my translation). Hence it is for Rodenbach (1998, no pagination, my translation) 'important to reproduce these views of Bruges', interleaved in the pages, as they 'collaborate with the events', and 'so that those who read these pages undergo in turn the presence and the influence of the town [...] and feel the shadows of the tall towers fall across the text' (Edwards, 2000, p 83). Rodenbach's warning to the reader is followed by one such view of Bruges before the actual novel starts, which sets the atmosphere of 'sleepy greys' (Edwards, 2000, p 76) that will permeate the following pages, 'an intrigue tinted by grey and black, metaphors of death, mourning, and melancholy' (Oberhuber, 2017, no pagination). As pointed out by Edwards, who has dedicated many years and writings to Rodenbach's fascinating book, the particularity of the work is that the photographs, in their association with the text, become 'both realist and unreal' at the same time (2000, p 83). The views of the city appear in the proximity of where the depicted site is mentioned in the text. Words and images are partners in crime in conveying a gloomy atmosphere: the text refers to the town in such a way as 'to suggest analogies to death, and the photographed town likewise presents a funerary vision' (Edwards, 2000, p 83). The images were specifically chosen because, as long exposures, they depict an immobilised 'ghost town' that departs from 'optical reality' (Edwards, 2000, pp 79). Intriguingly Edwards consulted the archive of Levy and Neurdein photographs, at the Roger-Viollet Picture Agency in Paris, and realised that many of them, 'taken at exactly the same time as those chosen for the book, show the streets of Bruges full of passers-by', which confirms the trailblazing logic behind the selection made for the book (2000, p 84). In their association with the protagonist's 'obsessional mourning' over the death of his wife, they also conjure up his mournful desire to seek 'the minute that would abolish time and realities and would grant him total oblivion' (Edwards, 2000, pp 72 and 80).

Another interesting exception is Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (1860), alternatively entitled *Transformation: Or, The Romance of Monte Beni* for the British and continental edition published by Tauchnitz (Sweet, 1996, p 25). Extremely sought after by Anglophone tourists in love with the city of Rome, which they saw as a museum, *The Marble Faun* is the perfect example of an established novel that is precisely transformed through photographs, since in the 1860s Italian booksellers

started to paste photographs of the places and objects mentioned in the text 'onto blank pages, supplied by the publisher for this purpose', and hence an eccentric case of accidental photo-literature originated more from the circumstances rather than the intention of the author to combine his fiction with photographs (Sweet, 1996, p 25).<sup>113</sup> The publisher Houghton, Mifflin and Company of Boston realised the economic potential of the operation and in 1889 released a new edition illustrated with anonymous photogravures that represented Rome 'as a timeless, depopulated museum' (Bryant, 1996, p 15), to provide 'an inventory of aestheticized objects for Anglo-American tourists to consume', 'distancing the reader from certain aspects of actual, quotidian Rome' (Sweet, 1996, p 26). This view of Rome as a museum for Anglophone tourists made the book almost become a travel guide and did not exactly coincide with Hawthorne's own vision of Rome that he described as 'the site of his Romance, [...] chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon, as they are [...] in America' (Sweet, 1996, p 25). However, although he was not involved in the process of selection of the images, he decided to agree to this sort of marketing operation (Sweet, 1996, and Shloss, 1987).

Lastly, thanks to McCausland (1942, p 2784), we learn that Alexander Black (1895) 'anticipated the contemporary photography book by publishing his *Miss Jerry*', the story of a female reporter in Brooklyn. As Black writes in the preface, 'the text was not originally designed for print, but for oral delivery in partnership with the series of 250 photographs from life, with which it formed what I have called a "picture play"' (1895, pp vii-x), namely a photo-play in which images were projected on the screen with a double 'magic' lantern while Black was reading the scripted lines for all his characters (Ramsaye, 1926, p 91). Translated into book form, the text was inevitably adjusted, and it was presented with 'thirty-seven illustrations from life photographs by the author' literally embedded in it, which makes it a pioneering book also from a design point of view (Black, 1895). It is fascinating to read the author's meticulous explanation of what was 'fictitious' and staged in a picture studio and what was more candid.

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<sup>113</sup> Bryant compares the process of transformation of *The Marble Faun* through photography with the opposite dynamic that is behind the 1985 novel *Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance* by Richard Powers: a canonised photograph transformed through fiction, namely the famous 1914 photograph by August Sander entitled *Young Farmers*, that provides the novel's title and the point of departure for Powers' fiction (Bryant, 1996, p 15).

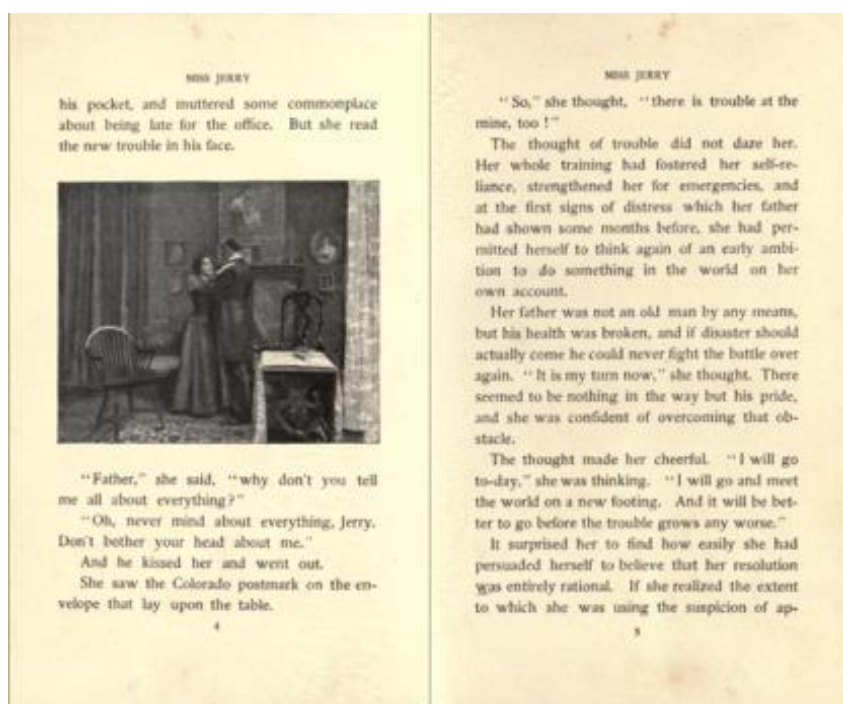
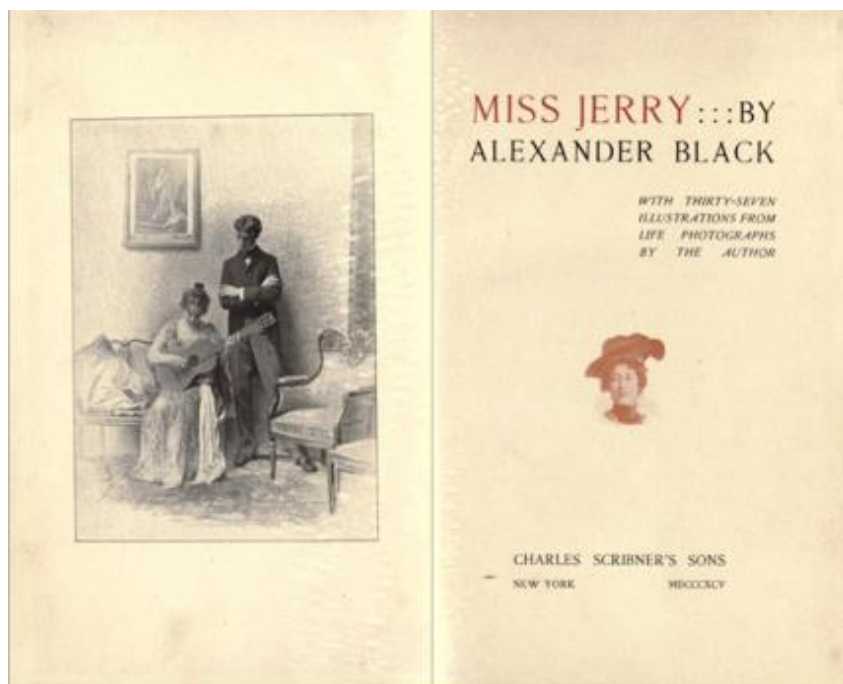


Fig 59 Alexander Black, *Miss Jerry*. Book, 18 x 24 cm, 1895, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, Internet Archive, public domain

One passage in particular reveals all the innovative force of this book in terms of image-text tensions, and I include it here in its entirety as it is crucial in showing the sophistication of nineteenth-century photo-texts.

*In this triangular partnership between the art of fiction, the art of the tableau vivant and the science of photography, I have sought to test certain possibilities of illusion, with this aim always before me, that the illusion should not, because it need not and could not safely be that of photographs from an acted play, nor that of an artist's illustrations, but the illusion of reality. If it is the function of art*

*to translate nature, it is the privilege of photography to transmit nature. Thus, I have sought to illustrate art with life* (Black, 1895, p ix).

It is important that the author uses the term 'partnership', as it shows clearly his collaborative relationship between words and images, but also what strikes me is his expression 'illusion of reality', which demonstrates his pioneering vision in his decision to distinguish the book from the picture play and use illustrations from photographs rather than photographs directly.

So, although in photo-illustrated fictions of the nineteenth century it is frequent that photographic images and texts co-exist in a hierarchical manner, with the predominance of the verbal, the eccentric exceptions discussed here confirm that it would be misleading to generalise that all photo-literary works of the epoch were uninteresting or unrefined in terms of image-text dynamics.

### **Photo-poetry**

As discussed in chapter two, thanks to Nott's (2018a, p 2) research we learn that, although the first use of the word 'photopoem' in English dates back to 1936, with Constance Phillips' anthology *Photopoems: A Group of Interpretations through Photographs*, pairings of photographs and poems have been made quite soon after the official invention of photography. Indeed, the connection between the invention of photography and the experimental presence of text continues from Florence's *Masonic Diploma* (1833) with Talbot's *Copy of a Stanza from the Ode to Napoleon in Lord Byron's hand* (prior to 1840), a work somewhere between a conceptual photo-text ahead of its time and photo-poetry. It is a 'photogenic drawing negative' contact printed from a page of hand-written manuscript from the poet's final five lines and 'flamboyant signature marking the conclusion of an ode that expresses Byron's remorse and anger over Napoleon Bonaparte's exile to Elba' island (Burkett, 2015, p 129). The image conceals a series of complex and mysterious questions (Schaaf, 1995, p 32). As Andrew Burkett quite rightly puts it:

*How Talbot arrived at the decision to photograph handwritten Romantic poetry at the dawn of the age of photography and why, in doing so, he chose to turn to Byron's work – and specifically these five lines of poetry and signature from Ode to Napoleon – remain as enduring questions which have yet to be given adequate historical, critical, or theoretical treatment by scholars of Romanticism, photography, or media studies, more generally* (2015, p 129).

The literary nature of the text in Talbot's *Copy of a Stanza...*, as shown in Figure 60 (Talbot, prior to April 1840) makes it the first phototext, written as one word, in which photography and poetry physically melt on the same surface and opens up all sorts of Pandora's boxes. Byron's verses are the photograph. Although behind its *raison d'être* might lie functional intentions, this phototext goes beyond the mere illustration of a possible use of the photographic apparatus to authors who wish to reproduce their texts. Indeed, Talbot decides to present this function in his six volumes *The Pencil of Nature* (1844-46), with plate nine, entitled *Fac-simile of an Old Printed Page*, where he quite telegraphically explains that the plate, 'copied of the size of the original, by the method of superposition', shows how 'this application of the photographic art seem destined to be of great advantage' to the Antiquarian. So *Copy of a Stanza...*, which is intriguingly edited out from *The Pencil of Nature*, must have had another meaning for Talbot. Let's attempt to elaborate on it.



Fig 60 William Henry Fox Talbot, *Copy of a stanza from the 'Ode to Napoleon' in Lord Byron's hand*. Photogenic drawing negative. Partial watermark 'J Whatman Turkey', prior to 4 April 1840, the Collection of Dr. Walter Knysz, Jr., courtesy of Hans P. Kraus, Jr.

Verses:

Yes—one—the first—the last—the best—  
The Cincinnatus of the West,  
Whom envy dared not hate,  
Bequeath'd the name of Washington,  
To make man blush there was but one!  
(Lord Byron, 1837, p 267)

Talbot's *Copy of a Stanza from the Ode to Napoleon in Lord Byron's hand* was made prior to April 1840, as Schaaf demonstrates (1995, p 32). In his catalogue number seven of the seminal series *Sun Pictures*, Schaaf compellingly shares the route of his research: Talbot sent a letter to Sir John Herschel on 21 March 1839, with a small print to demonstrate that DIY printing and publishing would become one of the most important functions of his negative-positive photographic process (1995, p 32). Talbot wrote: 'the enclosed scrap will illustrate what I call "every man his own printer and publisher"', as he strongly believed that replacing the printing press with photography would 'enable poor authors to make fac-similes of their works in their own handwriting' (in Schaaf, 1995, p 32).<sup>114</sup> It appears somewhat unclear which image corresponds to the specifically mentioned scrap and whether it has survived or not.

Schaaf reveals two more clues: an out-of-context thought Talbot recorded in the spring of 1840 in his research *Notebook P*: 'The Tribute of Science to Poetry, two views of house, and one copy of manuscript' and a letter Talbot wrote to Sir John Lubbock, on 4 April 1840, enclosing some photographs 'all of which are done with the Cam[era] Obscura, except for the facsimile of Byron's writing', which unequivocally confirms its approximate date. Talbot made this 'photogenic drawing negative' contact print (hence the text reads backwards) from the last page of handwritten manuscript from Byron's *Ode to Napoleon* (1814), by laying it on a sheet of paper coated with a salt and silver nitrate solution, and then exposing it to sunlight (Schaaf, 1996, p 169). Talbot created four negatives of the handwritten final stanza and flourish through his negative-positive photographic process and decided to label one of these variants as 'Specimen of

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<sup>114</sup> Anna Atkins' handwritten text in her book, known as the first photobook ever published, *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* (1843), reproduced both plates and her hand-lettered text through photography. The text serves primarily as a preface, where she explains why she adopted Sir John Herschel's 'beautiful' cyanotype process, and she dedicates these 'impressions of the plant themselves' to her 'botanical' friends (Atkins, 1843, no pagination). The book circulated only privately. The year before, Henry Collen photographically copied the Chinese characters of the Treaty of Nanking for the Queen, and Schaaf (2003, p 14) believes this was very influential for Talbot.

Byron's Hand'.<sup>115</sup> We can see the 1811 watermark on Byron's original sheet of writing paper, which was inevitably reproduced, and it adds a further, yet delimited, layer of textuality.

Talbot's choice is both predictable and unexpected. It was predictable because Talbot most likely had access to Byron's original manuscript through his neighbour and dear friend, the Irish poet Thomas Moore, who, in turn, was also 'the confidant of Byron' and therefore the best candidate to edit his posthumous 1832 *opera omnia*, after the poet's precocious death in Missolonghi while fighting the Ottoman Empire in the Greek War of Independence (Bloom, 2009). It is also quite normal that Talbot, a polymath with multiple vocations and pursuits, had an interest in Lord Byron. However, despite his literary predilections, he might have chosen the last stanza for technical and pragmatic reasons: in order to make a contact print of a photographic negative from the original manuscript, Talbot 'needed a page that was written on only one side' (Schaaf, 1995, p 32). However, the plot thickens, as the story behind this stanza is nothing but predictable when we consider the actual text in the stanza.

The *Ode* was composed in 1814 in reaction to Napoleon's surrender of his empire to the Allies and agreement to exile on the island of Elba (Burkett, 2015, p 23). Byron, for whom Napoleon was an absolute hero, saw this move as shameful and was 'utterly bewildered and confounded' (Burkett, 2015, p 22). The poet is angry and frustrated, as he cannot understand how and why Napoleon became a coward all of a sudden and chose exile over suicide (Burkett, 2015, p 22). So, Byron, disappointed by a real former Emperor and idol, is left only with a mythical imaginary idol, the honourable Titan Prometheus, who, unlike Napoleon, would have 'proudly died' if a mortal in a similar situation (Burkett, 2015, p 22). Intriguingly, the *Ode* was initially published anonymously and comprised 15 stanzas for the first two editions, with Byron deciding to reveal his authorship only at the tenth edition (Schaaf, 1995, p 32). From the third edition it appeared with a newly added 16th stanza that Byron swiftly composed to please his publisher in order to avoid the stamp tax (Burkett, 2015, p 23).

English scholar Andrew Burkett writes in his seminal essay 'Photographing Byron's Hand' that 'Byron never felt that the additional final stanzas [...] were to his poetic standard' and that 'indeed, the concluding lines of the poem are stale and

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<sup>115</sup> Two close variants of this negative are in the Fox Talbot Museum at Lacock, and the only known print from any of these negatives appears to be in the National Media and Science Museum, as it is not in the V&A – I checked after the acquisition of the Royal Photographic Collection.



unimaginative – perhaps even borderline obtuse’ (2015, p 23). They even mention two historical characters that did not appeal as big heroes to Byron: Quintus Cincinnatus (c. 519-c. 430 BC), a humble dictator of the Roman Empire, who preferred his farm to leading the Empire, and judicious George Washington, who, as pointed out by John Clubbe, despite appealing ‘to Byron’s rational admiration, he did not capture the poet’s imagination – at least not to the degree that did Prometheus or Napoleon’ (in Burkett, 2015, p 24).<sup>116</sup> By finishing the *Ode* with Washington, Byron perhaps wanted to emphasise the boring triumph of rationality over the ‘dramatics of heroism’ (Burkett, 2015, p 24). Both author and publisher agreed to remove the added stanzas, as they were compromising the pace of the *Ode* (Burkett, 2015, p 23). So they remained unpublished until after Byron’s death, until Moore, with the anthology that Talbot reproduced – somewhat disrespectfully of the wishes of the deceased author and focused on the economic aspects of making the most of Byron’s identity for his commercial enterprise – republished them, which makes the photograph a double first: the first image of a poetic text, which portrays a text that, despite its author’s intention, reappears as published for the first time after his death (Burkett, 2015, p 26).<sup>117</sup> Despite the fact that the pragmatic and technical interpretation appears the easiest to believe, it is nonetheless contradictory that, in order to illustrate how photography enables ‘poor authors to make facsimiles of their works in their own handwriting’, Talbot chose a cancelled stanza (Schaaf, 1979, p 209). Perhaps the adjective ‘poor’ hints at the fact that Talbot might have been familiar with the vicissitudes of the last commissioned stanzas, and, besides the technical motivations, chose it precisely to show that thanks to photography, you won’t be obliged to publish texts ‘poor authors’ are not happy with such as this one, because economically it is more sustainable.

Yet another hypothesis could be that Talbot ironically chose to make a *negative* of Lord Byron’s disappointment with Napoleon’s flight into exile to transform it, as the

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<sup>116</sup> As reported by Burkett (2015, p 24), ‘Lord Byron could have pardoned Napoleon more easily’, Stendhal once quipped, ‘if he had had a little of the colourlessness of Washington’.

<sup>117</sup> Batchen, in his chapter ‘Proto-Photography Far from Europe: The Scientific Experiments of Hercule Florence’, recounts the following anecdote:

*Talbot presented his ‘Talbotype’ process in 1841. On 11th December 1848, one of his associates, Thomas Malone, exposed a piece of sensitised calotype paper to the intense light of some burning phosphorous as part of a lecture, ‘On the Chemical Action of Light on Paper’, he was conducting at the Western Literary & Scientific Institution in London. The sign of success was the appearance in the middle of the picture plane of the word ‘Talbotype’, outlined by a stencil that had been laid upon the paper. In this case, a piece of text, a single word, the name of the photograph, is the photograph (2017, pp 93-94).*

image appears to our eyes on the other side – to turn Byron’s disappointment into an encouragement, an invitation to his rival Daguerre, the ‘emperor’ of photography, to follow Napoleon’s example and leave space to the other inventors. This is just a speculative thought – however, if he simply wanted to show the technical aspect of this innovative use of photography to reproduce text for the poor author (which is also an ode to self-publishing), he could have selected any other text from Moore, including the beginning that is also only written on one side.

And indeed, in Talbot’s introductory remarks in his *Pencil of Nature* (1844-46), in the section entitled ‘Brief Historical Sketch of the Invention of the Art’, he does not resist the temptation to clarify that, although Daguerre is the official inventor of photography – as he actually succeeded in obtaining a photograph that does not fade away – he is not the first to have attempted to invent the medium. This is Talbot’s passage:

*I met with an account of some researches on the action of Light, by Wedgwood and Sir H. Davy, which [...] I had never heard of. Their short memoir on this subject was published in 1802 in the first volume of the Journal of the Royal Institution. It is curious and interesting, and certainly establishes their claim as the first inventors of the Photographic Art, though the actual progress they made in it was small. They succeeded, indeed, in obtaining impressions from solar light of flat objects laid upon a sheet of prepared paper, but they say that they found it impossible to fix or preserve those pictures: all their numerous attempts to do so having failed. [...] and therefore, though the Daguerreotype was not so entirely new a conception as M. Daguerre and the French Institute imagined, and though my own labours had been still more directly anticipated by Wedgwood, yet the improvements were so great in all respects, that I think the year 1839 may fairly be considered as the real date of the birth of the Photographic Art, that is to say, its first public disclosure to the world (1844, no pagination, my emphasis).*

Replacing the word ‘invention’ with ‘birth’ and ‘first public disclosure’, in relation to Daguerre, emphasises Talbot’s attempt to dethrone him from being the first inventor of the ‘Photographic Art’ – merit that he does not hesitate to bestow to Wedgwood and Davy, who, actually, ‘anticipated more directly’ Talbot’s own ‘labours’ than Daguerre. Intriguingly, there might also be a parallel between the fact that Byron was obliged by the publisher to add an extra stanza, with which the poet was never totally pleased, and that Talbot did not include this image in the *Pencil of Nature*. Indeed Talbot chose another image of a reproduction of text for his book, a less literary one: *Fac Simile of an Old Printed Page*. He presented it as plate nine of the second volume of *The Pencil*

*of Nature* without indicating which text was in the image, namely Lacock Abbey's copy of the Magna Carta in Norman French (Schaaf, 2003, p 14).

Lastly, to further show the plethora of photo-text relations and readings that the image offers, looking at Byron's handwriting today with post-conceptual art eyes – through which words can 'be looked at', to borrow Liz Kotz's book title, as visual art – and focusing on the fact that Talbot selected the part of the text where the eccentric signature of Byron appears in all its splendour, it is quite tempting to see it also as a sort of meditation on appropriation, authorship and authenticity. Clearly, the image shares a deeper level of sophistication and mystery, and I was surprised to find that only a few scholars have addressed it systematically.

An interesting French photo-poetry pamphlet – which I discovered thanks to both Edwards (2008, p 557) and Margaret Denton's (2011, p 209) compelling essay 'Louis-Auguste Martin's *Promenades poetiques et daguerriennes – Bellevue*' – is Martin's *Promenade* (1850), which also happens to be the first photographically illustrated photo-poetry work published in France.<sup>118</sup> *Promenades* has long been neglected for its short length of 16 pages, and described as a 'curiosity of little interest' by Isabelle Jammes when compared to Maxime Du Camp's *Egypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* (1852) (cited in Denton, 2011, p 209). Denton brilliantly rehabilitates *Promenades*' importance as a striking object where, unlike Du Camp's photographs that are not integrated in the text, Martin's poems 'framed' the small paper photographs, as they were inserted between the verses and acted as 'visual complements to the author's poetic narrative' (2011, p 209).

Again, instead of considering these examples, Scott criticises Henry Peach Robinson's *Elaine Watching the Shield of Lancelot* (1859-60), arguing that

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<sup>118</sup> When it comes to identifying the very first volume or manifestation of photo-poetry in English, we are still in progress with the research. Nott's (2018, p 21) first case studies date back to c.1845, and it is the anonymous unpublished album *A Little Story for Grown Young Ladies, Illustrated Photographically*, which is number 37 of the General Album Collection at the University of St. Andrews and contains six paste-in calotypes, each accompanied by a handwritten poem of four verses about a loyal young lady who is rewarded with marriage upon her lover's return. Edwards includes at the end of his volume *Soleil Noir* an extremely useful chronology of books illustrated by photography by English and French authors (2008, pp 555-60). In the English authors' list there is a mysterious 1854 book by an author whose surname is Nye and entitled *Poems*, and after much research, I was not able to find any further information, so I have emailed Edwards, although the entry bears an asterisk which means Edwards did not consult it directly (2008, p 555). The book is included in Lambrecht and Salu's (1992, p 188) first volume of their bibliography of photography and literature, with its full title and publisher, Nye, *Poems on Several Occasions*, Dinan, 1854, no pagination and illustrated. Alas, even with these further details I still cannot find any information. Thanks to the collaboration with photo-poetry collector David Solo, I shall continue the research in this area.

'photography's indexical nature turns historical subjects into anachronisms' and that its 'constricted duration leaves little room for imaginative inhabitation, which does little to promote the willing suspension of disbelief' (1999, pp 240-41). First of all, I have already discussed the problems behind applying the notion of indexicality to photography in chapter three. Also, this position of the 'constricted duration' of the photograph has been challenged by Peter Wollen, who claimed that photographs can be seen as elements of narrative which they provoke in the viewer, and convincingly introduced the concept that the still photograph carries a 'fictional diegetic time' that is created by the viewer and is unpredictable (1984, p 119). Furthermore, Scott deprives Robinson of one of the core elements of his artistic strategy – the willing suspension of disbelief in the viewer, as elaborated in his seminal *Pictorial Effect in Photography* in response to the attacks that his most famous image, *Fading Away*, which depicts the seemingly serene death of a young girl in the presence of her grieving Victorian family, received (Robinson, 1893).

As pointed out by Mia Fineman, Robinson trusted his viewers' judgement, 'they would understand that they were looking at a crafted artefact rather than an unmediated imprint of whatever had lain before the camera's lens – and they would be *willing to suspend their disbelief* for the sake of art' (2012, p 27, my emphasis). Robinson wrote in *Pictorial Effect in Photography*: 'Cultivated minds do not require to believe that they are deceived, and that they look on actual nature, when they behold a pictorial representation of it' (1893, p 107). Scott insists that historical, literary or legendary themes such as Robinson's *Elaine Watching the Shield of Lancelot* 'strike the spectator as illustrations', as they lack the 'elasticities which characterise narrative painting' and the reader 'will feel, given the weak intentionality of the photograph, that further interpretation is un-called for' (1999, pp 240-41). I find Nott's position more convincing that 'Robinson's work reverses the idea of "photographic illustration": photographs aspired to artistic status while poetic quotation bore the supposedly illustrative burden' (2018, p 28).



Fig 61 Henry Peach Robinson, *Elaine Watching the Shield of Lancelot*. Albumen print, size unknown, 1859-60, courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum

Verses inscribed on the mount:

*And ah God's mercy what a stroke was there!  
And here a thrust that might have killed, but God  
Broke the strong lance, and rolled his enemy down  
And seared him: so she lives in fantasy.*

Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, 1859

In Arthurian legend, the story of Elaine is a tragic tale of death. She dies for unrequited love for Sir Lancelot, as told by Sir Thomas Malory in his *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485). Looking at the image, which comes accompanied by Tennyson's verses from his *Idylls of the King* (1859-85), Scott wonders 'how much of Tennyson's account, or indeed of any other account, is here and what can be identified' (1999, p 241). He believes that 'we do not ask what kind of "reading" it is, or what it means', as 'the narrative is outside the photograph, the photograph is a window into the narrative, or an *aide-mémoire*, or a photographed version of a *tableau vivant*' (p 241). For Scott the image-title dynamics in nineteenth-century photographs are 'a small self-fulfilling circle', 'a problem of modelling, props and arrangement' for the photographer, and a

matter of 'recognition' for the spectator, whose only task is to be 'able to approve the appropriateness of the image to the title or caption' (p 244).

Robinson's Pictorialist photographs frequently echoed the aesthetic principles of the Victorian Pre-Raphaelite painters, who also incorporated texts in their paintings (Waggoner et al., 2011). He openly admitted that he 'tried to make a Pre-Raphaelite picture in photography' with the *Lady of Shalott* (1861) (Robinson, 1892, pp 96-105) Robinson made *tableaux vivants* that offered what Margaret Harker describes as 'Romantic escapism' to relieve and entertain Victorian 'polite society' who 'turned away from the upheavals' of the industrial revolution and enjoyed dressing up and playing the party game of charades (1988, p 73).<sup>119</sup> Even if Tennyson's verses might reinforce or explain the image, I do not believe that the body language of the subject, a hallmark of Robinson's portraits – her melancholic look and resigned gesture of touching the shield of Lancelot – together with the open-ended relay phrase 'so she lives in fantasy', create a small self-fulfilling circle that kills the imagination of the viewer. Also, Scott writes about 'the viewer or spectator' as a sort of universal and immutable category, assuming that, regardless of their epoch, nationality and cultural background, they are already familiar with the story and they will experience the image-title dynamics as a sort of charade, which to me seems an unrealistic and Anglo-centric assumption.

However, what makes *Elaine Watching the Shield of Lancelot* important for the history and theory of photography – together with the other staged photo-poetry that Robinson presents with poetry on the mount, such as the eccentric *Lady of Shalott* – is that they offered him the opportunity to rethink and write about the slippery relationship between photography and fiction, as Nott (2018, p 30) brilliantly found out.<sup>120</sup> In an oft-neglected article that Robinson wrote for *Photographic Quarterly*, fascinatingly entitled 'Impossible Photography', he admits that the painterly suspension of disbelief is a '[convention] to which we agree without trying to make believe much [...] however much we may call the picture King Arthur, it is only a portrait of a dressed-up model', and in 'its anachronisms, painting is easier to believe than photography' (Robinson, 1892, p 103, cited in Nott, 2018, p 30). So, he partly changes his mind about cultivated viewers and their willing suspension of disbelief discussed earlier. Even if he acknowledges the existence of poems 'full of picture-giving lines' – quite an

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<sup>119</sup> See also Koudinoff (2019).

<sup>120</sup> See Nott (2018, pp 27-30) for a full list of Robinson's staged photo-poetry.

amazing scripto-visual adjective for a poem – he concludes that photography ‘was not yet capable of creating believable, fictional scenarios that were equal to the poetic captions with which they were partnered’ (Robinson, 1884, p 73, cited in Nott, 2018, p 30). After describing the staging behind the *Lady of Sahlhot* (1861), Robinson concludes:

*I think I succeeded in making the picture very Pre-Raphaelite, very weird, and very untrue to nature—I mean imaginative; but it was a ghastly mistake to attempt such a subject in our realistic art, and, with the exception of an Ophelia, done in a moment of aberration, I never afterwards went for themes beyond the limits of the life of our day* (1892, p 104, my emphasis).

So, despite the fact that the author himself concluded, some thirty years after his photo-poetic attempts, that the whole idea of staging such an imaginary subject of another epoch with the limiting ‘realistic art’ of photography, and ‘some awkward lines in it, for the P[re-]R[aphaelite] Brotherhood did not believe in composition’ was a mistake, these experiments offered him nonetheless the opportunity to reflect on photography’s theoretical issues.

Besides the works examined by Nott in his first chapter dedicated to the complicated origins of British photo-poetry, where he identifies the ‘thematic strands of the theatrical and the picturesque – through which sophisticated relationship between poems and photographs occurred’ my selection here continues to challenge the idea that nineteenth-century photo-poetry is ‘literal’ and ‘reductive’ (2018, pp 58 and 14).

### **Conceptual photo-texts**

Innovation and complexity of nineteenth-century photo-texts reach their climax with Bayard’s *Le Noyé (Self-portrait as a Drowned Man)* (1840), which I consider conceptual ahead of its time. Photography, like any invention in search of official recognition, entered history with text. Although the history of the invention of photography might be well known to the reader, it is worth retracing a few passages in light of the discussion of *Le Noyé*. Between 1837 and the end of 1838, the official inventor of photography, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, announced his discovery – or rather his improvements on Nicéphore Niépce’s process for obtaining ‘the image of nature’ – demonstrating his daguerreotype process to the director of the Paris Observatory, Dominique Façois Arago (Trachtenberg, 1980, p 4, and Hannavy, 2013, p 365). Arago was so fascinated by this novel and revolutionary invention that

he presented the technique to the French Academy of Science on 7 January 1839, in order to persuade the government to acquire the daguerreotype process. After King Louis-Philippe signed the lifetime pensions to Daguerre and Isidore Niépce on 7 August 1839, Arago had to formally and publicly explain the invention, and Daguerre, by the terms of the law, had to publish an illustrated manual with the various steps of the process (Hannavy, 2013, p 365). So, to be adopted as a public invention, photography had to be acknowledged and purchased by the French government. For this to happen, the invention had to be presented accompanied by a text that certified its authenticity, demonstrated its pioneering uniqueness and explained its characteristics. Neither Daguerre nor Arago referred to an image in particular in their lectures, but to ‘the image of nature’, focusing on the general advantages that photography would bring about: ‘its originality, its usefulness in the arts, the speed of execution, and the valuable aid which science will find in it’ (Trachtenberg, 1980, p 23).

And one of the first texts ever written to accompany a specific photographic image – that goes beyond a mere descriptive and technical caption – refers to the very official invention of photography: Bayard’s ‘suicide note’ that he hand-wrote on the verso of his *Self-portrait as a Drowned Man*, as shown in Figure 62 (Bayard, 1840). Made only a year after the announcement of Daguerre’s process, it is one of the most important images in the history of photography, mainly for two reasons that are not equally acknowledged. Firstly, it is considered the first ‘fictional’ photograph ever created (Baker, 2015, no pagination). Secondly, to my knowledge – after careful research in the major public photographic collections of nineteenth-century photography – I consider it to be the first photo-text ever produced where image and words are not physically occupying the same surface but are indispensable to each other and both constitute the artwork.<sup>121</sup> Whether the fact that the first fictional photograph is also the first photo-text is a mere coincidence or not it is yet to be discussed.

