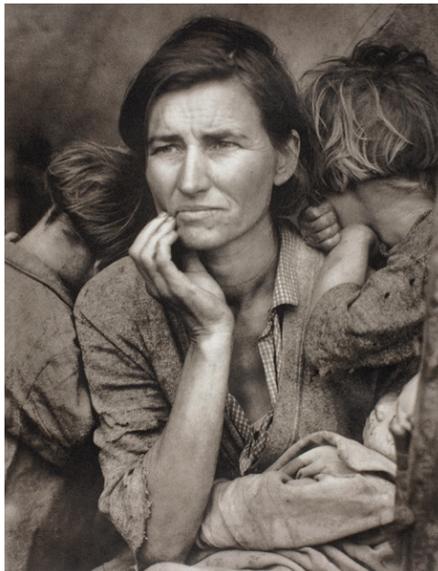




the gaze

is a hold

Florence Owens Thompson Florence Owens Thompson Florence Owens Thompson



Partial Accountings of Photography

What does a photographic history consist of? How do we trace historical lineage through photography? Recently, there is a more urgent conversation around the canon, about how it should be more reflective of the voices of many, less a “body of rules, principles, or standards accepted as axiomatic and universally binding.”¹ The question that arises, for me as an educator, is how to *do* this teaching. How to better reflect the medium, history, and context of photography more accurately, as violence, exploitation, homage, document, struggle—its power to represent, to hold.

I think back to my own photographic training. I remember the default: to show work from the codified (largely white male) art world. I ask myself, does repairing the unequal representation I received resolve itself with showing a greater diversity of artists to my students? Would that repair adequately elucidate photography as part of the bloodstream of our judicial, penal, advertising, educational, and familial histories? This question, how to teach photography in a way that can make the static image vibrate with its multiple possibilities, was the impetus for this project.

These words here are the admitting of the struggle to you, the reader. I want you to be implicated now in this question—because just like a photograph needs an audience to establish existence, so these questions need engagement in order to yield conversation.

To begin.

What is the punctum of photography upon the shape of our seeing?

I have asked artists, historians, educators to respond to the question of how we engage with the medium in order to unhinge

it, to pull it from its implied truth, and find a way to feel into new relations. I asked them, how do you teach this vast photographic story caught in colonial power? Where do you feel something from a photograph? How does tracing photography’s past become a place to acknowledge instability as a productive force of learning? I was not looking for answers, per se; rather, some paths that may allow for students (and ourselves) to shake the latent photo with its gazes of power and control,² and find a way to make a mark, a puncture of meaning, of emotion.³

The artists and historians whose writing is contained in these pages offer reflections on, and ideas for, an unmoored photographic history. American artist and educator Luke Stettner reproduced, through drawing, a photograph he took of graffiti on a storefront. Stettner’s drawing underlines the index of the body as the apparatus of labour in the struggle for meaning in and through the photograph. American artist and professor Em Rooney shared a recent syllabus from her *Critical Issues in Contemporary Photography* class. Rooney abandons formal syllabus language in order to present students with a manifesto that invokes, demands, and implores engagement with our mediated-by-photography world. Rooney states that the photograph is in our body; it will not leave when you exit the classroom.

American artist and professor Jared Thorne wrote of the first image he remembers deeply affecting him. The image he responded to is from his youth, found in popular culture, and is felt by him to be a reminder of the reality of a lived past. Thorne wants students to find this kind of engagement—a conscious desire for productive wounding through images. Canadian artist Maria Hupfield shared an image, *Resistance on All Fronts*, a singular photograph that depicts herself held and obscured by felt. We are allowed to see

her, as a viewer, *partially*. Hupfield makes a barrier, a protection for her subject, through physical intervention onto the image.

Lastly, Canadian writer and professor Namiko Kunimoto writes of the intent in her *Photography East and West* class at Ohio State University to shed the linear march of photographic time, particularly the narrative of technological improvement of camera machinery and image making. Kunimoto speaks to the necessity of engaging students with questions, a strategy of implication. No matter how difficult, we must be in pursuit of the unseen legacies, and potential, of the photograph. Precisely because of its most disturbing and vexing role in internalizing systems of power, it merits our attention. Ariella Azoulay states, "...despite the fact that photography speaks falsely, it *also* speaks the truth."⁴

But what if the studium becomes a second punctum?

