

THE RHETORIC OF VISUAL AESTHETICS:  
IMAGE, CONVENTION, AND FORM IN NEW MEDIA

by

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The Rhetoric of Visual Aesthetics: Image, Convention, and Form in New Media

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### *Abstract*

Across multiple contexts within photography's relatively brief history as a medium of 'light inscription,' a ubiquitous relationship pairing photographer with subject has dominated a common understanding of the art (*technê*). This pairing, across time, consistently demonstrates a dominant and linear perspective, wherein the former (photographer) works to "capture" the latter (the subject), toward the production of an image--whether inscribed on print media of the traditional darkroom, or through the bright screens of our contemporary mobile devices. This dissertation examines this linear relationship, and in particular, what new potential may emerge when photography is considered apart from it. That is, how might both professional and everyday photographers consider the art (and/or craft) as a set of social relationships--rather than a linear production? As such, I conduct a rhetorical inquiry into a variety of case studies. These range from Annie Leibowitz' photographing of high fashion models alongside real-life first responders in *Vogue*, to the less visible, affective, and often devastating human consequences of chasing the prestigious Pulitzer Prize, to the influence and power wielded by conventional photographic aesthetics within the coverage of a post-disaster event. My findings suggest that photography yields surprising rhetorical power when considered apart from its traditional understanding as a technology of image capture. By analyzing the aesthetics of public images and the leveraging of photographic conventions, my research highlights both the power and limitations that an ostensibly neutral technology overlooks when photography is understood as an unproblematic production which can only yield images. Rather, I argue that photography is better understood as *processual* in character, and *relational* in scope. Far from a static technology, my cases demonstrate that photography is made and remade, and brings the potential to expand its influence and power when social and public concerns become inclusive to its definition. These insights may help visual publics to move beyond normative views of photography as an endeavor initiated and terminated in the image of its maker. Rather, I contend a relational photography--what I refer to as a *photographic act*--catalyzes a process of connective, social invention and renewal.

Dedicated to my Dad,  
Theodore T. Kim



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While this dissertation represents years of hard work, still, it remains just that—a representation. This is to say the affective relationships bringing this work to fruition are better described as a gathering. Rather than attempt (and likely fail) to list in exhaustive fashion all who have contributed to this project, I instead will name those critical to my finishing of this work. The past several years have expressed various labors of love, bittersweet challenges and (near) triumphs, and ultimately—a project of which I am immensely proud, and of which consists in the people who made it so: my friends and fellow academics in the University of Colorado’s Department of Communication, as well as those in the Program for Writing and Rhetoric, my dissertation committee who not only fulfilled their respective service roles, but who each cared enough to guide, mentor, and to challenge me with thoughtfulness and erudition. Lisa Flores, David Boromisza-Habashi, Laurie Gries, John-Michael Rivera—to each of you I owe so much. Jerry Hauser, for all your stature and scholarly weight, you’ve demonstrated to me with incision conscience, humility, and mentorship. John Ackerman, my advisor and chair to the dissertation committee: you are who I want to be when I grow up. I find it incredibly rare in this business when someone can thoroughly back an ambitious project while simultaneously backing its writer—wholly and without fail. You’ve done so with intelligence, patience (!), the generosity of your time, your endorsing and advocating on my behalf without regard to academic capital, our conversations on theory and philosophy, your critical and beneficial pushing and pulling, your countless edits, your comments (and commentary), your humor, and most of all—your care. My mom, dad, and brother: you make for a small but loving family, and you’ve encouraged me through it all, regardless of standing or success. With sincerity—I can neither say enough nor thank you enough. Kelly Fleming, my muse, who with love single-handedly inspired me and this project to its potential and to its completion. My beloved cronies and collaborators: Diane Keeling, Jennifer Malkowski, Rex Parks, Jason Kalin—just a tiny sample amongst many others, and in particular, at both CU and NC State—we’ve experienced a lot together over the duration of this project; we’ve shown each other courage, vulnerability, relief, joy, what it looks like to celebrate with your whole body, and most of all, you’ve formed and informed an ethic of which I put to use on an everyday basis—and especially when the academic road appears to lose its horizon. Countless times you’ve brought me back. Steve Caldes and Jeff Becker: I’ve learned more about writing through our (really long) breaks during tennis matches than I ever could in seminar. And finally, to my daughters, Hannah and Bethany: no one can affect me as you do. No one. With so much pride, I am so lucky and grateful to be the person to whom you call Daddy.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The range of photography's existence across its relatively short history, from its advent to its current form, continues to share in common at least one requirement—light from which to inscribe representational images. These range from Daguerre's 15-minute portrait exposures inscribed onto metallic media to contemporary video cameras capable of making traditional still photography indistinguishable from a still frame pulled from a high-resolution moving picture. Both require light, both use that light to inscribe onto what it ultimately a symbolic representation of *something else*, whether person, place, or thing. The correlative is true in converse: in the absence of light, there can be no process of inscription—no light-writing can occur. Yet, I argue that even in mediated, photographic contexts where there exists an expectation of light, other light aesthetics (or figures of light, or figures of light aesthetics) persevere or compensate for the conspicuous absence of normative light ideal for photography (in terms of amount, amplification, intensity, and temperature). Both the presence and absence of these *conventional* photographic arrangements (light articulating with color articulating with composition) form what I refer to as a *doxa* of photographic literacy. This is so, even as most photographic conventions exist without names and labels. I contend that publics have quite a sophisticated understanding of these conventions, as this form of literacy is a pre-requisite for a “visual culture” to consume images in the first instance—whether still or moving. I

interchangeably use the terms “photographic conventions” and “compensatory aesthetics” to point to the rhetorical acts within the *process* of photography. I contend this process is best understood as relational: photographer, camera, subject, text, medium, symbolicity, meaning, exigency, and absence. Photography, then, is better understood as a set of relationships among moving objects and social phenomena—rather than a linear process wherein a photographer holds the power to first “capture” an image and then “fix” that image—all in a linear process easily noted as steps from beginning (photographer and camera) to end (a print, digital image, or another inscription onto a light-sensitive object).

### *Purpose of the Study*

My purpose is to describe and explain through the examples in this dissertation’s cases, an inventory of these resilient, persevering, and durable inscriptions for which we refer to as visual. A primary contention in this project is that these compensatory aesthetics of photography are the new “contrivance identical to all;” that is, the common agreement that we see the same visual form, figure, and color in terms of human perception.<sup>1</sup> Even in disagreement, we acknowledge that our common visual symbols, in the least, point to the same referential objects. As such, we assume it is reasonable to hold common meaning via these common visual conventions. The “contrivance” phrase comes from a Cambridge physicist, James Maxwell Clerk, who in the 19<sup>th</sup> century debunked much of Newton’s color theory. Despite his ambitious and successful experiments, he concludes, essentially, that it matter little to none if we do or do not

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<sup>1</sup> James Clerk Maxwell, “Experiments on Colour, as Perceived by the Eye, with Remarks on Colour-Blindness.” *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* 21 (1857): 275-298.

see the same (i.e., color). Thus, he himself places his own viable conclusions to visual experimentation into suspect territory, counter to his own professional ambition. In other words, I interpret Clerk's term as a way to denote that seeing is both rhetorical and contingent. In the face of ambiguity with regard to our ability to 'see' the same visual form, color, and distinctions, there is zero guarantee that you and I would visually perceive—in an identical sense—the same differences of color in either a rainbow—or on a box of Lucky Charms.

I have maintained that a reflexive orientation toward photography's rhetorical functioning and character, should include 1) an inquiry into the process of the visual text's inclusion, 2) naming the specific purposes being "addressed" by specific choices of inclusion, exclusion, and compensation toward rhetorical operation, 3) the circulation of photographic norms/practices, the professional conventions holding these in place that permit and necessitate the reduction of photographic representation in the formation of discourse, 4) the naming and functioning of photography's technical "affordances" in terms of deploying compensatory aesthetics and a rhetoric of capture/negation, 5) addressing the long-held cultural expectation of the visual to hold together aesthetics within symbolic form, and 6) what the image—and in particular, the photograph—is being reduced *from* and *reshaped into*.

### *A (Meta) Framework*

Although the subsequent chapter of this dissertation, the review of literature, spells explicitly and with specificity the multifarious scholarship from which my project builds, the *(meta) framework* of this study largely is informed by a relative dearth in addressing matter and material within contemporary rhetorical scholarship. In a recent article appearing in one of the

discipline's flagship journals, Ehren Helmut Pflugfelder announces the "need to devise a new perspective on rhetoric, or at least a unique rhetorical awareness attuned to the material conditions that rhetorical theory may have overlooked."<sup>2</sup> As such, on a rhetorical view, my study owes much to the scholarship of Karen Barad. Though Barad's work aligns closer to New Materialist and Science and Technology Studies (STS) approaches, her notion of "agential realism," I contend, is commensurate, allied, and significant to advancing a rhetoric of relational photography (i.e., what I term as a *photographic act*). With regard to Pflugfelder's call for a rhetoric expansive enough to include material concerns, Barad's contribution is exemplary to that which existing rhetorical theory may have "overlooked." The following description and explanation of her conceptualizing—and its purpose—holds promise and potential for a more expansive rhetorical framework:

I present a relational ontology that rejects the metaphysics of relata, of "words" and "things." On an agential realist account, it is once again possible to acknowledge nature, the body, and materiality in the fullness of their becoming without resorting to the optics of transparency or opacity, the geometries of absolute exteriority or interiority, and the theoretization of the human as either pure cause or pure effect while at the same time remaining resolutely accountable for the role "we" play in the intertwined practices of knowing and becoming.<sup>3</sup>

Barad addresses a recent and latent concern from a rhetorical discipline which more recently has taken seriously an accountability to that which we refer to as matter and the material—and without the collapsed assumptions of singular, linear agency, or agency centered exclusively on the human. Thus, for Barad, matter is "a doing," a *process of becoming* material that need not

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<sup>2</sup> Ehren Helmut Pflugfelder, "Rhetoric's New Materialism: From Micro-Rhetoric to Microbrew," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* no. 5 (2015): 442.

<sup>3</sup> See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* no. 3 (2003): 812-822.

rely solely on the representations of “words and things.” Accordingly, my project calls for a rhetoric capable of rethinking photography as less the noun-ridden referent of its own sign/word and instead asks what photography might look like otherwise—as processual. Significantly, the advantage of adopting agential realism for rhetoric is within this dynamic character of Barad’s theorizing (informed largely by her dual expertise in Quantum Physics). Her schema allows for capturing specificity in the movement of matter along with a capacity to map the rhetorical functions I describe above. Put another way, agential realism is oriented toward a specific theoretical and rhetorical exigence: a relational, processual, and distributive framework of photography’s becoming—of its making and remaking. As such, I consider Barad’s contribution to my study as immanently rhetorical in its capacity to account for photography’s complex relationships without a glib dismissal of the discursive objects of analysis closely associated with the rhetorical tradition—even as she challenges the legitimacy of a “pure cause” tied to symbolic representation.

To illustrate agential realism’s relational orientation to a processual photography—inflected—then deflected—through normative conventions, consider the work of photojournalist and documentarian, Sara Naomi Lewkowicz. In March of 2013, Lewkowicz photographed a series of images later to be published in *TIME*.<sup>4</sup> The visual subjects of her assignment was a couple referred to by the monikers of “Maggie and Shane.” Lewkowicz’ larger scope, domestic violence, was a unique one because of the relationship among photographer, subjects, and the phenomenon of real-time photography. I refer to this photojournalistic convention as “hyper-real.” Her real-time photographing of Shane’s acts of domestic violence, posed difficult ethical issues. Yet the public response surrounding the editorial decisions of appropriateness—reactions based

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<sup>4</sup> Sara Naomi Lewkowicz, “Photographer as Witness: A Portrait of Domestic Violence.” *TIME* Feb. 27, 2013. accessed from <http://time.com/3525038/photographer-as-witness-a-portrait-of-domestic-violence/>



on an ethic enveloped within a frame of morality—might otherwise served as an important professional discussion. Instead, the ethical frame disallowed a perspective which included the role of the photographer, herself, in terms of (non)intervention.

The photograph I analyze in brief, begins as a critical text, and exemplifies the hyper-real photographic address Lewkowicz' employs toward the traditional role of objective journalism and non-hyperbolic documentation [Figure 1]. Lewkowicz herself describes her non-intervention as a decision based upon her training and “intuition as a photojournalist.” Following the publication of the photos in *TIME*, she faced an inundation of criticism and a modicum of editorial support. This discourse followed the dialectic of her accountability as one to intervene or to not intervene--as a journalist or as a human being--witnessing a violent act.



Sara Naomi Lewkowicz

As Shane and Maggie continued to fight, Memphis ran into the room and refused to leave Maggie's side. She witnessed the majority of the assault on her mother. As the two fought, Memphis began to scream and stomp her feet.

[Figure 1]  
Lewkowicz' photo essay on "Shane and Maggie"

This image is disturbing in its content alone. However, I find it nothing short of incredulous that a specific compensatory aesthetic—that is, a photographic convention—appears in this image. Despite the kitchen's low level of available (artificial, incandescent) light—the room's relative darkness, non-metaphorically, Memphis still appears as a clearly visible figure. The child's hair is lit from the right and back of her head, with the light from the stove hood ostensible providing the necessary light for audiences to see. However, upon a closer read, either the photographer or its editor have created a sort of halo around the child's head that otherwise could not be depicted by a typical 35mm SLR light sensor. In photographic terms, Memphis appears to be lighted by a "rim" source (the hood bulb). While that is entirely possible, it is the child's *body* that reveals an aesthetic of editorial manipulation. Modern photography's ability to capture a range of light would not enable the photographer to depict Memphis' body with as much light as she appears. Her halo, her visible body, the warmth of the color temperature on and around Memphis—contrasts her innocence against the violence, darkness, and the conspicuously artificial, dim lighting at the far right of the image. The limitations of the camera's light-capture capacity does not remain unfettered. Instead, photojournalists and editors have long used software to manipulate images before circulation—even if this manipulative convention is executed without malice or ill intent. The range of light that a camera can capture, defined by its ability to retain detail within the brightest values (highlights) to the darkest values (shadows), remains as a limitation for photographers. As such, this shortened continuum of light must compensate in order to make a photo legible under low-lighting conditions: either the highlights (the brightest lights emanating from the stove hood) can be salvaged at the expense of the darkest

values (the shadow cast by the table chair's leg at the far left of the image), or vice-versa. Yet, the photograph makes light appear where it “naturally” would not otherwise. This leading move toward meaning making for audiences is an example of a convention—a compensatory aesthetic making a photograph appear as natural and as unproblematic to audiences.

Here, I believe Lewkowicz engages in a “black boxed” process—a metaphor borrowed from engineering—which illustrates the reduction of social phenomena into iterable form. This process occurs via her operating within traditional, photojournalistic conventions and norms.<sup>5</sup> These conventions work in tandem with an emerging exigency for Lewkowicz to create a set of visual texts for public consumption. That is, as a documentarian, she orients to an imagined audience of visual culture, and she addresses the audience with her visual, representative texts. Thus, the set of photographs themselves, as a material product of her work, also assumes a role as the ultimate arbiter of her work's import and significance. I argue, instead, that Lewkowicz is stripped of her agential powers of address, replaced by a messy assembly, or gathering, of relational agencies producing unpredictable discourse and to what/whom/where an “utterance” is aimed, in the Bakhtinian sense of the term.<sup>6</sup> I contend that this visual utterance is aimed at an alternative photographic subject: the photographer, herself.

In fact, the ensuing, controversial, and stunted discourse left behind a conspicuous and critical question (outside of the intervention debate): through what rationale did Lewkowicz *legitimate* her role as a permissible documentarian—in real-time? The photographer made far

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<sup>5</sup> Langdon Winner, “Upon Opening the Black Box and Finding It Empty: Social Constructivism and the Philosophy of Technology.” *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 3 (1993): 362-378.

<sup>6</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981).

more images with Shane and Maggie that had little to do with explicit violence. The ideological objectivity of editorial photojournalism provides permission for the image-maker to act as if she is a fly on the wall; the very conspicuous reflexivity of her own presence as a shadowing documentarian would otherwise go unnoticed within a public discourse—had it not been for the ethical question of intervention. This editorial phenomenon alone, along with its implicit pedagogy, makes strange the idea that Lewkowitz could act as an invisible agent. This type of agency is problematic—especially when it (the camera) is literally in one’s face.

It becomes evident from Lewkowitz’ recounting of the incident that she considers herself as one who reacts by using the “intuition” informed by her training. Who or what is she reacting to? Who or what are we reacting to? When are we reacting to it (before a prize is awarded? before our knowledge of the controversial narrative?) These questions form a small extraction of critical prompts helping a visual critic to map conditions for photographic address—that is, an act rather than an exclusively textual product. This photographic act counters the dominant view of Lewkowitz as one who sets out initially to enact her own agency by conditioning a discourse of everyday alienation through a long-term process “intended to paint a portrait of the catch-22 of being a released ex-convict.”<sup>7</sup>

A relational understanding of Lewkowitz’ photography makes significant a distribution of agencies inscribing a personal history of violence—first within a visual frame of redemptive possibility for a scapegoat past, and subsequently, through the functioning of reactive discourse rendered in language. These relational arrangements among image, body, and word, form the primary relational functions in terms of their rhetorical address and relative capacity to *reduce*

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<sup>7</sup> Lewkowitz, Photographer as Witness (photo essay).

and to *amplify* through a project traditionally centered on a representative visual text and its ‘reverse engineering’ through rhetorical *techne*.

The relationship among these agencies emerge not only through the affordances of photo “technesis” (e.g., the affordances of camera and light; Hansen’s term) but also through an affective response of the photographer to confront another against normative ethics of the profession.<sup>8</sup> These decisions also bear on the material function of the photograph to indict through juridical code in the process of bringing forth evidence of Shane’s violence against Maggie’s body—in the presence and witness of her two-year-old daughter, Memphis.

As a photographic act, additional nodes appear to the critic: a swarming discourse, the multitude of criticisms reduced into a dichotomy represented only through the photographer’s decision to intervene, reform the text, stabilizing it momentarily to include the dichotomy of reductive action along with its visual representations. This is not about text and context, wherein the former serves as a placeholder for photographic text and the latter as a proxy for discourse around this photographic text.

Rather, the symbols holding together the traditional role of news and documentary photography (e.g., photojournalism as a form of witnessing *other*) continually move within and without a relationship. As such, the photograph as visual text for criticism, or the “phenomena-as-reference”—which began as visual in form—enters into the new relationship, as well. The role from which a set of photographs began as a token for symbolic analysis begins to slip as proper methodological starting place as it is not given over, determined, as the primary reference from which to locate rhetoricality and indices of explanatory value.

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Hansen, *Embodying Technesis: Technology Beyond Writing* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

Accordingly, photography's relationship with modernist inquiry is bound within the assumption that the medium's *techne* is a stand-in for representing what can be known about the social. That is, the two are congruent with one another. Take for instance, the precise, geometric contours of a photographic viewfinder and what it affords its user to capture and delimit as a photograph. The photographic frame, in a non-metaphorical sense, sandwiches perspective, selection, and exclusion based upon the limits of that frame. The resulting photograph functions as a selection and representation of the material, known, and visible world. Its ability to bracket exterior phenomena is based upon the limits of that same frame. For photography, the staid but still popular linguistic colloquialism, "thinking outside the box," is limited, ironically, to the contents of that same box—a frame. Even the amorphous, complex, and mysterious qualities of light are reduced to what the photographic frame can represent. The camera's shutter mediates a specific amount of light onto film or a digital capture sensor, and freezes the frame, producing a replicable form of memory. The epistemological, humanistic endeavors of observation, the limited capacity of the mind to select a social field, human interpretation, capture, and generalization, serve as analogues to the ostensible functions of photography. That is, each endeavor can function only within its respective capacity *to represent*. The former achieves representation through a delineation of the visual, and the latter through expressions of known language forms. For both, the fixity of memory is isolated, homogenized, and made replicable. And from these frozen representations of knowledge, histories, narratives, and discourses are gridlocked, prescribed, and produced.

Thus, inquiry into photography as a popular and symbolic form of visual expression encounters stifling and constraining talk on the subject. These discourses are perpetuated by those invested in the craft. That is, both professional and everyday, lay photographers stagnate

the possibilities for inventional discourse because of the normative constraints of photographic media, and linguistic figures place these norms into a criterion of medium comparison. Take for example the drawings of Glasgow artist, Paul Cadden. His pencil drawings are based on photographs and his images are virtually indistinguishable from traditional, silver-gelatin photographic prints [Figure 2]. As one journalist notes:

They say the camera never lies - but these images prove you can't believe everything you see as they are not photos at all. Instead they are amazingly highly detailed pencil drawings, the work of Scottish artist Paul Cadden. Every hair, wrinkle and bead of water in these images has been drawn by hand, mainly with a pencil, in a pain-staking process which takes up to six weeks to produce a single picture.<sup>9</sup>

These “indistinguishable” drawings, devoid of an explanation of the artist’s process, rhetorically function as real photographs for public audiences [Figure 1]. Ranging from up-close portraiture to harried and candid city scenes, Cadden’s images can easily fool discerning readers into mistaking the pencil drawings for the real thing. Yet, photography’s claims to the real do not reside in liminality because of the hyperrealism evident in a set of drawings; rather, the discourses within the public culture of photography are reduced to their pre-determined, obsessive, and binaristic exigency: is it a photograph or isn’t it?

Jacques Ranciere calls this problem one of “resemblance,” which is apart from the problem of representation.<sup>10</sup> Even as popular discourse on the visual invokes and perpetuates the *topos* of symbolic realism as a stand-in for what is ostensibly material, for Ranciere, these objects still must be treated seriously: “...these *fictional* beings are none the less *beings of resemblance*, beings whose feelings and actions must be shared and appreciated” (Ranciere’s

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<sup>9</sup> Nigel Atkins, “UnHBelievable: Hyper-real pencil drawings look just like photos,” *Mirror News*, Mar. 15, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (New York: Verso, 2007), 120.





[Figure 2]  
*After* - Paul Cadden's "pencil on paper" drawing

emphasis).<sup>11</sup> Thus, to dismiss Cadden's drawings based on the criterion of resemblance is to dismiss them on the grounds of an ontological claim: What counts as a *real* photograph?

Contemporary discourses on photography also reveal a corollary to this question: What counts as a *better* photograph? Within this discussion, the ground of discourse moves quickly to the differences between the *techne* of film and digital photography. Not only are differences accounted for in terms of technical "affordances," but the discourses foreground a *de facto* practice to discuss photography in terms of which medium is preferred or better as a process and product. Professional photographers often address film as the medium more closely related to art and the cultural capital that comes with self-identifying as an artist, and discussions of film versus digital are grounded in questions of what is superior in terms of technique and production.<sup>12</sup> This conversation (film versus digital) has become so pre-determined and foregrounded in popular discourse that it makes strange an inquiry as to why there is a constant comparison grounded in ratings of each medium's superiority rather than treating each medium as one actor within a particular relationship, creating wildly *different* implications for each.

The social context of this dissertation resides within what Robert Hariman calls a "public culture of photography." Descriptions of the durable relationship between contemporary western culture and its reliance on the visual are labeled by other scholars as one of "ocularcentricism,"

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<sup>11</sup> Rancière, 116.

<sup>12</sup> This comparative discourse is perhaps best exemplified by the growing *FIND* movement (Film Is Not Dead). *FIND* is also a popular workshop for photographers held across different global locations. Testimonials of participants vary, but there is a consistent discursive pattern that frames film against digital as a way of defining the practice of photography. The name, in fact, perpetuates the frame as it suggests that the digital did not successfully kill off the film medium of photography.

as “the politics of display,” as “omnivoyance,” as “representability” and “representationalism,” as “iconicity,” as “spectacle,” and as the “burden of representation.”<sup>13</sup> In each of these examples, scholars interpret variably the function of the visual, but what is significant is the sharing of a common concern that sees culture relying heavily on images as one of the primary forms of rhetorical and communicative exchange. Nicholas Mirzoeff cites a phrase used by U.S. military strategists to describe a cultural and political “war” in which images serve as ammunition: “full spectrum dominance.”<sup>14</sup>

Yet, these characteristic descriptions rely on an assumption that the photograph-as-representation or the photograph-as-symbolic serves a proper starting point for analysis. Because a photographic image is a two-dimensional rendering of experience, that rendering can be thought of as flat representation—as a necessary reduction to experience. For example, both the flatness of digital screens and the flatness of the paper print are inflections of the photographic tendency to reduce the ambiguities of *spatial* sensation into two-dimensional representation. This project began by claiming inquiry is limited to a field of its own making; that is, neither language nor the visual can exceed their own making via the forms of knowledge production in a given culture. However, there exists a strong assumption—as evidenced in the discourses to be

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<sup>13</sup> For an elaboration on the “politics of display,” see Anne Theresa Demo, “The Afterimage: Immigration Policy after Elián,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* no 1 (2007); Paul Virilio’s specific concern is the image’s dominance in culture as it relates to temporality; John Tagg is concerned with photography’s limit, claiming that with visual representation, “meaning cannot be guaranteed on any level.” See Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994); John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 3. See also Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* Verso (2009), and Judith Butler, *Torture, Sexual Politics and the Ethics of Photography*, Lecture delivered at Stanford University (2009), for an elaboration of her term, “representability.” In brief, it is a meta-move on Butler’s part to define visual representation only in terms of its field of possibility, or within an “intelligible frame.”

<sup>14</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, “Invisible Empire: Visual Culture, Embodied Spectacle, and Abu Ghraib,” *Radical History Review*, 95 Spring (2006), 21.

presented—that photography is *only* a technology capable of producing photographs. Against this view, I contend that the processes of photography—the wild modulations of rhetoric between human and photograph—access invention and re-orientation. In other words, *the photographic act is not reducible to the photographs it produces*. Instead, considering the photographic act as a relational process opens up the space for an abundant rhetoric of photography that remains otherwise invisible in a culture that appropriates the image as a key site of social inquiry.

I consider the photographic act as an entangled, processual, and rhetorically rich site of inquiry. This process does not displace the important exigencies of symbolically-based textual criticism (e.g., visual rhetoric). Rather, the photographic act draws out what a processual rhetoric can *become* apart from the “representationalism” of images.<sup>15</sup> The function of the still camera—

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<sup>15</sup> *Aisthesis koine*, or *sensus communis*, is derived from an Aristotelian understanding of the human sensorium. Literally, “common sense,” this term has served as a fascinating topic for a variety of thinkers since antiquity including Aristotle, Kant, Descartes, Vico, and Gadamer. Whether translated to understand the capacity of the body to interpret a psychology of sensing material objects, or to denote the possibility of what some have called “a sixth sense,” (not phantastically, but as a meta-coordinating sense), or how the term signifies meaning-making practices in studies of publics and communities, at minimum, the phrase serves as a lightning rod for those who appropriate it toward particular ideologies. My own appropriation illustrates the spaces between “common sense” and sensing (i.e., as an affective condition). For example, contemporary photography eschews the empiricism derived from Aristotle’s psychological use of the phrase—in terms of the biological and natural—for one that reveals digital culture’s tendency to understand medium, its representations, and the senses as discrete and modulated outside of the sensation of natural “matter,” and instead toward technical affordance that acts as “sense-organs.” This much is evident in the fantasies of “smart” culture that I reference as a backdrop to this study, as sensors become the dominant term to feed data (including visual data) to smart systems (e.g., The Economist’s description of a “Sea of Sensors”). It becomes difficult to make essential claims on the arrangements of the sensory capacities—whether through the *De Anima* or as inflected by digital context—in part because the exigence aiming toward sense capacity suggests a total view. This is why there can even be talk of a sixth or extra sense. In the same way, a context such as virtual reality is not so far removed from the initial problem of understanding *through* the senses. See Book III of Aristotle’s *De Anima* (*On the Soul*), trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (New York: Penguin, 1986); Pavel Gregoric, *Aristotle on the Common Sense* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), and Thora Ilin Bayer, “Vico’s Principle

ostensibly—is to produce still images. Yet, this is the case only if members of a shared visual culture agree with this linear relationship. Consider instead, that a photograph (as a text) can produce a critical orientation toward a *processual* response constituting the photographic act through its specific relationships. That is, interested scholars may orient themselves to the rhetoric of photography’s processual characteristics. This attention to process, I intend to argue, must call forth what I am referring to as *complicity*.<sup>16</sup>

Considering photography as an act of complicity does two things for the visual critic: 1) it makes strange the notion of the photograph, itself, as an autonomic response to academically deployed tropes of the “visual” and “photography;” 2) the act of complicity breaks apart the “affordances” of the camera from recognized modes of photographic inquiry (e.g., rhetorical, semiotic, psychological, poststructuralist, canonical, the various “turns” within historical narratives) and instead favors the concept of rigorous contingency over argument with regard to

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of *Sensus Communis* and Forensic Eloquence,” *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, 83 no. 3 (2008), 1137-1143.

<sup>16</sup> From a communicative perspective, Mark McPhail defines “complicity” as “an agreement to disagree.” He builds his argument by pointing to the inevitability of humans to interpret the same social phenomena in varying ways. As such, for McPhail, “essentialism” is artificial, and complicity becomes a way to circumvent entrenched perspectives on reading racialized subjects. My view of complicity, which I elaborate later in the chapter, recognizes differential interpretation, but I do not pit this view against subjectivity. Rather, my intent is to foreground complicity as a value-oriented norm which functions to include paradox rather than to eschew it or to relegate it into prescribed categories. In context, both the photographer and photograph are complicit because of a variable relationship relying on normative interpretations to name each of their respective functions. In addition, complicity operates as a challenge to a critic’s own production of his texts. In my case, the “bringing forth” of a photographic act (i.e. Gumbrecht) names me as complicit with the sign of photography. What and how I foreground a suitable process for photography serves as an argument for *fixing* photography into a different configuration. Complicity, then, is a rhetor’s recognition or concession that the production of an interpretable sign is necessarily a performative endeavor. Performativity is parsed later in the chapter via Barad and Butler’s theories, and I reference the term as encompassing the *concession* of complicity while referring to a general process of reiteration. See Mark Lawrence McPhail, “Complicity: The Theory of Negative Difference,” in *African American Communication & Identities: Essential Readings*, ed. Ronald L. Jackson II (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1993).

constructing tenuous knowledge claims; 3) it allows for the critic to “reassemble” photography into non-normative configurations for the purpose of drawing out its processual rhetorics; and 4) a photographic act of complicity interrogates new spaces of becoming together—that is, it draws out the commonplaces of rhetoric and the commonplaces of visual literacy in such a way that participation in a reformed visual culture does not rely on the stifling criteria of identity politics in order to function as rhetorically powerful.

That is, this is necessarily a project of reshaping the edges of *doxa* and *endoxa* by pushing away cultural metrics of citizenship and subjectivity, and by pulling towards us the concepts of hypocrisy, paradox, and contingency as normative way of being in the world. The mutual recognition of such jarring terms, I contend, makes room to think photography as apart from identity. While the terms complicity and photography seem to occupy two disparate projects, I argue that to consider the latter is to necessarily invoke the former. One of the performative functions of writing this dissertation is to realign just what it is that the signifier of “photography” can refer to. Thus, a trope is remade in order to align the problem set above with my actual concerns about photography rather than using the *sign* of “photography” to organize the study. Visual representation as a path to identity, along with the representation of photography’s sign, are bound up with one another in contemporary public culture. It is not difficult to imagine this: the photographs in many homes and offices, on social media profiles, are considered unproblematic with regard to identity claims. As such, complicity must be forwarded on the ground of a rhetoric based on relationality and empirical immanence—this, against the reigning politics of identity-based subjectivity and the hierarchal world-making the practice invites.

This project provides one such attempt at reassembly, foregrounding social-material processes of the photographic act as rhetorically significant. The point however, is not to pit photographs versus photography or text versus utterance; rather, it is to ask *how* photography might be otherwise. Put another way, the how of photography moves from a rhetoric of the visual-as-text as an exclusive modality of rhetorical criticism—to a ground that reflexively recognizes the ever-moving target of the sign as processual, complicit, reiterative—and relational. That is, photography is made and remade again and again, not only by means of its representational media, but through a set of generative modulations bringing to the fore other considerations. Among these include an aesthetics of unnamed but familiar visual conventions, compensations, the matter of light, color, and composition, inter-texts, the ambitions and identities of bodies claiming sole agency in the production of photography, and the political structures and institutions promoting such agential claims through prizes, acclaim, and the continual remaking of a photographer as the subject of romanticism. In all cases, I contend there is a strong lure of considering photography as a photograph, or as an historicized form of visual media, or as the manifestation of technological, efficient, and digital affordances. The lure of isolating photography solely as a representative medium bars the critic from opening up a space to consider photography through relational and performative concepts that rely heavily on a notion of complicity as a necessary feature of rhetoric.

As such, I propose as a framework, an inquiry into what I am referring to as the photographic act.<sup>17</sup> This act defines the field of *apparent* potential for photography. Attending to an enlarged field of photography's potential enables a reorientation to photography via a re-mapping of common technical affordances (e.g., from film as memory to digital code as

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<sup>17</sup> Barad, 801-802.

memory). Such an inquiry also addresses the “production” of the photographic act, itself, which I see as an immanently rhetorical endeavor. Gumbrecht notes that *producere* means literally, “to produce,” or “to bring forward” an object into what he terms, “presence.”<sup>18</sup> Latour refers to this process as “achieving,” and via Heidegger, a “gathering.”<sup>19</sup> The utterances of bringing forward a picture, of achieving a picture, or gathering a picture—as opposed to shooting, taking, and making a picture—are foreign to common visual discourse because these phrases decenter the photographer’s exclusive agency away from its subject as ‘capture,’ and instead toward a modest positioning of the photographer as just one amongst many fluid connections remaking the act. For example, Deleuze and Guattari deploy several figures for process with special attention to the futility of understanding the process in immutable units. “Double articulation” brings an object into being, but there is constant slippage within our understanding of such a concept because of an inaccessibility to “complex laws” of change. The double implies a two-step process which tempts the critic into theorizing such a move into the logic of the modular, and subsequently, as an application rather than a reorientation.<sup>20</sup> The discursive practices of the

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<sup>18</sup> Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht links the act of production with bringing forth, and in particular, he is interested in how “presence” is achieved and modulated by “proximity” and “intensity” of movement. He writes, “If production means, literally, ‘to bring forth,’ ‘to pull forth,’ then the phrase ‘production of presence’ would emphasize that the effect of tangibility that comes from the materialities of communication is also an effect in constant movement. In other words, to speak of ‘the production of presence’ implies that the (spatial) tangibility effect coming from the communication media is subjected, in space, to movements of greater or lesser proximity, and of greater and lesser intensity.” His explanation also serves as a reminder that the conventions of language anchor concepts of space and visibility, and in many ways, conflates the two—or rather, flattens the two into a visual image. A telephoto lens may serve here as an ocularcentric figure: objects proceed closer to the lens, recede, and have varying degrees of focus. See, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>19</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> For Deleuze, a first articulation occurs on a molecular level and escapes a human capacity to interpret both substance and interaction. The second articulation demonstrates the passage from the first and “establishes functional, compact, and stable structures.” Yet, for Deleuze, it is crucial to

photographic act enable the appearance of photography as a technosocial apparatus and as a process in the making. Academic institutions, local and national policies and politics, corporate mandates, and the codes supporting legal deliberation—all contribute to the legitimation of contemporary photography's sign—and delimit the field of potential photographic action into prescribed uses. The expansion and contraction of this delimiting function of discursive practices is what I understand as the production of photography. This idea is separate from interpreting photography, itself, as a machine of production. I understand process, therefore, in at least two ways: 1) the rhetorical movements of procession and recession holding together the sign of photography, and 2) the process of the photographer already subject to reigning interpretations of that sign.

### *Discourses of Contemporary Photography*

In order to capture the differential distinctions of photography's role in contemporary culture, I offer a sampling of discourses intended to illustrate the dichotomous criteria steeping and holding down photography into strong, normative relationships with the photograph and claims to knowledge. These claims to knowledge may function as statements of identity, the securing of social capital through identity, and through language as an expression of what constitutes photography in a particular cultural moment.

Photographer Paula Berg addresses the relationship between photographic medium and art by stating:

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understand that the passage between the two is not a linear one; rather it is a space of "complex laws." See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 39-42.



I am very attached to the tradition of black and white photography and great photographers like, Atget, Cartier-Bresson, Kertesz, Callahan, Arbus, Capa, Model, and Sudek. It is this art form that I am most moved by and this tradition that I want to be part of.<sup>21</sup>

While we see a clear preference for her medium (black and white film and silver gelatin prints), her claim relies on the support of a popular canon of photographers, and only makes sense in relation to her own framing of photography as a preferential choice between film and digital. She continues with this short, simple, but telling sentiment: “I have made some concessions to the digital age.”<sup>22</sup> Berg elaborates that she now uses some black and white inks and paper (the digital darkroom) instead of a traditional wet darkroom. The point, however, is revealed through her use of the term, “concession.” For Berg, digital techniques are a concession because they are inferior in quality to film techniques and the traditional silver gelatin prints produced from film. Her discourse signals either an unwillingness or inability to consider each as separate modes of representation, not always framed in relation to one another on the criterion of superiority.

Yet, she is not alone. In fact, her words reflect the aforementioned ubiquity of this kind of comparison, even amongst practiced and articulate professionals of the craft. Cali Gorevic makes the following claim: “I have not yet seen a digital print that can match a gelatin silver print for luminosity. Further, they have more depth, inherent drama, and lots of room for creativity, in the camera and in the darkroom.”<sup>23</sup> Here, the comparison is obvious and explicit as she names the terms of debate herself. Following the framing comment, she quickly moves to *associative* discursive techniques to buttress her preference for film and print. “Inherent drama” is linked again to art (i.e., “creativity”) and reveals a tendency to speak of the film medium in terms of

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<sup>21</sup> Patricia Gilman, “Film vs. Digital: A Discussion by Members of PWP,” *Imprints*, May 26, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

essential properties. These essential properties are also supported by a frame of technological determinism wherein the affordances of physical media set the terms of debate.<sup>24</sup> Despite this deterministic framing, assertions of photographic media choice still appear to be within a photographer's control. For example, New England-based photographer, Stacey Hedman, explains that film captures a better dynamic range than digital as evidenced by its ability to "retain highlights," (the accuracy of displaying details at the higher end of the tonal range). She then proceeds to make a claim supporting her choice to use film and digital; that is, a professional choice that recognizes the utility of both: "The important thing to remember is that film doesn't mean digital is bad, and digital doesn't mean film is bad."<sup>25</sup> While I agree, generally, much of the discourse invoked above never moves from a comparison grounded in time (the inevitability of photography's technological development), nor from a comparison grounded in claims of technical superiority. Her words highlight the disconnect between a deterministic frame and the supposed agency of photographers to choose their own medium. This difference (between photographic media) and claims of essentialism buried within the same discourses vet the two media from a technical perspective, but again leaves little to no room to move the discussion elsewhere [while bracketing the impulse to compare].

Because this comparative, affordance-driven discourse leaves little room for a photographic reimagining, an inventive method requires creativity to avoid lapsing into the same, foreclosed shaping of photography's character. Latour articulates a spatial criterion of *comparing* difference in this way: "Modern temporality arises from a superposition of the difference

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<sup>24</sup> Baym opposes the concept of technological determinism with the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT). Baym considers this relationship a continuum, and advocates for "social shaping" as a more reasonable middle ground to frame analyses of technology.

<sup>25</sup> Melanie Brooks, *Freelance Photography: Digital vs. Film Case Study*, Feb 15, 2012.

between past and future with another difference, so much more important, between mediation and purification.”<sup>26</sup> Not time and space; instead, Latour collapses time and *experience*. Yet, I do not remain convinced that such criteria is useful as a generalizable perspective; much still depends upon what a named problem set (e.g., an argument, a research question, a hypothesis) is *addressing* as a referent. A time-based, comparative analysis of social media may be useful to its specific commitments of synchronic (e.g., “chatting”) and asynchronic (e.g., email) communication; a predictive model based on mathematical data sampling with terminating exigencies can be useful when a simple yes/no is desired. Yet, the examples of earlier discourse reflect a discursive tendency to isolate and compare the two media as the easiest template to follow. Far from inventional, this deterministic framework appropriates from other forms of visual-media comparison such as the difference between a standard, analog-based television and a high-definition (HD) television. There can be no interpretable meaning of “high” in high-definition without the non-high-definition television. Again, I find nothing inherently fickle with these comparisons given the goals of specific, affordance-driven analyses.<sup>27</sup> However, when photographic discourses reside in the totality of these comparisons, those discourses also reveal a tendency toward technological determinism. In particular, how power flows and circulates through photography is excised from popular talk related to the medium, in part because the affordance frame dominates, leaving assumptions of agency to remain as they are. Power and agency are inextricably linked as discursive and named concepts within critical scholarship, but they are neither the same concept nor modular to one another. They may bind with one another

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<sup>26</sup> Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 71.

