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On Photography's Liquidity, or, (New) Spaces for (New) Publics?

A public is poetic world-making.
— Michael Warner[1]

The echo of water in photography evokes its prehistory.
— Jeff Wall[2]

"Thus far, I am underwhelmed by photography's presence online and the lack of innovative explorations of the new medium," Jason Evans wrote, back in 2008, in his contribution to *Words Without Pictures*, an online project that for one year became a vital platform for discussing the current state of photographic culture.[3] Most interestingly, this statement came from a photographer who has embraced the possibilities of the new medium, vis-à-vis the analogue media of exhibition and print, for expanding our horizon of understanding what photography *can* be. And while Evans is careful to frame his position as one of either/and, distancing himself from qualitative judgments ("all photographs can work given the right context"[4]) as well as from championing the Internet as "the only new frontier for serious and independent photography," he does put forward the belief—one I share profoundly—that "complementary versions of *photographic thinking* can be played out at this interesting moment in the medium's history and that it's time for *any photographer with public, discursive ambitions* to shape our online context."[5] What I will have to say here is an attempt at explaining why I would be inclined to submit that the same diagnosis still holds true today, a decade later. I will also develop the notions of photographic thinking and publicness Evans was hinting at.

The Real Thing

The period since 2010, the year of the so-called digital turn—meaning that more content was published online than in print that year[6]—seems to be important with respect to thinking about photography with artistic claims on the Internet. Around that time, Jörg Colberg, the influential photography educator and champion of photobooks, claimed that while the Internet is important for disseminating ambitious photographic work, it is not the best place to view it.[7] The art-field respondents to the *Words*

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Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics (Abbreviated Version)," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 4 (2002), 422.

2
Jeff Wall, "Photography and Liquid Intelligence," *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 109.

3
The project, which was initiated by curator Charlotte Cotton and artist/curator Alex Klein, was later published in book form as *Words Without Pictures*, eds. Charlotte Cotton and Alex Klein (New York: Aperture, 2010). Subsequent web-based endeavors such as Either/And (eitherand.org) and, especially, Fotomuseum Winterthur's *Still Searching…* (fotomuseum.ch/en/explore/still-searching/) might be seen as rejoinders to this effort.

4
Jason Evans, "Online Photographic Thinking," *Words Without Pictures*, op. cit., 46.

5
Ibid., 47–48 [emphases mine].

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Whether it's possible to quantify this is another matter. The claim is made by Carola Zwick in *The Digital Turn: Design in the Era of Interactive Technologies*, eds. Barbara Junge, Zane Berzina, Walter Scheiffele, Wim Westerveld, and Carola Zwick (Berlin: eLab, Weißensee Academy of Art, 2012).

7
The archives of his *Conscientious* blog, and now magazine, do not see that far back, but his statement was preserved in a discussion featuring, among others, Marvin Heiferman, Carol Squiers, and Susan Meiselas, with the telling title "Has Facebook Killed the Photo?", *Art in America* 99, no. 4 (April 2011), 60.

Without Pictures questionnaire provide some arguments as to why that might be so. Photographer Eileen Quinlan, for instance, in response to the question about whether she enjoyed looking at photographs online, said she is "dismayed by the fact that [her] work is often consumed, at least upon first encounter, in JPEG form. The *real thing* sometimes disappoints. The illuminated screen offers a punchier image, a sexier image. And as the first image, it sets an impossible precedent. They are apples masquerading as oranges."[8] Here, the Internet, lending things a glossy sheen they might not actually possess, appears as a medium of disingenuousness; we never really know what we are looking at. The response of curator Rebecca Morse goes along similar lines: "When I look at any work online it is with the understanding that the image I am viewing is only a *reference for the real work* out in the world. Nothing compares to viewing an artwork *in person*."[9] The prevailing idea here is that of the secondary character of work presented online, which is treated rather like documentation. The *real thing* is somewhere else, in physical, not virtual, space.

This rejection of the Internet as a legitimate site for the presentation of photographic work (as opposed to merely the dissemination of its documentation) was reasserted a couple of years later by Kate Bush, currently Adjunct Curator of Photography at Tate Britain, in a feature dedicated to Michael Mack, one of the most acclaimed publishers in the photography world and the founder of MACK Books. "It's a contemporary recognition," Bush states, "that photography exists in two creative spaces—in exhibition form and in book and magazine form."[10] There is no reason to dispute this assertion. At the same time, it throws into relief another distinction—that between an exhibition and a photobook—where the question of primary and secondary, original and copy, is much harder, if not impossible, to answer.

