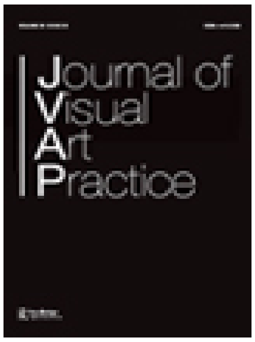

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Is this photograph taken? The active (act of) collaboration with photography

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ABSTRACT
Over more than 30 years of commercial and fine art photographic practice, I have often noticed remarkable disparities between the scenes, objects, events or moments 'out there' I had attempted to record – and the images within the resulting photographs. These (sometimes subtle, sometimes profound, but rarely anticipatable) disparities between what I had seen and what the photograph shows me offer the tantalising suggestion that there may be something else going on here – but something which the popular conception of photography may hinder our ability to recognise. This article explores the implications of four central assumptions implicit within the popular conception of photography that may impede alternative ways of thinking about photographic practice. Supported by a number of photographs that depict scenes, events and 'moments' that I will argue were not 'taken' but were instead created by the act of photographing them, I will suggest that new opportunities for practice may be available by 're-imagining' the practice of photography as an active – or as *an act of* – collaboration between medium and practitioner.

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Collaboration; the popular conception of photography; the subject of the photograph; bino-chrono consciousness

Introduction

Nobody can commit photography alone. (Marshall McLuhan 1964, 183)

Many photographs confront us with significant disparities between the scenes, objects or events 'out there' at which we pointed the camera – and the images within the resulting photographs. These disparities offer the tantalising suggestion that there may be something else going on here – but which the popular conception of photography may hinder our ability to recognise.

This article explores four of the central assumptions implicit within the popular conception of photography (including what it 'is' and what it 'does') as a first step towards devising new ways of thinking about, and using, the medium. Supported by several photographs that document scenes, events and moments that were not out there to be 'taken' but were instead created by the act of photographing them, I will argue that new opportunities for practice may be available by 're-imagining' the practice of photography as an active – or, as *an act of* – collaboration between medium and practitioner.

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As a legacy of its origins in the industrial revolution, one of the most widely accepted and influential assumptions in photography is that the camera is a 'mechanical device' (Kogan 2015, 869): one which – like the microscope and the telescope – provides an 'accurate and objective record' (Genoni 2002, 137) and 'a truthful account' (Fosdick and Fahmy 2007, 1) of what was 'out there' and shares 'the same level of reality' as the things they depict (Flusser 2000, 15). Snyder and Allen (1975, 145) summarise 'the modern position' that photographs show us things 'as they really are' (Ross 1982, 12).

This 'modern position' assumes that photographs are the product of (the interaction of) three factors (Rogers 1978; Smith 1999; Rutherford 2014):

(i) the appearance and/or behaviour of *the thing/s in front of the lens*,
(ii) the photographer's *intention*: what we want to show you and
(iii) the photographer's *expertise* in using the camera (and its attendant tools and techniques) in pursuit of our intended result.

The first reflects the belief that photographs are an objective and accurate record of 'something out there' (that which the photograph denotes) which we assume 'really did look like that' at the moment and from the perspective at which it was photographed. This confidence in the objective accuracy with which the medium depicts *the thing/s in front of the lens* is both reflected in and reinforced by the popular description of photographs as 'taken'.

The second reflects the belief that the camera is a passive tool under the control of the photographer/operator whose decisions in the pursuit of an intended result (that which the photograph is intended to connote) determines both the content and the appearance of the image – and (assuming the competence of the photographer) its corollary that his/her intention can be reliably inferred from the result of these decisions.

The third reflects the belief that the clarity and affective power with which the intended connotation has been 'captured' in the photograph depends on the expertise with which the photographer made and carried out these decisions.

While the merit of many photographs is indeed the result of these three factors, I will argue that some photographs are the result of a fourth factor – but one that the popular conception of photography often obscures from view. I will call this fourth factor 'the active collaboration by the medium'.

While the decisions as to *what* to photograph, as well as *how* to photograph it are subjective (and are the basis of our judgement that one photographer's work is superior to another's), the result is nevertheless acknowledged to be objective 'photographic evidence' that the scene, object or event really had 'been there' (Barthes 1984, 76) and really had looked like that at that moment and from that perspective. Bazin (1960) argued that it is this ability to record and show us something that was 'really there' which confers on photographs their unique power and credibility.

Figure 1 is the last known image of the *Titanic* as she set sail from Queenstown, Ireland, en route to New York. Figure 2 shows 12-year-old Anne Frank, leaning over the balcony of her apartment.

Looking at these images, we share a moment – with both the photographers and those they photographed – in which all is well, while, at the same time, we are conscious of knowing something they do not: the tragedy that was about to unfold. This unique

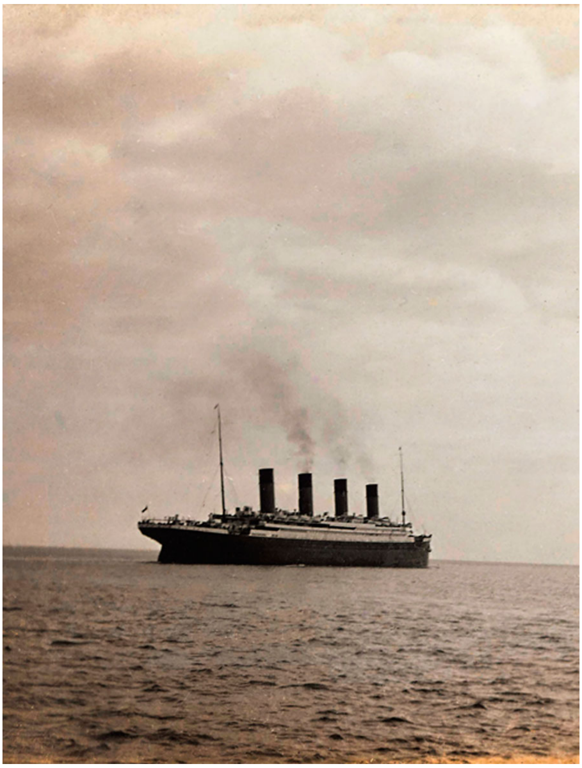

Figure 1. The last known image of the Titanic as she set sail from Queenstown, Ireland for New York. Photo by Kate Odell, 11 April 1912.

ability of photographs (to offer what Bryman [2012, 427] called 'a window on reality' and which Arnheim [1974, 155] described as one of its 'positive virtues') derives precisely from their mechanical origins. Their ability to affect us is therefore a result, not just of the scenes and events they depict – but because they are *photographs* of these scenes and events. In this way, the contribution of medium is as significant a factor in the final result as the thing/s in front of the lens, and certainly more significant than either the photographer's intention or his/her expertise.

Palmer (2017) has argued that the practice of photography is inherently dialogical and has always depended on – and benefitted from – the act of collaboration (including 'artistic coauthorship [between] photographers and their subjects, and [between] photographs and viewers'). However, even when the camera is acknowledged to have played a role in creating the scene, event or 'moment' recorded, but consistent with the conception of the camera as a passive tool under the control of the photographer, this influence is understood to be limited to the effect of its presence (and the implied suggestion that *a photograph may be taken*) on the behaviours of the individuals who may be recorded (Burgess, Enzle, and Morry 2000; Azoulay 2010).

What is rarely acknowledged however is the role of the medium in creating scenes, events and 'moments' which did not exist until they were photographed. One of the very few writers on photography to discuss this, Solomon-Godeau argues that, by

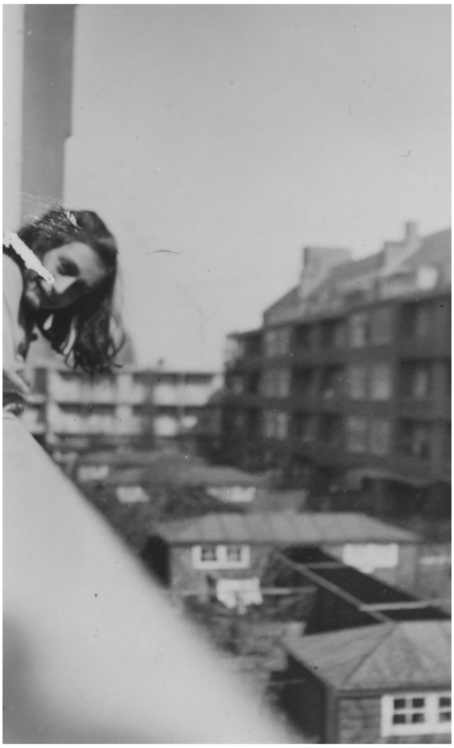

Figure 2. Anne Frank leaning over the balcony of her apartment in Amsterdam. Photo by Otto Frank, 22 July 1941.

considering and exploring the implications of photography's ability to create the event that the photograph records offers the prospect of 'a profound alteration in our perception of what a photograph is' (1981, 26–27).

