# OPTICS OF DISPOSABILITY

OPTICS OF DISPOSABILITY:
DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE STRUGGLE
TO APPEAR

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# LAY ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the ability of emergent modes of documentary photography to articulate and resist social and political violence that is characteristic of neoliberalism, for example the domestic militarization and increased incarceration rates, the shrinking of access to the public sphere, and the particular ways in which certain populations become especially vulnerable to such violence. Shifts in photographic production thanks to new media platforms and the reconfigurations of traditional photography genres have produced photographic strategies that are crucially poised to address such issues. The photographers and projects explored in this dissertation employ new ways of visualizing violence, speaking back to the ways that photography can be used to stultify discourse and misrepresent populations, and harnessing innovative modes of proliferating their work to produce new photographic and political communities.

# ABSTRACT

Amplifications in photographic production and the increased access to images in the 21$^{st}$ century uniquely position photography to articulate and intervene in social structures of power and provide new opportunities for civic engagement. In particular, photography has the potential to articulate and resist what can be understood as a politics of disposability, or the ways in which particular populations are rendered superfluous to the economic and social logic of neoliberalism and channeled out of society. I assert that neoliberal violence must be understood, in part, as a visual problem: the particularities of representation and visibility must be examined in light of the need to consider neoliberal social and economic policies as something other than an inevitability. This dissertation explores the ways that photography can serve to make visible not only the people and discourses that have been marginalized and suppressed, but the structures of disposability itself.

Developments in artistic practices and departures from traditional documentary genres converge with precarious labor conditions for cultural workers to widen the parameters for photographic production. The resulting work engages both with the ontological questions of what documentary photography has become as well as with its ability to operate as a potential site of activism—rather than mere representation—through new modes of mediation. This dissertation examines new photographic work that addresses the multiple facets of a neoliberal politics of disposability, the effects of which are compounded by race, class, and gender: police violence and domestic militarization, the skyrocketing rate of women's incarceration, and the institutional threats to youth and activism in the public sphere. These emergent photographic practices employ new strategies of visualization in order to complicate the viewer's relationship to representations of violence, contributing to a discourse that broadens the possibility for a critical and productive use of photographs, and imagining alternatives to the material and ideological conditions of neoliberal disposability.

*In memory of Edi,*
*who forever changed how I see*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION
OPTICS OF DISPOSABILITY

In the spring of 2006, eight months after Hurricane Katrina devastated Gulf regions of

Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, my friend Daniel brought me a photograph from New

Orleans. He found it on the ground in the Lower Ninth Ward, in a lot where he says three houses

came to rest on top of one another. The image's 4x6 surface no longer resembles what we

recognize as photography—its emulsion disintegrated by water, rearranging what was likely

once figurative into a new landscape of rust-colored blotches and speckles. I remember holding it

in my hands and thinking it was beautiful, and then immediately feeling shame for deriving

aesthetic pleasure from an artifact that was constituted by such a grave catastrophe.

I have studied this photograph, trying to find clues about what it once contained, and

trying to make sense of what it now contains. The only representational elements I can discern

are a small section of what appears to be wood paneling—maybe the wall in someone's house—

and a shape that could be someone's face or body, but I can't be entirely sure of either. On the

back I can make out "Nov. 1986," scrawled in cursive, and underneath that, another word,

indecipherable except that it appears to end in the letter "t." A name, perhaps. What the

inscription does make clear is that this photograph was treasured, and that the scene it displayed

is nearly as old as I am. It belonged to someone and it was important to someone; it was kept

safe for twenty years before Daniel pulled it off the silty ground and drove with it back to

Pennsylvania.

Most of the image's surface is consumed by the spotty patterns that resemble the alchemy

between water and metal, or rock and lichen. The photograph recalls Robert Polidori's 2006

work, *After the Flood,* a series of large format photographs of post-Katrina New Orleans

buildings and interiors. Polidori's images are symbolically and visually overwhelming—walls covered in rich mold patterns and waterlines; floors piled with abandoned personal flotsam. There is so much to look at in those photographs, and every detail—an overturned chair, a stained curtain, a lone shoe, a picture frame dangling precariously from a wall—evokes the haunting absence of the people who lived there. The broad scope and slow process of Polidori's large-format work was intended to function as a kind of homage to the lives and environments that were destroyed: by choosing to document the texture and the details of post-flood New Orleans, he is not giving us the sensationalized representations that we see in most media coverage, rather, he is trying to document a city's fabric and its people, devastated by negligence and ignored in the aftermath of disaster. The photograph that Daniel brought back, on the other hand, while echoing the textures and colors of Polidori's peeling wallpaper and water-logged furniture, *is* part of that flotsam: it is at once an image *of* something and an image that demonstrates or performs something else entirely. It is not a documentary photograph by design, but by circumstance.

I have kept this photograph with me for the last twelve years—these days it sits on a shelf above my desk. I feel a precise and nagging discomfort in my having it; I know that it doesn't rightly belong to me. It belongs to someone who endured tremendous loss—first in the storm, and then in its aftermath when they were subject to violence at the hands of the state—and this photograph is yet another part of that loss. I don't want it to be a token or a voyeuristic souvenir of tragedy and injustice. I fear it is those things, and it implicates me. Yet I understand that my relationship to this photograph is also productive: it operates as an enduring testimony to what happened during and after Katrina. It is not from what is depicted in the photograph that it draws its power; rather, it is from the way that it showcases the erasure of what was once there. The

original photograph contained an image and a memory from 1986, but this object of witness was born in the flood.

The photograph is unlike the others that I examine in the following chapters, but it sets the stage for them. It grapples with the complicated relationship between what is visualized and what is occluded, particularly in its capacity to illustrate and document violence and disaster. My intention in this dissertation is to understand the contemporary photographic dimensions of a politics of disposability in the United States, or the means by which particular populations are labeled as superfluous or dangerous and channeled out of society. Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath are chilling examples of this politics. As Henry Giroux (2006), Naomi Klein (2007), Spike Lee (2006), and many others have argued, the mismanagement of Hurricane Katrina and its ruinous effects on the city's most vulnerable populations was criminal, and simultaneously, the crisis emerged as an opportunity for private interests to take over the city's eviscerated infrastructure. This photograph is testamentary, not because it depicts injustice or violence in an indexically representative sense, but because it was created under those conditions and bears the marks of its consequences. It fails at representational completeness but this failure is itself instructive; its antagonistic relationship to representation becomes its most clarifying communicative strategy. Its ambiguous affiliation to audience and authorship is in some sense a blueprint for the emerging ways that photographs are produced, disseminated, and do work independent of their representative capacities.

**A politics of disposability**

In studying the visual manifestations of a politics of disposability I have come to examine the potential of photographic practice to reconfigure and resist this politics through its

engagement with the optics of violence, representative and authorial justice, and through the performative and activist work that photographs can enact through new modes of production and dissemination. In order to assess the ability of photography to visualize and resist a politics of disposability, it is important to first articulate the ways in which such a politics operates. I base my understanding of disposability on a theoretical framework that conceptualizes it as a neoliberal reengagement with biopolitics.

Michel Foucault conceptualizes biopolitics—or the mechanisms by which state and institutional power monitors, manages, maximizes, and administers human life—as the power to "make live and let die" (*Society* 241). Biopolitics for Foucault described the reassignation of sovereign power from force and deprivation (e.g. denying goods, freedom, or life) to biopower, in which individuals and societies are governed "by practices of correction, exclusion, normalization, disciplining, therapeutics, and optimization" (Lemke 5). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri expand upon Foucauldian biopolitics to include its social modalities, focusing on "immaterial labor," which redefines economic production as "aimed not only at the production of goods, but ultimately the production of information, communication, cooperation—in short, the production of social relationships and social order" (*Multitude* 334). Hardt and Negri's expansion of biopolitics integrates material and affective forms of communication and pedagogy. The production, reproduction, circulation, and consumption of images are central to this process.

Giorgio Agamben (1998) sees biopolitics as hinging on the ability to administer *bare life*, for which his core example is the concentration camp, the ultimate state of exception. He suggests that political society rests on the exclusion of *homo sacer*, the human stripped of political and social power and thus reduced to their biological function and available to be

disposed of or killed with impunity.[1] Agamben's text is brought to the contemporary fore through the overwhelming instances in which racialized bodies are framed as expendable in US society—for example in the ways they are policed, funneled into the prison system, and marginalized through immigration policy—and through the impunity granted to police that kill them.

While Agamben's analysis greatly informs contemporary articulations of disposability, it falls short on several counts. First, his articulation of exclusion from political community and his use of the camp as the paradigm of politics is totalizing, foreclosing the possibility of resistance and alternative formations that include the mobilization of new subjectivities (Comaroff 211; Giroux, *Stormy* 19-20; Laclau 240). This point is particularly crucial for the following study of how visual culture and artistic practice manage to harness resistant and agented subjectivities from within oppressive conditions. Several of the photographers discussed in this dissertation inhabit multiple—and sometimes seemingly paradoxical—subject positions at once, including status as both recipients of violence and agents of resistance, resulting in a more Foucauldian conception of how power is distributed. Second, Agamben's eurocentric perspective fails to fully consider race in relation to the historical, colonial precedents for states of exception and the violent ways in which sovereign power today operates through force as well as through its withdrawal of protection (Mbembe 2003; Khanna 2009; Weheliye 2014). Third, the description of exclusion from a political community also fails to account for the ways in which such

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[1] The conditions that enable an endemic of killing with impunity include a state of sustained emergency (fabricated, for example, by the color-coded terror threat levels following 9-11), and the construction of an enemy: "The state of exception and the relation of enmity have become the normative basis of the right to kill. In such instances, power (and not necessarily state power) continuously refers and appeals to exception, emergency, and a fictionalized notion of the enemy" (Mbembe 16).

exclusions happen not only outside legal frameworks but under the registers of legality as well (Comaroff 210; Laclau 234; Lemke 61).

Achille Mbembe (2003) amended both Foucault and Agamben's work to more comprehensively account for race and colonial histories, recentralizing the sovereign administration of death. Mbembe theorizes the central project of power as the control over death rather than life, characterized by the power to "let live and make die" (inverting Foucault's famous phrase), and setting the stage for a contemporary analysis of disposability under neoliberalism. Jean Comaroff articulates both Mbembe's concern with colonial practices of administering death from within legal frameworks and Agamben's oversight of this legacy, writing that "the colonized suffered as much through the exquisite exercise of the law as by its suspension" (214), asserting that "even under the law, one's vulnerability can be awesome" (210).

As Giroux suggests, disposability emerged as "a revised set of biopolitical commitments, which have largely given up on the sanctity of human life for those populations rendered 'at risk' by global neoliberal economies" (*Stormy* 11). Disposability as a new biopolitical framework under neoliberalism is attentive to the ways in which biopolitics administer and produce particular forms of life for some and not others—biopolitical pressure and governance is uneven and determined by a series of interlocking factors, most significantly race, class, and gender (Giroux, *Stormy* 19-20; Lemke 58). Giroux explains, "what is distinctive about the new form of biopolitics [that emerges under neoliberal militarization, market fundamentalism, and privatization] is that it not only includes state-sanctioned violence but also relegates entire populations to spaces of invisibility and disposability" (*Stormy* 21). In framing the visual engagements of photography with the biopolitical, this dissertation focuses on this neoliberal

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articulation of biopolitics, while drawing upon the affective social and pedagogical registers described by Hardt and Negri that include images, codes, and immaterial and affective labor (2004; 2009). The role of images in representational justice and injustice is crucial to a neoliberal reframing of biopolitics because of the ways in which the educative and self-perpetuating forces of visual culture simultaneously underpin and undermine the public's consent and relationship to a politics of disposability.

To be disposable means several things at once. First, it means able to be discarded, typically after use—descriptive of an object whose use renders it valueless (think: disposable diapers, cameras, razors, etc.). Alternately, it means available or ready for use, something *in excess*, such as disposable income. The former definition refers to consumption, products and waste; the latter to the circulation of capital, production and reproduction (Khanna 185). Ranjana Khanna identifies a third definition specific in its application to people, pinpointing the convergence between Foucault, Agamben, and Mbembe: disposability as "the sovereign commandment (over life and death and sexual excess)" (186). This definition refers to the possibilities of what can be done *with* or *to* the disposable person, combining the notion of a consumable or throwaway object and the administration of an object towards production, reproduction, and the consolidation of power. It is important to remember that disposability is not a Schmittian inevitability; rather, it is a central biopolitical function of neoliberalism. While for Agamben, bare life was the nucleus of modern sovereignty, disposability is the moving center of neoliberalism: constructing populations as ideological scapegoats, as fodder for the prison-industrial complex, and as an endless stream of labor[2] from within that system (Evans and

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[2] In 1865 the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution outlawed slavery and involuntary servitude except as punishment for a crime. Ava DuVernay directed the 2016 documentary *13th*, tracing the history of slavery in the criminal justice system, the exploitation of the 13th amendment's legal slavery loophole, and the subsequent criminalization of Blackness. According to estimates, there are currently 2.3 million individuals incarcerated in the

Giroux 46). While disposability is inextricable from—or as Khanna describes it, "a by-product" (193) of—capitalist production, Evans and Giroux importantly note that there is nothing arbitrary or unavoidable about the "wasted lives" excluded and expelled from contemporary societies. Rather, the phenomenon is an intentional *production* of disposability, to which the authors hold neoliberalism and neoliberal societies responsible (47-48). That is to say, contemporary forms of neoliberal capitalism are founded upon disposability and the production of disposable populations.

What is important to note is that the politics of disposability are no longer exceptional or reserved for extenuating circumstances. Instead, they become a central function of neoliberalism. Although certain populations are rendered particularly vulnerable and are specifically targeted, the overall threat of disposability looms large, affecting society as a whole and stultifying its ability to foster democratic public spheres. As Khanna suggests, disposability has a direct link to a constant state of precarity and a sustained state of war:

> The importance of those figures that are not 'outside,' as it were, is that one can
> understand the differentiated ways in which life becomes disposable in the state of
> exception even as it becomes the rule. And to focus only on the abjected is to fail to
> understand the many mechanisms through which the threat of the suspension of the rule

US, up from 2 million in 2008, constituting over 25% of the globe's prison population (Pelaez; Rabuy and Wagner). People of color are drastically overrepresented in the prison system, and incarcerated individuals constitute a contemporary and lucrative source of slave-labor for big corporations, who pay them little to no wages. Incarcerated individuals are stripped of their political, social, and economic rights, losing much of their constitutional protection upon entering the carceral system. Unable to unionize, they have little recourse against their extreme marginalization as a labor force.  Payment can be as little as two cents an hour  (Benns). Beyond private corporate contracts that exploit prison labor, some prisons have convict-leasing programs, through which prisons rent out work crews, a practice that began as a way to retain access to legal slave labor after the 13th amendment outlawed slavery (Benns; Pelaez). Furthermore, prison labor is often leased out to do work that is particularly dangerous, for example, incarcerated individuals in California are regularly placed on firefighter crews during the drought-fueled wildfire season. Between 30 and 40% of California's forest firefighters are incarcerated individuals who are paid between $1 per day and $2 per hour depending on their activity, their labor saving the state upwards of $80 million annually (Klein and Lewis; Lurie). Some fear that their labor as firefighters jeopardizes prison reform and delays early release initiatives because a diminished prison population would affect the firefighter labor force (Lurie). In her important book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010), Michelle Alexander details how police brutality and violence is authorized by the system of mass incarceration, and that while particular mechanisms of oppression appear to end, they are actually refashioned into new versions of themselves.

of law leaves one in a state of what Foucault describes as permanent war. 'Disposability,' in all its many ramifications, offers a way to access this state of permanent war (190).

By reframing biopolitics under neoliberal war culture, disposability extends the biopolitical reach of administering and regulating life. It also kills and administers death in other forms beyond biological: political, social, economic, and visual. Disposability underpins not only the question of sovereignty and its relationship to life, death, and power, but also the question of visuality and its relation to—indeed underpinning of—sovereignty. Visual sovereignty determines, for instance, the power to have one's portrait painted or to commission a work of art; the power to appear and have others apprehend one's image; the power to determine the appearance of that image, and to harness the power of authorship.[3] The fraught relationship between sovereign power and the visual representation of marginalized populations has a long history—one whose biased portrayals continue well into the present day.

Marginalized and activist citizens are harnessing social media to voice their critique of this visual dimension of oppression. For example, the hashtag #iftheygunnedmedown and its viral photo-campaign emerged as a reaction to representations of Black youth in the media after the 2014 police shooting of teenager Michael Brown. Photography discourse and cultural criticism is enriched by post-modern photography critics who point out precisely how photography can be a tool of domination and subjugation.[4] However, such discourses lack an articulation of the link between the expansion of a war apparatus as a cultural mechanism and the

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[3] Spanish painter Diego Velázquez was negotiating this politico-visual sovereignty in his 1656 masterpiece, *Las Meninas*. Instead of rendering a straightforward portrait of King Philip IV and Queen Mariana, Velázquez painted a portrait of himself, the court painter, in the act of painting the royal couple, who appear reflected in a mirror at the far end of the hall. He puts himself central, and puts us, the viewer, in the position of the couple— the painter locating us as the object of his labor, rather than the subject of the painting itself. Foucault discusses *Las Meninas* as a work primarily about political optics: a work through which representation itself is represented (*The Order of Things* 336).

[4] As photography theorists such as John Tagg, Susan Sontag, Allan Sekula, Abigail Solomon-Godeau and others have argued, photography can easily and deftly be used as a tool of oppression. For a discussion of photography's use in the context of colonization, see Olu Oguibe (2002).

need for photography that works to make this proliferation legible. Nor is there a productive

critique of the means by which war culture is tied, through photography, to domestic

disposability.


**Disposability and the image**

In order to craft these discursive connections, and to address the visual violence enacted

by disposability, photography must take disposability as its *subject*, not simply as an obstacle to

be overcome by visual negotiations or rectified in re-presentations. Disposability is a social

phenomenon that works through its complex relationship with visibility; it operates both through

the removal from public sight and consciousness as well as through public acceptance in which

structures of injustice are hypervisible but remain widely unchallenged. As a result, the antidote

to disposability is not to merely make the invisible visible—it also requires negotiating and

recasting the aspects that are visible yet dismissed. Disposability and visibility are mutually

reinforcing: along with social and economic death, whereby individuals are stripped of their

agency and rendered illegible within social and economic contexts, there is also a type of

photographic death, wherein subjects are either un- or misrepresented, creating a closed loop of

visual justification and support for marginalization.[5] However, while many photographers have

taken up the necessary task of creating autonomous representations of themselves and their

communities[6] and are thus working to rectify legacies of misrepresentation, a residual challenge

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[5] Aside from the aforementioned media biases, the histories of mis- or non-representation span from colonial representations to phenotype photography and the public dissemination of mugshots.
[6] For example, photographers Malik Sidibé, Lyle Ashton Harris, and Carrie Mae Weems, all of whom have redefined blackness in photography; Native American photographers Wendy Red Star and Will Wilson, who are rewriting Edward Curtis's photographic legacy; the all-women Middle Eastern photography collective Rawiya, working to combat global stereotypes about Middle Eastern women; and filmmakers Haile Gerima and Ava DuVernay, whose films are a response to the overwhelmingly white and racially biased North American film industry.

for photography remains: how to make visible not only the disposable or historically excluded, but also the processes and affects of disposability itself.

Disposability affects not only the subjects of photography, but also the ontology and use of the image, particularly within the context of contemporary image production and proliferation. The visual distinctions of the image as it is commodified and duplicated echo the mechanisms of disposability itself, compiling significant detritus of the digital traffic in images. Close to one trillion photos are being taken every year—as Teju Cole describes it, "an unrestrained gallimaufry that not only indexes the world of visible things but also adds to its plenty" (*Known and Strange* 176). The sheer quantity of photographs taken, coupled with the emphasis on the flexible and shifting qualities of the image itself, contributes to what has been termed the "post-photographic,"[7] describing, among other things, digital preponderance, the blending of previously discrete photographic approaches, and the rising use of found images, bricolage, and collaborative approaches. However, positioning the contemporary, post-photographic condition of images at odds with traditional documentary photography is not as productive as it might seem. Eva Respini suggests that it is risky "to create a binary of 'traditional' photography, which claims an indexical relationship to the world, versus the avant-garde tradition that considers the

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[7] "Post-photography" (Mitchell, 1992; Shore, 2014; Fontcuberta, 2015) has emerged increasingly in the documentation of conflict, describing the use of practices that have traditionally been considered artistic rather than documentary within photojournalism genres. The term, however, seems rather clumsy and under-thought, since the emerging practices can be understood as re-engagements with the visual, material, and theoretical limits of the photographic, suggesting that they are anything but "post." The term "post" itself is a generally dismissive and reductive way to disengage with a phenomenon, rather than to be—as these photographic practices are—in conversation with new configurations of the field. There is no denying that the advent of digital media has indelibly altered the photographic landscape, technologically as well as socioculturally. However, the bracketing of photographic practice with "post" fails to account for the nuanced ways that photography remains very much in a self-aware dialogue with its own history even as it revises and reinvents its antecedent formations. These emerging engagements also describe photojournalism's increasing development toward aesthetic, allegorical, and narrative concerns. Contemporary photography is marked by the dissolution of boundaries between photographic practices, borrowing from other disciplines, sourcing and recycling of images, and digital technologies and manipulation. Because I identify these practices as rooted in and connected to 'traditional' photographic practices (itself a problematic term since photography as a technology has continuously developed since its birth in the 19th century), I see contemporary photography's development not as linear (implying the death or decay of one era of photography and the birth of another), but as three-dimensional, or rhizomatic.

properties of photography itself: its circulation, production, and reproduction" (102). The temptation to articulate this binary, as Respini intimates, is stale: what is necessary in this particular moment in politics and photography is work that finds linkages between the two, rendering the discipline porous and discursive rather than ossified in its particular genres or incarnations. The photographers whose work I analyze in this dissertation straddle these distinctions, expanding rather than abandoning photographic tradition and recalibrating the roles of witness and pedagogy in the images—all the while remaining attentive to political implications of visual developments and photographic deployment.

The current historical moment that defines the parameters of use and distribution of photography elucidates how power deploys culture through the mediation of market forces. As Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) suggested, images do not only result from public culture but are constitutive of it. However, they could not have predicted the networked visual realities of contemporary culture or the way in which current digital constellations of production and distribution have constructed a sort of visual tipping point. Neoliberalism's expansion into social and political spheres, coupled with new media, obliges us to investigate how parameters for photographic production change and how aesthetics and values shift within those parameters. The neoliberal privatization of public spaces and the shifting cultural value of art contribute to what I consider to be a neoliberal sensibility. This term suggests that economic and social ideologies have shaped not only socioeconomic relations and practices, but have also altered the means by which we approach matters of aesthetic and creative concern. As a result, it is impossible to consider questions of visuality and disposability as separate from the political economy. However, in the same way that neoliberalism produces subjects by shaping desires and functioning as public pedagogy (Bauman 2011; Giroux 2008; Massey 2013), the neoliberal

sensibility expands the notion of neoliberalism as a purely economic mechanism with emphasis on market structures. This expansion requires us as producers and consumers of photography to understand how the particular positions that we inhabit as neoliberal subjects further shape the ways that particular groups are rendered more or less visible, and how distribution of power in the photographic relationship determines access to authorship and agency.

While the political economy and the technosocial conditions of photography shape this study, the genealogy of and tensions in photography discourses inform the theoretical analyses of its contemporary social and political role. From its invention, photography's worth and capacity has been hotly debated—France declared Louis Daguerre and Nicéphore Niépce's invention to be a democratic medium, belonging to the nation (Azoulay 155, 519), Charles Baudelaire insisted, in his scathing review of the Salon of 1859, that its users were sun-worshippers ("The Salon" 295), and George Bernard Shaw celebrated what he saw as photography's triumph over painting (Linfield 15). Members of the Frankfurt School were generally skeptical of photography and its move towards commodification: Walter Benjamin lamented the loss of aura but saw photography as a political practice of modernity (221, 224); Siegfried Kracauer saw it as a threat to memory and critical thought (58); and in 1931 Bertold Brecht famously wrote, "photography, in the hands of the bourgeoisie, has become a terrible weapon against the truth" (quoted in Linfield 20). In the later 20th century, postmodern art theorists and critical theorists such as Allan Sekula (1981), John Tagg (2009), and others have expanded the critiques of the Frankfurt school to take seriously the power structures that govern not only the social landscape under neoliberalism, but also the ways that images and their production are implicated in those structures.

A new generation of critics such as Susie Linfield and David Levi Strauss depart from the materialist critiques of photography to more centrally position questions of affect and reception. Linfield (2010), for example, critiques what she sees as postmodern pessimism and hostility towards photography, arguing that photojournalism can still serve as a force for good by mobilizing public consciousness. Similarly, photography theorists Elspeth Brown and Thy Phu identify an overreliance on a materialist analysis that exclusively focuses on the institutions of production and circulation and a failure to engage with affect and feeling in photography. They argue that criticism's persistent marginalization of photography's "shadow subjects, most notably, women, racialized minorities, and queer sexualities" is due to this analytic imbalance (3). While Brown and Phu are right in their assertion that the affective dimension of photography has profound political consequences and can serve as entry points for otherwise marginalized, identity-based discourses, they skirt the way in which feeling is intrinsically tied up in materialism and the particular nexus of social, political, and economic conditions that produce the possible range of feelings and affects to the exclusion of others. It is not a consideration of affect or feeling that is the problem—such an approach is fecund ground for examining how photographs work socially in shaping collective sentiment and memory. The issue, rather, is the examination of affect to the exclusion of the material and historical contexts that produce the conditions for affect. What remains salient in Brown and Phu's critique, however, is the truth of how "shadow subjects" are pushed to the peripheries, particularly as their subjectivities intersect.