Through the text we learn the image’s implausibility, as, quite logically, it is impossible for the subject to be both the man who committed suicide and the author of his self-portrait. The majority of commentators on this famous image tell the story that,

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<sup>121</sup> Collections consulted so far include those with a focus on nineteenth-century photography: Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Harry Ransom Center Photography Collection, Austin; George Eastman Museum, Rochester; Museum of Fine Art, Boston; Getty, Los Angeles; SFP Paris, BNF Paris, Musée d’Orsay, Paris; Nicéphore Niépce Museum, Chalon-sur-Saône and Alkazi Foundation, Delhi.



in 1840, Bayard was seemingly upset for not having been acknowledged as an independent inventor of photography, while in his notebook we learn that he started his pioneering process of producing ‘camera-induced direct positives’ before the divulgation of other methods, such as Daguerre’s and Fox Talbot’s (Batchen, 1999, p 157). Geoffry Batchen, in his *Burning with Desire*, also reports that in July 1839 Bayard exhibited 30 photographs in aid of earthquake victims in Martinique, and that one critic of the time praised them as ‘they unite the impression of reality with the fantasy of dreams’ (1999, p 157). So, presumably annoyed by the meagre sum the French government awarded him and by the vain appeal of the Académie des Beaux-Arts to prove the precedence of his process, he staged his famous *Le Noyé*, which represented himself naked from the waist up sitting ‘awkwardly on a bench, with back propped up against a wall so that the head and chest turned almost entirely towards us’, as shown in Figure 62 (Bayard, 1840) (Batchen, 1999, p 157). ‘The eyes are closed; the arms crossed; and the lower torso wrapped in drapery’, as vividly described by Batchen (1999, p 158). The composition, together with the addition of various props such as sculptural figurines, which he owned – as we learn from other self-portraits where he is surrounded by them – give to the image an aura of funereal solemnity (Batchen, 1999, p 157). The ‘Suicide Note’ on the verso plays a key role in mocking photography’s presumed authenticity and in placing information about the ‘fictive nature’ of the image outside the picture, as I have discussed in chapter three (Batchen, 1999, and Bate, 2014, p 2).

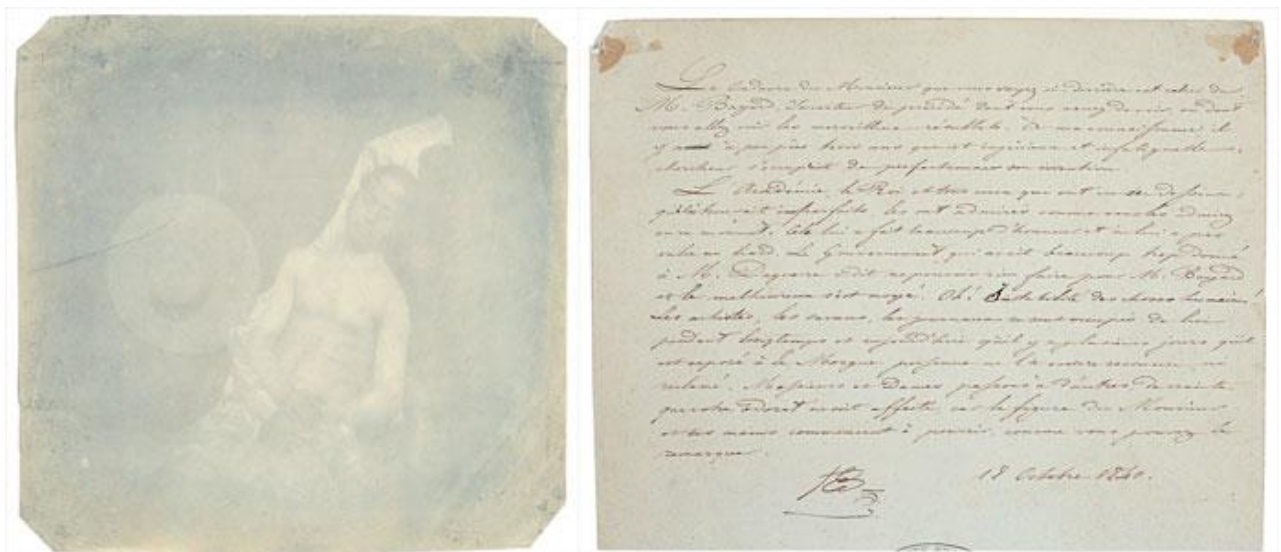


Fig 62 Hippolyte Bayard, *Le Noyé* (Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man) and ‘Suicide Note’. Direct positive print, 18.8 x 19.2 cm, 1840. Reproduction by Claudine Sudre, 1976, 18 x19 cm, courtesy Société française de photographie, Paris

Text:

*The corpse which you see here is that of M. Bayard, inventor of the process that has just been shown to you, or the wonderful results of which you will soon see. As far as I know, this inventive and indefatigable experimenter has been occupied for about three years with the perfection of his discovery.*

*The Academy, the King, and all those who have seen his pictures admired them as you do at this very moment, although he himself considers them still imperfect. This has brought him much honour but not a single sou. The Government, which has supported M. Daguerre more than is necessary, declared itself unable to do anything for M. Bayard, and the unhappy man threw himself into the water in despair. Oh, human fickleness! For a long time artists, scientists and the press took an interest in him, but now that he has been lying in the Morgue for days, no-one has recognized him or claimed him!*

*Ladies and gentlemen, let's talk of something else so that your sense of smell is not upset, for as you have probably noticed, the face and hands have already started to decompose.*

H.B.

18 October 1840

What an incredibly dense, implausible, tragicomic, ambiguous and foundational photo-text. The first element that captures the attention is the intrinsic implausibility of the image, since, as noted by Sapir (1994, pp 623), Bayard's words facetiously play with the absurdity of this alleged 'moment of authenticity', in which the dead person speaks in third person about 'mythologising' his own death and signs the note (Komninu, 2003, p 163). Clearly, commentaries on this photo-text work abound (Poivert, 2015, p 38). The concepts usually addressed in relation to it are death, theatricality, defeat, parody, invisibility, irony, silence, protest and innovation. Few critics give the text the prominence it deserves.

According to Michel Poivert (2015, p 38), the very first critic to write about Bayard and publish this particular image was Joseph-Marie Lo Duca in his book *Bayard le premier photographe* (1943), which is a compelling account of Bayard's trajectory narrated like a novel, with dialogues and rich in anecdotes – unfortunately not yet translated into English. For example, we read about Bayard's father's habit of

impressing his initials on fruit with the agent of sunlight, or Bayard's friendship with the actor of the Comédie-Française, Edmond Geffroy – influential in determining his predilection for photographing staged scenes (Lo Duca, 1943). The incipit is a somewhat improbable and sad dialogue between Arago and Bayard on the invention of photography, in which the former begs the latter to avoid publishing anything about his process, in order to not obfuscate Daguerre – so we can perceive a sense of frustration and defeat slowly growing. Lo Duca openly accuses Arago of having been dishonest with Bayard, pretending not to remember that he saw his proofs in March 1839, and that in May of the same year Bayard visited him to invite him to his exhibition – apparently the very first exhibition of photographs, which took place on 24 June 1839.

These anecdotes are crucial in allowing a deeper reading of the photo-text to grasp its somewhat Magritte-esque nature, as highlighted by Michel Frizot, who, in his chapter 'Ceci n'est pas une photographie' ('This is not a Photograph'), writes that Bayard was a bored *fonctionnaire* of the ministry of Finance, disappointed with his salary and a dreamer of images: 'not of their content but of their production', a dreamer of images' 'savoir faire', of depriving the world of a part of its real substance, to preserve appearances perceived as ineffable (1986, p 77). Some scholars focused primarily on the pictorial and compositional elements of the image, such as Jammes and Janis, who wrote about Bayard's obsession with staging images and how *Le Noyé* appears to them as a 'bizarre' parody of Jacques-Louis David's *Death of Marat* (1793), not dedicating enough attention to the textual elements.

Batchen examines all the photographic inter-textualities of the image, which contains props, including a straw hat, a ceramic vase and a small statuette of a crouching nymph that also appear in other images of the author (1999, pp 158-173). He also explores the visual connection of Bayard's pose with the *Death of Marat* as a homage to liberal aristocrat and revolutionary martyr Lepeletier de Saint-Fargeau, who died for a noble cause, revealing a more political twist lurking behind what seems an ironic joke (pp 158-173). Bayard's 'suicide note' also recalls David, as he included a piece of writing with his painting on the circumstances of the martyr's death, where he speaks to us from beyond the grave – like the dead protagonist of Brazilian writer Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis' 1881 novel *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*, who recounts his life, reflecting upon his failures, from the afterlife.

According to Jillian Lerner, Bayard composed *Le Noyé* as a performative fiction and a scandalous news item that highlights aspects of the competitive environment in

which the French photographic pioneers fought for attention (2014, p 222). The reception and circulation of the image is rather mysterious too. Three versions were made by the author, and only one with the 'suicide note' on the verso, explicitly addressed to the authorities of his epoch, and presumably not published or exhibited anywhere – as the inclusion of a handwritten text indicates they were 'intended to be handled rather than on the wall' (Batchen, 1999, pp 158-67). Poivert, in one of his texts on this photo-text, whose title could be translated as 'Suicide from Society: The Dead's Viewpoint', also sustains that Bayard is playing the living dead after multiple failures to be recognised as the inventor of photography (2002, p 22). When he explains the reason behind his resolute decision to commit suicide, Bayard deals with verisimilitude and truth (Poivert, 2002, p 22). Intriguingly both Poivert (2002) and Batchen (1999) use terminology that is reminiscent of literary theory when discussing the impact of the text on the viewer. When Poivert argues that Bayard's heliography, as opposed to daguerreotypy's precision, proposes a strange and unconvincing atmosphere, he uses the term 'a contract of photographic fiction', which swarms with irony and theatricality, as if he was asking his viewer to suspend their disbelief (2002, p 23). Later, he somewhat mocks the allegedly naive enthusiasm with which all the histories of photography solemnly welcome the image as the very first 'photographic fiction' ever, as he reassures us that the image, a theatrical self-portrait, is nothing more than a product of its own time – given the cultural life that Bayard might have been exposed to (Poivert, 2004, p 42). Hence, Poivert (2004) also blissfully reminds us to look outside the narrow realm of photography for some further clues to obtaining a better understanding of this image. Bayard was not living in a photography-only cloud, but was heavily immersed in Parisian life through his administrative job and entourage. The above mentioned actor friend, Edmond Giffroy, must have exposed Bayard to what was going on in the theatres of the time, such as the staging of the *Death of Chatterton*, precisely at the time Bayard's image was taken, or the influence that mime Jean-Baptiste Debureau's *Pierrot* (since the late 1810s) might have had on him (Poivert, 2015, p 42 and 44). However, Poivert (2002, p 23) appears at times contradictory, as he both accepts and counters the idea of Bayard as a defeated man. For him Bayard's real rival was Fox Talbot in terms of process, and he believes that Bayard's silent attitude – as he never takes part in his colleagues' attempts of having his work credited and appraised on *La Lumière*, the journal of the Society of Heliography, specifically founded in 1851 to overcome the hegemony of the daguerreotype, and of which

Bayard was an active member – confirms Bayard was not so upset (Poivert, 2015, p 41). The first editor-in-chief of *La Lumière*, Ernest Lacan explains that Bayard's silence is instead his response to the French government's request to step aside, and the self-portrait is a visual representation of his silence (cited in Poivert, 2002, p 24). For Sapir, on the contrary, 'Bayard's photograph offers such a new way of seeing which holds the potential, or the risk, of critiquing the dominant ocularcentric myth of transparent representation' (1994, p 628).

I believe that by showing for the first time that the camera can lie, that you 'cannot trust what you see in a photograph [...] as we are easily deceived' (Bate, 2017, p 3) – perhaps even by photography's 'official' inventor Daguerre, who claims to be the inventor, while Bayard has been trying to demonstrate that his heliography predates the daguerreotype – Bayard takes his revenge. He shows the limits of the 'apparatus' as soon as its invention is officially attributed to someone else, or, in other words, since he cannot be recognised for photography's invention, he might as well spoil it, by showing for the first time that the alleged 'candid' photography can be inauthentic. However, his intent is not simply negative and confrontational. Sapir also points out the intriguing relationship between failure, invention, discovery and surprise, and how one triggers the other (1994, p 628). I suggest that Bayard, who might not be remembered as the inventor of photography, as he lost the opportunity to provoke surprise and wonder in the public with the discovery of the medium, found a new, quite spectacular opportunity to surprise – and hence experience vicariously the adrenaline behind the notion of discovery – by revealing for the first time that the brand new photographic apparatus, hailed as truthful, can actually lie.

Unfortunately, the photo-text's title in its English translation spoils a little the surprise effect the reader encounters in the text, revealing the very implausibility of the photograph even before one can flip the print and read the 'suicide note' on the verso. This reminds me of other self-portraits as dead men and women, quite likely inspired by Bayard's, namely Luigi Capuana's *Self-portrait as Fake Dead* (1887) and, more recently, Martha Wilson's *Suicide* (1974) Oscar Bony's *The Triumph of Death* (1998), which is a quote from William Blake, and *Suicide II, Shot Self-portrait* (1998), where the element of the self-portrait is more visual than verbal as the artist is holding a remote release cord. These works are very powerful as the artist presents them in frames with bullet-perforated glass. The seriality and repetition of the artist's suicide self-portrait shows him as indifferent towards death. Death appears in its glaring

extremes, falling down the stairs, jumping, shouting. Another self-portrait with multiple bullet holes on the artist's face was titled *Finally, We Die* (1998). Bony's motivations behind this series are very different from Bayard's though, as Bony admitted he was extremely scared by death and by the fact of disappearing physically, and these works allowed him the illusion of becoming permanent after death, playing with the idea of death somewhat cathartically (López Anaya, 2002). Contemporary photographs such as Bony's reinforce *Le Noyé's* almost prophetic power and conceptual nature *ante litteram*.



Fig 63 Oscar Bony, left: *El triunfo de la muerte* (*The Triumph of Death*), right: *Suicidio II, Autorretrato baleado* (*Suicide II, Shot Self-portrait*), 1993-98

As discussed, Bayard might not be remembered for having invented photography officially, but *Le Noyé* has given him recognition for having produced the first implausible photographic fiction – and a very sophisticated, layered and somewhat meta-photographic photo-text composition that, similarly to the works of Duane Michals previously analysed in this thesis, challenges both Barthes' categories of anchorage (control) and relay (complementarity). There are a few elements on the relationship between the photograph and the text that make *Le Noyé* an extraordinary photo-text that plays with the very notion of 'meta-photographic', as it subtly touches upon the nature of photography itself, upon its 'trickery as a mere illusion of the real', upon the notion of 'photography as death' and upon the 'artifice of the actual text and image we are seeing' (Batchen, 1999, p 171).

*Apparently this is a photographer who has literally succumbed to photography, destined to return forever with the news that he died at his own hand for having invented the very medium that allows his return. [...] Turning repeatedly on the rhetorical figure of a fake death, Le Noyé engineers a space of uncertainty, a strategic hesitation, a troubling movement back and forth within the very grain of photography's logic* (Batchen, 1999, pp 171 and 173, my emphasis).

And hesitation is another literary theory term that, as I discussed in chapter three, Todorov (1975) employs to establish if a novel belongs to the genre of 'the fantastic' or not, based on whether the reader hesitates or not concerning the verisimilitude of the events narrated. Bayard also offers for the first time the opportunity to 'consume' photography as literature, through elements of storytelling. Furthermore, the text describes quite honestly and explicitly the real circumstances behind the decision to make such a photograph – M. Bayard is 'unhappy' about the government's decision to support M. Daguerre 'more than is necessary', and to declare 'itself unable to do anything for M. Bayard' – anchoring the image to presumably authentic facts and feelings that happened to the author.

At the same time, however, the text refers, ironically and exaggeratedly, to elements that by no means are to be found in the image nor seem plausible. Bayard, like Michals later on, as shown in Figure 47 (Michals, 1977), is intruding the image with other visual and multi-sensorial elements, such as the smell of his corpse due to the 'indefatigable experimenter's' alleged decomposition, or the reference to the morgue, where cadavers were displayed in a lesser compositional and elaborated way. This seems to refer to the limitations of photography, both as a two-dimensional flat object, which only engages with one and half of the five senses, and as a misleading medium that can easily lie, thanks to its mechanical reproduction of what our eyes appear to see, as I discussed in chapter three, via Eco (1982, p 33) and Burgin (1984, p 62) in relation to how this causes the phenomenon of disavowal. So, not only 'by undermining the veracity of the photographic image on its reverse' and having engineered a photo-text 'play' where 'everything is enmeshed with each other', as noted by Batchen (1999, p 171), but also by devising a fact and fiction melange, Bayard succeeded in putting together a highly elaborated meta-photographic work, only a year after the medium was officially invented.

Clearly, we are not in the realm of servility, as the text reveals details of the image playing with its authenticity. However, the image is so important as an early example of staged photography that to reduce it to a mere illustration of the text would

be inaccurate. However, perhaps it is complicated to talk about equal dignity and autonomy. Of course it can circulate, and has been reproduced, many times without the text, and it would not make sense to show the text without the image, so we could infer somewhat a supremacy of the image – but the role of text in this case is so subversive as an impossible *dénouement*, where the paradox between the resolution of how the content of the image is to be read and, at the same time, how impossible, absurd, ironic and unbelievable it is, is so deep that it makes it a perfect example of inseparable pairing with presumed hierarchical relationship that struggles to be fully unravelled.<sup>122</sup> Bayard's self-portrait with his 'suicide note' plays with both functions of photo-text relations, anchorage and relay, creating a mutually transformative force that flows back and forth from the image to the text and vice versa. That's why, even if three variants of the image exist, and only one is accompanied by Bayard 'suicide note', the pairing of photo plus text constitutes the artwork in its own right. As a purely speculative conclusive remark, the fact that the condition of the physical prints in the Collection of the Société française de photographie is impaired as the image is *fading away* – to use one of Robinson's image titles (1858) – and that a retouched version was made with a higher contrast, to better grasp the details of the image, makes me think that the image also deals with the theme of the photograph as an object, exposed and vulnerable to the passing of time, precisely as its author. Poivert (2015) highlights Bayard's adroitness with *mise-en-scène* – which has been praised also by Frizot (1986) – and what really matters within Bayard's theatricality is that it allows us to see most of nineteenth-century photography differently, not as merely determined by the technical possibilities, but above all as capable of making the mechanics and the theories of representation of the epoch correspond.

Nineteenth-century photo-texts are not all limited, primitive or embryonic as Scott (1999) would want us to believe, but, based on the selection presented here, they are demanding, inventive and sophisticated. Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms*, while questioning the concept of literary evolution as improvement, in relation to the genre of parody, asks quite rhetorically: 'The forms of art *change* but do they really evolve or get better in any way?' (2000, p 36). Photo-text hierarchical oscillations, from servility to ancillarity, complementarity,

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<sup>122</sup> Fox Talbot uses the French term *dénouement*, which means both conclusion and climax, in one of his most mysterious photo-text pairings in his *Pencil of Nature: A Scene in a Library* (1844-46) (OED, 2020).



autonomy, inter-dependence, mutual collaboration, confrontationality and so on, not only *change* (rather than *evolve*) within the same epoch, but often they do so within the same artist's oeuvre. Emerson, for example, renowned for changing his mind about what he called 'Naturalistic Photography' in the span of a year (to the point of declaring its death in an 1891 pamphlet), not only changed photographic subject matter and style – from his social documentary work *Pictures from East Anglian Life* (1888) to the lyrical and almost abstract imagery of his 'mist-filled world' in his *Marsh Leaves* (1895) – but also his writing in relation to his photographs became more autonomous and ambiguous (Jeffrey, 1984, pp 161-62, and Durden, 1994, p 283).

This chapter opened Part II of the thesis, dedicated to the analysis of the case studies. It examined a selection of pioneering photo-texts from the early days of photography that present sophisticated photo-text dynamics – as I disagree with the notion of a chronological evolution within photo-text practice, from an alleged embryo or clumsiness in nineteenth-century photo-texts to an equally alleged emancipation among contemporary ones.

The only 'evolution' or 'progress' photo-texts underwent is inevitably technological, determined by developments in printing techniques and layout, but the progress of the modes of operation of the practice should not be confused with that of the content and theory of photo-texts. Hence, I disagree with Hunter, who starts his section 'Development of the Photo Text' with the following observation:

*Before there can be any remarking of an affinity between someone's photographs and someone's text there must be mechanisms for bringing photographs and texts together in the first place, agreed-upon means of publishing composite works* (1987, p 36).

It is true that we nowadays take for granted the presence of a multitude of different types of imagery, including photographic reproductions, in any kind of printed matter, while it took publishers half a century to print a photograph directly onto the page of a book. However, Hunter (1987, p 36) appears to suggest that photo-texts' sophistication is limited by printing techniques, which is not the case – as printing techniques, design and layout might impact on the fruition, might facilitate certain dynamics rather than others, creating proximity, juxtaposition and so on, but ultimately it is the content of the image and the content of the words that mainly intersect, creating the third something. The next case study in chapter six is a good example of this. After a period of rapidly

accelerated technical conditions, as the First World War and its aftermath hastened technological developments in civilian life, especially photography, printing and communication techniques, more radical design practices emerged too (Jubert, 2007). Both beautifully designed books, in Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau's *La Mort et les statues* (1946) text precedes the photographs, whereas in Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* (1955), poems are printed underneath the press clippings. Their different layout may accentuate or reduce some minor aspects of their fruition, but ultimately their opposite political effect is primarily provoked by their photo-text dynamics rather than their design.

*The camera is just as capable of lying as is the typewriter.*

Bertolt Brecht, 1931

## **Chapter 6 Case Study Two: Conflicting Dynamics in Two Post-War Photo-Poems**

This chapter aims to advance photo-text theory, by showing, through the type of photo-poetry discussed in chapter two – in which photographic images and verses are presented together as one work – how the two functions of anchorage and relay introduced by Barthes (1977, pp 39-40) can have a different mission and produce a different effect from the one he envisaged. Indeed, anchorage and relay are terms that, due to the way Barthes (1977, pp 40-1) illustrated them, come with a connotational charge. Anchorage is associated with negative ideas of repression, control and ideology, while relay appears more as an empowering and liberating concept (Manghani, p 80).<sup>123</sup> This chapter demonstrates that this is not always the case, as anchorage can exert a politically liberating function, while relay a dangerous political drift towards unconcern. It is through the comparative analysis of two photo-poetry works produced after the Second World War and about it – Bertolt Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* (*War Primer*) (1955) and Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau's collaborative project *La Mort et les statues* (*Death and the Statues*) (1946) – that I intend to discuss the dangerous hidden potential of relay as well as defuse anchorage's supposed 'dictatorial' connotation. Rather than constituting the main focus of the analysis, the theme of war works here more as a 'common ground' between the works under scrutiny that allows me to better compare and contrast their different photo-text dynamics.

Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* is a collection of press photographs that the author cut out of mainstream magazines and newspapers, and for each of them he composed a poem of four verses (quatrain) to unmask the ideological messages lurking behind the flat, constructed and misleading photographic surface.<sup>124</sup> The photographs are mostly from

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<sup>123</sup> In chapter four I discussed how authors and artists – such as John Berger and Jean Mohr, Victor Burgin, Duane Michals and Roni Horn – knowingly or unknowingly have attempted to undermine the traditional 'anchorage' function as it is too repressive, showing that, contrary to what Barthes (1977, p 40) writes, the 'relay' function is not so uncommon in 'fixed images' and it is much more liberating and interesting.

<sup>124</sup> The scholarship about *Kriegsfibel* is substantial, especially in relation to photo-text and appropriation discussions. The main authors consulted, besides Brecht himself, are: Philip Brady (1978), Jefferson Hunter (1987), Jonathan Long (2008), Jane M. Rabb (1995), Georges Didi-Huberman (2018), David Evans (2003, 2009 and 2012), Tom Kuhn (2006 and 2008) and Andrew Miller (2015). Thanks to Jonathan Long's seminal essay, republished in the digital edition of Broomberg and Chanarin's *War*

the Second World War, Nazi perpetrators, dead Japanese soldiers, Churchill and a few bombed British cities (Brecht, 1955, 1998a, 1998b and 2015). Many pictures were published in the American magazine *Life* and credits are most of the time omitted. Disgusted by the omnipotent delirium of the Nazis, by their lies and propaganda about German supremacy and the ‘benefits’ of war, and pervaded by a yearning to denounce the situation, Brecht felt the need to counter the dangerously fictitious and misleading messages disseminated like viruses by the press – through the creation of a new type of literary genre, a photo-poetic one, which he called ‘photo-epigram’ in his journal notes on 20 June 1944 (1993, p 319). Brecht called these photo-poems ‘photo-epigrams’, because he was inspired by the Greek epigrams, ‘inscriptions engraved by the ancient Greeks on the marble of their tombs’ (Didi-Huberman, 2018, pp 34-40).<sup>125</sup>

In *La Mort et les statues*, Pierre Jahan took clandestinely dramatic photographs of removed bronze statues in Nazi Occupied Paris (1940-44), in the warehouse in the 10th arrondissement where they were amassed before they were melted down and reintroduced in the military industry to become weapons (Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, pp 79-81). Subsequently, to increase the chances of publication of these images, Jahan showed them to Jean Cocteau, who was very impressed and decided to respond to them with prose poems.

Hunter reports that a few of Brecht’s photo-epigrams were initially published ‘in the refugee newspaper *Austro-American Tribune* (1944), where they were described as “documents of our times”’ (1987, p 170). Hunter must have read this information in James Lyon’s *Brecht in America* (1980, pp 160-61 and 282), but sadly he omitted to credit the woman behind the first photo-epigrams’ publication and behind their description as ‘documents of our times’ – namely Elizabeth Freundlich, an Austrian ‘leftist yet not communist’ in exile, who was the editor of the cultural section of the *Austro-American Tribune* and who also compared them with Goya’s painting *Los Desastres de la Guerra* (*The Disasters of War*) in her introduction.<sup>126</sup> All the

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*Primer 2* (2013), I was able to ‘read’ vicariously some of the main German scholarship through his precious translations.

<sup>125</sup> Brecht read August Oehler’s translation, as he writes in his journal in July 1940 (Brady, 1978, p 280).

<sup>126</sup> John Willet, in his afterword of *War Primer*, the English edition of *Kriegsfibel*, also suggests it ‘could be compared’ – together with Brecht’s *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* – with Goya’s *The Disasters of War*, as if it was the first time such a comparison was presented, without mentioning Elizabeth Freundlich (sometimes she used the pen surname Lanzer), who was the first one to make the comparison in 1944 (Willet, 2017, p 88). To be fair, Willet does mention her and her role in publishing the three photo-epigrams in the *Austro-American Tribune*, but he does not credit her for the comparison with Goya (Willet, 2017, p 90).

vicissitudes behind the publication of *Kriegsfibel* are compellingly narrated by both Willet (2017, pp 90-94) and Kuhn (2008, p 176), who highlight Brecht's struggle to overcome ostracism and censorship, as well as the multiple editing and sequencing until the final version – facilitated by the fact that the photo-epigrams were originally mounted as loose pages on a black background, as we can see from pictures of the dummy, as shown in Figure 37 (Brecht, 1944), and in the German facsimile edition of 2008 (Brecht, 2008, p viii-x).<sup>127</sup> After lengthy negotiations with various GDR cultural institutions and publishers, it was finally published with a print run of 10,000 copies as a cloth-bound hardcover with illustrated dust jacket, as shown in Figure 37 (Brecht, 1955), by Eulenspiegel Verlag – *Verlag für Satire and Humor (Publisher for Satire and Humour)* – then in East Berlin, GDR (Long, 2008, p 199).<sup>128</sup> Different is the case for *La Mort et les statues*, which, unlike another collaboration that was never published between Jahan and Cocteau (*Plain-chant*), immediately found a publisher in Paris, the Éditions du Compas in 1946 (Cocteau, 1989).<sup>129</sup>

In October 1941 the Vichy government, allegedly for the needs of national agriculture and industry, declared in the *Journal Officiel* that statues of 'no artistic or historic importance' could be reduced to their material dimensions for their metal

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<sup>127</sup> 'At the end of 1944 Ruth Berlau put together a dummy with sixty-six photo-epigrams under the title *Kriegsfibel* and a copy, which is now in the Harvard University Library, was sent to' German Marxist theoretician Karl Korsch (Kuhn, 2008, p 176). Sadly, Knopf's detailed account of the genesis of *Kriegsfibel* has not been translated into English (Knopf, 1988, pp 410-14, and Long, 2008, p 198). A copy of the dummy is also believed to be in the New York Public Library, but they have not located it so far.

<sup>128</sup> Willet, the editor of the English edition – working closely with Günter Kunert, responsible for the first German edition, and Naomi Replansky, the first to translate some of the photo-epigrams into English – decided to alter the editing and sequencing of the original 1955 German edition and the subsequent 1994 edition, whose final order he describes as 'confusing' and 'irrespective of chronology' (Willet, 2017, p 93). I am sure this was done to make the reading experience more coherent and perhaps to counter the criticism Brecht received of missing the point in his analysis of the imperial warmongers (Kuhn, 2008, p 176). However, I believe that to do so inevitably entails altering the history of the volume, which is why the numbers of the photo-epigrams in this thesis correspond to the French edition curated by Philippe Ivernel, which clearly is more philologically loyal to Brecht's approved German original 1955 edition (Brecht, 2015).

<sup>129</sup> Surprisingly, there is no English edition of this important publication – whose dummy, set in two colours in the idiosyncratic Peignot font, is kept in the Musée Carnavalet Histoire de Paris. The main literature consulted – besides the three French editions (Jahan and Cocteau, 1946, 1977 and 2008), which contain important paratexts, such as Cocteau's original prefaces, Jahan's 1977 postface and Pascal Ory's 2008 preface – has been: Jahan's autobiography *Objectif* (1994) and his main retrospective's catalogue *Libre Cours* (2010), Cocteau's (1921, 1942, 1989 and 2006) most famous works, as well as his texts that relate with the topic of the war, other collaborations he made with photographers and his biographies, as it will emerge throughout the chapter. In terms of secondary literature, not much has been written about this book apart from Kathryn Brown's seminal essay 'Remembering the Occupation: *La Mort et les statues* by Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau' (2012) and Simon Baker's chapter 'Statuephobia! Surrealism and iconoclasm in the Bronze Age' in his book *Surrealism, History and Revolution* (2007).

constituents (Jahan, 1994, p 19, and Baker, 2007, p 222). In December, as Jahan compellingly recounts in his autobiography *Objectif* (1994, p 20), at significant risk to himself he photographed them clandestinely in the deposit where they were taken once removed from their public location in Paris. Cocteau's poetic intervention makes the book's political stance ambiguous, since with his prose poems he transforms Jahan's 'documentary realism into surreal effect', as pointed out by Kathryn Brown (2013, p 286). I shall illustrate how Cocteau's prose poems operate as dangerously escapist relay texts, in that they 'hijack' the reader/viewer from the tragedy of the Second World War, drifting them away from the Nazi perpetrators and their agency, towards political unconcern.<sup>130</sup> On the contrary, I argue that Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* (1955) is an example of photo-poetry in which Barthes' (1977, pp 37-41) function of anchorage has a positive connotation, since Brecht's poetry, while anchoring the reading of the images to the author's interpretation of the press clippings, attempts to 'rescue' them from their ideological surface, shaking people's consciences, awaking and nurturing their awareness on the poisonous nature of the war and preparing them for a *Peace Primer* that sadly never saw the light.<sup>131</sup>

Chapter six looks at the books' photo-text dynamics, discussed together for the first time, which epitomise Jean-Luc Nancy's image-text theory as, by 'attracting and repelling one another', text and images are '*monstrative* and *monstrous* to the other' (2005, p 64), in relation to notions of agency, political oppression, authenticity, mass media manipulation and ruin lust. As pointed out by Nott, each photo-poetic text is 'shaped by the circumstances of its conception and production, and each raises its

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<sup>130</sup> After I used the notion of the 'hijacking photo-text', I found the adjective 'hijacked' in a list of effects that the use of 'non-fictional' writing alongside a photograph can provoke – in Andy Stafford's introduction to his book *Photo-Texts: Contemporary French Writing of the Photographic Image* (2010, p 23), as a translation of Gisèle Freund's (1980) term '*détourner*'. However, I got the idea for this term from a piece of videoart: Johan Grimonprez's *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1997), the hijacking film that uncannily presaged 9/11. Later, I also found a more recent essay by Bernadette Buckley (2018) that uses the term 'hijacking' to describe both Brecht's intention with his selected photographs in *Kriegsfibel* and Broomberg and Chanarin's operation in their *War Primer 2*. I elaborate later in this chapter on why her use of the term is not convincing in relation to Brecht.

<sup>131</sup> The term 'rescue' is clearly a homage to Benjamin's fundamental praise of the caption that I quoted in chapter three, from his 1934 essay 'The Author as Producer' that also includes Brecht's comments on photography: 'What we must demand from the photographer is the ability to put such a caption beneath his picture as will *rescue* it from the ravages of modishness and confer upon it a revolutionary use value' (Benjamin, 1998, p 95, and Chiocchetti, 2012, p 152). On the back of *Kriegsfibel*'s dust jacket, there is a further photo-epigram, whose source is given as the (as yet unpublished) *Friedensfibel* (*Peace Primer*), where an image of young people at school is paired with an epigram in which Brecht reminds them that 'men like' them 'got hurt' and encourages them not to desert but to 'learn to learn' (Long, 2008, p 207, and Brecht, 2017, p 85).

own unique questions as to how poems and photographs interact' (2018, p 10). However, their difference in responding to the *monstrosities* of the war is intriguingly specular, as they deal in an opposite way to each other with the very notion of 'fiction' and offer two nuanced approaches to agency and denunciation that allow me to show how Barthes' photo-text notions of anchorage and relay can present different connotations (Barthes, 1977, pp 39-40). Paying 'acute attention to these nuances' allows us to 'plot the continuities and turning points' of photo-poetic and photo-text history (Nott, 2018, p 10). While in *La Mort et les statues* Jahan's images reveal a hidden true fact and Cocteau's prose poems fictionalise, creating parallel distant universes for the protagonists of the images, Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* has an explicit political mission to unmask the fictions – here intended as war propaganda, disseminated by politicians, the army and the press (Berlau, in Brecht, 2015, p 7 and Brecht, in Broomberg and Chanarin, 2012, pp 110-113).<sup>132</sup> Before discussing in detail their photo-text strategies, I need to further contextualise the works and the authors in terms of their ideas about photography and political views, as it is instrumental to better grasp their scripto-visual dynamics.