Roland Barthes famously characterized the punctum of a photograph as an intensity of emotion, unavoidably subjective in its power. His view reinforced the validity of the personal and subjective response to image. Barthes described the studium as being that where, "Thousands of photographs consist of this field [studium]... What I feel about these photographs derives from an *average* affect, almost from a certain training." This *certain training* is an unquestioned, oft colonial, heteronormative and patriarchal, gaze. For instance, Barthes describes an image by James Van der Zee, writing, "Here is a family of American blacks, photographed in 1926 by James Van der Zee. The studium is clear: I am sympathetically interested, as a docile cultural subject, in what the photograph has to say, for it speaks (it is a 'good' photograph)."⁵ Barthes holds the studium, or the content of the image, to a place of (so called) objective facts of understanding. It is clear, as a reader and viewer, that this characterization of 'general understanding' is problematic.⁶

The passivity of the studium needs to be shed. I would like to propose a second punctum as an engagement in active relation between viewer, and the social and lived experience in which they see the photograph embedded. Second punctum is not a solid

state; it does not lie docile as a complacent and unique 'aboutness'. Second punctum is a place of stimulation, a personal, changing, drawing of relationship. It is an attempt to recognize the codes of power and possibility within the photographic image. I have used the word punctum because, in this relation, it is *also* a felt response. The first punctum, as originally described by Barthes⁷, is the moment of feeling and intensity that connects specifically the viewer. The second punctum, I propose, asks that the viewer *continue* to feel and this time notice the relationship that the photograph holds with history.

Yet, the second punctum is not secondary; it is simultaneous. I feel this detail, *and* I feel this relationship to its social, cultural, historical context. Two punctums are the doubled inhabitation of the image—between its private and public layers of contact and its personal and social implications. Perhaps through this commitment and engagement with double feeling, the photograph and its context can be alive, again and again.⁸ This double punctum is the way we make connection—from our own experience, knowledge, class, race, and historical moment, to the image held within the web of history, power, authority, and revolt.

The control we try to wield by photographing can be terrifying, can be liberating. It will be neither if we do not provide ourselves and our students with the language to question and pull image and order apart, to have the courage to feel a relation to history. I want students to be aware of the potential power and responsibility of the viewer to re-activate the photograph, to make it a question, a wound, a gift. What we are taught to learn, to love, to desire, to condemn, is captured and passed through the machine of the camera eye.

the touch, the wound, the question, the anger

What I am reminded of, by each of these artist, historian, educator responses to the questions of *Partial Accountings* is that our felt response to the personal and the larger social context is part of our doubled responsibility to see.

Sheilah ReStack is from Caribou River, Nova Scotia, and is currently Associate Professor and Chair of Studio Art at Denison University in Granville, Ohio. She is a recipient of the Howard Foundation Photography Fellowship (2017) and Canada Council Project grants (2016, 2014). Her solo work explores embodied use of photography, and will be part of an upcoming residency at Eastern Edge. Her collaborative practice, with Dani ReStack, uses video to both document and create new narrative proposals.

Notes:

1. Merriam Webster dictionary, June 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/canon>.
2. Edward Said states, "...the act of representing others almost always involves violence to the subject of representation." Edward Said, *The Shadow of the West* (Virginia: Landmark Films, 1985).
3. This question became ever more apparent to me through the process of preparing a gallery talk at the Wexner Center for the Arts on my experience with Cindy Sherman's *Imitation of Life* exhibition.
4. Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (London: Zone Books, 2012), 116.
5. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 28.
6. Further articulated in Shawn Michelle Smith's *Race and Reproduction in Camera Lucida* where they state, "He calls upon the studium as if it is apparent, transparent, as if this lovely formal portrait could not be read in any other way, as if all readers would share his bemused reaction to the image and its subjects. While Barthes' reading might certainly be attributed to a particular set of European cultural codes, readers are not asked to "see" those codes as part and parcel of the studium, but instead to see through them to the meaning Barthes presumes. In other words, *Camera Lucida* asks readers to view a race based paternalism as natural, or beside the point, rather than as a culturally codified part of the studium to be put under examination." Shawn Michelle Smith, *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 24-25.
7. "This second element which will disturb the studium I shall therefore call *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole- also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that

accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me.)" Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.