Despite the wealth of discourses on photography, I perceive an inadequacy in the way that they continue to be siloed, and as a result, largely fail to communicate across genres and disciplines. By investigating the political structures that shape subjectivities, we make a discursive move that does not ignore affect or feeling in photography criticism, but on the

contrary, articulates a kind of photo-social treatise that enables us to analyze the fight for visibility under neoliberal disposability politics. Similarly, by borrowing strategies from conceptual art or social applications and integrating them into documentary work, photographers can resist historical biases or disciplinary constraints. By cultivating a rubric in which we acknowledge the available options presented and use the ethical imagination to envision others, we widen the parameters of photographic discourse, and by extension, the possibility of ethical action. For example, I consider the ways in which documentary photography can both embrace subjectivity as a central tenet and simultaneously portray, with accuracy and public relevance, political and social events. Or, how documentary photography can privilege what is beyond materiality and vision[8] in the photograph—a perhaps counter-intuitive notion—and as a result harness new capacities of intervention by performing political action beyond conventional forms of representation.

The discursive, technological, and political conditions position photography in a complex relationship to justice and violence that is, to a certain degree a question of visibility—who is represented, by whom, for whom, and how. However, photographic practice is poised to make use of this complex position—as an art, as a communicative device, as material and immaterial modes of activism, identity, and community building—to render legible and even resist the politics of disposability. The practice of photography also has the uncanny ability to broker particular relationships between participants *through* their representation and involvement in the

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[8] Photography's place in contemporary art discourse began to widen dramatically in the mid 20th century, as artists like Vito Acconci and Bruce Nauman began to use the photograph conceptually, drawing attention to what photographs *do*, as well as to their materiality or lack thereof. As Carol Squiers details, this conceptual work influenced later, postmodern artists like Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, and more recently, Alison Rossiter (13). The conceptual photographic experimentation was significant because it caused critics and audiences to begin to look at photographs differently—not merely as referents to objects in the world, but in their own right, setting the stage for the post-photographic. However, as Martha Rosler notes, art history discourses largely excluded photography, an omission that deforms and misrepresents the history of politics and critique in art (*Culture* 37). This exclusion contributes to the identity crisis of photography as it relates to art discourse, professionalization, media, and social amateur uses.

production and consumption of photography (Azoulay). This contemporary interstice of disposability and the ubiquitous proliferation of images thus reframes enduring questions about images and politics: how can photography be a site of rupture in a conjuncture that champions disposability— of people, of material, of resources, of memory, and of ethics? How can the material manifestations of photography be in conversation with photography as an immaterial process, and simultaneously be a space for renewed visibility of the generally unrepresented occlusions and disposals? What kind of critical visual literacy is necessary for the neoliberal conjuncture? Developing new approaches to visuality requires parallel investigations of the processes of production and consumption from within which the photographs emerge, and which constrain the possibilities of their reception in the public sphere.

These constraints inform the particular labor precarity[9] that artists experience today in the creative economy, limits that are amplified across race and gender. As the following chapters engage with alternative photographic responses to state violence, this dissertation is especially attentive to feminist practices of photographic research and production, with a significant focus on women photographers. Although photography has historically been more hospitable to women than other mediums, female photographers and photographers of color have still been ushered to the margins of the medium—manifest in the narratives that dominate the way artists are received or how their work is qualified by gender and race. The work of rethinking photographic genres and engaging with the politics of representation also requires a

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[9] The precarity of today's creative labor economy results from labor shifts in the 1970s, neoliberal privatization and deregulation, and incorporations of labor critiques from the 1960s that called for the increased freedom, creativity, and flexibility of the worker (Boltanski and Chiapello 169). The creative economy suffers from the casualization of employment (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; McRobbie, "Re-Thinking" 2011), the segmentation or the labor force where some have security and others are contract-labor, de-unionization, and socio-economic Darwinism, justified by a rhetoric of meritocracy. Simultaneously, austerity measures often first affect cultural, educational, and public funding for the arts, and the "leveling" of photographic participation through digital and online shifts have also contributed to the precarity of photographers. Additionally, private development capitalizes on creative economies, directed their labor towards private accumulation, rather than centered on the commons or the public sphere.

reengagement with the documentary photographic genre as a traditionally masculinist endeavor, from its demographic labor distribution to its foundations in positivist ethnographic research methods that claim objectivity. The photographers included here struggle with neoliberal violence in its various forms, while some of the photographers also struggle against the parameters of their own disposability.

These photographers develop strategies of making disposability and violence legible and urgent, not only to those most harshly affected, but to broader communities. In doing so, they communicate to wider audiences how they are implicated, illustrating Khanna's observation that structures of permanent war interpolate the wider society through general threats of disposability. As they address the reverberations of neoliberalism, these photographers simultaneously confront the role of photography—and their own precarious positions—in that same fallout. They demonstrate the ways in which politics can be recouped in art by addressing how the optics of disposability intersect with the neoliberal sensibility. What is important about their methods is that they all embrace the intersections between photography's technical and social development and the political constellation that shapes photography's political purchase. They grapple with photography's visual and extravisual capacities, suggesting that the relationship between photography and justice goes beyond questions of representation. This is demonstrated, in part, by the diversity of form and practice explored in this dissertation.

Chapter 1 examines the dimensions of neoliberal disposability as they manifest in conditions of sustained domestic warfare, police violence, and economic abandonment. My analysis in this chapter is framed by Judith Butler's concept of grievability through which she questions what subjects and bodies are legible in political frameworks of solidarity (2004, 2009). I look at the work of Peter van Agtmael, a war photographer who has turned his lens onto an

American landscape and the domestic consequences of nearly perpetual foreign wars. His series *War Graffiti* illustrates the psychosocial processes by which American foreign war policy shapes individual subjectivities, serving as a microcosm of the domestic wartime psyche. Van Agtmael's *Buzzing at the Sill* is a subtle and powerful project that explores quotidian life in the US as a reflection of the material realities and ideological scaffolds of ever-amplifying military pursuits. His work demonstrates that any analysis of the US's global campaigns of accumulation and military violence cannot be divorced from an equally critical inspection of its domestic element. Van Agtmael's work participates in the destabilization of photojournalism, as he experiments with narrative, text, and subjectivity in his projects, expanding what it means to document war.

Data artist Josh Begley also investigates the US's military apparatus, focusing on police violence. His work engages both with new technologies in photography as well as alternative documentary strategies. His work *Officer Involved* employs a different approach to picturing atrocity, relying on emerging data counts for police killings and using Google maps Street View images of the locations where the killings occurred. Begley's work participates in enduring discourses on visualizing violence, seeking to rearrange the traditional documentarian's appropriative relationship to photographs and enacting a particular refusal of sight.

LaToya Ruby Frazier's work *The Notion of Family* addresses disposability politics by photographing the disenfranchisement and violence against her community over the course of nearly two decades. Her documentation of the aftermath of deindustrialization in Braddock, PA is marked by her family and community's suffering under the War on Drugs, environmental degradation, the evisceration of social infrastructure, illness, and poverty. While she manages to communicate the immense scope of a politics of disposability in her own life, her work also

contests and reconfigures the power dynamics of the traditionally masculinist documentary tradition, participating in wider movements in photography discourse. Frazier's collaborative, and often-experimental work unsettles the boundaries of the documentary genre, positioning her not only as a powerful voice on the subject of social justice, but also as a revolutionary within photographic practice. The work of each artist builds upon that of the others, each contributing to the conversation about how to visualize and understand the ways that disposability politics manifest at the domestic, state level.

Chapter 2 examines how disposability amplifies across certain intersections of gender, race, and class, focusing on the crisis of women's incarceration in the US. This chapter includes photographic work that resists the prison-industrial complex as well as addresses representative inadequacies in documenting the realities of incarcerated individuals. The three women photographers discussed here employ methods of feminist research in their photographic projects and rely on collaborative and narrative strategies to trouble or upend the power distribution in the traditional documentary triad of photographer, subject, and audience. I return to Frazier's work in Braddock to examine more closely the constellation of social and economic conditions under which women, particularly poor women of color, are criminalized and funneled into the prison system. Her work is in conversation with critical texts such as Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* (2010) and Dorothy Roberts' *Killing the Black Body* (1997), highlighting the constitutive role of images and modes of representation in social campaigns designed to disenfranchise populations. While Frazier's work sheds light on the manifestations and consequences of neoliberal disposability politics, her feminist methodologies inform and expand the possibilities of photographic practice, particularly as it relates to social justice work.

Jane Evelyn Atwood's long-term documentary project on incarcerated women, *Too Much*

*Time*, is the only photographic investigation of its scope to date. I build upon her work to conceptualize the material conditions and consequences of the skyrocketing rates at which women are incarcerated, including factors of abuse and drug addiction, inadequate prison reforms, and social policies that unfairly target and criminalize women and girls.

By contrast, Kristen S. Wilkins' work *Supplication* is a series of large scale, formal portraits of incarcerated women at the Montana State Penitentiary that challenge the representative power distributions of portraiture. Her work also provokes a line of questioning about the vernacular use of photographs, spurring a discussion on how images are produced, accessed, and circulated within the prison context.

Chapter 3 focuses on new formations of the photograph and its political impact across digital platforms, in light of contemporary activist movements such as Occupy Wall Street or Black Lives Matter. Following Hardt and Negri's articulation of the immaterial commons (2009), I conceptualize a photography of the commons, parsing how images can constitute a public space in which producers, subjects, and consumers are legible to one another. I examine the photographic as performative; as capable of doing work beyond what it indexically represents, and capable of serving as witness, testifying, and proffering alternative political futures. I turn to Butler's conceptualization of public assembly and Nicholas Mirzoeff and his articulation of the "space of appearance" in order to consider what kinds of photographs might be able to constitute such a space, and in doing so, how they rearrange relationships of power, authorship, and consumption. Revolutions in social justice are being shaped and buttressed by visual media—mostly digital, and often amateur and collaborative. Political and social justice movements play out across social media with individuals sharing news, narratives, images, and videos. Understanding the visually networked nature of doing politics publicly is not merely a

matter of examining new media and new platforms; it must also concern itself with a renewed examination of the agented role of images. Within the context of neoliberal social policies and a highly image-reliant society, a more critical public visual literacy must emerge in order to make sense of photography's use as well as to assess the revolutionary and performative potential of the work itself.

One example of such work is Daniella Zalcman's collaborative project Echo/Sight, hosted on Instagram, which creates double exposure "mashups" between guest contributors. The resulting highly visible and diffuse photographs operate as visual and discursive connections across geographic and temporal distances. I examine some of the work from Echo/Sight to explore how they contribute to a photography of the commons by drawing together various activist work as well as by making apparent the connections between seemingly disparate manifestations of neoliberal and representational violence. I also examine the challenges faced by photography disseminated on new platforms, including the means by which such politics are appropriated by capital interests, threatening the publicness of a true commons.

The various photographic strategies explored in these chapters—eschewing vision in alternative representations of disposability; intervening in traditional documentary practices to advance feminist visual methodologies; redeploying conventions of portraiture to address vernacular photographic production and consumption; proliferating images across new digital platforms in ways that perform emancipatory politics—all engage with the visual dimensions of disposability while also participating in modes of resistance and pedagogy that move beyond the purely visual. What further binds these disparate practices together is their engagement with narrative subjectivity, locating them in timely discourses on disciplinary boundaries and emphasizing documentary photography's already paradoxical ontology. These works make clear

that photography is never put to rest, and its evolution remains unfinished: the debates about photography are continuously resuscitated and develop alongside the medium. Its adaptation and transformation is what remains endlessly fascinating about photography—it is never only one thing, and it occupies strange and contradictory polarities.

Importantly, this instability in photography is also what allows it to intervene in established discourses and simultaneously break new ground, bridging art, activism, new media, and communication technologies. This dissertation seeks to explore the limits and potentialities of photographic work in order to examine where photography stands in today's political conjuncture and how its adaptable and complex status positions it to address the multivalent and equally adaptive nature of disposability politics. This dissertation participates in ongoing discourses on visualizing violence, the ethics of representation, and photography's emancipatory potential. However, it also seeks to expand these conversations to connect photographic production to the larger affective and political formations of neoliberal disposability while remaining attentive to the odd and powerful qualities of photographs that are irreducible to content. While indispensable scholarship has been shaped by meticulous visual examinations of photographs, it has equally been buoyed by an attentiveness to the ways that photographs participate in the political and economic culture. This text seeks to bring these conversations together in a productive and thoughtful way in order to arm photographic production and research with the tools necessary to respond to and disturb structures of injustice and violence. The current political and cultural moment demands a renewed agility from photography as well as from those of us who attempt to understand it, calling for a visual literacy incisive enough to privilege public ethical practices alongside visual ones.

Found photograph, Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans, LA, 2006.



Found photograph, back, Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans, LA, 2006.

CHAPTER ONE
PHOTOGRAPHING NEOLIBERAL CONFLICT IN THE UNITED STATES

"What makes the profession a secure one, and what ultimately nullifies the political force of any of the images, is its reliance on one pretty dependable thing – the world's permanent state of war." –Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin on photojournalism, "Unconcerned but not indifferent," 2008.

**Grievability in the news**

In 2015, two very different images left the western world reeling. On September 2$^{nd}$, Turkish photojournalist Nilüfer Demir came across the lifeless body of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, facedown on the beach of Bodrum, Turkey. Aylan drowned along with his mother Rehan and brother Galip, as his family attempted to cross the Aegean straight to Greece. The resulting images quickly went viral, making international headlines and becoming the visualization of the Syrian refugee crisis, sparking renewed interest and funding for relief efforts.

The other photograph is a still from an April 4$^{th}$ cell phone video showing North Charleston, SC police officer Michael Slager fatally shooting Walter Scott, an unarmed Black man, eight times in the back. The image, taken from witness Feidin Santana's video, was rapidly shared across social media platforms and moved onto mainstream media front pages. On April 9$^{th}$, TIME shared the image on its cover, under the words "BLACK LIVES MATTER." In the wake of several similar instances of police killings in which the video footage was suppressed or deemed insufficient evidence, 23-year-old Santana feared the possible consequences for sharing a video that demonstrated extrajudicial police violence. Unlike the relative ease with which Demir released her photographs, Santana recalls, "I felt that my life, with this information, might be in danger. I thought about erasing the video and just getting out of the community, you know Charleston, and living someplace else. I knew the cop didn't do the right thing" (Helsel).

The image of Aylan operated as an international call to action and provoked a widespread ethical response. The photograph of Walter sparked similar outrage over police violence and brutality directed at Black individuals and communities, and yet failed to have the same broad effect. The success of Demir's image reinvigorated ongoing debates about photography's ability to inspire an ethical response, sparking renewed belief in photographic advocacy ("Iconic Image," 2015; Laurent, 2015). Susan Sontag had herself oscillated in thinking that photographs could provoke or suppress sympathy. In *On Photography* she wrote that photographs of atrocity can do "at least as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it" (21). Some 25 years later, in *Regarding the Pain of Others,* she demonstrated her own still-turbulent relationship to the work that photographs do: "As much as they create sympathy, I wrote, photographs shrivel sympathy. Is this true? I thought it was when I wrote it. I'm not so sure now" (105). Sontag is right of course in her ambivalence—photographs do both, and also provoke a broad range of reactions in between. The question of photography's ethical nature, however, depends more on the amalgamation of conditions that constitute the field of visual culture and the particular political contexts in which photographs emerge, than with the inherent capabilities of photographs themselves; Sontag's struggle with the ambiguity of photographs concedes to the complex and often paradoxical situatedness of photographs vis-à-vis their contextualization and spectatorship.

Demir's photograph removed Aylan, even momentarily, from a racialized population, faceless and white enough to act as a visual locum for any number of western children whose parents' hearts collectively broke upon seeing the image. Countless social media comments expressed that affective substitution— "Been crying my eyes out for the last hour after seeing this. Same size as my little boy. A truly powerful image" (@brucesutton2775 1:22 p.m.). Peter Bouckaert from Human Rights Watch correctly argues that ethnocentricity affected the image's

reception in the west: "This is a child that looks a lot like a European child," he says. "The week before, dozens of African kids washed up on the beaches of Libya and were photographed and it didn't have the same impact" (Laurant). Similarly, Susie Linfield suggests that while our reactions to images of children are particularly visceral and tend to elicit a more pronounced response, they are ultimately no more politically self-explanatory than other images (130-131).

Demir's other images of the Turkish officer carrying Aylan's body is composed as a recognizable if subconscious representation of innocence, sacrifice, and purity, echoing the oft-reproduced Pietà. The sacrificial victim is inscribed with symbolic, Christian value, perhaps even suggesting a Christian figure driven to a tragic death by Islamic radicalism, compounding already prevalent currents of Islamophobia. Through this symbolic inscription, coupled with Aylan as a stand-in for so many western children, Demir's images become both irresistible and unbearable to western audiences. In contrast, the image and video of Walter Scott, while shocking, is socially imbued with different symbolic value, sparking a more muted response among white, western audiences. The sort of symbolic violence that is inscribed on non-white and/or non-western bodies indeed sanctions further violence. These prescriptive differences suggest that the politics involved in eliciting ethical responses depend less on taking a great photograph than on the political possibilities of how we interact with and address images that show more or less grievable bodies. This chapter will examine the violence and visuality inherent in a politics and optics of disposability—exploring how images fit into such a politics and how photographers are attempting to create work that comments on the role of photography and focuses on the disruption of biased optics.

**Crisis of representation**

First, however, it is crucial to examine the identity crisis in which documentary photography finds itself. Standards that have long governed photojournalism are shifting wildly, thanks in part to available technologies, editing and post-production tools, and socially-networked production and distribution platforms. In 2015, the prestigious World Press Photo (WPP) awards provoked a heated debate on the rules of documentary photography, when 20% of entries were disqualified for post-processing or captioning inaccuracies. The controversy—indeed, photo-world scandal—caused WPP to conduct a five-month review of the foundation resulting in a code of ethics released on November 25, 2015. The guidelines are designed to govern the prize and serve as a leading example in the photography industry, detailing the judging process as well as outlining standards regarding manipulation, image use, captioning, postproduction, etc. (Lowry).

This controversy and the real or perceived need for a photography rulebook reveals something about the state of photojournalism today: it reflects the debate between journalistic aspirations of conveying an objective truth and emerging views that storytelling and construction constitute an increasingly central part of compelling and meaningful communication about ourselves and the world. The latter perspective suggests that while we can get facts and information instantaneously and from numerous sources, we must look to photography to help us understand, feel, connect, and make sense of the facts or event (Estrin, "Fact"). This understanding of photography's role does not suggest that facts do not matter, but rather that it is not entirely photography's responsibility to be factual, particularly since it is a medium that, like all other mediums of communication, relies on interpretation.

The WPP controversy illuminates a deeper and enduring dilemma of photography—that

photographs are called upon to serve both evidentiary and testamentary functions: on the one

hand, they are to provide indisputable proof of events or violence, while on the other, they are to

bear witness to it, serve as a symbolic representation of it, and bear the weight of its collective

recollection. In *Images in Spite of All*, Georges Didi-Huberman argues that the impossibility of a

photograph to bear witness to and represent the Holocaust as a singular atrocity reveals the

dialectical nature of the photograph: it bears the burden of the often-ahistorical collective desire

for it to fully evidence, represent, and bear witness, and yet it simultaneously stands as a

testament to specificity and subjectivity in its refusal or inability to do so. Commentators on the

WPP debate largely reduced this complex photographic function to a question of lying v. telling

the truth, a question that photographic theory has already transcended in its more sophisticated

treatment of the photograph's relationship to reality. While it is widely accepted that

photography is not synonymous with truth or objectivity, this is still hotly contested in

photojournalism, punctuated by documentarians that have lost their jobs or assignments due to

artistic license.[10]

In October 2015, the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University

organized a conference called *Image Truth / Story Truth*. In part a reaction to the WPP

controversy and the myriad questions about the state of journalism that the scandal brought to the

fore, the conference sought to investigate what the aims of photojournalism can and should be in

an era of enduring conflict. As an accompaniment to the panels, documentary photographer and

Columbia professor Nina Berman wrote that the aims of the conference were in part to direct the

conversation about photojournalism away from the technical considerations (that appeared to be

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[10] For example, the Pulitzer prize-winning photojournalist Narciso Contreras and photojournalist Miguel Tovar were both fired from the Associated Press for photoshopping out what could be considered minor details from their images: Contreras edited out a camera sitting on the ground and Tovar removed his shadow (Morrison).

the focus of WPP) and more towards ethical and ontological questions about what

photojournalism is and could become:

> Are photojournalists creating images that repeat certain visual tropes and perpetuate social stereotypes? Do contests such as World Press Photo and the Pulitzer Prize reinforce those stereotypes by consistently awarding work that focuses on the dramatic individuation of suffering and the search for the iconic moment?... Given the complexity of contemporary conflict, should pictures do more than provoke emotional reactions? Is it enough to simply wait for disasters to happen and then make gorgeous images of those disasters, as one panelist asked? Can a deeper form of documentation and witnessing take place that looks less to the dramatic moment, and more to causes and context? Can new technologies help or distract? Is a new visual language required? (Khorana and Adkison).

Berman raises important questions that open the door for different approaches to

photojournalism and documentary photography that might fall beyond traditional measures of

documentary practice, for example of those outlined in the new WPP guidelines. Yet her

comments also make it clear that the discourse around photography has progressed beyond a

question of "aestheticization"; rather, it must also take into account the political parameters and

problematics of witnessing, collaboration, distribution, and institutionalization.

In 2001, Martha Rosler critiqued what she saw as an aesthetic turn in photojournalism,

cautioning that photographers are shirking their responsibility, and that the "mutation [of

documentary photography] into ephemeral aesthetic form and its maker into an artist is a 'threat'

to this genre" (*Decoys* 211). Similarly, in 2003 Jim Lewis called for the de-aestheticization of

documentary work, writing "I really don't think that a picture of an atrocity should be a good

picture, a beautiful picture, a well-composed picture printed on good paper stock, rich in tonal

variation, etc., etc.… it should be casually composed, hastily framed, only competently printed,

and so on."  What both Lewis and Rosler fail to see is that aesthetic discourse at its best grapples

with the complex and often contradictory ways that optics, ideology, and the imagination

intertwine to uphold and reinforce cultural norms and simultaneously challenge, revise, and

reconsider them—affecting the theoretical understanding of aesthetics as much as it reverberates through the broader culture. Additionally, and from a practical and material perspective, the landscape of conflict photography is forced to adapt as journalistic access is restricted, the prosecution of war is increasingly digital and remote, and photographers struggle ethically and aesthetically to make sense of enduring states of conflict. Traditional photojournalism, in its aspiration to objective documentation, is often unable to respond to the growing discomfort with the hierarchical relationships between photographer, audience, and subject. It also largely fails to sufficiently address or proffer alternatives to the enduring traffic in western stereotypes about brown and black bodies that are reinforced by photographic traditions. The politically influential mode of photojournalism that emerged during the Vietnam War has been steadily dismantled by a number of material factors in the visual economy, including labor insecurity as secure staff assignments and investigative journalism are replaced by rapid story turnover, the popularity of citizen journalism, the rising dominance of uninsured contract work, and diminished journalistic freedom. Photographing conflict that is characterized by evolving forms of precarity and increasingly disguised forms of warfare requires new approaches that engage self-consciously with the state and role of photography itself, not to mention the enduring questions of labor, control of production, and authorship.

With such adjustments come new strategies to reconcile documentary responsibility with aesthetic and creative license, not necessarily signaling the death of photojournalism, but gesturing toward evolved ways of thinking about the optics of a neoliberal and networked age. These shifts contribute not only to a conversation about the state of the world, but about the broader practice of photography. Artist duo Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, who sat on the 2008 WPP jury, distil this watershed shift in photojournalism, articulating a plea for the

transition of the photojournalist from an "event-gathering machine into something slightly more intelligent, more reflective, and more analytical about our world, the world of images and about the place where these two worlds collide" (7).

Considering both the difficulties and possibilities inherent in documentary photography's crisis of representation, how is the medium adjusting specifically to the challenge of communicating violence and warfare in an era of neoliberal conflict? While photographs are crucial for translating combat across geographical and cultural distances, contemporary photographers must contend with the rise of war culture and the amplifying militarization of American society, and the increasingly central role of photographs as forms of public pedagogy. US-involved conflict is sustained by powerful narratives about threats to American safety that are deployed to justify international military intervention just as much as they are utilized to foment domestic militarization. Such militarization includes the evisceration of due-process and privacy through the Patriot Act and ensuing NSA transgressions; the arming of state police forces with surplus military equipment; draconian policies that overwhelmingly target people of color, the poor, and those with dissenting opinions; and the institutional barriers in place that prevent collective organization, protest, or the sustenance of productive and democratic public discourse.[11] These deformations are supported and carried out through the solicitation of consent to certain types of violence and infringements of rights, guided in large part through the visualization and public representation of war and violence. A central challenge for photographers is addressing the systemic, culturally entrenched aspects of conflict while

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[11] For more on domestic militarization and its neoliberal scaffold, see Henry Giroux, *America at War with Itself* (2016), *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism* (2008), and *Public Spaces, Private Lives: Democracy Beyond 9/11* (2003); Catherine Lutz, "Making War at Home in the United States: Militarization and the Current Crisis," *American Anthropologist* 104 (2002); Chris Hedges, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (2003); and Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (2015).

photographing it in ways that also address—rather than take for granted—photography's role in its articulation.