This article will explore four central assumptions implicit in the popular understanding of photography (what it 'is' and what it 'does') that appear to hinder our ability to recognise that, in some photographs, the scene, event or 'moment' was not 'there' to be 'taken', but was instead 'made' by the act of photographing it:

(1) the manner in which language frames and circumscribes photographic discourse,
(2) the ontological and epistemological assumptions implicit within the design and application of the visual research methods used to discuss and interrogate photographs,
(3) our experience of, and our assumptions about, the nature of space and time, and
(4) our assumptions about the kinds of things which are 'the subject' of photographs.

The influence of the conceptual obstacles posed by these assumptions will be briefly explored and, with thanks to the photographers who kindly granted permission to include examples of their work, a selection of photographs will suggest ways in which we might overcome these obstacles to devise new approaches to practice.

The influence of the discourse: the language used to discuss photographs

In a similar way to that in which the camera delineates what is enclosed – and what is excluded – by the frame of the photograph, the language we use to discuss photographs, including the biases imposed by the subject–object relations of sentence constructions, defines (from Latin *definire*: ‘to circumscribe’) our conceptions of what is happening and who or what is making it happen.

According to the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, the thought processes encoded within and promulgated by the structure of language (diction, grammar and syntax) have a profound, but often unnoticed, influence on our perceptions, experiences and understandings. Lakoff and Johnson (2008) argue that our conceptual systems are inherently metaphoric in nature and that, by informing the structure of the metaphors through which we make sense of the world, our language defines (circumscribes) what we attend to. Through diction, idiom, grammar and syntax, our language determines what things and relationships we have the means to describe – and therefore conceive of (and, as Orwell [1962] warned, will even do our thinking for us). As a product of the subject–object relations imposed by its sentence structure, our language also determines who is doing what. Together, these features of our language dictate both what we notice as well as the meaning we ‘find’ in it (Korzybski [1933] 1994; Hayakawa 1949; Whorf 1952). It follows, therefore, that concepts and relationships our language does not recognise (those things and actions for which we do not have words) are thereby rendered both invisible and ‘inconceivable’:

> [Thinking] follows a network of tracks laid down in the given language, an organization which may concentrate systematically upon certain phases of reality […] and systematically discard others. The individual is utterly unaware of this organization and is constrained completely within its unbreakable bonds. (Whorf 1952, 177)

Bourdieu (1993, 158) argued that, because our knowledge of the conditions under which work was both conceived and produced takes place after the fact in the domain of rational thought (and is, therefore, shaped by the syntactic structure of our language), our conception of the finished product (what Bourdieu called the ‘opus operatum’) conceals the process (‘the modus operandi’) by which it was created. Although Bourdieu was referring to the conception and production of social theories, Sekula (1982, 84) argues that the same ‘limiting function’ applies to photographic discourse by restricting or excluding certain notions from consideration.

In addition to its capacity to label – and thereby both circumscribe and delineate – our conception of the *nature* of things, Korzybski ([1933] 1994) argued that our understanding of the relations *between* things resulting from the subject–object categories of grammar and syntax informs our conceptions of both *what* is happening and the identity of *who or what is making it happen*. Accordingly, even if we adopt the habit of describing (and thereby encouraging ourselves to think of) photographs as ‘made’ rather than ‘taken’, we will still not escape the influence of the biases inherent in subject–object relations which lead us to assume that it is *the photographer/actor* who does the ‘taking’ or ‘making’.

Sekula (1982, 84) argued that ‘the logic of the discourse’ is a product of the frames imposed by the diction, grammar and syntax used in discussing photographs – and that these, in turn, lead to a ‘bounded arena of shared expectations’ (1982, 84) which limit the ‘kinds’ of meanings and interpretations that are possible:

> In a very important sense, the notion of discourse is a notion of limits. That is, the overall discourse relation could be regarded as a limiting function, one that establishes a bounded arena of shared expectations as to meaning. It is this limiting function that determines the very possibility of meaning. (1982, 84)

Deleuze (1989) goes further and argues that the influence of language even 'transforms' the material we are investigating:

> We mean that, when language gets hold of this material (and it necessarily does so), then it gives rise to utterances which come to dominate or even replace the images and signs, and which refer in turn to pertinent features of the language system, syntagms and paradigms, completely different from those we started with. [T]he language system only exists in its reaction to a *non-language material* that it transforms. (1989, 29, emphasis in original)

The most subtle – and as a result, perhaps the most powerful – way in which the language we use shapes the way we think of photographs is in the near-ubiquitous habit of saying that photographs are 'taken'. By describing (and thinking of) photographs as having been *taken* (past participle of 'take': to remove someone or something, Oxford 2005), we implicitly reinforce three assumptions which, together, are central to the popular conception of both *how photographs are produced* (by 'removing something') as well as *what they show us* (the thing removed):

(i) That the scene, event or moment depicted in the photograph already existed 'out there' in the world to be 'taken' (or 'purloined, confiscated, appropriated, stolen' [Crimp 1980, 98]) independent of the act of recording it. In describing the popular conception of photographs, I referred to this as *the appearance and/or behaviour of the thing/s in front of the lens.*
(ii) That, implied in the subject–object relations (which determines who was the actor and who or what was acted upon) is the assumption that it was 'taken' by the photographer (that it was s/he who 'took it'). I referred to this as *the photographer's intention.*
(iii) That the camera functioned as a kind of portable photocopier under the (more or less) conscious control of the actor/photographer, providing both an objective record of the existence of 'that which was taken' as well as reliable evidence that 'it looked like that'. I referred to this as *our expertise in using the technology in pursuit of our intended result.*

An essential first step, therefore, in conceiving of new ways to practice is to challenge the assumptions implied within (and reinforced by) the way we describe and discuss photographs. I am not being entirely flippant by suggesting that we might begin to change the way we think about photographs (what they 'are', how they are produced and what they can show us) if we were to say (and think) that photographs 'make themselves' – or if, when coming home with new pictures in our camera, if we were to say (and think) that: 'It certainly was photographing a lot outside today … '.

By describing photographs as having been 'made' rather than 'taken', I am not referring (as Artner does), to the photographer's ability to apply intention (by knowing 'what to look and wait for, as well as how to shoot it', Artner 2003) or (as Ansel Adams did) to the importance of expertise in *crafting* the image in pursuit of an intended result. Instead, I am suggesting that, by describing (and by thinking of) photographs as having

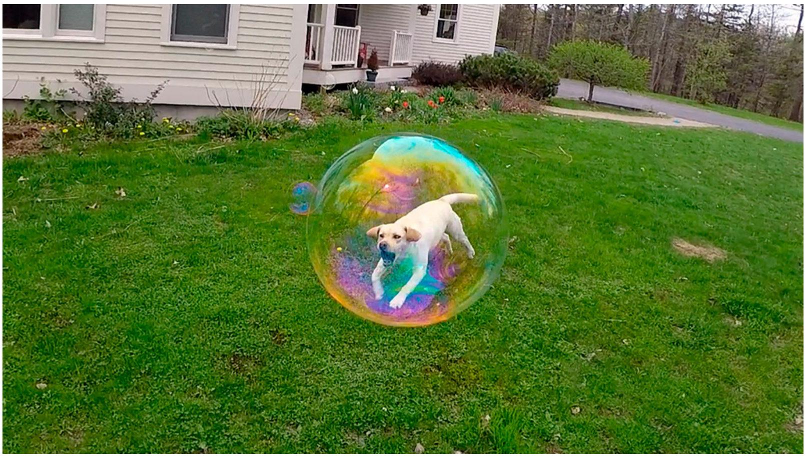

Figure 3. Dog in soap bubble – from ebaumsworld.random-randoms84611023.

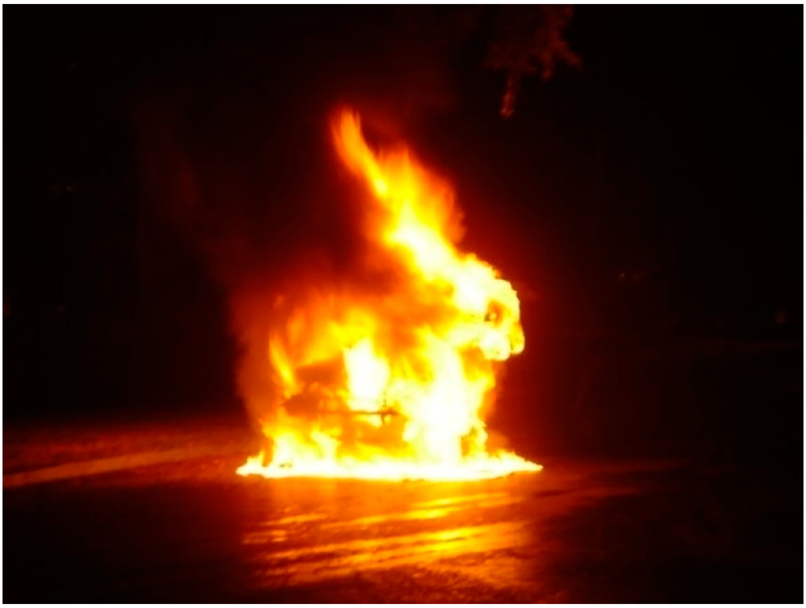

Figure 4. Rabbit in the fire, optical illusion – from moillusions.com.

been 'made' by the act of photographing them, we encourage ourselves to consciously and explicitly acknowledge the contribution of the medium in documenting 'a time that has never been […] part of any present' (Wall 2004).