<sup>27</sup> STS scholars typically dissociate the broad conceptual terrain of agency from the specific capacities of machines. The latter is referred to as an affordance. See Monika Buscher & John Urry, “Mobile Methods and the Empirical,” *European Journal of Social Theory*, no 12 (2009).

as articulations, but insofar as my analysis is concerned, I contend agency and power are derivative productions of movement in relationship—to one another and the people/objects/actions they address.

The introduction to this dissertation began with the assertion that photographs are poorly understood if limited to the terminating exigencies of photographic affordance and differentiation present in current discourses in and around photography: real/unreal, manipulated/pure, material/digital. The second working assumption addresses the relational power coursing through the discourses of photography—recognized or otherwise.<sup>28</sup>

The arguments in this dissertation consider multiple contingencies in relation to one another as a way to understand how photographic discourses align with other cultural formations to achieve power. That is, I believe that providing evidence of the dualistic character of contemporary photographic discourse explains very little on its own. Instead, I contend these discourses are working through a dynamic and processual relationship, a relationship characterized by its articulations to other cultural formations.<sup>29</sup> In other words, the dissertation also addresses cultural formations that seem as apart and disparate from the *topos* of photography, but these disparate formations are in actuality immanent and specific to the photographic problematic that *manifests* into the sampling of discourse provided above. In part, these discourses relate to—and are enacted by—legal, institutional, and corporate forms of power. Each of these entities is in turn formed by its own relational arrangement. In particular, and with regard to the photographic act, I will look to and provide evidence for the privileging of digital,

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<sup>28</sup> An elaboration of relational theory appears in the following chapter's literature review.

<sup>29</sup> By articulation, I am referring to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "double articulation," elaborated in an earlier footnote. I reference these authors' definition rather than Marxian articulation theories, the cultural studies notion promoted by Stuart Hall, or the articulation of politics via Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

computational code, along with sustained efforts to measure both culture and the complexities of ‘thought,’ in quantities. I will argue that these tendencies in culture are not merely given; rather, they articulate with photographic practices and talk to form a threshold of legitimacy (i.e., the normative boundaries of *doxa*). In other words, this relationship is not only confining to the task of understanding photography as an *act*, but also obscures itself from critique through its complexity. Both scholars of the visual and members of a shared visual culture must bracket these dualisms to allow for a relational, inventional process—one that is grappling with photography on an everyday scale. I would like to emphasize that these relations are not the “objects of study” for my dissertation. Rather, they are necessarily *complicit* with photography, and as such, I would like to dedicate space to the painting of this complex backdrop toward the end of this section.

As a rhetorician, I invest heavily in the goal of restoring a commonplace of action based on a normative ethics, for both personal and professional publics. I consider *topoi* as places, both physical and material, and derived by associational invention as a heuristic to form new lines of argument informing a body of scholarly work.<sup>30</sup> Place is also conceptualized as common through an interpretation of the bodily senses as in Aristotle’s work on the *sensus communis*.<sup>31</sup> Finally, place signifies material location. The signifier also aligns with the growing scholarship and

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<sup>30</sup> See Daniel E. Mortensen, “The Loci of Cicero.” *Rhetorica* 26 (2008): 31-56, and Sara Rubinelli, “The Ancient Argument Game: Topoi and Loci in Action.” *Argumentation* 20 (2006): 253-272.

<sup>31</sup> See Alphonso Lingis, “The Voices of Things.” *Senses and Society* 4 (2009): 273-82, and Thomas Porcello, Louise Meintjes, Ana Maria Ochoa & David W. Samuels, “The Reorganization of the Sensory World.” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 39 (2010): 51-66.

attention to place as a trope.<sup>32</sup> Commonplace suggests that a primary exigence of rhetoric is to include and share with others the contingent knowledge claims derived by our experiences and academic *techné*, and my goal is to include more people in the deliberation of visual knowledge practices. That is, I believe whether the commonplace signifies a physical place, the commonness of our sensory bodies, or the place of invention for argument, a primary goal is to locate and share political possibilities through the practice of rhetoric, and in particular, the practices of a visual rhetoric.

As a practitioner of everyday photography (and in the past, as a professional photographer), I take seriously my commitments to photography as a craft and art, the bodily and machinic practices of photography, the entanglement involved in the creation of a photograph, and the political possibilities derived from considering the photographic act as an intervention of rhetoric.

My perspective for this dissertation is based upon a material empiricism and deployed via an argument that theory and praxis occupy one another seamlessly. That is, my ontological commitments reject the creation of theoretical scholarship that trickles down to practice, or vice-versa.<sup>33</sup> Thus, in addition to existing literature and discourses on both professional and mundane

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<sup>32</sup> See Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, & Brian Ott, "Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place" in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, eds. G. Dickinson, C. Blair & B. Ott, eds. (Tuscaloosa, Alabama University Press, 2010), 1-54, for an excellent taxonomy of place-based and material/memorial studies, and Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies-Cities." *Sexuality & Space*, ed. Beatrice Colomina (Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 241-53, for a rendering of the body as material and in tension with the material of urban environments. Significantly, the word, "trope" is taken from the Greek language, and its meaning is translated to "turn." This is significant to understanding how a contemporary trajectory of knowledge practices in and around "the material turn" becomes legitimate as an area of study. Within another work in progress, I argue "trope" and "turn" used in this manner helps to constitute a criterion of legitimacy based on an expansion and marking of the rhetorical field by using the umbrella term, or trope, of "materiality." This usage is significantly different from the "turn" that suggests an inevitable trajectory of materiality-as-trope through a linear-historical perspective.

photography, I also lean upon my own experiences within both modalities to give presence to the process of photographing, much of which cannot be reduced to formula, language, or representation. Image and text can only invite comparison to one another within a specific *relationship* that refuses to join the two as inextricable, essential entities. While I have already expressed the deficiencies in a comparative method based solely in linear time (where film=past and digital=present/future; speech/text analysis=past/present, photographic analysis=present/future), another difference (e.g., Latour's mediation/purification distinction) is far more difficult to negotiate. Fortunately, scholars within and without the rhetorical tradition are working on ways to move the "crisis of representation" as a *topos* to a ground acknowledging the living influence of the material world. I call this fortunate not because previous methods for debunking and critiquing the sign of the visual could not account for gaps in knowledge production. I call this fortunate because these so-called gaps are being accounted for—within scholarship—as a recognition that the difference between mediation and purity is wild and complex, in many instances unintelligible, and potentially more encompassing than the already legitimated forms of inquiry scholars may use in the attempt to articulate this very difference.

Thus, I join in a tradition of scholars who seek to foreground pragmatic possibilities for invention while recognizing the paradox of articulating in language the affective dimensions of expression.<sup>34</sup> Within the study of rhetoric, claims of extradiscursivity that escape normative

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<sup>33</sup> Tone Kvernbeek, "Argumentation in Theory and Practice," *Informal Logic*, No 3 (2012).

<sup>34</sup> Within the rhetorical discipline, this paradox is evident in Robert Hariman's response to Raymie McKerrow's landmark essay on Critical Rhetoric. Hariman asks how one can argue for postmodernity as a political terrain while simultaneously employing the tools of modernity (including articulable language) to make an argument. Despite my own promotion of Karen Barad's work, I must recognize here that her politics of agential realism is also one underwritten by her expertise in quantum physics. Supported by a Derridian thesis, Laclou and Mouffe consider a "constitutive outside" in excess of our symbolic literacy in *Hegemony and Social Strategy*. Communication scholar Niklas Luhmann's argument for "autopoeisis" similarly relies on a

symbolic systems may be recognized as the always-contingent nature of argument, manifested as knowledge. Included in this challenging task is the ability to recognize the normative articulations through which contingent arguments are made, considered, deliberated, and excluded.

### *Overview of Dissertation Chapters*

The Following overview of case chapters, following the review of literature, highlights brief examples demonstrating the role that a photographic act can accomplish as it builds toward a moving and relational rhetoric of the image.

In chapter 3, I analyze a case centering on a controversy brought forth by Vogue's publication of a set of photographs featuring unlikely—and to many, unseemly—pairings of “first responders” alongside high-end, recognizable fashion models. In particular, I center this analysis on the lead image of the set, shot by famed image-maker, Annie Leibowitz. Her expert use of compensatory camera aesthetics—both live and in within the post-production process—connect the photograph to a set of mixed image conventions. In turn, a relational map of discontent, sacrilege, remembrance, and aesthetic associations to other unrelated, published photographs reveals itself via a trapped, binary discourse of (mis)appropriation and (dis)taste. This map, I argue, offers a richer tapestry in the form of a “gathered” rhetoric—one which distributes the power of one image toward surprising associations of aesthetic style. These associated, symbolic images, reach from Leibowitz' photograph to Robert Capa's notorious

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discursive framing in order to consider extra-discursive dimensions of communication. For an elaboration of affects, see Brian Massumi, *Parables For The Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), and Jane Bennett, “The Force of Things: Steps Toward an Ecology of Matter.” *Political Theory*, 32.3 (2004): 347-72.



image of the Normandy Invasion, and to fantastical visual representations of a post-9/11 culture of security and state exception.

Chapter 4 brings the devastating earthquake in Haiti to the fore through images-as-text, place as “event,” and subsequent analyses breaking apart those images into the “concerns” of compensatory aesthetics that photojournalists invoke through their representations of a devastated Haiti and the other-ness of its residents (e.g., violent depictions of looting despite extraordinary circumstances). Here, the analysis displays photographic relationships via the exigencies of editorial demand depicting civil / disciplined subjects of western compliance—made in the image of well-equipped rescue / disaster workers, along with their organizing technologies of disaster relief. A relationship emerges which highlights a distinction from the orderly, compliant Haitian subject with aesthetic depictions of Haitians “caught” amidst what are ostensibly unspeakable, inhuman acts. The image aesthetics “shoring up” this distinction demonstrates a moving process—one I contend cannot be reached through an exclusively visual-rhetorical criticism with image-texts placed squarely as objects of analysis. Implications include the roles of “conscience” and compassion rendered through these images—rhetorically.

Chapter 5 locates rhetoricality within a configuration of prize-winning photography. In particular, I look to the Pulitzer Prize for Photography as a type of holding pattern, suspending, but still moving, the relationships among editorial achievement, the near-invisible discourse of photographers’ ambitions, the legitimation of affective field work by such prize-granting institutions, and the mechanisms by which photojournalists are convinced to enter into incredibly dangerous conflict zones. Within a romanticism of dying—or a near-death confrontation in the field (e.g., Cartier-Bresson’s notorious Leica clearly marked by a lodged bullet and held up as a trophy), I contend that photojournalists with such ambitions enter the field with only a vague

notion of impending affective labor common to conflict zones. These photographers and their narratives mark tragedy and public clamor within frames of notoriety and risk, posthumous remembrance, and the notion that risk-taking within a conflict zone and/or violent context must be accepted publicly as a sacrifice for the common good. Prize-winning photographers, to be sure, have contributed much to public understandings of wars for which we may never have had access to otherwise. Yet, the highest accolades possible (in addition to the Pulitzer), awarded through the most competitive contests and by their respective juries (e.g., World Press Photo, Photographer of the Year (POY), White House Photographers' Association (WHPA), National Press Photographers Association (NPPA), and numerous others)—are only gaining more momentum in terms of participant-photographers and their growing number of entries into these annual contests. While institutions such as Washington D.C.'s Newseum recognize photographers who have passed in the field, to make known that a photographer's suffering—dead or alive—may have been in vain, is to commit public sacrilege. I begin the chapter with a key example, the story of Pulitzer winner, Kevin Carter, which makes strange and complex an otherwise simple narrative of risk and its commensurate reward through those who provide—and continually promote—accolade. The chapter demonstrates that praise garnered from the biggest prizes elides the affective, hidden risk of conflict work while simultaneously emboldening narratives of risk-as-romanticism, risk-as-duty—and risk never taken in vain.

Chapter 6 shifts the photographic act to the field of affordance—the rhetorical “technesis” of camera, lens, film, sensor sensitivity, artificial lighting, shutter speed—and most recently within the relatively short history of photography—the camera's appended, real-time feedback screen, aka the LCD, or digital viewfinder. The affordance of such real-time feedback questions the notion of a what a photograph can otherwise be. The relatively small images provided by

digital screens—most commonly found on today’s smartphones—function as real-time feedback to photographers. Yet, the act of looking down to see the image object—that is, the verification of successful ‘capture’—still exists as a material image despite its second-hand function as a photographic affordance and technology of preview. I argue this ostensible purpose and use via the LCD de-centers the photographic text as a fixed entity to be *gazed upon*. The LCD’s images ostensibly offer up crass precursors to final products distributed as archival prints of museum quality, and more often, digitally, unprofessionally, to social media sites and general circulation amongst friends, families, and the networks therein. It is here the photograph is considered a fixed entity. Yet, the LCD screen remains unproblematic as a way to understand the act of photography as a wholly different process. Its interpellating capacity aimed toward the photographer under the cover of an exclusive feedback mechanism removes consideration of those crass preview images as that which to forget. Brief historical examples of older cameras’ feedback mechanisms reveal a long-held relationship between photographer and viewfinder. Within these relationships, professional discourse demonstrates that most have considered feedback as merely an apparatus of personal agency. The relationship between photographer and textual product remains as a simple, linear, and unproblematic agential formula: photographer ‘waits’ for the “decisive moment,” and based on his skill and amount of endurance, ‘captures’ his target/prey, and hauls the photo home to literally ‘fix’ its existence as a product of the photographer, alone.

Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation. I provide implications of seeing photography as a relationship held together by its own sign, rather than as a linear technology capable of spitting out image-texts. In addition, I assert a self-reflexive tone in order to 1) follow through on my own claims regarding the relational character of photography which includes 2) a partial account

of my own decade-long experience as both a professional photojournalist and architectural photographer, and to put that experience into conversation with the major claims and examples of the dissertation. I conclude by offering up potential points of departure with regard to further rhetorical inquiry, and by objectifying fascinating trends within the public culture of photography—with the hope that those object-trends, too, will raise up from a two-dimensional object toward a photographic act mapping the rich diffractions that build, make, and “achieve” the image-symbols we know as photography.

My hope is that the following set of claims and evidence through my dissertation’s cases will serve as useful exemplars in describing a cultural backdrop—the relata of discursive practice for a present milieu, both for this study and for the purpose of demonstrating the need for performative-critical-processual perspectives. These critical perspectives function as keystones to the dissertation.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Judging by the title of W.J.T. Mitchell's essay, *There Are No Visual Media*, it may seem that a well-recognized scholar of visual culture and rhetoric has problematized the field into undisciplined oblivion. Yet, he reprises the title later in the essay to align with his actual argument: "*all media are mixed media.*"<sup>35</sup> From a cultural perspective, his generalizing statement is critiquing the notion that the human senses are artificially divided, with the visual serving as one part of the sensory canon of the human body. All informs all, might be another way to rephrase Mitchell's sensorial claim. Yet, while Mitchell's proposition serves as another way to problematize the notion of the visual, his claims do not function toward a schema for photography, alone. What I am terming the photographic act addresses a specific set of relations, and these relationships demand a processual view situating the act from a perspective of immanence. Immanence, as Deleuze notes, is not simply the opposite of transcendence.<sup>36</sup> Rather, it is the refusal to allow metaphysics (in his words, a "plane") to underwrite this empiricism. Thus, for this dissertation's literature review, I intend to lean upon scholarship useful for reframing a rhetoric of photography—one that foregrounds the act as processual, relational, contingent, and empirically material. In other words, the task is to draw out the "mixed media"

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<sup>35</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, "There Are No Visual Media," *Journal of Visual Culture*, 5 (2005).

<sup>36</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 282.

immanent to photography, itself, and to understand the representation of this mapping as *techné*, and to create academic alliances that test the patience of rhetoric.

Hannah Arendt notes with impressive insight the impact that the visual has had on modernity since Greek antiquity:

“From the very outset...thinking has been thought of in terms of seeing...The predominance of sight is so deeply embedded in Greek speech, and therefore in our conceptual language, that we seldom find any consideration bestowed on it, as though it belonged among things too obvious to be noticed.”<sup>37</sup>

Arendt points to the long-time relationship between sight and language, and to the deterministic characteristics of a sensual mode that remains, ironically, invisible. Although the visual was and has been embedded into language to its own exclusion, like a barnacle, photographs hitchhiked back into the field of speech rhetoric as a legitimate area of study, in no small part due to the influential work of Kenneth Burke. His formulation of symbols as the primary domain of human expression and interpretation opened up the modern rhetorical terrain to include anything one might consider as symbolic.<sup>38</sup> For the discipline of communication, this expansion was made manifest in 1970 by an influential committee representing the national discipline.<sup>39</sup> His rhetoric relied on literary works to explain his theories (e.g., Proust, Shakespeare) but his ideas had an incredibly influential effect on the trajectory and practices of disciplinary rhetoric. His pentad,

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<sup>37</sup> Hannah Arendt, cited in David M. Levin, *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>38</sup> Burke’s idea of “man as the symbol-using (and mis-using) animal” is found in his *Rhetoric of Motives*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969). An excellent exemplar of how Burke conceives of “form” via the symbolic can be found in his *Counter-Statement*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968).

<sup>39</sup> I am referring to the Wingspread Conference and its “re-animation” of the field of rhetoric in the revised volume, *Reengaging the Prospects of Rhetoric: Current Conversations and Contemporary Challenges*, (New York: Routledge, 2010).

for example, is included in most contemporary communication and rhetoric textbooks.<sup>40</sup> Another Burkeian method used in conjunction with the visual—and made popular in the visual-rhetorical discipline by Sonja Foss and Barry Brummett—is named cluster criticism. With regard to the inclusion of the visual, a scholar could now use a visual image to create a map of symbols present within the image and analyze the “clustering” of symbols as a way of judging that image’s persuasive functions. In addition, other symbolic assemblies outside of speech or written language—such as memorials and museums—could now gain legitimation as a topos of study within rhetoric. Burke’s other contributions are myriad, but his explanation of “god terms” helps to explain why modernism retains its modalities of efficiency and determinism. Barack Obama’s bid for re-election relied on artifacts such as a campaign placard that simply reads, “FORWARD.”<sup>41</sup> As Burke points out, it becomes difficult to argue against appropriated words such as “progress” within a modern frame that perpetuates an ideal of improvement, stacking,

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<sup>40</sup> Barry Brummett’s popular volume for undergraduates, *Rhetoric in Popular Culture*, relies on several of Burke’s theories and applies them to examples as a way of illustrating criticism. Foss’ influential text on rhetorical criticism also takes a student into the steps necessary for completing a pentadic or cluster analysis. While there have been many claims leveled against the use of Burke’s work as a cookie-cutter template for analysis (e.g., I attended an NCA-sponsored retreat called, *Teaching Rhetorical Criticism* in 2010, and this gathering brought many influential agenda-setters in the field together to discuss pedagogy and the problems facing teachers of rhetorical criticism. Without naming names, the practice of applying Burke in a mimetic fashion to all texts was universally denigrated, and called forth suggestions for alternative textbooks, practices, and designs to counter this tendency within the practice of criticism. Burke’s ideas—the ones expressed in his formal writings—are not subject to the same criticism, it should be noted. Instead, it is a contemporary manifestation of simplistic practices within the rhetorical discipline to which these criticisms are addressed (to which I may be added). Burke, the person—as opposed to his scholarship—held disdain for the formal academic tradition, and was ironically left out of this conversation. Also, rhetorical theorist, Ronald Greene, warns against the tendency to enlarge the domain of texts and finds that too many artifacts fall victim to “extent textualization,” which means that a text is over-determined in its meaning within the act of criticism (personal email correspondence, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

and uni-directionality.<sup>42</sup> Photography's differential criterion, as I noted earlier in the dissertation, is largely based upon these same ideals. Attributing causality to the category of "progress" is less useful here than recognizing that much of the current photographic discourse aligns with such a progressive view. For example, even the *Film Is Not Dead* discourses rely on a modernist logic wherein the choice to use film is foregrounded, while the transition to digital photography remains unproblematic for those photographers. As communication scholars began recognizing the suasive function of images through Burke and those appropriating Burkean methods for the visual, the inclusion of the image as an object of study became permissible through the criteria determining symbolhood as rhetorical and as the chief endeavor of humankind.

Yet, the brief inclusion of Burke and Arendt within this review is not meant to serve as an origin story for the study of the visual within speech-communication rhetoric. Rather, it simply provides *one* narrative for how a discipline can legitimize the study of the visual. With regard to the relationship between the west's ocularcentrism and modern rationality, David Levin argues there is little to say about the "domination" of the visual as a mode of perception. He notes: "More problematic, however, is the narrative that argues for the domination..." It is worth noting that both the Arendtian and Burkean citations I invoke, are themselves helping to constitute a field of potential action for rhetoric. The narrative function of a rhetorical literature review must be considered to understand how such a review serves the functions of legitimation and inclusion with regard to knowledge gleaned from argument and contingency. The path through Arendt and Burke serves as a linear foot-in-the-door to access one trope of photography; a history shaped by

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<sup>42</sup> In setting up the epistemological and methodological problem earlier in this chapter, I used "smart" projects as an example of hegemonic discourse that often acts as an implicit prohibition leading to the de-legitimization of rhetorical and materialist scholarship. I argue that the term "smart" functions as a contemporary "god term," as the binaristic relationship deploys a synecdochic "dumb" or "stupid" as an alternative. See also the similar concept of "ultimate terms" by Richard Weaver in *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, (New York: Routledge, 1995).



the “difference and repetition” of modernity’s reasoning and made strange by the “historicity of citation,” and genealogies of the discipline outside of a linear narrative.<sup>43</sup> The larger task is to map a conversation between intra- and inter-disciplinary scholarship in such a way as to privilege the relational sites of photography against the legitimation of difference reaped from an historical view. This distinction is not a small one. Discourses from a linear-historical view are utilized insofar as they relate to the rhetoric of a photographic act—not as they relate to the master trope of photography as a term or concept.

Thus, the landmark essay that follows is included for its ability to address a key problematic of the dissertation over its historical value. The two are not incommensurable, but the preliminary work of grouping literature in terms of its relational value to photography requires a less modular approach—one that entwines the dissertation’s aforementioned theoretical assumptions with the inclusion of other work. This move, while experimental, attempts to resist a grouping of scholarship based upon the sign of “photography.” Following Benjamin, I consider the literature’s relationship to rhetoric’s exigencies. Then, I consider literature claiming ontologies of the material, which connects the trope of the photographic act to STS literature, wherein Bruno Latour and Karen Barad are read carefully for their contributions to the dissertation. In addition, Barad’s work is able to enfold the literature of poststructuralist thought (i.e., Foucault, Deleuze, Butler), and I attempt to put this entanglement back into a conversation with rhetoric.

Walter Benjamin’s famous essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* addresses the anxieties of photography as a medium while presaging future

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<sup>43</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: Politics of the Performative*, (New York: Verso, 2007).

discussions of authenticity and the image.<sup>44</sup> Even so, Benjamin cannot disengage from applying a comparative media criterion to his claims. He writes:

The act of reaching for a lighter or a spoon is familiar routine, yet we hardly know what really goes on between hand and metal, not to mention how this fluctuates with our moods. Here the camera intervenes with the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.

First, Benjamin recognizes the historically specific role of photo technology and teaches us that visibility itself is malleable and confined to existing cultural frames of interpretation. The camera can “introduce” us to new ways of seeing precisely because of the inscriptions of visual habit are borne from an earlier medium—painting.

Here, Benjamin provides us with sharp and prescient insight on new ways of seeing (and not seeing). Yet, he too is caught up in the comparative framing presented earlier in the dissertation. Much like the problems created by invoking discourses comparing film versus digital photography, he makes claims about film based on the difference between photography and painting (the essay was originally composed in 1936). This tendency to compare offers up the significant question of whether time-linear media comparison is adequate as an exclusive mode of analysis for understanding new media.

Second, Benjamin’s essay--along with dozens of other visual critiques by famed critics—produces a tendency to produce the textualist response to the problematic via written discourse. Within the sub-discipline of visual rhetoric, a textualist framing typically means that a critical

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<sup>44</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” *ILLUMINATIONS: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968).

analysis starts and ends with a photograph.<sup>45</sup> Grounding analysis within a discrete image helps readers to map rhetorical concepts from speech/writing/text to images, but this practice also relays the specious impression that 1) photographs are precisely analogic to speech/writing/text, or instead, that 2) photography is characterized by the “pure opticality” of its medium.<sup>46</sup>

For example, visual-rhetorical criticism focusing on the function of enthymeme within a photograph may be useful as a starting place to understand the concept of presence/absence, but this comes at the expense of a careful reflection of what it really is that a photograph can do.

Cara Finnegan notes the relationship between language and visual forms: “Image vernaculars are the enthymematic modes of reasoning employed by audiences in the context of specific practices of reading and viewing in visual cultures.”<sup>47</sup> Naming an image as enthymematic presumes that a photograph is already imbued with the essential qualities of modern rationality—a rationality embedded within language. If enthymemes require an absence of a major or minor premise within a syllogism, then it must be presumed that a photograph can actually make a rational claim on its own. It is no small claim to say that photographs have moving parts that work more

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<sup>45</sup> Examples include Helmers & Hill, *Defining Visual Rhetorics*; Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, *Visual Rhetoric: A Reader in Communication and American Culture*, Hariman & Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. Handa’s *Visual Rhetoric in a Digital World* may be counted as an exception, but the distinction is based within a rhetorical, disciplinary divide between communication and English programs. Handa’s volume aims toward pedagogical exigencies. For a tropic history of developments leading to the sub-discipline of visual rhetoric, see Lester C. Olson, “Intellectual and Conceptual Resources for Visual Rhetoric: A Re-examination of Scholarship Since 1950,” *I* (2007).

<sup>46</sup> WJT Mitchell attributes this term to more than one scholar, but in particular names/blames Clement Greenberg for the phrase’s popularity. Mitchell, “There Are No Visual Media,” *Journal of Visual Culture*, 5 (2005).

<sup>47</sup> Cara A. Finnegan, “Recognizing Lincoln: Image Vernaculars in Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, no 1 (2005), 34. Although Finnegan employs an analysis of the enthymeme as an exemplar for the language of the visual, she is careful to do so; both here and elsewhere, she recognizes that the reading of images is specific to a culture.

or less like prose and can thus be manipulated in the same way as language.<sup>48</sup> Ironically, Benjamin's admonitions about the contextual specificity of media are manifested in analyses of images, themselves, with little to say about 'introducing us to unconscious optics.'

If a camera is to introduce anything at all, then visual analysis would do well to enlarge its scope to include the processual rhetorics of photography as a necessity unto itself *as well as* understanding its ostensible product, the photograph. This inclusion of photographic production shifts the burden of *techne* from that of organizing photographs-as-resources to audiences to one that increases the responsibility of understanding *techne* as a mapping of the relationship amongst new media technology, the bodily, sensorial, and material practices of creating images, the audiences to which photographs are presented, and the agencies afforded through the power of circulation and Bakhtin's notion of address in his *Dialogic Imagination*.<sup>49</sup> Still, considering the photographic apparatus *only* as a rhetorical *techne* creates gaps in understanding the affective

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<sup>48</sup> See James Jasinski, *Sourcebook on Rhetoric*; Barbara Warnick's volume, *Rhetoric Online* applies a number of textually-derived rhetorical concepts and applies them to a variety of images and figures found on the Internet. Web-based examples of parody and cultural appropriation are mapped from traditional rhetorical figures such as metonymy.

<sup>49</sup> Bakhtin explains that an utterance, expression, is located "on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context." I understand this concept as a transgressed function of expression refusing or traversing the clean lines dividing one's capacity to access expression over another. Significantly, addressivity is also an implicit search for the referent of the sign. The concerns for photography's study, then, are mapped according to an interpretation of a symbol's emanating lines reaching for referential support. As such, photography, when compressed into its sign, hides its points of addressivity. The critic's role is to draw these referents out, even if/when nonesuch exist. The point is not to intentionally complicate or problematize the sign—instead, I contend this is a necessary and reasonable task of criticism. To point to a relationship is to address that relationship, and to bring forward that relationship into view. A critic's set of exigencies cannot be determined without considering the polysemous addressees of the sign. See M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981).

dimensions of the photographic act and product. This problematic of the photograph's "supplement" is addressed in the following section.<sup>50</sup>

A displacement of the human as the central figure of social and physical interaction is the primary commonality amongst scholars who self-describe their work variously as science and technology studies (STS), materialist, new materialist, posthumanist, relational, affective, ecological, non-representational, flat ontological, or as extradiscursive.<sup>51</sup> This claim opens up space for other objects and artifacts to occupy a powerful role in how we understand the world, both materially and symbolically. This *does not* mean—in my view—that we should understand every object to be materially significant or as having a natural endowment of human-like capacity. This perspective, instead, reveals how much reliance a culture may have invested in the human as the moving force of the world. Object-Oriented Ontology as a philosophical discipline serves as a good example of the way in which some materialist scholars seek to lay down a normative view of matter. The scholar Ian Bogost, one of OOO's best-known proponents, has described the problem of modernism and scientific inquiry as one of "reductionism":

The idea is that science is insufficient to describe things, because it always races to the bottom (reductionism). We can't understand the DVD player simply by its components, or the components by their transistors, or the transistors by their atoms.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

<sup>51</sup> For example, I align with some environmental communication (*EC*) scholars (see Richard Rogers) who adopt similar approaches to agency alongside the materialists I cite in my chapter. However, I also argue that some of these scholars take the re-orientation of agency and apply it too evenly and without regard to the demands that Karen Barad's *relationality* places on scholars to consider the specificity of relations (objects, humans, institutions, places, discourse) in determining the social and its suasive functions. In Peterson et al's essay, the scholars propose a "land community" in which nature (e.g., a species of bird) can participate within a politically representative framework. I find this sentiment as romantic, ideal, and agreeable, but ultimately, untenable. In addition, this vision unintentionally reproduces the nature/culture divide in a similar fashion to the film/digital divide—through criteria of pre-determined dualisms. This difference is marked from Latour's use of "achieving" the social which I elaborate in this review.

Science, for Bogost, “races to the bottom,” because of its deductive methods, reducing possibilities for expansive inquiry, and thus breaks the plane of a “flat ontology.” A flat ontology does not privilege any object over another in terms of their capacity to affect, which is characterized by OOO scholars as the equal existence of objects. While I agree with and commend OOO scholars for their attention to the problem, I do not agree with the mandate to apply flat ontology, as humans are included as objects, too, with no special privilege. I fail to see how the criteria for “flat” can operate without addressing the human’s capacity to create, interpret, and judge a plane of existence. The bigger problem, I might suggest, is that OOO turns existence into a game of splitting hairs (what counts? what doesn’t count?) in a game of human-driven rationality while discounting *processual* emphases of social and material relationships. OOO’s forerunner, actor-network theory and the oeuvre of Bruno Latour, deserve attention in my dissertation for its influential role in pushing for a relational view of sociality in which objects are absolutely crucial to its understanding. Without the “flat” applied evenly across all matter, objects can provoke humans toward rethinking how material technologies like photography can alter the texture of social relationships, and in doing so, acts as a living critique of modernity’s desire to territorialize knowledge through a rubric of rationality—a form of rationality that pays little heed to non-generalizeable claims to knowledge. Flat ontology from an OOO perspective attempts to forward knowledge through a set of propositions defining the field—a problem for relational and processual analyses that bracket the ontological in favor of claims derived via an orientation of immanence.

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<sup>52</sup> Bogost’s example and definition is an excellent example of what can come from collaboration within an online community. On his blog, heavyweights and “laymen” alike participate in a conversation to define the field known as OOO, Object-Oriented Ontology, with the specific goal to lay out easier-to-understand vernacular prose. See Ian Bogost, *What Is Object-Oriented Ontology? A Definition for Ordinary Folk*, Dec. 8, 2009, [http://www.bogost.com/blog/what\\_is\\_objectoriented\\_ontolog.shtml](http://www.bogost.com/blog/what_is_objectoriented_ontolog.shtml).

While Deleuze is often grouped alongside Foucault within a continental poststructuralist mode of scholarship, his work is made relevant in more recent academic contexts of matter and materialisms.<sup>53</sup> His concept of “smooth” or “nomadic” space, provides scholars with a way to understand an immanent, non-metaphysical “propinquity” with regard to mapping relationships.<sup>54</sup> While a pure “plane of immanence” cannot be accessed directly through known forms of representation (i.e., “distinction without difference”), the smooth spaces of Deleuze depict an imaginative field of potential distinguished from current representative modes emphasizing orthodoxy—of the visual, of language, of code, and of the *known* body. Deleuze names the latter a space of “striation.”<sup>55</sup> Striated space marks up otherwise smooth spaces through representative acts (i.e., photographic texts versus photographic action), and thus, the dual concepts of smooth/striated space provide a rich rhetorical language from which to consider *techne* as a series of discursive arrangements capable of producing a photographic act. In addition, Deleuzian notions of “difference and repetition” are useful toward the dissertation’s aim to resituate photography from modernity’s interpretation of difference and repetition to one that makes strange the photographic concepts of fixity, habit, and memory.<sup>56</sup> He advocates for an ontology of singular action and expression—the antithesis of reigning photographic norms.

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<sup>53</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

<sup>54</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 430.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 537-539.

<sup>56</sup> Within the communication discipline, Deleuzian concepts are taken up by a minority of scholars within a cultural studies frame; in large part, this is due to Lawrence Grossberg’s influence. Mobilities scholars share a similar affinity to Deleuzian philosophy as a way to circumvent the ever-present problem of circumventing representation—and in particular as the affordances of digital technologies re-present the dichotomous problem named earlier in the chapter (e.g., film/digital, real/virtual). Virtual, here, is understood as distinct from the earlier connotation, and addresses representation through an intentional “capacity to affect” rather than through the capacities of *techne*. According to communication scholars de Souza e Silva and Sutko: “...we can suggest that the virtual

Latour amplifies the act of paying close attention to matter and objects. This approach is opposed to—but not a displacement for—observing human behavior. He asserts the importance of the material-empirical approach for inquiry in this way:

The word social cannot replace anything, cannot express anything better, cannot be substituted—in any form or guise—for anything else. It is not the common measure of all things, like a credit card widely accepted everywhere. It is only a movement that can be seized indirectly when there is a slight change in one older association mutating into a slightly newer or different one. Far from a stable and sure thing, it is no more than an occasional spark generated by the shift, the shock, the slight displacement of other non-social phenomena. Does this mean that we have to take seriously the real and sometimes exquisitely small differences between the many ways in which people ‘achieve the social’? I am afraid so.<sup>57</sup>

For Latour, “the social,” as a term, is anything but a given, ontological expression. This is why he uses the verb, “achieve,” in front of the term. In the contemporary communication discipline, social construction is far from a novel idea. For example, Foucauldian theories of power influencing much of the discipline should be characterized as *positive* power. That is, the notion that power is productive of cultural practices rather than derived from the subjects of culture. The general category of social construction and its associative terms fill the pages of humanities and

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for Deleuze is distinct from the idea of representation in Plato. According to the representational model, images resemble their originals, and objects resemble the idea (concept) to which they correspond. Leibniz’s idea of possibility, then, resembles more the Platonic representational model than the Deleuzian model of potentiality/actuality. The virtual for Deleuze is multiple, that is, it can be actualized in many different instances. Multiplicity then can be defined in contrast to the Platonic idea of representation, which is generally a one-to-one relationship.” See “Theorizing Locative Technologies through Philosophies of the Virtual,” *Communication Theory*, no 21 (2011), 40.

<sup>57</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 36-37. It may be worth pointing out the commensurability between my claims for what counts as knowledge through a lens of rhetorical contingency and what I am calling “complicity,” and Latour’s description of social empiricism as being “far from a stable and sure thing.” My claims toward a foregrounding of contingency within rhetoric align with Latour’s perspective. In addition, the term, “complicity,” while not directly addressed by Latour, calls forth my own belief that contingency and complicity should be thought of as gestures of *humility* in conducting inquiry, especially in the face of increasing demands to produce knowledge claims grounded in certainty, falsification, and binary outcomes.



social science textbooks, journal articles, and book chapters.<sup>58</sup> Yet, there is a sharp distinction between a poststructuralist approach (e.g., Foucault and his theories of discursive formation leading to “truth claims”) and Latour’s approach.

Foucault relies on the discourses of a given age, culture, era, to explain how categories such as expertise are concocted rather than essential. This expertise, in turn, creates objective and rationally supported knowledge claims—claim that he calls “truths.” He historicizes discursive practices in order to trace (i.e., what he calls a genealogy) the creation of categories.<sup>59</sup> These categories can include madness/reason, security/fear, and more importantly, manifest as “truths” for a given age. For example, the birth of psycho-pathology, for Foucault, is notable not only to foreground these practices as non-essential (birth suggests the creation of a category) but also because specific cultures *do* recognize the category of madness as a real truth.<sup>60</sup> The manifestation of such discursive truth practices also take on a latent form, as Foucault suggests. His original thesis extends to other forms of “productive power” in his later lectures through his

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<sup>58</sup> Ian Hacking’s popular work, *The Social Construction of What?* addresses the anxieties of postmodernist approaches to inquiry. These approaches are not on the fringes of scholarship in the humanities and qualitative methods, but rather occupy a central role. Within the discipline of rhetoric, Raymie McKerrow’s *Critical Rhetoric* served as a key text guiding a methodological push toward the theories of “postmodernism.” He outlines explicitly a “critique of freedom” underwritten by Foucault to illustrate the ways in which cultural subjects are formed as a result of “positive” power, which operates effectively by framing cultural practices as productions / productive of truth. Scholars may announce this critique as a signpost of self-reflexive, self-aware, scholarly subjectivity. Foucault opposes positive power to negative power in which subjects are formed as a result of direct disciplinary tactics such as the state’s capacity to publicly and visibly punish a citizen by violent means. See the opening example of “regicide” in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* to gain a better understanding of the distinction between positive/negative power alongside the role of sovereign/top-down power versus self-discipline.

<sup>59</sup> Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.” *The Foucault Reader* ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

<sup>60</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage, 1965).

theorizing of governmentality and biopolitics. An excellent, contemporary example of this extension of productive power in popular discourse can be found within a genealogy of birthing practices tracing its history from a “craft” to an industrial, medicalized endeavor.<sup>61</sup>

Discursive formation as a concept aligns well with rhetoric to the degree one considers discourse and symbolism as indicators or influence. Latour, as a token of the STS tradition, breaks from Foucault based on the belief that the power in discourse is still addressing a cultural subject—that is, a human subject. Karen Barad allows for the inclusion of both by refusing to dichotomize “discursive practices” against the material. This distinction is elaborated following a brief review of Latour’s contributions and his relevance to the project of a techno-social mapping within techno-social settings. As such, his work contributes to the dissertation’s exigency of non-reduction with regard to photography and its implicit expectation of photographic production in the form of a visual text.