8. As Ariella Azoulay states, "The limits of their interpretation are not determined in advance and are always open to negotiation. They are not restricted to the intentions of those who would claim to be their authors or of those who participate in their production." Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 129.

Images:

Page 44 top: Florence Owens Thompson. *Interview with Florence Owens Thompson, the Mona Lisa of the Dust Bowl*. Interviewed by Bob Datson, NBC Today Show. NBC, October 30, 1979; bottom: Dorthea Lange (1895-1965), *Migrant Mother, Nipoma California*, 1936, photogravure, edition 79/300, 30.4 x 23.5 cm. Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago/Art Resource, NY. Page 47: Luke Stettner, *PICTURE*, 2019, typewriter on paper, 21.5 x 28 cm. Page 48: Luke Stettner, *last days*, 2019, graphite on paper, 21.5 x 28 cm.

Page 48 and 49: *Luke Stettner lives with his family Carmen, Carlo and Rafa in Columbus, Ohio. Since moving to Ohio in 2015, he's taught undergraduate and graduate courses at Ohio State University, Ohio University and Denison University. His recent book Carrels was written in collaboration with Max Stolkin & Ofer Wolberger and published by Flatfix.biz.*

Page 52: *Em Rooney's work encompasses photography, sculpture, video, and writing—often using sculptural forms and materials to encase or frame photographs. Her specific materials, choices, and methods combine to work against the ubiquity of the photograph through their dedicational and allegorical qualities. Rooney is Assistant Professor Photography at Bard College at Simon's Rock.*

Page 53: *Maria Hupfield is an Anishinaabe citizen of Wasauksing First Nation and Canadian Research Chair of Transdisciplinary Indigenous Arts, University of Toronto. She is a recipient of the Canadian mid-career artist Hnatyshyn Foundation (2018), Lucas Artists Fellowship (2019-2020), and inaugural resident Surf Point Foundation Residency (2020), with a solo show at The Heard Museum (2019-2020).*

STAYS
STAYS

PICTURE in the eye

Passed out of PICTURE

a problem PICTURE

living PICTURE

PICTURE out

out of the PICTURE

the PICTURE of

PICTURE mind

to come into the PICTURE

mirror PICTURE

to see the PICTURE whole

PICTURE face

PICTURE plane

PICTURE window

PICTURE mold

get the PICTURE

in the PICTURE

be in (out of) the PICTURE

not in the PICTURE

make a PICTURE

put one in the PICTURE

PICTURE palace

emotion PICTURE

PICTURE wise

PICTURE show

sick PICTURE

commotion PICTURE

PICTURE frame

mental PICTURE

to put someone in the PICTURE

vanishing PICTURE



"For me, it was photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau which I came across by chance in a bookstore in Santa Monica in July 1945. Nothing I have seen—in photographs or in real life—ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. Indeed, it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after, though it was several years before I understood fully what they were about."

On *Photography*, Susan Sontag, 19

For me, it was a daguerreotype on the back album cover of the hip-hop group dead prez's *lets get free*. I was raised by Po-Black, educated, middle-class parents who made my sister and I read and watch everything related to Black American identity. It felt at times like *Eyes on the Prize* was playing on a continuous loop in our household. I also devoured readings in my A.P. U.S. History class. I remember writing an essay about how Booker T. Washington was essentially a sellout compared to W.E.B. DuBois. Still, with all of these ideas floating around my head, when my eyes examined the actual image of the scourged back of an anonymous Black slave, it crystallized everything. All the pain and anguish that I had either experienced, read about, or heard stories about from my parents and grandparents about growing up disadvantaged and Black in the 20th Century was reflected in the lacerations of that unnamed man's disfigured back. The physicality of the images cut into my psyche and, like Sontag, it now seems plausible to divide my life into a before seeing, and after.

I yearn to see and create images that cut sharply, deeply, and instantaneously.

Jared Thorne holds a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from Dartmouth College and a Master in Fine Arts from Columbia University. His work speaks to issues of identity and subjectivity as it relates to class and race in America and abroad. Thorne is an Assistant Professor in the Art Department at The Ohio State University and is the Head of the Photography Area. Before joining OSU, Thorne taught at the collegiate level in South Africa from 2010 to 2015.