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<sup>132</sup> Although the first entry of the OED definition of poetry reads as 'imaginative or creative literature in general; fable, fiction', by no means does this thesis want to suggest that poetry belongs to the genre of fiction and should be treated as such. Poetry is a genre of its own within literature. The link with the notion of 'fiction' is to be read as a poetic response to the misleading, fictional, ideological lies and propaganda disseminated by mainstream capitalist press during the Second World War in the case of Brecht, and, specularly, as a departure from reality, politics and explicit denunciation in the case of Cocteau (OED, 2017). Also see Brecht's *Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties* (1935) – number three is entitled 'The Skill to Manipulate the Truth as a Weapon', discussed later in this chapter (Brecht, in Broomberg and Chanarin, 2012, pp 110-113).



Fig 64 Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau, *La Mort et les statues*. Album/Dummy, size unknown, 1941-46, Musée Carnavalet Histoire de Paris

There are some important structural differences between the two books that make their comparison interesting. The most obvious difference is in quantity. Cocteau and Jahan's photo-poems are only 20 in total, with another nine alternative images that were edited out of the first edition reinserted in the appendix of subsequent editions (Jahan, 1977 and 2008). Brecht produced 88 photo-epigrams, of which 69 were published in the first German edition (1955). Also, in terms of authorship we have two photo-text books and three clear authors. *La Mort et les statues* is a collaboration between the two authors: the photographer, Pierre Jahan, asked poet and filmmaker Jean Cocteau to respond to the images with text to augment the chances of being published and selling more copies, thanks to the 'addition of an author with an established reputation' (Brown, 2012, p 289, and de Thézy, 1992, p 38). While possibly most of the images in *Kriegsfibel* do have an identifiable author, Brecht appropriates



them by presenting them most of the time anonymously and transforming them into his own photo-epigrams (Tifentäle, 2017, no pagination, and Evans, 2009, p 15).<sup>133</sup>

The books share the same photo-text chronological sequence in the sense that the text was produced after the images were taken. However, while in *Kriegsfibel* the epigrams appear below the images, in *La Mort et les statues* Cocteau's prose poems precede Jahan's photographs. How does the text's location impact on the fruition of the pairings? Are the texts ancillary or secondary to the images? Could we say that the texts lack autonomy, if we extrapolate them temporarily and examine them on their own? I shall elaborate on the first issues later. Regarding the second one, I would argue that it is too approximate to discuss text in general, as both works present a certain degree of polyphony and diversity within themselves – but at first glance what strikes me is that while in Cocteau the presence of demonstrative adjectives such as 'this' or 'these' ('ce', 'cet', 'ces'), which refer directly to the image in eight out of 20 pairings, and of verbs such as 'observe', directly addressed to the viewer/reader, increase the dependency of the texts to the images, in Brecht, even if he addresses the viewer/reader directly – a technique derived from his epic theatre – or he explicitly relates to the content portrayed in the image, the references are more subtle (Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, and Brecht, 2017). Both texts at times play with the rhetorical figure of prosopopoeia, in the sense that sometimes they almost read as speech balloons, making the subject depicted speak. However, prosopopoeia in Jahan and Cocteau goes one step further as a literary/rhetoric device and tradition of animating inanimate objects, such as statues, that dates back to the Bible and is recurrent in

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<sup>133</sup> Pascal Ory (in Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, p 7) writes about a 'grey area' of photography rules until the 1950s, when the name of the photographer 'disappeared behind the theme of the reportage or the name of the author of the text or the writer'. There are only six exceptions out of 88 – the total number of photo-epigrams, including also the ones edited out of the first 1955 German edition – in *Kriegsfibel*, where credits appear as part of Brecht's cut-outs. John Bretherick is the author of the image of a 'Sexy carrot', a 'pin-up vegetable' produced by nature in response to the 'current craze' (photo-epigram no. 50 in the English edition). 'Signal Corps Berlin' appears below the final choice of Hermann Göring's image, which is only published in the German and French edition (photo-epigram no. 25 in the latter). 'Associated Press' appears twice, once below the portrait of a German Landser, in photo-epigram no. 65 of the English edition, and in the caption of an image of a German combat aircraft caught as illuminated by the English Army's projectors, in photo-epigram no. 86 in the French edition. George Silk, a photographer from *Life* magazine, is mentioned in the caption about 'exhausted soldiers', in photo-epigram no. 62 of the English edition (Brecht, 2017, pp 62 and 65). In photo-epigram no. 49 of the French edition, there are three miniscule words, which resemble a credit below the sentence 'The German went that way', but it is unreadable (Brecht, 2017, p 59). This poses interesting questions in terms of establishing how appropriation impacts on the text-photo relationship when it comes to iconic images such as Robert Capa's D-Day photograph of a soldier in the surf (photo-epigram no. 63 in the English edition, and Tramz, 2014, no pagination).

Cocteau's oeuvre. For example, if we think about the scene from Cocteau's film *Le sang d'un poète* (1930), where a female statue (played by Lee Miller) starts moving and interacting with the protagonist.

Clearly the political views between the three authors also differ. Brecht was forced into exile and was clearly a victim and active denunciator of the war and Nazi Germany (Lyon, 1980, and Brecht, 1993). Jahan's (1994, p 21) position is one of denunciation and concern as his doubts about whether to publish *La Mort et les statues* or not show, because he considered it somewhat trivial to complain about the death of Parisian statues compared to the atrocity of the concentration camps. Cocteau's stance is by far the most ambiguous, given his presumed right-wing political views, his friendship with Nazi Party official sculptor Arno Breker and his explicit drift towards political unconcern during the Nazi occupation of Paris (Cocteau, 1989, p 112, Brown, 2012, pp 287, 292 and 295).

Both *La Mort et les statues* and *Kriegsfibel* were produced at a time of deep crisis of faith towards language, particularly the written word – 'far more likely to be a vehicle for falsehood' and for 'duplicitous and destructive motives' than the spoken one (Morley, 2003, p 101). As argued by Morley, it was during the Nazi occupation of France that Jean-Paul Sartre, inspired by Martin Heidegger, moulded his existentialist philosophy centred on the argument that 'language should be judged by the simple criterion of authenticity', after the Nazis' mobilisation of words in the service of lies (Morley, 2003, p 101). Intriguingly, yet quite wrongly, Jefferson Hunter describes Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* as a work 'entirely willing to turn photographs against their original uses, in the manner of Nazi propaganda itself: in 1943 the SS journal *Germanische Leithefte* attacked the United States by publishing a selection of FSA photographs with commentary' (1987, p 170). Hunter continues by claiming that its 'primer' nature, which entails simplicity and entertainment, makes *Kriegsfibel* 'entirely willing to fictionalize history: Churchill is pictured with a submachine gun and made to say that he knows the law of gangs, having always worked well with cannibals' (1987, p 170).

Brecht's bafflement towards photography's ability to portray immaterial aspects of reality, such as capitalism's impact on social relations or, for example, the toil of the workers, is summarised in his famous quote that Benjamin includes in his essay 'A Little History of Photography' (1980, pp 213-14) and that I discussed in chapter three (Chiocchetti, 2012, pp 150-52). In 'Über Fotografie', Brecht 'somewhat cryptically suggests that the individual image might also be *redeemed* not by combining it with

another image but by providing it with a *caption*' (Long, 2008, p 204, my emphasis). And *Kriegsfibel* is his response against the misleading power of photography and the need to teach how to read images, which relates to Benjamin's ideas about the illiterate of the future – men who cannot take or read a photograph – and about the essential political importance that captions will have (Benjamin, 1980, p 215). Not surprisingly, Ruth Berlau, the Danish artist and photographer who founded the Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv in Berlin – and collaborated with him on *Kriegsfibel* – stresses, in the preface to the first edition, the importance of the book in teaching us 'the art of reading pictures':

*The widespread ignorance of social relations that is carefully and brutally maintained by capitalism turns the thousands of photographs in illustrated magazines into true hieroglyphs that are indecipherable to the gullible reader* (in Brecht, 1994, BFA, vol. 12, p 129, translated in Brady, 2006, p 315, and Long, 2008, p 217).<sup>134</sup>

Indeed Brecht does not leave much room for interpretation with his resolute stance on photography as part of his 'congratulatory note' for the tenth anniversary, in 1931, of the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (AIZ, Workers' Illustrated News), a magazine to be celebrated 'for serving the interests of truth and restoring "the way things really are"', (Long, 2008, p 203).<sup>135</sup> In the hands of the bourgeoisie, believes Brecht, photography has become a 'weapon against truth', and 'the immense quantity of images that is spewed out daily from the printing presses and appears to bear the stamp of truth in fact serves merely to obfuscate the way things are' (Brecht, 1994, BFA vol. 21, p 515, and Long, 2008, p 204). The passage continues with a sentence that confirms his doubts: 'the camera can lie just as much as the typewriter', which undeniably and metonymically equates the two arts' potential falsehood and inadequacy to reproduce reality (in Grimm, 1975, p 267, and Chiocchetti, 2012, p 151). Rabb, in her *Literature & Photography Interactions, 1840-1990: A Critical Anthology*, writes that Brecht felt that 'photographs alone, however powerful, insufficiently represented complex realities', so he decided to accompany each of his photograms 'with a dense, often

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<sup>134</sup> Surprisingly, although Ruth Berlau is mentioned in the afterword of *Kriegsfibel's* English edition, a proper translation of both her preface and her texts on the dust jacket is not included. This is another anomaly of the English edition. The standard German edition of Brecht's writings (*Werke*) is: (Berlin and Frankfurt: Aufbau/Suhrkamp, 1988–2000), abbreviated as BFA.

<sup>135</sup> As pointed out by Long, Brecht particularly admired the AIZ, because, unlike other illustrated newspapers, it obtained its photographs 'not solely from the picture agencies that flourished in Weimar Germany, but also from organized groups of worker-photographers, whose activities it coordinated. The political value of the A-I-Z thus lay not only in the content of the images it published, but also in its placing the means of representation in the hands of the proletariat' (Long, 2008, p 204).

ironic, formal quatrain', as an attempt 'to provoke the reader to think critically and question all assumptions about society, especially fascist and capitalist ones' (1995, p 330).

In terms of language's inadequacy, Brecht's *Bad Time for Poetry* (1938) ends with the following verses:

*In my poetry a rhyme  
Would seem to me almost insolent.*

*Inside me contend  
Delight at the apple tree in blossom  
And horror at the house-painter's speeches.  
But only the second  
Drives me to my writing desk* (Brecht, 1987, pp 330-31).

'House-painter' is a reference to Hitler and a 1939 fragmentary draft in Brecht's typing has an extra stanza just before 'In my poetry a rhyme', whose last verse reads: 'Why do I only think about war?' (1987, p 575). H.R. Hays, in his seminal 1945 essay 'The Poetry of Bertolt Brecht', describes him as the only social and political poet, who in reaction to the tradition of romantic individualism set out to 'strip poetry of ornamentation and sentimentality' (1945, pp 153-54), what John Willet describes as 'laundering of language', so that it could be 'functional and shaped to teach a lesson' accessible to the ordinary people (2017, p 88). Inspired by the German tradition of folk songs, Brecht 'transformed his verse into a battle cry, a marching song, a keener instrument for satire' (Hays, 1945, p 152). And Brecht himself reveals his poetic sources of inspiration and evolution in his *Journal* in the entry for 3 August 1938 (Brecht, 1993, pp 11-12).

As far as Jahan's ideas on photography are concerned, even if he was a member of the humanist photographers' professional association Le Groupe des XV, which, as pointed out by Leplant (2013, no pagination), espoused the principle of 'real photography', the examination of some of Jahan's works and words prompt me to think that he believed photography to be more a medium of construction than a representation of 'reality'.<sup>136</sup> Although Jahan's 1994 autobiography *Objectif* does not contain a theory of photography as such, let alone a reflection on the role of language, we can find nonetheless some comments, every now and then, that help infer a

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<sup>136</sup> Le Groupe des XV was a collaborative group born in 1946 from the ashes of a similar one called Rectangle, with Willy Ronis and Robert Doisneau among others (Jahan, 1994).

plausible viewpoint. In a short text entitled *Solitude* he writes: 'Certain instants are without object; time seems interrupted; the present does not appear yet as that tiny particle of the future... it's that total and brief paralysis of life that *we have believed*, at times, to grasp' (Jahan, 1994, p 99, my emphasis).<sup>137</sup> Elsewhere in the book, Jahan shows how he enjoys exerting the right to dispose 'as he wishes' of his photographs, allowing himself all his 'regrets', such as collages, superimpositions and inserting balloons to make people and animals speak (1994, pp 106-07). And, in a way, Cocteau's intervention in *La Mort et les statues* speculates on the statues' imaginary thoughts or stories.

Text is a recurrent element in Jahan's works and *La Mort et les statues* is not a sporadic episode of photo-text in his oeuvre. Jahan's work is actually deeply rooted in image-text relations, from his early works as an illustrator for magazines such as *L'illustration* and in advertising, notably for Piguet and Daum, to the book *La Route de Chartre* (1948), where his 'never literal' photographs are described by Frizot (2010, p 15) as more incisive than the 'banal' 1913 text that they accompany – by Charles Péguy on his pilgrimage by foot to Chartres. He was also fascinated by texts written on the walls of a city: 'from politics to protest, from insulting to praising, from roughness to poetry, the wall offers everybody a way to express themselves, the message due to its inevitable concision becomes even stronger... I think that a city is only really lively in proportion to the insults caused to her walls' (Jahan, 1994, p 127). Also, Jahan liked to 'complete' some of his images by juxtaposing text with the photographic surface, such as *A votre bonne santé (Cheers)* (1940) and *Faites votre choix (Make Your Choice)* (1945) – or the later witty series *Petites Annonces (Little Ads)* (1981), where the small rectangles of classified ads of people in search of a partner, encircled and cut out of the press, are juxtaposed with some of his most ambiguous images, some of them portraying dummies (Frizot, 2010, p 20).

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<sup>137</sup> Intriguingly, on solitude and people in the public space he develops the concept of the *quidam* (fellow) as a momentary solitary being, and he loves capturing them (Jahan, 1994, pp 132-34).



Fig 65 Pierre Jahan, *A votre bonne santé (Cheers)*. Montage made with a photograph of the liberation of Paris on 20 August 1944 (Jahan, 1994, p 27), 1940

Frizot (2010, p 19) points out how the ‘surrealist’ drift in Jahan’s work is more a synonym for ‘unusual’, ‘bizarre’, ‘hermetic’ and ‘poetic’ rather than signalling his belonging to the eponymous movement. In describing his surrealist vein, Frizot writes:

*To make ‘surrealist’ images meant first that one was not satisfied with being a photo reporter or a documentary photographer, but that every image was the equivalent of a word, or of an idea and could be considered equal to a text or, even more nobly, to a poem, what later with semiology would be called ‘message’ (2010, p 19, my emphasis).*

However, Jahan was very interested in Surrealism and its characteristics of taking ‘advantage of ambiguity’ and lending itself to ‘transposition’, as claimed by André Breton (Jahan, 2006, no pagination). ‘I think that a photographer – writes Jahan – [...] (even though it is his duty never to falsify) is also entitled to use his negatives as a material which can create a dream. Surrealism is often pathetic or cruel, so why

couldn't it be loveable and poetic?' (2006, no pagination). Intriguingly, in describing Jahan's surrealist style, Frizot writes that it is 'close to Cocteau's spirit', portrayed by François Mauriac as an 'incessant fight with "*L'Ange du bizarre*"', the title of Edgar Allan Poe's 1844 satirical short story whose message is that the bizarre can really happen (Frizot, 2010, p 19, Cocteau, 1926, p 149, and Mauriac, 1957, pp 470-71).<sup>138</sup>

And in what is considered Cocteau's main text on photography, we see Edgar Allen Poe making another appearance. In his 'An Open Letter to Man Ray, American Photographer', published in *Vanity Fair* in 1922, Cocteau declares his distaste for 'the modern' and 'progress', but explains why he was 'seduced' by Man Ray's 'meaningless masterpieces in which ultimately there appear the most voluptuous velvets of the etcher', namely his rayographs (Phillips, 1989, pp 1-3). He writes quite enthusiastically:

*Your prints are the very objects themselves, not photographed through a lens but by your poet's hand directly interposed between the light and the sensitive paper. [...] No doubt, my dear Man Ray, people more attentive to symbols than I will see in your prints (so precious because there exists only one of each) phantasmagorical images and landscape. You come from the country of Edgar Poe. [...] You have liberated painting once again. But backwards. [...] The painter will be able once again, without regrets, to study the human face in detail, and you, my dear Man Ray, will nourish our minds with those dangerous games it craves [...]* (Phillips, 1989, pp 1-3).

Not only does Cocteau make a parallel between the photographer and the poet, which we encounter also in the prefaces of *La Mort et les statues*, but he clearly praises the type of photography that goes beyond realistic representation, that belongs to the 'bizarre' 'country of Edgar Poe', that nourishes the mind with 'phantasmagorical images and landscape' (Phillips, 1989, pp 1-3). If initially photography had freed painters from the task of realistic representation, allowing them to enjoy abstraction, thanks to Man Ray's 'meaningless masterpieces', Cocteau believes that 'now painters may again in good conscience pursue realism' (Phillips, 1989, pp 1-3). However, no matter how

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<sup>138</sup> And Jahan's encounter with Cocteau at Colette's flat at Palais Royal in 1942 was going to mark him, as shown by his 1947 nude *études* of a couple in bed to illustrate Cocteau's 1923 love poem *Plain Chant* – which sadly were never published as a book, because for publishers at that time two naked lovers in bed would represent 'utter desolation' and they were 'still too prudish' to do so (Jahan, 1994, p 47, and 1989, pp 96-97). That was not the case for *La Mort et les statues*, which immediately found a publisher in 1946, especially thanks to the contribution of Cocteau (Ory in Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, p 8, and Jahan, 1989, p 97). But above all, Jahan's 1989 book *Un Anniversaire de Jean Cocteau* is a sublime homage, where he selected 50 or so images from Jahan's archive to be paired with the same number of excerpts from Cocteau's poems – in such a way that Pierre Barillet praises as follows in the preface: 'coming from different horizons, texts and photographs superimpose, merge and speak to us the same language, while nothing is meant for them to serve each other' (Jahan, 1989, p 4).

aestheticised, artistic or metaphorical, the other photographic projects he contributed to as a poet, namely his collaboration with Lucien Clergue and Pierre Jahan, also deal with realism – especially the former’s imagery of the Gypsies of Saint-Marie-de-la-Mer (1850s) and the latter’s removed statues of occupied Paris. But, as I shall elaborate on later, Cocteau, with his poetic intervention, hijacks the images far away from the atrocities that brought them into existence (Rabb, 1995, pp 430-35). As per his alleged apolitical spirit, Claude Arnaud writes in his biography that ‘the social milieu in which Cocteau had been raised had no tradition of resistance’, as apparently he had always ‘managed to maintain a relationship with whoever was in power, whether radical or right-wing’, in order to preserve its ‘prestige and privilege, however much it may have ridiculed or denounced the government in private’ (2016, p 620).

Although in his *Potomak* saga (1919) Cocteau expresses his disquiet towards totalitarian regimes, I believe that when he is actually given the perfect occasion to do so, with *La Mort et les statues*, he is not able to fully take the opportunity. It is surprising that Kathryn Brown, who does not even take into account Cocteau’s works explicitly dedicated to the war, finds *La Mort et les statues* an oeuvre where he expresses ‘revolt’ against the enemy – as what she fails to identify is precisely Cocteau’s ambiguous relation to the concept of agency that makes the comparison with Brecht interesting, as I shall discuss later (Brown, 2012, p 292).

And intriguingly, Cocteau appears three times in Brecht’s *Journal*.<sup>139</sup> We read on 12 June 1940:

*cocteau insists that the idea of tank camouflage came from picasso who suggested it to a french war minister before the great war as a means of making soldiers invisible. cocteau also asks himself whether savages don't paint their skins less to make themselves frightening and more to make themselves invisible. that is a good idea. you make things invisible by destroying their form, giving them an unexpected form, making them as it were not inconspicuous, but at once striking and strange. the germans are marching on paris* (Brecht, 1993, p 57, my emphasis).

Despite the fact that camouflage was of great cultural interest, thanks to Roger Caillois’ paper on animal ‘mimicry’ published in the Surrealist magazine *Minotaure* (1935) – in which he claims that mimicry and camouflage in nature are non-human forms of ‘sympathetic magic’ – the passage is somewhat uncanny, as in my head it mingles

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<sup>139</sup> Brecht includes two of his caricatures, the one of Russian designer Leon Bakst in 1912 and of Picasso with Strawinski, from the days of Diaghilev’s Ballet Russes (Brecht, 1993, pp 59 and 70).



Cocteau's provocative irreverence, ominously arrested by the last solemn sentence about Germany's invasion to occupy Paris, with the becoming invisible via a change of form, melting precisely, of Jahan's statues.

Cocteau was deeply in opposition to any form of racism, and he signed a petition against anti-Semitism in France in 1940 – the same year he made his first public statement, during the Paris occupation, with a letter to young writers published in *La gerbe*, 'whom he encouraged not to lose faith in literature and to keep their distance from politics' (Arnaud, 2016, pp 628-30), which is exactly the opposite of what Brecht suggested to his young readers, namely to be 'reporters' of their circumstances whether in schools or factories (Lyon, 1980, p 160). On 23 May 1942, Cocteau composed the controversial 'Salut a Arno Breker' for the French paper *Comoedia*, on the occasion of the sculptor's exhibition in Paris, in which he begins by 'celebrating a supra-political "homeland" of artists from which nationalist divisions of loyalty have been banished' (Brown, 2012, p 295). However, the most disturbing part anticipates *La Mort et les statues*: 'parce que vous inventez un nouveau piège ou se prendra l'esthétisme, ennemi des énigmes. Parce que vous rendez le droit de vivre aux statues mystérieuses de nos jardins publics' ('because you invent a new trap for aesthetics, enemy of enigmas. Because you give the right to live to the mysterious statues of our public gardens'), (Cocteau, 1989, p 112). As pointed out by Brown, not only did Cocteau celebrate 'aesthetics over political reality', which was a 'signal of defiance to the right-wing French press', but when it comes to the urban landscape of Paris, 'specifically linking Breker's artworks to the city's public statuary could not fail to evoke the disappearance of those very statues between 1941 and 1942' – by the very hands of Breker's protectors and of which Cocteau was very much aware, as we learn from his journal (Brown, 2012, p 295).

Brown and Arnaud describe Cocteau as an opportunistic artist, and the collaboration with Jahan as a strategic 'self-conscious construction of his own public persona during the post-war scrutiny of French artists and intellectuals' (Brown, 2012, p 287). I agree, but I think that while the opportunistic operation of *La Mort et les statues* might have worked at the time, this analysis shows that a careful reading of Cocteau's poems unmasks his problematic political unconcern.

Linked with the notion of political unconcern, a further specular characteristic between the two books is that, while Brecht is coherent with his scruples against the beautification of objects – which, as I shall illustrate, he believes 'has something

obscene about it' in those bad times for poetry – Cocteau, in his handwritten preface to the first 1946 edition of *La Mort et les statues*, writes that the book has been 'composed' during the occupation, 'in an epoch in which we start the great war of the plural against the singular' and that 'the work of Pierre Jahan provides a typical example of beauty that a man alone can derive from an uncountable spectacle' of *laideur*, a word that means both ugliness and meanness (Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, p 15).<sup>140</sup> He refers to the 'kidnapping' and melting down of Parisian statues, and while denouncing it as a 'spectacle of *laideur*', when he refers to Jahan's photographs, I find it problematic that he mentions the notion of beauty in such a context (Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, p 15). Brown also describes this contradiction as an ethical dilemma, as he invites the viewer 'to take aesthetic pleasure in scenes of destruction associated with the recent trauma of war' (2012, p 289). However, if we were to focus on the idea of photography that derives from the above commentary, regardless of its ethical implications, we can infer that Cocteau praised Jahan's ability to adroitly make the most of photography's transfiguring power to transform an ominous phenomenon into something beautiful, which is a distortion nonetheless. In the second printed preface, Cocteau continues with a reflection on poetry, which shows a need to unmask what reality conceals, quite symmetrically dissimilar to Brecht's viewpoint:

*The profession of the poet, a profession that one cannot learn, consists of placing the objects of the visible world that have become invisible through the erasing of routine in an unusual position that hits the gaze of the soul and permeates them with some tragedy. It would be a matter of compromising reality, of catching it in the act [or flagrante], of inundating it with light out of the blue and forcing it to say what it conceals (Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, p 17).*

It is quite astonishing to realise how politically unconcerned the above sentence is – we are right after the liberation of Paris from the Nazis and the discovery of the Holocaust. Cocteau refers to visible objects that became invisible or hidden as the 'gomme de l'habitude', an expression somewhere between dust and routine that, by removing any agency of responsibility, makes denunciation in *La Mort et les statues* almost 'invisible', to use Cocteau's lexicon, as if objects, such as the *removed* statues, became invisible or hidden by themselves, because of routine. This almost serendipitously echoes Brecht's rhetorical opening verse 'A beach was obliged to dye

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<sup>140</sup> As of 2020, an official English translation of *La Mort et les statues* has yet to be published – hence the translations in this thesis are my own.

itself red with blood’ of photo-epigram no. 47 – where he criticises how the original caption of the image of an American soldier, ‘from the so-called “bourgeois press”’, by saying ‘forced to shoot’ ‘a dying Jap’, removed the agency of the perpetrator (Long, 2008, pp 214-15). The last rhetorical question, ‘by whom?’, anchors the image to agency, rescuing it from the dangerously irresponsible original caption.

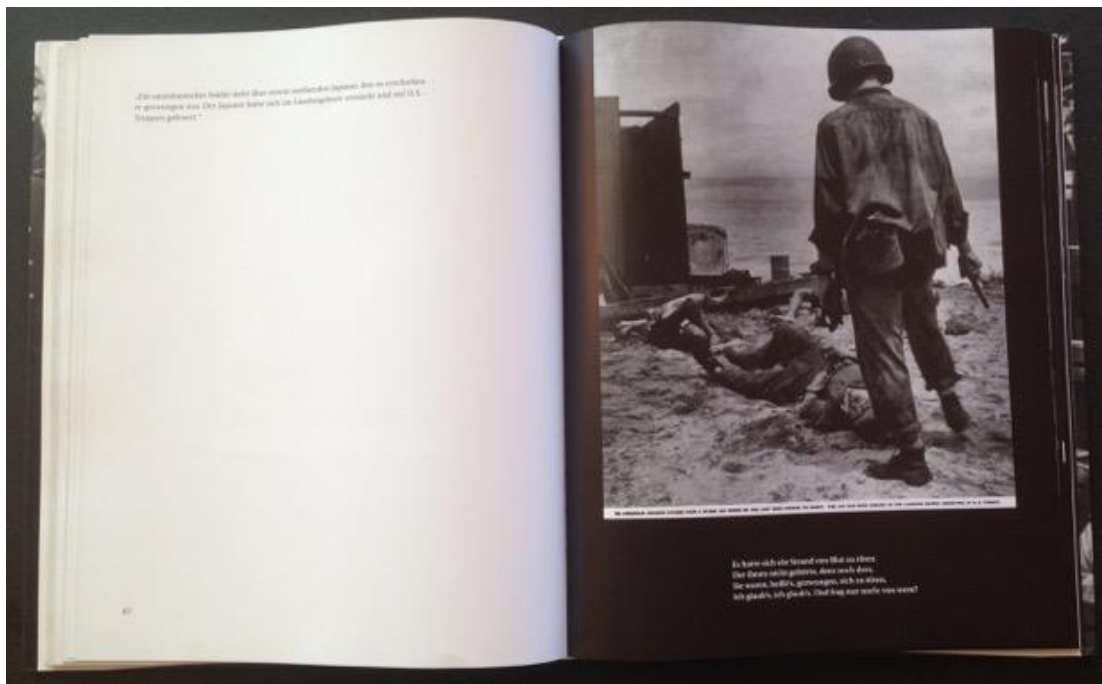


Fig 66 Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfibel* (*War Primer*), photo-epigram no. 47, my photograph

Text:

*A beach was obliged to dye itself red with blood.  
 It belonged to neither of them.  
 They were, so it is said, forced to kill each other.  
 I believe it, I believe it. I just want to ask: by whom?*  
 (Brecht in Long, 2008, p 215)

At times, as pointed out by Long, Brecht includes images that come also with their original captions, which makes the photo-poetic composition even more complex, as he enriches it with a further narrative layer. I am referring to another image where an American soldier is standing smoking a cigarette and looking down towards the dead body of a ‘Jap’ in photo-epigram no. 40 (Brecht, 2017, p 49). Here the agency is even repeated twice, both in the original caption and in Brecht’s quatrain, as the main focus is to show the outrageous spectacularisation of war violence condensed in the ruthless

exclamation of the American soldier: 'I killed him. It was just like in the movies', which dangerously provides an image of war and killing as something as entertaining as cinema (2017, p 49).

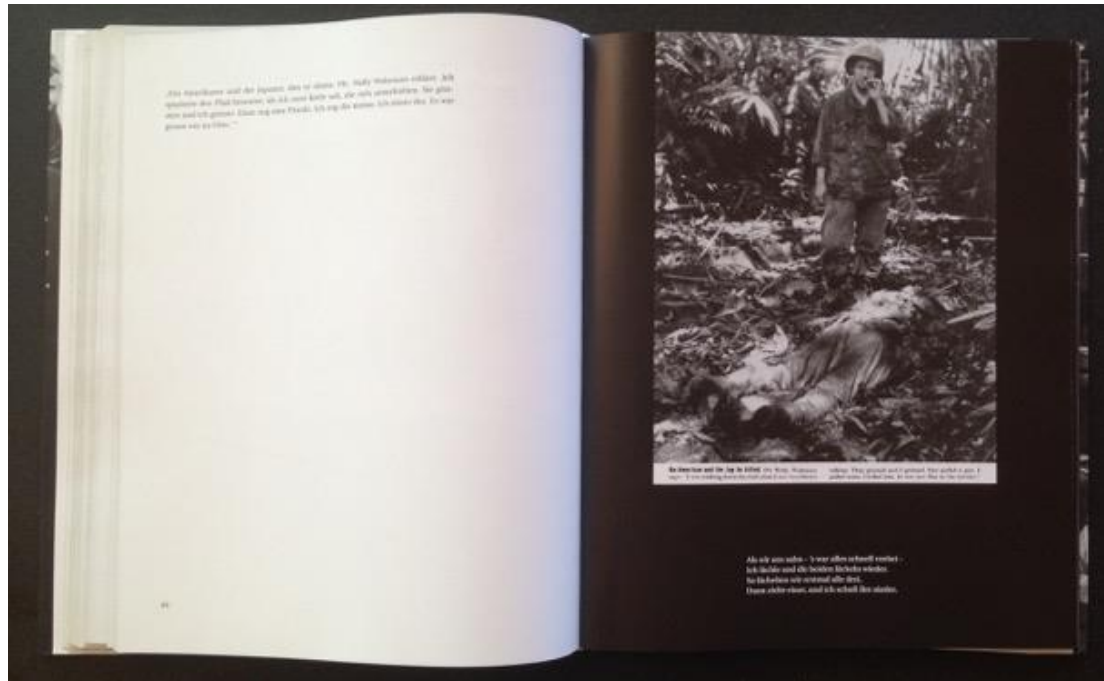


Fig 67 Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfibel (War Primer)*, photo-epigram no. 40, my photograph

Original caption: An American and the Jap he killed. Pfc Wally Wakeman says: 'I was walking down the trail when I saw two fellow talking. They grinned and I grinned. One pulled a gun. I pulled mine. I killed him. It just like in the movies'.

Text:

*We saw each other – it happened very fast –  
I smiled, and both of them smiled back at me.  
And so at first we stood and smiled, all three.  
One pulled his gun. And then I shot him dead.*  
(Brecht, 2017, p 49)

Brecht's poem repeats the content of the caption but lingers on the fact that before the American shot the Jap dead they smiled at each other, and the metamorphosis between an empathic encounter and a homicide 'happened very fast', disturbingly just

like in the movies, except that the Jap was dead for real (Brecht, 2017, p 49). Normally Brecht wanted his audience to be aware of the fiction of his epic theatre, to remind them they were not watching real life so that they could detach and really think; this was his renowned estrangement effect, and here he wanted to emphasise the dangerous parallel between cinema and real life put forward by the caption, reminding the viewers that death did happen for real in this case.

Going back to agency, in the second and final part of the second preface Cocteau continues:

*Pierre Jahan [...] has secretly photographed the deposit where Germany crushed, smashed and melted our statues. As a result, thanks to the angle of his shots, even the most mediocre statue finds splendour and a drama of solitude. I step aside for him. A photographic apparatus is nothing but the third eye of the man who uses it. Hence Jahan's album is an album of poems. Admirable poems where crime breaks out even more than from the spectacle of debris (Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, p 17).*

So, to be fair with him, he does mention Germany, but in a feeble and almost casual way, trying to direct the reader's attention more towards the adroitness of Jahan. Even if the last sentence contains the word 'crime', which entails some degree of denunciation of an action, Cocteau appears nonetheless more preoccupied with admiring Jahan's photographs as they have the merit of being like poems. The last expression, 'the spectacle of debris', degenerates into what Brian Dillon has wittily described as 'ruin lust', namely artists' somewhat perverse visual and emotional fascination with ruins (2014). Also, from a theoretical point of view, Cocteau equalises photography and poetry, something that also Nott elaborates on in his book, as we saw in chapter two: 'poetry and photography seem uniquely suited as analogues to each other', 'both, independently, deal with the seen and the unseen' (2018, p 5), or, as Nancy puts it, they are both 'the *there* of a *beyond*' (2005, p 125). Intriguingly, Ory defines as problematic the equiparation of photography and poetry and, although he does not elaborate further on why he thinks so, he nonetheless wonders somewhat rhetorically whether each photograph isn't stronger than the accompanying text, of which he thinks there isn't always such a need (Ory in Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, p 11).