Where Is the Work?

In light of this confusion, perhaps it is time to ask again a modernist question: What is it that is unique and irreducible in the experience of a photography exhibition, as

8 "Questionnaire / Eileen Quinlan," *Words Without Pictures*, op. cit., 82.

9 "Questionnaire / Rebecca Morse," ibid., 153.

10 Tom Seymour, "First Things First," *British Journal of Photography* (June 2015), 51.

opposed to digital or printed forms of presentation? In his *Understanding Photobooks: The Form and Content of the Photographic Book*, Colberg defines this distinction primarily in temporal terms: while an exhibition has a limited lifespan—when the exhibition ends, it ends—a photobook, if properly stored, will be around for decades, maybe even centuries.[11] By the same token, compared to exhibitions, books are relatively small and cheap to produce, and hence can easily travel great distances to find their audiences. This characteristic has made the printed form a central medium for the dissemination of ambitious photographic work, and thus a catalyst for photographic culture at large. And while the experience of a (photographic) exhibition, at least since the 1970s, is marked by what Jean-François Chevrier termed the restoration of the "distance to the object-image necessary for the confrontational experience" of the tableau form (although without, he insisted, implying a "nostalgia for painting" or any "specifically 'reactionary' impulse"[12]), the experience of the photobook is a much more private affair: direct, affective, immersive. This double point is made by Darius Himes, again in *Words Without Pictures*, to keep true to my point of departure. "Most photographers, curators, and gallerists (and especially those of a certain age and older), learned of, and fell in love with, photography through books. Ultimately," Himes concludes, "books are far more accessible than exhibitions of important work. One can return to them repeatedly and absorb the accompanying texts at will; a lap, two hands, a few hours, and some sunlight are all that is required."[13] Bill Jay described the development of photographic culture in 1960s Britain in exactly these terms, singling out books as "major sources of knowledge and inspiration."[14] Another argument in favor of the photobook is delivered by Jason Fulford, who, echoing Himes, asserts the "subtlety of control it offers in terms of context. The book form sets up all the intended relationships and fixes them in place."[15] Yet I am not rehearsing these arguments to claim the photobook as the "ultimate venue" for photographic work, as Richard Benson did on behalf of Lee Friedlander's photographs. Colberg argues that a photography project "can usually exist as both an exhibition and a photobook," although

11
Jörg Colberg, *Understanding Photobooks: The Form and Content of the Photographic Book* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 2.

12
Jean-François Chevrier, "The Adventures of the Picture Form in the History of Photography," *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960–1982*, ed. Douglas Fogle (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003), 116.

13
Roland Barthes would make a similar point in *Camera Lucida* about cocooned aloneness: "Further, photographs, except for an embarrassed ceremonial of a few boring evenings, are looked at when one is alone. I am uncomfortable during the private projection of a film (not enough of a public, not enough anonymity), but I need to be alone with the photographs I am looking at." Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 97.

14
Bill Jay, "Magazine Memoirs: Creative Camera and Album, 1968–1972," written for the conference, "What Happened Here?: Photography in Britain since 1968," held at the National Media Museum, Bradford, England, October 14, 2004.

15
Jason Fulford, "Subtlety of Control," *Words Without Pictures*, op. cit., 169.

both modalities will, and in fact should, be different, because the photobook is not a catalogue, but an autonomous medium of expression unto itself. If this is true, and both forms of presentation, even if different in character, are equal in status, then where does this leave us with respect to the question of the real thing? *Where*, precisely, is the work?

Liquidity

What if such a conviction—that photography is underpinned by a stable ontology—is misguided? What if, instead of asking what photography *is*, we should instead be asking about, in the words of Joanna Zylinska, photography's "acts, affects, and temporal effects," and accept what she calls the medium's inherent liquidity?[16] What changes via such an approach is not the cultural object as such, but rather our way of framing, understanding, and mediating it. If we think about the fact that a photograph is never born as a gallery print or printed page, but that at its inception there is always a latent, i.e. virtual, image, and that the final form of the photograph or photographic work is always a matter of a choice that can be made over and over again (notwithstanding examples to the contrary, such as the daguerreotype or Polaroid), a different picture, and different possibilities, emerge. Acknowledging this liquidity also forces us to change the way we think about photography as a medium, a concept traditionally based on notions of support, or material, that in the visual arts often acquire metaphorical status. It is not by chance that Rosalind Krauss developed her idea of reinventing the medium as "a *set of conventions*" in response to the intervention of photography introducing the paradigm of mechanical reproduction, concomitant with the idea of the ready-made, as well as the commodification of subsequent forms of support.[17] Hence, I would surmise, it seems much more constructive to think of photography in terms of a practice of seeing and thinking—*photographic thinking*—than one of producing predetermined classes of objects. Such a definition, sidelining the question of ownership, emphasizes the direct relationship between photography and what Jürgen Habermas termed "the public sphere"—"the sphere of

16 Joanna Zylinska, "On Bad Archives, Unruly Snappers and Liquid Photographs," *Photographies* 3, no. 2 (August 23, 2010), 139–153.