## Spectacle and the normalization of violence

Photographers who take conflict as their subject must also contend with the ongoing difficulty of documenting violence in a climate where atrocity images are both heavily censored and simultaneously consumed with renewed vigor. Henry Giroux examines what he calls the *aesthetics of depravity*, a collective, cultural phenomenon that describes how North American culture fosters a willingness to kill and the deep-seated pleasure derived from the consumption of images that illustrate such violence ("Instants of Truth" 4). Giroux connects the appetite for images of suffering to the surplus of such images, the legitimization of extreme violence in the larger culture, and the danger of a diminished ethical effect that Sontag identified and grappled with throughout her work on photography.[12] The spectacular and entertainment-oriented relationship we have cultivated to war imagery is another source of this malaise. Ongoing—if not permanent—war has engendered a commodification of what could be called the war spectacle. Jan Mieszkowski asserts that we have become not just spectators but consumers of war, and that war imagery cannot keep up with our appetites for the hyperreal: the public is "neither sufficiently appreciative of nor sufficiently traumatized by the show" (3). The spectacle of watching war has created an "entertainment-military-industrial complex," and one of its many implications is a disengaged public (Mieszkowski 6). The consumer attraction to images of

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[12] Giroux refers to Sontag's observation that images of violence may "no longer compel occasions for self and social critique," in order to demonstrate the ways in which the cultural normalization of violence goes hand in hand with an atrophy of robust public critique ("Instants of Truth" 4). Sontag, however, did not stand by this absolutely: while she knew that aesthetics of violence are indicative of regimes of power, she also suggests that reactions to atrocity images are complex and contradictory, and that these images are also central to cultural and ethical meaning-making. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag complicates our responses to images by grappling with the role of text as an accompaniment to violent imagery, writing that words may be more effective in communicating atrocity than the fleeting image (122).

disaster and misery reveals a deeper cultural swell of violent voyeurism and what Sigmund Freud called *scopophilia*, a pleasure derived from viewing, especially bodies in distress (Giroux, "Instants of Truth" 4; Seltzer, "Wound Culture" 24). Mark Seltzer refers to the consequences of this voyeurism as "wound culture," suggesting that the compulsion to gather around to spectate violence and trauma is itself a form of sociality, one that forms in the convergence between private desire and public space (3-4). The attraction to watching violence is compounded culturally by the militarization of society, where the private pleasure of transgressing a social taboo can be consumed en masse. Photographs perform a particularly central role in the visualization and proliferation of violence, while also being a space upon which the differential distribution of violence plays out.

The supply and demand of documentary production reproduces the political and ideological inequalities that underpin the dynamics of who suffers and who gets to watch. The production of pleasure and the desire to exert and view violence rely on the normalization of everyday violence ushered in through authoritarian and militarized modes of existence under neoliberal politics (Giroux, "Instants of Truth" 5). This normalization and ritualization of violence is supported by a governing strategy in which the threat of state-sanctioned violence remains ever-present, poised to strike at the 'other' for the sake of preserving the 'us.' Meanwhile, the 'us' becomes increasingly exclusive as greater parts of the population become categorized as unimportant, or worse, dangerous and intolerable—illustrated by the numerous examples of racist policing, the silencing of intellectuals, violence meted out on peaceful student protesters, etc., and what Giroux describes as the "[promotion of] shared fears and increasingly disciplinary modes of governance that rely on the criminalization of social problems," punishing populations by exploiting social and economic precarity ("Instants of Truth" 5).

The other side of the consumption and broad acceptance of violence is a mechanism of censorship that impedes critical inquiry and journalistic processes. Editorial choices and omissions that favor images absent of corpses, dying, or bodily violence dominate the US media. Such "sanitized images make it easier, in turn, to accept bloodless language" (e.g. "collateral damage")[13] (Friedersdorf 3). Conor Friedersdorf argues that whatever effect atrocity photographs may have on public consciousness or opinion, looking at them makes it harder to avoid a subject or to speak euphemistically (3). Similarly, thanks to strict embed rules whose interpretation is left to the discretion of military officials, journalists are increasingly prevented from documenting combat, often under threat of losing their embeds as military retaliation for publishing unauthorized images (Arango and Kamber).

So why is some suffering censored while other suffering is permitted and distributed for mass consumption? Rancière distills the conspiratorial cooperation of what deceptively appear to be opposing forces of oversaturation and censorship, but instead are a particular and intentional selection of images and the subjectivities that they represent:

> If horror is banalized, it is not because we see too many images of it. We do not see too many suffering bodies on the screen. But we do see too many nameless bodies, too many bodies incapable of returning the gaze that we direct at them, too many bodies that are an object of speech without themselves having a chance to speak. The system of information does not operate through an excess of images but by selecting the speaking and reasoning beings that are capable of deciphering the flow of information about anonymous multitudes. The politics specific to its images consists in teaching us that not just anyone is capable of seeing and speaking. This is the lesson very prosaically confirmed by those who claim to criticize the televisual flood of images (*Emancipated* 96).[14]

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[13] In her poem "What I Will," poet Suheir Hammad writes "Life is a right not / collateral or casual" (ln 28-29), rallying against the exsanguination and sterilization of war and recognizing the steps of dehumanization that must take place in order to make life merely collateral.

[14] Teju Cole echoes Rancière's analysis of our relationship to difficult images. He writes, "the problem is not one of too many unsettling images but of too few. When the tragedy or suffering of only certain people in certain places is made visible, the boundaries of good taste are really not transgressed at all… We must not turn away from what that kind of suffering looks like when visited on 'us'" (*Known and Strange* 216).

Rancière effectively neutralizes the seductive pull of what has casually been called "compassion fatigue," the idea that spectators and potential witnesses to atrocity become numbed by the sheer quantity of violent images—the notion that Sontag herself wrestled with. Instead Rancière suggests that it is not merely violence and suffering writ large that audiences feel compelled to ignore, it is violence against particular subjects (explaining, for example, the very different western reactions to the November 2015 attack in Paris and the sustained bombing campaigns in both Aleppo, Syria and Mosul, Iraq). Beyond ambivalent audiences, Rancière's argument implicates the political economy of image production and the critics who concern themselves with "oversaturation" in visual systems that concretize whose suffering counts and whose does not. The root of this ethical disconnect in public reception of atrocity photographs is that western audiences *seek* a representation of ungrievable, othered bodies depicted in news and documentary images of violence. These images support wound culture by making these bodies visually available for consumption and gratification. "Compassion fatigue" has more to do with the representation of subjects than with an excess of images. Visibility, or lack thereof, has a literal connection to disposability.

When we gather around to see violence enacted upon others, or when we are titillated by a suffering that is not ours, the public participates in the act of othering that makes violence possible and tolerable. Judith Butler exposes how those who are regarded as socially dead— excluded from sociopolitical participation— are rendered ungrievable, and thus, disposable by circumventing moral solidarity (*Frames* 4, 42). There is a dangerous laziness that supports these particular codes of commodification or digestibility of violence: many of the photographs that go viral (such as Demir's image of Aylan Kurdi) and inspire a sort of liberal, self-congratulatory outrage, are images that contain indicators for the socially appropriate feelings of response. Such

images point to injustice while protecting the safe, privileged position of the viewer as well as the established optic regimes of oppression. These tend to be images that reaffirm the ideologies we already participate in, not ones that challenge a concept of visuality and disposability itself.

The historical conjuncture and the cultural discourses that inform it are important components in understanding the relationship between a social ethics and new images of violence. *Total war*, a concept that originated in response to the escalating destruction of the Napoleonic Wars at the beginning of the 19th century, describes a war that persists without a tangible end, and in the pursuit of complete eradication of a so-called enemy. Two hundred years later we are confronted with a dangerously evolved picture of war that is entrenched in the western psyche—a warfare that is self-perpetuating and simultaneously constructs a culture that calls for it. The creation of a warring culture requires the solicitation of consent to certain types of violence and infringements of rights. This consent hinges on an ideological scaffold delivered via extreme nationalism and the peddling of fear, focused on a variety of "threats," including big government, immigration, and terrorism.[15] A United States at war with a large portion of its citizenry has emerged in stride with globalized, imperialist conflicts and alongside the expansion of a neoliberal ideology from an economic doctrine to one that governs social and political processes as well (Brown par. 7, 15; Giroux *Against the Terror* 1-3*)*. The successes of capital accumulation and unequal distribution rely on a politics of disposability that simultaneously makes them available to exploitation in the pursuit of capital accumulation.

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[15] This is visible, for example, in the ways that the War on Terror has created a genuine appetite for fascism in political frontrunners that support regimes of torture, violence, the language of eradication, and discourses of racial purity—all emblematic of the extent to which the US has succumbed to a war rhetoric now inextricable from American culture. It is, in large part, a reaction to the last fifteen years of pathologies of the national security complex and the corporate state. War is in many ways inseparable from lived experience; quotidian life might now provide context for war, not the other way around.

So how did we arrive at this point? First of all, it is a question of consistency: the US has been at war for 43 out of the 48 years since 1970, uninterrupted since 2001. Secondly, it is a matter of how neoliberal policy encourages warfare to become a cultural norm and a governing strategy. As private and corporate interests largely dictate governmental policy, war becomes an increasingly lucrative activity that secures billions in private contracts (Calio 2014; Karlin 2015; Weigley 2013). Because the perpetuation of war is inextricable from neoliberal capitalism, the experiences of war fall more heavily on some than others—determined, beyond the proximity to traditional war zones, by race, gender, class, and the fallout of global capital. Neoliberalism and the concurrent normalization of violence have given rise to the punishing state, a militarized, authoritative, and punitive apparatus of social control and enforcement (Giroux 2009; Wacquant 2009). The punishing state fills the vacuum left by the shrinking social and welfare states, and characterizes the role of government in a landscape that individually pathologizes social ills. What Giorgio Agamben (2005) called the *state of exception,* or the suspension of law in the name of security, is a contemporary license for atrocity and injustice and is justified in political rhetoric through the wars waged by the US: the many conflicts indexed under the War on Terror; the War on Drugs, conducted overwhelmingly according to structural racism and in harmonious concert with the prison-industrial complex; and the War on Poverty, a failure that has endured half a century. The acceptance of these wars bolsters a muscular police state, surveillance culture, the skyrocketing use of lethal force in police interactions with civilians, extralegal proceedings, and results in a country at war not only against real or imagined foreign enemies, but in an expression of autoimmunity,[16] against its own citizens as well.

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[16] Derrida (2005) elaborates a concept of autoimmunity, inspired by the biological phenomenon of a body's health-preserving functions instead attacking the body itself. Derrida suggests that democracy is centrally flawed by design, and that, in attempts to preserve sovereignty, it excludes and attacks certain parts of the multitude, thus destroying itself. Autoimmunity, as it is used in this chapter, is framed as gesture of self-preservation while attacking

The photography examined in this chapter comments not only on particular *sites* and *means* of conflict, but also on the nature of photography itself, within the context of conflict. It is not enough to simply transmit information about an event: in a culture that embodies and produces war, we need images that also reveal the structural conditions that shape conflict and the optics that support it. Such work also attempts to understand the role of the visual in histories of violence— how photography, and what is visible or invisible in it, can reproduce or counter particular representations, erasures, and disposals. This type of self-aware photography scrutinizes its role in systems of injustice, expanding the frontier and modes of development in photojournalism and documentary. The photographers in the following discussion are bound to one another by their efforts to trouble the regime of the visible. Peter van Agtmael, Josh Begley, and LaToya Ruby Frazier employ emerging photographic strategies and practices to tarry with the complexity of documenting contemporary conflict in the cultural landscape of the United States. They each address, albeit in markedly different ways, the role of the unseen in both sustaining and destabilizing disposability and structural violence. Van Agtmael and Begley take up spectrality and absence as politically productive, while Frazier insists on her subjects' presence and personhood.

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significant segments of the constituent population. The Posse Cometatus Act, a US federal law, was instated to protect against the military execution of such autoimmunity. It states that the US Army and Air Force cannot be deployed to enforce domestic policy. Framed as a safeguard for US citizens against abuses of federal power, the Act contains several excepted institutions of military power, such as the National Guard, Coast Guard, and the Department of Homeland Security. These bodies are permitted to act as law enforcement under state authority, which has resulted in catastrophes such as the notorious Kent State massacre in 1970. The Posse Cometatus Act is coupled with the Insurrection Act of 1807, which seeks to limit the president's power to deploy federal forces in the event of insurrection or disorder. In 2006, President George W. Bush signed a bill into law that contained an amendment to the Insurrection Act, permitting the president to authorize the use of US Armed Forces and National Guard "to restore public order in cases of natural disaster, epidemic or other public health emergency, terrorist attack or incident, or domestic violence" ("H.R. 5122" sec. 1076). That amendment was repealed in 2008 ("H.R. 4986" sec. 1068).

**Wartime subject: Peter van Agtmael**

Photojournalists must contend with the reality that war can no longer be photographed as a distant or contained phenomenon, but as a regulative principle in domestic life and public consciousness. War is no longer a finite engagement but rather a state of being in the world, and photography must adapt by employing new approaches and technologies that comment on the nature and practice of photography itself. Because war and its accompanying behaviors, ideologies, economies, and subjectivities are imbricated culturally, in order to interrogate war we must interrogate war as integral to understanding society. It is this double register of interrogation that Magnum photographer Peter van Agtmael takes up in his work, characterizing himself not as a war photographer, but tellingly, as a photographer of modern America (Zinser).

Van Agtmael's photos capture this cultural shift: war has become a means of regulating, shaping, and restricting social and political life. As Butler writes, "war is in the business of producing and reproducing precarity, sustaining populations on the edge of death, sometimes killing its members, and sometimes not; either way, it produces precarity as the norm of everyday life. Lives under such conditions of precarity do not have to be fully eviscerated to be subject to an effective and sustained operation of violence" (*Frames* xix). Precarity in this sense describes living in and navigating through a society permeated by war, punctuated by varying levels of danger to one's physical, social, and economic livelihood. Emerging war subjectivities are themselves a response to this sustained violence that produces not only material consequences, but also consent and an ingrained production of the conditions required to pursue and enact war. War can be understood both a presence and an event, supported through a persistent militarization of institutions and the soft or disguised forms of war, reflected prominently in a shift in the American psyche.

Van Agtmael investigates these broader strokes of warfare— he pulls into relief the ambiguous and unarticulated conditions that, when drawn together, begin to make visible the scaffold that sustains and defines war. His work acts as a way to reveal not the symptoms, but the undercurrent: themes and questions about war that irrigate its discourse. The images resonate because we are confronted with the unseen, structural, and subversive forces of wartime that resides within and around us— we are forced to contend with the knowledge that war has become attached to our everyday lives, and that by virtue of living in a war culture we run the risk of replicating it.

Van Agtmael's project *War Graffiti* examines a tenuous and precarious space in which community is reimagined. Over the course of several trips abroad as a war photographer, van Agtmael photographed graffiti in military base bathrooms in Kuwait and Iraq. The continuum of graffiti is punctuated by an assertion of taking up space, of being there; when considered in a wartime context, it is indicative of bearing witness, of saying "I saw this," itself mimicking a photographic function.[17] The graffiti in van Agtmael's series reads less as witness testimony and more like an effort to be seen, or in the face of being swallowed up by war, to be remembered. These private and sometimes tender declarations are left in a public and simultaneously anonymous space—a bathroom, itself a historically and contemporaneously political space.[18] By virtue of graffiti, the bathroom becomes a sort of confessional or community board, and the marks feel at once indelible and ephemeral. The totality of the combatant's confessional

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[17] Plate 44 of Francisco de Goya's *Disasters of War* is entitled "Yo lo vi" (I saw it). Goya's work is striking in its lack of moralizing and its indifference to captioning. The power of the work comes, in part, from its refusal to console or teach the viewer; instead, we are left to contend with the disturbing and confusing images ourselves, devoid of progressive or narrative logic. However, "Yo lo vi" does not mean that simply because something was witnessed, justice will follow. Perhaps it is designed to call our attention to the imbricated positions of seeing, watching, and witnessing, awakening the viewer to their own complicity.

[18] We might, for example, consider the contemporary anti-trans ordinances that render the bathroom a contested political space, and contribute to the climate of escalating state-sanctioned violence. This sort of legislatively-leveraged oppression registers not only as participating in a politics of disposability, but also as part of a war culture: one might imagine this as a "War on Alternative Gender Experience."

declarations reveals a broader wartime psyche. The photographs recall what Raymond Williams (1977) called "structures of feeling," a set of burgeoning attitudes and affects that— instead of being individualized and arbitrary— are culturally imposed and schooled perspectives which are circulated and formed socially at a particular historical conjuncture. The confessional and dialogic nature of the graffiti visualizes what it means to be at once individual and communal in the face of disaster, and betrays the conflicts, dissonances, tensions, and hopes that emerge simultaneously to function as the schooled wartime structures of feeling.

### *averted vision*

Van Agtmael's photographs are portraits of war we do not often encounter, uncharacterized by physical bodies and the visual cues of destruction. The destruction alluded to in these images is one that often goes unseen—the slow dismantling of communities and individuals through conflict. The photographs are a requiem of sorts, not only for the physical, human casualties of war, but also for the all-encompassing collateral damage that also claims our collective distance from enduring conflict. Van Agtmael's photographs unveil a different casualty, perhaps less viscerally shocking than many photographs of war; an encounter that emerges not through atrocity imagery, but rather through the careful detailing of the unseen or perhaps *unseeable* parts of war rendered momentarily visible. Williams' structures of feeling is useful here in that it acts as a parallel concept to van Agtmael's departure from purely representational, indexical photojournalism.

The confessional and conversational texts in the photographs reveal the confluence of social, personal, and ideological factors that contribute the wartime culture, for example: "I miss my family, please God forgive the lives I took and let my family be happy if I don't go home

again" and its aggressively scrawled response, "FAG!!!"; "I love Iraq" and its retort, "but Iraq doesn't love you"; "died for oil" and in response, just below, "fuck liberal pussy liars." Just as Williams' structures of feeling point to the manner in which consent is manufactured, and show how public sentiment reveals the possible and available perspectives under conjunctural conditions, van Agtmael's attempt to make visible the invisible is his self-conscious engagement with the pedagogic quality of visual culture. His photographs pause to consider the non-registered, inchoate, or difficult-to-pinpoint parts in historical narratives about conflict—the parts that swell together to behave as cultural currents, moving populations to support and participate in the mechanisms of war.

The photographs are examples of a technique dating back to Aristotle that is now known as *averted vision*—being able to see something more clearly by not looking straight at it, but rather just off to the side, for example a dim star in the night sky. This approach to photojournalism was illustrated by 2015 World Press Photo Award winner Sergei Ilnitsky's compelling photograph *Kitchen Table*, taken in August of 2014 in Donetsk, Ukraine, during the Ukrainian revolution. The photograph shows no bodies, but instead illustrates the devastation that violence leaves in its wake, not in exceptional and impressive measures, but in the ordinariness and unremarkableness of someone's apartment. It is an aesthetically subtle and tender still life, full of softness and texture. The diffuse daylight from the window just outside of the frame filters through a lace curtain, falling on a teapot and mug, a bowl with fruit, two kitchen knives— and yet, it dawns on the viewer, the table is covered with debris, glass shards, dust, and spatters of blood. The viewer is left to wonder about the history of the inhabitants of the kitchen and the aftermath of the violence that rendered them absent from this particular image. This sort of portrait is one answer to the debate on what kinds of images of violence have

an ability to resonate and what they are able to communicate after the violent event has happened. These images cause the viewer to question not only what happened, but also what is left and what must be repaired.[19]

This mechanism of understanding an event by examining its periphery and effects is what Geoffrey Batchen calls *looking askance*: he suggests that photographs about atrocity that do not picture it indexically provide an alternative entry into understanding and feeling historical circumstances, and that bearing witness to atrocity in this way that might facilitate a more authentic or productive experience beyond a conscious attempt to memorialize (227). Batchen's insistence that these photographs are provocative and productive in their refusal to explicitly show the central subject recalls both Avery Gordon's exploration of haunting and Roland Barthes' *punctum*. Gordon sees haunting—past and present forces that make themselves felt in everyday life—as an opportunity for interruption and for unsettling particular structures of power as they come into view, reminiscent of Williams' structures of feeling. She suggests that haunting is a call to action—it notifies us that what is unseen or concealed is present (xvi). She calls for strategies of making visible that focus on peripheries, or on negative space: "*finding the shape described by [an] absence*" (emphasis original, Gordon 6). Similarly, Barthes's fascination with the *punctum*—the small, often unintentional part of the photograph that pierces through the photograph's intended content (*studium*) to affect the viewer—also describes photography's spectral quality.[20]

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[19] Teju Cole's essay "Object Lesson" in *Known and Strange Things* describes Ilnitsky's image within the context of alternative approaches to depicting violence. Cole focuses on images that depict people's belongings in ways that betray violent events and simultaneously resist visualizing its human victims.

[20] What is described as Barthes' anti-intentionalism or his disdain for the *studium* and fascination with the *punctum* does not necessarily diminish photography as art (by undermining the artist's autonomy), because Barthes argues that art is already and necessarily divorced from intentionality. Champions of reception studies who place the onus and the significance of a work squarely on the shoulders of the audience, eagerly take up this anti-intentionalism. However, a dogmatic and orthodox belief in reception denies the conjuncture and what subjectivities, perspectives, opinions, and reactions are made *possible* within that particular context, for example through Williams' structures of

The ambivalence of photography lends itself to the collection of spectral pressures that Gordon describes; that the unseen is often the part that emerges from the photograph when the viewer takes on the condition of the object of study, by allowing themselves to be haunted or affected. The intention of averted vision or images that look askance is to make the photograph abstract in format and perspective in order to signal to the viewer that the image is necessarily a construction and that it echoes other constructions and deconstructions of narrative, memory, and history (Batchen 228).

Van Agtmael takes this fixation with the unseen on board, creating a psychological portrait absent of the material evidence of a violent act. By examining what happens in between and around an event or enduring conflict, one can begin to reconstruct a more complex and nuanced picture of the center itself. As Teju Cole (echoing Avery Gordon) writes, "If you set enough tangents around a circle, you begin to re-create the shape of the circle itself" (*Known and Strange* 206). The subtlety of the averted approach lies in its relatability to the viewer—while a shocking image of violence or atrocity can often cause viewers to distance themselves by declaring "that's not me," photographs like van Agtmael's reveal tensions and fears that are germane to most of us.

The question is how to look at the periphery—or the tangents around the circle—without bracketing the ethical question of image content. Averted vision in photography is not a retreat from difficult knowledge or itself a type of censorship; it is an approach that considers the complicated ways that we are able to access empathy, a sense of responsibility, and understanding, making an equally difficult but perhaps more holistic kind of knowledge

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feeling. A critical combination of Barthes' questioning of visuality and intention must be coupled with a reading of the historical conjuncture— not just of its impact on creative production from a political economy standpoint, but also of the way in which it shapes subjects that participate within these particular cultural processes of creation, interpretation, reproduction, and contestation.

available. The intention of averted vision is not to avoid atrocity, but to present it in a way that encourages investigation rather than turning away. This approach seeks to find an alternative entry point to understanding atrocity—to in fact get closer to it—while at once avoiding the facile reductions that viewers have been trained to make when confronted with visual cues of suffering, particularly when the suffering is experienced by those marked as 'other.' Censorship, on the other hand, seeks to disavow and disappear the atrocity altogether. By making visible the aftermath, the interstices, the precursors, and the ordinariness in extraordinary circumstances, averted vision engages emerging photographic uses of allegorical and narrative approaches in documentary. The idea is not to replace atrocity images but to balance and reconfigure them; in order to best understand and learn about conflict, we need multiple approaches to its visualization, including this sort of refusal in service of making legible its other, jettisoned aspects.

The formal composition of van Agtmael's photographs contributes to their revelatory function. Scrawled text is cut off by the photograph's edge, framed to indicate that the conversation is ongoing beyond our ability to apprehend it, in directions unknown but at times suggested. The composition flows outward, leaving the viewer tripping along the periphery, then drawn back to the center to re-read and retrace the possible chronology and narrative arc of the conversation. The moving center is the wartime subject—most obviously the combatant, but also, perhaps, the viewer—punctuated by fear and insecurity. The graffiti acts as a place for the writers to unburden themselves or reveal honesty that must otherwise be hidden in the combatant's quotidian life. In several photographs it becomes evident by the writers' textual interaction that vulnerability is punished or ridiculed. In one image, the central poem-like declaration, "The path is broken/ I have lost the spark/ the essence/ that is so decidedly me/ my

soul is suspended/ in darkness/ I am falling/ I am lost" is surrounded by aggressive responses: "kill yourself already," "this man needs to get laid," and "pussified bitch." The photographs expose what would be difficult if not impossible to uncover in other, more traditional portraits. They present the viewer—just as Ilnitsky's photograph does—with fragmented information about the people that belong to each graffito, and through their physical absence, the viewer is pulled in to occupy that space.