By adopting a new vocabulary to describe photographs, we can start to 're-frame' our understanding of what photographs 'are' and how they are produced to include the possibility that they are sometimes able to show us scenes, events or 'moments' which either did not exist 'out there' in the world – and so were not 'there' to be 'taken' (Figure 3), or which could not have been witnessed – and so could not have been intended by the photographer (Figure 4).

The assumptions within visual research methodologies

A central role of theory is to identify (uncover) and explore the possibilities inherent within practice through which, 'the unexpected and transforming possibilities within practice can be brought to light' (Davey 2006, 21). However, through the precepts hidden within 'the logic of the discourse' and the resulting 'bounded arena of shared expectations' (Sekula 1982, 84), our theories can also close off other possible investigations. Davey suggests that, by recognising the ontological and epistemological 'frames' that inform our theories and by examining the assumptions they both reflect and reinforce, resulting insights may serve as a midwife to new practices (2006, 21).

By informing our assumptions for both what photographs 'are' (automated representations of reality) and what they show us (things as they really are), the popular conception of photographs also shapes the design, the application and the objectives of the visual research methodologies used to interrogate them. One of the significant ways in which the discourse 'bounds' or circumscribes our shared expectations is in the widespread assumption that the value of photographs resides in what they connote *to* people *about* people by documenting the social meaning of actions and appearances. According to Barthes (1984), a photograph cannot be distinguished from its referent – and that this referent is always a *social* or *human truth*.

This conception of photographs – what they 'are' and what they are 'for' – defines them as both *an accurate record of as well as the product of* the social practices (what Cobley and Haeffner termed 'the politics of representation' [2009, 133]) which informed, and from which we can therefore infer, *why* the photograph was 'taken', *how* it was taken, of *what* it was taken (its 'subject'), and *when*, and *by whom*.

> Every photographic image is a sign, above all, of someone's investment in the sending of a message. (Sekula 1982, 5–6)

In her widely cited text (6453 citations as of June 2018) on visual research methodologies, Rose explicitly endorses this conception of what photographs 'are' (and, by extension, the purpose of investigating them) as 'valuable as records of what was really there when the shutter snapped [and therefore] sources of evidence in social science research' (Rose 2012, 299). As she acknowledges, this reflects the assumption that '[i]t is the objects made visible in images that […] researchers are interested in' and that the 'significance of the photos is seen to rest on what is pictured, not how it is pictured' (Rose 2012, 30–31).

These anthropocentric biases within the ontological and epistemological priorities of visual research methodologies (what Benjamin [2006, 117] called their 'historical circumstances' and what Sekula [1982, 84] termed 'the logic of the discourse' which has resulted in a 'bounded arena of shared expectations') define for us both *the purpose* of investigating photographs as well as *how we should do so*. As a result, we are led to look, not *at* photographs, but *through* them – as if through a portal or magical window – and this, in turn, informs what we are liable to see in them.

By limiting our definition of the referent (what it is we should look at – and for) to social or human truths (which Batchen [1999, 5] described as 'the dominant way of thinking about the medium'), visual research methodologies close off other possible conceptions of what the photograph (may) show us or 'what was really there', hindering our ability to investigate (or even to conceive of) what other kinds of subjects for our attention photographs might also record. By attending to – and by reflecting on the implications of – the differences between the appearance of the scenes, objects, events or moments out there we had attempted to record – and how the photograph depicted it, we might find that what the photograph is 'about' is something other than what we intended – and something which is the result of the contribution of the medium.

In an effort to peek beneath what van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001, 2) recognise as the 'superimposed […] layer of connotative or symbolic meaning', I will briefly consider how our anthropocentric perceptual and cognitive biases (McQuire 1997) about the nature of space and time shape also 'bound' the shared expectations about the events depicted in photographs.

The influence of 'bino-chrono consciousness'

Our assumptions about the nature of space (which allows us to perceive depth) and time (which allows us to perceive movement) are the product of our internalised mental model of the Newtonian universe – and we regard both as authentic and independent properties of the world in which we live. We may experience 'time passing quickly when we are having fun', but we 'know' that both the speed at which time passes and the direction in which it travels are constant and so adjust our interpretation of our sense perceptions accordingly.

This contrast between subjective experience and (what we believe to be) objective reality is why we enjoy stage magic: because it confronts us with an amusing intellectual dichotomy between what our eyes tell us has just happened – and what we know simply *cannot* have happened. But, as anyone who has shown a magic trick to a young child will know, they are not impressed because they have not yet internalised our (western) convictions about what is – and what is not – real or possible.

There are two main concerns here:

(i) our conception of space resulting from our binocular vision (which not only gives us the means to experience three dimensions – depth and distance – but provides 'an ontological standard of objective perception' [Cat 2013, 115] as a result of which we assume that three dimensions are an objective, tangible property of external reality) and
(ii) our conception of time resulting from our experience of a seamless, linear continuum (which leads us to the two assumptions: that events have duration – 'befores', 'durings' and 'afters' – and that both *the fact that* time advances from the past towards the future and *the rate at which it does so* are also objective features of external reality).

But, as illustrated by the challenges to our assumptions posed by the implications of quantum theory (according to which neither space nor time act in accordance with the familiar Newtonian model of reality), we often overlook the extent to which our understanding of – and, therefore, *our experience of* – both are cognitive constructs which establish the limits of the 'bounded arena of shared expectations' (Sekula 1982, 84) and so define what it is that we expect photographs to be able to show us.

Our experience/conception of space

Our conception (mental map) and experience of the real world are, in part, the product of the structure of the human body, including the functions of our sense organs and the operation of our central nervous system (von Uexküll 1926). Accordingly, we must be wary of the powerful influence of the anthropocentric assumptions that 'we see things as they really are'[1] (Hyvärinen 1994; Holyoak and Thagard 1995; Wolf 2003) and that they 'really are' three dimensional.

With its monocular eye, the camera knows nothing of depth and distance, but renders (what we 'know' to be) a three-dimensional world as a contiguous series of two-dimensional surfaces *because this Cyclops 'sees' it as such*. In doing so, the camera depicts – and so makes visible to us – relationships and juxtapositions in space (such as that photo of Aunt Edith with the telephone pole protruding from the top of her head) that we did not – or could not – see in the original scene. As a result, our conviction that three dimensions are an objective, tangible property of external reality leads us to think of photographs as two-dimensional 'shadows' of what were 'really' the three-dimensional forms which cast them – and from which essential details have been lost in translation.

In Figures 5 and 6, we are confronted by amusing misrepresentations resulting from the camera's 'magic trick' which has reduced what were 'really' three-dimensional spaces into

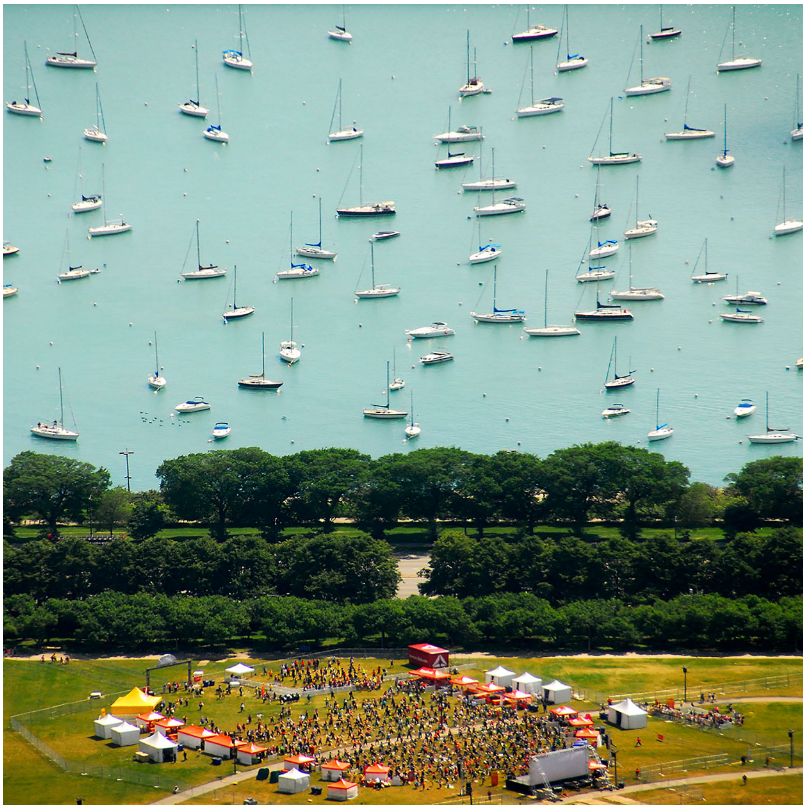

Figure 5. Floating boat, optical illusion – from https://c1.staticflickr.com.