17 Krauss speaks of the idea "of a medium as such, a medium as a *set of conventions* [emphasis mine] derived from (but not identical with) the material conditions of a given technical support, conventions out of which to develop a form of expressiveness that can be both projective and mnemonic." Rosalind E. Krauss, "Reinventing the Medium," *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 2 (1999), 296.

private people come together as a public"[18]—defined as a space of contestation vis-à-vis the public authorities. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge defined the public sphere as "the only form of expression that links the members of society to one another by integrating their developing social characteristics"; which is to say, as a space for the mediation of social experience.[19]

The Visual Public Sphere

As has recently been demonstrated by Emily Cram, Melanie Loehwing, and John Louis Lucaites, the existing theories of the public sphere, from Habermas, Negt, and Kluge to Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner, have focused on "the speaking citizen, largely limiting civic action to written and oral forms of deliberation, while ignoring—or worse, distrusting—all forms of visuality."[20] In an attempt at challenging speech's primacy as an emancipatory force, the authors propose the concept of the visual public sphere, a theory that involves recasting the civic spectator as equal with the civic actor, using the metaphor of the public screen as complementary to that of the public sphere, and submitting the concept of critical spectatorship. Susan Buck-Morss has hinted at exactly this dimension of the photographic image, stating that, "The image is frozen perception. It provides the armature for ideas. Images, no longer viewed as copies of a privately owned original, move into public space as their own reality, where their assembly is an act of the production of meaning. Collectively perceived, collectively exchanged, they are the building blocks of culture."[21] Considering the frame proposed by the editors of this book—to concentrate on practices reacting to and considering major social phenomena and exhibition spaces, understood in the broadest sense and defined as "discursive space in which photographic-based art and images are the starting points for intellectual and emotional knowledge production"—we should pose the question as to whether contemporary advanced (or ambitious) photographic practice fully participates in a thusly defined visual public sphere. Among compelling examples of practices that combine vernacular and professional imagery while trying to address urgent political and social

18 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 27.

19 Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 2.

20 Emily Cram, Melanie Loehwing, and John Louis Lucaites, "Civic Sights: Theorizing Deliberative and Photographic Publicity in the Visual Public Sphere," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 49, no. 3 (2016), 228.

21 Susan Buck-Morss, "Visual Studies and Global Imagination," *Papers of Surrealism* 2 (2004), 21.

22 *Cairo. Open City. New Testimonies from an Ongoing Revolution*, Museum für Photographie, Braunschweig, Germany, September 28–December 23, 2012.

issues, one could enumerate such endeavors as the 2012 exhibition *Cairo. Open City. New Testimonies from an Ongoing Revolution*, curated by Florian Ebner and Constanze Wicke[22]; Michael Taussig's essay "I'm So Angry I Made a Sign,"[23] his attempt at introducing visual thinking into cultural criticism; or Wolfgang Tillmans' engagement in the anti-Brexit campaign, with downloadable posters and by way of his Instagram account.[24] But bear with me; this is not where I would like to conclude.

Beyond Insularity

A curious coincidence. Toward the end of the 1970s, in the wake of the intense but short-lived intervention of critical postmodernism, which, as has been asserted, came to "pervert" modernism by way of the "presence" of the photographic image[25]—thus defining art in terms of photography instead of photography in terms of art, and in the same move realigning art with the surrounding world—photography went on to claim for itself, in Michael Fried's now-famous formulation, "the scale and so to speak the address of abstract painting,"[26] initiating photography's current exhibitionary order (that of Chevrier's "confrontational experience"), and firmly entrenching the medium in the paradigm of high art. Although this is much too synoptic a formulation, alluding to more than can be unpacked in a short essay, one could see this development as an irony of sorts, with photography coming full circle: in the process of becoming a peer among the arts, it had forfeited its claim to being a form of expression with universal, and also political, appeal. One should not forget that, as a parallel development, the market for illustrated weeklies had begun to founder, a turn of events that, as it worsened, pushed photographers working in the tradition of the documentary closer to the art field and its galleries and museums. According to Jorge Ribalta, one of the foremost historians of this tradition, "Photography's triumph as art means its complete defeat as document."[27] By which he means that total absorption into the art field, concomitant with the rise of an anti-realist discourse about photography, destroys "the political potential to link art to transformative radical politics."[28]

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Michael Taussig, "I'm So Angry I Made a Sign," *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 1 (September 2012), 56–88.