Another image presents a beige surface striped with the faint tracks of something dripped down the wall. In the center is lightly scrawled: "2$^{nd}$ tour hope I don't die."  The handwriting is rushed and the printing sloppy—it looks not unlike a child's handwriting, which only amplifies its feeling of vulnerability. The text is not prayer, confession, nor supplication; it is very simply a fear of disappearing made public. The act of writing in a public space where the author knows it will be seen is a small measure of insurance, not against disappearing, but against disappearing without anyone else knowing that they were there first. Above the text float three thought bubbles, drawn in heavy sharpie, but the viewer is unable to see what it contains; we only see this thought, unclaimed and uncontained, floating on the wall. Below it, even more faintly we can barely make out: "3$^{rd}$ tour me too." This two line conversation, a declaration and its response, contains within it the enormous promise of solidarity, of being heard and seen, yet simultaneously it also demonstrates the tremendous isolation of being adrift and in a sense, invisible. The graffiti images contain exchanges that are at turns tender and terribly violent, visualizing the instability and extremity of being a subject at war, even in this tiny, mostly unnoticed space. The photographs distill the unpredictability of these wide variances that overlap in the same spaces and people, under similar conditions and pressures. Van Agtmael's composition and selection demonstrate the always-partiality of these marks; the images always

only contain pieces of stories and narratives, emphasizing by its exclusion that which is outside the frame.

A rare sensitivity and powerful visual discretion informs these commitments within the war photography genre. Van Agtmael dwells at the threshold of underground and subtle phenomena. In an industry driven by a preoccupation with direct representation and recognizability, he pays attention to the penumbra and uncertainty of what falls just beyond the line of sight, demoting vision and visuality from their positions of photographic primacy. He entreats his viewers to develop a similar sensitivity and optic for understanding the fullness and significance of these photographs. These are images that enact a sort of visual ekphrasis— instead of writing a description of an image without showing it, like Barthes' famous "Winter Garden Photograph," van Agtmael shows an image of writing that in turn refuses to reveal the broader image, but compels us to construct it nonetheless.


### *text and image*

In these photographs van Agtmael dwells on the connections between image and text— not only acknowledging their inextricable and fraught relationship, but in a sense also exploiting the resistance that images and text have to one another. The work that audiences must do to decode words and images are radically different, and by drawing those actions together van Agtmael uses that difference to compel the image to function on several registers at once. In her discussion of Timothy Bahti, Rei Terada points out that the process of reading necessitates a sort of blindness to seeing images, or the ability to *see past* the visualness of individual letters: "Bahti figures reading as seeing *plus* interpreting *minus* seeing… there is a double sense of 'reading' here: as participle, reading is what we do as we see and interpret; as abstract noun, it is

the never wholly attained end product of seeing, interpreting, and learning not to see" (Terada). By articulating the cognitive and phenomenological distinctions between the seeing and reading, Terada exposes the tension between the two, while also reinforcing their interdependence. Reading of course induces us to produce interior images, while reading *images* also provokes a cognitive engagement with structures and affects of visual signs. The relationship between photographs and texts is complicated further by the historical faith in text and mistrust of images, which is at once paradoxically contradicted by a dogmatic desire for photographs to stand as objective proof. The mistrust of the image has been distilled in the photograph; our desire to see it as factual undercuts its own reliability as our expectations of it are unattainable.

Captions generally tell viewers what they are to take away from the images, pertinent information, or the bottom line. While critics and theorists have argued about the place, importance, or necessity of captions,[21] many artists have experimented with different combinations of text and image, ranging from Walker Evans's collages to Shirin Neshat's powerful *Women of Allah* series. The idea of disturbing conventional understanding of what images and captions are to each other is not new, however their combination—or what has been referred to as *writing* the photograph (Coates et al.)—generally follows the photograph-first-then-text sequence, with the textual elements overlaid or added, failing to stray entirely from the supplementary nature of the caption.

Captions as paratextual or supplementary devices play a role that is often unclear—are they part of the work or in addition to an autonomous image? Are they at odds with the image? As audiences, and particularly with documentary images, we often want the text to tell us what "really" happened, a desire that stems in part from a lack of trust in the image, and a lack of

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[21] Photographer Robert Adams famously argued that images should speak for themselves, while Susan Sontag conceded that the most effective method of communication would ultimately be a combination of image and text.

confidence in our own visual interpretations. We want to ground our interpretations, or at the very least be guided in our efforts to understand what information we are to take away from the image; we want to be told how to feel about the image. We have more anxiety with uncaptioned photographs; we desire a caption in order to ground it in the same world we inhabit, the where and when—we want to know what we are to know, in order to be done with the photograph. In the way that reading requires a certain "unseeing," this deferral to or privileging of reading can in turn blind us to the visual understanding of the image, or perhaps it allows us to definitively conclude our interaction with it. In certain cases, un-captioning requires a prolonged engagement with the image.

Van Agtmael's graffiti photographs incorporate text in a way that allows them to caption themselves (in some contexts the images appear uncaptioned, in others they are captioned with location and date). Rather than appearing as text that responds to the image or that is belatedly added to it, in this case the text and image converge and create a separate context, an uncanny climate of the war that van Agtmael is photographing and simultaneously refusing to photograph. These images do not just represent something but are something in and of themselves—they are not completely reducible to their indexicality—and so force us to reckon with the image as in excess of its representational ability or textual explanation.

The paradoxical blindness that is passed back and forth between reading text and images is in its own way a sort of averted vision; the needing to reduce one sort of sensation or function in order to be more alive to another. This kind of blinding or hobbling is part of understanding war "as something you experience, the experience of which deprives you of the capacity to experience it; war as sensory violence, felt and thereby unfelt; war as the disabling of these distinctions" (Favret 105). This deprivation goes beyond the fear of numbness in the face of

violence, its depiction, and the onslaught of countless images. Rather, it articulates a joint between war and its imagery: to communicate, visualize, or make war proximate, one is also removing it from context, asking the image to stand for or represent something it cannot encompass, and thereby rendering the violence both legible and illegible. Van Agtmael's images occupy this impossible dualism in that they manage to be texts and images simultaneously, causing us to be blind and seeing to both at once. On one hand, the images are exceedingly specific—the committed-to-ink confessional testimony of real, individual subjects—and on the other, they are simultaneously vague, the anonymity and generalized affect communicating something broad and unshaped about war.

Van Agtmael's challenging work with image and text is in the company of other artists who are increasingly pushing not only the photography genre, but also the photography book to new configurations. Teju Cole's 2017 book *Blind Spot* is also an unconventional juxtaposition of image and text, one that provokes a discomfort at the absence of expository information, but instead provides more holistic understanding of the photographs and their general function— paying more attention to their capacity to elicit information beyond what they visually represent. Each photograph in *Blind Spot* appears opposite a short narrative paragraph, headed by the name of the location in which it was taken, ranging from Lagos, Nigeria to Muottas Muragl, Switzerland. The paragraphs are in keeping with Cole's literary style—they read like fiction in their lilt and poetry, like fragments from a novel. The topics vary broadly, and are not always directly referential to the geography or to the photograph. However, by trusting Cole's compass, the viewer can begin to draw together the threads between some of the more abstract couplings, and between the sequencing of photo-text pairs. The texts are invitations to the viewer to do work: to track down the sometimes-obscure historical references, to imagine the connection to

geographical and temporal place, and to decipher the privileged vision we are granted through the photograph. The narratives are generative and instructive, perhaps containing clues to assist us in teasing out the poetics of Cole's visual composition. The relationship between the text and image is not coincidental. Cole writes: "in one enciphering corner of my mind I believe still that every line in every poem is the orphaned caption of a lost photograph. By a related logic, each photograph sits in the antechamber of speech" (*Blind Spot* 12).

Cole's images are composed primarily of manmade landscapes, detritus, plastic tarps and concrete walls, the overlapping textures in foreshortened views of street and scaffold, reflections in windows and puddles, garbage bins and cast away plastic bottles. Cole is concerned with the banal, the scenes and locations just next to the ones that garner the most attention—again, that which is just off to the side. The book itself is a general meditation on blindness and vision, both aesthetically and conceptually. After a brief episode of partial blindness that Cole experienced in 2011, he writes, "The photography changed after that. The looking changed" (*Blind Spot* xvi). The relationship between text and image at once prioritizes active watching and a letting go of the obsession with knowing exactly what we are looking at.

In many ways, Van Agtmael's 2016 monograph *Buzzing at the Sill* is simpatico with books like *Blind Spot*. Interspersed with a few pages of first person narrative, *Buzzing at the Sill*'s text reads like a notebook— scattered and personal, often poetic, and mostly not referential to particular images. Affixed to the inside of the back cover is a small newsprint booklet that opens up from right to left to reveal numbered black and white thumbnails of the images opposite corresponding captions. Some captions are simply city, state, and date, while others provide the exact time or a specific location such as "outside a laundromat" (*Buzzing* 010). The majority, however, give contextual, historical, or personal information, written in the same easy

narrative that peppers the body of the book. These narratives build a sense of context rather than explicitly decoding the images for us. As with his previous work, van Agtmael's conscious decision to rethink the function and location of the caption presents a guide on what we are to do with the photographs. The caption booklet—very much its own autonomous object—is physically positioned as an index and yet it operates beyond the immediate function of referencing and locating images, providing more than mere substantiating or grounding information for the images. The quality of "realness" in photography—that captions often attempt to corroborate—has less to do with an unassailable objectivity than its fidelity to engaging with the realities of the human condition and rendering those accessible or legible. The *narrative* reality, or van Agtmael's subjective experiences and anecdotes, constitutes the textual framing of the images—an untraditional stance for a documentary photographer, particularly a war photographer, but one that is pushing increasingly into the landscape of documentary work.

Van Agtmael recounts his experiences and memories with candor and tenderness, both throughout the body and in the booklet—for example recalling his early childhood experiences of ostracization and social awkwardness, propelling him on a path of observation and instilling in him a "deep wariness of humanity that has never again had reason to be reevaluated, despite all the goodness in the world" (*Buzzing*); or the reflection on having a writer with whom van Agtmael was on assignment write him into the article in such a way that van Agtmael was unable to recognize himself in the description, making him realize that he does the same with photography: "There's a great beauty but also a terrible presumption in taking the image of someone else and shaping it around one's own version of reality" (*Buzzing* 048); or the story of an impromptu party with Lakota youth in South Dakota, for which he was chastised by the young men's sister who explained the rampant alcoholism on the reservation, and detailed how

van Agtmael was participating in a historical legacy of exploitation (*Buzzing* 047); or the pictorial and narrative thread that weaves through the book about Lyniece Nelson's family, whose transgender teen daughter Treasure was murdered in 2011, four years before the suicide of her son, Daemion.

The book oscillates between being defined by image—not counting the index booklet there are only nine text pages amidst 72 images—and being shaped by its narratives. It troubles the boundaries of what a photobook can or should be, or for that matter, what shape the relationship between narrative and visual work can take, much like *Blind Spot* does. Van Agtmael forces us to forgo captioning in real time, fashioning a line of sight in which the photographs additively build their own context, deftly crafting an image sequence that moves like a film montage. Van Agtmael's anecdotes and historical narratives behave as a voiceover, animating the series of still images—reminiscent of Chris Marker's 1962 film *La Jetée*, a story about a man's memories in the wake of war. Taken out of the book, the individual images of *Buzzing at the Sill* are no less interesting, but they lose a measure of their force. Collectively, the images gain a sort of visual momentum, rolling over and into one another—the young man in car headlights at Taser-point, the boy holding the toy gun to his chin, the lawn flamingos in the snow. The images instill the uneasy sense that something is off, that something is sick here, but they also generate a powerful familiarity, one that complicates the work's critical capacity. It is in that tension between unease and familiarity that van Agtmael's work resonates; he weaves a network of mise-en-abymes in which every photograph is the center and simultaneously the peripheral context—and so always included, in a way, in every other photograph.

Mieszkowski writes that no single photograph can contextualize itself (107). However, as van Agtmael's work shows, the photographs sequenced and narrated en masse are able to

cultivate structures of feeling—a climate—spinning together the context in which they also find themselves. As a series, van Agtmael's photographs eschew iconic representation—no single photograph attempts to represent the totality of war, for example—rather they remain entirely specific individually while revealing something about their wider conditions. While it is important to have specific information and immediately representative photography, we also need this kind of work to express the sensibility of the neoliberal era; a phenomenon that is impossible to demonstrate in one image, but has entirely infused our visual culture. Van Agtmael's work reminds us that the photograph tells us as much about ourselves—and about how we imagine, visualize, and see—than about what it pictures.

*Buzzing at the Sill* is a natural progression in van Agtmael's work, a collection of contemplative reflections that reveal confusion, sadness, violence in the American quotidian— the seen, the unseen, and the hidden in plain sight. Published shortly after the 2016 presidential election, the photographs illuminate what van Agtmael describes as "the margins of America whose invisibility created the conditions for someone like Trump to succeed" (Sheehan). This series is less about the formal or visual attributes of individual photographs and more concerned with a photographic function: the mix of narrative, visual and otherwise, that converges to reveal the subtle shifts in a culture's temperature, constructing a portrait of a country and its ethos. The images emanate from the center of the din, but also stand at a somber and sober distance; they are a requiem. The book closes with this poignant narrative:

> I recently had a dream that lingers: I was with some American soldiers on a dusty road. Two children were standing with their mother. A shot was loudly fired, the young boy's body quivered, and he collapsed. He was taken to a house and the medics began treating him. The other soldiers stood around listlessly. I was covered in blood and eventually began taking photos. Somehow I couldn't bring myself to photograph the boy, just the surroundings. The only sound was the soft click of the camera. Slowly the scene changed in the house. My friends appeared with a record player. The music went on, and there was dancing. The dying boy slowly faded into the corners of the dream. I was still

standing there covered in blood. No one seemed to see me. A fire was lit and the room warmed. I could barely see the boy anymore. My friends finally saw me, and I put down my camera and started to dance. In America, we somehow feel immune, but in any country at war, the first thing they'll tell you is that they didn't think it could happen there (*Buzzing*).

*Buzzing at the Sill* serves as an imprint of war and policy on American society. By giving viewers glimpses into daily life under enduring war—both foreign and domestic—van Agtmael makes important contributions both to our collective understanding of neoliberal violence in its multiple formations as well as to the necessary reframing of what documentary photography can and must do.

The book's title is taken from Theodore Roethke's poem "In a Dark Time": "My soul, like some heat-maddened summer fly/ keeps buzzing at the sill" (ln 20-21). The title is also echoed in the opening narrative and cover photo, which van Agtmael explains is a buzzard that repeatedly beats at the window of a San Antonio burn unit for soldiers, trying to get inside. The dark implications of a vulture—a bird that feeds on carrion—desperate to access the injured soldiers, is an allegorical undercurrent that runs through the book. The American body: very much alive but also necrotic. This darkness is also the condition that van Agtmael's work is born out of, reminding us that vision is as much cognitive as it is physiological. Like the opening line of Roethke's poem, "In a dark time, the eye begins to see," van Agtmael's work serves as a guide for seeing in low light.

**Sites of violence: Josh Begley**

Engaging with invisibility and sight on registers that refer specifically to our collective ability to witness and testify to violence, data artist and research editor Josh Begley's online project *Officer Involved* acts as a visualization of the disposable populations of a militarized,

neoliberal era. There is no complete or official data on police killings in the US. Begley uses The

Guardian's project *The Counted* as his data set, which was the most reliable count from 2015-

2016– reaching 2239 deaths by the end of 2016.[22] In an approach to photojournalism that

engages more directly with photographic uses of bricolage and found images, Begley compiles

Google maps Street View images of the locations where US police have killed people in 2015.

Begley considers this art, not journalism, and defers to the journalists and activists who direct the

conversation on race and policing, including the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement

and writer Maya Raiford-Cohen, with whom he conceived of the project (Brook, "Visualizing").

   *Officer Involved* employs technology that is public and authorless, yet simultaneously

privatized and mega-corporate. The project uses technology to reveal the ways that it betrays

itself and us through the surveillance state, showing that security for some is grave danger for

others. Begley says he is interested in what is "unknowable about a data set," focusing on what

remains unseen, or unseeable (Lennard). By using images of the geographical locations of

violence, Begley foregrounds the imbricated physical and ideological zones of exclusion: the

physical places and political spaces that facilitate extreme and contested modes of violence.

*Officer Involved* visualizes these locations of extra-judicial killings and confronts the viewer with

an opportunity to contemplate the volume and troubling ease of these deaths. It holds the tension

between the racialized violence that is synonymous with the American quotidian, the politics of

disposability that punctuates a nearly permanent state of war, and the way that we watch this

violence unfold; the way that it is (and is not) visualized.

   It is this quandary of visualization that Begley's work begins to address. The images

revel in their incompleteness: not only is this project a response to incomplete death-counts, and

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[22] *The Counted* stopped tracking police killings after 2016, in part because of commitments by the FBI and the
Bureau of Justice Statistics to reform their procedures for tracking officer-involved deaths ("A Note"). Other sources
continue to track police-related killings, including the Washington Post and killedbypolice.net.

a visualization of that deficiency, but the images of death without the subject are themselves always incomplete, always in a state of suspended death. Due to Google Street view program scheduling, some of the photographs were necessarily taken before the death occurred there. Begley is effectively—if unintentionally— doing some complicated temporal work at which photographs are particularly adept: blurring the temporalities between event, memory, and present. These select photographs in *Officer Involved* look simultaneously into the past and into the future at death. Because of their absence, the subjects are always, in Schrödinger fashion, alive and dead at the same time: perpetually dying, over and over. Begley's work, without representing death in its physical forms, visualizes the conundrum of foregrounding the disposal, the violence, and the invisibility of disposability's mechanizations. In his exclusions, Begley makes that disposability more palpable: the subject is centralized precisely because of its absence in that landscape, preventing the viewer from jettisoning its disposal.[23] The disposal itself remains ever-present as it is never consolidated or concluded; the violence is not wrapped up or explained away. Begley refuses to perform reparative motions with his images, instead forcing his work to act as a testimony to erasure rather than as a memorialization that permits collective forgetting.

*Officer Involved* is at once a quantitative gesture towards the ongoing efforts to provide adequate documentation for an epidemic of police violence, and an attempt to visualize certain intangibles in our contemporary landscape, folded into the wars on poverty, drugs, and terror. The project is committed to exposing the links between photography and power by implicating

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[23] Brandon Tauszik's project *White Wax* employs similar strategies of non-visualization. From 2012-2013, Tauszik documented sidewalk memorials to murder victims in Oakland, CA. Taken at night, his photographs are all variations on a theme: tea lights, votive candles, balloons, liquor bottles, flowers, handwritten notes, and teddy bears—sometimes in small clumps, sometimes arranged along the length of a sidewalk. Like Begley, his omission of bodies, guns, and mourners is an intentional attempt to create images that differentiate themselves from the many spectacularized photographs of brutality and disaster; images that at once gesture to the antecedents and the aftermath of violence.

not only institutional power, but also our changing relationship to visual culture in a digitized, networked age. Begley uses data and technology we all use to guide our movement through physical space in order to punctuate the extraordinary ways that certain bodies are disallowed free movement through these spaces. His project raises questions about how to document violence in a way that probes into the structure of what makes that violence possible.

### *documents of death*

There are several iconic photographs that captured—or purported to capture—the instant of death, such as Robert Capa's famous and contested 1936 photograph *Fallen Soldier* from the Spanish civil war, or Eddie Adams's 1968 photograph of a Viet Cong prisoner's execution in Saigon. We now live in an era where we can go to our computers and watch death in the moment that it happens, over and over. Thanks largely to cell phone technology, amateur and civilian journalist videos that capture the moment of death are more commonplace than ever before. Today in the United States, such videos have enabled the public to witness the deaths of Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Walter Scott and many other individuals killed by police. Watching those videos is at once intolerable and surreal; bracketed by the casual nature with which we can watch other people's terror and the very limited scope and understanding those videos afford the viewer, their affect is of rather unspectacular documents. On one hand, the banality of the aesthetic and quality of the videos in no way reflects the extraordinary horror of a human being killed, nor can they adequately communicate the context in which these things occur—an inadequacy reminiscent of Didi-Huberman's meditations on the photographs from Auschwitz. On the other, they are also manipulable and deemed largely

insufficient as evidence to indict and prosecute officers.[24] These videos are, in a sense, rendered inadequate on both counts, and yet, they point to the weightiness and significance of our relationship to visualizations of violence.[25]

*Officer Involved* is an investigation of our visual access to those documents, and poses the question of how to best view, understand, mourn, and contest them. Begley's use of averted vision in his bodiless portraits of death allow him to focus, as van Agtmael did, on the subjects that are left out. We feel their absence in ways that also leave space for us to occupy the work. Begley writes, "Almost by definition this [use of Google Street View] removes (or obscures) human forms from the landscape. I think this has consequences. I wonder what the absences open up, what their emptiness might allow us to see" (Lennard). It is important to consider the productive work that averted vision does in its visual refusals. However, it is equally crucial to understand this approach as a response to spectacularization, not as a mechanism of erasure that stands against showing violence. As much as it is necessary to parse the social phenomenon of compassion fatigue, it cannot be overstated how important it is to continue to produce and disseminate images of violence as long as that violence endures, particularly in instances of systemic violence against targeted and vulnerable parts of the population.[26] By drawing from Google's images, reminding us of its ubiquitous surveillant interventions into the quotidian, the project emerges out of and comments on the burgeoning photographic practices that tarry with

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[24] Feidin Santana's video of Michael Slager shooting Walter Scott, however, proved to be the exception. While most images and videos of police killings have failed to significantly influence investigations, and most officers who kill are not prosecuted, on December 7, 2017, Slager was sentenced to 20 years in prison for the murder of Walter Scott (Blinder).

[25] In Claude Lanzmann's nine-and-a-half-hour-long Holocaust documentary film *Shoah* (1985), there is no footage or imagery from the camps. Lanzmann relies strictly on interviews with survivors and bystanders, and footage from the locations where atrocities once took place. When pressed about why he eschewed images that are generally understood as "proof," he said, "The proof is not the corpses; the proof is the absence of corpses" (Jeffries).

[26] For example, Philando Castile's girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, filmed and narrated the aftermath of his fatal July 2016 shooting from the passenger seat of the car, livestreaming the video on Facebook. She knew, even as her fiancée sat dying and the police officer continued to point his gun through the car window at them, how important it was to have proof of that violence and to make that proof public.

sourcing, curating, compiling, and archiving images. Begley's work is located in a continuum of photographers and artists who engage the post-photographic blending of technologies and photographic disciplines.[27] The work repossesses the mechanisms of normalized, omnipresent surveillance to produce a carefully crafted series that emerges out of the superfluous supply of online images. The use of Google Street View images enacts their "being-there-without-being-there" function, emphasizing the temporal and spatial displacement of the photographic while at the same time recalling Barthes' "*having-been-there*" (1). By using these photographs, Begley entreats us to enter those spaces.

Beyond the aesthetic implications for contemporary photographic practice, Begley's sourced material occupies itself with the belated visualizations of violence and the political consequences of those images' spectrality. *Officer Involved* employs the panoptic technology of Google Street View to depict the fallout of a neoliberal politic of disposability across geographies in the American landscape. The subjects of Begley's images, ever more present in their absence, attempt to remind the viewer of a society brutalized by social, economic, political, and physical death. In his epistolary essay on the inherited and systemic legacy of violence against the black body, Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) rings out the names of the Black individuals killed by police—Eric Garner, Renisha McBride, John Crawford, and Tamir Rice— punctuating the text with a staccato pattern. We—as readers and viewers— are tasked with extrapolating from these patterns. In Coates' essay, we form a picture of the broader implications as he gestures towards the enormity of the scaffold that produces and supports systems of racial violence and injustice in which such murders are found to be not only legal, but justified. In

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[27] Several contemporary artists employ the surveillant technology of Google Street View to create projects that, for example, comment on panoptic technologies that intentionally and unintentionally capture our quotidian footprint (Paolo Cirio and Florian Freier); capture passersby as anonymous ghosts rendered momentarily immortal by the Google eye (Jon Rafman); or depict particular geographies that have been economically and socially abandoned and are removed from the viewers through several layers of imaging software (Doug Rickard).

Begley's work, we watch the image tiles load as we scroll down the page; appearing slowly, in patchwork, first as grayed ghost tiles, there but not quite, haunting us like the unpictured victims.[28]

> Coates writes,
>
> What should be our aim beyond meager survival of constant, generational, ongoing battery and assault? I have asked this question all my life. I have sought the answer through my reading and writings, through the music of my youth, through arguments with your grandfather, with your mother. I have searched for answers in nationalist myth, in classrooms, out on the streets, and on other continents. The question is unanswerable, which is not to say futile. The greatest reward of this constant interrogation, of confrontation with the brutality of my country, is that it has freed me from ghosts and myths.

The ghosts and myths are shed, as Coates says, through interrogation. Perhaps before they can be shed, however, the same interrogation must first reify and make them legible. Ideology—the ghosts and myths that govern politics and are simultaneously disavowed through official channels of plausible deniability— must be made visible in order to be contested. In 1962, Canadian poet Earle Birney wrote, "it's only by our lack of ghosts / we're haunted" (116). The problem here is not that there is a shortage of ghosts; rather it is our refusal to apprehend them. It is historical amnesia—an unwillingness or inability to have a critical and generative relationship to the past—that damns us to an unjust future for which no alternative can be imagined. Begley's photographs haunt us, productively, in their spectral engagement with their absent but ever-present subjects and with disposability itself. Those photographs implicitly contain the histories of violence and enabling structures that are hidden in plain sight.