Observing material objects is crucial to inquiry for Latour because these objects (mundane or otherwise) are the conduits through which the social is mediated through “the shift, the shock, the slight displacement of other non-social phenomena.” In other words, opportunities

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<sup>61</sup> Atul Gawande, “How Childbirth Went Industrial,” *New Yorker*, Oct. 9, 2006. I typically employ this caveat when addressing a poststructuralist position—that there are many cases in which people struggle, defer to the categories of medical professionals and their diagnoses, and attempt to alleviate varying degrees of bodily pain; the degree to which one legitimizes a diagnosis depends on a normative definition which defines a bodily deficit. While Foucault often points to the dangers of discursively-derived knowledge claims (e.g., prisons, institutions of expertise, schools), he does not often point to examples in which the creation of normative standards—however fickle the method—also serve as principles of preference to subjects of culture. In other words, empiricism never escapes the norms from which we are to define the term (this is one definition of subjectivity), and as an extension of that concept, the choices we make may be thought of as preferential—even in the face of non-essential principles. Kent Ono and John Sloop refer to this idea as a “contingent telos,” while Gayatri Spivak names the political possibilities of Derridean difference as “strategic essentialism.” She finds a guiding, but ephemeral, ethic in which to find a subject’s agency. Her claims are significant for critics operating on contingent ground while lacking warrant for claims of essential morality. However, there is a major distinction between the *function* of bracketing ultimate claims and an *insistence* on perpetual deference.

for precise measurements are rare, and for Latour, the empirical world of matter relies on the units of measurement that provide traces for constituting what counts as social. As I consider additional scholarship in this dissertation, I hope to make this distinction (between a materialist and poststructuralist approach) a clear one, but one that is ultimately productive for rhetorical inquiry if considered in tandem with one another.

Latour's foundational work in his actor-network theory, his developments in conceptualizing the agencies of objects, and his foregrounding of matter—all in highly recognizable contexts (e.g., R & D labs)—opens up work for other scholars to approach the notion of empiricism with an eye toward the material qualities that help enable communication and sociality.<sup>62</sup> One such scholar is the aforementioned Karen Barad, a trained STS scholar who also holds a doctorate in quantum mechanics. She writes her theory of matter by appropriating her background in physics in order to illustrate what she names, “agential realism.” To remind, her contribution to my study and a rationale for her theory's relationship to rhetoric, is noted in the dissertation's first chapter. As a primary contributor to my project's overarching framework, it may be worth discussing, with specificity, how Barad's work is commensurate with, and encompassing of, contemporary modalities of rhetorical analysis.

Following Deleuze, Barad manages to map a version of agency that neither privileges language nor matter. Instead, she appropriates the theories of the notorious physicist, Neils Bohr, in order to highlight the properties of matter, which include both human and object. Her agential

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<sup>62</sup> While both Latour and his scholarship are alive and well, in 1997, he pronounced ANT as dead: “There are four things that do not work with actor-network theory; the word actor, the word network, the word theory and the hyphen! Four nails in the coffin.” (Henry Lowood and Sarah Sussman, 2003, profile on Bruno Latour for the Stanford Presidential Lectures series) Latour concludes his 1997 talk, “On Recalling ANT,” by announcing that “some other creature will emerge, light and beautiful, our future collective achievement.”

realism promotes an orientation toward what she calls, “relationality” and “entanglement.”<sup>63</sup> The advantage of Barad’s approach is that it can account for discourse as a material manifestation that is always moving in relation to other material entities such as bodies, technological devices, and objects on an atomic scale. On a gloss, her incorporation of the language of atoms and physics as a way to displace the stronghold of representationalism, appears to be circular; that is, it seems as if she is replacing one realm of representation (of cultural inquiry) with another (of deductive inquiry) in order to advance her argument. But on a closer read, she distinguishes between a Newtonian physics that considers all “relata” as having *a priori* value, and the physics underwritten by Niels Bohr: “matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency... That is, matter refers to the materiality/materialization of phenomena, not to an inherent fixed property of abstract independently existing objects of Newtonian physics.” Matter, then, is “a doing,” a process of becoming material that need not rely solely on the representations of “words and things.” The processual character of her theory aligns well with Deleuzian process. Significantly, the advantage of adopting agential realism for rhetoric is within the dynamic character of her theory that allows for capturing specificity *in* the movement of matter (which later appears—or congeals—as a cultural practice) without disavowing the symbolicity of discourse. For Barad, Foucault’s arguments for discourse are subsumed under her theory of matter but not displaced by it.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Barad, *Posthumanist*, 808.

<sup>64</sup> Barad’s notion of “discursive practices” is understood as immanent and material, and she specifically denotes that “the linguistic is not a synonym for discourse.” Thus, the Foucauldian examples noted earlier are considered as discourse for Barad, or what Foucault refers to as “discursive formations.” Additionally, what Barad has called, “thing-ification” is taken up by other scholars working within similar frames as it pertains to the troubling of human agency as the centerpiece of social action; Donna Haraway takes this line of thinking to address agency within a biological context more recently, while her landmark essay introduces her politics of the cyborg, a provocative re-orientation toward non-humanist agency; Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter* addresses the

Barad outlines an excellent view of matter and movement, the particularity of relationships, and how agency is reconfigured when considering *both* human practices and matter. Barad's theories are central to my dissertation and to the challenge of re-orienting the exigencies of a photographic rhetoric. She asks:

How did language come to be more trustworthy than matter? Why are language and culture granted their own agency and historicity while matter is figured as passive and immutable, or at best inherits a potential for change derivatively from language and culture?

While it seems that Barad is firing off provocative questions from a posthumanist perspective foregrounding the role of matter, her actual move here is to denote the imbalance between language and matter—one she wishes to restore. Thus, her theory of “agential realism” encompasses both the particularities of matter and human discourse, and she makes the explicit claim that one should not be privileged over the other.

Significantly, Barad proposes what she calls “performativity” as a critical mode of inquiry: “...performativity is actually a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve.”<sup>65</sup> This claim has two purposes: the first is to set up Barad's rationale for agential realism. The second purpose, in my view, is to respond to Judith Butler's version of performativity, which serves as an implicit example for Barad's assertion that language has become too

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power of “things,” as well, and her case study of a massive blackout along a wide swath of North America uses the Deleuzian concept of “assemblage” to make an argument that human agency is overdetermined when there are no people in particular to blame for the blackout event. These scholars are sometimes referred to as “new materialists,” and each promotes a unique vision for politics. This concern for the political aligns well with rhetoric's concern for a commonplace *demos*.

<sup>65</sup> Barad, 802.

influential in the constitution of social norms and practices.<sup>66</sup> This aligns with my view that the consideration of matter should not be limited to a list-making affair naming the material properties of object X in order to determine that object's function of Y. Instead, specific material properties are called forth, within an interaction of other properties (including language, including humans), to shape what we know as the social *within* interaction. The general problem of photography as I have already noted, is the strong human determination to consider its properties as inherently coherent and that its inherent function is to produce a photograph. Challenges to these well-honed conventions of photography must come from a perspective that considers matter, language, and motion, to highlight the distinction between a photograph and photograph-*ing*.

Finally, Barad's work speaks toward two of the primary problems I introduced at the outset of the dissertation. She writes:

The move toward performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices/doings/actions.<sup>67</sup>

The heavy tendency to use a differential criterion within analysis (e.g., discourses of media comparison pitting film versus digital, real versus virtual) and the tendency to view the photograph as the key object of visual scholarship, are two of the problems presented in my dissertation, and Barad's suggestion is to move out of the domain of the former and into the latter. I contend again that I do not consider "practices/doings/actions" to be in opposition with theory.

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<sup>66</sup> Just before her assertion that performativity is a "contestation," she writes, "Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words." Barad is critiquing Judith Butler's articulation of "performativity" in *Excitable Speech* as privileging the role of language (i.e., the mention of bodies turning into words). Like Butler, Barad also identifies as a scholar with a concern for how performativity can shape a new politics based upon similar problematics of representation and the material.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Barad's framework illustrates that theory is not simply applied toward analysis with resulting implications for practices, but that this notion of practice is already complicit with theory. This is why she considers "discursive practices" as material. "Relationality" seemingly yields a practical outcome, but it is important to note that this outcome is not fixed, but rather in continual motion and process. As I consider specific examples for analysis in this dissertation, the particularities of each case will illuminate different relationships—relationships that are not built upon binary criteria, but instead, singular, particular relationships.<sup>68</sup>

Because of the seemingly abstract character of both her theory and the physics that help it along, I will attempt to animate her work through an illustrative case demanding a framework capable of addressing multiple complexities across time and geographical space.<sup>69</sup> As Barad's project functions as a political vision, I will also explain how rhetoric can take advantage of a matter-based view in accounting for acts of inducements that are not primarily based in language; not only can Barad's theory address the current movement in rhetorical studies of places and monuments, but more importantly (to this dissertation), how photography and the photograph operate rhetorically as dynamic units of matter rather than analogues of language within a comparative history.

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<sup>68</sup> This idea of the singular can also be found in Deleuze's oeuvre. For example, his notions of "nomadic" spaces, "deterritorialized" assemblages, suggest that the field of possibility for action is broken wide open because of the lack of markings (symbolic or material) on these spaces. Massumi, a translator and protégé of Deleuze, emphasizes the idea of "becomings" rather than outcomes to remind readers that the human is always in process rather than a fixed entity. Butler asserts that what may appear to be fixed is rather an "iteration" or "re-iteration," and she grounds her analysis on the power of the symbolic (i.e., language) and its ability to mutate in a process of re-signification. See Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*; Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual*; Butler, *Excitable Speech*.

<sup>69</sup> I elaborate an example in the preview of chapters concluding this chapter.

In Butler's later work addressing representation and the visual, she acknowledges the exigency of escaping representation, but she also acknowledges the difficulties in doing so:

The demand for a truer image, for more images, for images that convey the full horror and reality of the suffering has its place and importance...But it would be a mistake to think that we only need to find the right and true images, and that a certain reality will then be conveyed. The reality is not conveyed by what is represented within the image, but through the challenge to representation that reality delivers.<sup>70</sup>

Butler's call to attend to the "challenge to representation" functions as a crucial link between STS scholarship and recent concepts emerging from within the rhetorical discipline.

Continuing with this formation of a citational alliance, I contend that rhetorical scholarship and the other literatures I preview in this section have a common ground. Consider the famous thesis from Guy Debord: "The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images."<sup>71</sup>

While Debord's general argument suggests we have completed the turn into pure representation (as opposed to lived experience), his claim above names the general category of "images" as the mediating force of sociality. This concern over mediation effectively serves as the disciplinary intersection at which one can usefully deploy the categories of rhetorical and materialist literature to account for the *how* of photographic mediation. The second clause of Debord's thesis simply asserts mediation as a concept; the process of actually understanding how visual mediation works in the particular creates an exigency for multiple frameworks across disciplines. As I have already argued, photographic mediation cannot be properly accounted for without accounting for the photographic act, itself. This exclusion serves as a departure point from Debord's obsession with the image, but more importantly, the exclusion sets up a rationale

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<sup>70</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2006).

<sup>71</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Red & Black, 2000).



for using a citational framework in this dissertation that can encompass more than the image as a starting place for analysis.

Although photography can be characterized as a mode of representation, this characterization forms a *tendency* toward a textual response (in the form of a photograph awaiting analysis) and displaces attention to photography's material properties—properties that shed light onto the suasive functions of the photographic act not found merely in the photograph-as-text. STS concepts are important to consider for my dissertation because one of the discipline's common concerns is to re-consider the role of the human as central to communication. Monika Büscher and John Urry explain this obsession of modernist social inquiry in terms of what they call, “propinquity;” modern culture relies upon “a ‘metaphysics of presence’, proposing that it is the immediate presence of others that is the basis of social existence.”<sup>72</sup> Against this view, the authors align with Latour in that the social is neither passive nor self-evident through human interaction alone. Instead, it is “achieved”:

All social life, of work, family, education and politics, presumes relationships of intermittent presence and modes of absence depending in part upon multiple technologies of travel and communications that move objects, people, ideas, images across varying distances. Presence is thus intermittent, achieved, performed and always interdependent with other processes of connection and communication.<sup>73</sup>

This claim inflects a characteristically STS orientation of interdependence and relationality in constituting “the social.” The re-orientation toward the social—which includes matter—is indispensable to the study of photography. I take up the notion that a photographic act is constituted only within the movement of objects—including bodies—and deflect it toward the

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<sup>72</sup> Büscher and Urry, 101.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

study of rhetoric's own *techne*. In doing so, I hope to advance an interdisciplinary agreement amenable to both this dissertation and to the study of visual rhetoric, proper.

While this review of literature effectively functions as only a sampling of scholarship I have used across the dissertation, the cases in this project feature important claims from additional theorists and critics alike. Generally, the common groupings of literature address each primary exigency of each section of the project. As a re-grouped refrain, I rely on interdisciplinary scholars including the new materialists, Karen Barad and Jane Bennett; Bruno Latour and his foundational work on agency and material ontology in the STS tradition, the poststructuralist-informed theories of Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Jacques Ranciere; from the broadly-conceived visual culture discipline, I read and work through the arguments provided by W.J.T. Mitchell, James Elkins, Ariella Azoulay, Stuart Hall, and Jonathan Tagg. Each problematizes photography and other forms of the visual by working through notions of representation (as problematic), the visual as sublime, photography as a template for citizenship and poststructuralist-informed politics, and also provide interdisciplinary connections to aesthetics unavailable from the communication discipline.

From within the communication discipline, I align with and appropriate the work of Nathan Stormer and Bradford Vivian. Stormer and Vivian each address the primary exigencies of the dissertation; that is, they have broken ground in the speech-communication rhetorical discipline for troubling notions of representation, symbolicity, and memory as the reigning ground within a *topos* of the material. As such, their work becomes crucial for the ever-moving project of creating citational alliances between scholars within the STS, materialist, relational, and rhetorical traditions. In addition, their work is commensurable with poststructuralist approaches to rhetoric. These scholars have and continue to inform my own visual framework,

its relationship to power and agency, the materialist properties of the act and product of photography, a re-orientation toward communication which emerges when human agency is de-centered, and the political possibilities and constraints inflected within considerations of the photographic image. These scholars/works represent my approach to each of the dissertation cases.

This project also recognizes, critiques, and extends on the work of contemporary visual rhetoricians in order to underwrite a rationale for enlargening the scope of analysis within the discipline to include the under-analyzed photographic *act*. Here, I look to Robert Hariman and John Lucaites, Cara Finnegan, Charles Hill, Margarite Helmers, Victoria Gallagher, Carol Blair, Laurie Gries, Lester Olson, Nathan Stormer, Nathan Atkinson, Anne Demo, Susan Owens, and Barbara Warnick (though many other scholars can be named simply by tropical association). Their respective commitments to both rhetoric and the commonplaces of public culture align with my own commitment to the rhetorical discipline. Their respective commitments to the *demos* and to rhetorical invention, through figures of the visual, provide an anchor to my own arguments for reproducing a photographic act.

Yet, this literature review reveals a conspicuous ratio of influences and references favoring scholars outside of the speech communication and rhetoric disciplines (STS, New Materialists, and especially Cultural Studies in the spirit of the late Stuart Hall in the U.K., and his student, Lawrence Grossberg, who smuggled Deleuze, Guattari, and Continental Philosophy's influence directly to the U.S. speech communication discipline). Many of these influences in turn inform the visual-rhetorical scholars named above. Their assumptions, in large part, are formed by these same outside scholars. Although a rationale for such inclusion may and can be grounds to level the common criticism of being aloof to literature ratios and in-discipline

cultivation, I operate with the working assumption that such influence is necessary given a *relative* dearth of literature within the sub-discipline of visual rhetoric. These outside influences are also immanent to my project in terms of providing usable frameworks for difficult and complex interpretations and inventions of visual theory that do not port well from other rhetoric sub-disciplines or within communication, generally.

As such, I provide below a summary of Barbie Zelizer's work on the photographic and figural depictions of dying, and who apart from Barad, likely gets closest to this dissertation's *topos*. Simultaneously, she serves as a bridge between the disciplines of mass communication, communication, and ultimately, rhetoric—both in literature and within her active participation across these disciplines. In addition, she understands the mass media function of audience interpretation and the cultivation of political action as a result, and in many ways accords with the conclusions of Hariman and Lucaites. Yet, she extends from those implications. The author not only grapples with a meta-understanding or a close read of photographic text, but also addresses with specificity the *internal* and figurative aesthetics within a relational assemblage under the sign of photography.

In Zelizer's *About to Die* volume, she highlights a particular function of the still photograph: its ability to leverage time (stillness) in order to achieve a kind of 'suspension' of finality.<sup>74</sup> Zelizer illustrates this function with incision through examples of several famous photographs, and ultimately she concludes that such photographs (Falling Man, Warsaw Boy, the Pulitzer-winning fire escape tragedy in Boston) foster engagement with viewing publics--regardless the valuation of particular interpretations toward a more thoughtful set of discourses surrounding the photo's content and cultural context.

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<sup>74</sup> Barbie Zelizer, *About to Die: How News Images Move the Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

The rhetorical analogue to a linguistic figure--already noted by several scholars of the visual--is the enthymeme. The figure has a capacity to invite thought, reasoning, reflection, action through a simple but suggestive move: a refusal to spell or speak out in linear fashion, a rational thread woven through a proposition or a knowledge claim. As such, it lures readers, hearers (in the context of language) toward the completion of a thought or utterance based around an inferential context of what the proposition is missing, as well as exercising a deductive move derived from general expectations of previously understood language patterns.

Thus, the enthymeme in language and the enthymeme in the visual are similar in their respective functions of addressivity, but the similarity stops there. There is no "whole" photograph or a "complete" photograph as one might think of as in terms of a syllogism. Without captions or text to support an expository function of information relay, the enthymeme could potentially stand-in as the master figure for the photograph, itself. That is, the photograph's sole function could be enthymematic and purely suggestive. It may articulate with Peirce's "interpretant," or function *as* the interpretant.<sup>75</sup> While a rational form of language demands a temporal sequence of sense-making on the part of the auditor ('Thus, it follows that...'), photographs have neither the strictures of language forms nor the signifying precision necessary to legitimating claims toward knowledge. Photographs and language: immanently distinctive.

Zelizer's project is unique—yet influential to my own critical concerns—in that it not only addresses the dual functioning of photographs toward iconic *and* (democratic) deliberative purposes (i.e., Hariman, Lucaites, Finnegan), but her work also foregrounds for a reader a confrontation with death and the *imagined process* of dying--through an ostensibly harmless look

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<sup>75</sup> C. S. Peirce, *The Collected Papers*. Volumes 1–6. eds., Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-36).

at a photograph. Yet, as she notes, these photographs "penetrate" and "linger" long after its medium has ceased to display the image.<sup>76</sup> In a word, about to die images are 'haunting.' These readings of images do not stop in a temporal sense, per Zelizer, and extend to other relationships throughout photography's history. That is, her analyses recognize that the text is only central to the figurative and aesthetic reads of an image as they come to bear on the relationships from which they emerge and derive power within and without culture.

Zelizer names and appropriates the still function of the photograph to haul in great insights about how photographs may affect us in ways we cannot articulate through language. A confrontation with a difficult image is not denoted as such because of an essentially confrontational subject matter in the photo's content, but rather because it provides interpretative room (confrontation, that is) that does not have to meet the requirements of linguistic expression and articulation. Put another way, the "falling man" (from a WTC building on 9/11) as a figure of imminent death is made powerful because of the *suggestion of time and relay*. These temporal characteristics afford the photograph its power; we must confront the stillness of the depicted figure and the resultant temporal expectations created therein, and for Zelizer's grim topic, those expectations are of death.

My inclusion of Zelizer in this section is not working toward developing extensions of the enthymeme. Instead, I look to the present characteristics of a photograph--including the affordance that brought it into being, the thing called the camera--to understand how the photographic image is always at play: it may be still, but that stillness may be the very function that *moves* audiences to participate by making meaning, making sense, and making politics of and through the photographic image. It may require light (literally, it is an inscription of light

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<sup>76</sup> Jack Shafer, "Deadly Images: A Q&A with Barbie Zelizer, author of *About To Die: How News Images Move the Public*." *Slate* Jan. 6, 2011. accessed from [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/press\\_box/2011/01/deadly\\_images.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/press_box/2011/01/deadly_images.html)

despite its final medium), but in turn, light is typically understood in both degree and kind--as if it were already mastered as a subject. Light's presence is not a subject of meditation for the practice of photographers in a hurry--its presence is instead *measured* by the capacities of camera technology. Much of an everyday understanding of light--for example, 'low light'--is naturalized by such camera measurements. In other words, there is relatively little light available to achieve a better degree of image integrity. Relative, that is, to the photo-sensitivity of film emulsion, to the ability of a camera to create an opening of light (exposure) at incredibly fast speed, to the ability of glass assemblies designed to be as efficient as possible in terms of capturing light while balancing the clarity of the glass, the size of the lens as a mobile accessory, and the versatility of the glass in terms of "focal length" and "depth of field." All these modulate how we *judge* the availability of light, and are understood only in terms of relative degrees to how much light the camera can ultimately capture.

So here, I depart from Zelizer through this claim: light, and its relative abundance / scarcity as denoted by the camera's technological affordances, (literally) makes the photograph. It is the verb of the image, as opposed to the photographer's self-fashioned agency. When light reaches an uncomfortable threshold (either too little or too much) put in place by the constraints of technical measurement, what then does light's relative presence / absence suggest? What does it draw out in terms of the photograph *and* photography's relational character? If stillness addressed time's ultimatum, then how do these light thresholds distribute everyday persuasions?

Common stylings I've described to this point of photography's ability to invent and reinvent include the aesthetics of compensatory light, shadow, composition, color, foreshortening—and unequivocally—the use of post-processing to provide similar compensations in both traditional form (darkroom techniques of manipulation) and in

contemporary, digital form (software such as Adobe's Photoshop as a ubiquitous tool for digital manipulation).

Post-production manipulations need not move Egyptian pyramids toward a better magazine cover, nor do they necessarily refer to superimposing one person's head onto another body in the name of humorous, vernacular pastiche. Rather, they do the subtle work to support the same conventions of photographing: cropping as retrospective composition, tonal and gradient adjustments as retrospective amplifications of contrast, color adjustment as retrospective response to an undesirable aesthetic combining color temperatures (e.g., indoor fluorescent light mixed with natural light coming through a window).

As such, the act of photography under 'bright lights' as a metaphor for mass-mediated representations of performance is something of a misnomer, and why I assert Susan Sontag's claim, "by the agency of Light alone," is only partially true.<sup>77</sup> It turns out that light has a supporting cast, and those features, those stylings of light, the aesthetics of post-production, and our continuous devotion to them as user-audiences can instead masquerade as adequate compensations without disrupting photography's own "burden," as Tagg would have it—as an object-based, textually commensurate, form of representation.<sup>78</sup>

Because this relationship between the constraints/affordances of the camera and photographic subjects is held together by standards of technology, it is these so-called mistakes, the 'not getting it right' photos, the light/dark, unwanted contrast photos, the photos of obviously artificial light—it is this aesthetic that is ubiquitous. These *mistakes* are better studied and far

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<sup>77</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1973), 68.

<sup>78</sup> John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).



more observed and experienced than the ideal they reach for. This aesthetic is not valued in some essential way (not for this scholar, anyway); rather, these mistake-aesthetics feature the symbols of representation of which we have the most experience. We make sense through *preteritio* - the act of negation - in this case, accidentally negating the ideal for a bunch of photos we never got right.<sup>79</sup> It turns out these are the ones that are the most pervasive, provide the most symbols for deliberating the relationship between light and person/subject (i.e., aesthetics) in their excessive or absent forms.

Again, the scope and emphasis of this sampling of scholarship addresses the exigencies of the project and I hope I have grown, modulated, constricted, realigned, and appropriated the literature through a productive process of building cases and exemplars—chapter by chapter. My hope is to demonstrate how a non-linear approach to photography can yield material and discursive arrangements of person, camera, light, chemistry, industry, expertise, identity, and commodity, to inform alternative practices, modalities, and re-imaginings of what a photographic act might be apart from its apparently transparent, introductory sign. A matter-based approach negotiates photography as an everyday, critical intervention against the sediment proscribing the medium's use to a tool of capture and reward.

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<sup>79</sup> H. A. Kelly, "Occupatio as Negative Narration: A Mistake for 'Occultatio/Praeteritio.'" *Modern Philology*, 3 (1977): 311-315.

## CHAPTER III

‘Reading’ the Figural Aesthetics of Media, Photography, and  
Visual Discourse in Annie Leibovitz’ *Three If By Sea*

At every turn...every ‘thing’—even materiality—is turned into  
a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation.  
--Karen Barad<sup>80</sup>

Following Hurricane Sandy, the photographer Annie Leibovitz set out to cover the aftermath of the disaster. Commissioned by *Vogue*, Leibovitz—best known for her 1980 fetal rendering of a naked John Lennon curled up alongside Yoko Ono—along with editor-in-chief, Anna Wintour, and senior editor, Corey Seymour, chose Sandy's first responders as the fashion magazine's photographic subjects. Curiously, the editorial team also included fashion models to appear within the portraits alongside real-life first responders. *Vogue's* decision to include these models prompted a wave of denouncements from professional journalists and amateur pundits, alike. The general sentiment of these critiques took aim squarely at the “frivolous” choice to include models and their accouterments “at a time like this.” *The Guardian* newspaper asked its readers “how offensive” they found the photo set—not whether they found it offensive. Popular online magazine, *Slate*, offered its headline, “*Vogue* Pays Tribute to Hurricane Sandy First Responders With Awful Photo Spread.” Meanwhile, *Gawker* asked its readership whether

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<sup>80</sup> Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes To Matter,” *Signs* 28, no. 3 (2003): 801-831.

Leibovitz' photo set was “tacky, tasteless, or both?” Popular blogger, Kottke, wondered aloud whether *Vogue* was “going for inappropriate and provocative but hit inappropriate and idiotic instead.” Readers responded in similar fashion. One commenter suggested the *Vogue* photo set was similar to *The Onion*'s “Golden Globe dress coverage but you know, without the irony.”

This chapter intervenes via an analytic for photographic interpretation that reverses the hermeneutic privileging of the word. Specifically, I draw out the aesthetic features of Leibovitz' photograph, *Three If By Sea* [Figure 3].



[Figure 3]  
Annie Leibovitz' *Three If By Sea* - Lead image in *Vogue*'s *Storm Troupers* feature, published in the magazine's February 2013 issue

I propose bracketing the dominant practice of interpreting public photographs on a hermeneutic axis derived in language. I contend an alternative framework dedicated to the unique functioning of ‘visual language’ instantiates potential for reading images through an aesthetic politic for the study of media within what Robert Hariman invokes as signifying audiences—that is, the target of circulation, reception, and reaction—what he names as a public of “visual culture.”

As photographic aesthetics of urgent rescue are consistently associated with disasters of a large scale and visually mediated as such to invested audiences, I argue that aesthetic features of rescue imagery—their “sensuous” characteristics of resemblance—suffer from a conflation between the function of resemblance (visual, iconic inscriptions understood in terms of similarity) and the latter function of image “recognition.” That is, aesthetic resemblances of rescuers and their technology in the form of photographic images, and what Mitchell, borrowing from Derrida, calls “the event of [the image's] recognition,” are considered as one by a visual public culture.<sup>81</sup> For example, the visual-symbolic links that give rise to a photo set and uses the term, “first responders,” finds associations with military aesthetics, mission, machinery—located outside of New York—on account of resemblance. These associations link to places far from New York—in Normandy, in Somalia, and atop Mount Suribachi. However, these aesthetic associations speak only to the rhetorical function of resemblance.

On recognition, “rhizomatic” entry and exit points for images, along with their “lines of flight” are by definition difficult to capture as—or into—referential discourse.<sup>82</sup> Even so, photographs “read” through/on the body, through/on spatial and temporal axes, do point to,

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<sup>81</sup> *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen, eds., The University of Chicago Press, 2010.

<sup>82</sup> Mark Bonta and John Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary*, Edinburgh University Press (2004), 136.

orient toward, and offer radical potential for visual literacy outside the frame of its linguistic counterpart. To reemphasize, two fundamentally different practices of visual inscription (resemblance and recognition) are conflated in the eyes of *readers* who encounter public images—including Leibovitz’ set. Accordingly, the subjective visual-communicative practices (e.g., panoptic, or at least, optical discipline) found within the *Storm Troupers* spread and its public reception serve as worthy demonstrations of a strong cultural tendency to conflate the functions of “resemblance and recognition.”<sup>83</sup>

A rhetorical critique of the *Storm Troupers* lead image, *Three If By Sea*, foregrounds popular assumptions of photographic media within contemporary cultural discourses: the tight association between photographic resemblance and representation, and the capacity of editorial images to invoke harm on civic identity through authorial intent. A primary concern of this chapter is to re-map discursive signifiers to its visual text. The tie between discourse and that which it addresses in visual form is significant with regard to a tendency for a visual culture to invoke a fantasy of reading images transparently, with meaning, and unfettered by constraints of identity formation and visual subjectivity.

This chapter is guided in part by the work of W.J.T. Mitchell who parses with incision the difference between an image’s aesthetics of reference and its often-ambiguous function as “sensual”—that is, addressing embodied, human sensation occurring in the process of “recognizing” a visual image. I explain how the shoot’s producers (*Vogue*’s editorial staff and Leibovitz) are complicit with the magazine’s readership in perpetuating a hermeneutical authority of image—the formation of a photographic *doxa*—situated as the important talk that supports conceptions of a necessary civic morality which includes a duty to non-sacrilege. The

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<sup>83</sup> Mitchell and Hansen, 300.

introductory sampling of reactions to *Storm Troupers* signifies the acceptable boundaries of talk in and around images associated with disaster. These discourses convey tacit and terminal exigencies of what constitutes (in)appropriate response related to images permissible to circulate following a named, natural disaster. Disaster imagery—specifically, the aesthetic inclusion and arrangements of rescuers and their machinery—provides not only an associated visual-rhetorical context for photographic images but also an unspoken warrant to guide language discourse toward the policing of attitudes in the formation of post-disaster civic identity.

I analyze how referential, aesthetic arrangements of contemporary rescue and high fashion found in the *Storm Troupers* photo shoot link to the aesthetics and formal features of other visual frames (e.g., the aesthetics of widely recognized military events) located outside the space and time of Hurricane Sandy's aftermath.

I conclude that the study of formal, aesthetic, and referentially-based visual sign arrangements is useful toward both everyday image interpretation and for visual-rhetorical critics, alike. One primary implication resides in an impossible claim, an implicit suggestion of recognizing the full scope of visual inscription on an auditor's body—the rhetoric of transparent knowing through visual representation. Yet, the former modality—the rhetoric of resemblance—can inform and guide public, photographic discourse in more expansive ways than evidenced in the *Storm Troupers* aftermath, as long as the delineation of resemblance is not situated as a tool of transparent seeing/knowing/transcendence.

In other words, I advocate for avoiding a conflation of the resemblance function with a task it responsibly cannot do—to represent lived experience for others. No dichotomous relationship between photographic images and those who *read experience* via the same images can provide a full measure of substitution (i.e., virtual representations in place of the 'real thing').

This is in part due to the fickle, unstable character of image and the image's synecdochal offerings provided by an absence of built-in expository forms in language to accompany an image (i.e., a newspaper caption). This malleable characteristic of the photograph, however, produces a tendency for contemporary visual audiences to engage a photograph *only* on a criterion centered squarely on *identity*.

Aesthetic “firstnessess” – a photograph's features of resemblance—are overlooked. Considerations of image aesthetics are displaced by the multimodal temptations to express opinion (and in doing so, to reassert one's identity) via the opportunity for comment brought by each image and its mystical lack of preordained structure and provincial interpretation. *Storm Troupers* and its accompanying public discourses demonstrate and confirm this contemporary social phenomenon of the photographic image.

While far from iconic in status, the image published in *Vogue* associates a public response imbued with meaning and the vehicle through which such interpretation resides—a text-centered frame. The widely recognized work of Hariman and Lucaites across the authors' imagistic corpus addresses the criteria for iconicity and how images meeting that threshold function rhetorically. How a “visual culture” first makes sense and meaning of a photographic text as it circulates across a threshold of numbers, in part defining a photograph as iconic, and subsequently, how the image—as text—becomes both a literal and symbolic token for deliberative re-appropriation, remain the primary concerns of the authors on a rhetorical exigence.

However, their concern over the threshold for which a photograph reaches “aesthetic status” as iconic also functions to center and re-center the photograph in its textual role in order to extract and account for its various interpretations—shared or idiosyncratic. The authors'

imagined audience to which the iconic photograph circulates swarms around the centered text to re-distribute its potential as a deliberative resource in the “liberal democratic polity.” In part, theirs is a meta-level account of visual politics with the image as that which addresses this polity in textual form. Every interpretation and its rhetorical functioning runs in and through the text, not merely as example, but as imbued with a natural position for criticism. Put another way, for Hariman and Lucaites, textual agency, from an audience read is *assumed* as primary, regardless of a reflexive nod to “objectivity” and its false promises, and as such, an image-first modality of rhetorical inquiry is not made problematic by the authors [*italics mine*]:

[A] large aesthetic frame unfolds from the vantage of the photographer, who is *above and at some distance* from the scene. From this vantage, one looks down on the scene from a safe place that is not included within it... The viewer is disconnected from the scene, *positioned as a distant spectator who can neither be harmed by nor affect* the action folding below. The viewer of the picture acquires the neutral, “objective” stance of the camera.<sup>84</sup>

While the authors recognize the meta-organization amongst apparatus, viewer, and text, their description is made ironic by 1) their distancing of the critic (as opposed to the viewer) to the central object (text); 2) the assumption that a viewer must *interpret through the text* (hence the voice and verbal tense inferring a “distance” and “safe place” provided by the text), and 3) that the “camera” is a general and assumptive stand-in for the photographer, who in turn is treated as an objective entity (as opposed to the reader’s stance on “objective” photography).

Their meta-level read of images is no doubt both rigorous and demanding of the reader and critic, alike. The authors’ understanding of how the visual articulates with politics is unrivaled in the field, on my read. Yet, claims toward a “performance space” in which audiences can find “emotional” interpretation reside in the text, alone. That is, the iconic text is “framed” in an assumed position of fixity, to which the visual critic must orient in order to follow their

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<sup>84</sup> Hariman and Lucaites, *No Caption Needed*, 215.



methodological framework. If images can *invoke* an emotional response, there is no assumption that a relational re-making of an image can provide an alternative framework through which an agential functioning distributes via moving relationships. Nor can a critic circumvent the quest for a visual and public literacy—without claims derived solely from a centrally positioned visual text. No heuristic be found outside the power of the image. Image potential starts and ends in the form of a deductive object of analysis. As such, I have little to quarrel with their well thought criteria for iconicity, nor is the scope of my project one that addresses such definitions. Put differently, my own claims move away from the authors' placement of imagistic power, their assumptions of image-first agency (plus an object-ive exigency), and instead toward the *inclusion* of the image-text as one in a moving relationship from which positive power (in the Foucauldian sense) becomes generative to both visual meaning and visual being.

Additionally, the ostensible exigency of recirculation tied to Hariman and Lucaites' claims of iconic re-appropriation—expressed as hopeful democratic outcomes via the symbolic image-text—says little with regard to how iconicity functions in tandem with a photographic act and its “recursive” qualities. That is, if traditional rhetorical criticism ties acts of public deliberation to future outcomes, then Hariman and Lucaites' criterion of iconicity as interpellating a visual and public culture--fails to embed a recursive interpretation of the deliberation process. Recursivity, as Stormer notes, is defined as the “tireless circulation between past and present.”<sup>85</sup> Present deliberation of iconic images by a visual public--in the form of reinvention and recirculation—fails to consider the temporal considerations of an image's recursive “movement.” Past is past, and future deliberation of iconic repurposing locks this argument—not into fallacy—rather, it disregards / discards the relational distributions of an

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<sup>85</sup> Nathan Stormer, “Recursivity: A Working Paper on Rhetoric and Mn timer. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 99, no. 1 (2013): 28.

imaging rhetoric within its own "tireless" movement. Hariman and Lucaites in no way present their scope of arguments as encompassing the whole of photography's remaking. I advocate, nonetheless, that a *gathered* perspective on photography and its dispersal of public persuasions--should in the least account for the relational conditions promoting the idea of visual distribution. Readings of famous visual texts, in other words, treat the iconic image as *fungible*—as liquid currency. The image from this view functions as a fixed entity to be traded and exchanged without equivocal concern. As I've asserted to this point, a visual rhetoric can be thought otherwise as a form of inquiry; it can function to pull the ground up from its two-dimensional flatness.

As an example of such a counter-frame, consider the concept of immanence, the flip-side of the terministic screen from a relational view. As an alternative to existing notions of modern transcendence, an immanent ontology recognizes a radical empiricism for navigating social phenomena in terms of immanent "folds"--contra Newtonian units of analysis and differentiation, and against the promises of digital emancipation.<sup>86</sup> Instead, such an ontology recognizes artifacts within a "monist" framework wherein a focus on apparent differences (e.g., between two texts) are considered instead diffractions of the same phenomena<sup>87</sup>. As such, I consider the visual aesthetics from an immanent perspective as commensurate with the photographic, relational act. Through this frame, one can consider the potential of disrupting modernity's schemas via commonly mediated texts (i.e, image/photograph). These texts may rely on over-determined affordances of transcending time/space, again through the use of aesthetic *convention*. The everyday use of visual conventions rely foremost on an imagined *telos* as a key rhetorical

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<sup>86</sup> Clayton Crockett, *Deleuze Beyond Badiou: Ontology, Multiplicity, and Event*, Columbia University Press (2013), 88.

<sup>87</sup> See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*; see also Steve Wiley and Jeremy Packer's work within the speech communication field on monist frameworks for material inquiry.

achievement of construing transcendence. I contend such a *telos*-based inquiry of the visual elbows out other powerful agents through which reiterative meaning has little guarantee of avoiding chaos or the implications of visual inter-texts gathered together without the promise of total reconstruction, without the promise of striation.

### *Analysis*

The lead photograph appearing in *Storm Troupers*, entitled, *Three If By Sea*, depicts three fashion models in a line, perilously hanging onto a rail on the starboard side of a 45' Coast Guard "response boat," ostensibly cruising through the harbor [Figure 3].

The models are wearing all-white, full-length dresses, each with a slightly different cut. The impossibly high heels worn by all three, in addition to the visual sensation of the response boat's movement (i.e., a slight blurring of the vehicle) creates a sense of exhilaration and danger. While the situation looks dangerous, the models' stoic facial expressions, body lines, dresses flowing accordingly with the boat's acceleration, and their carefully sculpted hair-in-the-wind—all constitute the aesthetic signs commonly found within commercial fashion photography. There is one first responder pictured, a man wearing Coast Guard garb, and he appears to be operating the rescue boat. The position of the rail and the models hanging onto it would otherwise block a reader's view of the boat operator / first responder, but we see him through a gap in-between the second and third models. Significantly, the color balance in the photograph is disparate. The majority of the frame's space is occupied by the boat in the foreground and the harbor out of focus in the background, and both figures are characteristically photojournalistic in color and style. A mundane blue-grey sky, lacking contrast, and the slight blur in the boat's motion provide

the candid anchors for reading the image as strictly editorial. Yet, the models look almost as if they have been transplanted to the scene (or photoshopped into the image during post-production). It's not just that they are mismatched in obvious terms of association (models and coast guard personnel/machinery), it's the color and direction of the light reflecting upon their faces and bodies—lighting not found elsewhere in the frame. The color temperature of the light hitting the models is on the warm end of the Kelvin scale measured in degrees, which is typical for commercial shoots attempting to emulate natural, ambient light, and specifically, the light that comes from the sun in late afternoon. The white dresses subtly reflect this warmer color temperature, and the acute direction of the light creates a textured effect, particularly in the third model's flowing dress. Additionally, the direction of the light places on the models' faces what studio photographers know as a "butterfly" effect—the effect created on a face by a light coming from roughly 45 degrees (up and to the right) to the subject's face. The models must be placed toward the front of the boat (right side of the image) if the light is to create such an effect. The primary light source—natural, artificial, or more likely, both—is coming from outside the frame, from the right-hand side, and against the steely sky sprawled across the background of the image. The boat is heading in the direction of the models' light source. In contrast to the otherwise blue-tinted frame, the light falling on the models give them the appearance of being closer to the foreground than the laws of physics would allow. In color theory, blue and yellow (cool and warm are rough equivalents) are complementary colors, which is a way of denoting them as opposites. As such, the models are endowed with exclusive lighting. The first responder, meanwhile, is depicted as a minor figure, and placed fully within the shadow created by the boat's enclosure. After all, the photo is not entitled, *Four If By Sea*.