Unlike Cocteau, Jahan's political consciousness appears more sensitive, when for example he preferred to work for *Images de Frances* – the new and more sober name of what used to be *Plaisir de France* – than for *L'illustration*, as the latter had contact

with the occupiers (Jahan, 1994, p 16). More importantly, Jahan felt that denouncing the 'kidnapping' and melting down of Parisian Republican statues, allegedly to 'reintroduce constituent metals into the circuit of industrial and agricultural production' (Baker, 2007, p 222), in reality to serve the war cause, was somewhat whimsical, a mere 'aesthetic murder', compared to the atrocities of the concentrations camps, which needed much more serious condemnation (Ory in Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, p 10). We could argue that Jahan specifically approached Cocteau because he thought he was a writer whose literary inclinations and ambiguous political position made him ideal to respond more mysteriously to his images, taking them and the viewer/reader away from reality, by hijacking them, and distancing the publication from the more shocking reportages, to whom it would have never stood up.<sup>141</sup>

*La Mort et les statues* and *Kriegsfibel* offer two nuanced approaches to agency and denunciation concerning the monstrosities of the Second World War. Through their 'hijacking' (the former) and 'rescuing' (the latter) photo-text strategies, they present a fascinatingly contrasting photo-poetic attempt to overcome the inadequacy of verbal and visual representation in such sceptical war times, which counters the connotational charge usually attributed to Barthes' functions of anchorage (repressiveness) and relay (complementarity) (1977, pp 37-41). If we look at the uncertain etymological origins and definition of the term 'hijack', it started as meaning 'thug', then 'to steal a vehicle and its contents', and later 'to illegally take control of a vehicle', including an aeroplane, and 'divert it to a different destination'.<sup>142</sup> Perhaps the most common yet bizarre

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<sup>141</sup> *L'Humanité* was the first French newspaper to publish, on 17-18 September 1944, an article about the Nazi death camps, particularly the one near Lublin, namely Majdanek, liberated in July 1944 by the Russian Red Army. The news comes with an image by an unidentified photographer with naked skeletal men (Lestienne, 2015, no pagination). *Time* magazine published an article on Majdanek by a staff writer on 21 August 1944 entitled *Poland: Vernichtungslager*. Then, when the Americans also discovered the concentration camps, images and news started to circulate internationally, such as in the *London News* of 28 April 1945. On 7 May 1945, *Life* magazine published the images of concentration camps by George Rodger, William Vandivert, John Florea and Margaret Bourke-White with piles of dead bodies (Cosgrove, 2013, no pagination). The most atrocious images of the gas chambers and crematoria, known as the *Sonderkommando* photographs, taken clandestinely from the hip of the photographer in the summer of 1944 in Auschwitz, were published, cropped, quite later, as pointed out by Georges Didi-Huberman in his seminal 2003 book *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (Didi-Huberman, 2008, pp 35-36).

<sup>142</sup> It started as 'underworld slang for a thug or hold-up man'. It dates back to 1920, when Ernest Hemingway employed it in the short story *The Ash Heel's Tendon*, later published in 1985 in the *New York Times Magazine*: 'This of course was an exorbitant price for a single bump-off job, but as he explained, "You take it or leave it. I ain't no working stiff. Get some cheap *hyjack* if you want a sloppy job' (Hemingway, 1985). Other early uses go in a similar direction, without particular reference to robbing vehicles. From Nels Anderson's *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* (1923): 'He is a hi-jack caught in the act of robbing a fellow who was sleeping, a greater crime in the jungle than an open hold-up' (Anderson, 1923, p 21). In 1923 it was also used to mean 'robbing a vehicle', as we can read in

explanation is that it comes from a greeting the hijacker would use on his victim: 'Hi, Jack!' (Wilton, 2007, no pagination). The terms 'thug', 'illegally' and 'victim' all point to a negative connotation of the word 'hijack', which is very far from Brecht's rescuing intentions. As pointed out by Brown, for Cocteau 'imaginative engagement with the urban landscape, including the "lives" and "deaths" of its statues, captured both the insult of [Nazi] Occupation and a desire to withdraw from it through art', through 'withdrawing into an ivory tower', to put it with Brecht (Brown, 2012, p 288, and Brecht, 1993, p 218). There is a basic difference between a notion of rescuing by educating readers and one of withdrawing or 'diverting' them from political conscience, hence putting them in a dangerous position of vulnerability, which is implicit in the term 'hijacking'. Also to unveil, to unmask an ideology is more constructive than demolishing it, and more in line with a didactic function of any primer.

Aimed at countering Nazi and war propaganda embedded in press photographs, circulating at the time of the Second World War in mainstream capitalist illustrated press, *Kriegsfibel* teaches the reader/viewer the art of dissecting press pictures. Brecht aims at rescuing the audience and helping them become immune to visual totalitarian ideology. In particular, the two works are analysed by looking at the notion of agency. Unlike Brown, who claims that Cocteau's intervention in *La Mort et les statues* 'pushes the expression of revolt on to the statues themselves', I believe that the photo-text dynamics in the book hijack the reader/viewer away from reality and denunciation (Brown, 2012, p 292). After a brief lament on France's submission to the Nazi occupiers, Cocteau takes the reader/viewer away from the agency behind the images (Jahan, 2008). Rather than denouncing Nazism, Cocteau's prose poems melancholically speculate on the destiny of the memory of some of France's *grands hommes*, whose statues have been 'kidnapped' by the occupiers, with French consent, to be melted down for military purposes (Baker, 2007, p 211). At times Cocteau drifts towards random and whimsical conjectures that refer to animal life and to a completely different epoch, such as when he mentions Leonardo da Vinci, in plate 11 – because in Cocteau's parallel universe, 'Leonard de Vinci' would wonder whom the hunter will catch first between the bear and the eagle, when looking at Jahan's dramatic close-up of the statue 'The Bear, the Eagle and the Vulture', which was originally located at the

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*Literary Digest* of 4 August of that year: "I would have had \$50,000" – said Jimmy – "if I hadn't been hijacked" (Wilton, 2007, no pagination).

fountain of Square Montholon in the 9th arrondissement of Paris (Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, pp 40-41). I believe this is even more dangerous in terms of confusing the political awareness of the audience, as Cocteau's texts, unlike Brecht's poems, precede the images on the left. It is unpredictable and perhaps subjective to establish what a general, implied human eye will look at first – unless we enter the field of neuroscience, which is fascinating yet beyond the purpose of this research. It might occur that, regardless of the text on the left, the eyes are sliding more quickly towards Jahan's dramatic square image on the right. However, the movement implied in leafing through a book with the text on the left and the image on the right entails somehow accompanying the eyes, sliding them along from the text towards the image. Particularly, with their typographical decision to have the keyword and title of the plate in bold, which makes it stand out of the bulk of Cocteau's short prose poems, it is plausible that the word impresses the retina and mind right before the eyes reach the photographic image. When these words are vague ('androgen, enigma, mirages, void, style'), or refer to animals ('the bear and the eagle, alligators'), or to characters or entities of other epochs, such as soldiers of Cleopatra or the Roman Empire, it is somewhat inevitable that they set the atmosphere for the viewer/reader to be hijacked away from the horrors of the war and its perpetrators. Unlike Cocteau's, Brecht's text is more circular, satirical and most of the time anchored in that very horrible present or extremely recent Nazi past, obliging the viewers/readers to re-immense themselves critically in the image and participate in its very deconstruction.





Fig 68 Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau, *La Mort et les statues*. Book spread, Paris: Les Éditions de l'Amateur, plate 11, my photograph



Fig 69 The statue 'The Bear, the Eagle and the Vulture' in its original location, the fountain of Square Montholon, Paris, 9th arrondissement, source: <https://www.messynessychic.com/2016/01/07/where-the-statues-of-paris-were-sent-to-die/>

Jonathan J. Long, in his seminal 2008 essay 'Paratextual Profusion: Photography and Text in Bertolt Brecht's *War Primer*', by going beyond the mere relationship between photograph and text – namely by examining 'all of the numerous paratexts (original newspaper captions, titles, explanatory notes, foreword, jacket copy, title page, and author's signature)' (Long, 2008, p 197) – argues against most critics' view of *Kriegsfiibel* as 'a didactic', 'unitary', 'Marxist corrective to "Western" histories of the war' (Grimm, 1975, p 263). This view is in line with a more nuanced and reception-based approach to the analysis of photo-texts also proposed by this thesis, in which, while we believe that *Kriegsfiibel* perfectly epitomises an attempt of 'rescuing photo-text', it does not necessarily entail a univocal and monolithic type of rescuing. On the contrary, the book presents diverse and changing responses specifically prompted by the content of the individual press images and the 'changing face of the war' (Brecht, 1993, p 319). For sure we can describe it as cyclical, given that the book in its original version starts and finishes with a picture of Hitler (Brecht, 2015, pp 9 and 145).<sup>143</sup> In the opening photogram Hitler is portrayed as giving a public speech and looking up, somewhat mystically, even above the Nazi swastika that appears in the top right, as if

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<sup>143</sup> The first is from a famous photo-shoot series by Hitler's official photographer Heinrich Hoffmann, who helped construct Hitler's public persona (Hoffmann, 2014).

he had received some kind of divine command. The accompanying poem apocalyptically subverts Hitler's message by making him *confess*, yet fictionally, that 'precipice' is 'the way Fate has prescribed' for them (Brecht, 2017, p 1).



Fig 70 Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfibel (War Primer)*, photo-epigram no. 1, my photograph

Text:

*Like one who dreams the road ahead is steep  
 I know the way Fate has prescribed for us  
 That narrow way towards a precipice.  
 Just follow. I can find it in my sleep*  
 (Brecht, 2017, p 1)

In this photo-poem, dated 14 March 1940, the words recall and mock Hitler’s speech in March 1936 in Munich, where he said: ‘I take the path that Fate dictates with the assurance of a sleepwalker’ (Willett, 2017, p 100). Disturbingly, it appears that such a sentence might have ‘hypnotised’ Cocteau, who, through Arno Breker and his Greek wife’s anecdotes, was temporarily fascinated by Hitler (Arnaud, p 668).

So, if before March 1936 Hitler seldom if ever spoke of himself in pseudo-mystical terms, using ‘messianic’ symbolism, from the 1936 speech that inspired Brecht’s photo-epigram onward, ‘the mystical relationship between himself and Providence’, or Fate, became almost constant in his major speeches, together with the belief in his own infallibility that became ‘ingrained in his rhetoric’ (Kershaw, 1987, p 82). However, I believe that in this particular sentence that caught Brecht’s attention, Hitler is clearly aiming at persuading his audience that he is there because Fate wants him there and

that he will follow the way she has dictated. In doing so, he replaces his agency with Fate, an inevitable and mysterious semi-divine force, as if he wanted to play it safe in the eventuality of having unsatisfactory results (which was clearly the case) – emphasising that it would not have been his fault had this happened. Summoning Fate is an attempt of ‘self de-agencification’, of preserving himself from any possible future accusations for what will be described as crimes against humanity, because, after all, he is only following the ‘dictated path’, so he cannot be held accountable. I doubt it is a coincidence that Brecht referred to this particular quasi-religious passage, paving the way for his rescuing photo-text method, which develops a subversion through a combination of prosopopoeia and apotheosis, pushing Hitler’s lethal absurdities to the extremes. By making Hitler say that the ‘dictated path’ he is taking brings us towards ‘precipice’, namely Germany’s catastrophic and apocalyptic finale in the Second World War, Brecht, instead of unmasking the real agency behind said precipice – namely Hitler himself and his omnipotence delirium – ironically and sarcastically takes his attempt of ‘de-agencification’ to the extreme, highlighting the absurdity of the idea that Fate wants us all to succumb and perish, as well as the ridicule and danger behind encouraging the following of this mysterious and evil Fate like a ‘sleepwalker’. By questioning directly our capacity to recognise the truth and to prevent catastrophes, through the courage to refuse to annihilate our will and stop following like sheep or sleepwalkers, Brecht wants to awaken us from the universal notion of war propaganda.

I disagree with Miller, who, pushing to the extremes Hunter’s aforementioned view on *Kriegsfibel*’s ‘will to fictionalize history’, writes that ‘applying prosopopoeia to the “heres” and “nows” of these press photographs’ entails that Brecht ‘engages with injustice’, as he miscaptions their image ‘to serve his own political agenda’ (Miller, 2015, p 236). If Brecht had a political agenda that might have been to spread awareness and pacifism, which was one of the reasons his *Kriegsfibel* was rejected multiple times by publishers as it was considered too pacifist – and the aforementioned *Peace Primer* never saw the light – I cannot see how denouncing war can be related with any notion of injustice put forward by Miller (2015, p 236). As noted by Rabb, when *Kriegsfibel*’s ‘sales floundered, Brecht offered to recommend the book personally to likely libraries and other institutions, arguing that “our mad suppression of all the facts and judgement about the Hitler years and the war has got to stop”’ (Rabb, 1995, p 330, and Brecht, 1990, p 691). Paradoxically, and particularly in these photo-epigrams with Hitler as the protagonist, Brecht might have had a similar preoccupation as the one

Hitler himself had and shared in his speech in Leni Riefenstahl's 1933 documentary, *Der Sieg des Glaubens (The Victory of Faith)*: a very basic 'never again': November 1918 for Hitler, the war and the holocaust for Brecht. This 'never again' warning relates to the closing image of Hitler screaming, which appears with his date of birth, 20 April 1899, and the following sarcastic poem:



Fig 71 Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfibel (War Primer)*, photo-epigram no. 61, my photograph

Text:

*That's how the world was going to be run!*  
*The other nations mastered him, except*  
*(In case you think the battle has been won) –*  
*The womb is fertile still from which that crept*  
(Brecht, 2017, p 81)

Interestingly, *La Mort et les statues* is also visually cyclical as it starts (Figure 72) and ends (Figure 73) with photographs whose focus is the leg of a 'removed' statue, about to be melted down.



Fig 72 Pierre Jahan, plate 1, from *La Mort et les statues*. Silver gelatin, size unknown, 1941-46

Text:

*Ce **tambour** tué ne connaissait ni le choc de chars  
d'assaut ni les pieux de fer  
qui traversent les bottes,  
mais son tambour a su  
defender sa peau et bat  
encore la charge.*

*(This killed drummer did not know neither  
the tanks' shock nor the iron poles  
that perforate the boots,  
but his drum knew how  
to defend its skin and still fights).*

(Cocteau, 2008, no pagination, my translation)



Fig 73 Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau, *La Mort et les statues*. Book spread, Paris: Les Éditions de l'Amateur, plate 20, my photograph

Text:

*Une jambe, un pied nu, un  
style. Voilà ce qui reste  
des festins du roi. La petite  
vérole met tout ce beau  
monde en fuite.*

*(A leg, a naked foot, a  
style. That's what's left  
of the king's feast.*

*The smallpox makes  
All that beautiful world escape).*

(Cocteau, 2008, no pagination, my translation)

Particularly, the last sentence of the first prose poem about the drummer boy who 'continues to beat the charge in the face of death' inspired Brown to construct the entire argument of her paper, that *La Mort et les statues* is Cocteau's 'important public statement' and an explicit 'corrective' of his earlier support to Breker, which she judges 'at best, naïve and, at worst, opportunistic' (Brown, 2012, p 292).

Brown claims that Cocteau displaces ‘muted public responses to the removal of Parisian statuary’ and pushes the expression of revolt on to the statues themselves’ (Brown, 2012, p 292). The drummer boy is not alone in this alleged ‘revolt’. Brown also includes the alligator statues of plate 12 (Figure 74), removed ‘from the basin surrounding Jules-Aimé Dalou’s *Triumph of the Republic* in the Place de la Nation’, who unite to form ‘barricades’, with their ‘appalling tangle’, as Cocteau calls it in the accompanying prose poem, against ‘the enemy’ mentioned in the prose poem to accompany the following plate 13 (Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, no pagination). Lastly, Brown links the presumed ‘act of rebellion’ of the ‘imprudent’ centaur of plate five ‘to the sounds of war’, as Cocteau wrote that ‘his face expresses revolt and his silent cries resemble the siren alarm’ (‘Son visage exprime la révolte. [...] Son hurlement silencieux ressemble aux sirènes de l’alerte’) (Brown, 2012, p 292). I would like to argue that no matter how fascinating it sounds, this argument is weak because Cocteau’s presumed ‘corrective’ is clumsy, as, with his ‘hijacking’ texts, he cannot resist drifting away from the very circumstances and perpetrators who caused such images to exist.



Fig 74 Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau, *La Mort et les statues*. Book spread, Paris: Les Éditions de l'Amateur, plate 12, my photograph

What is actually appalling is to create further confusion for the viewer/reader by speculating that statues of alligators that originally symbolised the enemy of the Republic, removed by the other enemy the Nazis and Vichy to become bullets, are ‘participating’ in the barricades. Which barricades? Against whom? Perhaps there are



too many enemies that mingle in this bizarre photo-poem. Happily, I can quote Cocteau himself to describe his own incomprehensible stance: 'I saw it as indecipherable as a hieroglyph that represents a crocodile and tells about a battle/fight', he writes to describe his weird and diabolic imaginary beings *Les Eugènes* in his novel *Le Potomak* (1919), somewhat reminiscent of Comte de Lautréamont's 'chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella' (Cocteau, 2006, p 34, and Lautréamont, 1868-69).

The centaur's silent scream creepily reminds me of Brecht's photo-epigram 39 'Singapore Lament' (Fig 78), of the mother who has just lost her son, and inevitably puts Cocteau in an ethically problematic, if not irreverent, position and causes Brown's argument to collapse. Perhaps Cocteau should have woken up from his 'mauvais rêve d'un poète' ('bad dream of a poet') and engaged with Jahan's images in a way that would have really hunted down Nazism, as he wrote in his journal in 1945.

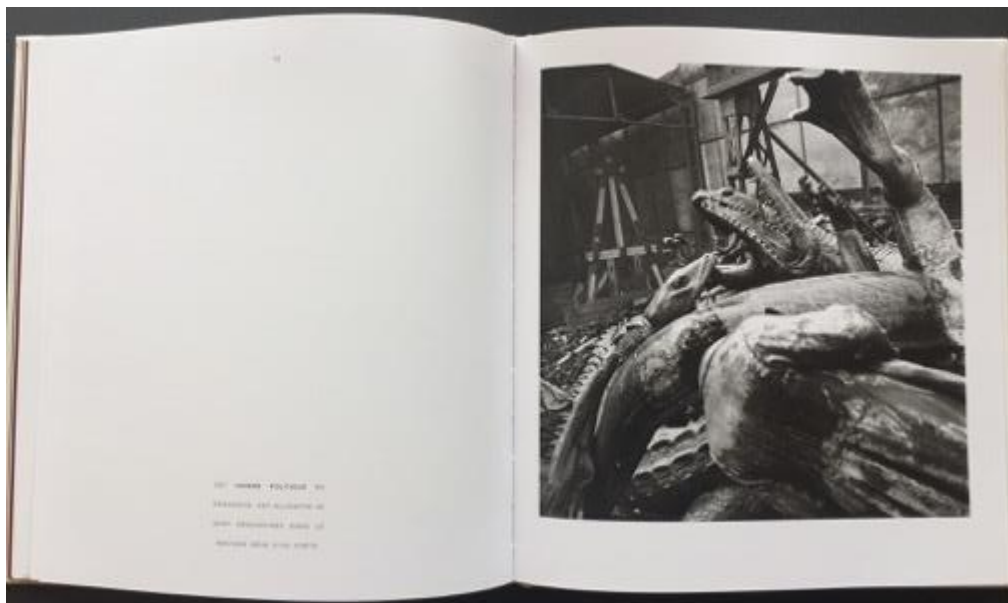


Fig 75 Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau, *La Mort et les statues*. Book spread, Paris: Les Éditions de l'Amateur, plate 14, my photograph

If I wanted to visualise the hijacking effect of Cocteau's prose poems on Jahan's imagery, it is Jahan himself who provides us with the perfect picture: Monsieur Thiers, who, like Cocteau, 'quitte' ('leaves') reality with the heavy ethical charge of doing it in plate 17 (Figure 76).



Fig 76 Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau, *La Mort et les statues*. Book spread, Paris: Les Éditions de l'Amateur, plate 17

I wonder if it is a coincidence that the very last word Cocteau writes in *La Mort et les statues* is 'fuite', namely 'escape', as escapism is the main atmosphere of his hijacking texts that drift the reader/viewer away from the political and historical context of Jahan's photographs towards unconcern.

Going back to Brecht, the title *Kriegsfibel* (*War Primer*) is not new in his oeuvre, given that in 1937, while exiled in Svendborg, Denmark, he composed unrhymed epigrams that he entitled *Deutsche Kriegsfibel* (*German War Primer*) – which he published in the Moscow-based German monthly *Das Wort* and later included in his *Svendborg Poems* (Isenberg, 2017, no pagination, and Willet, 2017, p 87). Also, within Brecht's work, the co-presence of photographs and texts dates back to his journals, with his portrait being the first photograph to appear in between his notes of 16 and 18 August 1938, attributed to an unknown photographer in the editors' notes of the German edition only – as neither the French nor the English editions comment on the image (Brecht, 1994, BFA, vol. 26, p 320).<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup>According to Long, who quotes from Knopf, as early as the 1920s Brecht began to collect newspaper cuttings, often providing them with explanatory captions as a way of commenting on contemporary events (Knopf, 1988, p 410). As Dr. Erdmut Wizisla, of the Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv, replied to my enquiry, 'they are not published in the journal since they are not part of it. They exist separately. Brecht started the journal in 1938. We do have a lot of clippings collected by him before and later, most without any description or context, but some with short texts or fixed in notebooks or on paper sheets. Some of them are published, but most of them are not' (Wizisla, 2018, no pagination).

Indeed a number of photographs and photo-epigrams that appear in Brecht's journal were later published in *Kriegsfibel*. The other not included is number six in *Kriegsfibel*, on the attack to Norway on 1 May 1940, which deals with the notion of agency, as an image of fires 'blazing' in the 'lonely fjords' of 'the Arctic regions' is paired with a quatrain that 'interpellates' – an Althusserian term that will reappear in the analysis of Victor Burgin's work in the next chapter – fishermen to ask them who is behind these 'deadly legions', and they sarcastically respond: 'our great Protector, protected by the night' (Brecht, 2017, p 6, and Long, 2008, p 209). The same editor of the journal, John Willet, gives a different translation of the last verse as: 'a gunman who loomed up at dead of night', which is less convincing, as the most common translation for 'Schützer' is 'protector' rather than 'gunman'. 'Protector' also sounds more in line with Brecht's primer tendency of introducing, sarcastically, a somewhat divine, unpredictable and mysterious agency behind the disasters of the war, to underline, by contrast, that those actually responsible are quite easy to identify – hence in the future war should be easier to avoid. This is a message he would probably have developed in his sadly never produced *Peace Primer* (Brecht, 1993, p 320, and Kuhn, 2008, p 176). Intriguingly, before having the title of *Kriegsfibel*, when the three photo-epigrams were initially published in 1944 in the *Austro American Tribune*, they were presented as 'extracts from a longer work by Brecht' – whose initial 'revealingly biblical title' was *Und siehe, es war sehr schlecht (An Inversion of Genesis)*, which, together with the desire to deconstruct Hitler and Nazi propaganda's semi-religious language, might explain all the religious references in the poems, such as the daring 'God is a fascist' in photo-epigram no. 4 (Kuhn, 2008, p 176).<sup>145</sup> The dramatic 'Singapore Lament', in photo-epigram no. 39, where Brecht addresses directly the screaming mother portrayed in the image, also revolves around quasi-religious agency.

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<sup>145</sup> The image of German-Jewish writer Lion Feuchtwanger is also included in the *Journal* cropped and with another caption in the journal on 22 July 1944. As pointed out by Long, photo-epigram no. 13, with its intentionally confusing repetition of the word 'enemy', denounces the 'absurd Allied policy of interning so-called enemy aliens with scant regard for anything beyond nationality, a practice which resulted in Germans of all hues, including Nazis, Jews, and communists, living in the same camps' (Long, 2008, pp 213-14). The caption in *Kriegsfibel* that Brecht decided to include highlights the image's adventures to be published, which echo Feuchtwanger's own adventures to escape from Nîmes to America (Long, 2008, pp 213-14). The caption of the cropped version that Brecht pasted in his journal reads 'America has much to learn from the fate that befell French Democracy. One of our greatest articles was Lion Feuchtwanger's "Lost Souls Limited" in which he pictured the tragedy of France's fall' (Brecht, 1993, p 156).

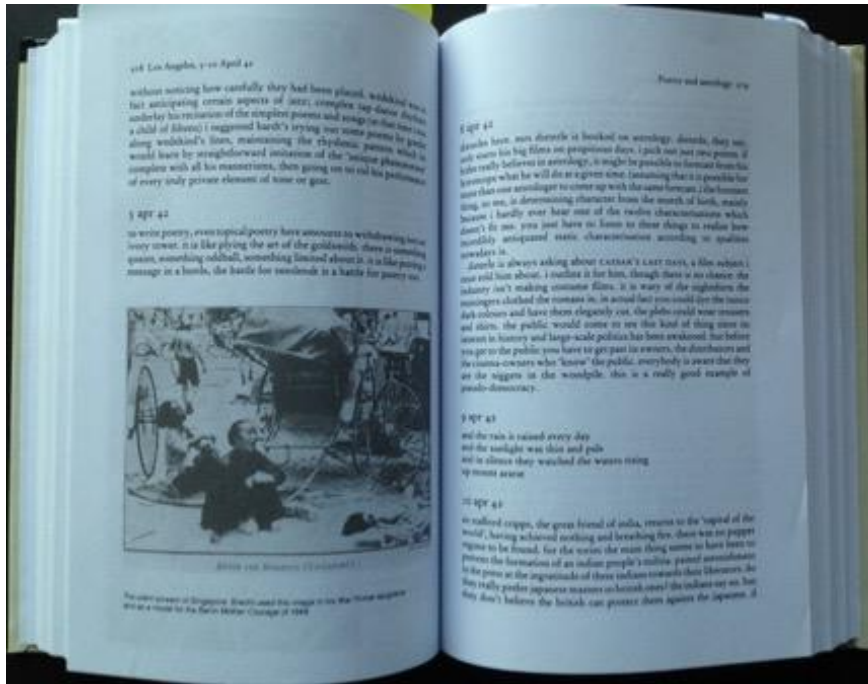


Fig 77 Bertolt Brecht, *Journals 1934-55*. Book spread, pp 218-19, London: Methuen, 1993, my photograph



Fig 78 Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfibel (War Primer)*, photo-epigram no. 39, my photograph

Text:

*O voice of sorrow from the double choir  
Of gunmen and the victims of the gun!  
The Son of Heaven needed Singapore*

*And no one but yourself needed your son*

(Brecht, 2017, p 48)

Here we witness another interesting contraposition, ‘playing’ with the concept of agency. Instead of making explicit the ‘rhetorical means by which agency can be suppressed in discourse’, here Brecht compares the ‘need’ of the desperate mother for her lost son, with what he calls sarcastically the ‘needed’ aerial attack by the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service on the English base in Singapore on 8 December 1941, the day after Pearl Harbour in Hawaii Territory (Long, 2008, p 2016, and Brecht, 2017, p 48). But who needed this aerial attack? ‘The Son of Heaven’ Brecht says (2017, p 48). Again, a divine, unpredictable – if not whimsical – mysterious agency. If we now focus on the mother and her loss, it is important to draw a parallel with *La Mort et les statues*, where we also encounter a kind of artificial family loss, although perhaps a more disturbing one compared with Brecht’s.

In the second pairing of the book an image of a statue of a young man only covered with a shroud, and shot from such an angle that he seems to be looking down with sadness, is preceded by the following text by Cocteau:

*Ce jeune orphelin de l’exode n’a pas seulement perdu sa famille et sa maison. Il a perdu son époque. Sur cette traverse de metal il refuse de regarder un univers des machines auquel il ne comprend rien. Il ne veut ni poudre, ni balles. Il a une epine dans le pied. (This young orphan of the exodus not only lost his family and home. He lost his era. On that metal sleeper he refuses to look at a universe of machineries of which he understands nothing. He wants neither dust, nor bullets. He has a thorn in his foot)* (Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, p 22).



Fig 79 Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau, *La Mort et les statues*. Book spread, Paris: Les Éditions de l'Amateur, plate 2

Not only is it in bad taste to lament the orphaned destiny of a statue in an era of approximately 55 million human victims of the Second World War, but also to hijack the viewer/reader away from the circumstances and the agency behind the existence of such an image and to take them on a completely different journey – a journey focused on the denial of the statue to understand modernity ('machineries') and what happened – is a desolate if not hopeless response that can easily degenerate into political unconcern. Indeed Brown talks about 'temporal and physical displacement' to describe Cocteau's tendency to complement Jahan's 'visual focus on the fates of specific statues' by identifying them as 'victims of "crimes" committed during the immediate past' (Brown, 2012, p 291). However, how the statue of this 'solitary orphaned boy slumped amongst the wreckage evokes' for Cocteau 'the fate of French refugees', which Brown speculates, is a mystery to me, as Cocteau makes not even a subtle reference to this parallelism (Brown, 2012, p 291). Unlike Cocteau, Brecht obliges readers/viewers to stay anchored to where we are in the image, to identify its vices and ideological viruses lurking behind its surface until they can look at it with different eyes: eyes that are rescued, cured as they have gained awareness.

In her 2018 essay, Bernadette Buckley uses the term 'hijacking' to describe both Brecht's intention with his selected photographs in *Kriegsfibel* and Broomberg and Chanarin's operation in their *War Primer 2*. She writes:

*This 'selecting and taking possession' of an external source is entirely against the spirit of the Brecht's Marxian project, which, rather than 'appropriating' images of the war, seeks more often than not, to vandalise them, by effectively scrawling all over them in a kind of poetic hijack. The effect is less to 'appropriate' a prior image than to demolish it, ideologically speaking (Buckley, 2018, no pagination, my translation).*

However, I believe that the term 'hijacking' is more appropriate to describe the effect of Cocteau's prose poems on Jahan's images, because, as shown above, Cocteau's text, which unlike Brecht's precedes Jahan's image, takes over the attention of the reader/viewer, while 'in transit' back and forth from text to image, and forces it to move towards a destination that is far away from the reality and the agency that originated the images. In this sense we could go as far as to describe his texts as between political naivety or unconcern and 'reactionary' as, through distraction, 'at a point in French history at which any sense of humanity demanded an unequivocal stance', they hijack political consciousness and nurture unconcern, a dangerous condition that can easily become a victim of totalitarianism (Boyarin et al., 2003, pp 369-71, and Gray, 2003, no pagination). For Brecht's operation in *Kriegsfibel*, the term 'rescuing photo-text' better reflects the political and didactic purpose of 'attaching' epigrams with a clear intent of unmasking the political agenda behind the pictures – anchoring their floating chain of proselytising/lobotomising signifiers, rescuing them from their own embedded ideology to return to the reader/viewer their actual meaning, which is anchored in real political and tragic circumstances.

Brecht started a 'linguistic clean-up' in Finland and this made him reconsider his ideas on the evolution of poetry, which he shares in two fundamental earlier entries in his journal on 22 and 24 August 1940 (1993, p 90). 'Certainly – he writes – ours is a time when the poem no longer serves to "*haunt, to startle, to waylay*". Art is an autonomous sphere, though by no means an autarchic one', which relates to his somewhat cryptic yet important parallel between the battle of Smolensk and the one for poetry (Brecht, 1993, p 91). Intriguingly he highlights poetry's active reception process and compares it with seeing:

*Poetry is never mere expression. Its reception is an operation of the same order as, say seeing and hearing, ie something much more active. Writing poetry must*

*be viewed as a human activity a social function of a wholly contradictory and alterable kind, conditioned by history and in turn conditioning it. It is the difference between 'mirroring' and 'holding up a mirror' (Brecht, 1993, p 91).*

Somehow though, Brecht felt that poetry alone was not enough, hence he opted for composing photo-poetry, which goes one step further in overcoming poetry's limit and this relates to Jean-Luc Nancy's aforementioned image-text theory (Nancy, 2005, p 64). By 'attracting and repelling one another', text and images are '*monstrative* and *monstrous* to the other': press photographs with their ideological and hieroglyphic patina are *monstrous* and in need of deconstruction by Brecht's verses, which allow him, in turn, to demonstrate the images' monstrosity while rescuing them from it (Nancy, 2005, p 64).