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[28] Photographer Joel Sternfeld also investigates sites of violence, after the fact. His series *On This Site* (1993-1996) addresses atrocity without directly representing it, also employing the visual strategy of averted vision. To counteract the abstraction of documenting sites of violence sometimes years after the fact, Sternfeld pairs the images with short texts that relay the crime or event; similarly, Begley's images are paired with the name of the subject and the city and state of their death.

**Corrective photography: LaToya Ruby Frazier**

LaToya Ruby Frazier also takes up the question of disposability in her ongoing work in Braddock, Pennsylvania. An industrial suburb of Pittsburgh, Frazier's hometown was the site of Andrew Carnegie's first steel mill, the Edgar Thomson Steelworks. As she puts it, her work "spirals from the micro to the macro" ("A Visual History"): she began photographing her family at the age of sixteen, and slowly widened the frame to include her neighborhood and community, ultimately focusing on the connection between their intimate and personal troubles and the larger, national networks of injustice and discrimination. Her work documents the community's ongoing struggles spurred by the steel industry's decline in the 1970s, subsequent white flight, and the resulting disinvestment in the largely Black population of Braddock. The steel industry's decline produced a growing surplus of un- and underemployed working-class people that largely fell outside of capital production. In response, the state grew its mechanisms for the management of this surplus population, its methods manifest predominantly in the heightened measures of policing and state-sanctioned violence meted out under the War on Drugs. Frazier shines light on these connections, illuminating a space that has been overshadowed and occluded by decades of environmental racism (by which the fallout of industry and environmental degradation falls most heavily on racialized populations), healthcare injustice, economic abandonment, and more recently, the gentrification initiatives of Rust Belt revitalization.

Frazier's Braddock project, published in the 2014 monograph, *The Notion of Family*, is structured around her nuclear family, anchored through three generations of Black Braddock women: her Grandma Ruby, who witnessed Braddock's prosperous years; her mother, who witnessed its decline; and herself, who grew up in an economically depressed and largely forgotten town, marked by the destruction of the War on Drugs (*The Notion of Family* 38). She

charges herself with the rewriting of history, through the generational ties of her maternal lineage. She intertwines art and documentary photography, working in collaboration with her mother, and creating images informed by feminist approaches to subjectivity and collaborative research (Weathers). Frazier and her mother photograph each other, resulting in portraits that reveal their familial ties and shared vision, while documenting the daily struggle with illness, injustice, and inherited burdens. By working collaboratively, Frazier unyokes herself from traditionally exclusive documentary traditions and destabilizes the individualized assumptions about photographic practice. As mother and daughter photograph each other, they locate the other in relation to themselves, at times cinched tightly to one another and sometimes tethered tenuously by that vague and fragile notion of family. In deftly sequenced moves, Frazier ties these personal bonds and intimate histories to the structural conditions that sustain her community's disenfranchisement and exclusion from the healthcare system.

Frazier's intimate portraits counter the neoliberal-directed narratives of internalized and individualized blame. She discloses the health issues that plague the women in her family—the pancreatic cancer and diabetes that took her Grandma Ruby's life in 2009; her mother's undiagnosed neurological disorder and cancer; and her own lupus diagnosis. Instead of turning the gaze inward and interpreting ill health as a sign of individual insufficiency and a source of shame, Frazier fixes on the class and racial biases of a dismantled social welfare and healthcare system.

Frazier's 2011 diptych, *Epilepsy Test,* from her Landscape of the Body series, particularly illuminates the dependent and antagonistic relationship between the destruction of the discarded body and the medical institutions of Braddock. On the left is a photograph of a woman (perhaps Frazier, or perhaps her mother) in a hospital gown, seen from behind, and on

the opposing side, an image of the demolition of the Braddock branch of the University of

Pittsburg Medical Center (UPMC) in 2010 (*The Notion of Family* 106-7*)*. Citing lack of

profitability, the demolition of UPMC Braddock terminated over 600 community jobs, and

effectively eliminated Braddock's access to adequate health and emergency services. A new

hospital was built in Monroeville, a wealthier suburb to the east of Braddock, inaccessible to

many Braddock residents (*The Notion of Family* 103, 119). Frazier's decision to place these two

images side by side is not only an aesthetic decision. Formally, they mirror one another. In the

image on the left an almost incomprehensible number of cables hang down the woman's

partially-covered back, looping up to hook into a machine of sorts, itself dangling on some

straps. The bedding is in disarray, and the background fades into a grey so dark the viewer has to

strain to make out a drop ceiling and a doorway beyond the slouching body sitting on the bed.

On the right, the skeleton of UPMC is visible amid debris littered and jutting out at all angles, the

frames of individual hospital rooms discernable with the building's outer façade stripped away,

and cables—so many cables—hanging and dangling from all sides. The images speak back and

forth to each other—the cables are the measure and sign of medical care and also of the

withdrawal or destruction of that care; the cables are the eviscerated guts of a structure and

infrastructure dismantled; and the cables are also the tether between the body and that system.

The relationships between bodies and institutions and cables run in an endless loop—institutions

that cause ill-diagnosed and ill-treated illnesses, the society that is tethered to the same

institutions that harm and discard those bodies, and the destruction of the building mirrored in

the body of the individual. The cables from the hospital room, cables that signify a possible

diagnosis—which itself indicates both the potential for sickness and recovery—appear to

connect across the diptych's divide to the shredded and hanging cables emerging as the torn building's viscera, like frayed nerves.

The images are both so dark— their lightest parts more grey than white— that they entreat the viewer to really investigate them, almost needing to strain in order to see properly. One can hardly discern where the cables originate on the patient; they seem to emerge from her head, from under her hair, but there is information available within the shadows— the viewer might not be able to see, but knows that it is there. The dark tone of the photographs seems to comment upon the history of racially biased film stock that was calibrated to best expose the tones of white skin, leaving many darker skin tones lost in shadow.[29] The low tone in these and several of Frazier's photographs are reminiscent of Roy DeCarava's images, a photographer who responded to the inadequacies in film and the optics of race by occupying the low tonal range in his photographs, rather than compensating with exposure or development. DeCarava's images are tender and somber, described by New York Times critic Vicki Goldberg as "bafflingly dark, suffused with stillness" (Kennedy). Cole writes, "[i]nstead of trying to brighten blackness, [DeCarava] went against expectation and darkened it further. What is dark is neither blank nor

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[29] Kodak Eastman developed their color film stocks in the early 20th century, and used test strip cards featuring a white woman— known as "Shirley cards"— to calibrate skin tone. Mid-century film was engineered by white technicians and optimized for white skin, and as Lorna Roth suggests, "film chemistry, photo lab procedures, video screen colour balancing practices, and digital cameras in general were originally developed with a global assumption of 'Whiteness'" (117). This assumption resulted in a film sensitivity bias towards light-skinned subjects, rendering darker-skinned subjects poorly exposed and inaccurately represented. Rather than not being included in photographs, such biases allowed black and brown subjects to disappear into shadows or be distorted by film grain through attempts to push the film to pick up more light. This example in the photography and film industry contributes to the "deconstructive analysis of the privileged role that 'Whiteness' has played in history, social and power relations, knowledge production/dissemination, and some aesthetic practices" (Roth 114-115).

Kodak updated its film stock in the 1970s and 1980s to improve emulsion sensitivity to darker tones, motivated largely by chocolate and furniture companies who complained about unsatisfactory advertising photography of their products (Cima 2015; McFadden 2014). Kodak marketed their updated film stock as being able "to photograph the details of a dark horse in low light," a coded phrase that referred to the film's ability to render darker skin tones.

empty. It is in fact full of wise light, which, with patient seeing, can open out into glories" (*Known and Strange* 147).

DeCarava, like Frazier, also occupied a fringe relationship to the popular and dominant forms of social documentary photography, opting instead to photograph the intimate, daily experiences of his subjects. What DeCarava did, and what Frazier does here, is resist our desire for a facile relationship to viewing. Frazier does not make our job as a viewer easy, instead she makes us do work that requires a quiet persistence, a patience, and a trust that the image always contains more than we are able to determine—visually and otherwise. Frazier imbues her images with a solemnity and slow-to-reveal complexity that parallels the community she documents. Her images are never just about one thing or another, they are always both and more: this diptych is about economic and healthcare abandonment, but it is also about the politics of seeing. These slow and full images refuse to deliver the visual crudeness that dominates documentary photography and journalistic media: images that deliver hyperbole and recognizability, designed to elicit specific, predetermined reactions, required in an environment of rapid turnover. Instead, these photographs are instead viscous and slow, containing information that is sometimes granted and just as often refused. Frazier's photographs contain a complexity that is as visually rich and compelling as it is uncomfortable and ambiguous; just as she claims complex personhood for herself and her subjects, she does the same for her photographs.

### *new social documentary photography*

The poignancy of Frazier's work comes from her engagement with social documentary photography on two very significant levels. On one hand, she deploys photography as a "weapon," echoing Gordon Parks' famous phrase by holding a mirror up to the cultural systems

that sustain social injustices and biases in the Black and labor communities, and by continuing the important visual conversation fifty years after the start of the Civil Rights Movement[30] ("LaToya Ruby Frazier" 2:11). On the other, she is crafting a political and aesthetic intervention into the history and contemporary composition of the documentary photography field. Her faithfulness to certain aesthetics of the documentary tradition contrasts her revision of that same tradition: Frazier foregrounds her subjectivity and personal involvement, employing collaborative and narrative processes in which she plans or partially stages certain portraits. These methods converge to create unapologetically intimate work that stands in stark relief against a tradition that was largely male, white, and that strove to be objectively uninvolved in the documented communities.

Frazier's portraits pay homage to the visual legacies of 20th century social documentary photographers including Dorothea Lange, Gordon Parks, Walker Evans and Lewis Hine, while doing what they were unable to: engaging in collaborative work from the inside, enacting a more powerful form of politics and critique. By including herself in her images and the project's narrative, Frazier makes her participation central, thereby confronting centuries of rehearsed truths about photography and its capacities for objective representation. At the same time, Frazier's work is about the state of photography in general. Her practices trouble the discrete bracketing of photographic disciplines, while also engaging deeply in the fecund photographic legacy of her own artistic forbears.

Frazier's photographs are an answer to the endemic practice of those with power representing the experiences of struggle or oppression of a marginalized group and thus shaping

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[30] Frazier's work locates her within a visual history and trajectory of important Black American photographers, such as Gordon Parks, Deborah Willis, Hank Willis Thomas, Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems, Roy DeCarava, and Ruddy Roye, among many others. Frazier's photographs participate in conversations political and aesthetic—for example recalling the unshakable intimacy of Weems' 1990 *Kitchen Table Series*, images that foreground women, their own photographic representation, and the political struggles waged across domestic spaces.

public knowledge about a marginalized reality. Curator and art historian Sarah Lewis writes, "The endeavor to affirm the dignity of human life cannot be waged without pictures, without representational justice," and this endeavor is a "corrective task," one that requires insider, collaborative, and experiential efforts (11). Frazier takes on this corrective task of fighting historic erasure by filling the vacuum in the narrative about Black families from Braddock and their connection to the steel and healthcare industries.

Central to this task is resisting the current narratives about Braddock that render it available for—indeed, disposed towards—outside investments and capitalization. Braddock is the "poster child for rustbelt revitalization… a story of urban pioneers discovering a new frontier" (Frazier, "A Visual History" 1:26). Frazier notes the privilege, assumed ownership, and developmental exploitation implicit in narratives of urban renewal: the landscape is presented as there for the taking—provided there are profits to be made— but without any accountability for capital's role in the environmental degradation, social and labor injustices, and the community's suffering. The view of Braddock as vacant, abandoned, and ripe for reinvestment renders the historically disenfranchised inhabitants unrecognizable, forcing them out of their homes to make way for new development. Much like North American pioneer narratives that justified the genocide and disenfranchisement of Indigenous populations by characterizing the landscape as 'empty' and awaiting cultivation, urban development initiatives label Braddock as a 'ghost town', relegating Frazier's community to the realm of phantoms—here but not here, socially invisible, impotent, or forgotten. The power to render a group of people socially, politically, and economically dead is central to a neoliberal politics of disposability. Frazier enacts representational justice through her photography in an attempt to correct the indignity and violence of being forgotten even as one lives, of being made into a ghost. The uneven violence of

a politics of disposability creates what Mbembe calls "new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead" (40). Frazier makes these communities, lives, social mechanisms and structures legible, even within an ideological and political system that relies on the sustenance of that illegibility. She says, "People call Braddock a ghost town. But I grew up there. People live there. We are not ghosts" (quoted in Cole "The Living Artist").

Shortly after UPMC Braddock's closure, Levi's launched its 2010 "Ready to Work" ad campaign. The series of ads appropriated the stark and shuttered industrial landscape of Braddock as the backdrop for a frontier narrative that called for urban pioneers to "go forth" into new territories. The campaign also featured slogans superimposed over photographs of Braddock residents, reading, "we are all workers," "there is work to be done and undone," and "everybody's work is equally important."[31] Frazier points out the outrageousness of these juxtapositions, citing the history of Black labor in Braddock, punctuated by unjust working standards and the poor employment record of the Edgar Thompson Steelworks. She explains, "They didn't want to employ us. They barely employed us" (Art21 2:30). In her 2011 series *Campaign for Braddock Hospital (Save Our Community Hospital)*, Frazier repurposed those ads, refusing the fetishization of working class struggle and economic depression. She added her own and other Braddock citizens' commentary to the ads' texts, undercutting Levi's sentimentalization of Braddock's physical and economic landscape. She asks, "*How can we* go forth *when our borough's buses and ambulances have been cut*?" and "*If* we are all *under-*

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[31] In 2017, Nordstrom released a pair of jeans that appear to be caked in mud, priced at $425. The "Barracuda Straight Leg Jeans" are marketed on Nordstrom's website as "heavily distressed medium-blue denim jeans in a comfortable straight-leg fit embody rugged, Americana workwear that's seen some hard-working action with a crackled, caked-on muddy coating that shows you're not afraid to get down and dirty." Such items illustrate the exploitation and appropriation of particular parts of the working-class aesthetic without consequence or understanding for the material realities of being working class. As one commenter wrote, "They're a costume for wealthy people who see work as ironic" (Andrews).

*employed unemployed industry* workers *then this representation of an 'urban pioneer' omits the fact that Braddock PA is 19C industrial town that has been abandoned by our government since the Reagan Era. The landscape is dominated by the Unites States Steel Corporation. The U.S.S. produces toxic waste on top of land where a majority of elderly, poor, sick, under-employed, working class reside*" (Frazier, *Campaign for Braddock*). Frazier produced silkscreen prints and photolithographs from the revised ads, which were exhibited alongside her photographs of the protests and activism around UPMC Braddock's closure.

*Campaign for Braddock* highlights the discord between the hospital closure and the Levi's campaign. The juxtaposition of her photographs with the altered ads showcases corporate opportunism and the complex and flawed ways that Levi's stepped into the vacuum left by UPMC, both through the ad campaign and the corporation's nearly $1M donation towards the construction of a community center. Such ventures herald an influx of outside investors motivated by financial opportunity rather than by economic justice. Frazier asks viewers to consider the hypocritical nature of celebrating Levi's exploitation on one hand, while bearing in mind how on the other, community institutions like UPMC actively participate in dismantling Braddock's infrastructure and abandoning its citizens. Moreover, she connects the threads of corporate irresponsibility, environmental racism, and a failing healthcare system. *Campaign for Braddock* reveals how romanticizing struggle is not only unjust in its overwriting of working class realities, it is a danger to the citizens because of its complicity in their erasure and disenfranchisement.

Frazier's more recent work in Flint, Michigan continues to visualize the racialized politics of disposability that contribute to socio-environmental disasters like the city's water crisis. Her projects illustrate that these crises are not isolated instances, despite the institutional

tendency to characterize these events as "insulated acts of governmental incompetence, a case of misguided bureaucratic ineptitude or unfortunate acts of individual misconduct" disconnected from "a neoliberal politics in which state violence is used to hurt, abuse and humiliate those populations who are vulnerable, powerless and considered disposable" (Giroux, "Poisoned City"). What Frazier's work does is first make visible the lattice that connects these crises and then reveal them as instances of state-sanctioned violence.[32] Her 2016 project *Flint is Family* chronicles the violence of governmental abandonment and the willful condemnation of a mostly Black and poor Rust Belt community. Like in her Braddock project, Frazier traces the industrial decline that frames the history and fallout of social disposability through three generations of Flint women—Shea Cobb, her daughter Zion, and her mother Renée, all of whom struggle and suffer together more or less at the mercy of state and federal officials willing to sacrifice countless lives in the campaign for financial gain and political success.

In April of 2014, under the direction of Flint's emergency manager Ed Kurtz (appointed in 2012 by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder), the town left its expensive Detroit water source and began drawing from the Flint River, a move that would save the cash-strapped city $5M over the course of two years (Kahn, "Flint is Family" pt. 1). Although complaints about the water began almost immediately, it would be over a year and a half before President Obama declared a state of emergency in Flint in January of 2016.  On September 24, 2015, Flint pediatrician Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha held a press conference in which she attested that cases of lead poisoning had doubled, and in some cases tripled, since the switch to the Flint River ("Flint Doctor"). Hanna-Attisha received harsh and strong pushback from state officials, who issued an advisory but maintained that the water met federal standards (Goodnough et al.). In October 2015, Flint

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[32] This new legibility makes possible certain connections, for example between the racially-motivated abandonment of Hurricane Katrina victims, the Flint, MI water crisis, the economic, healthcare, and police injustices in Braddock PA, and the extrajudicial killings of people of color all over the US.

reconnected to the Detroit water system, and once he declared a state of emergency, Obama

directed FEMA to award up to $5M in aid, an emergency assistance plan that expired on August

14, 2016. In February 2016 it became clear that Governor Snyder and city officials knew about

the crisis nearly a year before it was finally acknowledged— an act of willful endangerment,

what some have termed a racially motivated genocide by design (Fonger 2015; King 2016;

Roussi 2016).

Considering the grave disadvantages already faced by the residents of Flint—a town so

ravaged by economic abandonment that the US military conducted training maneuvers there

without informing residents in June 2015 (Fonger)—the actions of city officials merit severe

scrutiny. Hanna-Attisha explains the very targeted nature of the water crisis:

> [T]his is a community that has every challenge in the world. We have a 40 percent
> poverty rate. It's 16 percent in the rest of the state. We have one of the highest crime rates
> in the nation. The military special-ops medics—they train in Flint because we essentially
> have a war zone in our streets. We have no full-service grocery stores. We have
> tremendous unemployment and limited transportation options. The life expectancy of
> people in Flint is 20 years shorter than people in neighboring suburbs. Our children
> already had every obstacle to success. And then they got lead. *If you want to bring down
> a population even more than it already is, you expose it to lead* (emphasis added, Kahn
> "Meet the Woman").

This sort of violence doled out to the residents of Flint through environmental crisis is linked to

the health crises in Braddock produced by the pursuits of industry and the unaccountability of

corporations, officials, and politicians. Those rendered disposable are forced to address this

violence in the everyday of their existence—not just ideological violence, but violence that has

material consequences. Etienne Balibar writes that examining the conditions of the radically

excluded— those left out of political systems and denied the material means to survive, let alone

thrive— "force[s] us to address the reality of extreme violence in contemporary political

societies—nay, in the very heart of their everyday life" (120). Flint, like Braddock, is subject to

the state's increased policing since the 1970s as a method of controlling the superfluous working class populations that exist in excess of capital production, as well as to the state's deployment of power by limiting or withholding these populations' access to infrastructural processes and services—like education, healthcare, electricity, and water ("Democracy, Disposability"). The Flint water crisis and its inadequate containment reflects the mechanisms by which the state exercises control over the means of a community's reproductive capacities, similar to the limiting and removal of healthcare services in Braddock. These sorts of measures—in which violence is deployed through the everyday experience and by denying access to the necessary resources for survival—also serve to repress agency and collective activism in those populations.

Frazier, sensitive to how much is at stake, insists on creating work that reaches beyond the details of the crisis in order to contribute to the collective agency of the most affected populations and the consciousness of the greater public. She produces images and films that, while crafting a keen social critique, also celebrate the spirit and resilience of her subjects. She knows that discourses of subjugation and overcoming discredit the myriad ways that one can be simultaneously empowered and disempowered, visible and invisible, caught in a political or social "impasse" (Berlant 2011), and occupying a complexly active and political position by treading water, simply surviving, or refusing to be a ghost.

### *possibilities for resistance and hope*

This diffuse nature of oppression and resistance implicit in Frazier's work can be parsed by drawing upon Alexander Weheliye (2014) and his exploration of the mechanisms of living in populations rendered exceptional or superfluous under neoliberal disposability. He extends Foucault's theorization of power and resistance as multivalent and spread out in the everyday to

explore how resistance takes many forms, focusing on the ways in which marginalized populations occupy the indeterminate space of superfluity/disposability. Jeffrey Nealon explains: "As power becomes increasingly more capillary, more invested in everyday matters and everyday lives, so too an immense new field of possibility for resistance is opened. 'The everyday' in Foucault functions not as someplace untouched by power, but rather as a figure for the proliferation, saturation and intensification of power (which is also to say, resistance) relations" (107-108). Weheliye expands this nuanced articulation of resistance in part by abandoning enlightenment notions of progress implicit the narrative of "overcoming." Like Mbembe, he recognizes that Agamben and Foucault's eurocentric analyses of bare life and biopolitics fail to fully consider race and the legacies of colonialism (53-62, 64).

Weheliye's analysis has significant implications for photography that concerns itself with disposability. Such photographic work necessarily engages with aspects of humanity that are in excess of biological life— the politics of representation, legacy, the spectral reverberations of the unseen, memory, and so on. In other words, these photographs trouble, as Weheliye does, the narrow categorizations for what and who is considered human, and for that matter, living—in order to account for the struggle over the definition of life itself. He suggests that life—and therefore biopolitics, particularly in their current configuration of disposability—must be considered beyond the strictly biological. Weheliye does not characterize exceptional populations as external to political life, but, because of "how profoundly race and racism shape the modern idea of the human" [33] (4), as embodying particular practices of (non)living, resistance, and potentialities outside the commonly accepted configurations of what it means to be human. "Racializing assemblage" is the term Weheliye uses to characterize the "set of

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[33] In particular, Weheliye points out that political construction of race as a biological category belies the actual posteriority of race to racism—suggesting that "the biopolitical function of race is racism" (55).

sociopolitical processes that discipline" subjects into a spectrum of humanness— "full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans"—and that delimit who can occupy which modality (4).

These sociopolitical processes can be understood as this new set biopolitical forces under neoliberalism—the politics of disposability. The practice of photography, if it is to be concerned with justice, must take into account photographic life and death as it relates to social, political, and biological death. This photographic death, moreover, is tethered to its opposite, photographic life, and following Weheliye, the spectrum of what lies in between, creating a relationship between the political function of photography, the invisibility of the subject, and the social implications of that vision: sovereignty, or perhaps more broadly, humanity. For example, Didi-Huberman recognized this issue of reducing the human to mere life and the politics tethered to that reduction. He writes, addressing photographic life and death beyond the biopolitical, "[w]hat the SS wanted to destroy… was not only life, but also—whether within or beyond, before or after the executions—the very form of the human, and its image with it" (*Images* 43).

While Frazier's work is immediately concerned with Foucauldian biopolitics (for example the institutional administration or withdrawal of resources such as healthcare, housing, education, etc.), her photographs perform a kind of work that complicates their—and their subjects'—relationship to the biopolitical. While the photographs articulate the chasms between the exceptional populations and the needs of capital, they focus especially on the relationship between photography and the representation of humanness and resistance within those populations. Nealon's reading of Foucault insists that resistance has to be conceptualized as the redeployment of power, located not in a binary of opposition to sovereign dominance, but in the *everyday* within nuanced relations of power. "[W]ork on contemporary culture must consistently be reinscribed outside the binary realm of resistance *versus* power. Resistance is not a rare

attribute of certain heroic subjects, but an essential fact of everyone's everyday struggles with power" (Nealon 111). Indeed, Frazier's work does not characterize her subjects as merely dispossessed and external, rather, she portrays them as occupying complex and often contradictory subjectivities within the spectrum of exceptionalism or superfluity, sensitive to the fact that power cannot be reduced to domination alone. Her photographs are simultaneously an indictment and a celebration of humanity even within spaces in which particular expressions of it are disavowed or in which humanity is denied altogether. Her subjects are assemblages[34] represented in full complexity, riddled with contradiction, existing in spaces characterized both by the withdrawal and the intensification of legal frameworks.

By the very nature of the collaborative and subjective processes of creating her work, Frazier's photographs upset the classical hierarchies of representative relationships and the triangulated formation of the photographer-subject-viewer. Her photographs contain a sort of refusal to perform what is immediately and automatically expected of them: to portray victimhood or heroism as a dualism, one that might fit into existing narratives about war and injustice. Rather, her work forces the viewer to consider the complex ways that exceptional populations are rendered precarious. Simple configurations of internal/external are inadequate because the struggle for inclusion into systems of oppression does not dismantle those same systems but merely serves to obscure their hierarchies and subjugations. Instead, Frazier, like Weheliye, moves her subjects beyond a dualistic analysis of internal/external or oppression/agency while simultaneously making legible the politics of disposability that governs and depends on such dualisms.