24
See, for example, Jonathan Jones, "These Anti-Brexit Posters Show Just What We Lose by Leaving the EU," *The Guardian* (April 26, 2016), theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2016/apr/26/anti-brexit-posters-wolfgang-tillmans-eu-referendum [all URLs in this essay accessed September 16, 2018]; and "Wolfgang Tillmans Voices His Concerns (via Instagram) about the State of Germany," *The Art Newspaper* (January 22, 2018), theartnewspaper.com/blog/wolfgang-tillmans-voices-his-concerns-via-instagram-about-the-state-of-germany.

25
Douglas Crimp, "The Museum's Old, The Library's New Subject," *Parachute* 22 (1981), 35.

26
Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 112.

27
Guy Lane, "Jorge Ribalta on Documentary and Democracy," *FOTO8* (July 2, 2009), foto8.com/live/jorge-ribalta-on-documentary-and-democracy.

28
Ibid.

While I don't consider any of these developments to be adverse per se, it is difficult not to recognize the risk of ambitious photography, with the potential to interpret, deconstruct, and even change the world, devolving not so much into mere ornament as into a state of ineffectuality. The (re)discovery of the photobook (and other printed-matter forms such as zines) as a medium in its own right, could be seen as having come in reaction to such developments, with the promise of quick production, immediate dissemination, and more democratic accessibility serving as an antidote to the exclusivity of the gallery circuit. To be perfectly clear, this is not an argument against exhibitions, which, as one possible format for presenting "liquid" media, are uniquely capable of enabling collective, embodied reception: at an exhibition, we look at and absorb images together. And while there is no need to stress the importance of the development of such public sites of knowledge production, collective (aesthetic) experience, and exchange, they remain invisible to, and exclusionary toward, publics that, owing to social, geopolitical, and/or economic conditions, are denied access to this social world.[29] Nevertheless, it quickly became apparent that the photobook revival, while an important development for the medium and (self-)understanding of photography, remained an inbred phenomenon. As early as 2012, Markus Schaden, the founder of the PhotoBookMuseum, described photobook publishing as threatened by its becoming "just a circle where different photographers copy each other's work," and a "ghetto" in which young photographers "focus on style not content, and all buy books from each other." Urged Schaden, "We need to go beyond that."[30]

Digital Publicity

This is precisely why, in 2011, recognizing the same threat, Michael Mack founded MAPP Editions, an experimental publishing house for digital books. While the orienting of photobook publishing toward collectible books was exciting, providing as it did a business model for the publishing of ambitious work, it simultaneously undermined what had inspired Mack to become a publisher in the first place:

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This recognition brings us back to what Jorge Ribalta termed "public photographic spaces," in reference to the tradition of photography-based propaganda exhibitions, from the Russian avant-garde to Edward Steichen's *The Family of Man*, which was later appropriated by visual advertising. If we were to insist on the photography exhibition as a space for a public (and, further, for public reception, public thought, public debate), it is impossible to do so without acknowledging the fact of the public's participating in a propagandistic culture, and drawing conclusions from the fact that the documentary, as public rhetoric, is "a form of public persuasion, it is propaganda"; "Jorge Ribalta on Documentary and Democracy," op. cit. See, too, *Public Photographic Spaces: Propaganda Exhibitions from Pressa to The Family of Man, 1928–55*, ed. Jorge Ribalta (Barcelona: Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art, 2009).

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Colin Pantall, "Doing It by the Book," *British Journal of Photography* (January 2012), 71.

"making that nexus between ideas and artists available to as wide an audience as possible."[31] Digital publications presented a path forward for the publisher: one, because they seemed to make good on the promise of universal accessibility at a minimal cost; and two, because, unlike photobooks and exhibitions, they allowed (at least in theory) the supplementary inclusion of scholarly content, external links, and further contextual material, without cluttering up the work itself.[32] In other words, they allowed for the mediation of sometimes difficult, complex, or highly formalized content. To achieve his goal of becoming an international "hub that is seen as one of the leading places for this kind of work," Mack managed to secure funding from investors and to develop a three-and-a-half-year business plan. The reason for his enthusiasm was Apple's iPad, originally released to the public in April 2010, which, according to Mack, "was going to change everything." Fast forward to 2015, and Mack, acknowledging that his initiative was trying "to push a market that wasn't quite there, and […] wasn't able to carry us, or even justify the investment," was no longer "as ambitious" editorially regarding digital publishing. Mack saw the reason for this in the need for a publisher to put a lot of resources into developing for different platforms, concluding that ambitious digital publishing will not be viable until the emergence of "a hybrid system […] through which content, and illustrated content, can be uploaded and relayed easily, without the need to write code for each separate platform."[33]