Brecht's austerity towards the concept of aestheticisation is also shared with Benjamin and derives from their critique of the photographic trend known as New Objectivity, such as the 1928 photobook *Die Welt ist schön (The World is Beautiful)* by Albert Renger-Patzsch – which, by turning social inequalities such as 'abject poverty' 'into an object of enjoyment', through its 'modish' and 'technically perfect' representation, is an 'extreme example of what it means to supply a production apparatus without changing it' (Benjamin, 1998, p 95, and in Chiocchetti, 2012, p 163).<sup>146</sup> This is their preamble that allows them to praise the rescuing properties of the caption. However, in those dark times for poetry, when 'a conversation about trees is almost a crime', 'because it implies silence about so many horrors', as he wrote in his 1939 poem *An die Nachgeborenen (To Those Born Later)*, the traditional use of captions can also be misleading in the hands of propaganda – hence the rescuing effect of poetry not only helps unmask the ideology embedded in press photographs, but also in how they can dangerously circulate with manipulative texts appended to them (Willet, 1998, pviii, and Brecht, 1976, pxxi). It is Brecht himself who shows us a perfect example of how an apparently innocent photograph can be manipulated in the service of capitalism and fascism through a caption that not only removes the agency

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<sup>146</sup> However, when it comes to his own work, some years later in another journal entry on 10 June 1950, Brecht seems to slightly contradict himself, as after reading a text 'written by a working class student in Leipzig' on his own work and Gorki's, he appears somewhat disappointed by the overabundance of ideology and the lack of any aesthetic concept (Brecht, 1993, p 429). He makes a culinary parallel: 'the whole thing is like the description of a dish in which nothing is said about the taste. the first thing we have to do is institute exhibitions and courses to develop taste, ie for the enjoyment of life' (Brecht, 1993, p 429). Perhaps the post-war date of this commentary justifies its nature and encouragement of the enjoyment of life.



but also distracts the reader/viewer, making them focus on a fake 'positive' agency. In the third difficulty of *Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties*, entitled 'The Skill to Manipulate the Truth as a Weapon', originally published as a short text in *Pariser Tageblatt*, in December 1934, he writes:

*After a great earthquake that destroyed Yokohama, many American magazines published photographs showing a heap of ruins. The captions read: STEEL STOOD. And, to be sure, though one might see only ruins at first glance, the eye swiftly discerned, after noting the caption, that a few tall buildings had remained standing. Among the multitudinous descriptions that can be given of an earthquake, those drawn up by construction engineers concerning the shifts in the ground, the force of stresses, the best developed, etc., are of the greatest importance, for they lead to future construction which will withstand earthquakes. If anyone wishes to describe Fascism and war, great disasters which are not natural catastrophes, he must do so in terms of a practical truth. He must show that the possessing classes to control the vast numbers of workers who do not own the means of production launch these disasters. If one wishes successfully to write the truth about evil conditions, one must write it so that its avertible causes can be identified. If the preventable causes can be identified, the evil conditions can be fought (Brecht in Broomberg and Chanarin, 2012, pp 112-113).*

This passage, which surprisingly is not so often quoted by scholars, is fundamental in shaping the role of *Kriegsfibel* as the only possible protest genre the author could experiment with, given the dark moments of the horrors of the war, his lost hopes in poetic language and his anger towards fascist ideology embedded in press photography. The passage also explains why at times Brecht decided to leave the original captions with the clipping and composed quatrains that aimed at rescuing both image and caption and 'dig out what was going on below the surface of events' (1976, pxxi). After all, Brecht could not remain silent, as indeed the poem *In Dark Times* concludes: 'They won't say: the times were dark/Rather: why were their poets silent?' (1976, pxxi). A fundamental 1935 remark by W.H. Auden deeply relates with Brecht and his primer objectives: 'poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent and its nature clearer' (Funkhouser, 2005, p 108). As pointed out by Hunter, Brecht seemed to want the reader to 'always look at the photograph itself, noting what it includes and excludes, assessing the uses to which it is put, just as the audience to a Brecht play must always be aware of the dramatization' (Hunter, 1987, p 172). Although it is a device he theorises and employs within his epic theatre, the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation or estrangement) effect, to remind the

audience they were not watching real life, 'governs *Kriegsfibel* as it governs his theatrical work' (Hunter, 1987, p 172). In a way the very idea behind 'attaching' epigrams to 'misleading' press images can be read as related to this estrangement effect, to break the audience's spell of intellectual security at the thought that they were 'witnessing "reality"' (Hunter, 1987, p 172). Against conventional entertainment, in which members of the audience are taken out of themselves, feel better and forget all the worries of life, Brecht wanted to awake their consciences. He thought the audience needed to be emotionally distanced to ponder what was being presented in critical and objective ways. He strongly believed that the audience could no longer have 'the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place', hence his famous use of direct audience-address. This, as we shall see in the next chapter, anticipates Barbara Kruger's use of 'you', alienating the audience emotionally from the characters and the action, increasing their awareness and 'interpellating' their social conscience (Brecht, 1961, p 130). According to Fredric Jameson, the political message and content of the *Verfremdungseffekt* lie in revealing that 'what has been taken to be eternal or natural' is 'merely historical', hence 'changeable' (1998, p 47). Brecht's constant 'needling of readers, his constant effort to alienate them from the world the camera portrays' aims at making them 'pay attention to the "world" – the political assumptions, the aesthetic factors – turning the camera in a certain direction' (Hunter, 1987, p 172).

A photo-epigram that originally had a different image is no. 57, taken from a newspaper clipping that came with the text 'FRENCH HELMETS' on the top left, with many more amassed helmets, but captured from a longer distance and with a composition that includes other elements and could have distracted the attention of the viewer from focusing only on the helmets – which create an initially rarefied then more filled diagonal, from bottom right to top left, leaving the bottom left of the image as an empty triangle. Of course Brecht could have cut it further to remove the text and reduce the empty triangle, but the one he actually chose was serving his purpose much better, being a close-up only showing four helmets abandoned on a more allegorical surface of water, which hints at notions of flood or the deluge myth and universal catastrophe, the blood of the victims of the war and so on. It also contributes to creating shadows and an overall more dramatic effect. The helmets are fewer, closer and bigger and enhance the connection with our own heads that could have been wearing them.



Fig 80 Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfibel* (War Primer). Left: photo-epigram no. 57. Right: the edited out image, my photograph

Text:

*Look at the helmets of the vanquished! Yet  
 Surely the moment when we came undone  
 Was not when they were smitten from our heads  
 But when we first agreed to put them on*  
 (Brecht, 2017, p 41)

Here the use of the first person plural creates a much more empathic and participatory connection, which highlights the collective responsibility of the people in taking part in the war, while they could have deserted.<sup>147</sup> Quite outrageously, Cocteau goes in the exact opposite direction, as not only does he never mention issues of accountability or agency, but he also writes mostly in the third person, creating imaginary scenarios that have nothing to do with the current situation. The only exception is when he uses the first person in somewhat narcissistic relation to his own high school experience at the Grand Condorcet. Particularly, in his prose poem in response to photograph eight, where according to Brown an androgynous figure ‘is interpreted as a rape victim

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<sup>147</sup> Similarly, with the Winston Churchill one we can infer that he opted for removing too many further ‘optical unconscious’ details, hence potential distractions for the viewer’s retina, and for pushing the caricature effect of Churchill resembling a gangster – as the first line of the epigram explicitly hints at that (Brecht, 2017, p 15).

surrounded by' pieces of evidence such as a bucket, a broom and a piping, the 'de-  
degeneratification' reaches its climax, when he talks about an 'enigma' (Brown, 2012, p  
291, and Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, p 35).



Fig 81 Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau, *La Mort et les statues*. Book spread, Paris: Les Éditions de l'Amateur, plate 8

Text:

*Les pièces à conviction  
– un seau, un balai, un  
appareil de vidange –  
ajoutent encore à  
l'énigme. Les recherches  
continuent.*

*(The piece of evidence  
– a bucket, a broom, a  
piping – further add to  
the enigma. The research  
continues.*

(Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, p 35, my translation).

The reference to a rape appears in the previous photo-poem, where he stages a whole crime scene as found by imaginary police as soon as they arrive. The word 'enigma' and the phrase 'research continues' are deeply problematic, given that there is no enigma about why that statue has been removed to its original location in Paris and lies there before being melted down. There is no need for any further research – we know very well the behind-the-scene. The queer sexual reference to a rape makes Cocteau's hijacking operation even more disturbing.

Another specular characteristic in comparison with Brecht emerges thanks to the 2008 edition of *La Mort et les statues*, which at the end of the book shows the images edited out, which were alternatives for a number of photo-poems. If Brecht, in the case of the photo-epigram of the helmets, opted for the one that could produce a higher dramatic effect, Jahan and Cocteau's selected image for Claude Chappe – the French engineer inventor of telegraphy, who was sculpted by Emile Louis Macé and installed at the junction of Rue du Bac, Boulevard Raspail and Saint Germain, in the 7th arrondissement – removes the iconographic climax of the statue's head being smashed by a wrecking ball, which is instead portrayed in Chappe II, to leave the tension of the 'wait for the torment' (Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, p 39).

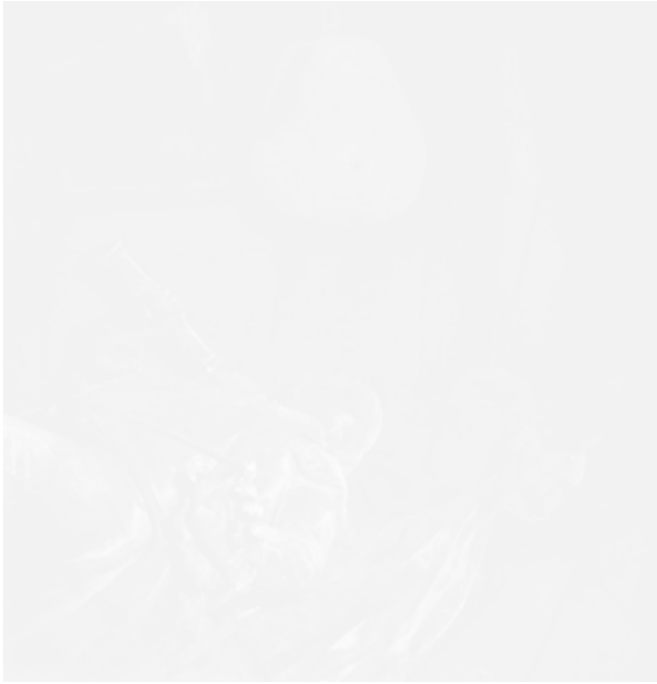


Fig 82 Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau, *La Mort et les statues*, Paris: Les Éditions de l'Amateur, plate 10

Text:

*Chappe attend le supplice.  
Observait-il avec sa lunette  
L'astre de métal qui s'approche  
du fond des siècles  
pour l'anéantir?*

*(Chappe awaits the torment.  
Is he looking at the metal  
Star that is approaching from  
The bottom of the centuries  
To wreck him  
With his telescope?).*

(Jahan and Cocteau, 2008, plate 10, p 39, my translation).

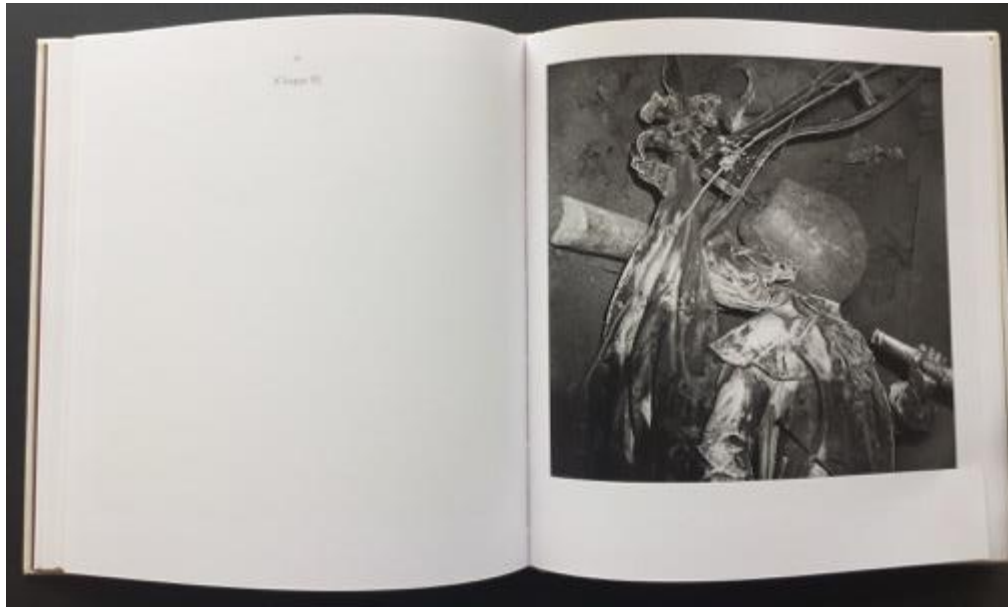


Fig 83 Pierre Jahan, *Untitled [Chappe II]*. Edited out image, published in *La Mort et les statues*, Paris: Les Éditions de l'Amateur, my photograph

There is a disturbing paradox: immortalising through photography the 'killing' of artworks that were meticulously crafted precisely to commemorate and give immortality to distinguished members of French society – which were melted down to be reintroduced as 'constituent metals', become 'bullets' and kill real men/soldiers, as we learn from Cocteau's very conversation with the aforementioned German writer and soldier Ernst Jünger in the former's journal (Cocteau, 1989, p 56, and Brown, 2012, p 287). By 'dying', these statues of questionably famous *grands hommes* have become the very material that will kill common *hommes* in the war – who most likely have not been 'immortalised' so spectacularly by a talented photographer, who could reintroduce them in the collective memory, and will only be remembered by their very close relatives.

Anchorage and relay are terms that, due to the way Barthes illustrated them, come with a connotational charge. Anchorage in particular is associated with negative ideas of closing and limiting, while relay appears more as an empowering and liberating concept. This chapter demonstrated how this is not always the case, as these connotations can be inverted. Through the comparative analysis of Brecht's (1955) and Jahan and Cocteau's (1946) opposite photo-text strategies, I have showed the

more dangerous hidden potential of relay (hijacking), as well as defusing anchorage's supposed 'dictatorial' connotation.

The next chapter continues to question Barthes' functions, by showing how anchorage and relay can co-exist in the same photo-text in such an enmeshed way as to challenge Barthes' (1977, p 41) adversative sentence that presupposes a dominance of one over the other. I will be questioning their very distinction through selected photo-texts from the 1970s and 1980s by Barbara Kruger and Victor Burgin that deal with the theme of patriarchy.



*We must be suspicious of this appealing assimilation of image to liberty and word to prison. Patriarchy depends on its divisions.*

Victor Burgin, 'Tea with Madelaine', 1986

### **Chapter 7 Case Study Three: 'Anchorelay' in Conceptual Photo-Texts on Patriarchal Society**

This chapter aims to advance photo-text theory by showing the blurred boundaries between Barthes' (1977, pp 39-40) categories of 'anchorage' and 'relay', discussed in chapter four, through the type of 'conceptual photo-texts' introduced in chapter two – in which it is the relationship and dynamics between images and words that is conceptual, as it emphasises the notion of art as idea, de-prioritising aesthetic values (Marzona, 2006, pp 6-8).<sup>148</sup> I compare a selection of works by Victor Burgin and Barbara Kruger, chosen because they address the same controversial theme of patriarchy. As pointed out with the theme of war in the previous chapter, rather than constituting the main focus of the analysis, the theme of patriarchy works here more as a 'connective tissue' between the works under scrutiny that allows me to better compare and contrast photo-text dynamics in their different bodies of work. The selected works that deal with the theme of patriarchy are from Burgin's series *US77*, which I compare by pairing them with Kruger's phototexts that explore similar issues. In them anchorage and relay co-exist in such a blended way that it questions their very distinction. At times, 'from a multiplicity of connotations offered by the image', words select or 'lock' some of them, without necessarily rejecting others (Burgin, 2018, p 27). On other occasions the photo-text dynamics go beyond the complementarity of the relay category and become more mysterious or riddling, enhancing each other's ambiguity (Burgin, 2018, p 27, and Hutcheon, 2002, p 121).

Laura Mulvey starts her chapter 'Dialogue with Spectatorship: Barbara Kruger and Victor Burgin' in *Visual and Other Pleasures* by admitting that the two artists make 'such different kinds of work that at first it seems almost arbitrary to discuss them together, or just a simple exploitation of the fact that both use words and photographs

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<sup>148</sup> Following the distinction on the spelling discussed in chapter one, since in both Kruger and Burgin words invade the photographic surface, in this case it is appropriate to call them 'phototexts' without a hyphen. The disappearance of the '-' hyphen does not mean an abrupt disappearance of the 'third something', but a spatial typographical reduction for its development in the viewer/reader's mind, as I shall illustrate.

in juxtaposition' (Mulvey, 2009, p 127).<sup>149</sup> Mulvey compared, focusing on notions of desire and sexual difference, Kruger's 'enormous enlargements' – as exhibited in the show *We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture*, held at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in 1983 – with Burgin's *Hotel Latone*, in his intimate book form, although the project originated as an exhibition in Calais in 1982.<sup>150</sup> Mulvey argues that Burgin and Kruger 'share a concern with spectatorship and the act of looking, the point at which the psychodynamics of voyeurism and the power relations of masculinity and femininity can affect a work of art', and this is undeniable (2009, p 128). However, Burgin's *US77* is a more suitable body of work for comparison with Kruger's phototexts than *Hotel Latone*. *Hotel Latone* is an intimate and ambiguous story of the dynamics between a heterosexual couple whose collocation in time and space becomes progressively elusive (Burgin, 1982, p 2). *Hotel Latone*'s leading force is the notion of displacement – both spatial, between words and images, and psychoanalytical, between the man and the woman of the couple (Mignon, 2010, p 81). On the contrary, *US77* more explicitly addresses the notion of patriarchy, in relation to representation and psychoanalysis in the American capitalist consumer society of the late 1970s, as its factual title suggests. Also, in terms of visual strategies, through superimposition and parody – here intended in Linda Hutcheon's sense of 'imitation with critical ironic distance' (1985, p 32) – it offers a more challenging comparison with Kruger in terms of photo-text dynamics. That the location of the text in Burgin's *US77* invades the photographic surface, unlike *Hotel Latone*, is not a mere detail. *Hotel Latone* has the text below the images in the exhibition and in the book – they precede and are separate from the image, lying on the left-hand page. When text and image occupy the same space, the two elements form a symbiosis that makes photo-text relations even more challenging in terms of creating a 'third something' in the reader/viewer's mind.<sup>151</sup> The superimposed text subtracts space to the image and does

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<sup>149</sup> Burgin and Kruger, however, have been exhibited together within collective shows quite a few times, such as the fundamental 1984-85 exhibition *Difference on Representation and Sexuality* at both the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York and the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London (Pollock, 2003, p 213).

<sup>150</sup> Burgin's *Hotel Latone* was also published in the magazine *Creative Camera* in 1983.

<sup>151</sup> In his 1975 essay 'Art, Common Sense and Photography', Burgin also explains how by placing 'a photograph of a baby at the breast of a woman in a private nursing home in Switzerland' alongside a photograph of 'a similarly composed mother and child group in a village in rural India', it produces the ideological message that 'mothers and their babies are the same everywhere', which was the 'smugly reassuring', yet 'mystificatory' message communicated by the 1955 exhibition *The Family of Man* curated by Edward Steichen, as also condemned by Barthes (Burgin, 2018, p 21).

not lie on an empty surface. The absence of an empty space between image and words reduces the time in which the viewer's eyes are not solicited by visual and verbal language. That interstice which lies in the transition from looking at the image and reading the words, and which allows the creation of the 'third something', becomes narrower. Hence the negotiation between words and image becomes more restricted, or, in other words, their 'incorporation by the devouring eye', to put it with Richon (1991, pp 32-33), is even more enmeshed. Photo-texts become phototexts. The disappearance of the '-' hyphen indicates a spatial typographical reduction for the development of the 'third something' in the viewer/reader's mind. The text needs to be readable, so it can only work on a section of the image where legibility is guaranteed, and the image has to incorporate such a section that can be inhabited by words, without losing its dignity and wholeness. Kruger's *Untitled (It's our pleasure to disgust you)*, as shown in Figure 85 (Kruger, 1982), provides a good example of surface or space negotiation between images and texts.

In a recent interview, Burgin referred to this interstice with the Japanese notion of *ma*, 'the interval, both spatial and temporal, between two successive events' – an interval charged with the meaning produced in this succession – and specified that he works 'with the *ma* between two psychological events: the image formed while reading the text, and the image formed while looking at the picture' (2019, p 23). In the case of Kruger, thanks to her background in graphic design, inspired by a mixture of idealistic post-war design and the ironic advertising style of the 1960s, she goes one step further, by making it 'a component (not merely a tool) of her art' (Heller, 1999, pp 111-12).<sup>152</sup> This allows her to create a space for text so that words, presented in the minimalist Futura Bold typography, are more prominent than in Burgin's phototexts, as they come with their rectangular black, red or white background, 'the most eye-catching of all colour combinations (e.g. the early *Life* magazine, the Nazi emblem, Soviet communism)', readable anywhere in the picture, and living in symbiosis with it (Heller, 1999, p 113).

Even by replacing *Hotel Latone* with *US77*, the differences between the two artists are still significant, including authorship – given that Burgin, after a brief use of appropriation in his earlier work, in *US77* takes his own photographs, while Kruger,

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<sup>152</sup> Kruger dismisses the terms design and advertising in defining her work, arguing: 'I'm someone who works with pictures and words, and people can take that to mean anything they like' (Heller, 1999, p 116).

after an even shorter period of taking her own 'almost anti-pictorial' photographs (1977-79), appropriates imagery from primarily 1940s and 1950s American film, television, illustrated magazines and advertising (Squiers, 1999, p 141). Burgin's *US77* black and white American landscapes, his 'road movie' as he describes them in his book *Between* (1986), are meticulously composed. They relate to the social and cultural changes in American society in the 1970s, creating an atmosphere that places the individual in a media-dominated environment.<sup>153</sup> Kruger's practice is informed by her earlier successful career as a graphic designer and picture editor for major magazines, such as *Mademoiselle* and *Aperture*, and her iconography consists of 'peripheral' images, 'workhorse photographs of advertising and magazine illustration that register quickly and are then forgotten' (Squiers, 1999, p 140).<sup>154</sup> Her 'arcane sources' also included a religious sculpture book, Red Cross guidebooks and first-aid manuals' (Squiers, 1999, p 147). Among the reasons behind her choice to stop taking photographs and use found images, there was the fact that the latter were 'simply unbeatable', because with their 'zesty implausibility, inadvertent humour, hegemonic giddiness, and mid-century vigor' they broadcasted 'ready-made aspects of modern American culture that Kruger wanted to play against – and that would have been pointless for her to recreate' (Squiers, 1999, pp 147-48). She was interested in demonstrating 'the many ways photographs could be made speak, even when they seemed dumb'; 'as long as pictures remain powerful, living conventions within culture, I'll continue to use them and turn them around', she declared in an interview (Squiers, 1999, pp 147-48). Once these images are taken away from their original context, they show all their ambiguous and opaque nature, 'providing the perfect visual foil' for what Carol Squiers describes as Kruger's 'attacks' (1999, p 140) and Kate Linker describes

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<sup>153</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York acquired the series in 2010, and interestingly in its catalogue entry for its collection, which is [available online](#), it contextualises the work in reference with Robert Frank, whose contradictory relationship with text I mentioned in chapter two:

*In 1977, Burgin – a British painter turned Conceptual artist whose influential writings on photography combined Marxism, semiotics, and feminist theory – set out across the United States by car, armed with a 35mm camera to make his own still "road movie" of the kind that he knew and admired by Robert Frank, if only he could believe in the potential for pure, unmediated self-expression of which Frank was perhaps the final practitioner. Burgin's series of pictures, collectively named "US77," were off-kilter and grainy like Frank's, but with the expressive heat turned way down; in its place were carefully crafted, seemingly unrelated vignettes "from life" superimposed in the corners of the images like the captions in fashion magazines* (The Met, 2010, no pagination).

<sup>154</sup> As pointed out by Steven Heller, it is important to clarify that although she did collaborate with commercial brands, she 'exemplifies the continuum of activist designers who, since the nineteenth century, have used the tools of mass communications to subvert the myths perpetuated by the powerful' (1999, p 109).

as 'accusatory words' (1990, p 12). The new meanings they acquire are 'worlds away from the decorative delusions that fill the magazines' where they were found (Skarstedt Gallery, 2009, no pagination). In terms of text, while they are both the authors of the words they associate with their images, Burgin's *US77* quasi-pamphlets are 'thumbnail sketches of basic theoretical concepts' or anecdotes imbued with a psychoanalytical patina, clearly an artistic spinoff of his theoretical writings and contain, or at times are direct edited quotations from, a range of sources, such as Viktor Shklovsky, advertising campaigns, Sigmund Freud and Vladimir Lenin, as he admits in his 1982 interview with Tony Godfrey for *Block*, a text partly republished in his book *Between* (Burgin, 1986, p 60).<sup>155</sup> Burgin clarifies:

*Although 'I' took the photographs, and 'I' wrote (most of) the texts, the voices of others intrude, and even my 'own' voice is inconsistent in tone across the work, calling into question the ideology of the individuality and autonomy of an art-work and of its putative 'author' (1986, p 58).*

As far as Kruger's texts are concerned, when she started to make photo-text works around 1977, she accompanied her own photographs with longer narratives, primarily on architecture and interpersonal relationships, to then choose – except for her curatorial work or her more text-only installations – lapidary, provocative sentences or questions, reminiscent of the language of advertising and political slogans (Linker, 1990, pp 13-18).<sup>156</sup> She was influenced by the writings of Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin, the latter of which she comments 'made her into an autodidact' (Goldstein, 1999, p 30). Although Kruger never explicitly mentioned Michel Foucault among her theoretical inspirations, both Craig Owens (1983, p 6) – in his essay that accompanied her 1983 ICA show, 'The Medusa Effect or, The Specular Ruse' – and Kate Linker (1990, pp 27-30) – in her book *Love For Sale: The Words and Pictures of Barbara Kruger* – saw in Kruger's work the influence of Foucault's (1977, pp 26) concept of power, as a complex system of 'strategies' and 'network of relations constantly in tension', and the political relevance of the body that he presented in his 1975 seminal book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. However, her desire to be inclusive, accessible and to involve the audience in a 'captivating' way made her mostly avoid direct quotations from these authors and opt for creating her own blunt slogans,

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<sup>155</sup> In his Preface to *The End of Art Theory*, Burgin reveals the relationship between his writings as artist, theorist and teacher (Burgin, 1986, pviii).

<sup>156</sup> See Kruger's 1979 self-published book *Picture/Readings*.

which are nonetheless swarming with insinuations based on popular aphorisms, clichés about human behaviour and basic ideological values. Burgin's texts in *US77* are longer, only apparently less aggressive and more dogmatic, theoretical and imbued by a cultivated complexity which appears to require 'privileged knowledge in order to be understood' (Mulvey, 2009, p 128). While a first superficial look at Kruger's work might suggest that her texts and pictures appear more as 'partners in crime' that reinforce each other, and Burgin's as less consonant, 'carefully crafted "missed connections" where the text surpassed its function as caption to produce other images that would be read in relation to the image' (The Met, 2010, no pagination), as I shall illustrate, their photo-text strategies and dynamics are more complex.

In order to better examine the differences and similarities of photo-text dynamics in these authors, I opted for selecting works that respond to a similar theme, power relations in gender issues. Hence the choice of comparing Burgin's *US77* – which, in his own words, 'represents the point in [his] work where a certain kind of feminist argument overcame [his] residual economistic marxism', and where 'the construction of sexual difference in representation becomes *the* issue', 'because patriarchal power relations, and the "masculine" identity which supports them, are now seen as *the* problem' (1986, p 40) – with a number of Kruger's phototexts that deal with women's struggles.<sup>157</sup>

While Kruger only occasionally works within a specific series, which made it less challenging to select her individual phototexts, Burgin is very meticulous about the seriality of his work. Burgin said that 'a piece like *US77* is to be read across the individual panels as much as within them', and that 'it can be seen as a sort of "static film" where the individual scenes have collapsed inwards upon themselves so that *the narrative connections have become lost*' (1982, p 16, and 1986, my emphasis). This prompted me to take the liberty to 'cherry-pick' some of Burgin's individual panels, which in turn determined my selection of Kruger's phototexts, produced later. Therefore, the methodology developed as a sort of dialogical 'cut-and-thrust', one-to-one comparison, as if creating new, imaginary diptychs, not necessarily in political or ideological opposition, but for the investigation of photo-text theory.

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<sup>157</sup> Burgin concludes his prelude to the series in his book *Between* by saying that 'this is the point at which, for certain friends on the left, my work started to go astray' (Burgin, 1986, p 40).

The point is not to establish whose phototexts are more feminist, ethical or impactful, but to study the way their photo-text relationships contribute towards photo-text theory. What is fascinating about their image-text dynamics is that they paradoxically appear to be very different and very similar at the same time, for reasons that go beyond predictable elements – such as authorship of words and images, style, location and length of text – and are quintessentially rooted precisely in the short-circuit that the works' word and image associations and hierarchies provoke in the receiver. Kruger's phototexts have been described as 'ruining' representations of stereotypes, clichés and power dynamics (a word she actually uses in her 1982 manifesto 'Incorrect', quoted later in this chapter), and I would add the adjective 'sloganeering' – although at times the slogans are presented as rhetorical questions, which would lead us to associate them with Barthes' notion of anchorage (Squiers, 1987, p 255). At the other end of the spectrum, Burgin's 'pamphleting' phototexts – where a sort of 'psychoanalysis in a nutshell' text is juxtaposed to only apparently unrelated images that, at times only feature a word or an object that is also mentioned in the text, at times nothing at all – would misleadingly lead us to Barthes' notion of relay. The selected works show instead a more complex relationship with Barthes' categories, which blurs their boundaries and questions their very distinction. Let's consider the first example: Burgin's panel *Patriarchitecture* (Figure 84) with Kruger's *Untitled (It's our pleasure to disgust you)* (1982) (Figure 85).



Text:

Fig 84, Victor Burgin, *Patriarchitecture*, from the series *US77*. Gelatin silver print, 40 x 60 inches, 1977

*Patriarchitecture*

*The man almost always feels his sexual activity hampered by his respect for the woman. Hence comes his need for a less exalted sexual object, a woman ethically inferior, to whom he need ascribe no aesthetic misgivings, and who does not know the rest of his life and cannot criticize him. It is to such a woman that he prefers to devote his sexual potency, even when all the tenderness in him belongs to one of a higher type. It has an ugly and paradoxical sound, but nevertheless it must be said that whoever is to be really free and happy in love must have overcome his deference for women and come to terms with the idea of incest with mother or sister.*





Fig 85 Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (It's our pleasure to disgust you)*. Photograph and type on paper, 7 x 9 7/8 inches, 1982, New York: Skarstedt Gallery

Text:

*It's our pleasure to disgust you*

Clockwise from top: *Forget morality, Forget innocence, Forget shame, Forget taste, Forget common sense, Forget desire, Forget heroes*

Burgin's panel portrays a billboard featuring a sequence of four illustrations of the same blonde woman in the process of strip-teasing. From left to right she is depicted in four different poses, from four different angles, gradually undressing from the waist up, removing the top part of her sequined dress first, then getting rid of an umbrella, which only appears in the first illustration, and stretching one of her long gloves, potentially before throwing it at the imaginary audience, to end up sexily looking at the beholder from her arched back in her garter belt lingerie. The billboard occupies two-thirds of the image and is installed in a somewhat desolate and dry American landscape, a suburban roadway with very sporadic vegetation, and where we can glimpse a somewhat unfinished architectural skeleton of a construction building on the left. There are no further elements in the billboard that would suggest the origin and purpose of these illustrations, since the image ends, on the right, before the

billboard's edge. It might be advertising for underwear or for a strip club, but we cannot be certain about it. The 'objectification' of the female body in this billboard is blatant.<sup>158</sup> Burgin's operation of 'critical topography' consists of creating an image with part of this 'objectifying' billboard and the surrounding American landscape, while superimposing a couple of concise observations about men's sexual drive towards women – whose tone lies somewhere between the solemnity of the aphorism and the pamphlet through psychoanalytical reflections (Bann, 2002, p 48). This panel's title *Patriarchitecture* – in capital letters in its first edition – is a witty and useful neologism that provokes a reflection on the structure, or rather architecture, of hierarchies within what is called 'patriarchy' in our society.

In his illuminating chapter 'Regarding Patriarchy' in his book *Studying Men and Masculinities*, David Buchbinder explains that while 'patriarchy' is a key concept, it is also a problematic term in discussing gender dynamics, because there is no clear and accepted definition of its notion, which 'tends to be used as a free-floating, transhistorical and transcultural term' (2013, pp 65-66). In his attempt to define the term that literally means 'rule of (or by) the father', he distinguishes between a 'formal patriarchy and a symbolic one', where the latter implies that power within a community is in the hands of a male individual because he has fathered many members of said community (formal) or is regarded as its father figure (symbolic) (2013, pp 65-66). Buchbinder also historically traces the evolution of the term from the Bible to medieval Europe's *jus primae noctis* (the law of the first night), according to which the lord of a territory might take the virginity of the bride of any of his subordinates (2013, p 66). As we approach more contemporary Western societies we move towards a symbolic patriarchy, where power is not necessarily 'vested self-evidently and officially' in the hands of men – but rather in a more Foucauldian sense, hiddenly penetrating and subtly capillary, 'a strategy operating through 'dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings', as Foucault wrote in *Discipline and Punish*, 'a productive network which runs through the entire body much more than a negative instrument whose function is repression' (1977, p 26), and that is, according to Buchbinder, 'something held out as promised to men' and 'always only provisionally held by individual males' (2013, p 67). A symbolic patriarchy is hence more similar to 'a discursive formation by means of which sex, sexuality, and gender

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<sup>158</sup> See Burgin's 'Perverse Space' about 'objectification' (2018, pp 103-16).

become intelligible and legible within a particular economy of power' that 'ranges across the multiple, interrelated institutional systems to whose organisation we give the name "society"'.

*Patriarchy then is today less an overt explicit social structure than a rather nebulous set of discursive strands that constitute for people in the culture an order and way of thinking of themselves as subjects within a sexed and gendered economy with material effects in the real social world* (Buchbinder, 2013, p 68).

This 'order and way of thinking of themselves' is heavily instilled in people's minds through symbols and stereotypes that circulate within society in 'scripto-visual forms', such as mass media, advertising and entertainment, forming 'chains of equivalences', which, 'in a kind of patriarchal algebra', have come to signify what Buchbinder calls the 'phallic power' (2013, p 75), whose 'privileged signifier' is the penis 'because it is *visible*' (Burgin, 1986, p 102). 'The vulva is rarely seen: its situation makes it invisible in any normal position even to its owner' wrote Catherine Johns in her *Sex or Symbol* (1982, p 72), which Burgin quotes in his essay 'Perverse Space' (2018, p 114). Through the analysis of Helmut Newton's *Self-portrait with wife June and models* (1981) and Otto Fenichel's 1935 paper 'The Scopophilic Instinct and Identification', he responds critically to Mulvey's notion of 'objectification', arguing that she has 'put a psychoanalytic frame', by using Freud's 1927 theory of fetishism (a 'return to Freud encouraged by Lacan'), 'around a non-psychoanalytic notion of "objectification", one derived from a Marxian idea of commodification – the woman packaged as object for sale' (Burgin, 2019, p 109).

With *Patriarchitecture* Burgin's focus is to disentangle the nebulosity behind the dichotomy of male love and sexuality.<sup>159</sup> He suggests that a truly liberated man is one who has succeeded in dealing with his submission and respect towards women and with the idea of incest – otherwise, nastily and paradoxically, he will end up devoting 'his sexual potency' to 'a less exalted sexual object, a woman ethically inferior' to the one of 'a higher type' to whom he feels all the 'tenderness'. Clearly, the strip-teasing woman in the billboard represents the 'ethically inferior' creature of his text, 'to whom he need ascribe no aesthetic misgivings, and who does not know the rest of his life and cannot criticize him', with the fear of criticism echoing a more

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<sup>159</sup> I am aware of the issues that looking at an artwork from the late 1970s with 'today's eyes' entails. Today's gender fluidity is far away from late 1970s sexist social structures in the US.

elegant version of 'castration anxiety'.<sup>160</sup> The two visual (strip-teasing woman) and verbal ('ethically inferior') elements of his phototext are anchored in a quasi-claustrophobic way. However, they also reinforce the idea of 'paradoxical sound' that Burgin writes in the text in terms of hierarchies (inferior versus higher), since he opted for showing only a representation of the inferior woman – plausibly as it's easier for it to be generalised as a stereotype – while the one of a higher type has to be imagined by the reader. But when we look at a large billboard that presents blown up figures we have to look up (higher), so paradoxically the viewer/reader presumably identifies with 'the man' in the text and looks up at the 'inferior woman', whose image anchors and is anchored by the words in the text that have a sexual connotation, such as 'sexual potency'. The words 'respect', 'tenderness' and 'deference' work as relay to the imagined woman of a 'higher type'. However, the verbs 'hampered' and 'overcome' precede these positive nouns, as if the conclusion that could be inferred is that the man's 'sexual potency' is to be devoted to the 'superior woman', which makes the text 'sexual potency' operate as both anchorage and relay.