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[34] "Assemblages are inherently productive, entering into polyvalent becomings to produce and give expression to previously nonexistent realities, thoughts, bodies, affects, spaces, actions, ideas, and so on. The fecundity of these becomings… however, ought not to be cognized as unavoidably positive or liberating, particularly when set against putatively rigid structures such as race and colonialism" (Weheliye 46-47).

Frazier complicates both the politics of representation as well the political conditions of disposability by insisting on the complex personhood of her subjects. In her film *Flint is Family*, Shea Cobb narrates: "the women of Flint are strong. We're here and you don't get to get rid of us at the price of a dollar. We are Flint. We live, we love, we get married. The water crisis does not stop that, it does not stop us from living." (Frazier, *Flint is Family* 10:15). This spirit of survival and hope flows through Frazier's work. Her images and interviews present hope not as a naïve belief in the future, but as the insistence on a cross-generational solidarity. Coates' "Letter to My Son" cautions against hope—he suggests that the cost of hope or of an imagined future is too high; that cost is borne almost exclusively by a small number of people. His resistance to hope is channeled through this refusal to celebrate progress won on the backs of disposable bodies—a condition that is repeatedly played out in places like Flint and Braddock. Coates' caution against hope is instructive because it relies on education rather than faith: he insists on the educability of humans grounded in a mutual responsibility to questioning, learning, and teaching. Frazier takes up this commitment to education in her work, knowing there is no way to talk about political life in America without also talking about education, the role of schooling, and public pedagogy. This is why her images matter: the hope that her work embodies is not specious or dreamy; it is a belief in education rooted in struggle and a responsibility to interrogating history. Her photographs are active rather than merely illustrative; Frazier's photography is about history, politics, economics, justice, and photography itself, all at once. With each project she carves out a more nuanced and sensitive space for documentary, collaborative, and activist practices to overlap and inform one another. And yet she refuses to succumb to nihilism or cynicism because she believes in the ability of her subjects to persevere.

Frazier's work entreats viewers to consider our ethical relationship to a neoliberal politics— how wellbeing for some comes at the cost of others' suffering, and how our knowledge of those relationships is mediated visually. Frazier's work is simultaneously a direct address of history and a challenge for the future: it is corrective and simultaneously prescriptive. Frazier does what artists, at their best, are able to do: she approaches and harnesses her art as a political and pedagogical force— outfitted with refined aesthetics but aimed to set in motion a shift, to exert a kind of pressure, and to be critical. The conversation emerges as she draws upon her historical influences, filling the gap of what they did not do, while also drawing upon the histories of the Black community and of working class struggle. Frazier tells the untold story of what happened in the wake of the industrial revolution and continues to fight, through her photography and activism, subsequent waves of exploitation, from UPMC Braddock's closing to the insidious exploitation of the commercial and creative industries.

Her work contributes to the construction and consolidation of community—a way in which precarious life can arm itself against vulnerability and expunction but careful to resist the erasure of singular individuality. Frazier manages to hold this tension between fierce autonomy and community without succumbing to the depoliticization of neoliberal atomization—not as an artist and not as a citizen. Her work explicitly illustrates the intertwined nature of the personal and the political while managing to resist the conflation of individual and collective. Frazier treats her subject matter—herself, her community, the disregard for Black life throughout history, as well as solidarity, complicated love, pride, and kindness—with the requisite thoughtfulness that such a profound undertaking demands.

**Riposte to ungrievability**

Frazier visualizes the struggles of a community that is commonly ignored, exploited, and subsequently erased in public memory. While hers is not a story explicitly about grief, it is a story of a society that renders particular lives and communities ungrievable. All three photographers' work is not only about the grievability of victims of war, but also about the grievability of a culture that allows and requires war; a grievability of an ethics that requires us to pause and think of how to respond to violence with something other than more violence.

The photographers in this chapter employ emerging photographic practices that work to expose the mechanisms of pedagogy and schooling that solicit consent to the wartime cultural apparatus. They also represent a still-forming ontological shift in photography as an art, a site of intervention, and a social practice. The work explored here takes seriously the challenge of utilizing photography as a means to transcend mere representation, functioning instead to implicate ideological, social, and pedagogical practices that contribute to the politics of disposability within the context of ongoing war. All three artists' work, however, manages to function in a capacity beyond mere critique. They act as a riposte to visual and social injustices: a disruptive examination of the intertwined optics of disposability and representational violence. Van Agtmael visualizes the construction of a national war-psyche and its indelible link to imperial wars waged on racialized people globally, and those waged through systems of disposability and oppression domestically. His work redefines the photojournalism genre to distil and visualize the historical moment of a country in sociocultural unease under neoliberal wartime. Frazier and Begley's work serve as living archives, their photographs making visible the dialectic between history (by rewriting, rethinking, and correcting) and the future (by envisioning or demanding alternative representation and engaging in activism)— all the while

doing the difficult ideological work of confronting and changing the way that marginalized lives and communities are portrayed, shamed, or erased.

These photographers serve as public intellectuals in their commitment to the future through their perspicacious articulation of the present. They proffer alternatives by virtue of their struggle to correct unjust histories and to make legible the formations and deformations of violence and disposability. Their work is a challenge to our ability to look at photographs because they emphasize what is beyond vision, suggesting that the unseen is particularly crucial not only to understanding photographs, but also to addressing a cultural crisis of neoliberal disposability. However, they do not simply seek to make the invisible visible; they tarry in the indeterminate space of making invisibility itself legible without erasing its legacy of disposal, injustice, and misrepresentation.

What makes work such as Frazier's, van Agtmael's, and Begley's weighted with significance is their ability to tarry with the tensions that arise in a contemporary documentary tradition, meaning they dwell *in* and indeed call our attention *to* the ambiguities— ethical, political and otherwise—that exist in the shady and fickle endeavor of photography. Most significantly, they call on us to understand rupture as more nuanced than a simple juxtaposition of domination on one hand and resistance on the other. Such a discourse of agency and resistance is crude and remains insensitive to the indeterminate spaces of struggle that exist alongside and in between the poles of subjugation and resistance.

This ambiguity is difficult and complex terrain for documentary work to address. It is difficult, largely because we are trained to view images crudely and to detect unsubtle visual cues about how to read photographic representation. Additionally, photojournalism and documentary photography tend to lag behind other photographic work in its continued insistence

on the indexical, representational relationship between the photograph and its subject. While these projects begin to do the work of unpacking the optics of war and disposability, they also exist within a regime of documentary work that is gendered, racialized, and stratified by class in ways that are deeply entrenched in the worlds of news and art. Every time we are confronted with an image of war, a process of requisition is at play in which the image requires us to define our relationship both to its content as well as to the cultural sphere in which images do their pedagogical and political work. Butler explains, however, that apprehending war images also provides a particular opportunity to question "how war is presented, and what absence structures and limns this visual field" (*Frames* xvii). It is through work like Frazier's, van Agtmael's, and Begley's that demands a slower, more thoughtful engagement with the evolving role and shifting limits of photography amid an increasingly normalized quotidian violence that we will begin to cultivate a more holistic picture of the interlocking issues of sociopolitical injustice and its visualization.
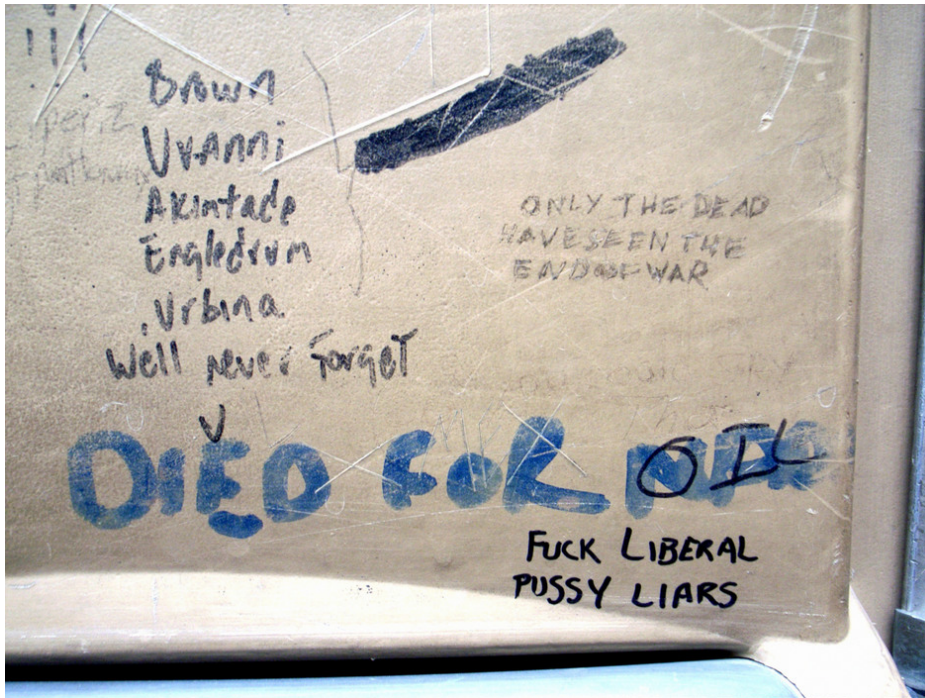
Peter van Agtmael. IRAQ. Baghdad. 2006. Bathroom graffiti. © Peter van Agtmael/Magnum Photos
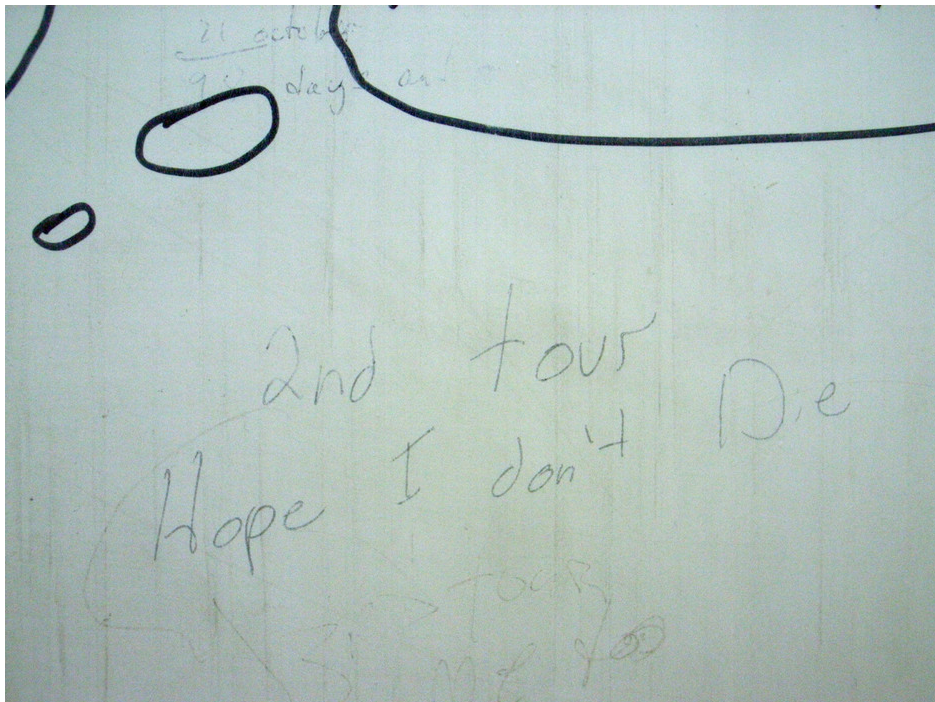


Peter van Agtmael. KUWAIT. Ali Al Salem. 2006. Graffiti written by soldiers on the walls of bathroom stalls.
© Peter van Agtmael/Magnum Photos

Peter van Agtmael. Pine Ridge, South Dakota. 2014. © Peter van Agtmael/Magnum Photos
This young man was arrested after being suspected of beating two men with a baseball bat and leaving their unconscious bodies in the street. I arrived with Officer Jesse Jack shortly after the assault. Paramedics were taking the men into an ambulance.
Officer Jack Started scouting the hedges around the darkened houses for the perpetrator.
A young man took off running, his distinctive cowboy boots pinned in the glare of the officer's flashlight.
He escaped, but Jack then circled the neighborhood in his car with the lights out. He sped up suddenly as he saw a lone figure in boots walking along the road. Jack switched on the siren, screeched to a halt a few feet behind the young man and leapt out with a taser in his hand. The man was arrested and taken to the hospital to be identified by the victims.
One of the beaten men was sitting in a wheelchair, his head lolling, while the other had collapsed onto the ground. A policeman was giving him CPR and shouting, "Don't die on me." The conscious man positively identified the suspect.
The unemployment rate on the reservation is about 80%. The poverty rate is more than 50%. And in Oglala Lakota County, which lies completely within the boundaries of the reservation, more than 40% of the population is under the age of 18.



Peter van Agtmael. Louisville, Kentucky. 2015. Derby outskirts. © Peter van Agtmael/Magnum Photos

Peter van Agtmael. Detroit, Michigan. 2015. Flamingoes outside a house. © Peter van Agtmael/Magnum Photos



Josh Begley. *Officer Involved.* [screenshot] 2015-2016. © Josh Begley

Josh Begley. *Officer Involved*, 2015-2016. © Josh Begley

LaToya Ruby Frazier. U.S.S. *Edgar Thomson Steel Works & Monongahela River*. Braddock, PA. 2013 ©LaToya Ruby Frazier; courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York/Rome



LaToya Ruby Frazier. *Epilepsy Test*, Landscape of the Body Series. Braddock, PA. 2011. ©LaToya Ruby Frazier; courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York/Rome

CHAPTER TWO
WOMEN AND DISPOSABILITY: PHOTOGRAPHING INCARCERATION

**Disposability, women, and the prison system**

The works parsed in this chapter are photographic practices that result from and attempt to negotiate the intersection between patriarchal neoliberalism and the prison-industrial complex. They explore how women are funneled into channels of disposability through the criminalization of womanhood and motherhood, intersecting with the criminalization of race, poverty, and addiction, and exacerbated by media depictions of women as central to public representations of suffering. This chapter explores the challenges of representing the specific kinds of violence brought to bear on female populations in the United States as a result of neoliberal disposability, particularly within reproductive policies and the prison system. Artists LaToya Ruby Frazier, Jane Evelyn Atwood, and Kristen S. Wilkins employ collaborative methods of feminist research in their photographic processes, pushing back against—while demonstrating an acute awareness of—the constraints, prejudices, and expectations placed on them and on the women they photograph as a result of their gender. These photographers are making images about women from within a complex historical conjuncture that compels them to address the uneven ways that a politics of disposability exacts violence along gender lines. Frazier negotiates the complicated intergenerational ties between her matriarchal family structure and the inherited burdens and traumas passed between them, locating them within systems of inequity. Wilkins and Atwood focus specifically on incarcerated women, a population that is growing at unprecedented rates in the US, nearly twice as fast as the male population ("Incarcerated").

One of the opening images in Frazier's *The Notion of Family* is *Self-Portrait October 7 (9:30 a.m.),* 2007. In the photograph, a young Frazier sits bare-chested on a bed, shoulders

pitched at a slight angle, staring intently and almost accusatorily at the camera. A small crucifix

hangs around her neck, and what appears to be a delicate tattoo of two entwined dragons

encircles her bellybutton, their conjoined tails disappearing under the elastic waistband of her

pajama bottoms. The caption on the opposing page reads, "Looking both inwardly and

outwardly, I desire to move beyond boundaries" (*Notion* 8). The inward/outward tension is

palpable in this photograph. It embodies the reflexive, self-implicating narratives about herself

and her family, and the complex emotional project juxtaposed with the material and political

realities that shape their lives. This image sets the tone for the following pages: the vulnerability

of disrobing is expelled by the overwhelming sense that Frazier is not on display but engaged in

a pose of strength. She is not a nude subject, but she has bared herself. She appears to anticipate

and resist objectification—she is putting her life and body forward, testifying to how "the history

of a town like Braddock is inscribed on our bodies" (McLaughlin 0:20) and how her work

"visually renders, through the bodies of myself, my grandmother, and my mother, seeing us

through portraits as markers of the social and economic shift and the decline of industry"

(McLaughlin 2:43).

Photographic projects like Frazier's in Braddock and Flint have not only advanced the

work that visual media is increasingly charged with—namely that of economic and racial

justice—but also that of gender justice. Neoliberal social policies and the politics of disposability

ramify unevenly across the North American landscape, contingent upon particular social and

economic contexts. The fallout of neoliberalism—including mass incarceration, the polarization

of wealth, draconian forms of punishment, economic abandonment, and reduced accessibility to

healthcare—impacts women[35] in pointed ways. This chapter attempts to follow Frazier's bivalent

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[35] I would like to be clear that when I speak of women, I include a broad range of individuals including those who are women-identified or transgender, and am leaving room for individuals who may identify as another gender but

action of looking both "inwardly and outwardly," examining both the complex role of women inside the prison system as well as the matrix of sociopolitical conditions that comprise the external foundation for incarcerating women, beginning with the social policies of the early 1990s.

The prison system is a space where the biopolitical and economic pressures on women converge and are amplified. Over-incarceration in the US stems from a set of racial, economic, and political relations that gave rise to the prison-industrial-complex as a means simultaneously to contain disposable populations—that were, in part, driven into underground economies by deindustrialization and globalization—and to create private revenue, according to the "assumption that public goods should be transformed into structures that generat[e] private profit" (Davis, "Understanding"). However, these relations also manifest visually, for example in media and cultural representations of criminal youth or dangerous motherhood. These relations are also organized according to gender—provoking shifts such as trends in women's incarceration—which as Angela Davis points out, the left has not contended with:

> In many ways the left is still dealing with this notion of the working classes as male, or white male, as in the case of the US. I think feminism, radical feminism, radical anti-racist and anti-capitalist feminism helps us to do the reconceptualization that is necessary in order to produce a left that is more in line with the vast changes that have occurred in the era of global capitalism, recognizing the feminization of the working class, the structural shifts in the global economy, of the fact that some industries are largely populated by women, industries that rely on reproductive labor, of care industries, domestic service, health care, etc. ("Understanding").

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require resources indexed under "women's health." Such identifications, like intersections with race and class, markedly compound the difficultly with which individuals are able to navigate economic and political systems like healthcare, criminal justice, and education. While there is more visibility than ever before regarding gender and gender identification, we are also witnessing a neoconservative backlash in which, for example transgender individuals continue to face tremendous violence through physical and policy violence (e.g. the previous North Carolina governor Pat McCrory's "bathroom bill," the Trump administration's recent withdrawal of protections for transgender students in public schools, and the rising violence against transgender people, in particular transgender women of color [Schmider]).

Her observations suggest that in order to address disposability, particularly within the matrix of relations that lead to the over-incarceration of women, an analysis of gender and labor must be central. Following W.E.B. Du Bois' argument that in order to truly abolish slavery, the infrastructure needs to exist to provide Black citizens with the economic and social ability to survive, Davis writes, "using the approach of abolition democracy, we would propose the creation of an array of social institutions that would begin to solve the social problems that set people on the track to prison, thereby helping to render prison obsolete" (*Meaning of Freedom* 115). What Davis is particularly attentive to—beyond how deindustrialization, privatization and enduring structures of racism force people into underground economies—is how criminality is a racial construction to begin with (*Meaning of Freedom* 46, 42).

Photographic work that addresses neoliberal disposability of women in the US is charged with addressing photographic legacies of representation—the politics of representing under- or misrepresented subjects—and saddled with the baggage of the broader, formative visual culture that influences a social understanding of gender. For example, Joanne Clarke Dillman points out that a significant amount of visual culture is dedicated to dead women and the killing of women, often as storyline devices. She suggests that the preponderance of dead women in popular and visual culture reflects and bolsters a neoliberal discourse that frames women as disposable, particularly within the contexts of globalized labor (2). The significance of Dillman's analysis is the degree to which gains in gender equity are 'balanced' by sustained threats to women's safety, mobility, and independence.[36] Narratives about women that proliferate in visual culture in turn mediate the reception and treatment of women as producers of that culture; violent depictions of women as disposable are mirrored in the worlds of art and media production in which women are

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[36] For example, in the United States over 90% of rapes go unpunished (Krakauer 123), and as of 2016, women earn 80% on average of what their male counterparts earn. Earnings ratios are compounded by race—when compared to white men, it is 54% for Hispanic or Latina women, and 62% for Black women (American Association).

underrepresented and underpaid (Klos 5-6; Schwab). Dillman argues that overwhelmingly, the representation of women underpins misogynistic and sexist ideologies, even within texts (filmic or otherwise) that are read as progressive or feminist, for example through sustained plot devices that rely on violence against women (7). The palatability of violence against women, indeed the killing and disappearing of women, translates not only across popular culture but also into the politics of art production itself.

The reason such visual narratives are so popular is because of historical as well as sociopolitical conditions that encourage particular ideas of artistry, authority, and femininity. While women artists continue to work to uncouple themselves from these prescriptions, they live in a neoliberal climate that dovetails seamlessly with a persistent and robust neoconservativism. This brand of neoconservativism is characterized by regressive political and social policies that target women, in particular poor women of color, evident for example in the many states attempting to roll back health and reproductive rights. President Trump has bragged openly about sexual assault, emboldened a public resurgence of neo-Nazism, and through his hyper-conservative cabinet appointments, is not only anchoring neofascism into mainstream politics, but significantly amplifying a politics of disposability, sanctioning overt expressions of violence against marginalized populations, and rolling back progressive gains made over the past century in fights for equality.

Of course, sexism, patriarchy, and disposability are not synonymous; however, they operate in concert with and inform one another. As a result, not all women are rendered disposable in the specific and aggressive way that neoliberal politics marks particular populations for removal or elimination; however, all women are marginalized to greater and lesser degrees under prevailing ideologies and policies. So as the climate for women intensifies,

we must examine how those disposals and marginalizations are parsed visually, by whom, and if those photographic projects are able to affect, in turn, the systems they examine and are simultaneously subject to.

**Biopolitics of prison photography**

As examined throughout this thesis, Giorgio Agamben's articulation of *bare life* (1998) provides a useful framework to think through how the legal suspension of the protection of law enables neoliberal politics of disposability, and how the legally sanctioned withholding of resources necessary for survival supports its advancement. However, Agamben's work lacks an analysis of the unequal and discriminate ways that bare life is distributed according to gender, failing to "investigate to what extent the production of 'bare life' is also a patriarchal project" (Lemke 63). Using Agamben as a starting point to examine how neoliberal disposability not only affects but also *reproduces* itself upon and through the bodies of women, my analysis of Frazier in particular focuses on how neoliberal ideologies of racially determined economic abandonment have immediate and visceral ramifications that play out on the bodies of women. Ranjana Khanna writes that Agamben's positioning of women as a "threshold figure," located closer to nature and at the margins of culture,

> neither allows for an understanding of the particularly gendered nature of excess life made into object or thrown into the camp, nor does it adequately explain why women can be used (through a discourse of justification in relation to war) to reproduce war and capital in the war machine when in fact they do not necessarily benefit from it. Disposable assets of the military variety can be reproduced through the production of woman as throwaway object (191).

Khanna is referring to the mechanization of disposability politics by, for example, designating the bodies and reproductive capacities of certain women as pathological, or, alternatively, deploying a kind of palatable violence—as Dillman suggests—onto women.

Similarly, as Henry Giroux points out, Agamben's analysis lacks an articulated link between bare life and neoliberalism, that is, an examination of how neoliberal sovereignty forms a basis for bare life beyond state sovereignty (*Youth* 174). Giroux writes, "[Agamben] offers no analysis of how decisions about life and death have now been appropriated by the sovereignty of the market" (*Youth* 174). This critique suggests that neoliberal social policies—wherein market logic dictates socioeconomic and sociopolitical structures—have come to enact a form of sovereignty linked to but distinct from state power. This point is particularly crucial to an analysis of how the prison-industrial complex is brought to bear upon women, in terms of how the differentially apportioned economic injustices of neoliberalism directly influence how particular bodies are rendered as bare life or inherently disposable.

Agamben's camp lends itself easily to prison analysis, particularly in its view of the prison as a demarcated space simultaneously within and external to legal society. However, the view of the prison as a limit space marked by total domination and total suspension of law may be less productive for thinking through the biopolitics of disposability. Instead, such analysis requires close consideration of the liminal spaces and interstices in which power is deployed across and alongside domination and oppression. These deployments of power are tethered to the visual modes of representation, and as such, images have a stake in articulating these political dynamics.

Photography, then, is a practice that can be exerted upon and within prisons to enact a kind of rearticulation of power, and its effects are both intensified and subdued because of the high levels of regulation within the prison environment.[37] While issues of auto-representation, reclamation of subjectivities stripped by institutionalization, and speaking back against the ways

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[37] Michelle Alexander, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Jonathan Simon detail the phenomenon of mass incarceration as an economic, political, racial, and neoliberal function of power.

catalogization is used to consolidate control[38] are crucial, contemporary analysis must also

concern itself with making legible the broader cultural conditions that requires and permits the

prison system. Such analysis must examine the interstices and undulations of power within the

all-encompassing, oppressive model of the camp or prison: balancing the extreme examples of

regulatory interest in the body with the keen interest in what the incarcerated are doing with their

images—including the ability to create them or appear in them, and ultimately, their ability to be

present in public consciousness.