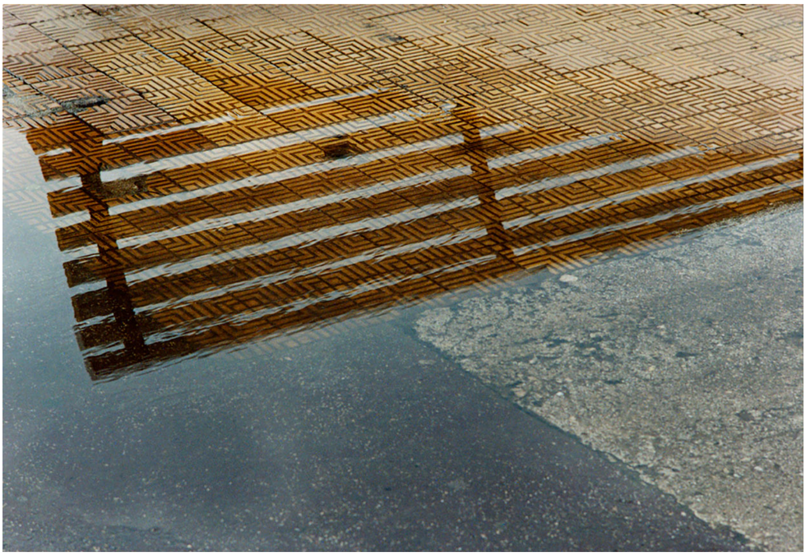

Figure 6. Promenade des Anglais #3, Nice, 2000, © Rutherford.

two-dimensional ‘shadows’. They are amusing because we can see through the photographs (and the trick) to recognise what had really been there in front of the lens.

How might our interpretation of such photographs and our capacity to conceive of what (else) they may show us expand were we to consider that, rather than two-dimensional ‘shadows’ of the real three-dimensional world, such photographs are accurate depictions of a world that, for the camera, really is two dimensional?[2] What might we then recognise hidden behind (sorry: that is a binocular precept; I mean hidden *within*) the world we know only through binocular vision?

Our experience/conception of time

Our conception of time as a seamless continuum imposes a conceptual frame of reference: what Enkvist (1995, 123) calls the ‘epistemics of cause and effect’. As a result, the same anthropocentric biases found in the priorities of visual research methodologies are also evident in our assumptions that photographs show us changes in the world that the photograph suspends (Sutton 2009, 38). As a result, we regard the photograph as an ‘excerpt’ from the real, full and unabridged event.

From the earliest days of photography, it was acknowledged that the medium reveals moments-in-time (such as *The Horse in Motion* [1878] by Muybridge and Edgerton’s photograph [1962] of a bullet passing through an apple) we could not otherwise witness. But, in the same way that we think of shadows as two-dimensional reductions of three-dimensional objects, we think of the discrete slices of time extracted from what is ‘really’ a continuum as a kind of ‘chronological shadow’ from which essential information (the ‘before’ and ‘after’) have likewise been lost in translation.

> The central problem was how to take […] moving reality and turn it into a static record for sober and steady analysis … (Ramalingam 2010, 3)

Note the assumption that 'real' reality *moves*.

In his discussion of the effect of slow motion and stop action which, the lawyers for the officers of the LAPD argued, biased the jury's perceptions of the 'truthfulness' of the (1991) video recording of the assault on motorist Rodney King, Arnheim too implies that our perception of time is the real one – agreeing that slow motion minimised the violence of the assault because 'in the real world … ' (1993, 537).

For Sutton too, time is understood to be objective, constant and knowable (meaning, presumably, that its properties are consistent with, and revealed by, our experience of it) and that its nature is revealed in 'movement in space' as in 'the sweep of the hands on the face of a clock' (2009, 34–35). Sutton not only endorses the objective, quantifiable nature of time, but conscripts photography to support this, claiming that '[p]hotographs can be used to quantify time in the same way that a measuring stick […] can quantify space' (Sutton 2009, 34).

Consider the way in which we understand and make sense of photographs such as Figure 7. Do we not look *through* the frozen image in an effort to recognise what really happened and which has been excerpted in the photograph? When we look at this photograph, do we not see the full, unabridged continuous action – as if in a film – of the diver's body falling towards and then entering the water, rather than the static moment the photograph actually shows us?

As an illustration of an alternative way of thinking about time, consider Arnheim's story (1969) of *The Monk and the Mountain*:

> One morning, exactly at 8 A.M., a monk began to climb a tall mountain. The narrow path spiralled around the mountain to a glittering temple at the summit. The monk ascended the path at varying rates of speed, stopping many times along the way to rest and to eat

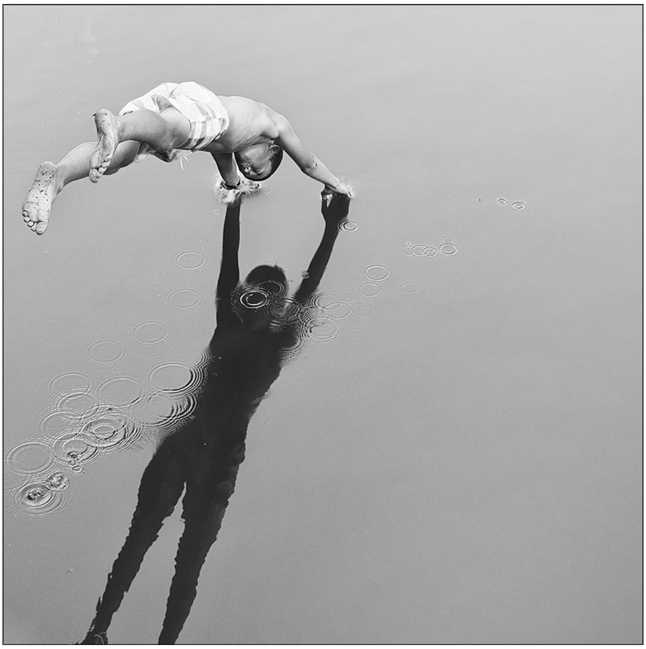

Figure 7. Dotýkej se mě (Touch me) – from http://galerie.digiarena.e15.cz/.

> the dried fruit he carried with him. He reached the temple precisely at 8 P.M. After several days of fasting and meditation, he began his journey back along the same path, starting at 8A.M. and again walking at varying speeds with many pauses along the way. He reached the bottom at precisely 8 P.M. (1969)

Is there a place somewhere along the path which the monk occupied at precisely the same time of day on both trips? – And how can we know? The only way to solve the problem (to recognise that, yes, there is indeed a spot along the path which the monk occupied at precisely the same time of day on both trips) is to mentally superimpose the two days and so 'see' the monk bump into himself. But the way in which we experience time (our unquestioning conviction of the objective reality of the Newtonian universe in which times travels in a single direction at a constant rate) makes it very difficult for us to see or conceive of time in any other way.

From the earliest photographs, it has been evident that photographic time is very different than ours, and so sometimes shows us the world as we could not otherwise have seen it. Consider Daguerre's 1839 photograph *Boulevard du Temple* (Figure 8) in which, as a consequence of the 10-minute duration of the exposure, none of the people on this busy Parisian street was in one place long enough to be recorded – except the figure (bottom left) who paused long enough to have his boots polished, thereby becoming the first human to appear in a photograph. The resulting photograph presents us with a scene that is otherwise inaccessible to a human observer – and so offers us a glimpse of a real world, but one that only the camera could witness and record.

Consider the photographs *Pressure 1* by Hamed Jaberha (Figure 9) and *Near Callanish, Isle of Lewis* by David Quentin (Figure 10) in which (like the photographs *Derrière la gare St-Lazare*, *Paris 1932* by Cartier-Bresson and *Ballet*, *NYC 1938* by Kertész) elements hang motionless, suspended in mid-air.

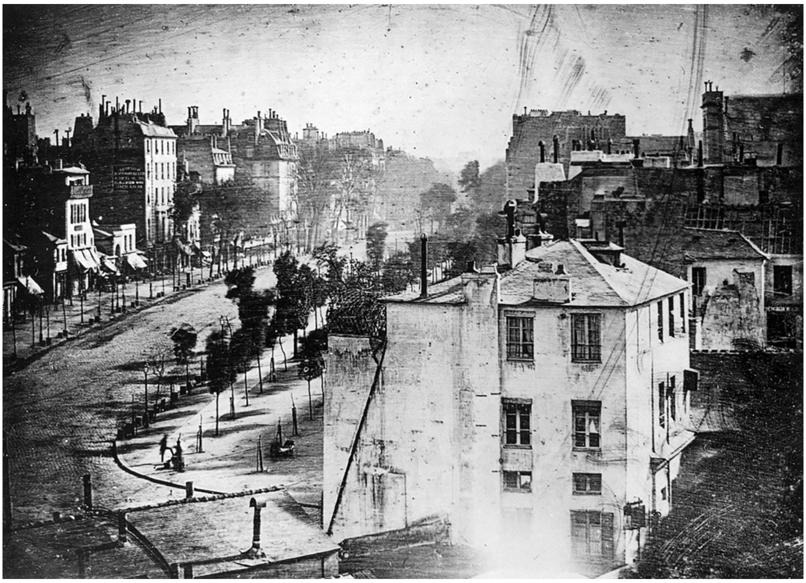

Figure 8. 1839 *Boulevard du Temple* par Louis Daguerre.