While this is a perfectly valid argument from a business perspective, I am not convinced that this is what we should in fact be waiting for. What Mack is envisioning is a cross-platform ecosystem of proprietary applications, enabling the synchronization of content across all important development platforms (both desktop and mobile), which will allow for the seamless publishing of well-designed interactive multimedia content. At this point in time, there are isolated initiatives such as MAPP or Musebook,[34] a digital publisher specializing in art books that was recently endorsed by Colberg;[35] but they come nowhere close to attaining the status of the photobook, understood to be a carefully designed and autonomous entity. The digital

31
Diane Smyth, "The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction," *British Journal of Photography* (August 2011), 90. Also, Smyth, quoting Mack (ibid.): "You look at our Steidl list and there are a huge number of items that are three volumes, 10 volumes or more, and we can't sell enough of them to be honest. We always limit the numbers to at least 1200 and they sell out; it doesn't really matter what price we put on them. That's great, but then they're in libraries or in collections, and nobody actually gets to see the bloody things. That's not what publishing is about."

32
Ibid.

33
Tom Seymour, op. cit., 57.

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Offering, for example, the latest Stephen Shore catalogue (musebooks.world/world/stephen-shore-1391.html).

35
See, Jörg Colberg, "Book Reviews W16/2018," *Conscientious Photography Magazine* (April 16, 2018), cphmag.com/reviews162018.

equivalents remain mere supplementary replications, never *the real thing*. This is because—at least until now—all such initiatives are restrained by the governing framework they adopt. Protocols in the space of the Internet tend to evolve at a rapid pace, rendering such frameworks quickly obsolete and forcing their creators to be constantly updating them, resulting in onerous overheads.

To return to this text's opening, when Jason Evans asserted that it was "simply a matter of time before a generation not weaned on paper and chemicals sees the manufactured bubble of 'art photography' for what it is, and begins to explore the potential of an inclusive, affordable distribution network and its inherently interesting formal qualities for presentation and distribution,"[36] he was both right and wrong at the same time. He was right in the sense that many photographers and other practitioners working with photography have indeed produced intellectually and aesthetically engaging work, very often allowing them to reach a significant audience at a fraction of the costs of publishing a book or staging a well-produced exhibition. But Evans already knew this in 2008. He was mistaken in the sense that to even discover the current "interesting formal qualities for presentation and distribution," and put them to creative, let alone critical, use, requires significant resources, not to mention the creative as well as intellectual collaboration of graphic designers (as in the case of a photobook), and technically-minded practitioners such as programmers, interaction designers, and so on.

Critical Design

Our biggest fallacy lies in our treatment of the computer as a tool—one that may be structurally complex but relatively easy to functionally operate. It is exactly for this reason that Vilém Flusser would call the computer a toy.[37] And playing the toy by the rules does not help us to understand its underlying programs and how they condition the ways we interact and express ourselves through them. Needless to say, much of this has been happening in the world of electronic and Internet art for a long time; but we need more of that knowledge, thought, and work to seep through into the mainstream of ambitious photo-

36 Jason Evans, op. cit.

37 See, Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

graphic practice if it is to participate meaningfully in the visual public sphere. Some ideas put forward by the Digital Bauhaus, a movement within the design community, initiated, in 1998, by Pelle Ehn with his *Manifesto for a Digital Bauhaus*, can be useful in unpacking what is at stake here. According to Colin Beardon, a truly radical digital aesthetic will only emerge "when the skills and abilities in the fields of creative practice are combined with a deep intellectual understanding of digital technologies to the point where they can be seriously challenged from an alternative standpoint."[38] And this will only be possible with the participation of other creative fields, especially that of theory and the arts. This kind of collaboration and dialogue can be seen as one possible definition of critical design.

In Beardon's view, the main inspiration and model for this aesthetic will come from theater, which could become "a virtual laboratory for the exploration of actions to 'shape the activities of life.'" Theater as a model for computing is of double importance to Beardon. "Firstly," he writes, "because in theater the performative act, with or without words, is a highly refined form of action. Secondly, because theater is virtual in the sense that it is purely hypothetical action. This does not mean, however, that it cannot be effective in the larger world outside of theater." As I understand it, this claim is derived from the centrality of interaction as a paradigm for the digital world, hence the importance of exploring and departing from the performative element as a way of building relationships across the digital constituency.