Regardless of photo-text dynamics, it is important to acknowledge that, when asked to explicitly elaborate on the concept of patriarchy, Burgin's position emerges as extremely similar to Kruger's about notions of ideology, representation, society and gender dynamics, as I shall illustrate throughout the chapter. As it deeply relates to and impacts on the discussion on photo-text dynamics in both artists' work, it is crucial to present it here. Influenced by French philosopher Louis Althusser's position that 'ideology presents us with its picture and invites us to recognize ourselves in this picture as if the pictures were in fact a mirror', Burgin stresses the importance of representation of people, a 'daily experience which concerns us all intimately' and that helps 'determine subjectivity itself' (1982, p 7).<sup>161</sup> For him a significant contribution to the debate about patriarchy comes from psychoanalysis: 'there is no essential self which precedes the social *construction* of the self through the agency of representation', as 'we become what we are through our encounter, while growing up, with the myriad of representations of what we may become – the various

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<sup>160</sup> 'Male desire, in so far as it leaves its trace in the image, is premised on castration anxiety' writes Burgin in 'Tea with Madelaine' (1986, p 100).

<sup>161</sup> To quote Althusser's theory in a discourse about patriarchy, without mentioning that he killed his wife (he claims by accident) and did not spend a day in prison would perpetrate the Freudian cover up that has ruined women for centuries.

positions that society allocates to us' (Burgin, 1982, p 24). That's how cultural stereotypes, such as 'femininity', develop: the woman, he argues, is represented as an 'essentially passive and dependent creature whose emotions rule her reason and whose exclusive aim in life is homemaking and motherhood', a vision that imposes itself through representation 'as being as inescapably natural to women as their biological gender' (Burgin, 1982, p 24). He will use similar words in his phototext *SEEING DOUBLE*, discussed later in this chapter.

In his 1982 postscript to the *Block* interview, he expanded on how psychoanalysis might offer the tools to 'resolve the problem of gender position vis-a-vis the image', which became the starting point for his subsequent essay 'Tea with Madelaine', also fundamental to better grasp his view on patriarchy. He praises the 'Freudian postulate of universal psychic bi-sexuality', as it 'allows us to move beyond the fixed, blocked, positions of biologism – where our investment in looking, our pleasure, would be seen as determined by gender' and 'to consider a subjectivity which can take up positions, more or less freely, on either side of the divide of gender, or even on both sides simultaneously' (Burgin, 1982, p 24).<sup>162</sup> And then he admits, quite honestly:

*I should say I'm not really qualified to speak on what may be the most important issue here – that of a possible 'specificity' of representation by women in relation to the female body – as a man what can I possibly have to say? My interest in the theory, even, (the pleasure I take in it), will never be free of the element of voyeurism, always already constructed and in place. However, I can use the theory to gain a necessary distance on my own relation to representation. The man's relation to the whole problematic differs fundamentally from the woman's: the woman must, by discovery and invention, locate herself-for-herself in representation (where now, predominantly, she takes place only for men); the man, on the other hand, is everywhere in representation in his own interest, and his interest seems predominantly to be to allay his castration anxiety – I'm aware this sounds reductionist (I'm invoking Freud, not Lacan – I mean the organ) but I believe it's true. Along with all other men in this society at this time my relation to representation is fundamentally certain (where the woman's is always precarious), and fundamentally fetishistic. That's the bad news; the good news is that I know it, and may therefore be able to do something about it. We can't dispense with the phantasmatic*

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<sup>162</sup> For him the kernel of the problem lies in 'the reconciliation of a bi-sexual unconscious with a mono-sexual body', with "bi-sexual" referring to the oscillations of active/passive, the pre-Oedipal ignorance of sexual difference, Oedipal phantasies-of/identifications-with the other sex, and "mono-sexual" meaning simply the given biological gender' (Burgin, 1982).

*relation to representation, but we should be able to re-work it, restructure it.*<sup>163</sup> (Burgin, 1982, p 25).

Seven years later, when Geoffrey Batchen asked Burgin in 1989 about photography as a phallogentric form of looking and his reaction to feminist critics who 'have expressed disquiet at the way' his 'work often literally reenacts the power relationship between the "one" who photographs and the "other" who is being photographed', he replied that they are a too simplistic and moralistic cul-de-sac and that his own response to feminism in the 1970s was to 'start making images of women' – as for him at the time, while 'female sexuality was endlessly problematized, male sexuality was taken for granted as something simple and self-evident' (Burgin, 2011, pp 90-91). He believed sexuality was being treated as a 'woman's problem' and his work 'aimed to represent male sexuality as every bit as uncertain and problematical as female sexuality: no essential masculinity – only *masculinities*', explaining the element of reenactment as an attempt 'to make some mechanisms', or 'patriarchitectures' precisely, 'visible' (Burgin, 2011, pp 90-91).

Burgin explains in his artist statement for the 1996-97 exhibition *Photo-Text, Text-Photo: The Synthesis of Photography and Text in Contemporary Art* that the reason behind his mingling of words and images derives from Freud's notion of 'psychical reality', which is 'made up not only of images, but of words too' and 'is organised according to the articulation of sexual difference' (Hapkemeyer and Weiermair, 1996, p 128, and Burgin, 1982). The text in *Patriarchitecture* partly reflects Burgin's idea that sexual identity is 'a trap, a destiny not set in motion by biology but by the construction of sexual difference through the Oedipus complex' (Mulvey, 2009, p 128). Clearly *Patriarchitecture* shows his intent to problematise the complexities behind male sexuality through partly exposing his psychical reality, revealing an aspect of Freud's controversial Oedipus complex, namely coming to terms with the idea of the man's incest with his mother or sister. The mother and sister are women that, together with the one of a 'higher type', are the absent female figures whose image can only to be imagined, encouraged by the 'empty space' of the desolate landscape behind the large billboard – as if it was a white canvas to be

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<sup>163</sup> 'What the women's movements have done in this century is to bring to light a repressed fact of history: there can be no basic social change of any permanence without a restructuring of the perception of the consequences of sexual difference. The precise terms of this insight are not fully understood – which is why it's still at the centre of a considerable effort in theory and practice at this moment' (Burgin, 1982).

filled with the viewers' imaginary pictures of ethically superior females. 'We are reminded that to say "image" is not necessarily to say "visible"' (Burgin, 1986, p 104). Their mention in the text produces a relay to a not depicted aspect of the man's psychical reality. However there appears to be a contradiction.

In his experimental essay 'Tea with Madeleine', Burgin mingles two different types of writing – a 'left-hand' critical discourse, which was first presented as a talk at a seminar on *Desire* at London's ICA in 1983, with a 'right-hand' artistic text about which he does not reveal any information, except that he considers 'the absent "third column" [t]here to be [his] gallery work from around this period (see *Between*, ICA and the Camden press, 1986)' (1986, p ix). There he writes that 'if "The woman" does not exist, as Lacan puts it, striking out the definite article (~~The~~), then it follows that "The man" does not exist either' (Burgin, 1986, p 96). Therefore, it appears quite contradictory that he starts his text for *Patriarchitecture* with the sentence 'The man almost always feels his sexual activity hampered by his respect for the woman'. According to Bann, in Burgin's case the structure of the presentation of *US77* encourages ambiguity and indeterminacy at the level of the image-text relationship, which 'is not a feature either of cultural criticism or of documentary photography' (Bann, 2002, p 48). Burgin described, in his 1973 book *Work and Commentary*, the uniqueness of the job of the artist as dismantling 'existing communication codes' and recombining 'some of their elements into structures which can be used to generate new pictures of the world' (Bann, 2002, p 49). New and critical. Indeed, this approach is 'paradigmatically represented by the short-capitalized titles which use word play and overdetermined metaphor' (Bann, 2002, p 55). The references in the titles and texts to Freud hint at the photographic image as 'a kind of visible dream text, or a hieroglyph as Freud might have called it' and invite the audience to favour rather than close off the chains of connotation (Bann, 2002, p 55).

In Burgin's 'pamphleting' texts there is no 'punch-line', like in Kruger's seductive yet interceptive phototexts (Linker, 1990, p 17), and the temporality of our reception is also different as the image reveals itself very slowly, even when accompanied by a text that has the character of a prompt (Bann, 2002, p 55). In Kruger's phototexts, image and text 'play contrapuntally'; they are both visually and verbally charged, as well as violent, which apparently appears to leave no room for ambiguity (Linker, 1990, p 16). She employs in both languages the rhetorical device of the oxymoron, which uses an ostensible self-contradiction (pleasure/disgust) to

illustrate a rhetorical point or to reveal a paradox. A crucified naked woman wearing a gas mask is superimposed with the text 'It's our pleasure to disgust you' to produce a rather disturbing effect, especially when our eyes encounter the gruesome detail of the large nails in each heel of her palms. As a method of slow and painful capital punishment, crucifixion entails suspending a victim by his or her arms from a cross beam, and abandoning him/her to hang until eventual death occurs from exhaustion and asphyxiation (Byard, 2016, p 206). Of course, the cross, the main religious symbol for most Christian churches, makes it inevitable to see a parallel with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, which is central to Christianity. However, she is wearing a gas mask to resist asphyxiation, which suggests that perhaps, unlike Jesus, who allegedly died after six hours, she might survive, supposedly if she forgets a number of things, including morality and heroes – again unlike Jesus, who is believed to have 'trusted in God when confronted by his adversaries, in the midst of suffering, and until he had drawn his last breath' (Bockmuhel, 2001, p 51). As a naked and sensual woman, she also has to forget innocence and shame. The sentence 'It's our pleasure to disgust you' clearly addresses the audience, with 'our' referring to women and 'you' to men. As it is her pleasure to disgust men, she can also forget about taste, common sense and desire. This phototext is one of the few by Kruger that presents two almost separate texts that are related through the image. The size of the central sentence is significantly higher than the 'to forget' list, which operates as a sort of metaphorical clock, counting the hours the woman needs to overcome and the tasks she needs to accomplish in order to survive and, in a more optimistic reading of the work, become a truly liberated creature, free from the male-imposed stereotypes.

So, despite its brutality, the phototext somewhat reveals its liberating force towards a world of enlightened independent women, which, though, can only occur at the price of deep suffering. However, the nails are not a minor obstacle to this potential happy ending. A more pessimistic reading is also plausible – the gas mask might not save her, but at least she will die as a rebel who takes pleasure in disgusting the perpetrator, like a prisoner who dies after strenuous torture, because she refuses to confess. The image alone is so violent that it would be fascinating to know more about its original context of publication – although one might wonder whether it was actually originally published somewhere or not, as with Kruger it is hard to know the exact origin of the images she appropriates. As Owens brilliantly put it:



*An inventory of Kruger's montage techniques – she juxtaposes, superimposes, interposes texts and images – and of the ends to which these techniques are put – she exposes, opposes, deposes stereotypes and clichés – indicates the importance of a 'rhetoric of Pose' to all her work. Most of the photographs Kruger reuses were originally staged – posed – and she crops, enlarges and repositions them so that their theatricality is emphasized (1983, p 5).*

In *Untitled (It's our pleasure to disgust you)*, by superimposing the 'to forget' list as hours of an imaginary watch, she occupies almost every part of the image and creates, unlike Burgin's *Patriarchitecture*, a rather claustrophobic phototext, which permeates the image with an atmosphere of brisk pace – where the pressure of time passing produces a tension with the painful slowness of the torture of crucifixion. The clock-like 'to forget' list appears as a sort of 'mantra meditation' of all the ideological things that the woman has to disremember to resist the sluggish and cruel lethal process of crucifixion. Somehow, this relates to Burgin's meticulous composition technique. In his classic essay 'Looking at Photographs', he wrote that 'the characteristics of the photographic apparatus position the subject in such a way that the object photographed serves to conceal the textuality of the photograph itself – substituting passive receptivity for active (critical) reading' (Burgin, 2018, p 32). As pointed out by Alan Trachtenberg, 'we can understand textuality as [...] the semiotic event of rendering the image intelligible by reference to the several codes or texts intersecting at the juncture of the image and the mind confronting it' (1978, p 845). Composition is then for Burgin 'a device for prolonging our imaginary command of the point-of-view, our *self*-assertion; for retarding recognition of the autonomy of the frame, and the authority of the other [the camera] it signifies' (Burgin, 2018, p 36), which aims to 'suppress the high degree of sensitivity of the photographic apparatus' to 'the sheer event of coincidence' (Trachtenberg, 1978, p 846). 'If composition signifies the maker's intentionality, what remains (or becomes) the uncomposed in the image represents an opposing energy: that of the recalcitrant world-as-such' (Trachtenberg, 1978, p 847). What Trachtenberg describes as 'the trace of the irrepressible' might undermine the word-image tension and distract the viewer from the intentional composition of the author, as I shall discuss in relation to his other panel *SEEING DOUBLE*.

Kruger, unlike Burgin, 'does not work with snapshots, in which the camera suspends animation, but with studio shots, in which it records an animation performed only to be suspended – a gesture, a pose' composed by anonymous

others, and is hence left with cropping, enlarging and repositioning as devices to limit the irrepressible and direct the viewing and reading experience (Owens, 1983, p 5). There appears to be a fascinating contrast between the empty space of the American landscape behind the large billboard on the left-hand side of the image, in the case of Burgin's *Patriarchitecture*, that leaves room for the viewer to imagine 'the higher type of woman', through the function of 'relay', as she is not to be found in the image, and the claustrophobic surface of *Untitled (It's our pleasure to disgust you)*, which leaves no room for imagining other women as they could represent the stereotypes of 'morality', 'innocence' and the other things to forget – precisely reinforcing the idea of forgetting about them, as it is not even worth imagining them. One could advance the idea that there is no room for relay in this phototext by Kruger. Indeed, the crucified woman's breasts appearing right above the word 'pleasure', with their nipples visible, in those pre-Instagram censorship times, are in an anchorage type of relation, hinting at the male scopophilic pleasure in looking at them.<sup>164</sup> However, by adding the personal pronoun 'our' in smaller size to the word 'pleasure', Kruger subverts this sexed relation, 'relaying' the notion of pleasure back to women – and not just any pleasure, but precisely to disgust men – which makes the phototext very confrontational. Speaking about her work Kruger says: 'I see my production as being procedural, that is, a constant series of attempts to make certain visual and grammatical displacements' (Siegel, 1987, p 18).

It is clear from the very first comparison that in both Burgin and Kruger the two functions of anchorage and relay co-exist 'in their one iconic whole', which is a possibility that Barthes himself envisaged, when he introduced the two categories in 'Rhetoric of the Image', as discussed in chapter four:

*Obviously, the two functions of the linguistic message can co-exist in the one iconic whole, but the dominance of the one or the other is of consequence for the general economy of a work* (1977, p 41).

However, in both artists their co-presence is so mingled – and at times the same text exerts both functions – that it is difficult to establish a 'dominance', as Barthes (1977, p 41) calls it, of one over the other, and perhaps it is more accurate to fuse them in a hybrid category for which the neologism 'anchorelay' could be proposed.

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<sup>164</sup> As explained by David Bate, 'scopophilia' is 'the pleasure in the act of looking (or, like masochism, being looked at)', which according to Freud, 'in the early stage of life is primarily an "auto-erotic satisfaction"' that later generates voyeurism (Bate, 2004, p 168, and 2009, p 82).

Going back to Kruger's use of personal pronouns, as pointed out by Masako Kamimura in his 1987 review of Kruger's 1983 ICA show *We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture*, a sentence that – one might argue – encapsulates her artistic and political view, Kruger's approach in activating the audience as readers of directly addressed sentences or questions, to increase their awareness and 'interpellate' their social conscience, is very Brechtian (Kamimura, 1987, p 130). Kruger, however, goes one step further: her mission is to pull into the process the female spectator, as she wrote in her 1982 text entitled 'Incorrect', which was published among her 'Position Papers' in her 1994 book *Remote Control: Power, Cultures, and the World of Appearances*. As it contains her manifesto, I quote it here in its entirety:

*Photography has saturated us as spectators from its inception amidst a mingling of laboratorial pursuits and magic acts to its current status as propagator of convention, cultural commodity, and global hobby. Images are made palpable, ironed flat by technology and, in turn, dictate the seemingly real through the representative. And it is this representative, through its appearance and cultural circulation, that detonates issues and raises questions. Is it possible to construct a way of looking which welcomes the presence of pleasure and escapes the deceptions of desire? How do we, as women and as artists, navigate through the marketplace that constructs and contains us? I see my work as a series of attempts to ruin certain representations and welcome a female spectator into the audience of men. If this work is considered "incorrect", all the better, for my attempts aim to undermine that singular pontificating male voiceover which "correctly" instructs our pleasures and histories or lack of them. I am wary of the seriousness and confidence of knowledge. I am concerned with who speaks and who is silent: with what is seen and what is not. I think about inclusions and multiplicities, not oppositions, binary indictments, and warfare. I'm not concerned with putting morality against immorality, as "morality" can be seen as a compendium of allowances inscribed within patriarchy, within its repertoire of postures and legalities. But then, of course, there's really no "within" patriarchy because there's certainly no "without" patriarchy. I am interested in works that address these material conditions of our lives: that recognize the uses and abuses of power on both an intimate and global level. I want to speak, show, see, and hear the sides of pleasure and laughter and to disrupt the dour certainties of pictures, property, and power (Kruger, 1994, pp 220-21, my emphasis).*

For Kruger, society is patriarchal and photography disseminates stereotypes, reinforcing a patriarchal perception of the world among its subjects to the point of masking it as 'natural', while it is thoroughly constructed (cultural), a position also shared by Burgin, as I illustrated above. Kruger's sentence 'there's really no "within" patriarchy because there's certainly no "without" patriarchy' echoes Burgin's

rejection to see 'ideology' as 'false consciousness', as 'it implies that it is possible to have a true consciousness', but 'we can never be in that privileged position from which we can see reality as it "really is": we can only "see reality" through representations' (2011, pp 49-51).

So, 'if ideology is a system of representations, and if this system is seen as conforming to that complex of institutions founded on and including language, into which we are all born and through which we are produced as "individuals", then it's not just a matter of us "speaking" these representations, but also of us being spoken by them', which made Burgin conclude that 'it is not possible to substitute a nonideological picture of the world for an ideological one' (Burgin, 2011, pp 49-51). This of course did not stop them from making 'important contributions to the aesthetics of sexual politics' and, through 'the conjunction between feminism and psychoanalysis', to 'use sexual scenarios to unveil' (Burgin) and 'attack' (Kruger) patriarchal politics (Mulvey, 2009, p 128). Kruger's unmasking mission of hidden ideological agendas is condensed in her famous 1983 phototext that contains the feminist 'retort', *We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture*, superimposed on a picture portraying the face of a 'recumbent' woman with her eyes 'blinded' by leaves (Owen, 1983, p 5), and which gave the title to her aforementioned show at the ICA in London (Linker, 1990, p 62). She believes that photographic representations, through which power dynamics impose themselves on our society, need to be questioned and unhinged to silence 'that singular pontificating male voiceover which "correctly" instructs' female 'pleasures'. On the other end, Burgin's *US77* aims at problematising male sexuality.

So, although they appear to have opposite missions, through similar photo-text dynamics, where pictures and words are bleeding into each other's meaning, they offer an important contribution towards photo-text theory that allows an exploration beyond Barthes' categories. I argue that both anchorage and relay can co-exist, in a hybrid form of 'anchorelay', not only within the same photo-text work – anticipated by Barthes (1977, p 41) himself – but within the *same* text of each photo-text, as we saw with the word 'pleasure' (Kruger) and 'sexual potency' (Burgin).

Kruger's emphasis on the reception side is quite crucial. She could have used the typical feminist expression of 'giving women a voice' through her work (indeed one of her phototexts from 1985 says 'We Will No Longer Be Seen and Not Heard', or another one from 1981, 'Your Comfort Is My Silence') – but interestingly she is

preoccupied with giving them a gaze and an ear too, when she writes that her work aims to ‘welcome a female spectator into the audience of men’ (Kruger, 1994, pp 220-21). As discussed earlier in relation to Burgin, an indispensable principle of much contemporary feminist theory is that women have traditionally been posited as passive recipients of the active, determining male gaze. John Berger’s classic text of the same period explains how these sexual positions became ‘culturally inscribed, resulting in a hegemony of representations, according to which “*Men act and women appear: men look at women; women watch themselves being looked at*”’ (in Linker, 1990, p 61, and Berger, 1977, p 47). The mastering look belongs by definition to those who wield power, and the act of looking is an extension and weapon of that specifically male power. Women’s capacity to look as fully participating spectators has therefore been severely constrained – limited to looking after home and offspring. Much of Kruger’s work, directed towards what Owens describes as ‘the mobilisation of the spectator’ (1983, p 11), explores the specific ways in which consumer advertising depicts or is pointed at women, an issue also addressed by Burgin in his US77 panel *SEEING DOUBLE* (Figure 85), which I compare with Kruger’s 1990 work *Untitled (It’s a small world but not if you have to clean it)* (Figure 86).

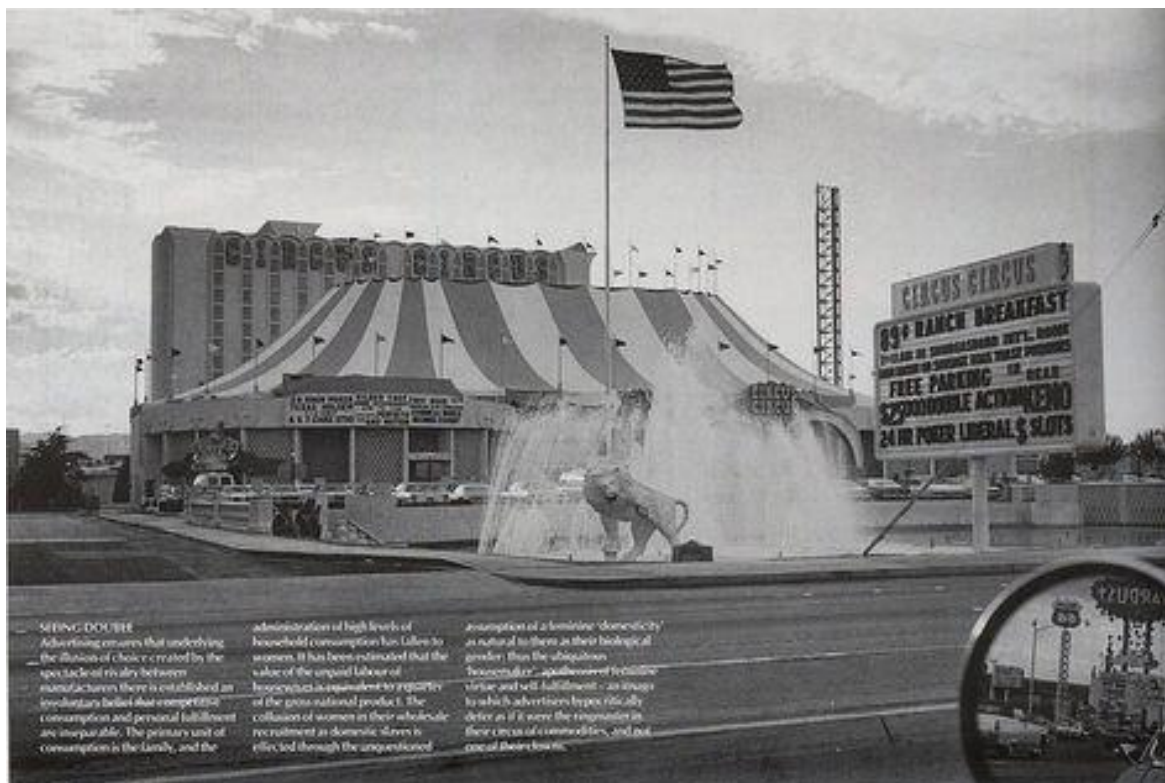


Fig 86 Victor Burgin, *SEEING DOUBLE*, from the series *US77*. Gelatin silver print, 40 x 60 inches, 1977

Text:

*SEEING DOUBLE*

*Advertising ensures that underlying the illusion of choice created by the spectacle of rivalry between manufacturers there is established an involuntary belief that competitive consumption and personal fulfillment are inseparable. The primary unit of consumption is the family, and the administration of high levels of household consumption has fallen to women. It has been estimated that the value of the unpaid labour of housewives is equivalent to a quarter of the gross national product. The collusion of women in their wholesale recruitment as domestic slaves is effected through the unquestioned assumption of a feminine 'domesticity' as natural to them as their biological gender: thus the ubiquitous 'housemaker', apotheosis of feminine virtue and self-fulfillment – an imago to which advertisers hypocritically defer as if it were the ringmaster in their circus of commodities, and not one of their clowns.*



Fig 87 Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (It's a small world but not if you have to clean it)*. Photographic silkscreen on vinyl, 14.3 x 10.3 inches, 1990, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

Burgin's phototext consists of a snapshot whose 'protagonist' is a building that provides breakfast and dance, two activities that normally occur at different times of the day. We cannot see it in its entirety as a fountain spraying water jets faces it. However, on the top right of the water jets we see the entrance sign and learn that the place is called 'Circus Circus', and its stripy flagged roof architecturally resembles a circus tent. Another sign placed on the fountain's edge repeats the name 'Circus Circus'. Taken from the other side of the road, inside a car, the photograph includes, at the bottom right, a rear view from the car's wing mirror, from which we can glimpse another building with the sign 'Yardus +' and part of another

car.<sup>165</sup> A pole with the American flag stands almost in the middle of the image, seemingly installed in the fountain, together with the statue of a lion.<sup>166</sup> The text is a reflection on advertising and its ‘hypocritical’ strategies of addressing women as administrators of ‘high levels of household consumption’, in order to ‘guide’ them in the selection of products to buy (Fig 86). In a society in which new needs are constantly being created and instilled in the consumer’s mind by marketing strategies, so that they can be satisfied by manufacturers who aim to sell their products, Burgin underlines how advertising plays the diabolic role of claiming to help women navigate the oceanic ‘illusion of choice’.<sup>167</sup> Burgin’s phototext ‘operates on the level of the literal and the metaphorical’ (Burgin, 1982). Luckily, for this panel we have Burgin’s own explanation as he provided it to the interviewer Tony Godfrey for *Block*:

*The caption ‘seeing double’ anchors certain aspects of the image, and further serves to link those aspects with the text. You can see this place is called “Circus. Circus” so, already, a literal ‘doubling’; the image includes a rear view in the mirror so you’re ‘seeing double’ there too: both the world before and behind you – picking up the theme of the present as transition. The text concerns two ways of seeing women in the home: as the advertiser presents her, in control of her home, choosing her products wisely; or as she also is, under their control (Burgin, 1982, p 17).*

Burgin uses the text to speak about ‘the circus as a metaphor for commodity society’ and to encourage women to deconstruct the imposed double and paradoxical role advertisers attribute to them through their campaigns, by giving them the illusion of being ‘the ringmasters’ in selecting products for household consumption, while at the same time being domesticated, mastered or patronised – hence ridiculed like

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<sup>165</sup> Apparently, in Kalasha – the language of a Dardic Indo-Aryan indigenous people – ‘yardus’ means ‘friend’.

<sup>166</sup> When asked about the reason behind the presence of a lion in the middle of the image, Burgin replied:

*Well ... Why indeed? ... This is a snapshot out of the window of a moving car. That is the way my eye went, and when I looked at the contact sheet this image presented itself as one that, as they say, “worked” – the composition seemed clear, and the content had a certain appeal. Of course when you start to analyse it there is a lot which you can pick out which wasn’t consciously intentional. [...] This has an American flag flying over it; if you wanted to you could read the lion as a signifier of British society – the European mind ‘thinking’ the U.S. here – perhaps this was a source of its appeal for me (Burgin, 1982, p 17, my emphasis).*

This relates to Trachtenberg’s idea of the irrepressible trace intrinsic in any snapshot, which at the level of image-text dynamics can create a distraction as discussed earlier.

<sup>167</sup> The marketing expert Philip Kotler, who influenced millions of people studying economics and business with his bestselling book, clearly tells a different story, when he writes, somewhat misleadingly, that ‘human needs are states of felt deprivation’ and ‘marketers did not create these needs, they are a basic part of the human makeup’ (Kotler, 2018, p 30).



'clowns', rather than admired like acrobats, by the same advertisers (1982, p 17). However, in the image there is no visual reference whatsoever to women and their 'unquestioned feminine "domesticity"', which makes the category of 'relay' prevail in this phototext. The place called 'Circus Circus' is not even a real circus with a real spectacle of domesticated wild animals, acrobats and clowns. Burgin's text also addresses the theme of the unpaid labour of housewives, and employs negative words such as 'collusion' to denounce women's complicity 'in their recruitment as domestic slaves' perpetrated through the 'unquestioned assumption of a feminine domesticity as natural to them as their biological gender'. He will utilise very similar words years later in his interview for *Block* magazine:

*One of the achievements of the women's movement has been to point out the extent to which the collusion of women in their own repression is exacted through such representations. They have argued that the dominant representations of femininity are not based on a natural, and therefore unchangeable, model: it is rather that this supposed femininity is itself a product of representation – representations, moreover, overwhelmingly produced by men (the counterpart of the mother stereotype, the other side of the same patriarchal coin, is of course the whore). Broadly speaking, the representation of the woman in our society is a representation of the-woman-for-men: whereas the representation of the man is a representation of the-man-for-himself (Burgin, 1982, p 24, my emphasis).*

The reference to the 'whore' as 'the counterpart of the mother stereotype' echoes his text in *Patriarchitecture*, and his reflection on the changeable dominant representation of the-woman-for-men is precisely the aim of Kruger's work.

Kruger's *Untitled (It's a small world but not if you have to clean it)* combines an image of a young, short-haired woman looking through a magnifying glass with her right eye, which we see enlarged at the centre of the magnifying glass. The image interrupts Kruger's first sentence, 'It's a small world', the (stereo-)typical sentence someone utters when they realise they have friends in common with their interlocutor. As she wrote in the catalogue of the 1996 exhibition *Photo Text Text Photo*, her sentences are 'fragments from cultural everyday speech, that are somehow sounding comfortable or familiar', which she tries 'to turn inside out' (Hapkemeyer and Weiermair, 1996, p 135).<sup>168</sup> At first glance one might think the

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<sup>168</sup> This is a sentence that appears in the German book on Barbara Kruger, *Buchstäblich, Bild und Wort in der Kunst Heute*, Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal, 1991, which is reproduced in German in Hapkemeyer and Weiermair's catalogue, translation courtesy Sarah Bahar.

woman is married, as she is wearing a ring on her fourth finger. However, a closer look reveals that she is not wearing it on the left hand, as tradition would have it, but on the other, which could anticipate the subversive power of the rest of Kruger's sentence, 'but not if you have to clean it' – which, through what Owens describes as stereotype's 'rhetoric of intimidation', signifies the threat intrinsic in every stereotype and produces multiple short circuits (1983, p 7). First, the verb 'to clean' creates a parallel between 'world' and 'home', a relay effect of text to text, rather than the usual text to image, which, together with the image of the young lady, makes us identify the pronoun 'you' with a female spectator only.<sup>169</sup> The fact that Kruger decided to use the word 'world' in the context of that typical and genderless sentence 'It's a small world', and the anchorage type of relation that is produced between 'world' and the circular shape of the magnifying glass that echoes the shape of planet earth, reveals the inclusiveness of her phototext. The word 'world' suggests a broader audience, which in turn might encourage the spectator to go back to the verb 'to clean', preceded by the obligation 'have to', and read it more metaphorically, namely as referring to people that are obliged to do tasks unfairly assigned to them. The word 'world' anchors the circular shape of the magnifying glass and 'relays' to the verb 'to clean', inviting the spectator to not interpret it literally, as a sort of double 'relay' given that there is no visual reference, either for a literal or a metaphorical reading of the verb. It is precisely the 'anchorelay' dynamic that takes place in this phototext.

While it is true that, as Mulvey wrote, language, 'in particular personal pronouns, [...] make visible and explicit the process of exchange between an art object and its spectator', which 'positions the subject and affirms identity', Burgin's pamphleting texts in *US77* privilege the third person, while it is Kruger who uses direct address heavily (Mulvey, 2009, p 128). A consistent motor throughout her work, Kruger's 'nervy (and often unnerving)' (Miller, 2012, no pagination) use of direct address offers a more immediate and accessible identification between the audience and the artist, 'transforming the essence of art itself' (Heller, 1999, p 109).

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<sup>169</sup> This phototext, with its subtle connection between the word 'world' and 'home', makes me think of a fundamental remark that Emanuela Fraire makes in her introduction to the 1976 photo-text book *An Album of Violence* by Stephanie Oursler, which I quoted in my essay 'Linguivore Species': 'although men and women seem to share the same revolutionary project of liberation from oppression, the war to liberate a population does not coincide with the war to liberate women who, after the revolution, go back to their passive discriminated condition. Once the social order is re-established, the violence that used to occur in the streets shifts back to the domestic space' (Chiocchetti, 2019, no pagination).

'The personal pronouns 'I', 'me', 'you', 'we', known in linguistics as 'shifters', are both personal and, at the same time, they 'resonate with people from many cultures and backgrounds' – hence they aim to 'identify with the viewer regardless of gender and race' (Klein, 2007, p 53). In this case they permit the shift from the abstract of 'It's a small world' to the concrete of 'but not if you have to clean it' (Owens, 1983, p 6).