Image:

dead prez, *Let's Get Free*, composed of stic.man and M-1, produced by dead prez, Hedrush, Lord Jamar and Kanye West, 1998-2000, Loud, 2000, compact disc.

I hate cameras. They are so much more sure than I am about everything.

~John Steinbeck

Recently, scholars and photographers have cast a critical eye on the histories of photography by pointing out how textbooks and syllabi on the topic have, with some notable exceptions, relied on presumptions about history and its writers that require reconsideration in a contemporary context. As theorist Liz Wells has pointed out, the majority of photography textbooks assert their own singular importance in their titling, such as Beaumont Newhall's *The History of Photography*, Helmut Gernsheim's *A Concise History of Photography*, and Naomi Rosenblum's *The World History of Photography*.¹ Yet, what does that powerful term "history" refer to? What does it exclude? Does the term refer to social histories of photography? Does it value aesthetic histories of photography?

Despite the totality of knowledge that the titles of these textbooks imply, a closer analysis reveals they are almost exclusively and narrowly focused on the history of *technology* and the inventors who copyrighted them. They ignore the fact that numerous photographers participated in the series of events that lead to each technological advancement in an iterative and contingent fashion. Wells calls this tendency to narrate the history of the medium as a sequence of triumphant inventions "The Priority Debate," thereby helping us understand the implicit limitations of this kind of historiography, where history is written by great individuals accomplishing great technological deeds.

Indeed, most students who enroll in my undergraduate photography class anticipate learning about a series of inventions that will culminate in the digital age, even though the class is titled *Photography East and West*, not *The History of Photography*. In other words, students have often been prepared for, and desire, a teleological history of photography that displays advancement, most often under the direction of white, male, colonial (and, later, capitalist) enterprise. From the first day of class, I invite my students to reconsider how photography's history has been made and by whom. Students are asked to read a text by Liz Wells and Derek Price titled "Histories of Photography" that documents but also critiques what the authors call the "Founding Fathers" of photography and pluralizes the notion of a single history.² In class we work in small groups and then as a whole to consider how typical photography textbooks construct a chronological victory story and what the weaknesses in that narrative might be. For example, I might ask: how have past exhibitions and texts on photography shaped our expectations for the field? What is

canonization, and what are its implications? How has photography been shaped by institutions?

Throughout the course, I remind students that we are investigating another version of the history of photography which, again, cannot be categorical or comprehensive. We consider how colonialism and photography developed together, and how photography was often a tool—if not a weapon—of the colonial era. My course begins with the emergence of photography and examines the medium's pivotal role in shaping relations between Asia and the West. It introduces East Asian photographers and movements such as the Real Photo movement in Japan alongside the Pictorialist and Straight Photography movements, and suggests points of connection as well as points of friction and disconnection across borders. The syllabus relies on essays rather than a textbook, as a selection of essays often offers a greater variety of voices and sources. My goal is to train students to gain a critical understanding of the histories of photography and to discern the uneven power dynamics behind modernism. I also aim to expose students to new aesthetics and theoretical approaches to photography. We explore early portraiture, architectural sites, colonial tourism, popular culture, family photographs, and contemporary art photography. Students compose written responses to assigned texts with guiding questions such as: how has the history of photography been written? How has canonization affected what we know about photography? How did photography frame relations between Japan and the United States? How are colonialism and photography related? How is modernity defined by photography? How does it complicate ideas of modernity? Yet, the syllabus has many of its own shortcomings: perhaps most obviously, it relies on an East-West binary in the title. It also "covers" only a fraction of the globe.

Nonetheless, it disrupts the idea that the history of photography is totalizing and unbiased. It allows students to witness how institutions create canons and allows them to consider the consequences of this in terms of gender, race, class, and the persistent emphasis on Western photography and inventors. They are left with the central concept that the power of images is fraught territory, and that photography is never neutral.

Namiko Kunimoto is an Associate Professor at Ohio State University and author of *The Stakes of Exposure: Anxious Bodies in Postwar Japanese Art*.