The aesthetics deployed in Leibovitz' opening photograph juxtapose modern photographic genres (i.e., photojournalism and well-resourced commercial studio photography) through choices in color, quality of light, and choices of the material from which the light reflects (i.e., models' hair, dresses, or the boat covered by a flat, diffused light on a cloudy day). This aesthetic marking of light reflects formal differences from which generic categorization can claim once those differences are articulated as such. Yet, it is the available associations of these aesthetic signs that give rise to interpretation and meaning for audiences. For example, as readers constrained the scope of discourses following the shoot to poor decisions on the part of *Vogue*/Leibovitz, those concerns never materialized through a referencing of the photograph's *aesthetic* qualities or the differences of genre found from within and without the photo shoot. Yet, it may be unreasonable to think such readers were completely unaffected by the linked resemblances of color and light as I have described, even if not explicitly articulated. One respondent, representing a minority view, wrote: "This is fine, at least the first responders get some shine too. They can say they were in *Vogue*. Tasteless would be them posing in front of someones [sic] flooded house." Whether an endorsement or criticism of the shoot, both perspectives attempted to shore up the walls of normative, acceptable opinion—an invocation of publicly-derived *doxa*—by marking what is and isn't "tasteless." Yet, for this commenter, it may be possible that this image simply contributed to a flood of other fashion-context images—and in effect, strengthening for him/herself the association between specific types of light and fashion imagery. My point is that this association between light and genre need not find articulation for it to take suasive hold of a reader. The "firstnesses" of Peirce's semiotic theory—the resemblances of an image—may appear in discourse as overlooked for the sake of making an identity-based claim on the "real" content of an image, but its influence is often left unmeasured as there is no

such category of aesthetic resemblance that can be parsed into bounded units of analysis yielding measurements in precision. For this reason, popular photographic discourse opts for the more graspable style of making meaning, often without direct reference to an image's formal, aesthetic, and material elements. Instead, the everyday act of everyday people reading public photographs relies on a silent process of visual-symbolic association across time and space. This process is free from the burdens of rational explanation and a requirement to assert claims through formal language propositions. Yet, even within this process of everyday, informal, visual reading, a criticism can reveal just how far and long a photograph's symbolic association may reach.

As such, the *Vogue* photographs do not stand alone. They reach for symbolic support across time and space, and find existing cultural formations offering up aesthetic precursors. Robert Capa's famous photograph of the U.S. military incursion onto Normandy's Omaha Beach during WWII set not only a precedent for the visions of future war photographers, but also a precedent for how American culture reads war imagery [Figure 4].<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> The Hungarian-American, Robert Capa, along with his brother, Cornell Capa, and the notorious Henri-Cartier Bresson, were instrumental in the formation of the Magnum Agency. Magnum is cited by most working photographers as holding the foremost influence for photojournalistic norms in the post-WWII era. Still based in New York, the agency has retained its reputation by contracting with acclaimed photographers across the world. In no small measure, Capa's photography before and after WWII helped to form the norms of editorial aesthetics still held in place by print media today. Significantly, his Omaha Beach photography propelled the mythos surrounding war photography to unforeseen heights. Today, the most esteemed prizes for photographers (Pulitzer, World Press Association, WHPA, POY) reveal the normative power of Capa's war photography. For example, consider the extremely uneven ratio of prizes awarded for images of war, images about war, and images in the context of war.



[Figure 4]  
Robert Capa's *France Normandy Omaha Beach*  
*LIFE*, published in its June 19th, 1944 issue

The lore surrounding the photo has helped its popularity; not only did Capa risk death but only 11 frames survived due to a film developing error by a 15-year-old clerk.<sup>89</sup> Significantly, professionals and amateurs, alike, still mimic the aesthetic elements of his image, entitled, *France Normandy Omaha Beach* (Figure 3). On the surface we see resemblance to the event, blurry motion, black and white, and both the humanness (literally) and machinery (literally, again) of war. With reference to *Storm Troopers*, similar human presence and machinery is on display; they are symbolically a part of how image readers so quickly recognize the rescue function—construed broadly—of first responders and machinery. On a second read of the

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<sup>89</sup> *Get the Picture*, 27.

“double moment,” we assert, gather meaning into the process of visual inscription. We tacitly assert the value of human life instead of its operation on the surface, we tacitly assert relational texts not pictured, such as the opening 21 minutes of *Saving Private Ryan* and all we may know (and don’t) about our personal experiences viewing that film (clearly, I was not at Normandy), we tacitly assert the event of 9/11 which fused the associations of first responders with the associations of military response, and emblazoned onto audience consciousness through the shared form invoked by the Marine flag raising on Iwo Jima and the firemen who raised the American flag atop the rubble of the WTC, as noted by Robert Hariman and John Lucaites.

Notably, “first responder” as a term itself is only circulated in ubiquity as a pious label, post-9/11.<sup>90</sup> More importantly, we tacitly assert heroism tied to both acts (soldier and photographer’s) as bravery and service, as photographic images typically represent the photographed subject and the photographer who remains invisible. Both the set of photographs and first responder subjects are naturalized as heroic and functioning as sacraments. Setting up the read through these icons paves the way to knock them down, as well. As such, it is not difficult to understand how readers reacted as if the placement of fashion models was not only misplaced or inappropriately placed within an existing aesthetic theme, but also how their mere depiction functions as sacrilegious to the icons tied to civic, moral duty—visual representations of first responders and their technologies.

*Three If By Sea* offered up a critical opportunity to delineate formal elements of an image, with generic ascriptions imparted after the fact. On the other hand, the Capa photograph foregrounds associative functions of visual symbolism linked to identity markers, specific

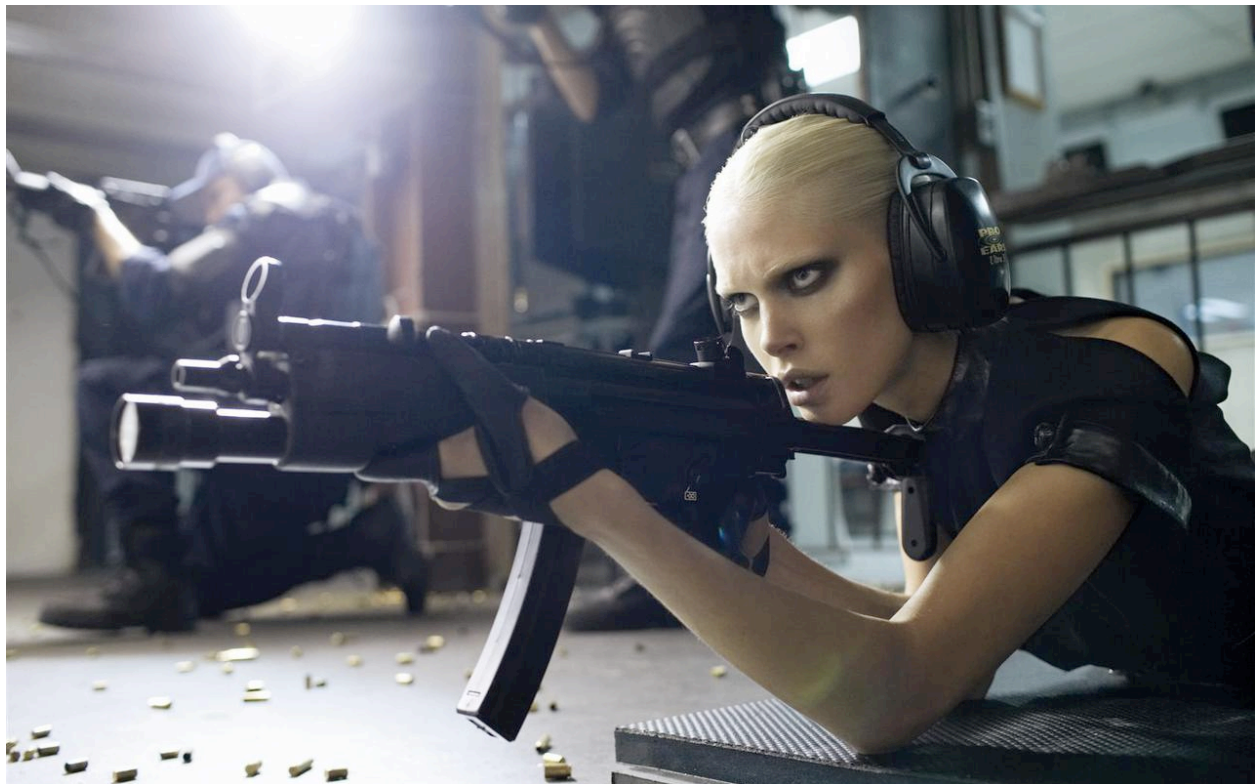
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<sup>90</sup> Although usage of the term, “first responder” dates back to at least 1976, the Oxford English Dictionary (*OED*) marks the term’s inclusion as a 2006 “draft addition” to its entries while denoting its singular etymological origin comes from North America. See *OED*. June 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/70609?>



events reaching across space and time, the visual support of a category now ubiquitously known as first responder, and the complex symbolic relationships delineating what may be considered as sacred outside of organized religion.

The third image, I contend, is capable of constituting a vastly different genre—even as the aesthetic elements are similar to those found in the previous two photographs. This image, shot by American fashion photographer, Steven Meisel in 2006, is part of a larger set entitled, *State of Emergency* [Figure 5].



[Figure 5]  
Steven Meisel's *State of Emergency*, *Vogue Italia*, 2006

Notably, the photographs were published in *Vogue Italia*. All of the photographs depict, once again, fashion models, their carefully sculpted styling, and elite wardrobes.

The models are depicted as post-9/11 subjects, and this time their conspicuous appearance occurs by way of unexpected backdrops such as an airport security checkpoint or in the process of being arrested by what appears to be members of a S.W.A.T. team. Specifically, I have chosen a photograph from this set featuring a woman (model) at what appears to be a police gun range. She is laying down in pronated position, taking aim at a target outside of the frame using a black, modern, automatic assault rifle. She is much closer to the camera than in the previous two photos, although she is aiming in the same general direction as the American soldier depicted in Capa's Normandy photograph. Two other officers/soldiers are obscured by the camera's shallow depth of field, but they appear to be doing the same with the exception of position—one is shooting from a kneeling position and the other, standing. The lighting falls on the model, accentuating her straight, slicked-back and blonde hair, her eyes, the fashion detail on her left sleeve, while tracing an outline of her assault weapon through a light "rim" effect (similar to backlighting but showing slightly more detail). Her clothing, rifle, headphone-style ear protection, her gloves, and mascara, are all black in color, which creates a stark contrast to her otherwise blond hair and pale skin. Her brow is furrowed from concentrating on the target. Her styling is reminiscent of contemporary, high-budget Hollywood action films, and if someone told me this was a movie still from a sequel to *The Matrix*, that person would have little trouble convincing me.

The aesthetic features of the Meisel photograph are well recognized, as referenced by its blockbuster-like character. If not well recognized, then at least more recognizable than the light aesthetics characterizing the Leibovitz Coast Guard image published in *Vogue Italia*'s print counterpart. As such, it is able to deflect many of the identity concerns/criticism that the *Storm Troupers* photograph cannot. While *Three If By Sea* depicts four people on a boat and is shot

from a distance (Leibovitz photographed the models from an accompanying, smaller, 25' response boat), Meisel chose to place his subject in the foreground, very close to the camera.

Silverman writes:

Theoreticians of cinematic suture agree that films are articulated and the viewing subject spoken by means of interlocking shots. They are thus in fundamental accord with Noel Burch's remark that 'Although camera movements, entrances into and exits from frame, composition and so on can all function as devices aiding in the organization of the film object. . . the shot transition [remains] the basic element [of that organization].' Shot relationships are seen as the equivalent of syntactic ones in linguistic discourse, as the agency whereby meaning emerges and a subject-position is constructed for the viewer.<sup>91</sup>

The light skin and hair of the model/officer/assassin is depicted in contrast to the otherwise black-clad character, and leads the reader's eye to her expressive face. The image is strangely intimate (bullets sprawled across the floor and all). Meisel's photograph appears as one that is squarely about this specific person, which aligns well with the formal shot arrangements of a protagonist in a film, or the singular subject of an editorial photo essay.

Overwhelmingly, the discourses emerging from both well-circulating media sources and readers, alike, laid down heavy criticism suggesting Vogue/Leibovitz made a "mistake" in their editorial decisions, both conceptually and in terms of accurately assessing audience response ahead of publication. Responses to Leibovitz' involvement ranged from placing her in the center of a comic error while otherwise lauding the photographer's career, to publicizing her private financial problems and pinning the blame on her desire to profit off of a tragedy. Within the discourse, there is no shortage of potential reasons motivating either Leibovitz or *Vogue's* editorial handlers. Yet, when the focus of critique is turned toward an ostensible warrant for *why* it would be wrong to be motivated by such reasoning, there exists little textual support to say so. As a corpus, I characterize readership commentary by its tendency to assert strong opinions

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<sup>91</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 138.

against *Vogue*/Leibovitz' motivations without punctuating the primary reason(s), written as if those reasons are obvious enough within a given, contemporary *doxa*, to leave absent. Following Mitchell, I posit that audiences considered these images as belonging to one, lump-sum interpretive process (not to be confused with a consideration for one meaning in a set of images) fusing aesthetic resemblance with authorial intent, and iconicity with the warrants for cultural identity formation. The images from *Storm Troupers*, in a sense, constrained readers into an interpretative mode wherein referencing aesthetic characteristics became the same as referencing the deeper concerns of normative propriety—the aforementioned *doxa* guiding one's sense of appropriately rendered public judgment.

The surface-level signs within the *Storm Trouper* images function as icons for multiple repurposing—as evidentiary, legalistic, truth-telling 'icons of proof' for a deed (inappropriate or otherwise), and as icons representing a gathering place for identity markers in the minds of *Vogue*'s readership. These two characterizations of iconicity have a long held relationship with photography and aesthetics but they endure through *language*.<sup>92</sup> The two notions have endured

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<sup>92</sup> Ocularcentrism not only indicates a given culture's reliance and preference for the visual, but also marks how the visual binds to the language of modern thought, and thus its function in the creation of modern knowledge claims: "Leonardo da Vinci (ca. 1508) built a small camera obscura to study perspective drawing. René Descartes, in 1637, put an ox eye in the hole to study focus... Sitting in their dark chambers, such thinkers were fascinated with the way it inevitably raised basic questions about the structure of the human eye, the reliability of perception, the nature of human memory and understanding." However, this is not just a problem lacking available modes of expression, although that question certainly poses its own set of interesting quandaries. Rather, the visual's uptake in legitimate modes of knowledge inquiry means that it modulates alongside formations of widely accepted knowledge claims. Martin Jay names the dichotomy of *lux/lumen* as a jumping off point for many thinkers concerned with the ocular. *Lux* is visible and refers to what we might today equate with visual perception, while *Lumen* can be thought of as mystical, higher ordered, or in contemporary terms, the operation of light matter (waves and particles) on human bodies which remains invisible to empirical perception. Descartes attended to the latter term because of his belief that the "geometric laws" of light "could be studied deductively because they corresponded to the natural geometry of the mind." See Lee W. Bailey, *Skulls Darkroom: The Camera Obscura and Subjectivity*, in *Philosophy of Technology*, ed. Paul T. Durbin (Norwell, MA:

through radical changes in photographic apparatus and affordance; they have endured through radical discursive breaks informing image interpretation, as well—including the shift to digital, photographic practice.

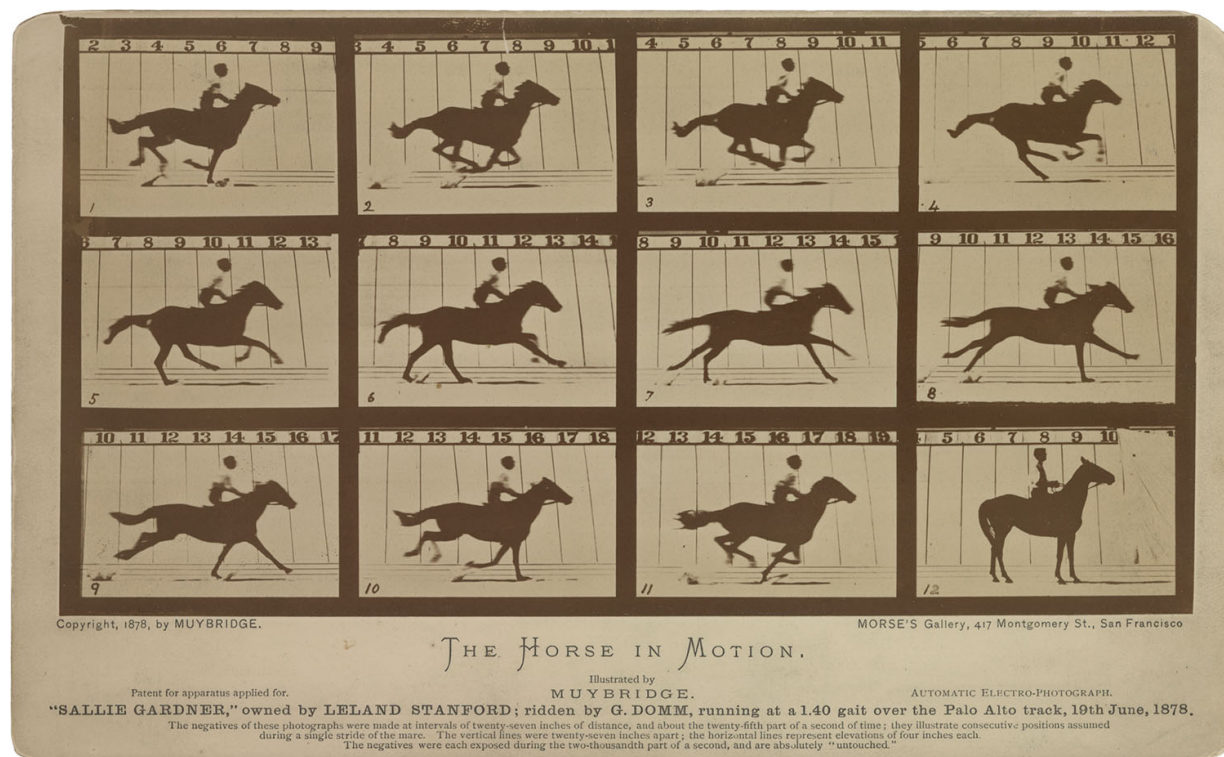
Since its modern invention in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, photography's function as a truth-telling apparatus has endured to the present. From the phantasm of visual proof presented by Hollywood to traditional news media's propensity to propel photojournalism to the status of objective truth, images have long served as a transparent counterpart to language. For example, the visual figure/scene wherein a kidnapper displays a daily newspaper alongside the kidnapped in order to verify the truth of the present moment--could easily serve both a blockbuster thriller and an unfortunate event mediated through CNN. Yet, a photographic truth function operates across multiple contexts, not least of which is its functional use as a method of scientific validity.

Perhaps the best-known exemplar of this function is contained within an image and its narrative, culled just short of photography's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. In 1878, the English photographer, Eadweard Muybridge, already well-known in the West's photographic communities for his sublime landscape photographs (he preceded Ansel Adams both in vision and in time), successfully photographed a horse in successive frames, with each frame freezing horse and jockey at a gait of approximately 36 mph [Figure 6].<sup>93</sup>

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Kluwer Academic Publishers), 63, and Martin Jay, "The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism." *Poetics Today* 9 no. 2 (1988), 313-314.

<sup>93</sup>See "Freeze Frame: Eadweard Muybridge's Photography of Action," *National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution*. This exhibit was on view from Oct. 2000-March 2001 in the Documentary Photography Gallery. See also "Entry 87: 'Animal Locomotion'" *Codex 99*, <http://www.codex99.com/photography/87.html>.



[Figure 6]  
 Eadweard Muybridge's *The Horse in Motion*, "Sallie Gardner,"  
 Owned by Leland Stanford; Running at a 1:40 Gait  
 over the Palo Alto Track. June 19, 1878.

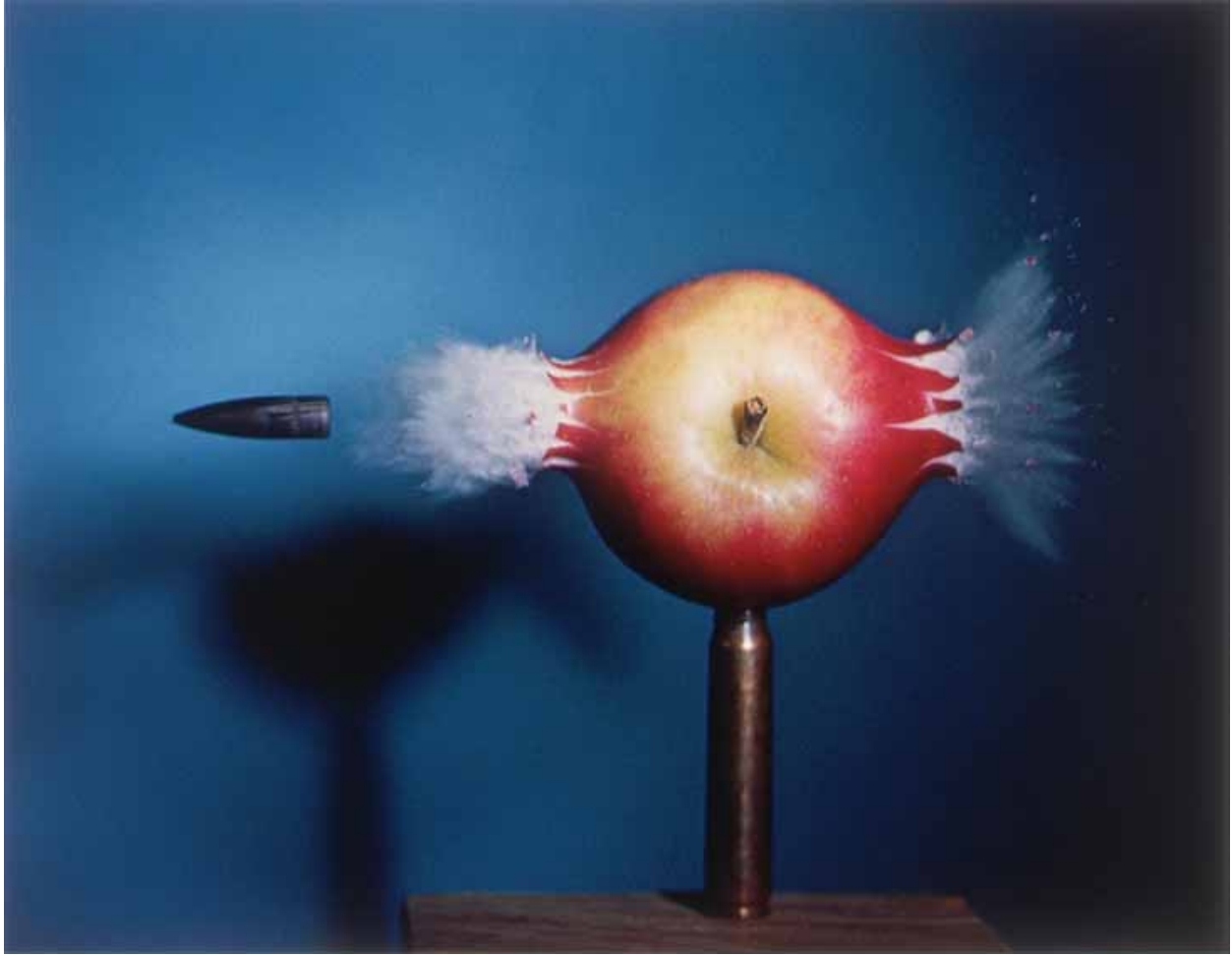
Notably, his success was measured by the set of photographs as evidence for settling a long-time curiosity: do all four hooves of a horse ever leave the ground? The answer, as evidenced by a series of frozen photographs, was an unequivocal "yes." Muybridge gained widespread fame for the successful experiment commissioned by Leland Stanford (Figure 1).

This episode of photographic history, or the textual version of it, evokes the seemingly precise rhythms of a well-trained racehorse galloping; the gait is denoted precisely to be "1.40," from which we are to infer that it did not deviate. The elaborate *techne* of the setup—trip wires to set off shutters for wet-plates, the careful measurements of camera separation, and of course, the challenge of freezing a galloping horse—also offered a view of photographic practice mired

in the exigence of scientific precision. He would later patent this as the “Automatic Electro-Photograph.” Muybridge believed that photography was more capable of an affordance than it was previously held to be, and after his success, print outlets such as *Scientific American* vetted the process and brought forth this discursive practice as a legitimate use of photography. In addition, Muybridge’s experiment negotiated the traces of movement (before-during-after) perceived and interpreted by human eyes. Prior to his success, this determination of movement by human eyes was not precise in scientific terms, but Muybridge’s photographs put into motion an expectation—a suggestion—of what ‘to see’ *in time* when one couldn’t see. Significantly, Muybridge would eventually engage in another project of movement—not of the photographic subject, but of the photographs, themselves. In 1882, he invented the zoopraxiscope, which set images on glass in succession, and the movement suggested an unbroken line of vision through time. In other words, Muybridge had invented the first form of motion picture apparatus. Using the same logics of precision and believing the fantasy of stopping time, other photographers would follow suit. The most notable of these is Harold Edgerton, the M.I.T. engineering professor who used the freezing affordances of light strobe, stop-motion photography to capture his iconic image of a bullet’s impact on an apple [Figure 7].<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> The photograph “was used to illustrate a lecture he gave in 1964 entitled “How to Make Applesauce at MIT.” For more on Edgerton’s stop-motion photography, see *The Edgerton Digital Collections (EDC) Project*, <http://edgerton-digital-collections.org>.



[Figure 7]  
Harold Edgerton's *Bullet Through Apple*, 1964

The Muybridge narrative and the Edgerton photograph reveal a long-held relational link between claims derived from photographic imagery and the language of evidence from which such knowledge finds authority. Photography served as the fantasy technique from which Muybridge could both deduce the natural movement of an animal and provide visual proof of his photo-scientific triumph. In the experiment's scientific frame of deduction (The hooves left the ground: true or false? Was the hypothesis nullified?), photography serves as an apparatus to extend the notion of scientific reliability—and it does this job quite well. Within this proof function of photography, other considerations of “reliable” photographs—especially those



outside the image aesthetics of scientific reliability—are bracketed or ignored by auditors in service of a seamless narrative frame enfolding audiences. The Muybridge story “sutures” vested audiences into a story moored to an expectation of a decisive climax or culmination of story.<sup>95</sup>

Other considerations of the photo—considerations forcefully bracketed by the power of narrative exigency and a desire for decisive knowledge claims—are held within a category I’ve been referring to thus far, by way of Mitchell, as the “event of recognition.” Naming image recognition as evental, as Mitchell and Derrida have, suggests there is far more to the operation of an image on a body than the image’s surface-level aesthetics could offer by way of signification practices.

While the Muybridge photograph is constrained to its stated exigency of providing proof, it provides only a sparse offering capable of addressing or accessing known and unknown visual inscriptions on the body—from an audience’s perspective. The aesthetics of Muybridge’s horse and Edgerton’s apple offer an aesthetic commonplace for visual rhetorics of precision, but say little else about what the moment offers outside of a scientifically informed method. All that cannot be known when we remake these famous photographs *in the image of bodily sensation*—what Latour, borrowing from Heidegger, calls a “gathering” of “concern.”<sup>96</sup> These concerns are not materially embedded into images, of course, but instead, we might think of our deeply held concerns and anxieties as begging the image for a seat at the table, that place where meaning is codified in the form of a frozen, still assembly of visual signification—the photograph. This

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<sup>95</sup> In Kaja Silverman’s landmark work on film theory, she details how moving images suture viewers into a seamless narrative through series of arbitrary “shot arrangements.” Notably, her concept of suture articulates with classical Greek performance divisions of sound/image/text (*melos-opsis-lexis*). Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>96</sup> Bruno Latour, Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern, *Critical Inquiry*, 30 no.2 (2004).

temporal reversal is important to understanding that interpretive ascriptions are often latent and assigned *after* the fact of image production. What Mitchell refers to as the “event of recognition,” as I read it, is heavily informed by Derridean thought on image, and in particular what Derrida refers to as “that dangerous supplement,” which is an elusive dimension of articulation residing within each image.<sup>97</sup> The supplement, for Derrida, functions as a stand-in for unintelligible excess, for extradiscursive sensory inscription whose meaning has little guarantee of ever articulating itself through known language forms—including visual signification.

Encountering—that is, recognizing—the excess of visual signification may not yield iterable, malleable interpretations of the image, but this is not to say excess cannot inform human bodies through sensual, affective modes. Unintelligible reference, then, prompts neither a warrant to problematize an image analysis based upon vague, unknown categories nor does it warrant writing off completely what an image cannot say without its discursive tools to articulate a stable meaning of image. Instead, the aesthetic arrangements that portend representation through a criterion of resemblance may offer critics a way to speak into excess meaning by linking known symbolic associations within and without the image. For images emanating from a regional center as New York, criticism must address a known space of reference—and particularly when that region is culturally marked by a grand tragedy such as 9/11. Yet, images representing New York are not determined solely by regionalism—they may link symbolically across space to radically different regions and cultural contexts.

What Mitchell refers to as the “double moment” of image encounter finds alliance in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. They offer the term, “rhizome,” to critique the clean lines of modernist signification, and to point out the potential of a sign or nonsign’s

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<sup>97</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 141-64.

passage into radically different contexts. A “rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states.”<sup>98</sup> Deleuze and Guattari offer a view not uncommon in continental philosophy, that links seemingly disparate regions and cultures and which advises to avoid a linear analysis of signs—known and unknown, of resemblance and of recognition.<sup>99</sup> In other words there is no such thing as a cut and dry signification process, with one sign transplanted to another context until enough signs gather that an image begins to emerge out of a jigsaw puzzle cut with precision. Instead, images inscribe foremost onto bodies—actual human bodies. This process of inscription is highly complex, highly unstable while scholars and publics reading visual images through a hermeneutical lens *may* derive *some* claims inductively. That is, the photographic inscription process appears to evade total discursive expression and interpretation. Yet, to accept the preceding claim is to accept a linear agential relationship between a photograph and its reader. To suggest that total understanding, meaning-making, or comprehensive interpretation of a photograph is difficult to achieve is also to say that these meaningful endeavors are possible in the first instance. A photograph may “evade” full translation because of a cultural presumption that meaning making *should* be possible. This places an agency of transparent, interpretative powers into human hands rather than onto human *bodies*.

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<sup>98</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21.

<sup>99</sup> Supported by a Derridian thesis, Laclou and Mouffe consider a “constitutive outside” in excess of our symbolic literacy in *Hegemony and Social Strategy*. Communication scholar Niklas Luhmann’s argument for “autopoiesis” similarly relies on a discursive framing in order to consider extra-discursive dimensions of communication. For an elaboration of affects, see Brian Massumi, *Parables For The Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), and Jane Bennett, “The Force of Things: Steps Toward an Ecology of Matter.” *Political Theory*, 32.3 (2004): 347-72.

While the body is often considered by scholars in terms of its materiality, the more tacit claim is that the body is locatable primarily in space, supported by an ocularcentric privileging for visualizing.<sup>100</sup> You can point to the space of a body in an image, but it is more difficult to point to the time of the body within an image. Time, however, is also crucial to image analysis. For example, the temporal category of rhythm also regulates and resides in bodies, it may be signified in terms of consistency and irregularity.<sup>101</sup> Debra Hawhee insightfully tropes Burke with a concern for bodies. She quotes him here: “The rhythm of a page, in setting up a corresponding rhythm in the body, creates marked degrees of expectancy, or acquiescence.” Burke describes the relationship between “rhythm” and “bodily processes” in terms of form, and as easily recognizable to biological beings. Using music as his context, he notes: “Rhythm is so natural to the organism that even a succession of uniform beats will be interpreted as a succession of accented and unaccented beats.”<sup>102</sup> I find almost indispensable the notion of interpreting homogenous “beats” as a way to understand the “rhythm” of the photographic act of recognition, and by extension, the concepts of “succession” and “acquiescence” provide insight into more concrete photographic practices indicating time within the material image. On “innate forms,” Burke writes, “These forms are the 'potentiality for being interested by certain processes or arrangements,' or the 'feeling for such arrangements of subject-matter as produce crescendo, contrast, comparison, balance, repetition, disclosure, reversal, contraction, expansion,

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<sup>100</sup> David Michael Levin, *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>101</sup> Here, I am referring to time in terms of space: “the temporal category of rhythm . . . resides in bodies. . .” This reveals at least my own tendency to reference bodies as visual, and as something to which you can point.

<sup>102</sup> See Debra Hawhee, *Moving Bodies: Kenneth Burke at the Edges of Language* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press), 27, and Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

magnification, series, and so on.”<sup>103</sup> Whether he means innate (as attributed to others’ interpretations) or innate as a bodily desire (of “being interested”), is less important to this chapter than recognizing that these practices become a way to understand the distinction between aesthetic alignments within an image and its counterpart of recognition. Recognition, “that dangerous supplement,” pushes scholars to find in language a mastery, a will toward reading images in totality, even if such an endeavor is neither possible nor encouraged.

We understand the singular image within a field of homogenous capture--much like grabbing a frame from a video. Repetition is the form of homogeneous representation in this interpretation. Yet, like the horse, repetition is nothing but a series of singular moments (a series of unique, still photographs) appearing as repetitive sameness because of *expectation* that emerges from rhythm and the interpretation of such, informed by the biological regulation of the human body’s own repetitions (e.g., heart, breath, walking, as Burke notes in CS). Understood rhythmically, the still image functions not in terms of its capacity for scientific truth (e.g., the exigencies of Muybridge and Edgerton), but in terms of its guise as a unit sequenced together with other units toward uniformity. This is why the Muybridge illustration and Edgerton’s apple do not signify the same thing. The former works toward expectation in the form of a singular still while the latter has already spilled the beans, so to speak, and functions as an illustration of the visual-technological sublime.<sup>104</sup>

Considering the first responders and their machinery as merely aesthetic, as I have done in portions of my reading, may similarly be thought of as sacrilege. After all, I am also using aesthetics as a warrant to preferentially address the many concerns of a photo set; concerns that

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<sup>103</sup> Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 46.

<sup>104</sup> Nathan Stormer, “Addressing the Sublime: Space, Mass Representation, and the Unpresentable,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21 no. 3 (2004), 212-240.

may not reside within acceptable norms of public image reception. For visual-rhetorical critics, the second part of the “double moment” of encountering an image—its recognition—provides what Ralph Cintron has called a “storehouse of energy” in describing the character of an inventive *topos*. As such, recognizing an image outside of its aesthetic relations is to read, perhaps too deeply, into any and all projections, anxieties, and motivations of an imagined set of readers. Instead, the hope of this essay is to point to aesthetic affinities across images as a way to prompt different (and hopefully, more expansive) inventive arrangements for image readers of publicly-distributed photographs. Doing so does not place aesthetic concerns above identity concerns, but instead, transplants visual-rhetorical discourses on photography to a more subtle terrain capable of marking formal differences without the burden of sacrilegious association moored to concerns over identity. Again, following Latour and Heidegger, I contend that photographs are better understood as *gathering* meaning, even as our discursive forms of the visual and language resist total understanding. Expanding the territory of photographic discourse through a separation of its functions—however artificial the distinctions—assists the everyday reading of photographs by offering up an expanded literacy (of light, of arrangement, of relation to other images), and subdues the desire to read imagery in totality. As a photograph is inscribed onto the senses of the body, what is articulable may represent only a small portion of that photograph’s suasive influence. Put another way: reading images critically foremost requires humility on the part of the reader. Reading images strictly as a marker for identity makes it easier to read people in that same fashion; if the discourse is to be believed, it is far too easy to conflate a person’s identity with her visual counterpart. Critics of *Storm Troupers* are not wrong in their

opinions, unless that determination is guided by a moral code. Misaddressed may be a better way to situate those opinions.<sup>105</sup> Here, I again turn to the insightful Lingis. He writes:

We also all admit that the axes of the sublime and the base, the essential and the accessory, the triumphant and the degenerate, the noble and the superficial, are set forth in epics and legends, monuments and shrines, statues and songs. We find in them the ordinances that command our affirmations and our reprobations, our hopes and our visions.<sup>106</sup>

Lingus provides one of the finest descriptions a critic may apply to the functioning of images—and what I posit for this dissertation as the primary exigence for a more humane visual rhetoric for the people, imagined via reactionary discourse tied to a signifying photographic text. Reading images from this perspective recovers the apparent missteps of *Vogue*'s readership while reversing the directionality of the fantastic powers of agency granted to image-makers.

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<sup>105</sup> The notion of address invoked here is Bahktinian; Stormer borrows from the concept in his aforementioned essay; “Addressing the Sublime: Space, Mass Representation, and the Unpresentable.”

<sup>106</sup> Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 6.

## CHAPTER IV

### Conventional Conscience and Representations of “*Bare Life*”: Haiti, Aid Mobilization, and the Visual Rhetorics of Intervention

In the following chapter, I examine the extent to which visual representations of contemporary disaster aid mobilization serve as technologies of power that cover the “bare life” of subjects by invoking visual rhetorics of response.<sup>107</sup>

Looking back to Chapter 3, I brought forth a case wherein a trapped discourse of (mis)appropriation emanated from Annie Leibowitz’ photograph combining aesthetics of high fashion with real-life first responders. I argued that her use of camera aesthetics (along with *Vogue*’s post-production editing) reached far outside the photo shoot’s central image-as-text to create a set of distributed interpretations while connecting to other ubiquitous and associative images across time and space. Additionally, I analyzed Leibowitz’ expert use of photographic aesthetics. Yet, her technique operated as just one of several agential modes of a photographic act.

However, in this chapter, I turn to a different modality of photography’s sign to examine both western and Haitian subjectivity through the lens of photographic convention, arguing that these aesthetics help to form a relationship amongst field photographer, mobile technologies of western aid, and the imposition of order through images in order to create and maintain the

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<sup>107</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, (Stanford University Press, 1998).



respective *topoi* of subjugation following the massive earthquake which devastated Haiti and its citizens in January 2010.

By displacing the political with a public invitation to view the spectacular international effort to mobilize aid to Haiti—to those who are ostensibly victims of “natural” disaster—popular visual rhetorics following the earthquake turn on typical questions of Western efficiency, heroism, and from the American view, depictions of depravity. Following Giorgio Agamben’s claim that sovereignty has moved toward “a more ambiguous terrain” in its operations, representations of the recent disaster response—as a specifically Western intervention into an unfortunate culmination of nature, shoddy infrastructure, and abject poverty—displace complicity on the part of those who mobilize that very response. Instead, visual rhetorics function to construct both the Haitian and the Western subject in a way that ultimately cleanses the consciences of viewing publics.

While not a facile critique of relief agencies, I argue that visual-cultural publics negotiate the necessary function of visual appeals—through familiar aesthetic conventions of photography, a familiar refrain of this dissertation. Such imagery can and has been successfully deployed to raise funds for the purposes of immediate western aid while simultaneously questioning political practices that remain elided until the event of sublime disaster and death. Such accounts may remain occluded without the apparatuses of public and popular circulation, among which includes the visual representations circulating among visual publics. On a visual-rhetorical view, Laurie Gries delineates the importance of visual circulation both in terms of method and iconic imagery. I find significant in her approach that the author moves beyond the distribution of the image as symbolic capital for/to a general liberal democratic polity, and toward a “consequentiality” of the image. My above reference to the “event of sublime disaster” may be

better read through Gries' incisive description of the relationship among rhetoric, matter, distributed agencies, and the re-iterability of consequences:

Like a dynamic network of energy, rhetoric materializes, circulates, transforms, and sparks new material consequences, which, in turn, circulate, transform, and stimulate an entirely new divergent set of consequences. It is, in simple terms, a distributed network of becomings in which divergent consequences are actualized with time and space.<sup>108</sup>

Although this chapter examines representations of “bare life,” Agamben's paradigm establishing the consequences of (non)citizenship is of a secondary concern. Instead, I look toward the *visual construction* of bare life to interrogate the degree to which these readings were possible and stable preceding the earthquake. According to the CIA Factbook:

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere with 80% of the population living under the poverty line and 54% in abject poverty... Haiti suffers from a lack of investment because of insecurity and limited infrastructure, and a severe trade deficit... The government relies on formal international economic assistance for fiscal sustainability.<sup>109</sup>

I argue that visual rhetorics of response thus serve multiple functions: they serve as foregrounded resources for the important instrumental end of aid mobilization while supplanting political responsibility toward deeply impoverished communities in favor of a visual constructions working powerfully to clear the conscience of publics who sympathize, donate, and co-determine/reframe the meaning of compassion.