**The problem with prison photography—a genealogy**

Contemporary analyses of prison photography are conspicuously lacking in an otherwise

rich landscape of visual discourses. Curator and prison photography scholar Pete Brook's

research constitutes the bulk of available scholarship. In the curation of his 2014-2016 traveling

exhibition, *Prison Obscura*, Brook identified a complex problem in the prison photography

genre: the combination of a lack of unencumbered access to prisons and the simultaneous

absence of visual insider narratives about prison. While early social documentary projects were

instrumental in inserting prison discourse into public consciousness and making photography

available to activism, "such documentary photography has come under scrutiny for

commodifying tragedy and hardship; for parachuting into grave situations and leaving just as

quickly; and for being the reserve of Western photographers and white, male patriarchy" (Brook,

*Prison* 8). The necessary response, according to Brook, is visual work that exerts some kind of

pressure on this documentary practice (*Prison* 8); work that provokes a more nuanced

understanding of the conditions that drive the prison industrial complex and of the lives of the

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[38] For example, in the late 19th century, French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot photographed women institutionalized in the Salpêtrière psychiatric hospital, using these photographs to "document" and thus reify his diagnoses of hysteria and degeneracy.

incarcerated individuals themselves; work that competes with the proliferation of imagery about prisons that is neither accurate nor politically productive.

Hindered by restrictive access to prisons and the prohibitions on incarcerated individuals to photographically document their own experiences, visual documents of prison life are notably limited. The history of the photograph within the carceral system affects how photography is used within prisons and produced about prisons. As Allan Sekula and others after him have detailed, photography as it intersects with the carceral system has historically been used as a form of surveillance, indexing, record keeping, and control.[39] Contemporary mug shots, for example, which are often distributed across media, are descendant from Alphonse Bertillon's 19th-century police archives that catalogued 'criminal types' (Sekula, "Body" 18-19). Today mug shots are employed both as vehicles of sensationalism and spectacle (for example in the publication of celebrity mugshots or the mugshot tabloids such as *Cellmates*, *Just Busted*, or *The Slammer*), as well as to publicly emphasize the danger and criminality of an individual.

Such documents contribute to the intersection between representations of criminality in news and in entertainment media to reproduce visual tropes that are grounded in racial and class stereotypes. These visual representations in the media are publicly understood as accurate reflections, and as such serve to reproduce and reify themselves. Furthermore, these representations seem to attest to the danger, depravity, and violence of the incarcerated individuals rather than of the prison system. Angela Davis writes,

> [T]he saturation of our visual environment leads us to think that we actually have some real knowledge about the issue. But, as a matter of fact, real knowledge about this institution has been marginalized from public consciousness. The media do not educate us about the real, long-term costs and consequences that imprisonment imposes upon us

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[39] See Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," 1986, and *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983,* 1984; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices,* 1991; Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others,* 2003; and John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning*, 2009.

> as a nation, as communities, as families, and as citizens and individuals with non-resident status. It does not educate us on how the institution of enslavement has lived on, generation after generation, by influencing how other institutions are administered (*Meaning of Freedom* 126).

Prisons—in particular male prisons—are a mainstream subject and "one of the most important features of our image environment;"[40] their ubiquity in entertainment and popular culture results in a generally unquestioned acceptance of the necessity of prisons (Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* 18).[41] Images in popular culture buttress mechanisms and narratives of danger and criminality, fomenting opinion about public safety and the need for punitive measures, and reinforcing what Giroux has identified as the "punishing state" (*Youth*), which is why counternarratives to the portrayal of incarceration and incarcerated women are particularly crucial.

Women's incarceration, however, receives much less attention than incarceration generally, both in research and in visual culture. While certain popular television shows do spotlight women's incarceration, for example, *Orange is the New Black,* and the Australian drama *Wentworth,* they contribute to the traffic in popular culture stereotypes about incarcerated women.[42] While there is a rich archive of women's writing from prison, little of it reaches mainstream media and there is a dearth of public scholarship on the topic (Davis, *Are Prisons*

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[40] In 2012, tech company Introversion Software released the video game Prison Architect, a simulation in which players construct and run a private prison. As of 2016 the game had sold over two million units.

[41] While exceptions do exist—including select photography projects or Ava DuVernay's documentary *Thirteenth* (2016)—collective public knowledge of the carceral system and industry is severely limited.

[42] In certain ways these shows also attempt to address significant realities of incarceration, for example the experiences of trans women. However, only OITNB cast a trans actor, Laverne Cox, to play the role while Wentworth's casting choices contribute to enduring problems in television and film in which cis men are cast to play trans women. Recently, several cis men have received attention and awards for such roles: Jared Leto as Rayon in *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013); Eddie Redmayne as Lili Elbe in *The Danish Girl* (2015); and Matt Bomer as a trans sex worker in *Anything* (2017). In response to the latest casting, actor and trans activist Jen Richards spoke out about the dangers of casting cis men as trans women: beyond issues of economic equality and authenticity, she said, "Cis audiences reward them because they see being trans itself as a performance" and rewarding these performances solidifies the belief that trans women are really men, which in turn causes anxiety about masculinity/heterosexuality that is then translated into violence against trans women (@SmartAssJen).
Furthermore, many transgender individuals are sentenced to prison based on their sex at birth or genitalia, resulting in a majority of transgender women in male prisons, who are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault and often denied the medical and hormonal treatment they require (Davis, *Freedom* 99; Law, *Resistance* 202-203, 208).

*Obsolete?* 64; Law, *Resistance* 128). The absence of material that places women at the center of a politics of disposability rather than at its periphery (or as its collateral) is manifest in the palpable lack of projects that focus on women's incarceration.

Photographic work specific to women's incarceration is even more limited, unsurprising considering the gap in scholarship on the subject.[43] Most of the projects are done by men and about men; and even when projects specifically focus on incarcerated women, the patriarchal and masculinist underpinnings of the social documentary genre are brought to bear upon the subjects. There are, however, several notable exceptions, including Jane Evelyn Atwood who has conducted the most comprehensive photographic study on incarcerated women to date; Kathe Kowalski's work on women in the corrections system as part of a lifelong project of documenting women that fall outside the normative public sphere; Cheryl Hanna-Truscott's project on pregnancy in prison; Kristen S. Wilkins' work, *Supplication,* a collection of large format, early 20th-century style portraits intended to function as a counternarrative to mugshots; and Jacobia Dahm's project on prison visitation.

Such thoughtful and critical photographic work on the realities and injustices of the prison system is necessary to combat the volume of misrepresentations. However, the central task for researchers and photographers is not only to visualize prisons, but also to make comprehensible the web of factors that result in the largely unquestioned political and socioeconomic power of the prison system. In order to see the prison system properly we need photography that addresses it directly, but we also need to look to the side and examine what happens before, around, and next to the prison system: we need to apply averted vision to social and political interrogation as well. We need work that, to return to Teju Cole's apt metaphor,

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[43] In November 2016 I contacted the collections department at the International Center of Photography in New York, and was not altogether surprised to learn that they had no catalogued photographs of incarcerated women in their collection, despite a significant number of photographs of incarcerated men.

reconstructs the circle by setting enough tangents around its periphery. By focusing too tightly on prison representation reform, one misses the broader constellation of racism, white supremacy, neoliberal privatization, patriarchy, homophobia, and xenophobia that perpetuate the need for and profitability of prisons.

Photographic work like Frazier's examines the precursors and periphery of the prison system to address the socio-visual problem of the prison that Jean Baudrillard identified: that "prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, which is carceral" (352). Baudrillard is pointing to the oppressive and carceral nature of the punishing state, of which the prison system should be understood as an extension and expression, rather than as a foil. Baudrillard cautions that instead of seeing the historical and cultural continuities between wider society and the prison, the systemic violence of society flies under the radar, remaining hidden in plain sight. It is in this spirit that Frazier's photographic work explains the context through which women are criminalized and pushed into a system that catches the fallout from neoliberal economic and social policies.

However, the question of making visible the politics of disposability in the context of women's incarceration is complicated. On one hand, women's incarceration is an issue that garners a limited amount of attention, overshadowed by attention to men's prisons and subjected to standards of male prison reform. On the other hand, the marginalization and disposal of particular women is increasingly visible but also increasingly authorized. The intersection of palatable visibility and simultaneous obfuscation places women's incarceration in a particularly difficult and vulnerable position. Due to the relatively marginal status of incarcerated women within both public consciousness and visual representations, work such as Atwood's—more traditional social documentary photography (but conducted with a feminist research process)—is

still necessary; consciousness about and representations of incarceration of women is still lagging several decades behind general knowledge about incarceration generally.

These visual aspects of disposability intensify the multiple levels of punishment already brought to bear upon incarcerated women. The lack of critical visual attention compounds this phenomenon, rendering the realities of women's incarceration if not invisible, then grossly distorted to reflect instead racial and sexist tropes of criminality. The issues that women face are largely unique and are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, including sentencing bias, physical and sexual violence, and the absence of proper services for large percentages of women who have substance abuse issues, histories of abuse, are mothers, or are pregnant. For women, these realities are intensified by the lack of visual representation required to reify their struggles and contest stereotypes, as well as by the forceful intergenerational aspects that affect the families of women most strongly. Frazier's work functions as a challenge to neoliberal narratives about racialized women and criminality and lays bare the visual realities of a community struggling under the politics of disposability.

**State violence outside the prison: LaToya Ruby Frazier**

LaToya Ruby Frazier takes on the task of making visually legible the material effects and intergenerational violence of disposability on women. As she reminds us in her work on Braddock, women are not exterior to violence—as was the dominant early 20th-century perspective on war and women (Goodman 1)—but inextricably bound up in it. In *The Notion of Family*, Frazier details how women shoulder much of the domestic destruction foisted upon working class Black populations by the War on Drugs. Halfway through the book is a portrait of her brother, Sergeant Brandon Frazier (2008). He is standing with his back to the camera, in

pixilated military fatigues, the back of his cap embroidered "FRAZIER." He stands in the woods, and the shallow depth of field blurs the bare branches and the snow-dappled ground around him. On the opposite page is what appears to be what was once the structure of a building, now reclaimed entirely by vines (*Ajax Way*, from Landscape of the Body Series, 2011). The vines completely obscure all signs of the building, betrayed only by its monstrous, leaf-covered skeleton. Both this structure and Sergeant Frazier are standing, but obscured by camouflage and claimed by forces perhaps more powerful than they. On the following page Frazier writes, "An only son/ A father/ A college student/ A soldier/ While you were away fighting the Global War on Terror, defending us from Weapons of Mass Destruction, the continuation of the War on Drugs incarcerated men your age, leaving single mothers defenseless against domestic biochemical weapons and pharmaceutical companies" (*Notion* 82).

Frazier's focus on intergenerational, matriarchal narratives is finely attuned to the ways in which the effects of disposability and structural violence—manifested across social, environmental, political, and economic spheres—are gendered. She writes that "society looked away in contempt while the Reagan administration sent its troops, cops, and K-9s to raid my home and classroom," and how she bore witness as the War on Drugs "decimated my family and community" (*Notion* 65, 38). These testimonials are punctuated on the one hand by images of boarded up, abandoned buildings, skeletons of businesses that thrived in her Grandma Ruby's youth; and on the other, domestic interiors and portraits that reveal a parallel wear and degradation on the bodies and psyches of herself and her family.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the title of Frazier's project, *The Notion of Family*, recalls Edward Steichen's famous 1955 Museum of Modern Art exhibition *The Family of Man*, an ambitious show of 503 photographs from 68 countries by 273 different photographers. The

exhibition was very popular but was widely criticized for its humanistic platitudes about universality and its honorific of photography as a lingua franca, and it inspired several exhibitions in the following decades that attempted to address and correct Steichen's oversights. *The Family of Man* structured itself around postwar worldviews—at once insular and optimistic—reflected in its narrow perspectives (most of the photographers are white, western, and male; roughly 20% were women) as well as its mythical belief in oneness and humanity, glossing over the trenchant social, political, and economic differences that compound class, gender, and race. Allan Sekula diagnosed the exhibition as "the epitome of American cold war liberalism," a calculated attempt at "promoting a benign view of an American world order stabilized by the rule of international law" and "univeraliz[ing] the bourgeois nuclear family" ("Traffic" 19).

   *The Family of Man* exhibition catalogue was reissued to commemorate its 60th anniversary in 2015; *The Notion of Family* was published the previous year. Frazier's title calls into question the very construct that Steichen so steadfastly based his assertions of unity upon; the word *notion* reminds viewers that we cannot know what family means in advance, much less bind all of humanity together under its mantle. A notion can be a fleeting whim or an impulsive idea—and it may or may not materialize, an instability that Frazier explores in her photography. She seems to internalize Roland Barthes' assessment of *The Family of Man* as the manifestation of American mythology; her photographic processes and the resulting images assert that the relationships indexed under family cannot be taken for granted, and that these myths must instead be examined. In doing so, she reveals unexpected tethers—between community members and blood relatives certainly, but also across generations, through shared abuses and systemic violence, across geography and through history. Frazier resists the ahistoricity of *The Family of*

*Man*, grounding her project firmly in the history of Braddock, the neoliberal mechanisms of disinvestment and surveillance, and the traces that these mechanisms leave on people.

One way in which Frazier's work is in quiet conversation with Steichen's exhibition is her focus on the singular and fractured families that she builds her work around—her own in Braddock and Shea Cobb's in Flint. They are notably absent of men except for more marginal roles that fade and reemerge. The matriarchal presence speaks to the splintering effect the War on Drugs has had on families, as well as to how women have been and remain central to social reproduction, education, and social emancipation. Her need to focus on the women of her family is a result of the differently disposed-of men in her life and the communities ruptured by the siphoning-off of men into the military, the carceral system, or in undervalued and physically and psychically destructive labor: "Our husbands, brothers, sons, and boyfriends were relegated to menial wage jobs, underemployment, or layoffs. Undermined by the mainstream economy, social isolation kept them company" (*Notion* 41). Today neoliberal and authoritarian policies rely on similar mechanisms of organization and criminalization that prevailed in the 1990s by focusing on particular subsets of the population, singled out as especially 'depraved' or 'abnormal;' mechanisms that intensify as they are exerted upon female or differently gendered bodies.

The visibility of such women is complicated both by contemporary modes of oppression and by efforts of resistance. On the one hand, Trump's administration has unabashedly advanced authoritarian white supremacy (evidenced by the Muslim immigration ban, vociferous condemnation of Black neighborhoods, his support of stop/frisk, the appointment of alt-right individuals such as Steve Bannon, the aggressive rollback of women's reproductive rights nationally, and his defense of white supremacists in Charlottesville, VA). Simultaneously,

expressions of public protest, especially when orchestrated by people of color are increasingly characterized as riots, and both citizens and immigrants of color are coded as dangerous.

On the other hand, race is overwhelmingly folded into whitewashed narratives of resistance: white liberal responses fall short, often inadvertently sustaining narratives of oppression (e.g. there was opposition to the Trump administration's Muslim ban but a failure to articulate support for Black Lives Matter, or failing to connect the women's march to efforts led by women of color, working class women, gender non-conforming individuals, trans women, disabled women, etc.). As a result, the visual dimensions of struggle are appropriated and remade according to white, middle class standards, as evidenced by the Levi's Braddock campaign that positions working class struggle as hip and sexy. Frazier's work importantly intervenes on the visual intersections of these forces. She resists this appropriation of struggle, reclaiming it for herself and her family, revealing how decidedly unsexy environmental violence and economic abandonment is, and addressing how women get positioned to receive violence both in material and in visual spheres. She shows too, that women's bodies are contested spaces for political and ideological control, and thus, a crucial site for photographers to articulate how the struggle over this control is visualized.

Women figured as the tolerated recipients of violence are a recurrent phenomenon in visual culture, both in photojournalism and in art photography that often traffic in themes of femininity and tortured artistry. Beyond Dillman's analysis of women in popular culture, this signification is intensified by intersectional analysis, when the bodies upon which violence is administered are most often racialized and marked by class. The visual trope of the suffering or mourning woman carries considerable risks, as Marta Zarzycka explains: "the tendency of contemporary media to use women as signifiers for the ravages of wars, genocides, and racial

and gender inequalities… may partially explain the recognition of these images by both professional and wider audiences—all of them have received awards in the prestigious World Press Photo contest… *conflating femininity and oppression risks reducing women to the pathological and the melancholic…*" (Zarzycka 15, emphasis added).

This conflation, however, is precisely what Frazier's complex project rallies against. Frazier baring her torso and staring down the viewer in *Self-Portrait October 7 (9:30 a.m.)* highlights the ease with which women's bodies are designated sites of violence and suffering. Yet this image also suggests the resistant and persistent strength that moves through the bodies and lives of these women. Knowing that myth and truth comingle in all photographs, Frazier offers as proof not her visage, but the multiple and complexly layered parts of her life. The light source in the image is from slightly below—perhaps Frazier is holding a lamp, we cannot be sure. What we can see are the refracted beams, streaking her body with highlights and hot spots—just above her inner elbow, the top of her breast, the underside of her collarbone, her neck. Even the light, moving across her body like sunlight through water, complicates as much as it illuminates. The work that follows is not a facile or reductive representation of a family or community, rather, it is an evolving portrait that builds upon itself, tarrying with all its irregularities and contradictions—visual, political, and familial. The image sequences are interspersed with personal and historical narratives, pulling the viewer into portraits that require both patience and work: the lovingly arranged framed photographs on a bedside table; years of smudges on a light switch; her mother doing Frazier's hair; the two of them on opposite ends of a sofa angled away from each other. While Frazier highlights the struggles and injustices doled out to the women in her family, she also portrays themselves with dignity and complexity, even in desperate moments.

While the women in Frazier's Braddock project are intimate with suffering, they are not reduced to signifiers of that suffering. Instead, they connect the realities of injustice to a broader network of factors that Frazier identifies with surgical precision. Similarly, Robin Kelley writes that while trauma cannot be separated from struggle, "reading black experience through trauma can easily slip into thinking of ourselves as victims and objects rather than agents, subjected to centuries of gratuitous violence that have structured and overdetermined our very being" (2016), suggesting that people are not reducible to their trauma, nor to their bodies as sites of violence. He critiques the depoliticizing mechanization of trauma within postracial, liberal discourses, explaining that discussing oppression and injustice through the language of personal trauma is more institutionally palatable because it does not position social justice and oppression at the forefront, rather, "the solution to racism still is shifted to the realm of self-help and human resources." Kelley's call for discourses and activism that foreground social justice and oppression on a public scale is palpable in Frazier's work: while the photographs capture the very personal conditions and experiences of her subjects, the investigation of violence and injustice does not end at the limit of the familial circle. The economy of Frazier's words and images leave no doubt about how the forces of deindustrialization, neoliberal disposability, racial and gender violence, and environmental injustice converge in debilitating ways.

### *gendered and racialized biopolitics of reproduction*

Important to understanding Frazier's photographic analysis of these interlocking social and economic mechanisms is a return to the examination of how neoliberalism produces a specific type of biopolitics, one defined by disposability that merges the maximization of certain lives with the extinguishing of others. Frazier's work is located within a neoliberal political

conjuncture that frames women—especially poor women, women of color, and individuals who

are gender nonconforming—as dangerous to white, corporate supremacy[44]. Disposability

functions, in part, by rendering entire groups of people as *inimical* to safety, health, and

prosperity, and thus makes these populations available for disposal, mistreatment, and

exploitation in the name of social progress. In post 9-11 United States, foreign or racialized

women are placed in the symbolic center of the threat against American stability—as Sokthan

Yeng points out in *The Biopolitics of Race: State Racism and U.S. Immigratio*n, immigration

controls specifically target women. They are viewed as a threat to social resources (as a potential

drain) and to the white supremacy (via the "browning" of America), through what Yeng calls

"dangerous sexuality," locating the racialized female body as the site and source of social ills

(125-126). While Yeng focuses on immigration policy, her analysis is applicable to the

biopolitical control of women who already reside within the US, many as citizens.

This gendered biocontrol is not new, however it has been honed in unique ways under

neoliberal rule in the last 40 years. Concurrent with the era that Frazier grew up in, the War on

Drugs enacted by Ronald Reagan and amplified under Bill Clinton advanced narratives about

rampant criminality in communities of color, underpinned by a "demographic alarmism" about

the fertility of women, particularly women of color (Hendrixson 240). While young men of color

were classified as "superpredators"—animalistic, unfeeling criminals—young women were

pathologized for their fertility and reproductive potential, and viewed as a "source of social

pollution and pathology," suggesting that pregnancy in young women of color "is by definition

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[44] Assata Shakur is a prime example of a racialized woman characterized as a mortal threat to the neoliberal social order. In 2013 she became the first woman to be added to the FBI's most wanted terrorist list (Porter), an action that demands scrutiny of the process by which her charges were belatedly redefined as terrorism. Her portrayal as a terrorist, years after her conviction by an all-white jury and her subsequent escape from prison to political asylum in Cuba, is shaped in large part by post 9-11 discourses that justify militarization and securitization through the manufacture of an "all-embracing collective fear" or "moral panic" (Davis, *The Meaning* 71).

incorrigible; by definition, a threat to national prosperity; by definition, in need of containment" (Hartouni 109).[45] The public discussion in the 1990s and early 2000s about a teen pregnancy 'epidemic' was a coded way to talk about teen motherhood, specifically, young working class mothers of color, without addressing race or class explicitly (Hendrixson 250; Luker 1996). Furthermore, it had little to do with the actual numbers of teen pregnancies, which were and continue to be on the decline (Tafuro 202), rather, these discourses were about access to birth control,[46] abortion, and—as the social state continued to be privatized—corporate and governmental fears about providing public support such as welfare, childcare, and subsidized healthcare. By capitalizing on the proliferation of racist stereotypes like the "welfare queen" (a trope fabricated by Reagan about hyper-fertile women of color exploiting federal assistance programs), neoliberal reform was championed in the name of eliminating fraud and ensuring public safety.

While such harmful stereotypes and narratives gained momentum and buttressed the social and economic policies under the Reagan and Bush presidencies, the biopolitics of neoliberal racism and misogyny was not limited to republican administrations. In 1996, Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, ending guaranteed federal funding to poor families, imposing capping measures that denied benefits for additional

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[45] Panic about demographics and overpopulation is generally not founded in statistics regarding population growth, but rather in prejudiced narratives about race, poverty, and the fertility of women of color, largely in the global South (Hartmann 260). What results is a discourse on women's health that toggles between the need for access to mechanisms for family planning and racially motivated biocontrol. Rather than focusing on developing policies that are pro-women, many discourses about international population control function as an extension of state control of poor women of color by mitigating their reproductive capabilities, and failing to focus on reform that would attend to general health, childcare, education, and concerns that are specific to culture and region (Hartmann 266). The alarmism about and criminalization of women of color's fertility harkens back to the 19th century eugenicist movement's influence on prison sentencing, in which women of color were given particularly long sentences, not necessarily contingent upon their crime, but as a mechanism that "sought to have 'genetically inferior' women removed from social circulation for as many of their child-bearing years as possible" (Lucia Zedner, quoted in Davis *Are Prisons Obsolete?* 72).

[46] Long-term provider controlled birth control was targeted specifically at poor women and women of color (Hendrixson 252-253).

children of mothers already on welfare, cutting poverty programs, offloading aid administration

to the state, and ushering in an era of stringent eligibility requirements for receiving aid,

including "workfare" requirements and lifetime limits (Hartmann 275). Many states also

imposed harsh limits that applied to those—most often women—relying on aid to care for the

children of incarcerated family members (Law, *Resistance* 165). These reforms were designed to

operate in concert with harsher drug sentencing and mandatory minimums that were introduced

under the War on Drugs and that served to usher in the era of mass incarceration and

skyrocketing trends of women's incarceration. The 1990s saw a 108% increase of women in

prison and jail along with a 53% reduction of people on welfare (Law, *Resistance* 165).

Such policies are intentionally punitive, punishing women of color and poor women for

having children, not providing resources to care for and educate those children, and furthermore,

enacting mechanisms that move those children through education systems that both resemble

prisons and funnel youth into them (Giroux, *America's Education* 54). According to the 2015 US

census, women are 35% more likely to live in poverty than men, with women's poverty rate

reaching 14.2% (US Census, "Poverty Rates"). Single mothers are at the highest risk of poverty,

with 35% of single mothers living in poverty with their children, and women and children

account for 70% of the US's poor ("Women and Poverty"). More than 80% of single parents are

single mothers (US Census, "Family Groups" Table FG10) and single mother households are

80% more likely to be in poverty than single father households and almost five times as likely

than families with two parents ("National").

While these statistics are an undercurrent in Frazier's work, they do not define it. The

narrative and visual arcs reveal poverty, single mother households, illness, and addiction, but

Frazier refuses to contribute to stereotypes about women and poverty—instead she wants to

communicate a reality that is often missed or ignored. She writes: "My work is much larger than a black girl making images about drug addiction… My mom is not some fragile lady hanging out on a corner with her cheeks sunk in. She's this woman in her kitschy bedroom where she obviously loves cats. She's got this figurine of Jesus Christ and these angels. All these things that people assume, if you're a black woman living below the poverty line and you've had a history of substance abuse, that you wouldn't have" (quoted in Meraji). Frazier spent her first few years in a housing project that was demolished in 1990 after tenants filed a housing discrimination lawsuit (*Notion* 37). She was raised primarily by her Grandma Ruby, who decorated her house with dolls and treasured possessions, which Frazier called a "firewall" against the outside world, poverty, and decline (*Notion* 14). Frazier's images and narratives communicate hardship without pathologizing the individual—she manages to strike a delicate balance between intimacy and the structural forces at work.