Notes:

1. Ed. Liz Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 49.

2. Wells, 49-64.

Course Description: Critical Issues in Contemporary Photography

This course was originally taught using two books. I ordered them both to check them out and discovered that they were the type of books that get tossed at the end of library sales. One person's generic & categorical ideas about photography as an art form. Four stars on goodreads.com. You could, and maybe you will read the books and access an overwhelming breadth of knowledge about what "art" photographers are doing today, but you will not get a sense of what makes photography—or even more broadly pixelated images—critical to speak about today. What is contemporarily critical—indeed crucial, integral, perilous even—about photography? As I read this to you now there are drones with facial recognition software flying over our heads. A.I. camera drones. How might these toys/machines impact war? Or Domestic Policing? There are thousands of images circulating on Twitter, on Instagram on Facebook, whose truths are uncertain. These images that fuel fires, fan flames, perpetuate and generate stereotypes are at our fingertips constantly. I've heard the average person spends 22 years of their lives looking at screens. How does this inundation of images affect our behavior, our thoughts, our feelings about ourselves? Our Feelings towards our environment, towards our neighbors, towards our loved ones, towards "the other"—whoever they may be? What in the stew of advanced global capitalism does it mean for us to/for others to hold cameras in their hands? To approach another body (flesh and blood), or space (almost always holding histories of other earlier inhabitants) and to say: "I will capture you." Or; "You have been captured." Or "I can help you." Or "I can't but someone else may," or "You are mine." or "This is for posterity," or "This is poetry?" What does it mean to consume these images and what might their existence mean for the survival of our planet? Can they work towards social justice, or even social empathy? Towards art? How is the production of art all wrapped up in these questions? It doesn't make sense any longer to think of photography in a bubble. Everything is an image. Most art now is photographed and is seen by most as pixel images that circulate on the web, these images are tossed and scrambled in with advertisements for real estate hunting apps, and meal delivery services, and new, over-the-counter birth control.

GET IT WHILE YOU CAN
P E O P L E .

They are mixed in with
screenshots of
videos of chil-
dren being
separated from their
parents and held against
their will. They are mixed in with

GIFs of Ellen Degeneres dancing, and
Melania pulling her hand out of Donald's grip.

Images (photographs) are used in and with sculpture. In and
with video. They are your favorite personal branding tool. They
are owned by Instagram. How did we get here? Less than 100 years ago
photographs were considered parochial, barely allowed in institutions as art.

They were the stuff wild of experimental artists in Europe: taking photographs
from the newspaper and cutting them up to make collages. They were the stuff of
Dada. Either complete utility, or complete nonsense. 100 years before that they didn't exist.

Consider the exponential growth of this medium in relationship to painting. The first
painting happened tens plus tens of thousands of years ago and yet there is no such thing as
viral painting, for instance. Photographs are they are the stuff of life, and as such, their existence
as art must be considered in relationship to their ontology more generally. They are. Everywhere.

Try to not look at your phone for the entire 3 hours of this class. Try to close your eyes on I87, or on
the subway. We are swimming in them. We are breathing in them. So how can we answer the question:
What are the critical issues in photography today? We will only be able to skim the surface. A survey
if you will. But hopefully less of a straight line: less "The Photograph as Contemporary Art" and more a
diffuse and in turn dense undulating ripple. Instead of starting in the '70s and moving directly forward
in time our class will create an hourglass shape. First, we will look out, or around, or above. We're the
mini-fairy people on the top of the drone. Our first set of readings will address some of the consequences
of our image and technology dependency. We will slowly travel backward in time towards the beginnings

of what the former teacher of this class might have called "the current moment in photographic history" and look at
the politics of representation from the 1970's onward. We will talk about appropriation—as an art form and as a weapon of
power, as well as personal and public archives. The class will end (THE CLASS ACTUALLY NEVER ENDS) with a look at artists
and specifically artists, using photographs now—how, why, for what? Maybe the persistence of physical photography is a protest
against the corporately funded cloud, maybe it's useless nostalgia. Maybe its 500 things in between. You will be the judge. So,
in this class, we're going to read. A lot. Photography IS (and will forever more be) history. You've gotta know about it.



Maria Hupfield, *Resistance on All Fronts*, 2007-2018, C-print and industrial felt, 124.5 x 94 cm.