### *When not Where*

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<sup>108</sup> Laurie E. Gries, “Iconographic Tracking: A Digital Research Method for Visual Rhetoric and Circulation Studies.” *Computers and Composition*, 30 (2013), 346.

<sup>109</sup> CIA – The World Factbook – Haiti. Accessed at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ha.html>

The subtitle to Judith Butler's recent book on war photography reads: *When is Life Grievable?*<sup>110</sup> I would like to call attention to the naming of "when" as a useful analytic frame. With regard to Haiti's perpetual condition of poverty (preceding, during, and following disaster), it would seem that the conscience of Western publics might reasonably stake its (in)attention to the country based on a fixed and stable representation of its exigences or interests within Haiti.

In other words, instead of asking "where" life is grievable, Butler calls our attention to the "when." This is especially useful in understanding the conditions from which the conscience of audiences arise and become activated. It seems clear that when the event is deemed a "natural disaster," bodies that were formerly elided in their mundane poverty are now the objects of massive aid mobilization. Butler prefers the term, "representability," as opposed to representation, to get at the notion that representation cannot even happen in the first instance, unless a frame of intelligibility is granted (e.g., that Haitians bodies indeed exist and are worthy of our consideration). Read along with Agamben's distinction between *zoe* and *bios*, these visual representations of aid to Haiti can be understood as a witnessing of a temporary granting of political rights; it is the normative understanding of "natural disaster" itself that opens the door for representability. In other words, so long as the publics' view accords with a normative understanding of disaster, visual representation is allowed to take place, Haitian bodies are made intelligible, and the requisite conditions for the public's conscience are set into place. Edward Casey articulates "place" not as a fixed, spatial boundary, but rather having the characteristics of a moving, always-emerging, becoming, and *processual* event, commensurate with Heidegger's critique of emplaced fixity within infrastructures of technologies:

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<sup>110</sup> See Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* Verso (2009), and Judith Butler, *Torture, Sexual Politics and the Ethics of Photography*, Lecture delivered at Stanford University (2009), accessible at iTunes U.

Not only do such places not contain strictly, as on Aristotle's model; they do not even hold, lacking the rigor and substance of thickly lived places—in contrast once again with the ethereality of pure space, which cannot properly hold anything. Their very surface is perforated, open to continual reshaping and reconnecting with other surfaces.<sup>111</sup>

In this instance, place *is* event, and the previously invisible Haitian body that was already suffering from poverty is now made intelligible through the event of disaster.

To better understand the ways in which the event of disaster confers the representability of the post-earthquake Haitian subject, it is useful here to see the patterns of aid to Haiti in recent years, and in particular, to account for *when* Haiti has received the most monetary support from developed nations. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) keeps a record of statistics related to regions and countries that are termed as “fragile states.”<sup>112</sup> It states:

Net official development assistance (ODA) to Haiti has fluctuated over the past 20 years. Since 2002, it has increased substantially, with very sharp rises in both development aid and peacekeeping expenditure. The peaks in aid to Haiti are mainly a result of humanitarian aid, in particular to help the country recover from tropical storms in 1994, several hurricanes in 2008 and food riots in April 2008. Humanitarian aid as a proportion of total ODA to Haiti has increased from 0.2% in 2002 to over 20% in 2008.

As a result of the earthquake that hit Haiti in January 2010, the volume of aid provided to this country in the form of humanitarian assistance will, of course, increase.<sup>113</sup>

These statistics demonstrate that the total number of “development assistance” money centers around events, not general conditions of poverty. Humanitarian aid mobilization happens through the event of Haiti—not the place of Haiti—and becomes the evidence, par excellence, of

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<sup>111</sup> Edward S. Casey, “Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-World?” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 91 no. 4, (2001), 684. Here, Casey also describes place as synonymous to Deleuze and Guattari’s “desiring machines.”

<sup>112</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Aid to Fragile States: Focus on Haiti*, accessed at [http://www.oecd.org/document/10/0,3343,en\\_2649\\_34487\\_44454474\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/10/0,3343,en_2649_34487_44454474_1_1_1_1,00.html)

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

the conditions for representability. The mundaneness of poverty is not an event, nor a frame of intelligibility unless it is so designated by the state. As Butler states, "...these normative schemes work precisely through providing no image, no name, no narrative, so that there never was a life, and there never was a death."<sup>114</sup> As the mayor of Winstonville, Mississippi noted in the aftermath of Katrina, "No one would have checked on a lot of black people in these parishes while the sun shined."<sup>115</sup> Thus, the conditions that give rise to the viewer's conscience (and its cleansing) can only occur through an understanding of Haiti as event.

### *Politics of Representation*

Contemporary visual culture is recognized by scholars as an essential site of contestation, despite claims that through visual representation, "meaning cannot be guaranteed on any level."<sup>116</sup> Through the visual texts I analyze to illuminate the rhetorical function of photojournalistic depictions, we can in the least observe that these images are marked by this instability. Representation, and more specifically, in its photographic form, announces a rhetorical "truth-telling connotation" for its audiences. Yet, the photographic frame can be defined far more by what is missing from the capture than what is contained within it. Publics, then, are left to construct narratives and political claims around what is inherently *missing* within the (re)presentation of images. As such, passive audiences of visual culture make the overdetermined, interpretive leap from visual fixity toward a false rendering of others' bodies.

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<sup>114</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, (Verso, 2009), 146.

<sup>115</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Fear*, Malden, MA: (Polity, 2006), 78.

<sup>116</sup> John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 3.

The consequences of this process may vary across contexts. Insipid party photographs plastered across a social networking site may indeed rely on the same rhetorical features, but the consequences of such may not be of concern until the context reaches a threshold of violence and dehumanization as understood by what we call disaster and war. This can be especially problematic with regard to the problem of visually representing the body in pain:

Rancière argues that this insistence on circulation means that politics now “consists in transforming that space of circulation into the space of the manifestation of a subject. . . . It is a dispute about the division of what is perceptible to the senses.” Insofar as that dispute concerns the visual, necessarily interfaced with the other senses, this politics of bringing the embodied subject into presence in space is visual culture.<sup>117</sup>

The visual, then, is not simply a sidekick to traditional discourses circulating around disaster. It becomes an object through which publics can make rhetorical claims based on the degree to which they believe they can sense another’s pain through imagery. Despite the forewarnings and problems within the function of visual representation, audiences may be well aware that there is an abundance of information that they cannot access that lives outside the image. However, individuals may also believe that their powers of inference can reconstitute that which is missing from the image, while *others* suffer from a lack of understanding. No rational person believes that he or she is actually engaged with an enemy on the ground while watching war coverage through CNN. But individuals make “evidential” claims based on these images, nonetheless.

John Tagg states the relationship between a photographic image and its meaning as such: “What exceeds representation... by definition, cannot be articulated. More than this, it is an effect of the production of the subject in and through representation to give rise to the phantasy of this something more.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, “Invisible Empire: Visual Culture, Embodied Spectacle, and Abu Ghraib.” *Radical History Review*, 95 Spring (2006), 23.

He calls out an over-determined self-assessment of identification that works hand-in-hand with the flawed extractions of visual representation that make the visual image so powerful. By examining each of the texts below, I attempt to uncover the ways in which the photographic image works rhetorically—that is, to reveal the ways in which the image gives confidence to the viewer through familiar aesthetics and conventions, such as arrangements of light, color, framing, and the suspect call to personal agency by photographers in the tradition of the Magnum Agency and its “fathers” of photojournalism—to promote the view that professionally circulated interpretations are in fact reasonable and legitimate assertions.

### *Visual Conventions of Response*

Here, I attempt to demonstrate the pervasiveness of the visual rhetorics of Western aid mobilization and presence in Haiti following the earthquake. Through these images, we see the spectacle of order, discipline, technology, superiority, and care for Haitian victims. This “care” is enunciated even more so because of the stark contrast provided by the visual juxtapositions of purported looting, recklessness, and violence by Haitians (most emblematically depicted by the image I discuss below of the man stealing a coffin). I argue that these images not only displace a concern for the extreme conditions of poverty that preceded the disaster, they also relieve a collective sense of conscience of American publics who “witness” through these images, American heroes who are doing all they can to help these victims of “natural” disaster.

Combined with a massive push for raising money through the International Red Cross, UNICEF, Mercy Corps, and hundreds of other charities, these images serve as evidence that the

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<sup>118</sup> John Tagg, 4.

Americans' consciences are being cleansed through the efficient machinery of aid mobilization; that is, the very possibility for the production and reception of the texts themselves serve as part of the evidence. One of the ironies of this cleansing of the conscience is that the more gruesome the images, the more recklessness depicted of Haitians running amok amidst pain and death, the more "we" can say that we are not responsible for that moral lapse. All we can do is send our best. And our best are operating efficiently, morally, and with big hearts. And these images evidence that this is carried out on our behalf—western aid workers are temporarily conferred with our conscience.

If place can be understood as event, then the context for this particular collection of texts should be sensitive to issues of timing. *The Big Picture* is an online repository of newswire photographs. The site is a part of the Boston Globe franchise, and within recent years, it has become a favorite of photojournalists, critics, and general public.<sup>119</sup> Part of its popularity can be attributed to the site's consistent publication of large, high-resolution images within an online news media culture that has watched images shrink amidst worry over copyright and reproduction infringement. The images span across the page, and the site is designed for the viewer to take advantage of full screen viewing. Images come from the largest wire services, including the Associated Press, Reuters, and Getty Images.<sup>120</sup> Captions—staying within journalistic norms of distribution—come from the source with only light editing for typos.

I chose this site for three reasons: 1) Its ability to release wire photographs immediately as they become available, which is doubly important during notable crises; 2) The high

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<sup>119</sup> Big Pictures of Haiti Earthquake – Boston Globe Big Picture Haiti – Esquire. Accessed from <http://www.esquire.com/blogs/endorsement/big-picture-haiti-011910>

<sup>120</sup> The Big Picture – Boston.com. accessed from <http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/about.html>



resolution of the images makes more detail available to the viewer and critic. Methodologically speaking, this consideration is a conscious choice of the critic: regardless of size, these images still count as representations. Confirming the suspicions of Benjamin, there is no such thing as an original—materially speaking—and the digital information that goes from camera to satellite to various news organizations can be reproduced, cropped, and re-appropriated, in endless forms; 3) The site’s popularity across broad audiences demonstrates an increased “circulation” to publics in the face of the widespread and fragmented nature of contemporary online visual distribution. These considerations are important to the visual rhetorician, as they particular choices on the part of the critic. In the past, a broadsheet newspaper clip, a ripped out magazine image, or even a silver print could serve as a more stable and common point of reference for critics and audiences. While these print modes of representation are still around, the massive migration to digitize information for distribution has made for an incredible variety of choices for the critic to consider.

The first photograph within this collection is emblematic of the military-inflected imagery of mobility and technological sophistication—as opposed to the “shoddy infrastructure” of Haiti [Figure 8].



[Figure 8]  
U.S. military helicopter water drop

The caption reads: “People run toward a U.S. helicopter as it makes a water drop near a country club used as a forward operating base for the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division in Port-au-Prince, Haiti... Relief groups and officials are focused on moving aid flowing into Haiti to survivors of the powerful earthquake that hit the country on Tuesday.”<sup>121</sup> What is remarkable about this photograph is the stark contrast painted between the desperately depicted Haitians and the U.S. military helicopter. The chopper is in plain view, at the top-center of the image, with nothing obscuring it—the blue sky behind it makes it pop out in contrast. From its position, it forms the

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<sup>121</sup> Haiti Six Days Later – The Big Picture, accessed from [http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2010/01/haiti\\_six\\_days\\_later.html](http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2010/01/haiti_six_days_later.html)

top point of a triangle-like formation. The bottom half of the triangle depicts Haitians sprinting up a hill toward the helicopter. The long shot of the photographer aids in this depiction—by using a long lens, from seemingly nowhere.

The camera is not a value-free technology. Components, additions, and especially, lenses, all function to guide the photographer in particular ways. These same features inform how we view pictures, as well. The telephoto (zoom) lens has helped to sustain our understanding of ‘mass audience.’ This technology works in the opposite fashion of the wide-angle (which I attend to later in this chapter). It shortens the foreground-background relationship in an exaggerated style, giving the appearance of compressed subjects. This can turn what may amount to a few dozen people as spectators of a mundane sporting event (say an amateur golf tournament) into a dense occupation of golf fans. The compression that this lens offers effectively flattens perspective (in varying degrees, depending on the lens used) in such a way that individuals seem to be pressed next to each other.

Collectively, this technology gives the sense that the audience of individuals is of one being. Jack Bratich discusses the construction of audience: “audiences are seen not as empirical actors to be examined in their concrete activity, but as discursive constructs, as effects of a variety of programs, institutions, and measuring instruments.”<sup>122</sup> In other words, we can conceive of the audience here as the subject. Consider the modern photographic coverage of any professional sporting event; close-up photos of either individuals in motion, or a team huddling, are usually placed in the context of a background filled with fans. Now, of course, tens of thousands of fans are populating this field in reality, but the lens technology will not allow us to take into account that the stadium is full of contours and curves, that the fans are in fact

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<sup>122</sup> Jack Z. Bratich, “Amassing the Multitude: Revisiting Early Audience Studies.” *Communication Theory*, 15 no. 3, (2005), 243.

occupying a largely separated space, with steps that lead back into the rear of the structure. Instead, we just see the giant singularity of a mass audience that serves as the effective backdrop of the quarterback calling signals from the line. This is one way that the camera, and here, its lenses, ‘helps’ us to see these taken-for-reality constructions.

Elsewhere, I’ve attributed this privilege of seeing to the invisible photographer-agent. The photographer as executor, as always invisible, carries with her many choices in terms of what she wants to capture, who she wants to capture, and how she wants to go about doing so. This invisible position connotes photography’s ability to self-select, to subject subjects to formation without showing herself as the conduit for agency. Racial, gendered inscriptions “captured” within the frame confer an a priori ‘metaphysics of presence.’ With the photographer literally (and figuratively) outside the frame, that which remains inside is the stuff of real life. Frozen, and then systematically reproduced, these images commit its unwitting subject into codification. Particularly, candid images—those of photojournalism, and those everyday images of friends and family—reduce the rhetor into the ether. Why is this important? Because the conduit-agent’s cultural presumptions, his biases, his normative ‘frame,’ is constructed as always already before the moment of capture. Thus, his place as the invisible photographer allows him to be in a space—an unproblematic space—where he can shoot without burden, without oversight. The only worry he may have is responding to a discourse among editors, publishers, about what is politically correct, what is “decent” for various publics in terms of reception discourses. Otherwise, his role as conduit goes unfettered.

Thus, one cannot have a conversation on photography’s subject formation (what is present in the image) without discussing the particular cultural assumptions the photographer brings to bear before any image is actually shot. Significantly, the photographer’s role as a

subject himself must also be interrogated. The metaphors of photography carry a heavy, false presumption that the photographer is indeed the agent. The photographer “shoots,” the photographer “takes” a photo (and in the parlance of mid 20<sup>th</sup> century jargon, the photographer “makes” a photo). This sense of agency creates a complex role for the photographer—on the one hand, the photographer takes credit for his or her work; on the other hand, the invisibility position allows the photographer to escape the games of subject inscription. Jessica Evans writes the following on the inflated position of the photographer as meaning-maker: “The way round this paradox of art as mimetic and expressive is, in the fundamental conceit of romanticism, to attribute to the artist higher powers of perception that allow her/him to apprehend a reality deeper than mere appearance.”<sup>123</sup> Thus, by conferring meaning making onto the photographer as one who can see beyond (perhaps, even into the sublime), the photograph is read rhetorically as that which is a passive object.

The frame through which we understand Haiti—not as a place—but as an event, is aided through the appearance of intelligible figures. In this particular image, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush are part of the aid spectacle [Figure 9].<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, *Visual Culture: The Reader* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 136.

<sup>124</sup> Haiti, 70 Days Later – The Big Picture, accessed from [http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2010/03/haiti\\_70\\_days\\_later.html](http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2010/03/haiti_70_days_later.html)





[Figure 9]  
Bill Clinton and George W. Bush on display following the Haitian earthquake

They are depicted walking, and they are moving with purpose and gravity. The visual symbolism of Clinton and Bush in Haiti operates intertextually—relationally—with Clinton and (the senior) Bush's very public and visible role in appealing for aid following both 9/11 and Katrina. This example illustrates the ways in which previous inscriptions of meaning follow into the current crisis. The Clinton-teamed-with-Bush-bipartisans-as-humanitarian figures rely on a frame of meaning that began with other crisis events and thus, their appearance within the efforts to mobilize aid to Haiti not only adds to the legitimacy of the effort, but more importantly, provides

a rhetorical frame from which American publics abroad can come to understand the event as disaster.

Representations of aid mobilization work in and through the superior technologies of the West. Technology, here, is understood within what Michael Calvin McGee has termed the “ideograph.”<sup>125</sup> Technology is a sign under which we are to make sense of the West’s narrative of progress. The technology operates symbolically as that which extends human capacity. This image shows a close-up of a monitor interface that reads “SEARCHCAM” on its bezel [Figure 10].<sup>126</sup>



<sup>125</sup> Michael Calvin McGee, “The ‘Ideograph’ The Link between Rhetoric and Ideology.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 no. 1 (1980).

<sup>126</sup> Haiti Six Days Later – The Big Picture, accessed from [http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2010/01/haiti\\_six\\_days\\_later.html](http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2010/01/haiti_six_days_later.html)

[Figure 10]  
Technologies of display extend visual capacities within rescue operations

A rescue worker from Fairfax County, VA, holds the monitor up to reveal an image of a woman who is “alive and conscious, buried under the rubble of the collapsed University of Port-au-Prince. We don’t see the actual woman under the rubble, but it is through the miracle of the technology itself that we are able to access this woman. We can only make sense of technology-as-progress if we can situate it within a region that is read as ostensibly backward—one that is not technologically developed. This narrow inscription of technological meaning works to position those who hold the power of these instruments as also the ones who are able to save those without. The conscience of those watching from abroad is at stake, and with this temporary conferring of the conscience to aid workers, the technology employed becomes a symbol of using all means possible to save those whose culture has not yet “developed” such sophistication. Invention itself is within the preserve of those who save.

In addition, this image serves as an example of a triple-layered representation. Through the terminal (computer) screen, the viewer witnesses the photographer’s image, which in turn represents the search camera technology through which we’re able to see the trapped woman. This hyper-textual representation further obscures and destabilizes meaning while simultaneously giving the impression to the viewer that he is able to empathize with the victim’s desperate situation *because of* the technology.

Another image demonstrates the Western gaze of technological superiority: the frame of the image is covered throughout with make-shift tents making up a “temporary camp for homeless Haitians.”<sup>127</sup> We may marvel at the density of the tents in such a cramped area, and

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perhaps even the strange sense of interesting aesthetics that this directly overhead view affords us. In this particular instance, a “Canadian Forces” helicopter provides us with this privileged view.

The screen/terminal (TV, internet, smartphone, etc.) is an extension of the aid mobilization apparatus, just as Butler describes the smart bomb:

The so-called smart bomb records its target as it moves to destroy it—a bomb with camera attached in front... relays that film back to a command control and that film is refilmed on television, effectively constituting the television screen and its viewer as the extended apparatus of the bomb itself. In this sense, by viewing we are bombing, identified with both bomber and bomb... and yet securely wedged in the couch in one’s living room. The smart bomb screen... effects the phantasmatic distinction between the hit and its consequences...<sup>128</sup>

Particularly with camera angles, such as the overhead wide shot, a privileged view of Haitian suffering is designed for no one except the exceptional Western viewer—the one at home. It is, in a way, a taunting of the Haitian camps below. From the comforts of home, we have this vantage, this perspective, the “phantasies” of agency that separate us from them. We can clear our consciences with this privileged detachment in place.

In addition, we can observe that most of the images shot with a long lens (usually +200mm) or from a vantage point on high (e.g. the helicopter), the viewer typically ignores such detachment; that is, both the long, compressed image the wide-angle aerial shot are both well within the familiar conventions of photojournalism; the Western viewer has become well-accustomed to these styles. This is what Robert Hariman and John Lucaites, borrowing from George Scott, refer to as “seeing like a state.”

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<sup>127</sup> Unfortunately, this particular image could not be reproduced in print form for this chapter because of its lack of image-pixel resolution.

<sup>128</sup> Butler cited in Ronald Greene, “Another Materialist Rhetoric.” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 15 (1998): 37.

This large aesthetic frame unfolds from the vantage of the photographer, who is above and at some distance from the scene. From this vantage, one looks down on the scene from a safe place that is not included within it... The viewer is disconnected from the scene, positioned as a distant spectator who can neither be harmed by nor affect the action folding below. The viewer of the picture acquires the neutral, “objective” stance of the camera.”<sup>129</sup>

One particular image stands out because of its peculiar orderliness. This image identifies “Haitian-Americans” in an organized queue boarding a “U.S. C-17 Globemaster” military plane [Figure 11].



[Figure 11]  
Haitian-Americans queued to board a U.S. military plane

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<sup>129</sup> Robert Hariman and John L. Lucaites, *No caption needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and liberal democracy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007): 215.

Those awaiting to board appear to be dressed in clean clothes, and there are no signs of disruptive behavior. This is another instance in which rhetorics of the camera itself aid in the construction of an image of order. The shallow depth-of-field alongside the photographer's choice of angle—one that displays a compressed view of the line—produces what photojournalists sometimes call a “clean” image. The large plane at the far side of the image terminates the perspectival vantage. The symbolism of the American plane is the “end,” the goal, of those escaping disaster.

With regard to the “rhetorics of the camera” I mention in the above paragraph, Michael Shapiro notes, “Despite the elements of photographic practice that contribute to the signifying effects or rhetorical force of photographs—angle of vision, framing, distance, lighting... etc—the interpretive culture within which photographs are displayed tends to bracket the practices involved in creating the image and concentrate on the image itself.”<sup>130</sup> Thus, in this particular image, the construction of orderliness—which articulates with the representation of those who hold political rights—is derived from carefully chosen interpretive moves by the photographer and through the technology of the camera that provides a menu of conventional choices in the process of image construction.

### *Representations of “bare life” Following Disaster*

In several of the wire photographs I examined, Haitian looters were on prominent display. These images, viewed out of context, depict a war of all against all. The rhetorical function of these images serve at least two purposes 1) to allow for Western audiences to confirm the

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<sup>130</sup> Michael J. Shapiro, *Writing Practices in Biography, Photography, and Policy Analysis*. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press), 1988, 124.

sentiment that we cannot possibly fathom the degree of selfishness amidst so much tragedy, and therefore our efforts, donations, and encouragement following the disaster are doubly generous. That is, we still give despite this apparent greed; 2) As mentioned above, the more that we depict and view these selfish acts, the more that our best representatives (our bravest representatives assisting in Haiti) are foregrounded as heroic, selfless, efficient, orderly, disciplined, and effective.

For example, in one particular image, black silhouettes of what appear to be three young men are moving across the top of a pile of rubble caught on fire [Figure 12].<sup>131</sup>



[Figure 12]

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<sup>131</sup> Haiti Six Days Later – The Big Picture, accessed from [http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2010/01/haiti\\_six\\_days\\_later.html](http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2010/01/haiti_six_days_later.html)

### Haitian “scavengers” traverse a pile of burning rubble

One is carrying a sack and approaching toward the other two. The caption labels them, “scavengers.” In another image, amidst a blue sky, and judging from the shadows, a strong midday sun, a densely packed crowd is caught in action with their arms thrust high into the air, aimed at a single bottle of what looks like Gatorade. The caption tells us that these are looters. One other image shows a man, amidst a crowd, his face intense. He is holding a small machete-like knife. His mouth is tense and his upper lip is sweating. According to the caption, he too, is a looter. Without the benefit of more information, a dominant reading of this image affords little grace to this man—he looks almost possessed and ready to enact violence. Of course, we have no idea what he’s really up to, whether he’s protecting something/someone or if he really does have designs to get what he wants. In any case, this is a notable example of the “absence” that characterizes every frame of the photographer. Left with an enthymematic space, Western readers can ascribe whatever they want to the man’s intentions. The reading is not likely to be a charitable one.

One of the rhetorical effects of photographing the Other—especially the Other engaged in dehumanizing acts—is that an additional air of candidness is afforded to the subjects. Western audiences cannot imagine, especially during such strife, that a Haitian photographic subject may actually be aware of the presence of the camera—that is, the Western gaze that certainly shares roots with early ethnographic study and codified as a visual norm through *National Geographic*. This reveals something about the way in which we ascribe identity to Haitian subjects. Surely, they are so depraved as to not recognize the photojournalist (or pack of photojournalists, as is often the case) recording the act. But if we reflect on many of the images that use a wide-angle lens, it becomes evident that the photojournalist is *very* close to his subject (spatially), and this,

at least in part, demystifies the notion that the Other is always already unaware. The fly-on-the-wall position of the photographer that is ridiculously invoked as the gold standard of good photojournalism is rarely achieved, nor in my mind, should it be. When that standard has become such a normalized way of shooting and reading photographs, the visual rhetorician must be in a position to make this normal relationship, strange again, and at least concede that the *opportunity* or *potential* exists for both the photographer and the Haitian subject to co-construct meaning through the visual image. The notion of photographer and subject confronting and recognizing each other returns at the end of this chapter as part of a hopeful political vision (via Azoulay) that relies on the ties between the citizen and non-citizen.

The lens of the camera is itself a powerful technology. The near ubiquitous usage of the wide-angle lens in contemporary, mediated society, by professional photojournalists, gives us a distorted view on the world that has become reified to the point where we no longer recognize the distortion. The use of such a lens is so commonplace, that it has replaced the traditional 50mm lens of the 35mm modern camera and its usage, its way of seeing, is now considered ‘normal.’ Newspapers, magazines, the Internet—all feature a majority use of the wide-angle. When we see Barack Obama’s arm raised in victory on election night in Chicago’s Grant Park, and frozen into history on the front pages of newspapers nationwide the following morning, we don’t consider the elongated, distorted nature of his figure with respect to perspective. He looms large, as well he should, considering his historic victory. But this moment is owed the naturalization of the wide-angle. In the lens’ relationship to other figures, especially other human beings, it necessarily becomes a technology that privileges the individual in space by making larger and longer, the elements in the foreground, while stretching the background into an



infinite distance in a more pronounced way than the eye would normally configure this relationship.

In perhaps the most sensational image within the archive I've collected is an image of a Haitian man pulling a dead victim out of a coffin by the leg [Figure 13].<sup>132</sup>



[Figure 13]  
The apparent theft of an occupied coffin

According to the caption, he is engaging in this incredible act so that he can steal the coffin. A large red, black, and white mural in the frame's background reads, "RUE DES MIRACLES"

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<sup>132</sup> Haiti Six Days Later – The Big Picture, accessed from [http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2010/01/haiti\\_six\\_days\\_later.html](http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2010/01/haiti_six_days_later.html)

(STREET OF MIRACLES). The man even appears to be wearing something of a smile on his face. This image may indeed qualify as what famed Magnum photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson has coined as “the decisive moment.” Of course, we are at the photographer’s mercy when it comes to captioning. It matters little if he believed that the man was indeed stealing the coffin; this exemplifies the fickle nature of visual representation. We do not know what that man’s ultimate end may be—he could be selling the coffin to make money for his own family’s survival—or he could be, as the dominant reading suggests, stealing the coffin out of greed. The larger point is that we cannot know, and that in the face not knowing, we are likely to interpret the act, anyway. Returning to the notion of the photographer as he who is ultimately responsible for disseminating the dominant reading, we can observe that the conventions of visual capture are themselves normative; that is, contemporary photojournalists are very much interpellated by the narrowly defined tradition that rewards and awards photographers according to these conventions.

Many historians and students of modern photography would cite Henri Cartier-Bresson’s 1952 book, *The Decisive Moment*, as the most formative guide for future photojournalists in understanding the (non)discursive limits, a visual-rhetorical norm, for what makes a great photograph. Cartier-Bresson writes:

In photography, visual organisation can stem only from a developed instinct... We work in unison with movement as though it were a presentiment of the way in which life itself unfolds, but inside movement there is one moment at which the elements in motion are in balance. Photography must seize upon this moment and hold immobile the equilibrium of it.<sup>133</sup>

Cartier-Bresson here cites “photography” as the agent. It is photography which “must seize upon” a moment that assumes to be a natural one in a natural world. The developed “compass,” or

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<sup>133</sup> Russell Miller, *Magnum: Fifty Years at the Front Line of History*, (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 102-103.



instinct of the photographer is that which can capture the proper image. Although Cartier-Bresson is quite elegant in his explication of this process, he manages to leave out that which informs his would-be audience: the penultimate film exposure and the technology used for a subsequent exposure onto the silver-gelatin paper for which a visual public ultimately views such an image.

For the French photographer, the decisive moment is a way of seeing rather than a way of technological capture. For to introduce the rough, inelegant technology that is a reality of the process, Cartier-Bresson must then also acknowledge the constraints of this real, “one moment.” The moment is actually several moments, aided by the technology of the modern shutter. The field of view is constrained by the frame, as demonstrated earlier, and as such, a larger conception of space itself is neglected. The emphasis on, and the connotation of, the moment is considered as a temporal element. Movement, for Cartier-Bresson, is related to timing, as any consideration of his many retrospectives would reveal. This movement is necessarily linked to the present, and is thought of in terms of pulling a trigger just at the right moment, when all of the various visual elements, brought to the fore, are ready to be presented to the waiting photographer. The photographer, of course, is privileged to access such an ‘aligning of the stars,’ she merely needs to wait for the right moment. Here, the human agent is inflated to such an exceeding degree; the resulting image is judged according to whether the individual photographer’s compass was working correctly or is, perhaps, inherently flawed. In other words, it is the photographer, and not the Haitian “thief” who captures, represents, and possesses the overdetermined agency through which viewing publics do not have recourse to question or problematize.

Within any analysis that critiques visual texts featuring dehumanization and desperation,

one should not ignore the ways in which the incredible aesthetics of the destructive sublime can come—despite the irony—through the conventions of photograph. The idea of the sublime (destructive, beautiful, as beyond words) is not a new concern to rhetoricians. In the eighteenth century, George Campbell was occupied with the notion of how to communicate this discursively through description.<sup>134</sup> Nathan Stormer points out that “sublime” has been operationalized in a number of different ways—it is a contested term. For Stormer, the sublime has two distinct characteristics with regard to both rhetor and audience; these are marked by “the irony of representing that which exceeds discourse and the effect of recognizing images of the sublime without necessarily experiencing the state of sublimity.”<sup>135</sup> Scenes of destruction can seem so beautiful because of lighting and composition—an artist can use these conventions to point out the ironies along with the other side of the representation that features symbols of hope, but much of the time they are employed because photojournalists have relied on looking for and literally “hunting” for good light in all situations, without context in consideration. Photography, though, does not only rely upon the rhetor’s “eye” to discern the beautiful amongst destruction; images can be interpreted from a particular public standpoint, wherein “the camera serves to ideologically naturalize the eye of the observer,” as well.<sup>136</sup> This results in a strange aesthetic of beauty amidst destruction brought to us by the photographer, but well within a frame of intelligibility for the viewer. How we read these images from the comfort of home is unmoored from the photographer’s intent. Nevertheless, we interpret these images as appropriate to the

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<sup>134</sup> George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, in P. Bizzell and B. Herzberg (eds), *The Rhetorical Tradition* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001).

<sup>135</sup> Nathan Stormer, “Addressing the Sublime: Space, Mass Representation, and the Unpresentable.” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 21 no. 3 (2004), 217.

<sup>136</sup> Allan Sekula, as cited in Shapiro, 128.

context of our individual sensemaking; in other words, these images are used to our liking as emotional resources.<sup>137</sup>

As I've previously mentioned, this chapter is *not* by any means intended to be a facile critique of aid to those who need it in their most desperate moments. Rather, it is the *displacement* of a larger political responsibility *by* these images/representations that deserves interrogation.

The instability of the visual image, as it circulates within popular discourse, is significant and is a concern of the visual rhetorician. This instability unleashes its potential as publics come to grapple with the meaning within the image. While it may be assumed that representations of the aftermath of disaster evoke sympathy, compassion, or perhaps even empathy for the victims of disaster, we can observe through publics' response that these interpretations can be turned on their heads. In particular, interpretations varied wildly with regard to the so-called looters:

The pictures are eye opening. As for the looters, allow them to take what they want to survive. The goverment [sic] will compensate the store owners later and no one will be shot as long as it supervised in a manerly [sic] way. The country has to be rebuilt from scratch anyway, the goverment will come out on top in the end. God Bless Haiti and the rest of the world.<sup>138</sup>

This example of reactionary discourse illustrates both a sympathetic concern for Haitians while invoking the sovereign (which one?) as an entity capable of restoring Haiti—presumably to either its pre-disaster status or to a miraculously endowed “rebuilt” Haiti. Another online commenter expressed his/her disdain at the amount of open contempt written on the comment board from others reacting to these images:

For you few compelled to write hateful commentary I wish a year of very, very, bad

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<sup>137</sup> Hariman and Lucaites.

<sup>138</sup> Haiti Six Days Later – The Big Picture, accessed from [http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2010/01/haiti\\_six\\_days\\_later.html](http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2010/01/haiti_six_days_later.html)

dreams, dreams where you are helpless against the wrath of Mother Nature. Perhaps it will introduce to you the notion of compassion. As it is, you are utterly deserving of contempt.<sup>139</sup>

While this sentiment is well intended and meant to curb some of the hateful remarks left in a public forum, the commenter still reveals the agent of disaster as Mother Nature. Here, nature itself is the sole cause of disaster, and reinforces the idea of disaster-as-event. While comment boards of news media websites have demonstrated repeatedly just how quickly a public forum can self-destruct into a platform for insults, racism, outlandish claims, and naivety, we can still mine from them the assumptions from which these claims are made. While a few cited facts backed up with links to legitimate sources, much of the discourse was relayed within the Haiti-as-accident frame. Zygmunt Bauman reflects on the modern version of natural disaster by inserting human behavior into the discussion: “Suddenly, natural disasters appear to behave in the way only human-made, *moral* ills were previously supposed to... it is equally blatant that the apparent selectivity of ‘natural blows’ comes from morally *pregnant*, even if not morally *motivated*, human action.”<sup>140</sup>

Significantly, when publics confer a sense of conscience to aid workers, it sets in place a unique, and bizarre relationship between the viewer and the subjects of disaster who are ostensibly “represented.” In other words, the more that we view Haitian subjects as “looters,” as lacking morality in a time of great need, or as generally those who do not observe civil norms, the more our own consciences (the viewer) are cleansed through the dutiful aid workers. Simply put: the ostensible depravity of Haitians gives rise to the increasing exigence of the aid worker’s call to duty. If Haitians are represented outside of a spectacular frame where everyday acts of kindness and mutual help are observed, the aid worker does *not* rise to the level of hero—instead,

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Fear*, Malden, MA: Polity (2006).

she is simply there to lend a helping hand. In this way, what is not shown, what is not represented may reveal more about the aid worker's actual role. Instead, as audiences, we only receive the "double" or "shadow" of both Haitian and aid worker, in Phillippe-Joseph Salazar's terms.<sup>141</sup>

Rhetorics of response, for the critic, must be placed into conversation with rhetorics of conscience and compassion. What does it mean for the rhetorician to invoke a language of conscience? Can we access conscience without a mediating techne that always works to destabilize the very conditions that give rise to conscience in the first instance? That is, how can we operationalize (to use an ugly word within this context) a notion of conscience that serves as a useful resource for sharing compassion with the other? Robert Hariman provides the insight that compassion need not be an "affective" response in order for it to be a powerful construct through which we can advance a politics based on caring.<sup>142</sup> In fact, in order for it to be a public resource, he argues that in fact, we need to move from thinking compassion simply in terms of affect and toward ways that we can productively understand what might otherwise be considered as moral claims.

This is not an easy call to answer. When we witness (through representations, always) what we could consider the devastation of an entire region, the first impulse of the critic (at least this one) is to answer with moral authority. This is a travesty, and we need to react accordingly, one might claim. And this is understandable: visual images function rhetorically to enact embodied and visceral responses to dehumanization. The impulse to react seems, within the

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<sup>141</sup> Cited from University of Colorado Boulder, Dept. of Communication colloquium, April 16, 2010.

<sup>142</sup> Robert Hariman, "Cultivating Compassion as a Way of Seeing." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 6 no. 2 (2009).

initial stages of horrified reaction, well, reasonable. But the critic must also carefully consider what precedes and follows the conditions that give rise to conscience. In other words, the empathetic moral response must be balanced and put into conversation with a politics that carefully negotiates human rights. Not simply as a reaction to a horrible event, but as a way to operationalize these moral concerns for the future. Within a micro-analysis, one may not care to think about politics when faced with depictions of dehumanization—and perhaps this is right. What can politics do for a dead body that occupies a coffin that another is trying to “steal” so that he may sell it in order to survive? This is a tension that faces critics, and one that should not be overlooked so easily.

While an ideal politics may not be crafted in direct response to the dehumanizing event, we can at least begin to understand how always-mediated visual representations both mobilize our own consciences and also fail us at a fundamental level by posing as a “shadow” of the truth. Yet, representation also provides us with hope if we can learn to accept the instability of these rhetorics. Judith Butler states this quite eloquently:

The demand for a truer image, for more images, for images that convey the full horror and reality of the suffering has its place and importance. The erasure of that suffering through the prohibition of images and representations more generally circumscribes the sphere of appearance, what we can see and what we can know. But it would be a mistake to think that we only need to find the right and true images, and that a certain reality will then be conveyed. The reality is not conveyed by what is represented within the image, but through the challenge to representation that reality delivers.<sup>143</sup>

As mentioned above, Agamben’s paradigm of “bare life” only operates in this chapter as a concept useful toward understanding the conditions under which a subject is not conferred political rights, and is thus, expendable from the state’s view. My aim is not to interrogate the boundaries of what constitutes bare life nor do I want to determine its specificity. And certainly,

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<sup>143</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 146.

I do not follow Agamben to his conclusion that the concentration camp is the new paradigm of politics afforded by a state of exception.<sup>144</sup> Even so, interrogating visual representation in its apparent flaws and providing a space from which the rhetorical critic can consider the possibilities of a moral vision may not be enough to move the conversation forward.

Here, with regard to the “challenge to representation” that Butler forwards in the above passage, theorist Ariella Azoulay provides a provocative vision of politics that argues for a vision of citizenship that is inextricably tied to the apparatus of photography.<sup>145</sup> She calls this vision “the civil contract of photography,” and directly confronts what she deems as flaws in Agamben’s politics in which power resides with the sovereign’s move to exception. She notes, “Agamben fails to consider citizenry and citizenship independently of sovereign power and as power’s source of authority and legitimacy. When he identifies the man of the declaration as a trace of *homo sacer*... as the basis of political sovereignty, he misses the direct threat man poses to the citizen...”<sup>146</sup> Instead of sovereignty, Azoulay identifies within photography, the potential for disruption inherent in a civil code amongst both political subject and non-subject, alike. Through photography, she attempts to “reformulate the boundaries of citizenship as distinct from the nation and the market whose dual rationale constantly threatens to subjugate it.”<sup>147</sup> She contends that historical and disciplinary divisions have traditionally kept photography and the citizen apart from one another; the former belonging to visual culture and aesthetics and the latter belonging to political theory. Azoulay relays her thesis as such:

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<sup>144</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*

<sup>145</sup> Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, (Zone Books, 2008).

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 24.