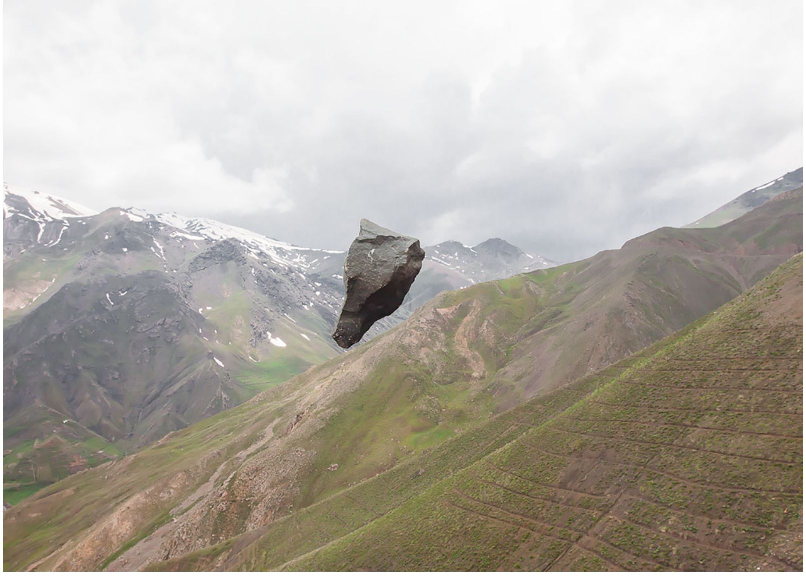

Figure 9. *Pressure 1*, © Hamed Jaberha.

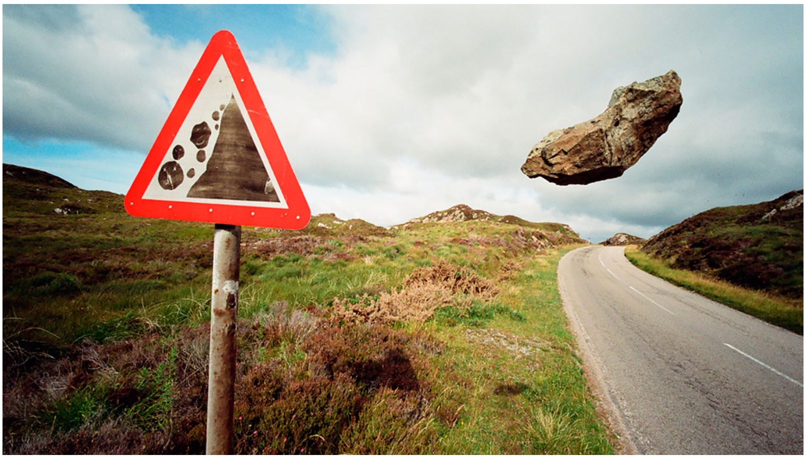

Figure 10. *Near Callanish, Isle of Lewis*, © David Quentin.

Photographs such as these 'rocks in the air' present us with a logical conundrum. While their photomechanical origins argue that they are objective and reliable records of *what was* (Snyder and Allen 1975), our conception of time precludes us from seeing what the photographs clearly show us: rocks that are suspended motionless in mid-air. (Note the ease with which we are prepared to set aside our conviction as to the truthfulness and reliability of photographic evidence when this conflicts with the assumptions imposed by our bino-chrono consciousness about what really was. Where now, our confidence in the uniquely objective credibility of photographic evidence?) Instead, despite the photographic evidence, we conclude that, like galloping horses frozen in midstride, as a consequence of extracting excerpts from the continuum, these photographs misrepresent what we know *really* happened.

In explaining their intentions in making these photographs, Jaberha wrote:

> Sometimes I don't know they are going up or falling [down] but I would like watching [them] fly, whereas they are too heavy for flying! [T]he photographs have [been] taken next to the places of the war (between Iran and Iraq). These places still have many [of] the war mines from about 30 years ago. Although Saddam Hosain is [dead], the evil is still alive. It reminds me there is a tragedy behind the beautiful nature. (Personal correspondence)

Quentin wrote:

> [This series of photographs] is forcibly retrieving time from the vertiginous depths of "geological slow time": it is showing us geological ultra-fast time instead. Documentary geological photography for the anthroposcene, maybe? (Personal correspondence)

In his photograph (Figure 11) *Paranal Residencia*, Colosimo shows us an equally objective and accurate record of a moment, but one which is not accessible to us – and so was not 'there' to be taken, but was instead created by the act of photographing it.

In his photographs of dancers *Oihana Vesga Bujan* and *Elly Braund* of the Richard Alston Dance Company (Figure 12), Guest combines *the frozen* and *the fluid* to show us (like Mili's stroboscopic studies) moments-in-time which are both an objective record of *what was – and which exist only in the records made of them*: moments which were created by an act of photography.

In describing his intentions for these photographs, Guest wrote:

> Photography is designed to freeze moments, to capture and hold in its grasp both the fleeting and the ephemeral. However, choreographers and dancers are [interested] instead in the journey between the two. This project [uses photography] to describe the progression of movement through time, as well as the suspension of time itself. (Personal correspondence)

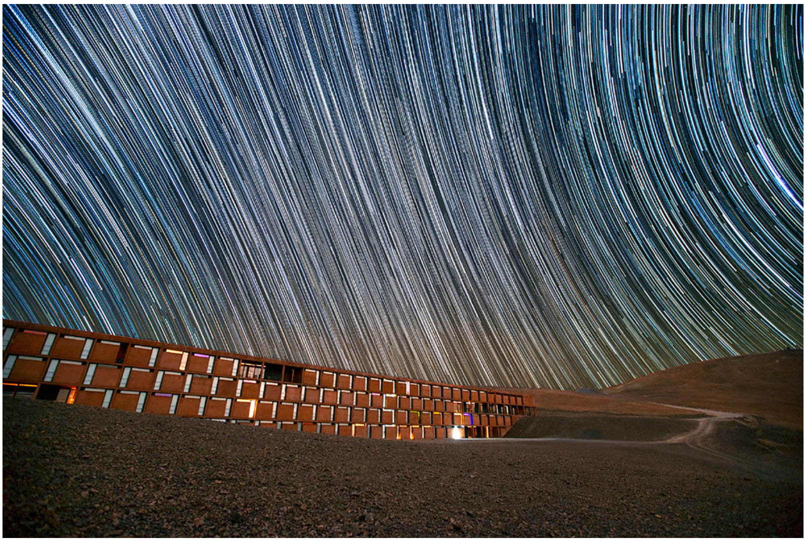

Figure 11. *Paranal Residencia*, © John Colosimo (colosimophotography.com) ESO.

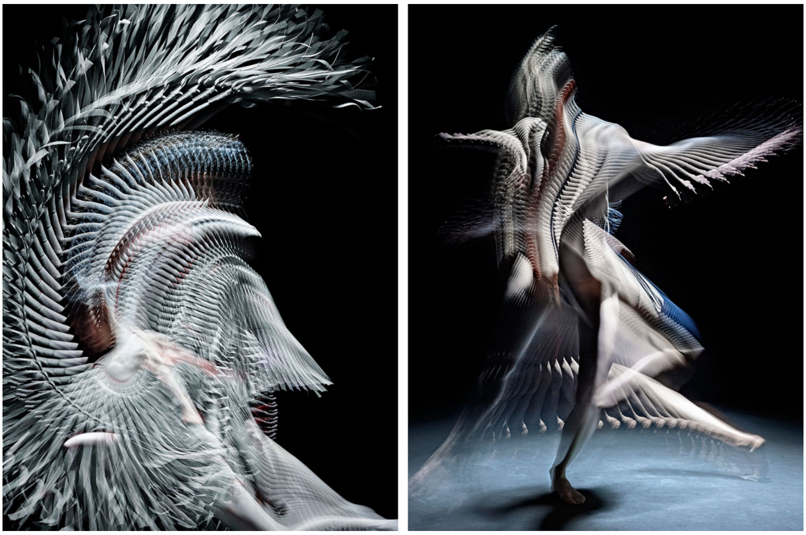

Figure 12. Dancers *Oihana Vesga Bujan* and *Elly Braund* of the Richard Alston Dance Company, © Rick Guest.

Just as with the medium's depiction of three-dimensional space, the 'bounded arena of shared expectations' (Sekula 1982, 84) imposed by the 'dominant way of thinking about the medium' (Batchen 1999) makes it difficult to accept that alternative experiences and depictions of time may be equally 'natural and truthful' (Fosdick and Fahmy 2007, 1) and show us scenes and events 'as they really are' (Ross 1982, 12). Instead, confronted with such frozen or fluid events-in-time, we are obliged either to dismiss the photograph as an inaccurate depiction of the event(s) it purports to record (but, as a mechanical recording, how can a photograph be inaccurate?) – or acknowledge that the moment or event documented in the photograph exists only in the record made of it – and was therefore created by the act of photographing it.