As pointed out by Linker, through her work Kruger aims 'to intercept the stereotype', for her an instrument of power, and 'to suspend the identification afforded by the gratifications of the image', which she does by deploying 'the stereotype's "double address"' that 'constructs the viewer twice over, addressing him or her both personally and impersonally, as individual (you, here...) and as type' (1990, p 29). Craig Owens described how Kruger's use of personal pronouns allows her 'to incorporate the spectator' and 'give body, weight and gravity to her pronouncements':

*Kruger appears to address me, this body, at this particular point in space. But as soon as I identify myself as the addressee of the work, it seems to withdraw from me to speak impersonally, imperiously to the world at large (1983, p 6).*

Without moralism or didacticism, she 'stages for the viewer the techniques whereby the stereotype produces subjection, interpellates him/her as subject' and then 'reflects the stereotype back on itself' (Owens, 1983, pp 7 and 11).

In the introduction to the catalogue of the 1983 exhibition *Comment*, held at Long Beach Museum of Art, which featured both Burgin and Kruger's phototexts, Connie Fitzsimmons questions 'the performative effectiveness of advertising to produce sales' – which for some polls and studies is 'directly proportionate to the volume and transmission of the message', wondering if 'the power of the institution of advertising' is located somewhere else (1983, no pagination). Burgin and Kruger show that said power lies in advertising's ability to create and perpetrate stereotypes. When the magazine *Esquire* asked Kruger, in 1991, to comment on 'American manhood', she wrote a text that is reminiscent of Burgin's ideas about 'dominant representations of femininity':

*It seems to me that there's a big difference between being a man and belonging to a manhood. [...] "Man" can denote gender. It can be a signifier of biological phylum based on the investigations of science and the shifting identities of the body. But "Manhood" [...] is about society, stereotype, myth, folklore, power, and, of course, ideology. "Man" can be nature but "Manhood" is culture. Being a man can be about pleasure but belonging to a manhood is usually about desire.*

*Which is kind of sad because desire only exists where pleasure is absent. Manhood is what you're supposed to want (1993, p 224).*

Advertising curates precisely 'what you're supposed to want' and in so doing it produces and circulates stereotypes 'endlessly, relentlessly throughout society' (Owens, 1983, p 7). For Kruger, *Esquire's* request made 'a lot of sense', as 'after all magazines are [...] extremely temporal creatures', 'about desire and images of perfection', 'feeding us the "latest model", they show us "the look" and tell us how to get it' (1993, p 224). Magazines 'know that today's divinities are yesterday's papers', so 'they want interchangeable figures, not bodies', they prefer 'Manhood' to 'Man', because even when they offer good quality content ('brow-furrowing think pieces'), 'all [the] seriousness is brought to you by about two hundred pages of advertising and that's where we are really told about manhood, about how it looks and what it takes' (Kruger, 1993, p 225). Then she lists an array of possibilities of manhood from 'exhilaratingly bohemian' to 'heroic', to conclude that 'manhood' is 'Man At His Best' 'and very good for business' (Kruger, 1993, p 225).

According to Owen, 'It is precisely at their point of circulation that Kruger intercepts stereotypes' and her professional experience as a graphic designer allows her to 'exploit the instant legibility' of its techniques, 'to expose it too, as another weapon in the stereotype's arsenal' (1983, p 7). So, direct address, together with her adroit design choices, have made her work highly identifiable, and her sentences almost 'repeatable sayings', which have become 'part of our collective consciousness, feed for the parody fodder, and part of the visual culture mix' (Klein, 2007, p 53). She has found a way 'to make art that transcends the insularity of the art world' and grant the public 'access to her ideas that questioned power structure and gender dynamics' (Heller, 1999, pp 111-12). The recognisability of Kruger's work also increased thanks to her choice to invade a variety of media and sites particularly in the public realm, including billboards, posters, bus tickets, media shelters, merchandise and architectural projects, as 'she wanted to address the spectator on a number of fronts' (Goldstein, 1999, p 31), as I will illustrate with the next series, *HELP*.

Burgin's experience with the public space is more limited to his famous 1976 poster *Possession* (1982). Kruger said in an interview with Shauna Miller: 'I think my work engages a public audience because I am that audience' and 'I understand what it means to read standing up or read in public' (Miller, 2012, no pagination). And she

can be very demanding with her audience. Her 'aphorisms pack as much of the punch as her aggressive visuals do', making it almost impossible for the viewer 'to dodge the conversation' (Miller, 2012, no pagination). After all, one of her phototexts from 1992 shows an image of a tooth's extraction juxtaposed with the slogan: 'You Are A Captive Audience'.

*Kruger has created a voice that mocks, undermines, and rebels against a myriad of traps, critiquing their premises, their operations, their boundaries, and their proprietors. She constructs her own traps and then springs them, using the seduction of photography as both subject and bait* (Squiers, 1999, p 148).

In discussing the artists' differences in terms of how they think about and deal with their audience, the roles of irony and humour are important. As pointed out by Sheri Klein, Kruger is very familiar with 'the ability of words to have a visual plasticity', with 'the power of the ad', in all its graphic elements (2007, p 51). Her deep understanding of 'the relationship of humour to advertising, via memory', namely that we are more inclined to 'remember things that are associated with pleasure', prompted her to play with language 'to explore its absurdities, disrupt logic and rationality' (Klein, 2007, p 52). Often employing puns, she combines words and images to produce 'social commentary about consumerism, women's rights or the lure of advertising in the most economical of terms' (Klein, 2007, p 52). Intriguingly, it is precisely against 'consumerism' that Burgin confesses to have removed 'irony' from his phototexts in *US77*, after his precedent work *UK76*, in his 1982 interview for *Block* magazine. Tony Godfrey criticises Burgin for having made 'the connection between text and image [...] far less obvious' in *US77*, as we saw with *SEEING DOUBLE*'s loose association of words and image, and for Godfrey this entails that 'the viewer is required to do far more work (Burgin, 1982, p 22). Also, Godfrey believes Burgin's decision to destroy the 'authorial presence', as it was for Burgin a 'too obvious [...] ironic voice', to be 'a weakness in some of the *US77* panels, which lack the directness of, for example, *A Sense of Tradition* (in *UK76*)' (Burgin, 1982, pp 16 and 22). Burgin's reply is quite crucial for a better understanding of his view about irony's inevitable relationship to the audience's active or passive role and how this impacts on image-text dynamics:

*Much of that earlier work, from UK76 back, was based on certain assumptions about the nature of ideology as 'false consciousness' we discussed previously – which no longer seem tenable.<sup>170</sup> It's this which*

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<sup>170</sup> As illustrated earlier in this chapter, Burgin rejects seeing 'ideology' as 'false consciousness', because 'it implies that it is possible to have a true consciousness', but 'we can never be in that

*accounts for the heavily ironic tone of that work. I'm no longer happy with this as it positioned the reader as merely the consumer of my irony (Burgin, 1982, p 22, my emphasis).*

For Burgin, irony in an artwork is problematic because 'it has to assume a shared understanding of the things one is being ironic about, that's to say it has to imply a basic unspoken text from which it can distance itself as irony' (1982, p 16).<sup>171</sup>

*There's a level of resignation to, and even complicity in, the things irony disparages, which makes irony a very dubious tool in ideological struggle – irony knows, whereas we have to begin by saying that we don't know but want to find out, at least if we're to avoid preaching to the converted (1982, p 16, my emphasis).*

So, for example in *SEEING DOUBLE*, the word 'collusion' referring to women, which is everything but ironic, produces a short circuit in the audience, particularly in relation to Kruger's 'if you have to clean it'. It might sound almost anti-feminist, as if Burgin was accusing women of being complicit and passive in accepting the stereotype of 'feminine domesticity', produced and exploited by advertisers. However, complicity and collusion are voluntary acts that can be interrupted, so Burgin is suggesting a space for change, to refuse the female stereotype – which links back to Kruger's image of the woman with the magnifying glass, a metaphor to encourage vigilance, to look for subtle details, as awareness is the first step towards the end of subservience. And he is of course aware of the consequences of his anti-popular choice of erasing irony from *US77* in terms of accessibility and audience, as this passage reveals:

*In US77 I used three distinct forms of language [a didactic, maybe pedantic, voice; a narrative voice; and a paradoxical voice], one of which did demand more of the reader – made him or her more aware of having to construct meanings, rather than having to just consume them. What one ends up doing is not simply reading off the direct correspondences between the image and the text, but rather linking associations of the text to associations of the image – a process, I suppose, closer to poetry, where meanings occur primarily along chains of associations (Burgin, 1982, p 16, my emphasis).<sup>172</sup>*

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privileged position from which we can see reality as it "really is": we can only "see reality" through representations' (2011, pp 49-51).

<sup>171</sup> See Hutcheon (1994).

<sup>172</sup> Burgin does 'try to go for an optimum audience', not 'the biggest by any means', but he thinks it would be a 'big mistake to work only for a small number of theorists' (1982, p 16). When criticised by Godfrey about the amount of knowledge the reader/viewer needs to have in order to approach his work, he argued that one 'can enjoy Sartre's novels without having read his philosophical work', such as his 'technical work like Being and Nothingness; even though, effectively, his novels are the continuation of philosophy by other means' (Burgin, 1982, p 22). Burgin does not believe in 'simply

Talking about chains of associations, Kruger's lesser known 1989 phototext *Read Between the Lines*, where she juxtaposes the definition of the word 'story' with the phrases 'read between the lines', comes to mind. Also, Burgin strongly believes that when he is 'making "art"' he is 'constructing an entirely different sort of text' whose main aim is not to be didactic or communicative:

*There's a popular idea of art in which artists are seen as desperately trying to 'communicate' but, arguably, the texts of 'art' are those very texts most remote from a communicative intention. On the one hand there are fairly unambiguous and successful attempts to communicate – "Walk/Don't Walk", for example; on the other end of the scale there are texts like Finnegans Wake (1982, p 22).<sup>173</sup>*

In *US77* the communicative intention is not lost at the level of the text alone, but precisely in its subtle and enigmatic relationship with the image, as we saw with *SEEING DOUBLE*.

With *Omnipotence*, Burgin 'reiterates the duality of master/mastered', presenting the dual male role as a counterpart to the female one in *SEEING DOUBLE*, and the two panels he explains 'can be linked across the work via the image of the car: viewed from the outside, and then from inside, looking out' (1982, p 17). Buchbinder reminds us that 'we must recall that even among men the access to power is unequal' (2013, p 68). With *Omnipotence*, Burgin shifts the attention back to masculinity, seen as 'the problem' by contemporary feminists, to demystify the alleged 'omnipotence' of men and show that in post-industrial times patriarchy needs to be recontextualised, as 'economically speaking, the father's authority in the home is an anachronism' (Fig 88). Questioning male privilege, he exposes today's fragility of the father figure, for him 'merely a commodity in the labour-market' (Fig 88). The last sentence, where he concludes that 'the identity of the patriarch as wage-slave is in perpetual transit between work and home' made it almost natural to associate Burgin's *Omnipotence* with Kruger's provoking commission *HELP* from the Public Art Fund in 1991.

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and finally "understanding the meaning" of the work, as it 'isn't "in" the work, like a lump of cheese in a wrapper; nor is the meaning somehow "behind" the work: in the mind of the author, for example, or in "reality"', but rather they are 'the product of an individual's reading of the work, and these readings in turn depend on that individual's particular biography and upon his or her social, cultural, milieu' (1982, p 22). For him, it is 'an enormously complex process', as 'it's always a question of a shifting plurality of meanings which vary "within" the individual and between individuals' (1982, p 22).

<sup>173</sup> 'A Tea with Madelaine', discussed at the end of this chapter, clearly shows this point.



Fig 88 Victor Burgin, *Omnipotence*, from the series *US77*. Gelatin silver print, 40 x 60 inches, 1977

Text:

### *Omnipotence*

*Economically speaking, the father's authority in the home is an anachronism which recalls preindustrial times when he directed family-based production. In most cases today the father is himself merely a commodity in the labour-market. His 'authority' now serves to reproduce in his children his own subservience to corporate and state power, providing them with the image of an ultimately benevolent controlling wisdom through which they will later tend to view all others who wield power over them. The objective authority of the father has collapsed into that gap which the factory opened between work and family-life. Simultaneously master-of-the-house and a servant in his place of employment, the identity of the patriarch as wage-slave is in perpetual transit between work and home.*



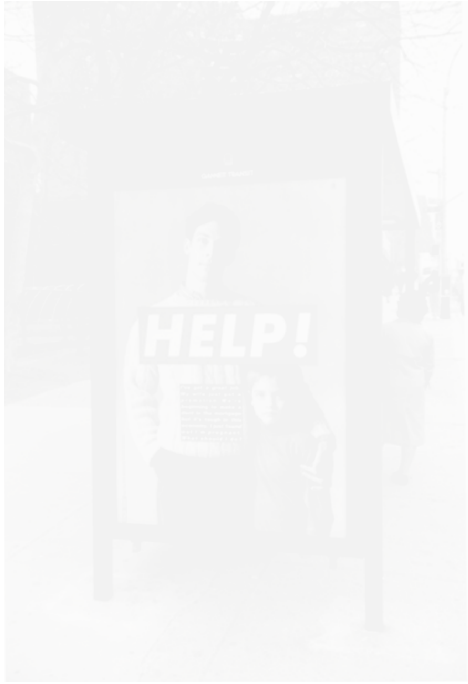


Fig 89 Barbara Kruger, *Untitled*. Bus shelter posters, *HELP*, New York City, 1991, Public Art Fund

Text:

*HELP!*

*I've got a great job. My wife just got a promotion. We're beginning to make a dent in the mortgage but it's tough in this economy. I just found out I'm pregnant. What should I do?*

Burgin's image portrays a confident-looking, youngish yet balding man in his Chrysler Cordoba, smoking a cigarette. The car occupies the majority of the image's surface. Behind it, on the top left, a line of men of different ages, weights and heights, in their work suits, walk in the street or wait to cross it. Some look more serene, others more preoccupied. None of them faces the camera. Burgin's shadow is reflected on the car. There is a profusion of masculinities, pictured, reflected and projected. The text is entitled, paradoxically, *Omnipotence*, as it literally means 'having unlimited power' while it reveals a despondent view on the less powerful post-industrial identity of the father, which could be subtitled as the descent of the patriarch – as an homage to Grayson Perry's groundbreaking book *The Descent of Man* (2016), on the poisonous effects of rigid masculine roles and how to rethink manhood.

In his 1975 essay 'Art, Common Sense and Photography', Burgin illustrates a fundamental example of how rhetorical structures, such as paradox – for Jacques Durand behind the success of 'the most audacious advertisements' – can interfere

in the text/image relationship and challenge Barthes' categories of anchorage and relay, which is what is happening here too (Burgin, 2018, p 27). Burgin's text includes certain negatively charged words, such as 'subservience', 'collapsed' – referring to the 'objective authority of the father' – 'servant' and 'wage-slave', which encourage the viewer to look back to the image for clues, to test whether these proposed 'signifieds' are or can be 'retroactively projected into the image', as Barthes puts it (Barthes, 1977, p 27). They do not anchor any aspect of the image in particular, as the men represented look anything but slaves, or what we are historically and visually used to identifying as slave. With their elegant suits and corporate ties that they (or their wives) freely purchased, and their fancy cars, they do not necessarily convey an image of factory workers whose 'authority now serves to reproduce in [their] children [their] own subservience to corporate and state power' (Fig 88). It could be tempting to classify the deception of not finding even a vague visual correspondent for these negative verbal elements as a 'failure' or 'mistake' in image-text dynamics. While it appears plausible that they are in transit between work and home (anchorage), the viewer/reader is obliged to imagine other types of men that would more realistically represent these ideas of fragility and victimhood (slavery) described in the text (relay). Perhaps an image from Allan Sekula's *Untitled Slide Sequence* (1972) – which portrays workers from all hierarchies and social classes at the end of a day shift, as they exit the aerospace factory's General Dynamics Convair Division in San Diego California (a reference to the Lumiere brothers' early famous filming of their own factory workers exiting from work) – would have produced a more 'anchored' and credible phototext. What could the relationship between 'anchorage' and 'plausibility' be? Does there have to be a relationship? The text is making a clear socio-political and economic statement that aims at reconsidering the image of the patriarch in post-industrial times – not anymore an omnipotent tyrant, or 'the problem', as Burgin wrote to introduce the series – but a victim himself of the economic system, 'a servant in his place of employment' (Fig 88). This is already a message with which feminists and women in general might feel uncomfortable and in disagreement. It becomes even less easily acceptable to women if such a text is enmeshed with an image that, when looked at in detail and in association to said text, produces a sense of contradiction or implausibility. However, the author's shadow reflected onto the car can trigger multiple readings: it could be an invitation to reconsider the very role and image of the post-industrial

male patriarch as subservient to state and corporate power, and go beyond appearances (after all, the dress doesn't make the man, as they say), or an intentional contradiction to produce exaggeration and provoke a reaction, a gap to be filled with reflection.

Also, 'the image of an ultimately benevolent controlling wisdom', through which the children of this new post-industrial impoverished father 'will later tend to view all others who wield power over them', creates a chain of subservience to corporate and state power that clashes with the notions of 'benevolence' and 'wisdom' (Fig 88). We are so far away from any idea of ancillarity or parasitism of word to image: the image does not illustrate the text and conversely the text does not confirm the image – they both coexist and contribute towards an imagination with a very loose 'degree of amalgamation' (Barthes, 1977, p 26). When Barthes mentions Gerbner's study on certain romance magazines – where the verbal message of the headlines, gloomy and anguished on the cover, is always accompanied by the image of a radiant cover girl – he explains that there 'the two messages enter into a compromise', with 'the connotation having a regulating function of preserving the irrational movement of projection-identification (Barthes, 1977, p 27). *Omnipotence* appears as a phototext whose word and image dynamics are ambiguous, if not irrational, precisely because of this hybridisation that the blending of anchorage and relay generates.

Irrationality and queerness pervade Kruger's bus shelter posters, where a series of conventional portraits of American males is superimposed with the single bold word 'HELP!' that guides passengers to smaller blocks of text, wherein a supernatural world populated by pregnant men in crisis is depicted. A seemingly benign traditional portrait of a father with his son is gradually, yet uncannily and abruptly, twisted and reframed by concise phrasing. The text starts with plausible descriptive and progressively longer sentences – 'I've got a great job', 'My wife just got a promotion' – a rare yet verisimilar event in a patriarchal society – and 'We're beginning to make a dent in the mortgage but it's tough in this economy', which sounds very familiar. This familiar flow of information is suddenly interrupted by the uncanny and supernatural sentence 'I just found out I'm pregnant', with all its implausible force that immediately produces a short circuit in the mind of the reader, who is almost swept away and tempted to look at the belly of the father to test the information, but does not have the time as the sentence is followed by a sort of

hopeless question addressed to the dazed and confused audience: 'What should I do?' Besides the fundamental political issues that this series raises on the theme of reproductive rights, such as the questions of 'how would the equal distribution of procreative capabilities change how we perceive the joys and labors of childbearing?' and 'how would it alter who has power over whose body?', it also sheds some important light in terms of photo-text intersections (Public Art Fund, 1991, no pagination). Like Hippolyte Bayard's *Self Portrait as a Drowned Man*, it confronts us with the 'implausible' photo-text, perhaps the most spectacularly puzzling example of 'anchorelay'. The image is plausible, the text tries to anchor its protagonist by saying that the portrayed man is pregnant, which is impossible and implausible, so a relay to a supernatural scenario, where both men and women are capable of conceiving and delivering children, is produced precisely in the text's failed attempt at anchorage. Now, Kruger could have staged a photograph with a man with a fake belly to connote pregnancy, and Bayard is pretending to be dead, but this would not have changed the anchorelay dynamics of the phototext. Perhaps it would make the image look awkward or kitsch and the political statement less powerful. Kruger comments about the series: 'in this series of pictures and words I am attempting to raise questions, but to try and do so with humour and a kind of quietly bemused consideration. Hopefully this work can help focus attention on our dreams and who can dare to dream them, and our bodies and who controls them' (Public Art Fund, 1991, no pagination).

Another interesting photo-text relation appears in Burgin's panel *FLIGHTS OF FANCY*, where the image of the plane operates to anchor visually Viktor Shklovsky's quotation in the text, 'we slept with many of them – mechanically, the way a man planes boards', as if Burgin subverted Barthes' theory that it is the text which anchors the image, and making the plane almost a visual whim, a partial illustration of a portion of the text.



Fig 90 Victor Burgin, *FLIGHTS OF FANCY*, from the series *US77*. Gelatin silver print, 40 x 60 inches, 1977

Text:

*FLIGHTS OF FANCY*

*Inessa Armand wanted to write a book about free love.*

*Lenin wrote her a letter. It concluded:*

*The issue is not what you subjectively want it to mean,*

*The issue is the objective logic of class relations*

*In matters of love.*

*Shklovsky reminisced: we slept with many of them-*

*Mechanically, the way a man planes boards.*

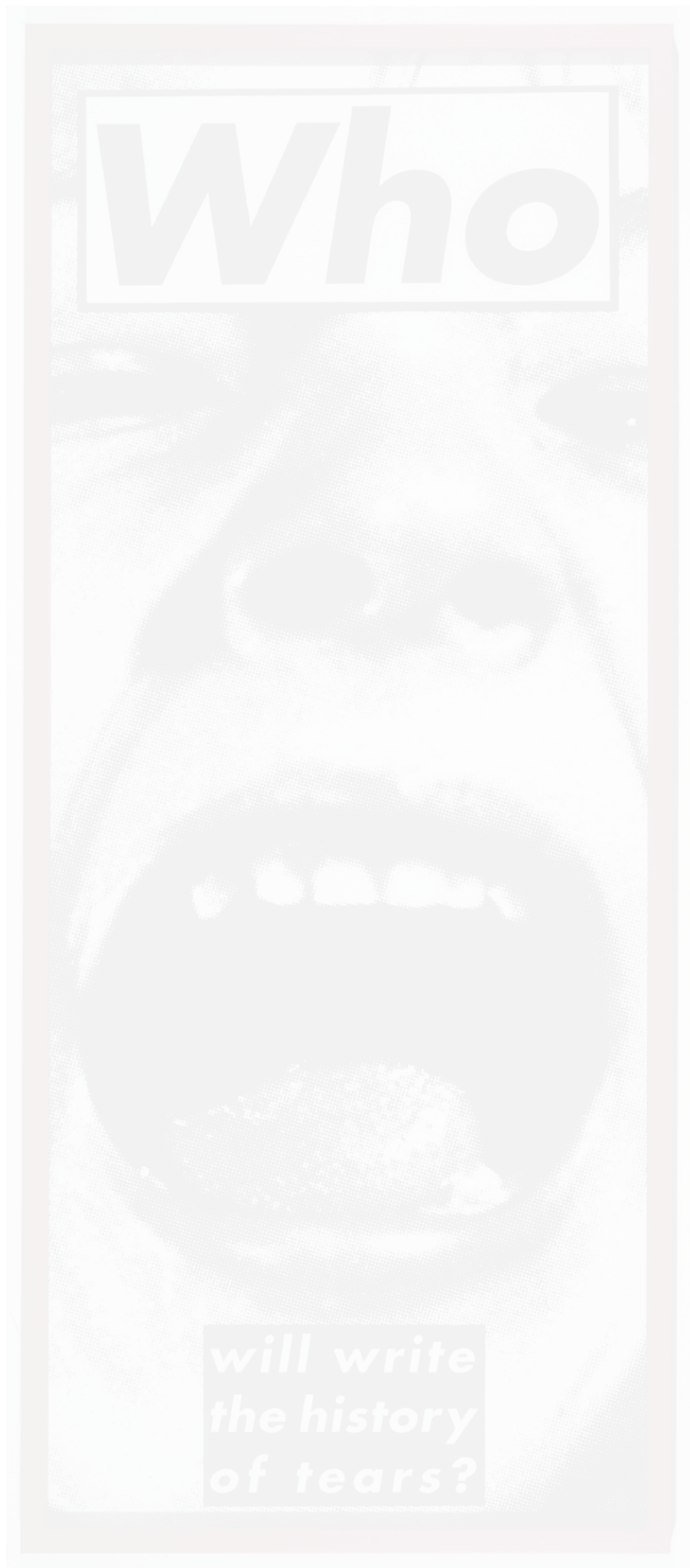


Fig 91 Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Who will write the history of tears?)*. Silver bromide photograph, screen printed type on paper in artist's frame, 246 x 104 cm, 1987, ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe

An apparently banal image of a plane seen through the windows of the airport from inside an empty gate, after five lines of empty chairs, is superimposed with a text entitled *FLIGHTS OF FANCY*, an expression that refers to the faculty of imagination.<sup>174</sup> Indeed, imagination is what the viewer needs, together with some further knowledge on the people mentioned, to be able to participate in the word and image dynamics of this phototext, as if he or she had to board the depicted flight. A ‘fancy’ is also ‘a superficial or transient feeling of liking or attraction’ and the verb ‘to fancy’ means to feel a desire for something or someone, which relates to the sexual content of Shklovsky’s quote.<sup>175</sup>

Burgin starts with an anecdote about Inessa Armand, an incredibly fascinating Russian feminist born in Paris, who, after getting married and becoming a mother of five children, decided to devote herself entirely to the Bolshevik cause, to the point of becoming Vladimir Lenin’s mistress. From a letter Lenin wrote to her in 1939, we learn that she wanted to write a pamphlet for working-class women about free love, but Lenin thought she should ‘throw out altogether’ the ‘demand (women’s) for freedom of love’, as for him it was ‘not really a proletarian but a bourgeois demand’ (Lenin, 1939, no pagination). For him, the expression ‘freedom of love’ was misleading and difficult to understand by the proletariat. He listed ‘many shades’ or nuances the expression could entail and expected to know what she had in mind, which were clearly not – he thought – the last three points: freedom from the serious element in love, from childbirth and freedom of adultery, typically what ‘the most talkative, noisy and “top-prominent” classes’ would have understood (Lenin, 1939, no pagination). He strongly believed that for the proletariat the most important were the first two points, which I struggle to fully comprehend: freedom from ‘material (financial) calculations in affairs of love’ and, he wrote, ‘the same, from material worries’ (1939, no pagination). However, Burgin decides to quote Lenin’s conclusion only: ‘The issue is not what you subjectively want [freedom of love] to mean, the issue is the objective logic of class relations in matters of love’ (Lenin, 1939, no pagination).<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> OED, 2020.

<sup>175</sup> OED, 2020.

<sup>176</sup> The entire text of Lenin’s letter to Inessa that he wrote on 17 January 1915 reads:

*Dear Friend,*

*I very much advise you to write the plan of the pamphlet in as much detail as possible. Otherwise too much is unclear.*

*One opinion I must express here and now:*

*I advise you to throw out altogether § 3—the “demand (women’s) for freedom of love”.*

Following Lenin's seriousness about love and social class, Burgin adds the more libertarian memory of another incredible Russian and Soviet figure, literary theorist and writer Viktor Shklovsky, one of the main exponents of Russian formalism, who, as Burgin's text says, remembered how 'unemotionally' they slept with many women, in the same mechanical way as men board flights.<sup>177</sup> Reducing the combination of these two sentences to its skeleton, the message's kernel becomes: (communist) men can and did sleep mechanically (and subjectively) with many women, who could not write a pamphlet about 'free love' because the concept could objectively be misunderstood in terms of class relations. This sounds like a 'suave entrapment', to quote another phototext by Kruger, which is lying dormant, not even slantly but counterintuitively behind the image of a plane at an empty gate.<sup>178</sup> Which type of book is then allowed to be written by women? Kruger provides a tragicomic answer in her 1987 phototext *Untitled (Who will write the history of tears?)*. Kruger pairs this rhetorical question with a crop of a portrait of a woman screaming in despair with her mouth wide open – a clear suggestion of women as,

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*That is not really a proletarian but a bourgeois demand.*

*After all, what do you understand by that phrase? What can be understood by it?*

1. Freedom from material (financial) calculations in affairs of love?

2. The same, from material worries?

3. From religious prejudices?

4. From prohibitions by Papa, etc.?

5. From the prejudices of "society"?

6. From the narrow circumstances of one's environment (peasant or petty-bourgeois or bourgeois intellectual)?

7. From the fetters of the law, the courts and the police?

8. From the serious element in love?

9. From child-birth?

10. Freedom of adultery? Etc.

*I have enumerated many shades (not all, of course). You have in mind, of course, not nos. 8–10, but either nos. 1–7 or something similar to nos. 1–7.*

*But then for nos. 1–7 you must choose a different wording, because freedom of love does not express this idea exactly.*

*And the public, the readers of the pamphlet, will inevitably understand by "freedom of love", in general, something like nos. 8–10, even without your wishing it.*

*Just because in modern society the most talkative, noisy and "top-prominent" classes understand by "freedom of love" nos. 8–10, just for that very reason this is not a proletarian but a bourgeois demand.*

*For the proletariat nos. 1–2 are the most important, and then nos. 1–7, and those, in fact, are not "freedom of love".*

*The thing is not what you subjectively "mean" by this. The thing is the objective logic of class relations in affairs of love.*

*Friendly shake hands!* (Lenin, 1939, no pagination)

<sup>177</sup> Indeed, within the Bolshevik Party two tendencies towards sex co-existed during the 1920s, and Alexandra Kollontai represented the more libertarian and emancipatory one for women. See Christine Sypnowich's 1993 essay 'Alexandra Kollontai and the Fate of Bolshevik Feminism'.

<sup>178</sup> Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (We are the objects of your suave entrapments)*, 1984. *SLANT* is the title of a photo-text work by Aaron Schuman, which, inspired by Emily Dickinson's poem *Tell All the Truth But Tell It Slant*, and by her notion of the 'slant rhyme', a type of rhyme with words that have similar, but not identical sounds, explores 'slant' as a photo-text strategy (Schuman, 2019, no pagination).



despite themselves, the most suited authors of such a historical study: they must have shed many tears in a male-dominated society, where they can only author the history (of tears), but not of the actions that provoked them. Kruger and Burgin's works examine 'desire and sexual difference and our understanding (or misunderstanding) of both under patriarchy' (Mulvey, 2009, p 128). 'The words which appear on advertisements,' writes Burgin, 'do not, simply by their presence, destabilise regimes of the publicity image' (1986, p 106). While Burgin reveals 'the mechanisms by which a message is manipulated through representational strategies of association between "manifest and latent contents of the image", to convey subjectively-determined human values, goals, ideals and desires designed to become inscribed in the popular pre-conscious', Kruger's 'assaultive, accusative and confrontive' provocations, through her use of contradictions, expose 'the strategies and tactics of formal logic as instruments of power' (Fitzsimons, 1983, no pagination).

The last examples I would like to consider exaggerate even further the distance and autonomy of words and images, making it difficult to describe their relationship either as anchorage, or relay, or even anchorelay: Burgin's panel *Framed* and Kruger's 1983 phototext *Untitled (We are your circumstantial evidence)*, which are connected through the woman's reflection in the mirror, mentioned at the end of Burgin's text and portrayed in Kruger's phototext.



Fig 92 Victor Burgin, *Framed*, from the series *US77*. Gelatin silver print, 40 x 60 inches, 1977

Text:

*Framed*

*A dark-haired woman in her late-fifties  
 Hands over a photograph showing the haircut  
 She wants duplicating exactly.  
 The picture shows a very young woman  
 With blond hair cut extremely short.  
 The hairdresser props it by the mirror  
 in which he can see the face of his client  
 watching her own reflection.  
 When he has finished he removes the cotton cape  
 From the woman's shoulders. 'That's it', he says.  
 But the woman continues staring, continues staring  
 At her reflection in the mirror.*

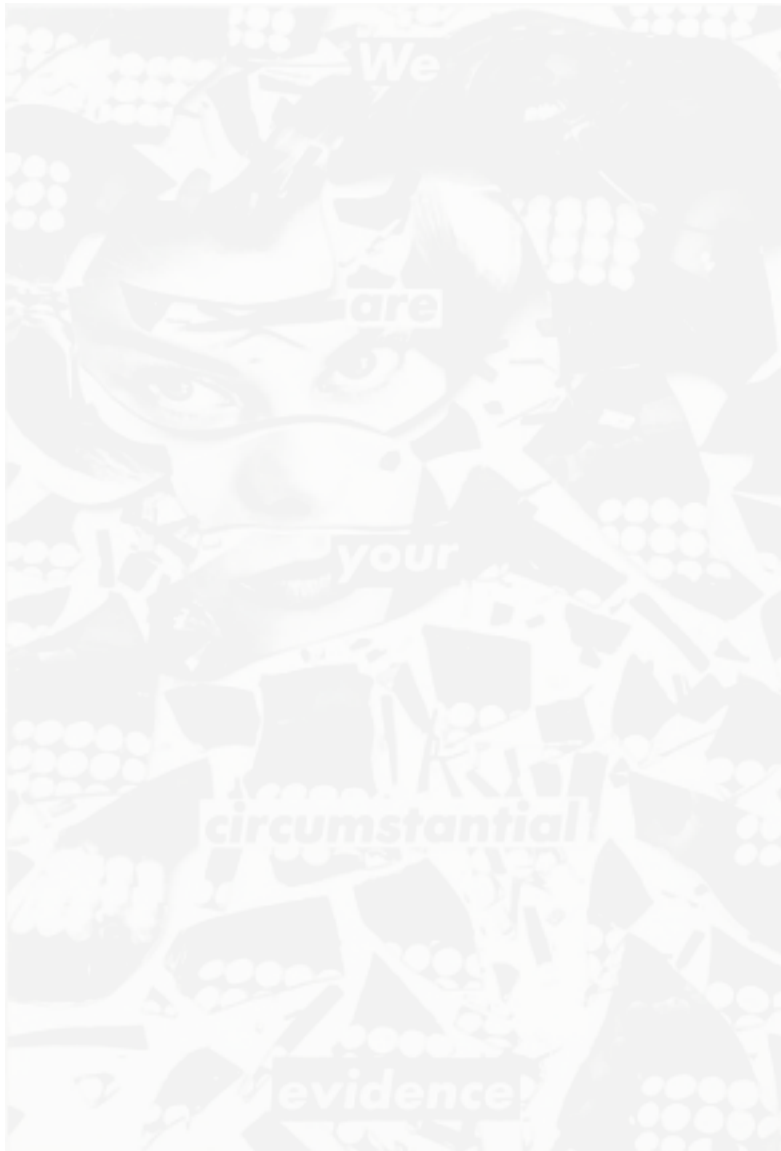


Fig 93 Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (We are your circumstantial evidence)*. Gelatin silver print and type on paper, 12 feet 3 inches x 24 feet 3 inches, 1983, Philadelphia Museum of Art

A framed poster of the famous Marlboro cigarette cowboy campaign is at the epicentre of the image, with a close-up of the proud cowboy savouring his cigarette – when it was still not obligatory to state, and perhaps not so known, that smoking kills. There are many other elements in the image on which Burgin himself dwells in his own explanation for this panel, included below. The text teleports us to another parallel universe where a dark-haired woman in her late fifties is at the hairdresser asking for a mission impossible: to get exactly the same look as a very young woman with blond hair, cut extremely short, as depicted in the photograph she hands over to the hairdresser. At the end when the job is done, the woman keeps looking, supposedly perplexed at her reflection in the mirror.