The widespread use of cameras by people around the world has created more than a mass of images; it has created a new form of encounter between people who take, watch, and show other people's photographs, with or without their consent, thus opening new possibilities of political action and forming new conditions for its visibility. The relations between the three parties involved in the photographic act—the photographed person, the photographer, and the spectator—are not mediated through a sovereign power and are not limited to the bounds of a nation-state or an economic contract. The users of photography thus reemerge as people who are not totally with the power that governs them and who have new means to look at and show *its* deeds, as well, and eventually to address this power and negotiate with it—citizen and noncitizen alike.<sup>148</sup>

Significantly, Azoulay is no fool when it comes to photographic representation; she is well rehearsed in the critiques of the photograph's instability as well as the capacity of the photographic act to incite violence to the other through the act of capture. While I have no delusions that a political vision relying solely on photography can alone circumvent the sovereign or the market, I am indeed inspired by the ways in which Azoulay restores photography not just for professionals, but for everyone who wishes to invest in thoughtful, inventive ways of looking at one another. In that spirit, I would like to call for more attention within the field of visual rhetoric, specifically, to examine the ways in which everyday—even mundane—photography can help to establish a sense of citizenship. I have written a brief entry related to this vision from which I very much want to expand.<sup>149</sup> With this call, one will likely run the risk that he will encounter unproductive discourses of “citizen” journalism as a way of appropriating participation into already well established media that do little but temporarily reshuffle an already existing media framework that relies on predictable, quantifiable metrics, which measure only the uptake of circulation and reception via frequency counts rather than the idiosyncratic meanings emerging from either a 1 or 0 to suggest a validity of total measurement.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>149</sup> Daniel Kim, “When the People Point and Shoot, What Do They See?” Guest Correspondent on *No Caption Needed*, edited by Robert Hariman and John Lucaites; accessed from <http://www.nocaptionneeded.com/?p=3454>.



My real hope is that we might be able to look at one other with clear eyes and measured thoughtfulness—both with and without camera. This move could establish a baseline from which to better understand how terms such as conscience and compassion can interject and intervene within a politics that does not forget or forgo a responsible and reasonable *ethic* (i.e., Spinoza's concept of this broad category) on the part of those who both wield the camera--along with rhetorical critics aiming for the interstitial crossroads between a robust treatment of difficult concepts (e.g., the nature of conscience) and a call to compassion within the boundaries of the empirical and pragmatic.

## CHAPTER V

‘If you do this, I will own you forever’:  
The Pulitzer Prize for Photography as Rhetorical Assemblage of Affective Labor

In the spring of 1993, photojournalist Kevin Carter arrived in Sudan; there on an assignment to track rebel movement in the region, he encountered the unexpected. At the time, Sudan was also suffering from a devastating famine, and shortly after arriving in the village of Ayod, he witnessed “masses” of starving bodies. A friend and fellow photojournalist who accompanied Carter on this assignment describes what happened next:

Seeking relief from the sight of masses of people starving to death, he wandered into the open bush. He heard a soft, high-pitched whimpering and saw a tiny girl trying to make her way to the [UN] feeding center. As he crouched to photograph her, a vulture landed in view. Careful not to disturb the bird, he positioned himself for the best possible image. He would later say he waited about 20 minutes, hoping the vulture would spread its wings. It did not, and after he took his photographs, he chased the bird away and watched as the little girl resumed her struggle. Afterward he sat under a tree, lit a cigarette, talked to God and cried.<sup>150</sup>

Just over a year later, Carter accepted the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography for his image of the starving girl [Figure 14].

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<sup>150</sup>Scott Macleod, The Life and Death of Kevin Carter, *Time Magazine*, September 12, 1994, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,981431-1,00.html>



[Figure 14]  
Kevin Carter, Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography, 1994.

Two months after he received the award, Kevin Carter took his own life, and his body was found inside of his red pickup truck with a hose piping in fumes from his vehicle's exhaust.

During the spectacle surrounding the Pulitzer ceremony, Carter was not immune to this highest of accolades accorded to photojournalists. He wrote to his parents, "I swear I got the most applause of anybody. I can't wait to show you the trophy. It is the most precious thing, and the highest acknowledgment of my work I could receive." This reaction, on the surface, may seem odd, given the gruesome nature of Carter's work. Yet, it is not at all surprising—many conflict-zone or war photographers conceive of their work as a kind of duty, affording themselves an exceeding status of agency to capture what no one else can. The risk involved in

such work adds to the romanticizing of high-stakes photojournalism, born from the traditional aesthetics of Farm Security Agency (FSA) documentary photography, the famed Magnum Agency, imagery and lore of WWII photography, among other historical examples existing primarily across the 20<sup>th</sup> century (contextually, photography's history is relatively short one, constructed recursively in the present). What can account for this inflated identity of the war photographer? This chapter examines the rhetorical mechanisms placing affective demands on those conflict photographers in the field confronting ineffable violence and inhumanity.

Accordingly, I argue that the Pulitzer Prize for Photography enacts a primary set of mechanisms, that is, an assemblage, which gathers power via the institution of the Pulitzer organization in tandem with photographers' self-disciplining practices toward ambition and reward. In no uncertain terms are these photographers immune from the desire of accolade and praise despite the apparent nobility of their dangerous labor. In addition, I employ the term assemblage to address the complexity of self-discipline enacted by conflict photographers themselves. The romanticism of war photography—with the birth of photojournalism as a partial result—pits photographer against both himself and others who *make a living* putting themselves in harm. This harmful and risky context is notable for the way in which the Pulitzer institution assembles with self-disciplining practices coursing through a construction of affective labor. Photographers' affective labor often is occluded in its romanticism (or lack of narrative if no harm befalls a photographer). The assemblage enacts and builds upon the conversion of the affective photographic act--into an exigency characterized by a bounded field of intelligibility for a visual public.<sup>151</sup> This rhetorical function of the assemblage also enacts and is enacted by the

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<sup>151</sup> Manuel Delanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*. (New York: Continuum, 2006); most of Delanda's volume is based upon Deleuze and Guattari's ideas found in *A Thousand Plateaus*, and thus serves as a kind of translatable version of their dense and original work.

Pulitzer organization. Much of the same power conduits follow to several other prestigious prizes such as the World Photo contest, the White House Association of Photographers awards, the National Press Photographers Association prizes, Photographer of the Year, the annual Hearst competition, along with others. The function of this gathering and marking of boundaries is an attempt to turn the act of photographic representation into an object of categorization, recognition, and utility. Thus, a deterritorializing follows a disciplining of the assemblage, releasing the act for wide distribution, ready-made for a consuming public eager to both make sense of the anxieties around the particular image as well as stake ownership claims through their ‘reading’ of the image.

The Pulitzer assemblage works in tandem with lofty—and thus dangerous--ambitions of such photographers with respect to these prizes (journalistic ethics prevent a drawing of the short straw in the newsroom as a way of ending up in a conflict zone). Publicly, this assemblage of time-honored legitimacy via institutional power, strips away the affective photographic act from the conflict narrative. Ambition for prizes disrupts the romantic notion of the courageous journalist prepared for the worst. Both before and following the death of Carter, the so-called Bang-Bang club spoke in frank terms of their ambitions, with the Pulitzer at the top of the list.

Yet, the consequences of this relationship pitting decency, journalistic ethic, ambition, and reward, protects the institution’s standing and legitimacy precisely because the affect and labor necessary for the existence of tangible accolade—remains occluded by its inability for a public entity (e.g., newspapers—but they too are subject to the same prize) to articulate that same affective labor. If one cannot tangibly point to something or clearly represent a process of affective labor, none such exists as far as a public discourse is concerned. This invisible intensity

along with the idea of ungainly and raw ambition work together to grease the wheels of photographic legitimacy—at quite a cost.

The complexity of this assemblage sterilizes it from the labor of a prize-winning photograph's conception, and reframes both the image and its recourse into predictable and binary discourses (typically, whether the images should have been circulated or not; whether the photographer should have photographed the scene or not). The Pulitzer acts as a neutralizing filter, and the visceral image becomes embedded within the frame of accolade and reactionary discourses.

The result is sedimentation—an identifiable stratification of *techné* for those who would engage in these unadulterated practices. These include the awarding committee, the editors and publishers of media corporations eager for associative recognition, the self-fashioned consciousness of the romantic war photographer, the will to gather in an Heideggerian sense, are not solely the doing of the institution, nor the doing of individuals with malformed motive. Rather, this assemblage gathers in order to prepare and to convert a sublime referent into legible symbols, readily available for consuming publics. Simultaneously, this same process and coursing of power effectively place incredible demands on those who do its bidding. My aim is to account for the various articulations of the Pulitzer assemblage and to problematize the idea of the will to truth placed within an understanding of the photographic subject's claim to agency.

First, it may be useful to review Manuel DeLanda's delineation of assemblages, and to assess how this chapter's formulation squares with existing scholarship in the area of visual rhetoric. Elaborating on Deleuze and Guattari's theory, DeLanda explains that territorialization and deterritorialization refers to both "spatial" and "non-spatial" processes:

One dimension or axis defines the variable roles which an assemblage's components may play, from a purely *material* role at one extreme of the axis, to a purely *expressive* role at

the other extreme... The other dimension defines variable processes in which these components become involved and that either stabilize the identity of an assemblage, by increasing its degree of internal homogeneity or the degree of sharpness of its boundaries, or destabilize it. The former are referred to processes of *territorialization* and the latter as processes of *detrterritorialization*.<sup>152</sup>

He explains that these processes occur at a multitude of levels, from physical “face-to-face conversations” to the geographical boundaries of organizations, to the detrterritorializing process that destabilizes borders and boundaries or “increases internal heterogeneity.”<sup>153</sup> With regard to the Pulitzer organization, it falls in line with what DeLanda claims is a common feature of all organizational assemblages: “an authority structure.” One function of an assemblage analysis is to mark the “elements that play an expressive role, that is, those components that express the *legitimacy* of the authority...”<sup>154</sup>

Lester Olson, in his review of the literature on visual rhetoric scholarship in the communication field, recognizes that the term is itself elusive and describes it as such: “I am using that expression here as a shorthand to emphasize culturally-shaped practices of seeing in their relationship to historically-situated processes of rhetorical action.”<sup>155</sup> Olson intentionally leaves much room for engagement and analysis with visual texts, and this reflects the wide range of scholarship on the visual that follows his qualification. He makes a specific call for scholars to expand the field and poses a series of challenges for visual rhetoric education. One such challenge is posed as such: “How might concentrations on visual rhetoric be designed so that... students receive a systematic education that grounds them well in rhetoric at the same time that it

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<sup>152</sup> DeLanda, 12.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>155</sup> Lester C. Olson, “Intellectual and conceptual resources for visual rhetoric: A re-examination of scholarship since 1950,” *The Review of Communication*, 7 no. 1 (2007).

makes them thoroughly familiar with cultural practices of viewing and interpreting images”?

While this is no doubt useful with visual rhetorical study, this claim is also revealing of the body of visual rhetorical literature, writ large: in exchange for the post-process deliberation around the meaning of images and how they implicate publics (criticism), there is little to account for how the *production* and *practices*—the conditions of possibility for criticism—are themselves both rhetorical and constitutive. A theory of assemblages can thus help us account for how organizations form and deform these conditions of possibility.

Recently, scholars in the field of visual rhetoric have explored the photographic image in terms of its capacity as a public resource for cultural, political deliberation.<sup>156</sup> This view of agency locates its power within the audience. I consider this a post-deployment view of agency, a conception of deliberative meaning making that gives publics the opportunity to assign and if so desired, appropriate a message to the image. Cara Finnegan, in her discussion of “image vernaculars,” argues that visual “enthymemes are powerful because they grant audiences agency... the concept of image vernaculars preserves a necessary space for agency by theorizing the ways that viewers mobilize images as inventional resources for argument.<sup>157</sup> Robert Hariman and John Lucaites attribute a similar capacity to agency, positioning it within the “iconicity” of an image. That is, the way that a public comes to deliberate and agree on the power of the visual determines its status as an icon. The authors explain “how the photograph provided a new model of political identity... By revealing how emotions are constructed through visual images in the

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<sup>156</sup> See Robert Hariman and John L. Lucaites, *No caption needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and liberal democracy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); John L. Lucaites and Robert Hariman, “Visual rhetoric, photojournalism, and democratic public culture. *Rhetoric Review*. 20 no. 1/2 (2001); Cara A. Finnegan, “Recognizing Lincoln: Image Vernaculars in Nineteenth Century Visual Culture.” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 8 no. 1 (2005).

<sup>157</sup> Finnegan, 34.



public media, the iconic photo demonstrates how photojournalism communicates essential resources for democratic deliberation.”<sup>158</sup>

Although these perspectives contribute a great deal to our understanding of how publics are both informed by, and take advantage of, these resources within our civic lives, I contend that visual rhetoric in this view is limited by a lack of theorizing on the epistemological model that precedes deliberation; we should account for how institutions articulate and modulate malleable resources that constitute and delimit how, and under what conditions, images come to exist, and how these practices, in turn, circulate within strict rhetorical limits.

Paradoxically, ironically, the images produced out of the demands of the assemblage, *disarticulate* from the assemblage to become icons, which in turn become resources around which publics can construct emotion, express anxieties, and project identities, none of which are necessarily specious. Thus, the demands of the Pulitzer assemblage constitute processes *not conflated* with the post-production process and circulation of the image. The images *turn* onto a continuum of critical iconography. Thus, Robert Hariman and John Lucaites’ notion of the construction of emotion built on these iconic images-as-resource is unmoored from the Pulitzer assemblage that works to divorce the affective labor in the field from photographic representation.<sup>159</sup>

Yet, we cannot ignore iconography, altogether. Though this chapter interrogates the demands of the Pulitzer assemblage and its practice/production implications, there also exist post-production discourses—outside of the actual award-winning images—that valorize a mythology of the war photographer. To what degree are the claims true that a ‘certain type of

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<sup>158</sup> Hariman and Lucaites, 22.

<sup>159</sup> Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites. *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

person' is attracted to this type of risky work? How do these claims help the assemblage to further legitimate its work in an invisible fashion? I see an analogue here between Zygmunt Bauman's discussion of "natural disasters" and this kind of mythology, of those naturally attracted to—addicted to—the violence of human disaster: "...it is equally blatant that the apparent selectivity of 'natural blows' comes from morally *pregnant*, even if not morally *motivated*, human action."<sup>160</sup> What then, can account for the conditions of possibility for the "morally pregnant," as it regards the Pulitzer and its legacies?

Even with the mediative function of the Pulitzer, the assemblage perhaps most speciously articulates with the demands it places on the photographers. Earlier in *TIME*'s recounting of this narrative, the article informs us that Carter formed a group with fellow photographers, named the "Bang-Bang" club by a local magazine for their propensity to follow and photograph violence. Two years before Carter made his notorious photograph, one of his fellow members, Greg Marinovich won the Pulitzer by capturing an image of a man being stabbed to death in a politically motivated killing. This awarding apparently "raised the stakes" for the rest of the photographers' club, and Carter was singled out for his extreme anxiety over 'not being good enough.' The Pulitzer, as the ultimate prize for many photojournalists, provides the impetus for the over-compensation of this kind of performance anxiety. The award becomes the ultimate symbol of ambition, despite the surreal circumstances and context under which these journalists do their work. In sum, the assemblage places extraordinary demands on the photographers by articulating with what amounts to a commodification of would-be-poiesis. In blunt terms, the Pulitzer, directly in line with the cultural norm of rewarding and judging hierarchies, capitalizes on suffering by ranking which image 'best' captures the 'worst' of human behavior. The

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<sup>160</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Fear*, Malden, MA: Polity (2006).

business of ranking within hierarchies is nothing more than a liberal individualist political norm that seeks to commodify objects that seem, on the surface, far removed from the specious grasp of capital.

The notion of a winner, or in this case, a recipient, of a prize such as the Pulitzer, is premised on the liberal individualist notion that one is entitled to such rights such as entering into a contest of winners and losers, even within this seemingly ridiculous context of documenting the best of the worst kinds of human behavior. One must ask, then, what are the ontological conditions under which an assemblage can exploit this game of ranking, of winning, and losing? Here, it becomes useful to understand how we might move from a context of rights, social contracts, and liberal individualism, to an anti-foundationalist ground which favors neither the concept of the individual or the mechanisms in place to award such individuals. If, as I have argued, that subjectivity and the notion of audience is an effect of genealogical shifts in discourse and the assemblages that create the conditions possible for effecting subjects, then agency must be reformulated on contingent grounds. The literature on post-foundational (un)grounding in political theory problematizes the notion of first rights, or those rights which claim themselves as uncontestable.<sup>161</sup> These rights, when confronted with the agonistic, opposing practices of an embodied accountability (agency understood within the frame of assemblage), should be interrogated in such a way as to advance everyday practices beyond the norms of contemporary liberal governance. A postfoundational perspective advocates that we should remove our fixation with practices as they emerge from an originary, ontological moment. A lack of ground-as-epistemic approach replaces ontology so that collective decisions must be made despite much uncertainty, and in the face of difference among cultural subjects.

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<sup>161</sup> See Marchart, O. (2007). *Post-foundational political thought: Political difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Norval, A. J. (2007) *Aversive democracy: Inheritance and originality in the democratic tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Mouffe, C. (2005). *On the political*. New York: Routledge; Barber, B. (2004). *Strong democracy: Participatory politics for a new age*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Farrell, T. B. (1995). *Norms of rhetorical culture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

My contention is that while these rights are normatively helpful protections, they are not a guarantee from a post-foundational perspective. That is, the entitlement of the liberal individualist is political, and not an inherent, transcendental human right that can be demanded or enforced in a democracy. This construction is always contingent on the “normative foundation” of our contemporary political horizon.<sup>162</sup> As Oliver Marchart notes, “The moment of the political, when society is confronted with its own absent ground and with the necessity to institute contingent grounds, has always already come and does not stop coming.”<sup>163</sup>

When privacy is confronted with the seemingly intractable conflict with the values of accountability, it cannot be automatically privileged as a basic right. The embodiment of accountability, or the practice of such in the face of an assemblage premised on the notion of these rights, may deserve consideration, even when a violation of freedom is at stake. “...either contingency is ontologically necessary or it is not (to assume it is only ‘a bit’ necessary or ‘not quite’ necessary and still call it ‘necessary contingency’ would be ludicrous, because it means collapsing it into the ontic which would mean applying the very difference one wants to define),” writes Marchart, describing the protean nature of a horizon without grounding.

As such, we can observe the ways in which the Pulitzer assemblage not only sanitizes representations removed from affective labor and the abhorrent conditions under which the photographer works, but it also functions this way because it fits so well within what we consider to be our ‘natural’ rights—our right to pick winners and losers, our right to recognize these winners, and our right to constitute objects of discourse (the images, e.g.) ready for consumption. The discourses that sustain this notion of ranking and rights apply not only to the hierarchical

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<sup>162</sup> Stanley Deetz, *Democracy in the age of corporate colonization* (Albany: State University of New York Press).

<sup>163</sup> Marchart, 2007.

demands of the assemblage in picking a winner (ties are not typically in vogue in the liberal individualist model), but also have critical implications for the photographic subject. Because of the aid and mobilization and social movements associated with the rhetorical force of such 'humanitarian' photographs, the practice itself (of a westerner going to a remote, impoverished land to photograph suffering for the ends of their sponsors/media) elides much criticism. Gould is in agreement with Marchart in a critique of Sylvia Benhabib's view of universal and basic human rights: "Benhabib wants to have it both ways then: for if the rights are really contestable, then one possibility has to be that they can be abrogated... Either the rights are contestable, or they are not."<sup>164</sup> For Chantal Mouffe, difference is not only ubiquitous, it is itself an essential condition for which a postfoundational ground can exist. Drawing on Derrida's conception of "*différance*," Mouffe states, "In the field of collective identities, we are always dealing with the creation of a 'we' which can exist only by the demarcation of a 'they.' This does not mean of course that such a relation is necessarily one of friend/enemy, i.e. an antagonistic one."<sup>165</sup> Yet, we have constructed and allowed the assemblage to function under this kind of relationship, and under these assumptions.

As previously mentioned, the Pulitzer is associated with humanitarianism and the romanticism of journalists who put their lives on the line to show publics the images they would otherwise never be able to see. They bring attention to particularized regions within massive conflicts that are obscure to the western eye. I'm well aware of the positive attention that horrific images can bring to bear on relief efforts, the public mobilization of aid and support, and the

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<sup>164</sup> Gould, C. (1996). Diversity and democracy: Representing differences. *In Contesting the Boundaries of the political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 171-186.

<sup>165</sup> Mouffe, 2005.

fundraising that may come from those efforts. But the Pulitzer institution is positioned as a relatively neutral entity, rewarding photographers and images that deserve the award in their own right—that the images of ‘truth’ and ‘duty’ are self-evidently superior and justly rewarded. The claim of neutrality with regard to the Pulitzer’s complicity as part of the assemblage is revealed through its criteria for judging winners: “There are no set criteria for the judging of the Prizes... It is left up to the Nominating Juries and The Pulitzer Prize Board to determine exactly what makes a work ‘distinguished.’”<sup>166</sup> Under the guidelines for “Administration” of the prize, the Pulitzer web site states, “In photography, a single jury judges both the Breaking News category and the Feature category. Since the inception of the prizes the journalism categories have been *expanded and repeatedly redefined* by the board to keep abreast of the evolution of American journalism” [my emphasis].<sup>167</sup> Understood in cooperation with the earlier claim of neutrality, this statement reveals how the award retains its malleability—its elasticity—in order to conform to the changing, normative, and hierarchical demands that reconcile ‘good and just photography’ with capital.

The same year that Kevin Carter received the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography, another journalist, Paul Watson, won the Pulitzer for Spot News Photography (these are the two photography prizes awarded annually by the committee). For American audiences, Watson’s images are familiar ones—they too are gruesome, visceral, with violence bordering on the sublime [Figure 15; Figure 16].

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<sup>166</sup> The Pulitzer Prizes FAQ, <http://www.pulitzer.org/faq#q5>.

<sup>167</sup> The Pulitzer Prizes Administration, <http://www.pulitzer.org/administration>



[Figure 15]  
Paul Watson, Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography, 1994 (a)





[Figure 16]  
Paul Watson, Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography, 1994 (b)

Watson photographed a dead American soldier dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia. He recalls the scene: “I was terrified, but at the same determined to get that picture. It's really hard to describe the state you go into at a moment like that. It's cliché to talk about out of

body experiences, but it really did feel as if I was watching somebody else do it.”<sup>168</sup> What accounts for Watson’s ‘determination’? With his life on the line, with the acknowledgement that he was in fact participating in the spectacle, what would cause this person to push himself to such limits that would cause the ultimate in affective work—an out-of-body experience? This kind of determination is constructed and understood as one of the demands of the assemblage. While a host of other ‘parts’ are articulating and dearticulating with the Pulitzer, the prize becomes representative and symbolic of that once-in-a-lifetime shot (i.e., shoot now, think later). How that plays morally upon the photographer is relegated to after-the-fact deliberation, which almost inevitably leads to the photographer’s own tragedy:

I felt almost... what I can only describe as an immediate contact with that soldier--you know, almost a conversation. I heard a voice almost distinctly... and he said... if you do this, I will own you forever.

Watson invokes that familiar narrative of war-zone photographers in his reply back to the dead soldier: “I don’t have a choice...” And later, “I had to photograph what they were doing in order to tell the truth.” This narrative positions the photographer not as one who is pressed by the demands of ambition, opportunism, circulation; rather, he is understood as one who is uniquely placed, spatially and temporally—as if fate led them to this moment where no other action would be appropriate except to shoot the camera. The effects of the photographer’s ‘choice’ to make the award-winning image are sad, indeed. Watson still suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and is continually haunted by the image.

At the same time, this particular occasion for Watson’s interview is brought about by the publication of his memoir. That a contemporary photojournalist would even have a memoir is testament to the assemblage’s demands. I want to be clear that my argument is far removed from

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<sup>168</sup> *Journalist Paul Watson on Witnessing War*, Interview on *Fresh Air* from WHYY, August 27, 2007.

scapegoating the photographer-as-agent; in fact, my point is the opposite—blame can only be attributed to the degree to which the photographer is afforded an equal amount of agency. Rather, I want to illustrate how Watson’s success can happen simultaneously with his suffering. Of course, opportunism and suffering both refract degrees of difference—no one within this frame is completely innocent. But by discussing this guilt/innocence, we fall back into the trap introduced at the beginning of the argument; we become ones subject to the filtering of the Pulitzer, the sanitizing of affective moment through the false choices of attributing guilt/innocence to the photographer. Instead, we should regard the Pulitzer process as an assemblage that first gathers, then applies the external pressure that works upon those who labor in the affective field.

What follows from this claim is an inquiry into other various parts that constitute the assemblage along with their functions. One such function is understood by the ways in which the Pulitzer assemblage praises its subjects consistently within the tenets of liberal individualism. Perhaps nothing foregrounds how this process is problematic more than the way that the award ironically evacuates authorship from many of its winning photographs—in effect, further eliding the affective relationship between act and representation. In many iconic photographs, what is less known is that several photographers often shoot the same frame, give or take a few inches of perspectival change, post-process cropping, etc. In Hariman and Lucaites’ analysis of the famed Tiananmen Square photograph, they point out that three different versions of the image were circulated by various media (AP, UPI, Magnum).<sup>169</sup> The man standing in front of the tank varies in his physical position slightly from one photograph to another, and each version has slight variations on cropping. Yet, it is a safe bet to say that nearly every viewer of this photograph cannot distinguish one photograph from the others.

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<sup>169</sup> Hariman and Lucaites, 211.

The exigency, the assignment, of these photographers are often the same: they work under the same constraints of a homogenized conglomerated media culture that demands uniformity, even as the daunting task of capturing suffering within the photographic field places incredible affective burdens on individual photographers. It is within this context that the Pulitzer Prize is awarded. It works as an assemblage to disarticulate the affective endeavor from the so-called photographer-agent; what follows this process is an additive process—one that reassembles the act into a field of discursive, normative intelligibility. The notion of the photographer's agency is problematic to begin with, and the Pulitzer assemblage can capitalize on our notions of the agent as one who, with intention, goes out into the world and returns with handful of incredible images. Thus, the privilege the photographer has enjoyed as the invisible 'I,'—always hidden, unrepresented in the depiction of the photograph—is itself problematic, as is the notion that the one who possesses the camera is the one who claims for himself the intentional capacity of agency. Because the assemblage relies on a notion of authorial, intentional, and liberal individualist perspective of how images are formed and understood by publics, it becomes increasingly important to square the relationship among photographer, image, and agency, with the ways in which these problematic and traditional notions are appropriated by the assemblage.

This problematic relationship has not always been so, and in fact, this is a construction derived from the Enlightenment. The *camera obscura*, the first prototype of the modern camera, serves as both an elucidating metaphor and concrete example of the relationship between agency and the visual. Lee W. Bailey explains: "Leonardo da Vinci (ca. 1508) built a small camera obscura to study perspective drawing. René Descartes, in 1637, put an ox eye in the hole to study focus... Sitting in their dark chambers, such thinkers were fascinated with the way it inevitably

raised basic questions about the structure of the human eye, the reliability of perception, the nature of human memory and understanding.”<sup>170</sup> Thus, from the first, the technology associated with the would-be camera helped to define, shape, and demarcate the boundaries for human thought. Richard Rorty expands on how this relationship between camera and thought helped to form an understanding of Enlightenment thought. “In the Cartesian model, the intellect inspects entities modeled on retinal images... In Descartes’ conception—the one which became the basis for modern epistemology—it is representations which are in the ‘mind.’”<sup>171</sup>

The frame of the camera is quite literally, a frame on the world; a terministic screen—a way of seeing, and especially a way of not seeing; as such, the frame itself, the viewfinder, is a technological invention that gives the photographer a false sense of agency—for what becomes emphasized is the frame as a metonymy for reality, and not that which is excluded from it.<sup>172</sup> The frame is a device intended for control—the photographer can include whatever she wants within the frame, record the image, consider it a historical artifact, a piece of truth as keepsake—all without recourse to questioning the tremendous capacity of agency the camera allows her.

Whitson and Poulakos relay Nietzsche’s endorsement of aesthetics, as a necessary way of soothing and removing ourselves from the harshness of reality: “In doing so, the creator of language ‘glorifies the world’ and makes it more hospitable, in effect turning the chaotic into the

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<sup>170</sup> Lee W. Bailey, *Skulls Darkroom: The Camera Obscura and Subjectivity*, in *Philosophy of Technology*, ed. Paul T. Durbin (Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers), 63.

<sup>171</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 45.

<sup>172</sup> Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966); See also David Blakesley, *The Terministic Screen: Rhetorical Perspectives on Film* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003).

orderly, the dangerous into the safe, and the hostile into the amicable.”<sup>173</sup> Such is the capacity of the camera frame to do just that. The role of photographer as agent, then, is clearly exaggerated—in this view, he simply participates in the game of aesthetics so as to shield himself and others from what should not be seen. Thus, we can see how the earlier discussion of assemblage’s function of sterilizing images for public consumption falls in line with earlier discourses of agency as understood through the relationship between photographer, his ‘technology,’ and subject.

In addition, the technology plays a constitutive function: as reified conceptions of a ‘normal’ perspective, the aforementioned distortions become a part of the cyclical “historicity of convention.”<sup>174</sup> That is, when the photographer offers an image as utterance, she is now part of the creation process whereby future utterances may draw upon the past image as a conventional resource. So the photographer’s technology plays a two-fold role: first, its various exaggerations, distortions, draw upon the agentic force of past convention; in turn, this new figuration serves as a cultural, historical resource for future subject formation.

A more sobering elaboration on this configuration of agency is one in which the subject not only becomes (unwittingly) a cultural resource for convention, but also one in which the subject becomes detached from his interiority, and becomes what Gilles Deleuze has referred to as the “dividual.”<sup>175</sup> This marks a return to our discussion of Deleuze’s theory of articulation and modulation. Jack Bratich elaborates on this concept, concluding that this “dividual” then

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<sup>173</sup> Steve Whitson & John Poulakos, “Nietzsche and the aesthetics of rhetoric.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 79 no 2 (1993), 136.

<sup>174</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>175</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on Control Societies.” In *Negotiations*, trans. M. Joughin, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 177-182.

becomes a “malleable” and replaceable subject. He notes that “subjects and objects in this reality lose their stable interiors in favor of becoming variables to be modified in their relation to each other... Subjects, rather than being coherent selves with interiority, are broken down into a variety of capacities and then are recomposed with others in permanent fluctuation.”<sup>176</sup> Thus, agency is always already implicated within the function of the assemblage.

This disarticulation of representation from affective labor has consequences both for the public’s consumption of the Pulitzer image and for the photographer himself/herself. As they circulate, these images become contested, appropriated sites of meaning—understood through Hariman and Lucaites critical criteria for iconography—and in turn, become resources for publics to express anxieties, to project identities through these representations.<sup>177</sup> Only through a disarticulation can the image-as-representation become malleable enough to serve the interests of a pluralistic polity. Inviting narratives that *include* both the affective act along with its representation place the photograph into a frame that limits its pliability, and constructs the image as bounded within a specific, privileged moment privy only to photographer and photographic subject.

The Pulitzer Prize is an institution that forcibly creates new subjects through its rearticulation of the award-winning image/representation, now devoid of its *poiesis*—for both artist and consumer. With the award, the locus of power is newly formed in an intertextual space—an articulated synthesis of image/photographer, carefully prepared for a consuming public. As in the examples mentioned above, these photographic images-as-symbols attempt to capture a referent that border on the sublime. A public (and the photographer) cannot be

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<sup>176</sup> Jack Z. Bratich, “‘Nothing is left alone for too long’: Reality Programming and Control Society Subjects.” *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 30 no. 1 (2006), 71.

<sup>177</sup> Hariman and Lucaites.

expected to make immediate sense of horrific scenes that the image represents. Thus, the normalizing function of the Pulitzer works to resolve the anxieties of the irreconcilable act into an assemblage that coldly substitutes easily identifiable tropes of isolated courage for the messier task of making meaning which may result of unsettled, troubling stasis. So, on the one hand, affect on the part of the photographer, and on the other hand, the risky hermeneutics of misrecognition and irreconcilability are elided—disarticulated—from the Pulitzer assemblage in order for the award-winning photograph to achieve its utmost elasticity for public consumption.

Jacques Rancière shows us how a genealogy can reveal the ill-formed past of the ways in which conventions of looking are hijacked within particular discursive formations (e.g., his description of the devil made visual from what should have remained as prose, and thus becomes “grotesque”). Rancière describes this generic ‘takeover’ as a certain “regime of representation.” All representation (or conversely, “anti-representation”) is understood within this specific regime. Thus, whether Susan Sontag’s claim of images as “truth” remains salient today, it is the changing historical, cultural context itself that does more of the rhetorical work than the “resemblance” of the artifact to the experience.”<sup>178</sup> For Rancière, this was not always so:

...Balzac could populate his novels with Dutch paintings and Hugo could transform a book into a cathedral or a cathedral into a book... Wagner could celebrate the carnal union of male poetry and female music in the same physical materiality; and the prose of the Goncourts could transform the contemporary painter (Decamps) into a stonemason, before Zola transformed his fictional painter Claude Lantier into a window dresser/installer...<sup>179</sup>

Whether this is a move backward toward Benjamin’s privileging of the aura, or if Rancière’s description and assessment was ever found to be true, we still need to account for the changes in

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<sup>178</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 2001), 68.

<sup>179</sup> Rancière, 2007, 42-43.



representation that have since taken place. In particular, the audience is positioned as subjects of discourse through the assemblages's effects, and we can understand this through Foucault's notion of biopower. In addition, the image itself, the ways in which it circulates through dense layers of mediation with no beginning or end, has no telos to speak of. Returning to Deleuze, he describes our contemporary, mediated environment—what he terms “control society.” He shows us the move from disciplinarity, as conceptualized by Foucault, to control logic: “The various forms of control... are inseparable variations, forming a system of varying geometry whose language is *digital* (though not necessarily binary). Confinements are *molds*, different moldings, while controls are a *modulation*, like a self-transmuting molding continuing from one moment to the next, or like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another.”<sup>180</sup> Put one way, Deleuze is attempting to outline the context of our current possibilities for representation. Expression must be understood within an epistemological frame of “endless postponement.”<sup>181</sup>

This places the newly territorialized assembly squarely within the field of governmentality. Governmentality aims to reduce risk, and asks a polity to take upon themselves the operations that would contribute to the sanitizing process that the Pulitzer began.<sup>182</sup> Thus, the Pulitzer-as-institution does not discipline its subjects directly (save for the photographer), but instead inaugurates a specious variety of biopolitics that leaves the dirty work to the consuming public. This public is already conditioned through normalized, discursive boundaries that ‘coach’ non-controversial, non-risky behaviors. Foucault's discussion of the “technologies of the self” is a useful frame through which we can observe and understand the priming function of publics. He

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<sup>180</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Postscript on the Societies of Control*, 59 (Winter 1992), and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), and Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, (Stanford University Press, 2009).

considers such technologies as that which “help individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.”<sup>183</sup> These effects are linked through institutions, and are effective because the subject claims for himself agency, unwitting of the larger mappings of power. The rhetor’s agency, or if you’d rather, the rhetor’s ability to act upon, to express, to describe, is limited by the discursive formations that precede the interaction with the other. Thus, when the Pulitzer is announced, and the image is circulated, the public is more than willing to carry on the mantle of sterility, vis-à-vis the sublime image. The rationale for this notion of sterility is elaborated by Thacker and Galloway’s attempt to redefine “security”: “In biopolitics, security is precisely this challenge of managing a network of technologies, biologies, and relations between them. Security can be defined, simply, as the most efficient management of life (not necessarily the absence of danger or some concept of personal safety).”<sup>184</sup>

Publics are not only primed to receive the sterilized versions of these images in a linear, causal fashion; rather, we should again consider the role of (hyper)mediation. Contemporary mediation gives us the false sense that the audience of individuals consists and behaves as one actor capable of a collective judgment. Jack Bratich problematizes this construction of audience: “audiences are seen not as empirical actors to be examined in their concrete activity, but as discursive constructs, as effects of a variety of programs, institutions, and measuring

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<sup>183</sup> Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 18.

<sup>184</sup> Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The exploit: A theory of networks*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (2007).

instruments.”<sup>185</sup> In addition, the taken-for-granted ordering invoked by viewing publics is problematic. We may have a pronounced tendency to look at the products of the assemblage’s representations as products of an additive, historically linear nature. Foucault, on his concept of genealogy, writes: “Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of oblivion; its task is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form on all its vicissitudes.”<sup>186</sup> Thus, the hypermediated context in which we experience the image does not progress from a continuum that started long ago, in which layers upon layers of mediation are understood to be additive obstructions. There are discursive breaks in our history that allow for these conditions of representation—the attempt at expressing experience.

The laboring photographer is thus implicated within a dense web; the assemblages of awarding institutions place affective demands that are removed from the image’s final representation. These demands are allowed in the first place by the models of rights and radical individualism afforded by political theories emerging from the Enlightenment. A return to Bauman’s claim that the conditions for “natural” disaster are already “pregnant” with its own potential, is helpful here. He writes:

The ‘natural’ evil had to renounce its ‘naturalness,’ that feature which cast ‘nature,’ in opposition to ‘culture,’ as a phenomenon definitely *not* of human creation and thereby placed firmly beyond human power to challenge, to tinker with, to rearrange or reform. Culture, nature’s opponent, however did not treat any of the successively drawn boundaries of nature, simultaneously products and determinants of culture’s own self-limitation, as anything more than temporary armistice lines, definitely negotiable and breakable.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Jack Z. Bratich, “Amassing the Multitude: Revisiting Early Audience Studies.” *Communication Theory*, 15 no. 3, (2005), 243.

<sup>186</sup> Michel Foucault and Nikolas Rose. *The Essential Foucault*. (New Press, 2003), 355.

<sup>187</sup> Bauman, 82.

Accordingly, conditions under which photographic subjects are ‘captured’ and commodified are given a release from critique because of the discursively constructed ‘causal’ relationship between a rhetorically powerful image and mobilizing relief.

Immediately following the Oklahoma City bombings, two, nearly identical photographs were captured of a firefighter carrying a dead baby girl in his arms. Two amateur photographers, who happened to be standing next to each other, each snapped a picture of this moment. One of the photographs won the Pulitzer Prize and the other appeared on the front page of Newsweek [Figure 17].



[Figure 17]  
Charles Porter IV, Pulitzer Prize for Spot News Photography, 1996

Lester LaRue, a gas company worker, shot the Newsweek photo. After getting his negatives developed at his local Motophoto, he took the images home. In speaking of the photograph which would soon become famous, he told his wife, “I don't want anyone else to see this photo.”<sup>188</sup> I do not question LaRue’s intentions in that moment, with the trauma still freshly imprinted on both his mind and on the prints lying before him. However, the next morning, he saw that a picture identical to his had appeared on the front page. Soon after, Newsweek came calling—they wanted to buy LaRue’s image. Later, he turned on the evening news and heard the baby’s mother, Aren Almon, say that “she was proud her daughter had come to symbolize the innocence of the victims.” For LaRue, this was implicit permission to take braver steps toward commodifying the image, and in doing so, commodifying the tragedy. He sold distribution rights to other publications, granted permission to make 18-inch replications in the form of little statues, and even offered the rights to have the image reprinted on t-shirts. Almon was irate. She fought for future control of the image along with the depicted firefighter, Chris Fields, but in January 1997, a federal judge denied their request, rationalizing that neither the child nor the firefighter was “readily identifiable.”<sup>189</sup>

For Pulitzer winner, Charles Porter IV, the narrative following his capture of the image took a different path from LaRue’s. Yet, the same demands by the assemblage, the same demands of commodity, came calling for him, as well. Soon after he sold his image to AP, the image began to circulate around the world, and in the moment, “he wished he had never taken that “stupid photo.”” But with the encouragement of both his minister and his newly hired lawyer,

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<sup>188</sup> Julia Prodis, “Tragedy Framed Forever; The Pulitzer Prize-Winning Photo that Captured Oklahoma Bombing Continues to Haunt Four Lives,” *The Toronto Sun*, April 13, 1996, p. 24.

<sup>189</sup> “Judge Rules on Oklahoma Bombing Photo,” *The Washington Post*, Jan. 19, 1997, A29.

he began to consider offers to reappropriate the image into objects such as a figurine, a commemorative coin, and even a calling card.<sup>190</sup> The firefighter, Chris Fields, began to hear talk behind his back from other firefighters who were also at the scene of the bomb's aftermath—and who were now also resentful of the singular attention given to Fields.