One highly convincing use of theatricality in constructing a cross-media documentary project, which for all its whimsicality amounts to a pointed commentary and reflection on the current refugee crisis and the ways Old Europe is (not) dealing with it, is Anaïs López's *The Migrant* (2012–2018).[39] This story of a bird, the Javan myna, which the artist became familiar with in Singapore, and by extension our relationship to animals and our modern ways of striving to engineer the ideal society, exists in the form of a book comprised of photographs, pop-ups, illustrations, and comic strips; as a web documentary; is exhibited; and is presented during performative storytelling

38
Colin Beardon, "The Digital Bauhaus: Aesthetics, Politics, and Technology," *Digital Creativity* 14, no. 3 (September 1, 2003), 177.

39
See, migrant.nu/en and anaislopez.nl/the_migrant_the_app/in/what_is_going_on_now. *The Migrant* was a Krakow Photomonth 2018 project.

sessions staged by the artist. López's example is the more pertinent here because she makes use of playfulness, of play as an immersive force. As Bill Gaver convincingly laid out in his argument for utilizing *Homo Ludens* (*Ludens* is derived, in part, from the Latin for "play") as a model for digital design, "pleasure comes before understanding, and engagement before clarity."[40] This realm is still very much open for exploration.

For Experimentation

Jorge Ribalta's view that "experimentation and innovation on the document side cannot be dissociated from experimentation in the radicalization of democracy," has never been more true. Clinging to received notions of publicity and a literal realism (for example, the one enforced by the World Press Photo) is no countermeasure to what has been called the politics of post-truth, and the recent revelations about how the big players in the Internet have been playing their constituencies.[41] One could argue that in spite of all the "information" we have access to, the world has reached a new level of unfathomableness. In the face of this evident crisis, we need to find new ways to create and disseminate reflexive, thoughtful, and critical content, especially in visual form. And while these days even relative photographic neophytes are able to hold court on the importance of format, paper stock, and printing technique to the overall effect of their photobook, we still know comparatively little about what makes a great Internet publication, what works and what doesn't, and why. For this, we need the big institutions in the field to set aside the resources for, and commit to, conducting more active research in digital interaction design specifically geared toward lens-based media, with the goal of creating frameworks and tools and making them more readily available to a wider community of practitioners, including photographers, artists, designers, programmers, and journalists.[42] If such a laboratory were to come into existence, it might give birth to a new medium: that of the, for lack of a better term, digital photoapp ("digital photobook" causes a misunderstanding right from the start).

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Bill Gaver, "Designing for *Homo Ludens*," *(Re) Searching the Digital Bauhaus*, eds. Thomas Binder, Jonas Löwgren, and Lone Malmborg (London: Springer, 2009), 176. Gaver's argument stems from the recognition that "the real revolution is that computing is leaving the confines of task-oriented, focused, rational work, and joining us in our homes, on the street, at parties, on lonely mountaintops—everywhere, in short, where we leave work behind to do the things we really want to do"; ibid., 164.

41
Of course, I am referring to the Cambridge Analytica scandal, but also to the ongoing debate about (the need for) censorship, and the difficulty of pinpointing hate speech, in relation to outlets such as Alex Jones' Infowars (see, Jason Wilson, "A 'Political Hit Job'? Why the Alt-right is Accusing Big Tech of Censorship," *The Guardian* [March 4, 2018], theguardian.com/the-chain/2018/mar/04/alt-right-big-tech-censorship-law-suits); as well as recent revelations about the weaponization of Facebook to incite violent attacks against immigrants in Germany; see, Casey Newton, "Facebook Should Help Us Understand the Link Between Political Speech and Violence," *The Verge* (August 23, 2018), theverge.com/2018/8/23/17771460/facebook-germany-refugee-violence-study-criticism.