Burgin refers to the Japanese concept of *ma*, 'the interval, both spatial and temporal, between two successive events – an interval charged with the meaning produced in this succession', and how he works with 'the *ma* between two psychological events: the image formed while reading the text, and the image formed while looking at the picture' (Chiocchetti, 2019, p 23). *Framed* is the perfect example of how distant Burgin's *ma* can be.

When asked to say something about the exact relationship of text to image in *Framed* in the aforementioned *Block* magazine interview, Burgin replied:

*We usually see words used to comment on the image in some way; for example, to give some extra information about what is shown in the image. Alternatively, we see an image used to illustrate a text – to show pictorially what has already been mentioned verbally. To take this example: the 'keyword' Framed is used to relate together a number of pictured and 'written' frames: the frame of the panel itself; the frame of the Marlboro poster; the frame of the photograph described in the text; and the frame of the mirror in which the woman watches herself. Secondly the word 'framed' – in the language of gangster and cowboy films has the meaning of the misrepresentation of an individual: the good guy is 'framed' by the bad guys. The cowboy in the poster helps this reading. Now this idea of being framed, of having a certain 'picture' of yourself imposed on you by others against your will, can then be attached to the stereotypes which are arranged as oppositions: young girl/middle-aged woman; male hairdresser/cowboy – these are clearly distinguished cliché representations of people used in the media, and in culture in general. We can go even further with this sort of reading, although you'll probably find this a bit extreme: the cowboy in the poster is smoking a cigarette; a slang term for a cigarette in this country, is 'fag' and 'fag' is also a term of abuse used against homosexual men. And again, under the poster there's a bag, the term 'bag is a similarly sexist insult used to describe a woman 'past her prime'. These sorts of 'literalisations' of elements in an image aren't often picked up consciously, but I think that they contribute to what we might call the "unconscious" of an image – contribute to that certain 'taste' an image has and which we find so difficult to account for (1982, p 19).*

What Burgin describes as a sort of 'literalisation' of elements in an image, that contributes to what he calls the 'unconscious' of an image – and might be prompted both visually and verbally – create such a degree of fragmentation that it questions the very idea of using categories for photo-text dynamics. It is a position that Linda Hutcheon also envisaged in her chapter 'Text/Image Border Tensions' in her seminal 1989 book *The Politics of Postmodernism*, where she discusses the works of both Burgin and Kruger, labelling them under the genre of postmodern photographic

practice.<sup>179</sup> She argues that ‘in this kind of postmodern art, while the relation of the text to the image is never one of pure redundancy, emphasis, or repetition, the text also never guarantees any one single, already apparent meaning’ (2002, p 120). After discussing Barthes’ categories of anchorage and relay, she shows how both ‘the repressive (or at least controlling) function of the verbal component’ (anchorage) and the complementing one of relay, in the relationship between the linguistic and the pictorial – in what she calls postmodern ‘photo-graphy’ – are ‘consciously’ and endlessly problematised (2002, p 121). To illustrate her view on the category of anchorage, she mentions Burgin’s ‘double meaning play’ in his poster *Possession* (1976), where ‘though the very presence of a text might suggest’ the repressive function, ‘the actual words, when read in relation to the picture, turn it against itself’ (2002, p 121). Intriguingly when it comes to questioning the category of relay in ‘those postmodern photo-graphy’, Hutcheon (2002, p 121) uses Kruger’s phototext *Untitled (We are your circumstantial evidence)*, where the sentence is fragmentedly superimposed (one word per line) on an image of a broken mirror, from which we can see parts of the features of a very sensual young woman.

Circumstantial evidence is indirect evidence inferred from circumstances which afford a certain presumption, or appear explainable only by one hypothesis. For example, if traces of DNA of a person are found at a crime scene, they do not automatically cause the person to whom the DNA belongs to be ‘framed’ (precisely!) as the killer, because said traces could have been left there prior to the crime or it could be a forensic mistake. Kruger’s direct address allows us to identify ‘we’ with women and ‘your’ with men, and the phototext *could* immediately and feministly teleport us to question the creation of Eve from Adam’s spare rib in the Book of Genesis. Hutcheon writes:

*The text does not elucidate the image; it adds no obvious information not evident in the image. It is more Derridean supplement than substitution. What it does above all, though it de-naturalize the relation between the visual and the verbal and also any evaluative privileging of one over the other* (2002, p 121).

It is not surprising that she employed Jacques Derrida’s ambiguous concept of the ‘supplement’, given it is always ‘undecidable’ whether the supplement adds itself and

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<sup>179</sup> See chapter two for an explanation of why I opted for the label ‘conceptual’ rather than ‘postmodern’ phototexts in the case of Burgin and Kruger.

'is a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence', or whether 'the supplement adds only to replace', to fill an 'emptiness' (Derrida, 1976, p 144). Perhaps one of the most exciting moments in the research for writing this chapter occurred when I found a fascinating passage, in Burgin's incredible and experimental essay 'Tea with Madeleine', where in the artistic parallel text he links gender dynamics to photo-text dynamics, quoting Barthes' categories, to show how misunderstandings are born:

*The image is on the side of the feminine. Polysemic. Swept away along streams of associations it provokes but does little to control. 'Text' is its pilot (Barthes: 'anchorage'). The image is potentially frivolous. It wanders. A 'serious' book is one which contains no pictures (and where the words do not seek to 'paint' pictures).*

*'Thinking in pictures... is unquestionably older than [thinking in words] both ontogenetically and phylogenetically ...' (Freud). The image is on the side of the pre-Oedipal. The word stands to it in the relation of the Law – words added to an image always have an air of paternal guidance and/or reproval.*

*But there is another way of looking at this. We must be suspicious of this appealing assimilation of image to liberty and word to prison. Patriarchy depends on its divisions. First: the woman/the man. But the image/the text is just such a form of patriarchal organisation. Just as, in patriarchy, the concept of the woman is the repository of that 'feminine' which a man must evict from himself in order to become the man, so the concept of the image is made up of that which must be expelled from the text in order that the word may become Law. To demand that the image be liberated from the word therefore is to make a gesture whose implicit essentialism exacerbates the problems it seeks to cure (Burgin, 1986, p 107, my emphasis).*

The passage not only confirms that a thematic approach to exploring photo-text intersections better allows a focus on theoretical aspects, but also that choosing the theme of patriarchy was particularly appropriate and fruitful. Instead of binary oppositions between male/female and text/image, Burgin proposes a 'kind of riddling quality in the visual/verbal interaction, as with a rebus or hieroglyph' (Hutcheon, 2002, p 121).

In the aforementioned 1996 exhibition *Photo Text Text Photo*, one of the curators writes about the relationship between art and life, discussing how post-Duchamp photo-texts of the 1920s – such as the ones produced by the Constructivists El Lissitzky, Alexander Rodchenko and Gustav Klutis, and the Dadaists Kurt Schwitters, Raoul Hausmann and John Heartfield – were concerned with practical life and hence socially engaged, as 'their intended central focus was the educational, or

appellative – if not agitative – character of these works’ rather than a pure interest in photographic art (Hapkemeyer and Weiermair, 1996, p 12). Propaganda has always circulated through photo-text montages in everyday life, through political campaigns, advertising, newspapers and magazines, so it is plausible to believe that these artists decided to fight it and awake consciences through propaganda’s very own ‘scripto-visual’ code. In chapter six I showed that Brecht also had a similar strategy of turning photographs against their original uses by juxtaposing poems in response, to rescue their ideological nature, ‘in the manner of Nazi propaganda itself’, given that ‘in 1943 the SS journal *Germanische Leithefte* attacked the United States by publishing a selection of FSA photographs with commentary’ (Hunter, 1987, p 170). *Mutatis mutandis*, Burgin and Kruger’s phototexts exploit mass-media techniques to produce phototexts that disseminate their deep ‘deconstructive impulse’, as they want to make us question what tends to be called the ‘world’ – through unveiling the ‘scaffolding’ behind the dispersed and subtly insidious structures of power in contemporary society.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> The expression ‘deconstructive impulse’ was also the title of a 2011 exhibition, subtitled *Women Artists Reconfigure the Signs of Power, 1973-1991*, of leading North American female artists from the late twentieth century, including Barbara Kruger, which explored the feminist contribution to the ‘deconstructivist movement’, ‘a term describing artwork that examines [and subverts] the imagery of the popular media’ (Princenthal, 2011, no pagination). As pointed out by Mulvey, ‘parallels are often drawn, nowadays, between the transition from the 1920s to the 1930s and from the 1970s to the 1980s. [...] Over the last two decades, radical art movements have looked back to the traditions of, for instance, Brecht, the Surrealists, the Soviet avant-garde, to rediscover and redeploy avant-garde strategies and aesthetic theories that had become lost or buried in the intervening three decades’ (1989, pxv).

## Thesis Conclusions

The aim of this thesis has been to dissect the genre of photo-texts and to expand the knowledge about them. I will first discuss the methodology of the research, then move to the conclusions and contributions to knowledge.

The research was conducted combining different methods. Archival research was done at both public and private international collections for the nineteenth-century materials: the Victoria and Albert Museum, the National Art Library, the Royal Photographic Society, formerly at the National Media Museum in Bradford, the Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, the Wilson Centre for Photography, the British Library, the Fox Talbot Museum, the Alinari Collection in Florence, Robert Hershkowitz Ltd, Richard Saltoun Gallery, Société française de photographie, The Met and MoMA in New York and the New York Public Library.<sup>181</sup>

The collaboration with American collector David Solo on activating his Photo-Poetry Books Collection allowed me to dig into this type of photo-text. For chapter six on Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* and Jahan and Cocteau's *La Mort et les statues* I consulted the Bertolt Brecht Archive in Berlin, the Archives of l'Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC) at the Abbaye d'Ardenne, the Bibliothèque d'art et d'archéologie at the Musées d'art et d'histoire in Geneva and the library of the Fondation Jan Michalski pour l'écriture et la littérature, which has an ever growing collection of photo-text books – and where I had the chance to be a writer in residence between June and September 2018. While in Switzerland, I also had access to the Jean Mohr Collection at Musée de l'Élysée in Lausanne to better study his collaboration with John Berger.

For chapter seven on conceptual photo-texts by Victor Burgin and Barbara Kruger, I studied their works, together with the other conceptual photo-texts that I mention in chapter two, at the Bibliothèque Kandinsky and the library of the Maison Européenne de la Photographie both in Paris, thanks to a six-month residency at the Cité internationale des arts from January to June 2019. While Barbara Kruger never replied to my request to interview her, I had the honour of meeting Victor Burgin on a number of occasions thanks to my DOS, and to

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<sup>181</sup> For the research conducted on Peter Henry Emerson at the V&A, see the preface of this thesis.



interview him about his work, photography theory and the 'scripto-visual' form in general.<sup>182</sup>

The participation in a number of conferences and lectures was instrumental in advancing the research. I mentioned the 'Fiction and Photography' symposium (2014) in the preface, and I must add the presentations on nineteenth-century photo-texts at the 'Image-Text' symposium in Ithaca, New York, and to Image Text Ithaca MFA students in the prints and drawing study room at the V&A in London with original materials, both in 2015. Taking part in the 11th conference of the International Association of Word and Image Studies (IAWIS) in 2017, on 'Images and texts reproduced', within the panel entitled 'Photobooks or phototexts?' at the University of Lausanne, allowed me to further clarify taxonomical matters discussed in chapter one. Also, the 2018 international conference 'Le phototexte engage: Du militantisme aux luttes de visibilité (The Committed Phototext: From Activism to Struggles for Visibility)' at Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris, where I presented the paper 'Linguivore Species' on violence against women and collective healing through two photo-text books, allowed me to clarify my thinking on conceptual photo-texts – and to meet key photo-literature scholars such as Paul Edwards and Andy Stafford, with whom I started an enriching and critical dialogue on photo-texts that has partly informed Part I of this thesis. Lastly, organising and moderating the 2018 PhotoBook Week at the historical bookstore Shakespeare and Company in Paris, on the theme of photo-text books, allowed me to invite and discuss photo-literature with Professor Jean-Pierre Montier (chapter one and two), and photo-novels with curator Frederique Deschamps (chapter two).

I shall now move to the conclusions of the thesis. The methodological Part I, 'Understanding Photo-Texts', has dealt with the problems concerning the definition of the object of study. This proved quite challenging, since the photo-text is a hybrid object of study addressed by and contested among different disciplines, such as word and image studies, photography history and theory, comparative literature and, at times, national literatures too. As these disciplines are not always in dialogue with each other, despite their proximity – and since

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<sup>182</sup> Part of our conversations was published in *Aperture's The PhotoBook Review* issue 16 (Burgin, 2019).

none of them has so far managed to agree on a definition to classify and dissect the photo-text in all its components and diversity – it was fundamental for my research to sort out the ontological, taxonomical and theoretical confusion that shrouds photo-texts.

To do so, I had to examine the different disciplines that deal with the photo-text separately and build a transversal interdisciplinary literature review. So, both a literature review and a foundational analysis, Part I was a necessary preliminary investigation on the key problematics in discussing photo-texts and the limits of the existing scholarship. These problematics and limits were, in turn, instrumental in identifying the areas that needed further scrutiny and formulating a rationale and methodology for the selection and analysis of the case studies in Part II. Part I also allowed me to identify the types of photo-texts, the historical periods and themes, as well as the theories on photo-text dynamics that provided the most fertile soil for further investigation, which I presented in the form of case studies in Part II.

Through the research, it emerged that part of the process of advancing knowledge about the photo-text was first and foremost to delineate what it is and clarify its polymorphous character. I had first to elucidate how to spell it, highlighting the importance of the hyphen, which represents the fundamental photo-text component of the ‘third something’ – an imaginary object that develops in the reader/viewer’s mind through the eyes’ dance back and forth from photo to text, and back to photo. Indeed the photo-text has mainly not been defined at all by scholars, who at times took it for granted and skipped directly to the analysis of case studies (Zehnhoff, 1988), focusing on a specific type, such as the photo-essay (Nye, 1988 and Mitchell, 1994) or the photo-novel (Baetens, 1988), or on a specific geographical area, such as the American photo-essay (Blinder, 2019) or *Italy Observed in Photography and Literature* (Traub and Ballerini, 1988), without explaining what they meant by the umbrella term ‘photo-text’.

On the occasions that scholars have attempted to provide a definition, it is seldom convincing for a number of reasons. First, they miss the crucial point of the mandatory co-presence of both words and photographs, without which the ‘third something’ cannot exist. Hence, they include in the genre of photo-texts works that clearly belong elsewhere, such as ekphrasis, namely a literary device in which a work of visual art is described in detail by words only in a literary text

(Hunter, 1987, Stafford, 2010, Montier, 2018, Cometa, 2017, and Wagner, 1996). And third, they impose the impossible condition of considering as photo-texts only those works in which the relationship between photographic images and words goes beyond the illustrative or descriptive function. If in a photo-text both words and photographs have to contribute to its meaning, how can we say that a descriptive text or an illustrative photograph do not contribute to its meaning? Maybe the third something that they create is less fascinating as there is less space for imagination, if words and images are in a too literal or banal relationship, but they still create it. Or what about experimental works where such an illustrative or descriptive relationship is intentionally explored to the limits, as in the case of Annie Ernaux and Marc Marie's *L'usage de la photo* (2005)?

Therefore, in chapter one, 'Photo-Texts: Definition and Affiliation', I proposed a definition that took into account all the problematic issues that emerged in the interdisciplinary literature review and combined my view with the most convincing elements of other scholars' definitions. Photo-texts are 'bimedial iconotexts' (Lagerwall, 2006, p 119), in which both photographic images and words co-exist and constitute the body of work within the pages of a book or on the gallery/museum walls, as they must 'simultaneously be read and viewed' (Hunter, 1987, p 2) together, to form new meanings, while preserving equal and separate ontological dignity – and at times distance – to 'shoot some tensions' or trigger some dynamics that juxtapose the two systems of signs without confusing them (Montandon, 1990, p 6). Photo-texts are partners in crime that create a 'dialogue to which neither of the two media can, even for a moment, escape' (Cometa, 2017, p 2). This dialogue or 'interpenetration of images and words' (Bryson, 1988, p 185) enhances each medium's narrative potential and expands the fictionality – intended as imaginary character – of the work as a whole in its reception, since in the constant back and forth and tension, between looking at the images and reading the words, a third imaginary and unattainable object, the 'third something' (Eisenstein, 2004, p 12), develops only in the viewer/reader's mind, 'the one who ultimately always "makes sense" of' photo-texts (Wagner, 1995, p 12). Before this can happen in the mind of the reader/viewer, images and texts have to be incorporated by the 'mediating organ of the eye', which 'swallows everything, obliterating the difference between the written and the visual' (Richon, 1991, pp 32-33).

The photo-text is not just a hybrid object, but it is also extremely diverse, as it combines photographic images and words in multiple ways. These ways can be so different as to generate equally different types of photo-texts, such as the photo-essay and the *roman-photo*, both belonging to the same umbrella genre of the photo-text, as they are made of the same components (photographs, words, third something) – but they form, individually, a specific type or sub-category, as their elements vary in characteristics and style.<sup>183</sup> Hence, after clarifying what photo-texts are, and sorting out taxonomical confusion in chapter one, it was important to examine how they can be classified and provide a taxonomy in chapter two. I have identified six existing different types of photo-texts and introduced a new one that has been there for a while and needed to be given a label.

Photo-captions and titles are the first texts that have accompanied photographs in their circulation, aiming to reveal more basic information about the context of production of the image and the content portrayed. I showed through Newhall (1952), Freund (1980), Mulas (1968-72), Fontcuberta (1984) and Krims (1970) how they can provide fertile soil for fiction, propaganda and artistic subversion.

Scientific/knowledge-based photo-texts have been produced to divulgate research, theories, instructions and discoveries within a multiplicity of disciplines, from medicine to criminology, primarily in the form of photographically illustrated books. I discussed how these publications, far from being innocently didactic projects, disseminated institutional ideology over a plethora of delicate matters such as race, gender, or in other words *otherness* (Sekula, 1981, and Tagg, 2009). Within this type of photo-text the photograph – which originally played the secondary role of confirming and illustrating the text, where Knowledge with a capital K was conveyed – acquired a status of artistic value over time.

Photo-essays are non-fiction photo-texts that respond to the documentary purpose of exploring in words and photographic images a specific topic, both in the shorter form of a feature within a magazine and as a whole book. Often dealing with socio-political issues, they raise important ethical issues in relation to the subjects portrayed, as the abundant scholarship about this type has

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<sup>183</sup> See the glossary of key terms at the beginning of the thesis.

highlighted, especially North American examples in the 1930s and 1940s – a decade that saw the publication of many of them (Moran, 1974, Hunter, 1987, Mitchell, 1994, Weinberg, 2001, Entin, 2007, Crain, 2009, and Klingensmith, 2016).

Due to the slippery term ‘literature’ – which has multiple meanings, including ‘scholarship’ – the type labelled photo-literature, namely a photo-text that mingles fictional writings, such as novels and short stories, with photographic images, is the one that presents the highest degree of confusion, as scholars have labelled as photo-literature too many different objects that clearly belong elsewhere, such as to photo-criticism or ekphrasis (Grivel, 1988, Lambrechts and Salu, 1992 and 2000, and Montier, 2018). Thanks to this type and to writers’ experimental approaches, here photography is finally liberated from the burden of authenticity (Dow Adams, 2008, and Pedri and Petit, 2013).

Initially considered by scholars to belong to photo-literature, photo-poetry – not to be confused with the relationship between photography and poetry – has recently started to be treated as a separate type of photo-text that mingles poems (including prose poems) and photographic images (Bonney, 2015, Barthes, 2000, Montejo Navas, 2017, and Nott, 2018). There is something fascinating about the relatively self-contained universe yet boundless imaginary potential of the photograph and the poem, when they encounter each other, that makes them the ideal components of a photo-text (Crawford and McBeath, 2016). The swinging quality of photo-text interactions within photo-poetic works, equally as literal, illustrative or banal as they are pioneering and subversive – together with the relatively less attention they received – made me decide to explore further this type in Part II with a dedicated case study (Phillips, 1936, Holme and Forman, 1946, Man Ray and Éluard, 1935, Slinger, 1971, and Cortellessa, 2020).

The *roman-photo* or the photo-novel is the most codified of all types with specific rules, coming from the photo-comics realm, both in terms of how to stage the images and how to write the text, which mostly consists of dialogues between the portrayed subjects in speech balloons (Jacobelli, 1956). Images and texts have to collaborate to create the maximum dramatic effect, convey action and dynamism within the static space of the printed page and the still photograph. A product conceived with a specific female target audience in mind, it entailed all sorts of patriarchal and paternalistic implications in 1940s Italy, where it was born.

The photo-novel reached incredible commercial success mostly in Catholic and southern countries, less so in Anglo-Saxon culture. Intriguingly it was also used for political propaganda by the Italian Communist Party to attract female votes (Bonifazio, 2017). Due to its focus on romance, it took a while before scholars examined it rigorously without snobbery, but once they started, they almost never stopped, making the photo-novel a lively field of academic and curatorial explorations (Baetens, 1988, 1991, 2010, 2013 and 2017, and Deschamps, 2017). The term 'photo-novel' has appropriated the term 'novel' from literature, which refers to a 'long fictional prose narrative', becoming somehow misleading and impeding literature to have its specific label for novels with photographic images.

In conceptual photo-texts, as the adjective suggests, it is the relationship and dynamics between images and words that is conceptual, rather than descriptive, or literary, poetic, journalistic, scientific, instructive – in other words it emphasises the notion of 'art as idea', de-prioritising aesthetic values (Marzona, 2006, pp 6-8). In terms of photo-text dynamics and hierarchies, conceptual photo-texts usually encapsulate the most accomplished democratic intersections with both visual and textual elements sharing equal importance in contributing to the meaning – or, at times, the ambiguity – of the artwork. Being a type of photo-text whose label I introduce with this thesis, although the works have been around for quite a while, I felt it necessary to elaborate on it further with a longer text in chapter two and to dedicate one of the case studies to it.

This classification presented in chapter two, 'Types of Photo-Texts', has enabled me to sort out taxonomical confusion and identify the types of photo-texts that needed further scrutiny. A plausible and convincing taxonomy ensures a more accurate comparison between works, which, in turn, fosters a better contribution to knowledge about the photo-text.

From a theoretical point of view, being a compound object, it was crucial to understand and dissect the three components that constitute the photo-text: photographic images, words and the third something in chapter three. As per the first component, namely the 'Photo-' element, it was important to understand photo-texts' affiliation to the larger family of image-texts – which entailed considering the photographic image in comparison with other type of non-mechanical images such as painting and sculpture, as the '-text' part remained

unaltered. To my surprise, I realised that within word and image studies scholars have either taken for granted or failed to clarify the relationship of photo-texts to the wider field of image-texts, neglecting photography's peculiar nature.

Within photography theory, the debate has mainly focused on photography's ontology in relation to the notion of truth and authenticity and, more recently, to that of fiction, rather than on photography's relationship with other types of images. This has produced two factions of theorists, the realists and the anti-realists, which, with a few important exceptions – such as Benjamin, Burgin, Berger, Rancière and Bate – failed to acknowledge the fundamental role of text and language in advancing the discourse.<sup>184</sup>

In comparing photographs with other types of non-mechanical images, in terms of their relationship with what we tend to call 'reality', I showed that an important passage has been neglected to explain their differences: the psychoanalytic concept of disavowal, without which the peculiarity of photography cannot be fully grasped. *I know very well that photographs are not analogous to reality, but nevertheless I interact with them as if they were*, constantly questioning their relation to truth, because they reproduce some of the conditions of perception (Eco, 1982) and due to their psychopathological everyday use (Creekmur, 1996). As I concluded in the first section of chapter three, entitled 'Photo-', unlike image-texts, photo-texts suffer from a delayed reception, given that before their scripto-visual dynamics can be savoured by the beholder, the photographic element will inevitably be tested against a sort of reality and plausibility principle.

In terms of the second component, discussed in the second section of chapter three, entitled '-Text', I looked at the traditional canon of photographic works and critical texts through the filter of photography's relationship with text. This enabled me to demonstrate the fundamental role text plays in allowing us to go beyond

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<sup>184</sup> Within the discipline of comparative literature – the other one to deal with photo-texts every now and then – there is also a theoretical corpus, but it has mainly to do with literary theory, with photographs in literature occupying a marginal role. It is very rare to read rigorous theoretical reflections about photography by literary scholars, who, except for Cometa (2017), mainly focus on photo-literature, neglecting the other types of photo-texts (Carrara 2020), or embark on anthological projects, arranged geographically, that explore the relation between photography and literature as, somewhat rigidly, the presence or impact of photography in fiction writing (Armstrong, 1999), or the photographic depiction of literary works and authors, regardless of the actual co-presence of both images and words.

the realist/anti-realist conundrum within photography theory, and to accept once and for all photography's double soul, rather than paradox, of being *both* a realist and a fictional medium, easily subvertible by text.

Finally, as per the third component, the '-' hyphen that I see as a double symbol for both the third something and the text-photo relationship, in chapter four, entitled 'Towards Photo-Text Theory', I mapped out a selective critical history of ideas that contribute towards what I propose to call 'photo-text theory' – by examining both the occasional and fragmented writings that take text-photo relations as their explicit object and by discussing the possible ways to expand it. To do so, I interspersed examples from twentieth-century photo-text practitioners, artists and thinkers such as Nancy Newhall and Duane Michals as well as more recent names, such as Roni Horn and Jane Tormey, with a special focus on Roland Barthes' (1977, pp 37-41) famous functions of anchorage (control) and relay (complementarity) to describe the effect of text over the image. While so far ideas about photo-text dynamics were scattered around different epochs, disciplines, countries and publications, I gathered a selection of them here in this thesis, where they have been re-examined together for the first time in this way.

This compilation was instrumental in shedding light on the possible ways to expand photo-text theory. I realised that while Barthes' is the first one to envisage the possibility of co-existence for both anchorage and relay in the same photo-text encounter, I was not fully convinced by his adversative sentence that reads 'but the dominance of the one or the other is of consequence for the general economy of a work' (1977, p 41). The sentence appears to presuppose that there is always a dominance, while I have shown photo-texts in which it is difficult to establish so. Also, due to the way in which Barthes (1977, pp 37-41) has described the functions of anchorage and relay, and to the way in which artists, such as Duane Michals, have employed and challenged them, anchorage is associated with the negative idea of repressiveness, while relay appears a more liberating function that text can exert over images. So, these reflections started to shape the idea and need to test Barthes' (1977, p 41) functions with a selection of case studies.

In addition, the findings from the taxonomical research made me realise another set of points that further shaped the development of the case studies for Part II. First, the fact that nineteenth-century photo-texts have received less



attention from scholars initially made me think that a possible reason could be their presumed more banal photo-text dynamics, an idea put forward by Clive Scott in his book *The Spoken Image* (1999). I had the pleasure to refute this assumption myself while I was doing archival research at the V&A on Peter Henry Emerson and other nineteenth-century artists that I discuss in chapter five. Second, I was particularly surprised by the lack of more systematic studies on photo-poetry, as, also thanks to my collaboration with photo-poetry collector David Solo, I realised the plethora of publications that still awaits critical attention. A similar thing happened with conceptual photo-texts, amplified by the fact that since I was giving that name to that type of photo-text for the first time, the least I could do was to elaborate on it further. So, a combination of all the findings from Part I with my archival and curatorial work produced the architecture and rationale for the case studies presented in Part II. Andrea Cortellessa's (2020, no pagination) interesting parallel between Mitchell's (2017) idea of the conflictual encounter between images and words and the 'peculiar frequency' with which image-text works represent conflict – something which I had noticed myself as I mention in the introduction, though via Barthes rather than Mitchell – together with personal interest in the topic and past work collaborations that I mention in the preface, encouraged me to cluster the case studies thematically around significant kinds of image-text analysis: poetry and war and conceptual critique of patriarchy.

In chapter five I have shown not only that photo-texts are as old as photography itself (Hercules Florence, Hippolyte Bayard and William Henry Fox Talbot), but also that some of the nineteenth-century ones are as trailblazing as later ones. I have examined and celebrated their sophistication in terms of a number of their features, structuring the chapter by type of photo-text to echo chapter two and discussing works by Bayard, Fox Talbot, Rejlander, Gardner, and Emerson, among others. Photo-texts in the nineteenth century presented a good degree of diversity, since almost all the types of photo-texts discussed in chapter two were – *mutatis mutandi* – already to be found in the early days of photography. I showed how they were also diverse from a graphic point of view: typed or handwritten, invading the photographic surface or appearing on the side, the mount or the verso, stemming from the same author or not. Sophistication is also and above all to be detected in their photo-text dynamics that go beyond the

mere descriptive, ancillary or hierarchical relation, but already show signs of complementarity and complexity. To use Barthes' categories discussed in the previous chapter, which, despite their limits, are nonetheless extremely useful labels of photo-text dynamics, sophisticated photo-texts present both anchorage and relay dynamics. Last, but this is less common, there have been occasions in which nineteenth-century authors of photo-texts, such as Peter Henry Emerson (1886) or Alexander Black (1895), reflected on the word-image relationship, a clear sign of their awareness of what they were doing by mixing photographs and writing. By revealing their most eccentric features, I have also countered some of the scholarship available, which reduces them to embryonic and simplistic episodes (Hunter, 1987, p 3, and Scott, 1999, p 53).

Chapter six showed that anchorage can exert a politically liberating function, while relay a dangerous political drift towards unconcern, through the comparative analysis of the photo-text dynamics of two post-Second World War photo-poetry books. I showed how in the case of Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* (1955), Barthes' function of anchorage, normally believed to be repressive, has instead a positive connotation, since Brecht's poetry rescues and liberates the press clippings from their dangerous ideological surface of war propaganda typical of mainstream magazines in capitalist societies, unmasking their sordid attempt to remove agency. At the other end of the spectrum, Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau's collaborative project *La Mort et les statues* (1946) encapsulates the dangerous hidden potential of relay text, since Cocteau's prose poems hijack the readers/viewers, teleporting them away from the tragedy of the Second World War, with an escapist drift towards political unconcern.

In chapter seven I demonstrated how anchorage and relay can co-exist in the same photo-text in such an enmeshed way that it becomes difficult to distinguish them, through a selection of works from Barbara Kruger's appropriated photo-texts of the 1980s and from Victor Burgin's photo-text series *US77* that address the theme of patriarchy. As I have illustrated, in both Kruger and Burgin anchorage and relay's co-presence is so blended, with the same text at times exerting both functions simultaneously – hence the term 'anchorelay' – that it is difficult to establish a 'dominance', as Barthes (1977, p 41) argued. The selected photo-texts by Burgin and Kruger showed how Barthes' categories can be

deliberately and endlessly problematised, hence questioning their very function (Hutcheon, 2002).

This research contributes to the history and theory of art and photography by looking at the traditional canon of photographic works and critical texts through the filter of photography's relationship with text. Furthermore, it demonstrates the importance of considering photo-texts as a specific genre within the traditional canon of photography history and theory, word and image studies and comparative literature, offering an original interdisciplinary method that combines these different disciplines.

The thesis also contributes to the critical history of photo-texts by developing a more sophisticated approach to analyse them. It presents a definition that takes into account photo-texts' idiosyncrasies. By clarifying the existing types of photo-texts and identifying a new one, conceptual photo-texts, a type that was there and needed to be labelled, the thesis offers a clearer classification that sorts out the taxonomical confusion that has been haunting photo-texts. By examining the occasional reflections on the text-photo relationship, this research also contributes towards photo-text theory and suggests ways to expand it, by challenging Barthes' seminal functions of anchorage and relay that he introduced in relation to the linguistic message juxtaposed with press and advertising pictures.

Through the analysis of case studies that range from the nineteenth century to more contemporary examples, this thesis also counters the historical assumption of 'progress' in photo-text relations. By showing sophistication in a number of nineteenth-century photo-texts, the idea of a chronological evolution in photo-text dynamics from early alleged embryo to later supposed adroitness, put forward by Scott (1999), is here refuted.

From a methodological point of view, this thesis offers a thematic approach for the analysis of the case studies, which are clustered around three main narratives: sophistication of nineteenth-century photo-texts, post-war photo-poems and 'conceptual photo-texts' in patriarchal society. Such an approach is different from most studies published on the subject. Indeed, except for the aforementioned 2018 conference 'Le Phototexte engagé', whose main focus was the politically committed photo-text, most publications on photo-texts have mainly a geographical and chronological focus (Blinder, 2019, and Stafford, 2010,

among others) or anthological and typological approach, as they explore a specific type of photo-text (Rabb, 1995, and Nott, 2018). The thematic approach is more suitable for the theoretical examination of photo-texts as it better allows the identification of contrasts and affinities in photo-text dynamics, since the compared works deal with the same theme.

Furthermore, this thesis sheds light on works that have been less explored, such as nineteenth-century photo-texts, the types of photo-poetry and conceptual photo-texts. It also brings back into focus the almost forgotten curatorial projects *The Photograph As Artifice* (1978) and *Photo text text photo* (1996), and rare publications such as Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau's *La Mort et les statues*, (1946), Holme and Forman's *A Poet's Camera* (1946) and Penny Slinger's *50% The Visible Woman* (1971).

While Bertolt Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* has received significant attention by scholars, it has never been discussed in comparison with Jahan and Cocteau's *La Mort et les statues* through the filter of Barthes' functions of anchorage and relay. Likewise, although Victor Burgin and Barbara Kruger's works have been compared before by Laura Mulvey (1989), they are here analysed together for the first time through the filter of Barthes' photo-text categories.

Lastly, the English translation of currently untranslated material in French, such as passages from Jahan and Cocteau's *La Mort et les statues*, Jahan's autobiography *Objectif* (1994) and Michael Nerlich's essay 'Qu'est-ce un iconotexte? Réflexions sur le rapport texte-image photographique dans *La Femme se découvre* d'Evelyne Sinnassamy' (1990) – which introduced the concept of 'iconotext' for the first time – add to the originality of this research.

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