One of the modulated attachments of the Pulitzer assemblage functions to commodify the event within the same fashion of its liberal individualist, hierarchical process of competition. This competition creates demands on those it envelops in its march toward legitimacy. Typical reactive discourses, understood in isolation, depicts subjects such as photographers LaRue and Porter as greedy and exploitative—especially at the moment that their greed is made public. But their actions cannot be understood in isolation. The assembly structure was well in place before the bombings occurred. It is no small observation that Porter didn't even ask to be nominated for the Pulitzer. Yet, with this kind of 'success,' no matter the circumstances, moral choices must be made for those implicated. Greed is understood in the public's imaginary as a subject's intentional choice in taking action. Agency is conferred upon those who would seek to profit off of devastated lives. But this is only a small part of the formulation. When the Pulitzer institution sets up a structure, subjects who are implicated—whether the photographers, the baby's mother, the firefighter, the news editor under pressure to publish the most provoking image—have limited recourse. They are always already *responding* to the demands of the assemblage.

Of course, the chances for rupture exist in particular, historic moments. For Rancière, the possibility for remapping representation, retaining *poiesis*, and resisting the assemblage's operations of divorcing affect and meaning, are not only hopeful, but possible. He believes that a kind of equivalence in what he calls, "the surface of design," is possible through certain

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<sup>190</sup> Prodis, 1996.

conditions: “firstly, the equal footing on which everything lends itself to art; secondly the surface of conversion where words, forms and things exchange roles; and thirdly, the surface of equivalence where the symbolic writing of forms equally lends itself to the expressions of pure art and the schematization of instrumental art.”<sup>191</sup> Rancière’s example is a kind of flattening of representation. He wants to revive the possibility of representation through and across the practice of designing artifacts. Thus, his examples include industrial design campaigns, and he includes Alexander Rodchenko’s Dobrolet airplane poster designs as an exemplar of meeting this criteria. Still, one must pose the question of unrepresentability. For Nathan Stormer, the sublime, or what he refers to as the “unpresentable,” is not beyond discourse. It may be “witness” to the possibility of representing the sublime, but he argues that our understanding of such remains within our symbolic field of intelligibility:

According to claims for the unpresentability of the sublime, at the moment of apprehension, when the infinite is grasped in its particularity, discourse ceases to function properly. When one senses the limitlessness of the universe in a grain of sand, speech loses its coherence because the economy of scale within discourse is found wanting... I submit that the sublime is no more beyond words, beyond representation, than any other human experience.<sup>192</sup>

Stormer’s argument is premised on the notion that what is unintelligible does not align with our notions of the sublime. Because we can talk, identify, apply attributes to what we consider the sublime, this, for him, is evidence that the “unpresentable” is not beyond discourse. This is at once encouraging and disappointing with consideration to the future of representation. On the one hand, this points to inflated notions of the sublime within our everyday discursive practices. On the other hand, this concession doesn’t provide space for the “enframing” that Heidegger

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<sup>191</sup> Rancière, 106-107.

<sup>192</sup> Nathan Stormer, Addressing the Sublime: Space, Mass Representation, and the Unpresentable,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 21(Sept 2004), 216.



posits.<sup>193</sup> Surely, there are both events and subjects that are beyond our field of discursively intelligibility. To not conflate these with the sublime is one thing, but this doesn't resolve the referential meaning of symbolic action that goes beyond Stormer's own notion of the sublime. If it is indeed unnamable, what remains as the proper function of representation toward this, which is by definition, 'outside,' and absent?

Fortunately, disruption can be reconfigured outside the problem of representing this notion of absence; resistance can take place while the problem of (mis)representation is effectively bracketed. This is illustrated through events immediately following 9/11, and before territorializing gatherings had a chance to discipline the various attempts at meaning making, small spaces of resistance opened up in which citizens had no choice but to approach representations of the horrific head-on. Thus, what has been termed by Paul Christopher Johnson as "organic civil religion" was instituted by a devastated public culture—even if only temporarily. Impromptu, spontaneous representations were created by a public in the wake of the terrorist attacks, whose scenes are now familiar in our cultural memory of the aftermath: "...several visitors wept as they ran their hands over the jackets, helmets, and boots. Others mouthed silent words as they placed their hands on the garments. Still other visitors wrote notes and added them to the alter."<sup>194</sup> Perhaps, then, the conditions of possibility for rupture can only exist within spatial and temporal areas in which the affective labor of representation is not divorced from the sublime's outside and its absence—that is, the referent—of which it attempts to symbolize.

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<sup>193</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, New York: Harper & Row (1977).

<sup>194</sup> Paul Christopher Johnson, "Savage Civil Religion." in Bryan Rennie and Philip L. Tite, eds., *Religion, Terror, and Violence: Religious Studies Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2008): 50-51.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Ocularcentric and Textual LCD as Public Image

We also all admit that the axes of the sublime and the base, the essential and the accessory, the triumphant and the degenerate, the noble and the superficial, are set forth in epics and legends, monuments and shrines, statues and songs. We find in them the ordinances that command our affirmations and our reprobations, our hopes and our visions.

--Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative*<sup>195</sup>

Photography appears to be an easy activity; in fact it is a varied and ambiguous process in which the only common denominator among its practitioners is in the instrument.

--Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Mind's Eye*<sup>196</sup>

This chapter considers what it means to “bring forth” into legibility a photographic object of analysis, suitable for research, how and why this endeavor is necessary, and what this may mean for a critic examining the function of representation as a rhetorical endeavor.<sup>197</sup> I provide

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<sup>195</sup> Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 6.

<sup>196</sup> Henri Cartier-Bresson, “The Mind’s Eye,” in *The Mind’s Eye: Writing on Photography and Photographers*, ed. Michael L. Sand (New York: Aperture, 1976), 15.

<sup>197</sup> Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht links the act of production with bringing forth, and in particular, he is interested in how “presence” is achieved and modulated by “proximity” and “intensity” of movement. He writes, “If production means, literally, ‘to bring forth,’ ‘to pull forth,’ then the phrase ‘production of presence’ would emphasize that the effect of tangibility that comes from the materialities of communication is also an effect in constant movement. In other words, to speak of ‘the production of presence’ implies that the (spatial) tangibility effect coming from the

as example an exception to the traditional photographic text for rhetorical criticism. These traditional texts may include an image, a tangible darkroom print or archival find, a thing one can photocopy, print, or scan. However, my primary text in this chapter is not a fixed image on paper—it is more accurately described as an affordance of technology or a *techne* necessary to the production of photography: the LCD (liquid-crystal display). Once rare and now a ubiquitous technology, the LCD associates with its contemporary counterparts of newer technology such as LED screens built from cheaper, more efficient lights. Both can be located on the backside of contemporary digital cameras.

I contend that rhetoric is located within the process of mapping the LCD's relationship to humans, other types of cameras (i.e., video, film), its former self (35mm viewfinder), the function of the LCD as a technosocial affordance, repetition, memory and narrative forms of “shot arrangement,” and the figurative arrangement of language. In short, I approach the emergence of the LCD—as an object *of* and not merely *for* photographic practice—as a set of *discursive practices* that encompasses categories of both symbol and matter. I argue that rhetoric *is* the complicit act of bringing forth such an object into common view. The LCD appears as a text in this chapter. Yet, while considerations of the LCD are distinguished from former modalities of photographic looking, such as the 35mm viewfinder, the viewfinder is by no means excluded as a textual candidate by a criterion of novelty.

For this chapter's analysis, I divide into unequal portions the discursive practices—in the sense of Barad's theorizing—of digital photography with regard to the LCD screen. Each section in the analysis begins with a heading (and signifier) addressed by these discursive practices (i.e.,

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communication media is subjected, in space, to movements of greater or lesser proximity, and of greater and lesser intensity.” See, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004): 17.

the relata of *Object, Affordance, Repetition, Memory, and Enthymeme*). I consider each section in terms of the relationship held together by the practices that bring forth the LCD as a text.

‘Emergence, representation, and photographic apparatuses of looking’ might be suitable as a label or title for this chapter, but the phrase remains awkward as the naming of a rhetorical text. I suggest this awkwardness is more than an indication of my poor choice of words. The rift between discursive practices and the image is a recurrent phenomenon problematized and demonstrated repeatedly in this dissertation. The rift stems largely from the popular *conflation between word and image*—a subject dear to both rhetoric and philosophy. Many terms represent this divide, but I contend the term “ocularcentrism” accurately connotes both a culture’s over-determination of the visual as a stand-in for the other senses and interpretive meaning-making faculties.

Ocularcentrism—a culture’s propensity to bring forth objects and representations through a logic of visual modalities—is not a novel idea located in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century despite claims to the contrary.<sup>198</sup> We “see” when we understand a concept, we “watch” our televisions although we may mute the sound when the phone rings, we participate by “observing” when the exigence turns toward scholarship at a given site(s). David Levin notes the recurring problems that ocularcentrism has posed for thinkers since antiquity. Stuck within the symbolic registers of the linguistic, thinking / writing / reading / knowledge overlap to such a degree that the ‘centrism’ of the visual finds expression in these traditional modes. For example, Michel Foucault, perhaps the most influential poststructuralist to the discipline of rhetoric, finds expressions of power within

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<sup>198</sup> While estimates vary, it is clear that participants of digital culture are increasingly producing more and more photographs—*TIME* estimates “380 billion photographs will be taken this year alone.” I reference this statistic as a contrast to the criteria naming a particular age as properly ocularcentric over another; the ‘proof’ of its emergence is not driven by statistics, but by its relative stronghold on expressions by other means, such as language. See David Michael Levin, *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

the visual. The panoptic gaze, on which he based his studies of societal discipline and cultural formation, took shape within the visual-in-language. His notions of discipline, self-discipline, and sovereign-based discipline, all rely on visual figures. The opening to his *Discipline and Punish* asks of the reader to consider the gruesome scene in which a subject of the king is accused and punished for attempted regicide. He provides the following provocation in terms of violence and visibility:

The flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pincers, his right hand, holding the knife with which he committed the said parricide, burnt with sulphur [sic] melted together and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his limbs and body consumed by fire, reduced to ashes and his ashes thrown to the winds.<sup>199</sup>

Foucault sets up a graphic scene at the outset to mark a contrast between sovereign power (as illustrated by the punishment for those who would challenge the king) and panoptic power which functions as a visual technology of discipline, first as a prison, and later as a model for societal self-discipline (e.g., what he later makes manifest as the various concepts of governmentality, biopolitics, and technologies of the self—all of which include discursive practices). Descartes receives special mention if only for the sheer number of times he is humiliated within visual literature as the patriarch of conflating vision /mind / knowledge.<sup>200</sup>

Ocularcentrism not only indicates a given culture's reliance and preference for the visual, but also marks how the visual binds to the language of modern thought, and thus its function in

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<sup>199</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage, 1995): 3.

<sup>200</sup> Martin Jay names the dichotomy of *lux/lumen* as a jumping off point for many thinkers concerned with the ocular. *Lux* is visible and refers to what we might today equate with visual perception, while *Lumen* can be thought of as mystical, higher ordered, or in contemporary terms, the operation of light matter (waves and particles) on human bodies which remains invisible to empirical perception. Descartes attended to the latter term because of his belief that the “geometric laws” of light “could be studied deductively because they corresponded to the natural geometry of the mind.” See Martin Jay, “The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism.” *Poetics Today* 9 no. 2 (1988): 313-314.

the creation of modern knowledge claims: “Leonardo da Vinci (ca. 1508) built a small camera obscura to study perspective drawing. René Descartes, in 1637, put an ox eye in the hole to study focus... Sitting in their dark chambers, such thinkers were fascinated with the way it inevitably raised basic questions about the structure of the human eye, the reliability of perception, the nature of human memory and understanding.”<sup>201</sup> However, this is not just a problem lacking available modes of expression, although that question certainly poses its own set of interesting quandaries. Rather, the visual's uptake in legitimate modes of knowledge inquiry means that it modulates alongside formations of widely accepted knowledge claims. An excellent example of this attitude comes from the discourse of Henri Cartier-Bresson, co-founder of the Magnum Agency and cited in photojournalism's literature as the patriarch of modern photojournalism: “Above all, I craved to seize the whole essence, in the confines of one single photograph, of some situation that was in the process of unrolling itself before my eyes.”<sup>202</sup>

Levin notes that “the will to power” of studying the visual-in-language leads the category toward a dominating tendency—what he calls hegemonic—of creating and “enframing” knowledge to serve a fantasy of totality, mastery, and perfection through available *techné*.<sup>203</sup> Yet, the whole of the process for Cartier-Bresson is located within his desire for the photograph; photography and photograph, agency and object, are conflated, and if the photograph is

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<sup>201</sup> Lee W. Bailey, *Skulls Darkroom: The Camera Obscura and Subjectivity, in Philosophy of Technology*, ed. Paul T. Durbin (Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers): 63.

<sup>202</sup> Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952).

<sup>203</sup> These two terms, of course, are not his. The former comes from Nietzsche and the latter from Heidegger. Heidegger's enframing concept is especially useful to understanding the role of representation as “technology,” including technology's tendency to “enframe” itself to the exclusion of less obvious phenomena such as the power of a flowing river. See Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

momentarily bracketed as an object, then rhetoric's scope is limited to a pre-determined, natural act of photography's capacity to "seize." Nicholas Mirzoeff describes this relationship between visual culture and its primary function: "It is a dispute about the division of what is perceptible to the senses. Insofar as that dispute concerns the visual, necessarily interfaced with the other senses, this politics of bringing the embodied subject into presence in space is visual culture."<sup>204</sup>

Thus, it is worth noting that there is no tacit operation within this essay to reach deep into an orientation positing essentialism *behind* human interpretation, nor toward developing an ontological account of rhetoric as a thing creeping back toward the human despite *techne's* provocative tendency to reinvent discursive practices. That is, there is no *a priori* imperative to resolve what Bradford Vivian refers to as Aristotle's "scholastic calculus of essence and appearance;" or to solve the millennia-old problem, reemerging in 1980s cultural studies as the "crisis of representation."<sup>205</sup> That goal provides a different scope of discursive relations. I attempt to resist a pre-determined move toward ontological claims, even as I cite theorists and thinkers who invoke new ontologies as part of their scholarship. Affinities with posthumanism are present in this study, but there is little to convince me that such labels open up opportunities to examine discursive practices. From my view, this provocative practice of actively signifying alternative attitudes and orientations in the name of ontology do little except to shut down potential audiences. Yet, questions emanating from the trope of the ocular flee from the critic's

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<sup>204</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Invisible Empire: Visual Culture, Embodied Spectacle, and Abu Ghraib." *Radical History Review*, 95 Spring (2006): 23.

<sup>205</sup> Bradford Vivian, *Being Made Strange: Rhetoric Beyond Representation* (New York: SUNY Press, 2004), 3-4. Butler encourages scholars to shift toward the "challenge" that "representationalism" poses rather than trying to resolve the problem of representationalism: "The reality is not conveyed by what is represented within the image, but through the challenge to representation that reality delivers." See Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, (Verso, 2009): 146.

frame with ease. In addition to performing criticism, this chapter also considers what a rhetorical critic may address by invoking the visual as an object of study. In particular, I look at the troping of photography with regard to the process of textual legitimation. Thus, I consider Cartier-Bresson's claim in the epigraph as a challenge to first, recognize the complexity of choosing a text for the rhetorical study of photography that does not default to a photograph as ready and apparent for criticism, and second, to consider the rich ways in which an object, sign, or discursive practice *becomes* representation—that is, I am interested in a rhetoric of 'bringing objects forth.' This is quite different from an exigence aimed toward resolving the problem of representation. I acknowledge the massive gap between photographic representation as ocularcentric truth claim and the stuff underwriting real life, from which experience is extracted and re-inscribed as tenuous knowledge. Still, as the "common denominator" of the camera is understood in processual relation to that which gives it voice, or to that which gathers people, their practices, other quotidian matter (i.e., light), and other technosocial objects and networks—my primary contention is that rhetoric lives—rightfully so—within the emergence of photography's sign.





[Figure 18] – Henri Cartier-Bresson, “master of the viewfinder”<sup>206</sup>

[Figure 19] – Henri Cartier-Bresson’s 1946 portrait of Jean-Paul Sartre (with architect Jean Pouillon)

While representations--as known signs, media, actions--may serve a persuasive function as these texts look outward and await their interpreting audiences, I argue that persuasion is better located when looking at the ways in which objects *adduce*, bring themselves forth, or are brought forth,

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<sup>206</sup> Both photographs were on display for an exhibit at the National Portrait Gallery, "Tête à Tête: Portraits by Henri Cartier-Bresson," which ran from Oct. 1999 – Jan. 2000. The photographs were reproduced digitally for an interactive collaboration between the Magnum Photo Agency and The Washington Post. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/museums/photogallery/bresson/index.htm>.

as movements making the object visible to oneself and to the subjects of photography's discursive practices.

To illustrate this argument, I demonstrate my own bringing forth of an object: the small screen appended to the rear end of a digital camera. In order to do so, I appropriate a processual, relational framework familiar to scholars within science and technology studies (STS) and by those within the rhetorical discipline delineated earlier in the dissertation proposal. In addition, I rely on the work of poststructuralists such as Foucault and Judith Butler, and notably, the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.<sup>207</sup> This framework, which I describe as the performative inquiry of photography's "discursive practices," and alternatively, "relationality," encompasses far more than categories of language and the visual to point out suasory features setting the object on a trajectory toward cultural visibility.<sup>208</sup> Thus, a corollary to this argument is a critique of addressing representation *only* on the level of its apparent visibility; that is, representation encompasses more than an interpretation of suasory features existing on the surface (e.g., a photographic print). In that scenario, the object is already determined; it has already been brought forth and made (as legible).

Examining discursive practices of the photographic act in this study serves to address concerns emanating from the troping of photography as a work and category. That is, this essay's exigence is located within a drive to make photography visible in terms of what Bruno Latour calls "concerns" rather than peeling back the layers of photography's "technosocial" aspects.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> An elaboration of appropriated literature can be found in Chapter 2.

<sup>208</sup> "Discursive practices" or the consideration of discourses as a mode of conducting scholarship, receives special attention later in this chapter.

<sup>209</sup> This call by Latour asks critics to take a break from debunking and deconstruction and instead attend to relational mapping which can include objects as actors, as he of course has suggested in the past, but also the concerns of human actors. He worries that techniques of

This is not a critique that finds its terminal exigence by excavating the “black box” of photography.<sup>210</sup> Langdon Winner notes that a black box approach utilized by social constructivists of technology fails to recognize the “possibility that there may be dynamics evident in technological change behind those revealed by studying the immediate needs, interests, problems, and solutions of specific groups and social actors.”<sup>211</sup> The goal of addressing immediate interests suggests those objects which already demand recognition in a public culture of technology are a suitable arrangement of *techne* available to meet those immediate needs. In this instance, photography’s capacity to produce an image-as-text is linked with inventional capacities of public interpretation. How those interpretations move, enact, and identify with audiences toward their needs is a noble endeavor to pursue. Yet, the scope of this study resists the move to interpreting texts as a starting place or primary purpose.

Emily Cram notes that the reigning tendency in rhetorical studies for addressing “visual images and performances” has been within the “interpretation and circulation of images in mass public culture.”<sup>212</sup> Most often, this type of study appears as the study of “iconic” photographs and their inventional capacity for promoting deliberation within a democracy. Cram urges instead for

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contemporary critique—particularly within a postmodern frame—can obliterate the past through games of endless distinction and deferral, and possess the tools for creating unthinkable controversies (e.g., 9/11 denial). See Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern.” *Critical Inquiry*, 30 no. 2 (2004): 225-248.

<sup>210</sup> The black box concept ranges from actual engineering practices to metaphors of sociality. In short, it is a process by which outputs are determined solely by inputs, as a way to reduce the complexity of processes—on both machinic and social scales. See, Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Winner, “Upon Opening the Black Box and Finding it Empty,” *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, No 3: (1993).

<sup>211</sup> Winner, 238.

<sup>212</sup> Emily Dianne Cram, “‘Angie was Our Sister:’ Witnessing the Trans-Formation of Disgust in the Citizenry of Photography,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 98 no. 4 (2012): 411-438.

an increased attention toward "quotidian photography" and its political potential. She writes, "The photographed is both subject and object while the relationship to the camera invites an inventional space of fantasy and becoming...The camera brings forth an image of a body located in a specific time and space and produces a subject to be encountered."<sup>213</sup> For Gumbrecht, "production" is "the act of 'bringing forth' an object in space."<sup>214</sup> The difference between these two views is rendered implicitly through language, and whatever affinities may appear initially—soon dissolve when photography is addressed through the category of agency.<sup>215</sup> While Cram moves to the ground of the under-attended in visual-rhetorical study via an increased attention to the vernaculars of photography, her view is still supported by an agency placed within the audience, as noted by her use of "the photographed," who may understand that an expectation of photography is linked to "the anticipation of being looked at by others." Gumbrecht brackets agency toward a description of how representation functions. In both cases, an object (or subject) is 'brought forth,' or made visible, and how, if, and when scholars address these objects help to determine the field or scope of a photographic rhetoric.

When Cram refers to the "inventional space of fantasy and becoming," a critic may use method to address this space of rhetorical potential. On the one hand, fantasy and becoming

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<sup>213</sup> Cram, 422.

<sup>214</sup> As cited in Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*. (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>215</sup> Within the context of publishing and its relationship to the humanities, Toby Miller notes his admiration for the "new" literary history's tripartite approach to analyzing texts, what the historian Roger Chartier calls...a focus on "the text itself, the object that conveys it, and the act that grasps it"; and an identification of "the strategies by which authors and publishers tried to impose an orthodoxy or a prescribed reading." From my view, the "text" is the object, the "object that conveys it" is a mediating, rhetorical process derived from discursive practices, and "the act that grasps it" is highly contingent upon interpretation and the relative commensurability between argument and belief. See Toby Miller, "Teaching, Shall We Say, Elsewhere: A Response to 'The Academy in Peril,'" *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Jan. 12, 2013.

articulate well with studies of affect; that is, the space of invention is rhetorically powerful, but generalizeable results may not be derived, and even for the rhetorical critic, judgment is difficult because a critic needs *something* to critique. That is, if an object is not predetermined as such (e.g., a photograph), claims may be made toward the function of affect in bringing forth the object for the critic's reference, but affect in its operation tends to escape such fixity. Deleuze and Guattari refer to this fleeing or resistance to known categories as "lines of flight."<sup>216</sup> This slippage of known meanings related to a sign or object is also related to Derrida's usage of "iterative force," the idea that a sign can find its way to contexts outside of its original use.<sup>217</sup> Both are linked to affect as an undertow for language, and as such, discovering meaning based solely on the conventions in language takes a back seat to affect, which cannot be reduced to meaning.

The idea of bringing forth an object seems somewhat straightforward for a critic; if the object is already circulating as an object suitable for criticism, then it has already reached a point of visibility--and thus legitimacy--as a potential text. If not, then perhaps it is the critic's role to do just that: to make immutable that which may or may not exhibit malleable properties. Patricia Clough reminds scholars that "matter's capacity for self-organization in being in-formational. . . may be the most provocative and enduring contribution of the affective turn."<sup>218</sup> Again, Clough is addressing what I am roughly equating to the function of making objects appear, even when such matter is not an object in its traditional, bounded, fixed sense. I understand Karen Barad's

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<sup>216</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

<sup>217</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

<sup>218</sup> Patricia T. Clough, "The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedica and Bodies," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25 no. 1 (2008): 1.

"agential realism" as acknowledging matter's self-organization, a field which includes objects, bodies, movement, and language.<sup>219</sup> The bringing forth for Barad is not necessarily located in the human critic, as she argues that agency is nothing at all until an exchange of energy moves matter within a field; that which sets into motion these objects and puts them into a relation need not be the human critic, nor start with the assumption of an agentic directionality. The naming of an agent, the source of power in a relationship, or even a primary identification of objects in that relation (i.e., "relata") must be understood through the "discursive practices" of their making.<sup>220</sup> It is important to note here that discursive practices are not necessarily localized through arrangements in space. Discursive practices are not determined solely by regionalism—yet, they may link across space. Deleuze and Guattari use the term, “rhizome,” to critique the clean lines of modernist connectivity, and to point out the potential of a sign or nonsign’s passage into radically different contexts. A “rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states.”<sup>221</sup> The LCD, for example, is a product of Japan, but the practices around the LCD may link its production to the modern knowledge claims of German chemists and French physicists. The LCD also may be legitimated by its link to popular ocular practices of identity formation within digital cultures—the commodities binding image with personhood. The two views (Barad and Deleuze) are commensurate, and while Barad performs a distanced,

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<sup>219</sup> Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, no 3, (2003), 812-822; Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>220</sup> Barad, 801.

<sup>221</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 21.

physicist's style in her characterization of practices, Deleuze moves (typically) to unconventional spatial metaphors—the game of figuring movement and space within the confines of language.

With regard to representation, Barad notes, “The move toward performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices/doings/actions.”<sup>222</sup> These discursive practices, I argue, are inherently rhetorical, as their function is to make known what is obscured by culture. To include both human and language within the categories of matter and discursive practices, respectively, is to concede that any study of discursive practices is fraught with contingency. Human interpretation is bracketed from agency in that any given relationship among objects 'self-organizes,' and thus it becomes difficult to attribute ultimate intentions and directionality to any given object. It is the *relationship* which brings forth iterable things and concepts and visions and signs. Implicitly, the recognition of such is addressed toward human judgment and interpretation, which is why Barad uses performativity as a way to discuss discursive practices.

A performative approach weaves in and out of both known and unintelligible signs, signals the non-guarantee of ultimate signification (i.e., Butler's performative), and significantly—for this critic—considers complicity as unprovocative.<sup>223</sup> Barad notes, “performativity is actually a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of

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<sup>222</sup> Barad's notion of “discursive practices” are understood as immanent and material, and she specifically denotes that “the linguistic is not a synonym for discourse.” I do not consider “practices/doings/actions” to be in opposition with theory, or as part of a dichotomous frame privileging theory as a priori. For Barad, this distinction is made in her elaboration of both Newtonian relata and Bohr's quantum theory; only the latter does not place atomic matter on a privileged scale.

<sup>223</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: Politics of the Performative*, (New York: Verso, 2007).

representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve.<sup>224</sup> Complicity is part of an orientation toward discursive practices rendered within performance. The "we all admit" indicated by Lingis in this chapter's epigraph is a concession of the complicity inscribed within the interpretive act--against the portrayal of knowledge-as-certainty in the act of bringing forth.

Complicity, then, is also paradoxical in its operation. At once, it draws out a desire--a human desire--to remain orthodox or reconciled with a higher order or ontology while simultaneously eschewing the methods by which essence is pitted against representation. Burke may say that it is merely a "secular analogue" in language framed within strides toward "salvation," and that much seems evident against a critical, rational, and subjective "motive," but this resonant claim does not invite an implicit investigation into an *a priori* of rhetoric--should one exist.<sup>225</sup> Complicity also is a concession to the certain modes of scientific rigor and a concession to what is termed, affect. If the concept of affect is granted an audience, then that audience receives little guarantee of fixed meanings and interpretations in and around a text—and in particular, if one locates affect in the body. If one subscribes to a Deleuzian view of affect, then effects on/of the body do not guarantee a portable, representational version of meaning to be rendered in language. Affect, at least on the Deleuzian view, potentially remains at a level of non-signification, and while increased attention to the trope of affect may point to its importance in determining a "capacity to affect or to be affected," much remains to be seen in how scholars operationalize the term, appropriate it toward meaning, or find its refusal to cooperate with known conventions to be ultimately, frustrating.<sup>226</sup> Again, this task is different than identifying a

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<sup>224</sup> Barad, 802.

<sup>225</sup> Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

<sup>226</sup> See Brian Massumi's introduction in Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.



category called affect that is influential to discursive practices—the argument to locate affect within non-parsable units spells neither its own doom nor its potential to occupy influence. Rather, a more realistic task is to show the ways scholars attend to such amorphous energy within a cultural backdrop preferring just the opposite.<sup>227</sup>

Thus, performative modalities are not merely substitute methods for rigorous scholarship; understood in this frame, I contend that a performative orientation acknowledging the mere potential of affect is necessary for criticism rather than a preference toward criticism. In particular, it is commensurate with rhetoric if rhetoric is a method that valorizes argument, the probable, and contingency within the complex task of identifying 'that which moves us.' The identification of such movement is necessarily the function of rhetoric on my read.<sup>228</sup> The objects brought forth that are the most readily identifiable are also the objects that persuade *through a demonstration of their passage*.

While the dissertation takes as its exigence the bringing forth of discursive practices within what I have termed a photographic act, this chapter specifically addresses the emergent

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<sup>227</sup> In grappling with the categories of “culture,” “discourse,” and “affect,” Gilbert points to the possibility that all discourse might inflect affective capacity, but that disciplines such as “discourse analysis” routinely ignores such possibility in favor of “etymological” uses of the term. For Gilbert, this becomes an implicit claim that the discipline locates its explanatory power only within linguistic conventions. See “Signifying Nothing: ‘Culture,’ ‘Discourse’ and the Sociality of Affect,” *Culture Machine* 6 (2004).

<sup>228</sup> Gilbert rejects that Deleuzian materialism is only suitable to the cultural studies fashioned from Williams to Hall to Grossberg, or that Deleuzian philosophy cannot be made useful. Rather, he poses a challenge: to construct “a theoretical vocabulary with which to describe and discuss modes of social experience which do not operate according to either the signficatory or the rhetorical logics of language.” Easier said than done.

process of textualization as inherently rhetorical.<sup>229</sup> In order to do so, I begin with the visual feedback mechanism of the digital camera—its LCD.

### *Object*

Shifting from traditional interface designs of viewfinders designed to combine photographer and camera into a seamless agent, small, liquid-crystal displays (LCDs) emerged on the backend of consumer-based digital cameras starting in 1995 with the release of Casio's QV-10.<sup>230</sup> Their emergence articulated with the emergence of the digital camera, and as such, its ostensible function was to provide the photographer with a pair of wildly new affordances: the capacity to review and receive instant photographic feedback without the need to produce a print, and the capacity to use that same feedback mechanism to shoot "live," (i.e., "live preview") foregoing the traditional modality of pressing one's eye to the back of the camera in order *to see*. The changing design of the camera interface demanded of the digital photographer to expand her habits of interfacing from one mode (peering into the camera) to two (peering and reviewing).

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<sup>229</sup> By photographic "act," I invoke the term in at least three ways: the first usage is tied to a performative mode of studying/using photography; the second refers to an intensified attention toward photography as a modality of action rather than passive text; the third usage is enthymematic: to ask tacitly how one attributes the power of photography while making suspect a view wherein photography is an endeavor necessarily prompted by a human agent rather than as an agency of photography's relations.

<sup>230</sup> See Casio Computer Co., Ltd., "Casio QV-10 LCD Digital Camera Registered as an Essential Historical Material for Science and Technology by Japan's National Museum of Nature and Science," Sept. 13, 2012, and Michael Zhang, "Casio QV-10: The First Digital Camera that Offered an LCD Screen and Live View," *PetaPixel*, Sept. 5, 2012. <http://www.petapixel.com/2012/09/05/casio-qv-10-the-first-digital-camera-that-offered-an-lcd-screen-and-live-view/>.



[Figure 20]  
Casio QV-10 LCD Digital Camera

While the LCD emerged on the camera at this time, its scientific development is traced back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when a chemist measuring the properties of cholesterol in plants such as carrots, discovered a new substance that “seemed to have two melting points.”<sup>231</sup> Upon consulting the German physicist, Otto Lehmann, Lehmann concluded “the cloudy liquid was a new state of matter and coined the name “liquid crystal,” illustrating that it was something between a liquid and a solid, sharing important properties of both.”

For this chapter, the choice of the LCD as a starting point began with my own curiosity as to the strange arrangement of a screen ‘stuck’ to a camera, and in turn, how that screen so

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<sup>231</sup> “History and Properties of Liquid Crystals,” *Nobelprize.org* Sept. 9, 2003.

effectively paved the way for obscuring itself—ironically—in its most ubiquitous form (the mobile phone). Yet, as I learned more about the LCD, and the language of chemists and physicists pointed to the liquid crystals as being in a marked state “between a liquid and a solid,” (with no confusion whatsoever that this was some *kind* of matter), I realized the scope of my own paper began to expand. I mark this as a critical moment where I had to stop and interrogate my own criteria for the inclusion of the LCD as a text outside a frame of disciplinary expansion. On the one hand, the language provided by scientists spelled an implicit permissibility to study the LCD within my own field. That the scientific basis for the LCD—its not-quite-liquid crystals—could be called material was not in question for scientists, so why should I have that problem? In fact, not only was matter now on the table for a humanist, other research linked liquid crystals to the study of “surfactants,” (a kind of molecule protective of liquid), and one of several phenomena under the umbrella category of “Soft Matter,” for which Pierre-Gilles de Genne won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1991.<sup>232</sup> Thus, inclusion, I argue, necessarily entails the imperfect means by which a critic brings forth, organizes, and aims his signifiers toward a self-made rubric for legitimacy. In other words, this general project of “bringing forth” objects for study concerns not just the quotidian aspects of everyday seeing and the political struggle for agreement; this process must also involve the critic’s moves in the act of bringing forth her text—information that may or may not be made available on the written page. The critic engages in bringing forth objects not just for the sake of visibility, but also for a number of reasons tied to discursive practices of the academy in creating knowledge.

The newer tendency to invoke the word, “material,” or “materiality,” denotes an expanding scope within humanities or social science disciplines—rhetoric included—which

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<sup>232</sup> Pierre-Gilles de Gennes, “Soft Matter,” *Nobel Lecture*, Dec. 9, 1991.

provides scholars with more interdisciplinary opportunities, sources, and perspectives while also taking seriously an alignment of language-based arts with STEM-based sciences. Yet, criteria for inclusion into the “material” varies widely. As mentioned before, the related field of OOO (Object-Oriented Ontology) brings together a wide variety of scholars, but it strangely focuses on a principle of “flat ontology,” wherein varying objects are “real” with the same force of existence that places them in that state. Unfortunately, while this view can serve as a provocative way to reorient oneself to otherwise vetted categories of knowing and interpretation, it also leads to a brute criterion of in/out as it regards the inclusion of ‘what counts’ in a flat ontology.<sup>233</sup> This example receives mention as one way in which the organization of material tropes can have profound influences on what is suitable/available for study, the relative commodity linked with that line of research, and in effect functions as a shibboleth for what is legitimate in one’s field—even if that trend is described as emergent. Rhetoricians looking to related, interdisciplinary fields addressing matter, may encounter differing labels of such influence: New Materialism, OOO, Speculative Realism, and STS, for example. As a critic tied to the field of rhetoric, I might choose STS as a broad term of inclusion for those who subscribe to relational, processual perspectives denying the human as the sole proprietor of influence. I would not likely choose Speculative Realism, even if some of the same authors I cite may be grouped under that term.

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<sup>233</sup> Bogost’s example and definition is an excellent example of what can come from collaboration within an online community, and a reflection of what I see as two legitimate concerns: 1) using platforms such as Bogost’s blog (the design is excellently rendered) and advocating for such commonplace articulations as a form of discursive practice, and 2) the necessity (!) of using sites of informational exchange that cannot wait for typical print publishing lag time, particularly when topics relate to the study of the digital. Bogost demonstrates consistently the utility of a small, focused audience in helping to cultivate ideas, whatever audiences may think of them. On his blog, heavyweights and “laymen” alike participate in a conversation to define the field known as OOO, Object-Oriented Ontology, with the specific goal to lay out easier-to-understand vernacular prose. See Ian Bogost, *What Is Object-Oriented Ontology? A Definition for Ordinary Folk*, Dec. 8, 2009, [http://www.bogost.com/blog/what\\_is\\_objectoriented\\_ontolog.shtml](http://www.bogost.com/blog/what_is_objectoriented_ontolog.shtml).

This points to my regard for academic survival—it is a recognition that an academic’s choice of one term over another includes a consideration of identifying normative organizational schemes suitable to its cultural *doxa*. When one calls forth the LCD, one must also call forth its supporters—the performance of enacting citational alliances. The formation of these alliances is what allows criteria of rigor to recede (if that criteria is met) so that arguments and lines of thought remain.

### *Affordance*

STS scholars utilize the term, affordance, to bracket the relationship between power and medium. Instead of using “agency” as a term, a word with much baggage in the humanities and social sciences, scholars employ affordance as a way to discuss *techne* for the purpose of removing associations and interpretations of power for a given medium.<sup>234</sup> In other words, an affordance signals that a development—social, technical, or both—is already recognized as legible, even if the discursive practices enframing the affordance remain occluded from view.

The LCD screen introduced an entirely new visual phenomenon to still photography: video. By video, I am not referring to the affordances of contemporary cameras which capture both still and HD video with ease; rather, I am referring to the moving images appearing on the LCD screen as an analogue to the movement of photographic subjects traditionally seen only through glass. With the transition from film to digital, photography was uprooted from a mode of

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<sup>234</sup> STS scholars typically dissociate the broad conceptual terrain of agency from the specific capacities of machines. The latter is referred to as an affordance. See Monika Buscher & John Urry, “Mobile Methods and the Empirical,” *European Journal of Social Theory*, no 12 (2009) and Nancy Baym, *Personal Connections in a Digital Age* (New York: Polity, 2011).

self-evident visual experience (i.e., the only thing mediating a photographer's vision from photographic subject was *transparent matter* in the form of glass or plastic) to a mode of *watching* the screen as part of the new photographic apparatus. By reframing the practice of reviewing photographs into terms typically associated with the passivity of watching screens (i.e., TV), the LCD begins to emerge as an object. This is not to say that the prior modality of the film camera was indeed a transparent frame on the world. As Lingis notes, "Visual space is not pure transparency; it is filled with light, intense or somber, crystalline or mellow, serene or lugubrious. If the light seems neutral when we look at things, that is because its color is without surfaces and our eyes do not go to encounter it like an object."<sup>235</sup> Video and photography can be linked together by their similar visual affordances (one as a medium of the still and the other as a medium of moving stills), but the arrangement, or relationship that begins to move the LCD into recognition is better described as a relationship between the active transparency of a prior photographic modality and other screen media associated with passivity, or "watching."

While discourses of photography continue to attribute agency to the photographer in command of his photographic subject (i.e., the myth of "the decisive moment"), this new modality flipped that arrangement on its head without much ado or fanfare by photographic communities—which is to say, unrecognized in discourse.<sup>236</sup> Couched within a discourse of technological progress and affordance, the still-new ability to review photographs on the spot became the measure of the LCD's worth—what Winner had described earlier as meeting "immediate needs." What was actually being addressed was the progressive design of importing

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<sup>235</sup> Lingis, 13.

<sup>236</sup> Not only did Henri Cartier-Bresson, from whom the phrase is attributed, take up photography after a hunting trip in west Africa, but he often uses language in a similar vein: he "prowled the streets," he "trapped life." See Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952).

matter (liquid crystal) with digital code to create new possibilities within the craft. The emergence of this design trumped and foreclosed critical talk about emerging modalities of photography. Professional photojournalists quickly consolidated discourse into capacitive terms by sizing up the new camera's ability to produce the same products of the old (i.e., scanned negatives) via a more efficient interface. One indication of the dominance of affordance-driven discourse can be located within the jargon soon to follow. In particular, the term, "chimping," made its rounds through professional discourses. The term refers to the then still-developing habits of using a digital camera which invited working photographers to shoot and watch (i.e., review photos) within short, repeated bursts rather than the older habit of temporally displacing all review and feedback to darkroom time.<sup>237</sup> Other photographers watching their peers observed that they looked like monkeys in this new repetitive cycle of shooting and watching; thus the term was deployed as a pejorative that also attached an associative accusation of poor photographic technique to those who could not help themselves from marveling at the new affordances of live preview, live exposure setting, and instant review--over and over again. For these working photographers, the introduction of the digital via the LCD interface instantly removed the existing separation between photographer and event/subject in terms of both time and space. Instant feedback informed photographers on the spot, positing new exigencies of shooting *until* 'I get it right,' and knowing *if* 'I got it right' without the need to move from an event or assignment.