Rather than seeing such photographs as 'chronological shadows' from which the 'before' and 'after' essential to a true (anthropocentric) understanding of what 'really' happened have been lost in translation, what if we were to consider that the conception of time photographs show us is equally real and objectively true conception of time: a perpetual 'now' in which everything is happening at once – and keeps on happening forever? If, instead of excerpts or misrepresentations of what was really in front of the lens, we were prepared to think of such photographs as truthful accounts of 'nonlinear space' and 'non-chronological time' otherwise inaccessible to us, we may start to see photography through a new conceptual metaphor: as a means to escape, explore – or even to depict from a vantage point outside the fence – what Sekula termed the 'bounded arena of shared expectations' (1982, 84).

The 'subject' of photographs

In the same way that thinking of photographs as 'taken' directs (and limits) our attention to the person, place or thing removed (Look at this … Do you see what I see?), the widely held view that, like Waldo, the subject of the photograph is ‘in’ the picture (Phillips 2009), directs (and limits) our attention to either *the appearance* or *the behaviour* of the thing removed.

Another example of the way in which the popular conception of photographs is bounded by shared expectations is the assumption that the subject of the photograph is, by necessity, something that exists (Phillips 2009), that this thing *is* the scene or object represented (Scruton 1981) – and not the way in which it represents it (Phillips 2009).

Further, Barthes tells us that a photograph cannot be distinguished from its referent, that ‘a pipe […] is always and intractably a pipe’ (1984, 5) – but, in *La trahison des images*, Magritte instructs us otherwise: that *a painting of a pipe* is not a pipe. This conflation of the subject of the photograph – what the photograph is ‘about’ – with the thing/s in front of the lens is the source of the error of reification commonly made in describing our photographs (This is our daughter Rhiannon …).

Consider this popular conception of the subject of photographs in the context of Capa’s remarkable series of photographs *Allied landing on Normandy beaches, 6th June 1944*, many of which are blurred as a result of camera motion during the exposure. While this blur might be deemed a flaw or weakness in the accuracy with which the photographs depict the thing/s in front of the lens, this contribution by the medium is the proof (the *logos*) of the soldiers’ (and Capa’s) frantic efforts to get safely ashore while under fire from the German guns. In this way, these photographs are indeed an ‘accurate and objective record’ (Genoni 2002, 137) and ‘a natural and truthful’ account (Fosdick and Fahmy 2007, 1) – but an accurate and objective and natural and truthful account of their *photographicness* (Rutherford 2014).

While some have acknowledged that it is possible for photographs to have subjects other than the photographed objects (Phillips 2009), efforts to extend the definition of what might be considered the subject of the photograph beyond the thing/s in front of the lens shift the locus only a small way – to either the photographer’s *intent*, or his/her *expertise* in the manipulation of the medium – and so we return to where we began: that the subject of photographs (those aspects of photographs to which we should attend) are the product of (the interaction of) the three factors:

(i) the appearance and/or behaviour of *the thing/s in front of the lens*,
(ii) the photographer’s *intention* and
(iii) the photographer’s *expertise*.

The position, implicit in the logic of the discourse (and reaffirmed by Scruton and others), that the subject of the photograph is *that which we see through the portal* and not the way in which the camera represents it (Phillips 2009) blinkers us to the possibility that, as is the case in these and the other remarkable works by Treharne (Figure 13), the subject of the photograph is *the way in which the medium has recorded it* – a feature of the image which is not the result of either intention, expertise or the appearance/behaviour of the thing/s in front of the lens. The subject of such photographs is instead photography itself (Solomon-Godeau 1981, 26).

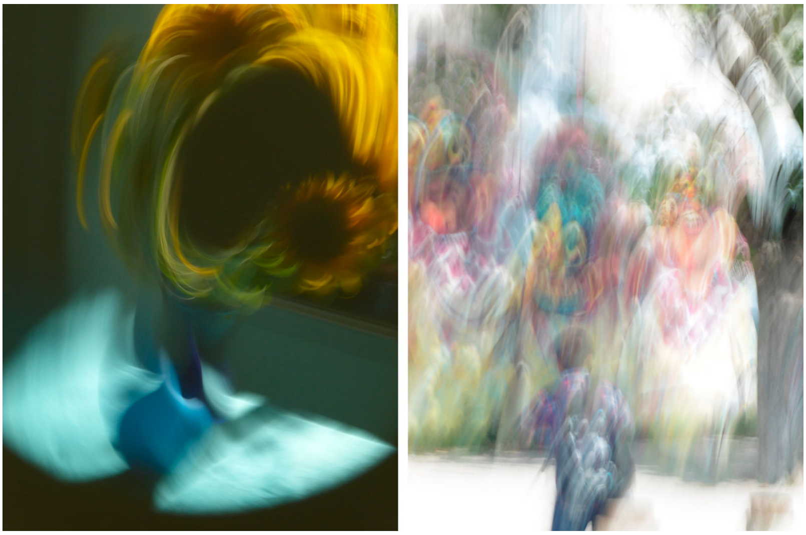

Figure 13. Blackhole sunflower and La Rochelle, France, © Adrian Treharne.

Treharne wrote:

> I want my photographs to exist as a world of their own, not as window on the world. (Personal correspondence)

Accordingly, rather than a documentary or social truth, the subject of the photograph – what the photo is actually 'about' – is (sometimes) the glimpse it offers of the world as it really is – but as it really is to the camera: a way of knowing the world around us which is otherwise invisible to us due to the conceptual constraints imposed by bino-chrono consciousness. The scenes and moments thus recorded did not – and sometimes could not – already exist 'out there', but, as both the record and the product of a very different way of experiencing the world, were only made visible by the active contribution of photography (Rutherford 2014).

In the final section, I will briefly consider the work of other photographers which challenges and extends the bounds of our shared expectations and which suggests alternative ways of imagining what else our photographs might actually be 'about'.

So, are these photographs 'taken'?

As a result of their influence our conception of what photographs 'are' and what they are able to show us, the assumptions imposed by language, the logic of the discourse and our experience of space and time hinder our ability to recognise the possibility that

- sometimes, the scenes, events and moments depicted in photographs did not exist out there – and so could not have been witnessed and therefore could not have been intended, and
- the medium of photography is sometimes therefore an active collaborator in the creation of scenes, events and moments that exist only as a result of photographing them.

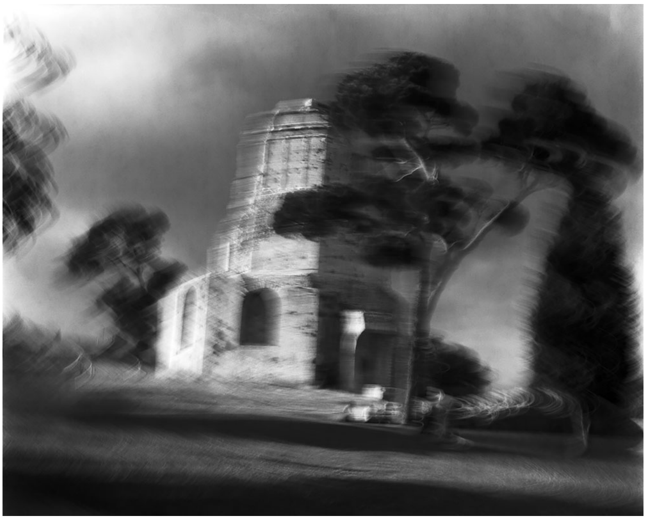

Figure 14. Tour Magne, Nimes, 1980, © Alex Neumann.

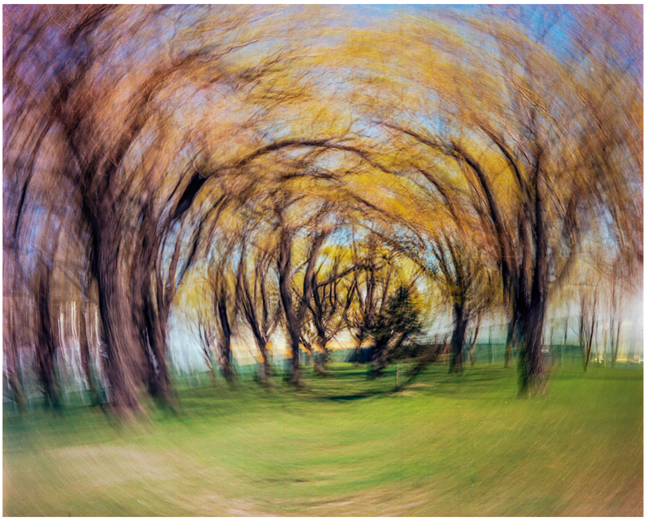

Figure 15. Trees, spring, Toronto, Canada, 1980, © Alex Neumann.

Neumann's work (Figures 14 and 15) intentionally explores the camera's unique contribution in the creation of unanticipatable results. In his series *Landscapes*, Neumann explains that he invited the camera collaborate with him to produce patterns and textures created by the movement of the camera during the exposure.