42
The existing platforms for digital storytelling either don't allow for responsive design (klynt.net, korsakow.com), are better suited for branding (racontr.com, studio.helloeko.com), or are geared more toward reading (atavist.com). Then there are tools like Readymag (readymag.com) or Webflow

Having said this, it would be remiss of me not to highlight the compelling and important work that has already been done in this field. To start with, some producers, like Paradox, the National Film Board of Canada, and the IDFA DocLab;[43] the *New York Times* and *The Guardian*; and mediators such as the Docubase or Ydoc foundations,[44] have been at the forefront of such pursuits in the field of photography for some time now. Additionally, notable projects include Geert van Kesteren's *Why Mister, Why?*—launched as a multi-screen exhibition, book, and dedicated website, in 2005, and as an extended iApp edition, in 2013[45]—which deals with the aftermath of the Bush administration's Iraq War; Kadir van Lohuizen's *Via PanAm* (iPad app and online blog, 2011; book and exhibition, 2013),[46] which, while focusing on the Americas, attempts to reflect on worldwide issues of migration; Lisa Barnard's *The Canary and the Hammer: The Gold Depository* (2017), the artist's response to the 2008 global financial crisis, and her attempt at exposing via elucidation the global north's drive to accumulate wealth[47]; and Robert Knoth and Antoinette de Jong's *Poppy Interactive*,[48] the interactive documentary follow-up to the duo's acclaimed book, *Poppy: Trails of Afghan Heroin*,[49] and corresponding video installation[50] unraveling transcontinental networks of violence and chaos wrought along international heroin trading routes by insurgents, criminal organizations, and corrupt or ineffectual governments. Also of great importance is Rob Hornstra and Arnold van Bruggen's *Sochi Project* (2009–2013), an epic story about the site of the 2014 Winter Olympics that deconstructs Vladimir Putin's neo-imperialist political ambitions while unearthing the (post-)Soviet legacy of the region.[51] The project was notable not only because its web version, unveiled in 2013, manages to balance a readerly vertical format (for van Bruggen's writing) with a focus on (Hornstra's) photography, but also because in their attempt to find a way to practice what they call "slow journalism," the duo managed to actively seek out and sustain their own public, which helped them finance their work via crowdfunding, and to share their progress by annually publishing the ongoing project in various

(webflow.com) making responsive web design more easily available, but they force their users into a closed, subscription-based ecosystem, making the future of the content dependent on the future of the provider—and many have faltered in the process; see, Gannon Burgett, "Visual Storytelling Platform Storehouse Announces It's Shutting Down," *Digital Trends* (June 15, 2016), digitaltrends.com/photography/storyhouse-storytelling-platform-shutting-down-square—and generating constant maintenance costs. Atavist's trajectory seems to provide the best point of reference: in 2015, *The Atavist* (the magazine built on the Atavist framework) decided to ditch its mobile apps in favor of one unified web app (for exactly the reasons Michael Mack withdrew from trying to spearhead "photoapp" development), realizing that on the web, they were able to reach "a readership often 50 to 100 times larger [...] than what [they] could in the app"; see, Evan Ratliff and Jefferson Rabb, "Goodbye, Native Mobile Apps," *Atavist Insider* (September 18, 2015), atavistinsider.atavist.com/goodbye-native-mobile-apps. It remains to be seen what happens after the framework's acquisition by WordPress owner Automattic.

43 See, paradox.nl, nfb.ca/interactive, and doclab.org/category/projects.

44 See, docubase.mit.edu and ydocfoundation.org.

45 See, whymisterwhy.com. While the iPad app is still available, the web-based Flash version (whymisterwhy.com/webedition.html) is no longer working. The project was shown at Krakow Photomonth 2007 as part of *Theaters of War*, curated by Mark Power.

printed formats. Wider publicity—and attendant discussion of the subject of their work—followed on the heels of the project's completion, which included the launch of the website and the publication of a photobook.

When the iPad version of *Why Mister, Why?* was made available, Jörg Colberg described it in his review as demonstrating that "photojournalism does have a very good electronic future. Photojournalism […] should be about well-produced stories first and then about trying to reach audiences with those stories. In a day and age where some people confuse taking Instagram pictures with photojournalism, *Why Mister, Why?*, the app, demonstrates what can be done with new media without sacrificing what made the profession in the first place."[52] Meanwhile, a lot has changed across the media landscape.[53] Current estimates suggest that for most people, especially if we are to take into consideration the digital divide, the smartphone will eventually be (if it isn't already) their primary, if not only, means of connecting to the Internet, making it the natural primary development platform. What will become of the tablet, taking into account the fact that laptops continue to become smaller and, in the case of 2-in-1 laptops, functionally convertible, remains to be seen. Also, the inclusion of other visual media (moving images, drawing) seems both desired and needed. From among the aforementioned projects, only *Poppy* and *The Migrant* are responsive web apps, and only *The Migrant* can be added to the Home Screen as an autonomous, full-screen app. Surely they can be regarded as signposts toward what ambitious photographic work on the Internet can look and feel like going forward. Consider this my plea for research into the current potential of the Internet—a shared public visual space, accessible to many more people than traditional print-based media sources—as a publishing platform for accomplished, reflexive, critical photographic work, not in the walled gardens of specialized applications (even if cross-platform), but as autonomous web apps. Featuring responsive design, so that they read well (that is, differently) on differing screen sizes, from smartphone to laptop to large desktop display, these publications should offer a focused and immersive, if not necessarily seamless,