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<sup>237</sup> It is difficult to find a textual citation for this term, and it circulated widely within the forum, Sportsshoooter (a discussion board for all photojournalists, not just sports photographers) during the late 1990s and early 2000s. It has since been taken up by others in wider contexts; this particular usage comes from NYT technology writer, David Pogue. See entry for "Chimping" in *Schott's Vocab: A Miscellany of Modern Words & Phrases*. <http://schott.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/23/chimping/>.



Yet, the affordance-driven talk about the digital also displaced attention from the complete reversal of orientation with regard to the interface. Not only did the digital spell a photographer's need for additional time and travel related to an assignment, but the introduction of the rear-facing interface also asserted an implicit condition to this efficiency: to adopt the conveniences of the new camera meant to also adopt a new orientation to photography. The photographer was now photographer-subject; watching the small screen was now as important to one's work as the task of shooting. Thus, the photographer became active producer and passive viewer, simultaneously. Photographic representation, then, can be parsed into the sign of a material interface, the sign of habitual transformation, and of course, the sign of the photograph. In this way, an account of the photographic act incorporates production as a rhetorical endeavor not as a good in itself, but as part of the persuasion occurring during an emergent coordination of discursive practices. The advent of digital-visual feedback changed our orientation toward the representational photograph from a *product* borne of photographic practice to a *modality* necessary to photographic practice.

### *Repetition*

With the convenience of digital feedback, and the successful outward push from professional product to indispensable, ubiquitous, everyday tool attached to all manner of portable devices from phones to inexpensive cameras sitting on the helmets of skiers and snowboarders, users of the digital camera are developing new rhythms, cadences, of shoot and review. Repetitive motion in photographing is linked closely to the fourth category of "memory," but this section attempts to draw out the influential--and by definition, pervasive--features of digital image production. The contemporary camera is pervasive insofar as it is digital. By this, I

mean that digital photography relies on strings of 1's and 0's to propagate its affordances. There is no instant feedback without digital code, there is no "weightlessness" to the camera within a smartphone without code, and there are no "apps" to manipulate photographs without code. Evens' description of digital scope bears repeating here: "The digital is particularly ill-equipped to deal with the limit case, the ambiguity of the border, because its own borders have no ambiguity: *on* or *off* but not in-between."<sup>238</sup> Repetition, then, as it relates to a photographic act, is confined to the homogeneity from which it is borne. It adopts a style suited to the digital limit, figuring repetition as an expectation or outcome of digital progress.

This form of repetition articulates with narrative forms of repetition and together they function toward expectation. Thrift, in discussing technological determinism, claims that a "new technological order provides the narrative mill." I read Thrift's connotation of "order" as the symbolism of that order rather than an access to a version or reality tied to an essential order--that is, order is rhetorical. Yet, the dream of accessing such a direct order--was alive far before the limits of code and the digital, as relayed through the narrative of Muybridge in Chapter 3. Uniformity is *the* principle of the digital. Reproduction, then, is based upon the digital photo's capacity for sameness in code, as I will discuss in the following section addressing the discursive practices of photographic memory.

### *Memory*

Digital culture primarily associates memory as a container for modular, "weightless" units of information. The price of memory containers continues to drop while simultaneously,

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<sup>238</sup> Aden Evens, *Sound Ideas: Music, Machines, and Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xiii.

engineers devise increasingly sophisticated ways of increasing their capacity to hold 1's and 0's. As such, one of the emerging practices of digital photography is located within a photographer's consideration of keeping/discarding images. Digital's film predecessor constantly reminded photographers of the delimiting investments tied to the simple act of pressing a shutter button, such as traversing space (to return to a specialized site for processing), money (for film, for processing, for travel now made strange by instant circulation), time (as when a consumer mailed a roll of film to a discount processor, the waiting accompanying every step between capture and print, regardless of consumer or professional), material investment (the actual headaches produced by common photo chemistry such as fixer, realizing that changing film to continue shooting could let in uninvited light and thereby ruin not only the entire roll but also the embodied processes enabling visual inscriptions onto that roll; the utter lack of guarantee that the mechanisms of film advance and retraction would not fail on a given day). As such, the pressing of a button was understood as *costly*.

With the advancement of the digital, memory containers displaced many of these investments. Thousands of digital photographs can be stored on a single card--a far cry from the 36-37 frames of negatives yielded by one film roll. "Shoot until I get it right" became the new slogan for digital photographers. Photographs became *disposable* units in the same way that the digital portends a lack of "real" matter--a claim that is patently false. There was nothing to waste in this new scheme. Both the acts of spontaneous disposal (deleting images while shooting) and of repetitive shooting with nothing to lose--literally--became linked to a notion of memory as disposable, expendable. In part because of a technical knowledge gap arising between industry and consumer stemming from the sudden onset of digital cameras, the new affordances of disposable memory trumped other potential discourses of the digital *as* material, especially in

terms of memory (the increased capacity of the digital is *still* capacity based upon material design). These habits of thinking photography are placed within a frame of difference--the difference between habits induced by 35mm film photography and the habits of the digital. While the purpose of this comparison is to make a case for how practices of digital photography production followed from an understanding of the digital-as-invisible (with the help of disposable memory), it is worth pointing out that these two points of comparison are not an analogic pair. The comparison is only valuable insofar as it addresses the shifting concerns of matter and memory within discursive practices--practices that address the changing inducements of both photography and digital media. For example, one could easily compare the ease and portability afforded by the 35mm film camera against a horse-drawn wagon serving as a "mobile" darkroom for wet collodion plates (early glass/plate negatives) as a way to address material investments of photographic practice.<sup>239</sup> Yet, that exigence binds itself to a trajectory of photographic affordances through linear time for the purpose of denoting a history of photography's material encumberments. The disposability of memory--one reason why images may now be regarded as something delete-*able*--is linked by relation to other discursive habits of photography such as the capacity for repetition and review afforded by the digital LCD.

Vivian points to the long-held relationship between remembering and forgetting, noting especially that western traditions of "forgetting" are positioned as opposite of memory (remembering), and based upon a notion of "subtraction."<sup>240</sup> He argues instead for forgetting as a productive, political endeavor. Yet, the digital's limit and function within photography proscribes

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<sup>239</sup> The invention of the wet collodion process in 1851 is attributed to Frederick Scott Archer. See Susie Clark, "The Conservation of Wet Collodion Positives," *Studies In Conservation* 43 no. 4 (1998), 231.

<sup>240</sup> Bradford Vivian, *Public Forgetting: The Rhetoric and Politics of Beginning Again* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2010).

only delete/not-delete as options. The "dialectical" relationship Vivian names between remembering/forgetting becomes one the primary exigences to which the scholar offers an alternative, productive, and more useful way to forget. This is not possible in the language of keep/delete photography. Memory is zero-sum in operation, and conflates with other binaries such as exists/imagined, presence/absence, productive/disposable. The language of contemporary digital photography--and the apparatuses supporting it as a medium of code--moves to a ground of affordance-driven discourse because of a lack of malleability within its delimiting binary framework.

The material texture of the digital screen--the aggregate of single units (pixels) to form a recognizable visual sign (photograph)--is qualitatively distinctive from the screens designed for analogue viewing. As such, the modulation of light in producing the digital image—the intersection of natural and manufactured material properties—is also immemorial in function.<sup>241</sup> The characteristic “grain” of film is ported to the digital sensorium of viewing reception in the LCD, and the logic of the grain (a cue that a photograph is reaching its reproducible limit, as in a print enlarged in the darkroom) is quite different in aesthetic character from film. Blockiness, pixelation, lossy, and aliased are contemporary colloquialisms used to describe similar limits of the digital’s reproductive capacity.<sup>242</sup> Those limits are imposed by both the intended size of

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<sup>241</sup> This view of light’s relationship to photography is quite different from Susan Sontag’s reduction of the process: “By the agency of light alone...” is meant to denote the simplicity of photography, but in doing so removes the description’s utility from such strange, singular contexts in which light encounters the limitations of contemporary photography’s digital and material design.

<sup>242</sup> Specifically, these terms refer to a digital rendering of “raster” graphics or a “bitmap” (as opposed to vector-based graphics), and are referred to alongside their digital file type (“jpeg,” “png,” “tiff”). The difference in these two types of graphics is evident on most web pages. While typefaces are rendered using mathematical equations, scaling upward and downward without any noticeable gain or loss, photographs on that same web page will exhibit “lossy” behavior if they are enlarged beyond their original pixel count (either on-screen or print).

reproduction and its relationship to light during the photographic process. It is precisely this *difference* between the aesthetic of the film medium at its limit and the digital medium at its limit that does not allow the photographer to forget that she is “watching” the screen rather. She can no longer participate in the fantasy of “transparent optics” as the agent of photography—what the film camera afforded so easily through its viewfinder designed to obscure itself from an apparently seamless experience of photographing.<sup>243</sup> In other words, the “suture” is ripped apart by the visual connotations of the digital feedback screen. Thus, the screen functions to memorialize subjects in the highly subjective states of the digital and its associated practices—namely the affordances of disposability.

Yet, the digital LCD also serves as a perpetual reminder (to not forget) that the photographic experience cannot be a transparent one because of its aesthetic properties when the camera encounters the limits of light. This is the reason I have described the digital photographer as one who *watches* rather than one who *sees* (via transparent modes). If the digital sensor of the camera does not have enough light to produce an image at the intended size, the image will exhibit properties of decay, as in the colloquialisms used above to describe a photograph at its digital limit. While the digital sensor is designed by industry with a product (photograph) in mind, the representations presented on the LCD exhibit visual qualities similar to an image struggling for more light or more density in its pixels. Because the LCD is thought of as a feedback device, insofar as photographing is concerned, its affordances are derived from less-sophisticated sensors and sparse pixel arrangements. It is a cheap screen manufactured on east

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<sup>243</sup> For Cartier-Bresson, the Leica film camera became an “extension of the eye.” Butler notes the articulation between televisual media and advanced weaponry (“smart bombs”) in order to point toward the similar function in which the television serves as a transparent medium of violence “effectively constituting the television screen and its viewer as the extended apparatus of the bomb itself.” See *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2010), and Ronald Greene, “Another Materialist Rhetoric.” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 15 (1998), 37.

Asian assembly lines. Light trails, digital grain, and fewer pixels to represent visual images are reminders that the ostensible function of the camera--its *sine qua non*--is to produce a *different* image more properly displayed on larger screens, as digital prints, on a coffee mug, a t-shirt, the back of an iPhone case, or via projection. The preceding examples of the photograph, therefore, are produced by affordances of the digital aimed toward a product, while the “photographs” I watch in succession on the back of my camera are aesthetically distinctive and a reminder that the feedback mechanism is designed to recede back into the distance where its function in producing photographs remains properly obscured.

### *Enthymeme*

The function of enthymeme—a *techne* of language which excludes one (or more) rational premise or conclusion from a syllogism—has been discussed by Cara Finnegan as a form of agency. She argues that visual “enthymemes are powerful because they grant audiences agency... the concept of image vernaculars preserves a necessary space for agency by theorizing the ways that viewers mobilize images as inventional resources for argument.”<sup>244</sup> Thus, for Finnegan, the photograph-as-power is deployed during the circulatory phase of photographic production. Agency resides with given audiences who would engage in the interpretation and subsequent appropriation of the image. This chapter’s exigence follows from its theoretical framework, and allows room to consider Finnegan’s argument in relationship to a delimited field of photographic reception. In other words, the re-territorializing of the photographic trope does

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<sup>244</sup> Cara A. Finnegan, “Recognizing Lincoln: Image Vernaculars in Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, no 1 (2005), 34. Although Finnegan employs an analysis of the enthymeme as an exemplar for the language of the visual, she is careful to do so; both here and elsewhere, she recognizes that the reading of images is specific to a culture.

not spell a necessary displacement of audience-agency views of visual rhetoric. Robert Hariman and John Lucaites attribute a similar capacity to agency, positioning it within the “iconicity” of an image. That is, the way that a public comes to deliberate and agree on the power of the visual determines its status as an icon--despite any number of interpretive spins made by the photograph’s constituents. The authors explain “how the photograph provided a new model of political identity... By revealing how emotions are constructed through visual images in the public media, the iconic photo demonstrates how photojournalism communicates essential resources for democratic deliberation.”<sup>245</sup> Thus, the authors seek to place agency within the “democratic deliberation” process of interpretation and appropriation by audiences. Audiences in this view--what I have referred to above as a photograph’s constituents--are termed the “public culture” of the photograph by the authors. From both of these perspectives, agency must be located within an audience.<sup>246</sup>

The exigence of this chapter does not aim toward a debunking of this agentic attribution. Rather, it seeks to understand agency as inextricably tied to processes which form a network of relations through a remapping of the photographic trope. In this sense, the LCD feedback screen is not merely the displacement of the photograph; rather, its concerns are different from the audience view as the Deleuzian “lines of flight” emanating from the photographic trope lead to sometimes surprising places such as the otherwise mundane site of a camera’s backside. Here, the audience is the photographer, herself, constituting both the photographic subject facing the

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<sup>245</sup> Robert Hariman and John L. Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

<sup>246</sup> For a useful history of developments leading to the sub-discipline of visual rhetoric and its tendency to locate agency within public deliberation, see Lester C. Olson, “Intellectual and Conceptual Resources for Visual Rhetoric: A Re-examination of Scholarship Since 1950,” no 1 (2007).



camera *and* the formation of her own identity through repeated viewings of the LCD in that same process.

Enthymeme, I suggest, works differently within this configuration.<sup>247</sup> The *techne* is persuasive through a connection to discursive practices of screen watching. These practices range widely from watching television to viewing photographs in a museum to reviewing negatives over a lightbox through a loupe (magnification glass). In each instance, the LCD is linked to other forms of watching through a common material design--the border. In technical terms, a digital screen of any size is measured by its longest diagonal, corner to corner. This description also reveals that in each of these examples, the screen / box / rectangular frame is designated by its physical viewing limit--what we typically refer to as its dimensions. Yet, I would like to suggest that the repetition of these viewing/watching habits--discursive practices of looking--have trained audiences to consider the outside of the frame (physically, literally) as an enthymematic extension of visual representation. The discipline of film studies imported the term, "suture," to describe a similar process within the same film:

Theoreticians of cinematic suture agree that films are articulated and the viewing subject spoken by means of interlocking shots. They are thus in fundamental accord with Noel Burch's remark that 'Although camera movements, entrances into and exits from frame, composition and so on can all function as devices aiding in the organization of the film object. . . the shot transition [remains] the basic element [of that organization].' Shot relationships are seen as the equivalent of syntactic ones in linguistic discourse, as the agency whereby meaning emerges and a subject-position is constructed for the viewer.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> James Jasinski's entry on the "enthymeme" refers to it variously as a "type of premise that possesses inferential or connective potency," as Toulminian "warrant," as "truncated" in Aristotelian terms, and for Bitzer, an "incomplete syllogism." See James Jasinski, *Sourcebook on Rhetoric: Key Concepts in Contemporary Rhetorical Study* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 205-209.

<sup>248</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 138.

The above serves as an insightful cue into the enthymematic function of suturing. However, “interlocking shots” in the case of the LCD are not occurring within the same text (photo, film); instead, “shot relationships” are *spread out across time and space*, and the suture is located within the *commonality of discursive viewing practices*. The missing premise within these viewing practices is the implicit recognition by audiences of the suture as visual-representative technique within a self-contained narrative (e.g., film, photographic essays)--to the displacement of recognizing the suture as also functioning across frame genres. Thus, the normative habits of interfacing with a visual frame are linked together through a relationship of modes of watching. The following is a simplified definition of suture: “The techniques used by film to make us forget the camera that is really doing the looking.”<sup>249</sup> Excepting the intentionality embedded within this claim, it is otherwise accurate insofar as my argument is concerned. The looking camera, with its capacity to form a viewing subject, has turned back onto the photographer as a passive screen for watching. The technical aspects of such a feedback mechanism aligns its purpose with its predecessor of the viewfinder and its ostensible function to photograph *subjects rather than crafting oneself through the act of watching*, and as such, denies the LCD’s connections to other frame genres. Watching-photographing is not only a new discursive habit foregrounded in an affordance of technological progress, but its function is specific to the connections it makes with other frames. Enthymeme, as a master trope for visual suture, creates a delimited field of suggestion; audiences take up this suggestion within its more familiar form of narrative rather than suggesting potential absences derived from screen design.

In sum, this chapter considered photography’s characteristics through its representational associations, the ocular’s role within forms of language, the LCD’s movement from technical

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<sup>249</sup> Dino Felluga, “Terms Used by Narratology and Film Theory,” Purdue University. <http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/narratology/terms/>.

realm to assembled text, and the rhetorical functions of that movement—that is, its “bringing forth,” or production. Interpretations aimed toward the legitimation of the object, from this view, do not form the study’s exigencies. If the photograph tacitly is understood as that which a camera can produce, then this chapter attempts to move that understanding toward an examination of the discursive practices setting apart, or bringing forward, the apparatuses of photography—in this case, the LCD. In other words, if photography is considered a practice of producing *photographs*, perhaps it is also worthwhile to ask, What are the discursive practices producing the camera? Doing so illuminates a critical process of choosing a text outside of an academic orthodoxy asking that a critic begin the act of criticism via a textual product—the photograph. Here, camera and photograph *both* function as representations, and *how* one representation may occupy a problem set for criticism over the other, in this instance, shapes the contours and concerns of a critical analysis.

Put another way, my hope is that visual-rhetorical critics may permit a displacement of an otherwise centrally located image-text (e.g., an LCD’s display) for the purpose of redistributing its *relata* into a ratio of visual agencies or characteristic influences holding together a capacity for “achieving” photography.

## CHAPTER VII

## CONCLUSION

My hope is that this project has successfully addressed the notion of how a photographic act can be thought of as complicit and performative through language, discourse, and matter, and with each chapter foregrounding a key moment of rhetorical production—a congealing—in the making of photography as an act. A summation of these rhetorical functions through my cases is provided following a demonstration of a photographic act which by necessity includes a self-reflexive rendering as a primary influence in the relationship between myself in the self-fashioned identity as a former, professional photographer, and the relational view for which I've argued throughout this dissertation.

When I first entered the doctoral program at the University of Colorado, I made a decision to enter into what I since have referred to as a "Photo Fast." In the 10 years prior, I had worked primarily as a photojournalist. I also took a two-year detour making my living as an architectural photographer in Chicago—a wildly different scene with vastly different expectations. Regardless of context, I had become so accustomed to the conventions I have written about in this dissertation that I no longer held either the joy or excitement of the art and craft I had loved for so long. Dulled to the exigencies of familiar assignments and the conventions supporting them, it became difficult for me to see beyond the aesthetics of image

making as holding hope for the creativity and freedom from the familiar I had to that point longed for.

I have held a variety of positions as a photographer allowing me to work within incredible contexts: while working in Washington D.C., I routinely accessed the bowels of Capitol Hill and the senators and representatives therein; I've traveled by unmarked vehicles in numerous presidential motorcades as a part of the White House Press Pool. I've stood on top of the Sears Tower with a giant view camera (the type of camera resembling an accordion) in order to photograph the enormous Hancock Building in Chicago. I've photographed public figures—both of the Clintons, Tiger Woods, Michael Jordan, Summer and Winter Olympians, the Denver Broncos, and even a one-day stint following around Monica Lewinsky—paparazzi style.

Yet, I was experiencing a kind of slippage, even if realized only in retrospect. I found myself disaffected by affectation. During an assignment for The Seattle Times, I was sent to photograph a stand-off between police and a desperate, gun-toting suicidal man who held his partner as a hostage in a motel room. Over a period of several hours, I stood with a 600mm lens propped by a monopod—that monstrous lens one would otherwise only see at a professional sporting event. I was held at a safe, marked distance from the motel, and next to other familiar friends / journalists from neighboring media outlets. We chatted, making small talk with one another and with police officers at the scene. In other words, I had long protected myself from the visceral and emotional scene through repeated and similar experiences. Unfortunately, the scene was a familiar one to most of us. We knew our lack of access, Our distance from the motel, would yield familiar images. Stand-offs for photojournalists existed within an editorial category called “spot news.”

The images I made that day were far from spectacular. A typical shot from such a lens

and from such a distance could only yield a fixed number of aesthetic possibilities. All media personnel familiar with stand-off conventions could most likely predict what would appear in the paper and television news within the next cycle: a highly compressed, flattened Image, with the uncooperative natural lighting offered to us during the mid-day light creating unflattering shadows from the sun directly above—that detested time of day when no amount of compensation could yield a ‘better’ aesthetic. The set of photographs, in turn, required a run through Post production, where editors were charged with amplifying the photograph’s conventional features before publication. Yet, a curiosity remained: why would a photographer desire the warm light of the late day—to represent a situation which could ultimately end in murder and suicide. Meanwhile, my editors at the Times relayed through my handheld radio the what and where of my next assignment. Neither myself nor my editors spoke with excitement or urgency in our voices—the tedium of a stand-off brought forth visual-conventional expectations, and in turn, I was expected to file to the photo desk a set of photographs created toward these aesthetic expectations—before moving onto my next mundane assignment.

At the time, I thought very little of these conventions. After all, I was still a fresh-faced photographer, full of ambition, and grateful to have the security of that rare status amongst photographers—a staffed and salaried position. However, and over time, photographic expectations—the culmination of a photographic process starting with photographer and ending with a conventional and visual news text—stood-in for what I once considered as a creative, public-facing endeavor, replete with an ethical stronghold expressed in reference manuals such as the Associated Press Stylebook and the pedagogies of my undergraduate training. Put another way, I came to realize over the years, across both national and international contexts, that the expectations of aesthetic image conventions were not simply considerations of the job—the

conventions themselves and the expectations therein—defined the job.

Relatively speaking, that was a long time ago. Yet, these gathered experiences forecasted for me a snowballing of discontent. I could no longer see as I once had, and assignments became routinely mundane. Fixed, recognizable, and immutable image conventions were now the expectations across all of my photographic work. The novelty and social capital accompanying my work eventually disappeared to the point I no longer wanted to pick up a professional-grade camera or equipment. And that's how I embarked on this self-fashioned "Photo Fast."

I committed only to the camera appended to my smartphone, and I made pictures only of my own volition—if at all. I refused to be bound by the strictures of professional convention, even if it meant denying close friends the favor of photographing their weddings. Put another way, I felt a new potential toward a remaking of photography but I hadn't a clue what that might look like. I made a decision to begin anew. Still vague at the outset, this decision slowly formed the impetus for this dissertation. Putting down the camera in exchange for the capacity to observe image making phenomena became my new interface to the art.

These autobiographical details and narratives of novel experiences no longer access a form of social capital for me. Over those years, a cynicism strode through my stride to the point I no longer wanted to associate as a career photographer. Yet, I hope some of my former photographer-subject-self demonstrates with self-reflexivity, the relationality within what I've referred to as a photographic act, and with along with it, the wild, mutable array characteristic of a processual photography. Through this particular lens, I provide a recap of my project through a summation of my dissertation's cases:

In the Leibowitz / Vogue case, I heard echoes of my experience across both commercial and editorial photography aesthetics. Yet, the conventions published in the *Three If By Sea*

image pushed beyond personal experience and into a public culture of image discourse—in particular, I examined discussions emanating from this visual text and around the important roles of first responders, piousness and civility, and especially the supporting, compensatory aesthetics of a strange mash-up between high fashion (across time and space, reaching toward other images) and a very real symbolism brought about by a security state, post 9/11.

Looking back at the 2010 Haitian earthquake, my capacity to be affected on a personal level leveraged my desire to understand the rhetorically of a complex, post-disaster set of representations. Initially, these pictorially depictions became the focus of my scholarly attention. Soon, I discovered through both historical context and an emerging aesthetics of order—facing outward to western publics—that textual representations could not alone account for Haitian subjectivity and the difficult notions of compassion and compassion—even as those two topoi were now objects of rhetorical study.

The story of Kevin Carter and the other tragic stories encouraged by editorial ambition and supported by ostensibly sterile institutions such as the Pulitzer-awarding assemblies, are perhaps closest to my personal and scholastic understanding of photographic world-making and breaking. I am affected by these narratives and the very real lives behind them. As such, I sought to demonstrate the ties of cultural photography in terms of personal ambition, editorial pride, and the mechanisms by which neutralizing institutions support the rhetorical functioning of image-awarding phenomena.

The LCD screen—quickly outmoded by cold fluorescent displays, and currently displaced by efficient LED lighting, gets closest in this dissertation to the strange role of what can be considered as a proper text of photography. In particular, the LCD redistributes the agencies invoked for so long by the heavyweights of photography's relatively brief history, and



especially the influence of 20th century modes of interaction between photographer and subject. Far removed from the mystical weight of photographer-as-hunter, of photographer as one with the full capacity to “capture” and secure images, to haul them back to an editorial staff or admiring audiences, the LCD, I contend, demands of the visual critic a (dis)placement of a photographic text. From the ephemeral appearance and disappearance of images in sequence on the back of a contemporary camera or on the flip-side of a smartphone, I’ve argued that as a critic I must take seriously the rhetoricality of not only what that camera produces, but especially the role of the text outside its traditional fixity.

Visual rhetoric as a field exemplifies a tendency to identify as a sub-discipline to rhetorical and speech communication studies. As such, this self-fashioned sub-field relies upon symbolic analysis to interrogate the image *and* its unlisted, public context. Here is one prominent example of the reliance on symbolicity to hold a place for the visual text: the reigning textbook for visual-rhetorical studies exemplifies this tendency toward signification by organizing the volume into “six symbolic pairs” (Olson, Finnegan, Hope, 2011). That which is excessive to symbolism, I contend, is not nor cannot be the point of departure organizing the volume and its pedagogical intent for conducting analyses. That is, the Derridean “supplement,” or Barthes’ “punctum”—the remainder to interpretation, the potential to recognize excessive meaning or visual inscription held together by the sign of affect—must align with reigning methods of textualization supported by Wickman’s (2013) claims: that visual rhetoricians tacitly accept the publicly circulating photograph as a “phenomena-as-reference” so that resulting reductions can be analyzed within known and iterable forms of method, and so that interpretations can be stabilized for public consumption.

This alignment of the visual text as a proper object of study—and its potential to break from that framework—becomes increasingly important when the task of criticism must address bodies and discourse, as well, even as they are rendered visually and through-the-lens. This concern is as material as it gets—far from a set of epistemologically ordered claims toward academic production.

The symbols holding together the traditional role of news and documentary photography (e.g., photojournalism as a form of witnessing *other*) enter into a relationship of distributed agencies. The photograph as visual text for criticism, or the “phenomena-as-reference”—which began as visual in form—enters into the new relationship, as well. The role from which a set of photographs began as a token for symbolic analysis begins to slip as proper methodological starting place as it is not given over, determined, as the primary reference from which to locate rhetoricality and indices of explanatory value.

A rhetorical analytic for engaging with public photography within the sub-field of visual rhetoric may address cultural, material, and lived experience by referencing the content within the physical, geometric borders of a bounded image. The act of visual criticism, I have argued, addresses photography based on various arrangements and characteristics of the medium: its affordances/constraints which provide resources for compensatory, aesthetic invention; the aesthetics emerging in a formative moment of the medium’s history and how photographic affordances support and compensate for non-ideal forms for “light inscription.” A third way to approach photography in public context—especially one purporting facts, rigor, or legitimacy of knowledge—what Wheeler refers to as a “nonfiction photographic environment” most often tied to the traditional print news genre—is to understand process via the photojournalist’s choices in the process of inscribing, the distribution and relationships of power through the image, and how

this process is obscured by what I read in the literature as a consistent habit of foregrounding image-as-text without extensive consideration to how that text is constantly moving in relation to the discourses/people/practices the text is supposedly addressing. Put another way, I maintain that the visual text of rhetorical criticism is not discrete at all. Rather, I consider the visual text as a *distribution of address*.

*How* this consideration of perspectival process *refers* to its object of analysis reveals a tendency to terminate considerations of visual product and process within the photograph, to do the bidding of referential invention.

Accordingly, I see rhetoric as the study of emergence. Rhetoric attends to the movement of objects and how they process and recess into view, how they gain suasive power over other objects as their edges sharpen into focus, and how they recess into infinite blur and indistinction when they cannot be maintained or cultivated by discursive practices productive of that emergence. Discourse is but one inflection / deflection of its visual counterpart, and as often as demonstrated in my cases, discourse mis-addresses that which holds its concern. This is because the counterparts of language and image do not equate to one another, even as ostensible opposites. In each example, discourse in and around an image-driven problem reproduces itself as a wayward map trying to stuff both language and image into the same legend.

Even so, I would be remiss to neglect photography's life as a medium borne not only from discourse, but from matter. For example, consider that Eastman Kodak at one point had enough chemical patents to launch its own subsidiary wholly unrelated to its photography operations.<sup>250</sup> Consider that photography cannot function without light—variously characterized

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<sup>250</sup> Ernest Scheyder and Liana B. Baker, "As Kodak Struggles, Eastman Chemical Thrives," Reuters, Dec 24, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/12/24/us-eastman-kodak-idUSTRE7BN06B20111224>.

as both wave and particle. Consider that digital photography does not need its former self (film) as a way of establishing its own material properties. It, too, needs light in order to capture an image in the form of dense pixels—pixels made of physical matter—which is an incredible achievement. Light only scratches the surface of a material rationale for photography. Consider the plastic molding attaching an LCD display to the rear of the camera, the metal slivers that form what we call a shutter, and the ground glass of the lens—mediating human visual perception via focal length, focus, position, and aperture—that has been designed and re-designed many times over in order to reduce its size and weight for the sake of portability and mobility.

This small sampling of photography's materialisms—literally—is one way to rationalize the inclusion of the medium into the academic norms of materialist scholarship—that is, to trope the sign of materiality in order to create strategic academic alliances. Yet, the act of naming material properties faces a problem of presuming these material parts move in a magical trajectory toward a functioning camera. The only reason to consider material properties—in my view—is to reimagine matter as functioning interdependently to produce singular social experiences otherwise obscured by a list-making of materials that only results in a realignment of established and known categories.

I have spoken many metaphors out of the mouths of many thinkers and theorists throughout this dissertation. The invocation of this tactic is prompted by what I see as a set of concerns for rhetoric as a disciplinary practice. I have called out those concerns a variety of times throughout this dissertation: I have named a concern for the function of contingency in relation to argument, and especially to the production of that argument—typically understood as critical practice. I have suggested a concern for disciplinary alliances *amenable* to the

hermeneutic sensibilities of a rhetorical discipline's world-making community. I am concerned with modes of academic production. I am curious as to how educational institutions are put into new relations with enchanting resources—of money, of alignment, identity, and redistribution (e.g., the University of Colorado's highly prioritized efforts to gain capital, leverage, and mobility derived from an alignment with other Pac-12 institutions and the appropriation of prestigious norms for local adoption).

I am concerned with how that bears on a communication discipline already entrenched into units, divisions, fields, and sub-fields. This is only a concern insofar as rhetoric has to find rest in/as one of these units. These unit boundaries help to condition a sensibility toward guarding, deflecting, and defending challenges away from the discipline's boundaries for the sake of a *distinctive* field in propinquity to those fields already serving as a guiding model—the disciplines which already have met the criteria of what is reasonable, legitimate, and influential in the crafting of knowledge. I have called out a concern for the text's central occupation as the object of critical inquiry, opting instead to consider arrangements of matter as new textual possibilities.

Because I am, by definition, an ocularcentric subject in the process of writing and re-writing the visual, I am bound to some optics over others in order to understand photography from a necessarily idiosyncratic perspective—the contingency and complicity left out of the pages of our discipline's most highly held journals and volumes in exchange for the academic capital garnered through a scholar's commitment to orthodoxy—a refrain of Mitchell's slight of the “academic structures of governance.”

Thus, I see *complicity* as a requirement of the rhetorical critic based upon common assumptions within a field that in the past has valorized the ideas of contingency as a warrant for

judgment—a rare privilege indeed. I adhere to an ontological commitment based upon a choice to view actions and objects within communication, rhetoric, and culture, as parts of an always-moving configuration; each enacts the other in specified ways according to the properties of its movement, and outcomes are temporally contingent and singular—rather than epistemic and generalizable. That is, outcomes are always-emergent, and characterized by what Latour refers to as “far from stable.” My ontological commitment then, demands recognition of complicity.

Objects, texts, and people, for example, are complicit with one another, either through material connection or through the living being who makes sense of that connection. In addition, the aforementioned obligation to restore rhetoric’s commonplaces demands the recognition of complicity between scholar and text, critic and criticism. The complicity of rhetoric provides a space for the critic to fight identity politics through recognition of the complicit act in which he or she already participates. The possibilities inherent within a complicit approach, in my view, are politically productive. For example, a rhetorician who does the useful work of criticizing neoliberalism via its rhetorical functioning, should retain—in the least—a *capacity* to publicly and personally recognize the difficulties of everyday living, to recognize the self-fashioning of one’s standard of living, of well-being—that increasingly invite such practices. Instead of heading for the hills and digging in one’s heels to defend oneself as an enlightened subject, or give up the ghost altogether in order to buy inexpensive consumables made in China (inexpensive only in cost)—the rhetorician can *lay claim* to everyday acts of apparent paradox, hypocrisy, failure, and succumbing to the lures of consumerism (just as one example), and as a way to advance understandings of what a rhetoric can otherwise be—not only to abstract audiences or publics, but also to oneself. I also recognize such complicity can be examined from

a view that resists the very possibility of choice in embodying such an orientation, as either intentional or from outside one's subjective possibilities.<sup>251</sup>

Complicity is also a challenge to the notion of self-reflexivity, a popular term in the humanities and social sciences. That which is self-reflexive may be defined as “containing a reflection or image of itself.”<sup>252</sup> While complicity shares in the value of self-modulating response and action appropriate to a given cultural context, it relies on a dialectical view that invites a framing of social context into knowable texts within a predetermined field; this is another way to frame the problem of photography's relationship to modernity I delineated at the outset of the dissertation. When those texts are non-linguistic in character, self-reflexivity has no way of escaping the frame in which it resides to address relationships—what I attempted to demonstrate earlier in this chapter. I cannot advocate for a relational photography while simultaneously standing apart from that same relationship, circular as it may be. Alternatively, and still within the frame of self-reflexivity, visual figures have no choice but to be considered as texts because some *thing* needs to be considered as the idea, photo, phenomenon, event, to which the self must refer.

Complicity takes up the notion that rhetoric is working within the creases (and many times in the absence of) texts, inviting notions of paradox in the everyday, recognizing the failure of one's own actions in the face of a normative ethics (of subjectivity), and provides a way for rhetorical scholars to consider how inducements might reside outside of the striations guiding

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<sup>251</sup> I recognize that Foucault's theory of governmentality could posit complicity as a conceptual token of power exercised by oneself on oneself via technologies.

<sup>252</sup> Entry for “self-reflexive.” *Oxford English Dictionary*.  
<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/self-reflexive>.

*doxa*. That is, complicity does not only define the edges of a cultural *doxa*; it is already bound up and entangled with it.

Yet, I too am attempting to join the ranks of academia, and certainly I am complicit with a process that must acknowledge the monumental structures of academic institutions already in place. My path, professional or otherwise, is forged through a singular perspective such as what one sees when looking through a camera's rangefinder. Production, being, articulation, striation, and congealing are all terms referring to a passage—not from one thing to another—but from wild arrangements of matter to recognizable arrangements of matter. This, in my view, is a text: a produced arrangement of matter, recognizable in form, and made, created, achieved through the process of becoming recognizable. These theorists' views are far from identical, but they each reference and advance an understanding of process that considers matter as complex and inaccessible to meaning until its arrangement—as an object—moves into focus. The effort to create my own disciplinary alliance for the purpose of smuggling theory, I believe, is an instructive task, and one that asks the critic to consistently reengage rhetoric's capacity as a way of *doing* life. This project is moot if my ontological commitments to affecting and being affected are limited to visual research. I refuse to consider my relational and ethical views as professional capital and practice—especially within an academic context in the business of borrowing and creating knowledge claims—not in a general sense, but with all the *purpose* and *will* and *incision* that is required in the business of academic orthodoxy.

In order to align with such an orthodoxy, I enter into that aforementioned “black boxed” process—the reduction of phenomena into iterable form—by engaging within traditional photojournalistic conventions and norms in order to create a set of visual texts for public consumption. That is, as a visual documentarian—whether professionally or in an everyday



capacity—one must orient to an imagined audience of visual culture, and (begrudgingly) address audiences with photographs as the ultimate arbiter of a work’s import and significance. As

Hanno Hardt notes:

Knowing the details of existence beyond the frame of the photograph, for instance, or extending the photographic image into the historical moment of its creation, are necessary conditions for providing a sophisticated and exhaustive interpretation of a photograph. But facing a photograph, beyond a confrontation with past experiences, turns into an encounter with the photographer as author and with the autobiographical nature of the photograph (Pritchett, 1989). Thus, *every photographic portrait is also a self-portrait of its creator* [italics my emphasis].

Thus, instead of a smooth alignment between photographer and audience, more often than not, the photographer-agent is stripped of her own power of address by virtue of a mess of agencies capable of producing unpredictable discourse and to what/whom/where a (Bahktinian) “utterance” is aimed. I am inclined to agree with Hardt: a photograph moves far beyond its accumulation of meaning via historical interpretation. Considering a photograph as an “encounter” is a wonderful starting point to displace traditional notions of the image-as-text. Looking closer, one may see that the text is not displaced at all. Rather, the text is but a humble, moving piece in a complex but beautiful relationship most often referred to as photography.

As I cited earlier *TIME*’s claim regarding the year-over-year exponential growth of image-making—by professionals, yes—but *especially* by citizen-photographers, everyday photographers, equipped with cameras appended to ubiquitous mobile devices, my hope is that this present body of work will serve as a useful point of departure toward a richer tapestry of photography—that the relationships appearing in my examples will capacitate a fuller, richer, and identifiable strata from which a visual public, that ubiquitous photographer, can discover a literacy—a visual lexicon—that connects our present trend of “filtering” to its past as a

inexpensive way to create color by screening light, by the techniques of darkroom printing, or as light leaks from a broken film canister.

Take for example, the critical role of post-production work. This process, too, is a central consideration not only as a supportive process to photography—but as a critical *mode of proactive photography*. My claim is that post-processing—typically employed to bring a photograph's luminosity, color, and tonal quality up to (and in several instances, beyond) an editorial or printable standard—has extended itself into contemporary, everyday photography—from a supporting role to an active, (and roughly equivalent) role, within the photographic act.<sup>253</sup> Post-production is now a ubiquitous practice for both professional and everyday image-makers; news photographs are rarely (if ever) published directly from a photographer's camera or image file, and virtually all major smartphone designers and manufacturers now embed native software along with their smartphone cameras—to emulate the effects of traditional lighting gels (aka 'filters') and to imitate the aesthetics of traditional darkroom printing techniques. Thus, the post-production process is no longer a supportive process—rather, it is in itself a form of *retrospective photograph-ing*. It is but one more modality in the relational map of image-making.

The larger implication from my view, however, is to move photography—not separate it—from singular texts and their supporting aesthetics, and instead toward reiterable relationships—that *gathering* of image, camera, digital affordances, negations of light,

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<sup>253</sup> At the 2016 World Press Photo contest (one of the most prestigious award events for a photographer), the organization announced that fewer entries this year were disqualified due to the egregious use of post-processing by its entrants: "This year, out of 174 finalists, a slightly lower 16% of all final entries were disqualified, seven were disqualified for cloning issues and 22 for extreme processing." In its recent past, the contest organizers became increasingly dismayed by photographers and editors' use of digital manipulation 'to such an extent that the processed colors diverge from the original colors,' or changes in density, contrast and saturation that obscured or eliminated objects or backgrounds in the frames." See Olivier Laurent, "World Press Photo Finds Fewer Manipulated Entries in This Year's Photojournalism Contest." *TIME* Mar. 1 2016. accessed from <http://time.com/4243751/world-press-photo-manipulation/?xid=newsletter-photos-weekly>.

compensations of color, photographer, media, mediation, misdirectional agencies, subject, time, space, and most of all, a capacity to affect and to be affected, in the words of Alfred North Whitehead. This gathering—always on the move, always relational in its symbolic and material capacities, always malleable and mutable, always distributive and redistributive in its suasory production, and always recursive—is the common *topos* in the making and re-making of photography, again and again.

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