Neumann wrote:

> In [this] series, the resulting images were created in the camera. The resulting image is what the camera 'saw'. The images represented the many possibilities of chance. (Personal correspondence)

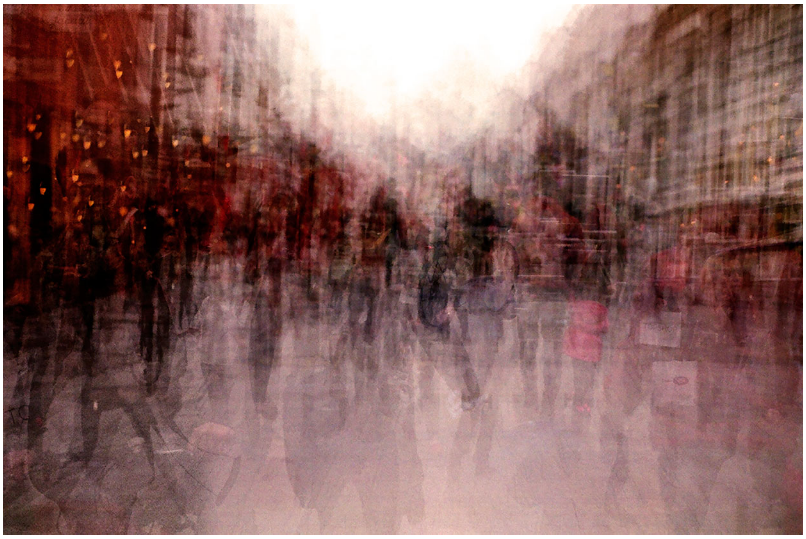

Figure 16. *Optical Kinetics* 3 – Ghosts of Grafton, © Cris Llarena.

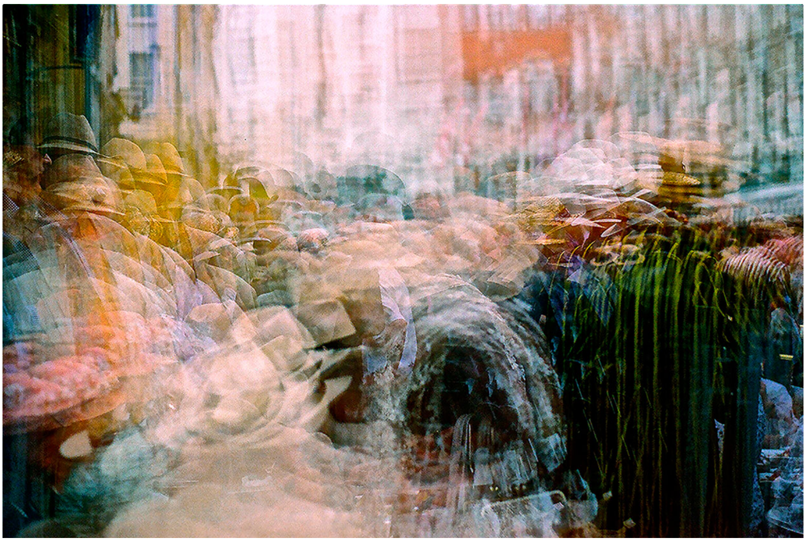

Figure 17. *Optical Kinetics* 4 – Hats Serenade, © Cris Llarena.

The photographs by Llarena (Figures 16 and 17) and Searight (Figure 18) offer us accurate and objective and truthful accounts of both ‘nonlinear space’ and ‘non-chronological time’ which can only be made visible to us through the act of photographing them.

This contribution by the medium has been noted by relatively few photographers:

> I never have taken a picture I’ve intended. You don’t put into a photograph what’s going to come out. Or what comes out is not what you put in. The camera is ‘recalcitrant’. You

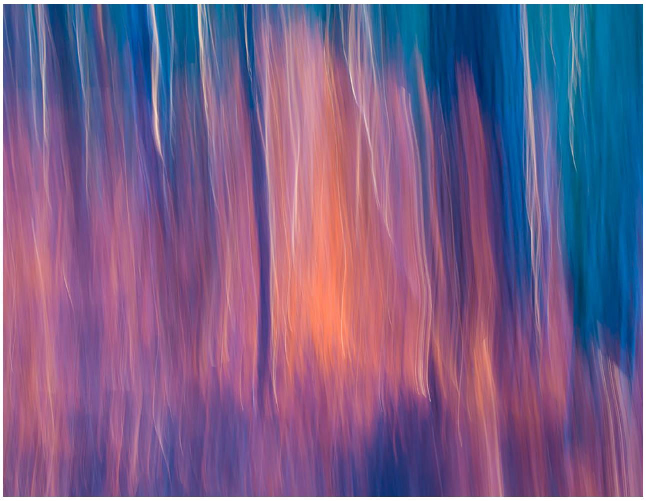

Figure 18. *Rhythm and Blues*, © Peter Searight.

> may want to do one thing and it's determined to do something else. (Arbus 1972, 11 and 14–15)

> I photograph to find out what something will look like photographed. [T]he photograph isn't what was photographed, it's something else. (Garry Winogrand, cited by Sontag 1973, 197; Diamonstein 1981–1982)

In explaining her intentions in making these photographs, Llarena wrote:

> *Optical Kinetics* […] intends to make viewers aware of the constant surveillance surrounding us. The inevitable discomfort in watching and being watched brings us a step closer to the intellectual movement, Transhumanism. Our sense of autonomy is diminished by close surveillance, promoting a distortion of us as self-determined beings. Our perceptions vary from person to person and the belief that we are merely passing through life in a world that is constantly changing, the sense of *déjà vu* exists. It is the idea that each of us, not society or religion, race or colour, should give meaning to an apparent meaningless world. (Personal correspondence)

In explaining his photograph *Rhythm and Blues*, Searight wrote:

> [I]n the same way that a potter does not know exactly what is going to emerge from his kiln until the door is opened, I was never sure that I created a worthwhile result until I saw it on a big screen in front of me. [T]his process has taken me quite a long way away from photography as a mechanistic process which has often been trivialised by the sophistication of modern cameras. (Personal correspondence)

In her series *At the Museum* (Figure 19), Kyne draws on a way of representing the thing/s in front of the lens unique to the photomechanical process: that of seeing 'out of focus'. In explaining her objectives, she too, is one of very few photographers who considers that her way of working is to collaborate with the camera (what she describes as her 'camera-being') to create scenes and moments which, in the manner in which they appear in the resulting photograph, did not exist (or, again, were unavailable to us) until brought into being by the act of photographing.

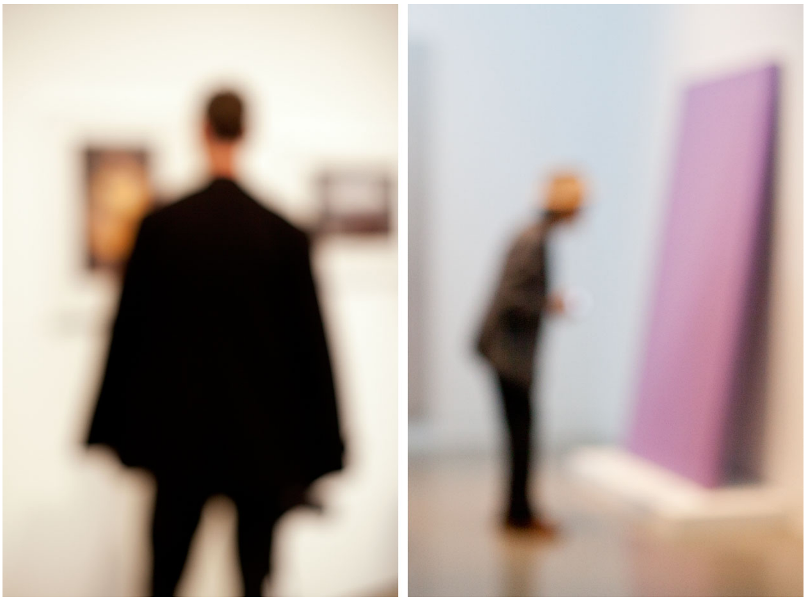

Figure 19. *At the Museum* 13, 2010 and *At the Museum* 31, 2012, © Barbara Kyne.

In explaining her intentions in making these photographs, Kyne wrote:

> [W]e perceive reality through phenomena and since by definition, phenomena [are] described through the senses, our imagination of what possibly IS, is limited. It is an unconscious bias that I aim to disrupt. My camera and I act as a unique species, perceiving reality as only 'it' can. If the viewer can accept the perception of my camera-being, we can get on with the activity of imagining what else IS, and also realize that our fixed notions might not be correct. Another thing that is important for me is to show photographs as agents, rather than just the pointers of Postmodern theory. (Personal correspondence)

My practice attempts to explore the ways in which the camera maps the world by offering it scenes and materials (such as juxtaposed planes and the reflections in the topography of three-dimensional surfaces) whose potential is apparent to even a *bino* like me. Through these projects, I use the camera as a way to 'see through the fence' and explore ways of seeing that are otherwise inaccessible to us through the conceptual limits imposed by our 'bino-chrono' way of knowing.