46
See, viapanam.org/viapanam/about.

47
See, thegolddepository.com/home.html.

48
See, poppy.submarinechannel.com and, for more information on the project, paradox.nl/project/poppy/#work.

49
Robert Knoth and Antoinette de Jong, *Poppy: Trails of Afghan Heroin* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012).

50
The installation was shown in *A New Display: Visual Storytelling at a Crossroads*, Krakow Photomonth group exhibition curated by Iris Sikking, Tytonie, Krakow, Poland, May 14–June 12, 2016.

51
See, thesochiproject.org. The project, as with many of the works mentioned here, also functions as a book and an exhibition, with the subtitle *An Atlas of War and Tourism in the Caucasus*.

52
See, Jörg Colberg, "*Why Mister, Why?* by Geert van Kesteren," *Conscientious Photography Magazine* (September 5, 2018), cphmag.com/why-mister-why.

53
While in 2013, Internet usage in the EU reached 75 percent of households (ranging from as high as 90 percent in the UK to as low as 58 percent in Italy), it is estimated that, by 2020, the European Commission's Digital Agenda to achieve 100 percent population coverage with 30 Mbps broadband will be a fact, and smartphone subscriptions relative to the population will reach 95 percent. See, Olaf Acker, Florian Gröne, et al., "The Digital Future of Creative Europe: The Economic Impact of Digitization and the Internet on the Creative Sector in Europe," Strategy& report, 2013, PDF, 9; the full report is available online at:

experience of the work in question, at the same time subtly providing contextual information that would allow audiences less versed in contemporary photographic parlance to find their way into the work, be touched by it, and maybe develop a desire to experience it as a photobook or, *in person*, as an exhibition.

Coda

Most importantly, though, let these attempts *slow down* the Internet,[54] strategically and critically so, and participate in the visual public sphere, hopefully inviting more and more people into our small photographic realm, making it maybe a little less airtight and self-sufficient. At the same time, we might come up with new grammars of visual expression, and new tools for critical understanding. It is important to remember that the public sphere is a phantom, as difficult to pin down and characterize as photography itself, and that its structure is thus performative, always ready to reconfigure itself. "Public discourse," Michael Warner reminds us, "is poetic. By this I mean not just that it is self-organizing, a kind of entity created by its own discourse, nor even that this space of circulation is taken to be a social entity, but that in order for this to happen all discourse or performance addressed to a public *must characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate*, and it must attempt to realize that world through address."[55] So remember, this is not about creating new business models, but about the opportunity to participate in the visual public sphere as actors and as critical, conscious spectators. It is about accepting no less significant a responsibility than that of playing at poetic world-making.

strategyand.pwc.com/media/file/The-digital-future-of-creative-Europe.pdf. The year 2020 is also expected to mark a new digital turn, with mobile data consumption overtaking fixed broadband, even considering that both are growing at a staggering rate. See, "Perspectives from the Global Entertainment & Media Outlook 2018–2022," PwC report, 2018, PDF, 10; the full report is available online at: pwc.com/gx/en/entertainment-media/outlook/perspectives-from-the-global-entertainment-and-media-outlook-2018-2022.pdf. With 5G connectivity around the corner, and the expectation that VR and AR technology will mature enough to be made widely—and affordably—available, the space for, and possibilities of, digital publishing in visual media seem once again wide open, and this is why, in my opinion, we have again arrived at a watershed moment that might be compared to that of the releases of the iPhone and iPad, in 2007 and 2010 respectively.

54 This was the point of departure for Triple Canopy, an intriguing initiative aiming to provide a digitally native, but intellectually rigorous, reading experience. For the editors' account of their attempts at slowing down the Internet, and of their battles with protocols, see, Triple Canopy, "The Binder and the Server," *Art Journal* 70, no. 4 (December 1, 2011), 40–59, artjournal.collegeart.org/?p=2644.

55 Michael Warner, op. cit., 422.

Note to addendum:

In Krzysztof Pijarski's essay (pp. 17–30), the footnotes were unintentionally omitted from this volume. This addendum contains the full text including the footnotes.

- The editors