In the series *Submarines* (Figure 20), I sought to create conditions that made it impossible for me to see or to choose the scenes and moments recorded by the camera. In the first stage of this series, I held the camera directly above and parallel to the surface of the water, while those who had agreed to undergo the ordeal of posing for me lay submerged, facing upwards, trying to keep their eyes open. As a result, I was unable to look in the viewfinder when releasing the shutter – and, even if I had been able to see the viewfinder, the constant changes in the surface of the water and the 'delay' between pushing the button and the release of the shutter made it impossible to 'choose' with intent the particular scene or 'moment' recorded by the camera.

In the second stage, *Supermarines* (Figure 21), a waterproof camera was held below the surface of the water and pointed upwards (diagonally) through the surface towards

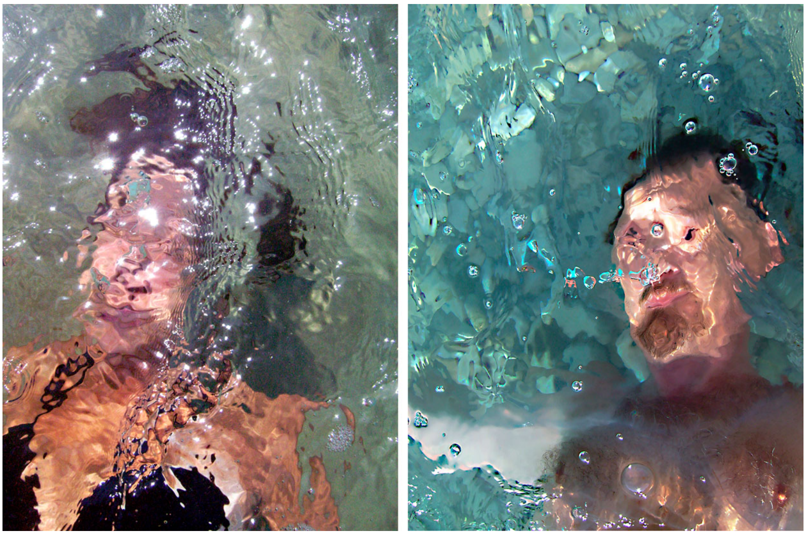

Figure 20. Cretan Sea submarine 0488 and submarine David, © Rutherford.

figures whose heads and torsos were above the surface. Once again, the constant changes in the surface texture of the water and the 'delay' in the release of the shutter made it impossible to arrange the elements within the frame (or even to predict with any certainty what elements might be in the frame), to anticipate how they will be rendered or depicted, and therefore to choose with intent the appearance of the particular scene or 'moment' to be recorded or the moment at which the photograph was made (Figures 22 and 23).

As a consequence of the inability of any human observer to have seen/witnessed/experienced the image (the unique configuration of the thing/s in front of the lens as

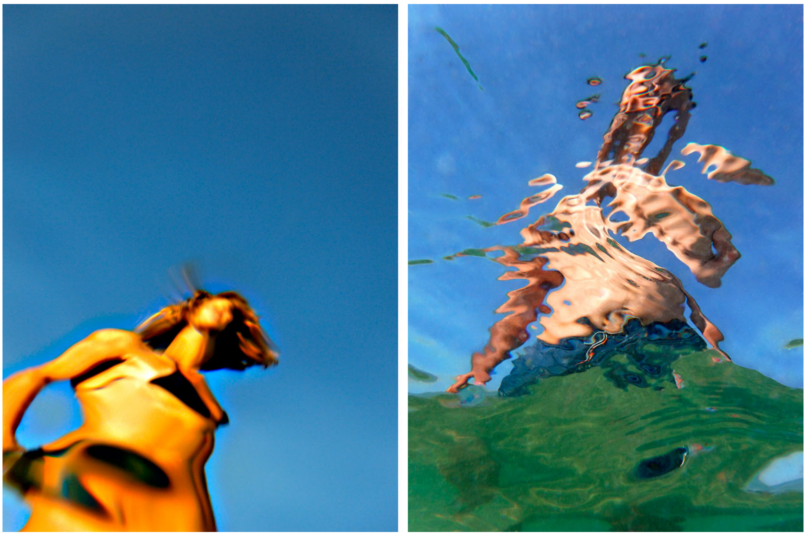

Figure 21. Cretan Sea supermarine 4201 and Hooman Moghadam supermarine 215261, © Rutherford.

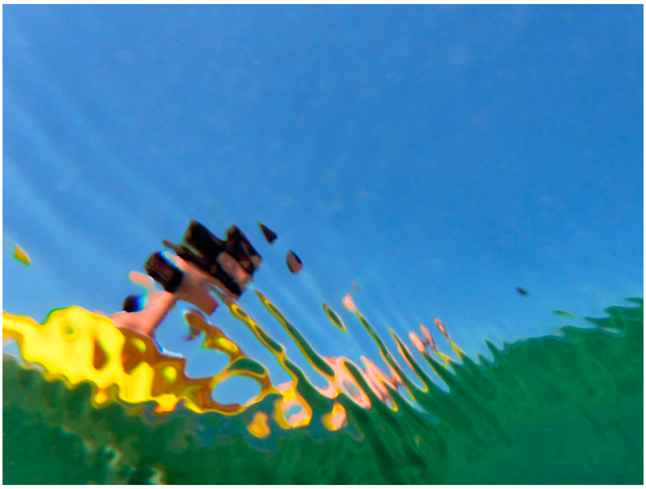

Figure 22. Cretan Sea supermarine 6288, © Rutherford.

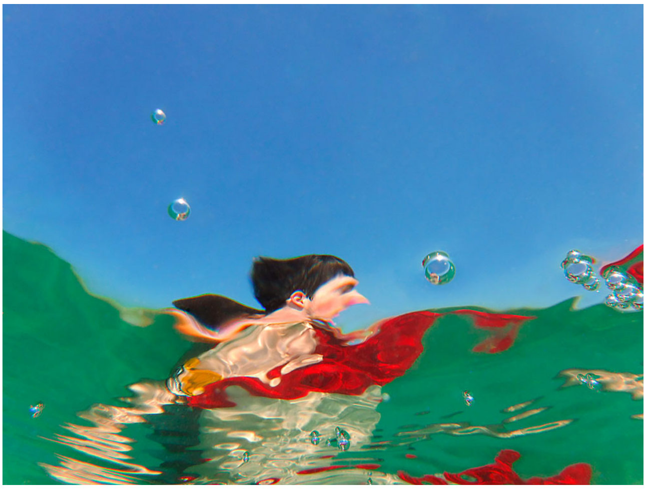

Figure 23. Leon Anselmann supermarine 475487, © Rutherford.

they would appear in the resulting photograph) in the microsecond during which it existed – as this would have required this observer to (i) remain underwater while the photographs were being recorded and (ii) be capable of seeing the image in the viewfinder while both were underwater – I submit that the scenes and 'moments' recorded in these photographs did not exist (or were entirely inaccessible to any human observer – which, except for hardcore positivists, amounts to the same thing …) in any meaningful sense of the term and so were not 'there' to be 'taken' but, as both the record and the product of the camera's way of seeing, were instead created by the act of photographing them.

Conclusion

The dominant way of thinking about the medium and the language through which this is reinforced has defined

- the assumptions implicit in the logic of the discourse and in the shared expectations of both practitioners and critics as to what photographs ‘are’, how they are produced and what they are ‘for’,
- what many practitioners consider it possible to achieve with the medium and
- the way in which photography is taught to aspiring practitioners.

If, instead of looking *through* photographs for their subject (and one which we expect to be a social or human truth), and begin to look *at* them, we are likely to be obliged to find new words and phrases to describe what they show us and these may, in turn, help us to see photographs – both the way they are created and what they show us – through a new conceptual metaphor.

By challenging our assumptions about the contribution of the photographic medium in the creation of images, and considering instead that photographs can be the result of a collaborative relationship with the medium and its unique way of seeing both space and time, it may be possible to devise new practices through which we can explore both the world ‘out there’ and the world ‘in here’ and uncover phenomena which we can see no other way.

Notes

1. I am not referring here to the accuracy of our interpretation of the social/cultural meaning or significance of objects, but only to our confidence in our ability to discern their ‘true’ form or appearance.
2. A helpful insight into the camera’s two-dimensional view of the world is offered in the 1884 satirical novella *Flatland* by Edwin Abbott Abbott which describes a world that exists in only two dimensions and whose inhabitants are thereby unable to even conceive of a third.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Originally an editorial and illustrative photographer in Toronto, Canada (1982–1993), since withdrawing from commercial practice, Rutherford’s photographic projects explore the active (or, *the act of*) collaboration by the medium in the creation of scenes, events and ‘moments’ that did not exist (and sometimes could not have existed) until brought into being by the act of photographing them. Rutherford’s photographic projects have been exhibited in Canada, the US, the UK, New Zealand, Japan and France. Rutherford’s website: http://www.theshadowofthephotographer.co.uk. Rutherford is currently Programme Leader of MA Advertising at Bournemouth University (UK).

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