Under policies that punish and hobble already vulnerable populations, the politics of disposability affect women in particularly pernicious ways, functioning on the one hand through its control of futurity and reproduction, and on the other withdrawing the resources necessary to survive in the face of extreme neglect, poverty, injustice, and the dismantling of communities. Once disabled by economic injustice and the evisceration of support structures, women also become increasingly vulnerable to addiction, sexual abuse, and assault, with little recourse, in part because of biases in the criminal justice system (Covington and Bloom 2-4; Griffiths 196). Similarly, the sexualization of women of color positions them as available for abuse and sexual assault, both in the wider community and within the prison system, making them vulnerable to the intersection of biopolitical power and disciplinary power.

The conundrum of such gendered policies is that they exist within a culture that appears to advocate for women and children: "women and children first" policies and discourses exist according to "a logic of paternalistic treatment of women and children that purports to protect them but almost always also disempowers them and sometimes harms them" (DiQuinzio and Meagher 1). This double bind of policies identified by Patrice DiQuinzio and Sharon Meagher as a "predator/protector" relationship operates under a paternalistic logic that often forces women into compromised and subordinate positions (2).[47] For example, in the 1990s the racialized prosecution of crack use and an intensifying neoconservative interest in fetal rights converged to target Black pregnant crack users. It was socially acceptable to prosecute these mothers in particular, despite the fact that drug use during pregnancy is prevalent across racial and socioeconomic strata. As Dorothy Roberts writes, "society is much more willing to condone the punishment of poor Black women who fail to meet the middle-class ideal of motherhood" (178-9). By claiming an interest in fetal health (while neglecting the interests of the mother), it was possible to position racially motivated policing in a socially favorable light. The individualizing neoliberal logic blames ill health and poverty on individuals' pathological behavior rather than on the structural mechanisms that deny populations the resources necessary for survival, which in the case of these mothers, "shifts public attention from poverty, racism, and a deficient health care system, implying instead that poor infant health results from the depraved behavior of individual mothers" (Roberts 179).

Such policies target women that deviate from the 'ideal' expression of cis, middle class, and white womanhood (Silliman xii). This ideal extends from a social norm to a symbolic

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[47] This cloaking of such harmful policies is evident both in what Henry Giroux has correctly identified as a war on youth (*America's Education*) as well as in state legislature claiming to "protect women" through measures such as restricting abortion providers to such degrees that they are forced to close their doors, leaving many women without reproductive care or the option of safe termination for unwanted pregnancies, or in instances where "fetal harm" laws most often target pregnant women (Annapregada; Scheller).

representation of the national body, and deviations from this 'norm' are perceived as

sociopolitical threats and criminalized. The "predator/protector" relationship in turn rationalizes

that recipients must be managed and administered as means to protect them from their own self-

destruction (cycles of poverty, crime, hyper-fertility, etc.). Furthermore, using this model of

womanhood to symbolize the national body—whose preservation requires both defense and

violence—does two things simultaneously. First, it sets apart already-marginalized subjects—

people of color, immigrants, Muslims, gender-nonconforming and LGBTQ individuals, the

poor—as potential threats to the integrity of the nation and acceptable womanhood. Second, it

uses the figure of the woman as a cloak for neoconservative and neofascist public policy that

actually endanger the civil and physical rights of women: "their agency, choice, and rights of

these women do not matter as much as their moral status as 'gate-keeper' to the race or

community"[48] (Black).

### intergenerational, feminist documentary

As Roberts pointed out in the late 1990s, Black women are blamed for embodying and

reproducing social ills through childbearing. She reminds readers of the coerced sterilization

campaigns of the 1970s, and the juxtaposition of criminalization of Black reproduction[49]

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[48] This metaphor plays out, for example, through the racist stereotype of the hyper-sexualized black male predator brutalizing innocent and helpless white women. The very real consequences of such propaganda have recently come to the fore as Carolyn Bryant Donham, the white woman who accused 14-year old Emmett Till of harassment—an accusation that lead to his brutal murder—revealed that she had fabricated her testimony.

[49] A central problem that emerges in reproductive rights discourse on the left ('my body, my choice') is that it "is rooted in the neoliberal tradition that locates individual rights at its core, and treats the individual's control over her body as central to liberty and freedom. This emphasis on individual choice, however, obscures the social context in which individuals make choices, and discounts the ways in which the state regulates populations, disciplines individual bodies, and exercises control over sexuality, gender and reproduction" (Silliman xi). This is a key observation because the spectrum of control over one's body (from access to birth control, abortion, healthcare, etc. to incarceration with little to no autonomous rights or control) is contingent upon a system that places particular bodies along that spectrum, and, as Jael Silliman points out, a discourse that fixates exclusively on individuals' choices discounts the ways in which choice is tethered to the biopolitical state and social apparatuses that govern sexuality, reproduction, life, illness, leisure, and death.

alongside the burgeoning fertility business for white middle class women (3-4). While Frazier grapples with the material and ideological fallout from policies of disposability and the War on Drugs, she also incisively addresses these symbolic, socio-visual dimensions of reproduction, particularly its legacy in communities of Black women.

Her work confronts the decades of damning narratives pathologizing the bodies and sexuality of Black women, blamed for "perpetuating social problems by transmitting defective genes, irreparable crack damage, and a deviant lifestyle to their children" (Roberts 3). In the portraits of herself and her mother—posing together or attending to their homes, families, and illnesses—Frazier reclaims their bodies while also offering them as evidence of the violence that politics of disposability mete out, showing that degradation and illness is forced *upon* women's bodies, not borne *of* them. Set against this biopolitical and discursive landscape, Frazier's work makes important interventions into the endemic precarity facing Black women and their portrayal in the public sphere.

The intergenerational aspect of Frazier's work, toggling between three generations of Braddock women, emerges out of her break with the objective pretenses of traditional documentary photography. Part of her ability to do so rests upon her artistic process itself: she de-emphasizes herself as an author by sharing that position of power with her mother. Frazier writes, "My position and role as daughter, photographer, and filmmaker transcends the objective practice in classic documentary, which has continuously undermined the Black family experience by avoiding our emotional and psychological realm" ("Statement"). By turning the lens on herself as well as on her mother, she implicates them in a photographic view that is at once devotional and critical, highlighting that her political subjectivity is inextricable from her political and photographic concerns.

By positioning intergenerationality at the center of her projects, Frazier constructs a moving center of women, enacting a collaboration in which her subjects are also authors. Her reconfiguration of the power triad—photographer, subject, audience—of traditional social documentary photography is such that her work retains the acuity of investigative projects but is at once reflexive and unabashedly subjective. Frazier credits the idea of intergenerational collaboration to Dorothea Lange's iconic 1936 portrait of Florence Owens Thompson and her children, *Migrant Mother*. In that portrait, Frazier saw a triangulated relationship between Lange, Thompson and her children, and the US government that framed and controlled the photographic project itself, creating a constellation that is typical of traditional documentary photography; that is, one that excludes the subject's voice and perspective (McLaughlin 4:30). As Frazier puts it, her own photographs of three generations of women are a response to the question, "what would Florence Owens Thompson's portraits look like, if she made them herself?" (McLaughlin 5:17). Her mother's authorship and participation is predicated on Frazier's insistence that her work contest the convention that only those with power and privilege make work about the marginalized ("Conversation" 153). Frazier's pointed and intentional upending of that long-established power dynamic in documentary photography is—as Laura Wexler notes (145)—a rearrangement of Rancière's distribution of the sensible, redefining "what is seen and what can be said about it… who has the ability to see and the talent to speak"[50] (Rancière, *Politics* 13).

Frazier's preoccupation with the intergenerational ties of women is intentionally cast against a backdrop of enduring intergenerational effects of violence against them. Beyond representation, her work highlights the ways that communities are fragmented and how traumas

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[50] Frazier says, "The mainstream narrative and story about Black women in our lives is completely distorted. And we've never been able to speak for ourselves; we've never been able to bring a visual representation that challenges the complexity of what our bodies have endured. We've simply had our voices and our stories completely negated, silenced, and omitted from history. So here we are, these invisible women. We're hidden, mysterious… if you deem them unworthy to be seen, that takes away their humanity" (McLaughlin 5:56).

are intergenerationally shared. Crucial to understanding how Frazier's work functions both as a critique of and as an alternative to state-sanctioned violence against women is an address of the interlocking phenomena of the War on Drugs, addiction, cycles of domestic abuse, and the incarceration of women. The policies of the 1990s, out of which Frazier's work is born, speak now to the intensification of biopolitical administration of women-identified subjects and their rapidly accelerating institutionalization. Furthermore, the prime position that Frazier bestows upon intergenerationality in her work is a deliberate move to draw attention to the ways in which this violence is not only exacted upon individuals, but how the repercussions move hereditarily through communities, in particular through women.

Frazier's series of overlapping portraits with her mother, in which they pose against an upturned mattress draped in blankets and sheets, also visualize the cord that tethers her to the women in her family. She makes no attempt to beautify or sentimentalize her familial bonds or the enduring but fraught relationships between herself and her mother:

> Mom is co-author, artist and subject. Our relationship only exists through a process of making images together. I see beauty in all her imperfections and abuse. Her drug addiction is secondary to our psychological connection. When we are capturing one another we meditate on our difference and sameness. The collaboration between my family and myself blurs the line between self-portraiture and social document. Utilizing photography and video to navigate dynamics of the roles we play complicates the usual classifications of functional and dysfunctional families. My work has a deep concern for the mother/ daughter relationship. Relentlessly documenting encounters with my mother and grandmother enables me to break unspoken intergenerational cycles ("Statement").

Frazier is making sense of her maternal relationship by photographing her mother and letting her mother photograph her: "it's my way of accepting you as you are and gaining back all that time we lost" (*Notion* 22). The two often appear together, side by side or overlapping, choreographed images that are about women conjoined in struggle, illness, and devotion ("unified in sickness, death, and our struggle to survive" [*Notion* 92]).

In *Momme (Shadow)*, 2008, Frazier's mother squarely faces the camera, chin lifted and gently jutting, gazing defiantly into the lens. Her tank top is stained, and her bra straps escape onto her shoulders, one strap twisted against her skin. Frazier stands behind her, her mother's body shielding her from the camera. Her eyes are averted, downcast. Behind the two women is a shadow cast against the bed sheet backdrop, constituting a third figure. The shadow seems to suggest the continuity of the matrilineal relationship—either gesturing towards Grandma Ruby, who would die the following year, or into the future at possible generations to come.

Also from the 2008 Momme Portrait Series is *Momme*: here we see Frazier's mother in profile, her eyes downcast, with Frazier behind her, facing and looking at the camera this time. We see half of Frazier's face and half of her mother's; the tips of their noses and lips overlap at the midline. Their features betray them as mother and daughter and their postures seem to facilitate the exploration of how they are connected—where one ends and the other begins. Beyond her genetic bonds, these images more broadly address of Frazier's tethers to her social history, and how that history shapes her own future. They are a means to explore how state violence translates generationally and compounds itself, but at the same time, how resilience and survival in the face of that is also a means of living—that for all of the attempts of social policy to rob populations of their humanity, she is refusing to relinquish hers, even if the lives of her family do not look like what discourses of white resilience suggest it should.

Her conscious reprioritization of autoreflexive subjectivity and the sharing of authorship also raises important questions about women's testimony and what Leigh Gilmore identifies as the chronic mistrust of women's speech about themselves and others within the public sphere, a pervasive skepticism that is imbricated in legacies of slavery and colonialism (2017). Frazier's insistence on the potency and value of her own voice and experience, and the voices and

perspectives of women in her family contest the legacies of doubt and discredit wrested upon women speaking publicly about their experiences. Not only does Frazier's work embody feminist research practices, but it emerges as a kind of feminist speech in itself, insisting on public space and authority as she calls existing regimes of power into question.

This emergent and resistant form of authority, politics, and representation also draws upon a continuum of women photographers—for example Elinor Carucci, Sally Mann, Carrie Mae Weems, and Nan Goldin—who root their labor in 'family album' projects that seek to unpack the bonds between women and the social and political roles that they are schooled, forced, coaxed, or shamed into and out of. Some of Frazier's portraits are reminiscent of the experimental work of Italian-Brazilian artist Anna Maria Maiolino, particularly her image *Por Um Fio (By a Thread)*, 1976. In the image, Maiolino, her mother, and her daughter sit side by side, connected by a string running from one woman's mouth to the next, appearing to connect the three generations. The three women gaze directly into the camera, unfazed, presenting their matrilineal genealogy. The visual and metaphorical themes are germane to Frazier's work—the tenuous tether between generations of women; the oral and visual power of autonarration; the viscerally subversive act of using one's own body in visual representation; and the breaking of the third wall as documentary subjects return the viewer's gaze. The power of Frazier's work is that it foregrounds the personal as a way to access the full range of political and public structures and pressures—not as a means of individualizing social issues. By making work that showcases her family, their bodies, stories, and interior lives, she manages to make work about a network much larger than them, concretizing the connection between the personal and the social, a connection neoliberal discourses continuously attempt to sever.

Like these other photographers, Frazier's intimate authority and the critical eye with which she regards herself and her subjects is imbued with both a hardness and a sensitivity, rendering her gaze at times indistinguishable from love. However, Frazier moves beyond an attempt to visualize an immediate family experience, focusing instead on dimensions of oppression, struggle, and solidarity. What sets her apart from her antecedents is that she transcends the photographic convention of showing power in the banal. Rather, her portrayal of injustice is present in the surgical scars rezoning the landscape of her mother's breast and in the heavy domestic silences as she and her mother sit in separate rooms, but it is also central in the public spectacle of the eviscerated UPMC hospital. While other family album projects succeed in communicating certain universalities of struggle, joy, and love, Frazier's work is a focused political project; it is an explicit indictment and simultaneously a testament to the enduring fight for justice.

### slow violence

Frazier's focus on the multigenerational family structure makes legible the pedagogy and futurity of her political concerns. She is acutely aware that systemic issues create ruptures and corruptions that are passed down as inherited trauma, and simultaneously, that the violence enacted on her community is a long and ongoing process, its wide scope difficult to prove or address. This relationship between the deep past and the future is theorized by Rob Nixon through what he calls "slow violence," a term associated with environmental injustice and its oft-ignored and differential fallout onto already marginalized and poor populations. What Frazier makes palpable in her own work is how this slow, unspectacular procession of ecological and biological degradation becomes a burden borne by working class populations while the

indifferent and unregulated corporate entities retain immunity through geographical and temporal distance (Nixon 447). Frazier details how the industrial environment has compromised the health of those living in close proximity to the factories, and once ill, healthcare provisions for those living below the poverty line are denied or removed entirely. She writes, "Tired of waiting in emergency rooms and being told by UPMC doctors that her migraines, chest pains, seizures, and shortness of breath are psychological, Mom stays inside. She has become a prisoner in her home" (*Notion* 46). Many of the portraits of Grandma Ruby, her mother, and herself were taken over the course of several years, which Frazier describes as repeated cycles of illness and healing, an effort to document their illnesses (Meraji). On one page she lists several chemicals for which the Environmental Protection Agency has cited US Steel Corp. for emitting. The list includes tetrachloroethylene and benzene, about which Frazier writes:

> Tetrachloroethylene, a colorless organic liquid with a mild chloroform-like odor, can be found in our drinking water. With many years of exposure it increases risks of cancer. Areas of heavy traffic, gas stations, and areas near industrial sources may also have high levels of benzene, a colorless, flammable liquid known to cause cancer. Occupational exposure that also includes asbestos, metals, and UV radiation create risk factors for autoimmunity illnesses such as lupus (*Notion* 56).

Frazier's Grandma Ruby died of cancer in 2009; her mother struggles with cancer and other undiagnosed illnesses; and Frazier suffers from lupus.

A few pages before the list of chemicals is the image *Grandma Ruby, Mom, and Me* (2002). Grandma Ruby and Frazier's mother sit on adjacent sofas, facing the center of the room. The curtains are drawn and a soft light illuminates both figures. Two baby pictures and two other portraits hang framed on the wall above the women. Grandma Ruby wears sweat pants and sneakers and sits slumped against the cushions; her right ankle resting on her opposite knee, and her left arm draped over the end of the couch. Frazier's mother sits pitched forward on her sofa, her head resting heavily in her right hand. Her left shoulder escapes from the holes in her t-shirt.

At her feet, framed by her crossed, bare ankles, are six prescription bottles, one laying on its side. Both women appear to gaze solemnly towards the center of the room, perhaps towards the camera, but the shadows on their faces makes it difficult to tell. Frazier's mother's brow is furrowed; her exhaustion palpable. Frazier is unpictured, but the inclusion of "Me" in the title reveals her subjective entanglements with and presence in the images, even when she remains behind the camera.

Not only are the ill effects of slow violence physical, but also bureaucratic; in Braddock, the sufferers have inherited environmental catastrophes that do not read as emergencies, contributing to the citizens' low visibility and undermining their access to care and chances of survival. Frazier is also acutely aware of how the sufferers of environmental damage are temporally incarcerated—bound to both past and future through "the metamorphoses wrought by toxicity, the pursuit of social justice, and their collective relationship to apocalyptic time" (Nixon 454), trapping her community in bureaucratic impasses that underwrite institutional inaction.

While Frazier directly addresses environmental violence and racism, the slow violence her work makes legible is also ideological and affective; she imbues her subjects' stories with the weightiness of their own histories as well as the legacies of the policies and injustices exacted upon them. Her patience and long investments in her projects reveal a sense of elongated time, not only in the years that her project spans—now half her life—but in the ways that her photographs reach into the deep past through her subjects' heritage and insistently press against the future—her photographs might be characterized as much by sense of futurity as they are by their keen ability to articulate a specific contemporary moment. Frazier recalls that as a young photographer, she could not yet express the sense of injustice in the poverty that her family

experienced, but felt that photographing her life "was one step closer to removing what I can only describe as an intangible slow deterioration of my family" ("Conversation" 152).

The narrative path of this slow deterioration begins with her as a teenager, and moves through images of illness and isolation, physical degradation both architectural and human. In one portrait, *Grandma Ruby and Me*, 2005, she re-animates her own childhood in a semi-posed photograph with her grandmother, her hair in the same braids her grandmother used to do for her. They sit on the floor together, surrounded by her Grandma Ruby's doll collection, both staring into the camera, the shutter release cable coiling around the far side of Frazier's body and into her right hand. This restaging is part of Frazier's research process—at once faithful documentary and experimentation—to understand her own history, family lineage, and three generations of trauma. In the photograph, Frazier is twenty-three but looks like she could be ten years younger. This image allows her to reinhabit and examine her own history, and inspires in the viewer an acute awareness of photography's slick temporal mutability. Frazier's photographs move chronologically, through her family's illnesses, Grandma Ruby's death, her mother's surgeries, and the destruction of UPMC Braddock.

The undercurrent of the narrative arc is the tension that Frazier's approach lends to the images: they move swiftly between exterior and interior scenes—'straight' documentary and artistic, experimental work that recalls Francesca Woodman, particularly in her set of long-exposure self portraits from her HomeBody series (2010). In the images, Frazier is in an empty room, alternately draped in a blanket or otherwise partially obscured; her face blurred as she moves her head during the exposure, or her head tucked down as she crawls on the floor, her back to the camera. She explores this relationship between the body and the materiality of the environment—much as she did in *Epilepsy Test*—folding into herself, leaning against the peeling

wallpaper and crumbling plaster, pressing her hands and knees into the floor. These images, in their seriality, operate as proofs or tests in which Frazier explores where she and her environment overlap, how they create and define one another, and where they diverge. The photographs feel very much like problem solving, a working through and out—or "problem sets," as Woodman called her own images—that Frazier conducts between herself as photographer, herself and her family as subjects, and the camera as the intermediary. Frazier's work on intergenerational aspects of state violence lays the groundwork for a critical understanding of women's incarceration and its catastrophic effects on women and their communities.

**Feminist research inside the prison: Jane Evelyn Atwood**

While Frazier's work provides an examination of the environment that cultivates and houses the prison-industrial complex, photographers like Jane Evelyn Atwood document women's incarceration from within the prison institutions themselves, shedding light on an under-discussed and misunderstood sociopolitical phenomenon. There are currently over 215,000 incarcerated women in the US, with 1.2 million women under the supervision of the criminal justice system, including probation and parole ("Facts"; "Incarcerated"). In other words, women in the US constitute 5% of the world's female population but 33% of the world's female incarcerated individuals, higher than the global percentage for all incarcerated individuals in the US, which is currently at 25% (Bahadur; Law, "U.S. Prisons"; Ptacin). US incarcerated women is the fastest growing carceral population—increasing 800% from 1980-2014, (from 26,000 to 215,000)—and while there are more incarcerated men than women, the female population is growing at nearly twice the rate of that of the male population despite no increase in crime rate or women's criminality (Bloom and Covington 1; "Incarcerated").

The surge in incarcerated women since the 1980s is in large part a direct result of Reagan and Clinton's War on Drugs' drug sentencing and social welfare reform. Operating hand in hand with the criminalization of expressions of womanhood and motherhood that deviate from white patriarchal state ideals, drug-sentencing laws have had a disparate impact on women, particularly poor women of color. Between 66 and 80% of women are incarcerated for nonviolent offenses (contrasted with around 50% for men), and the majority of all women's offenses are drug related[51] ("Facts"; "Women in the Criminal"). Mandatory minimums for drug-related offenses, changes in policing to target neighborhoods of color,[52] and conspiracy laws that target nonviolent and marginally involved offenders have all contributed to surges in incarceration rates among women (Gaskins 1533). The threat of mandatory minimums encourages charged individuals to accept plea deals rather than risk trial, and because women are typically more peripherally involved in the drug trade and lack significant information to trade for more lenient sentencing, they often end up with longer sentences than more centrally involved men (Atwood 28; "Changing"; Gaskins 1534; Young and Reviere 5, 76).

Gender intersects with race and class to delineate a particularly vulnerable section of the population, one that is increasingly criminalized, in part for its reproductive capabilities, but also, and nefariously, for defying gender roles (Talvi 12, Law, *Resistance* 205). Historically, women

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[51] Drug use in the US is overwhelmingly treated as a criminal issue rather than as a public health issue, and treatment resources are largely inaccessible for various reasons: they are either prohibitively expensive, or if subsidized, resources are difficult to access because of inadequate supply and long wait periods (Talvi 25). Even more significantly, drug use is often used as a scapegoat for social woes, blaming working class and racialized Americans who suffer from the evisceration of their access to education, health resources, job assistance, welfare, housing assistance, and food programs.

[52] The racial disparity of drug related arrests and convictions is historically linked to differentiated sentencing for crack and cocaine—imposing harsher sentences on crack users and unfairly targeting low-income users ("Fair"). In 2010, Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act, reducing the sentencing disparity of crack to cocaine from 1:100 to 1:18 (meaning now the possession of 1 gram of crack carries the same sentence for 18—rather than 100—grams of cocaine), an improvement but still a compromise ("Fair"). Cocaine use is a more widespread problem than crack use, and there are far more white users of both crack and cocaine than Black users ("Results" tables 1.29A and 1.34A).

were incarcerated for behavior deemed to be unfeminine, behaviors for which men were not penalized (Law, *Resistance* 162). Women who defy gender roles—for example by using sexuality in an unsanctioned way (i.e. as a sex worker) or by exhibiting criminal behavior thought to be masculine—are more severely punished for their assumed pathology and danger than men (Talvi 12). These essentialist narratives about women's nature and the deviance from it were popularized in 19th-century studies of women's criminality, most notably by Italian sociologists Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero who concluded that there were biological markers for criminality and prostitution (Griffiths 192). The result of such enduring and persistent narratives is that while masculine criminality is normalized, feminine criminality continues to be regarded as a sign of deep pathology and women under state punishment are seen as "far more threatening to society than their male counterparts" (Davis *Are Prisons Obsolete?* 66). By establishing gender as a precedent for punitive control, the assignation of criminality is a means by which the behavior of women is vulnerable to persistent scrutiny and discipline. As a result, incarceration has historically been used to control gender behavior, both through prison rules and sometimes by organizing individuals into separate, more punitive spaces (Law, *Resistance* 205).

The complexity of visualizing the way that such crime policies have been shaped by gender biases demands bodies of work that draw together the historical and contextual conditions of incarceration and the experiences of individuals caught in institutions that administer state violence. Jane Evelyn Atwood's work sheds light on the booming business of women's incarceration in the 1990s, paying particular attention to these women at a time when no other photographers or scholars were focusing on them. When her research interests in the late 1980s revealed the emerging punitive incarceration trends that sent increasing numbers of women to

prison for longer sentences than men and mostly for non-violent offenses, Atwood began a decade-long international project that took her to 40 prisons, jails, and detention centers in nine countries (Atwood 11). Her project was motivated by wanting to explore why women ended up in prison, what kinds of femininity are criminalized, and what their experiences of incarceration were; although by the end of the project Atwood writes she was "propelled" predominantly by "rage" at the injustices she was uncovering (11).

Atwood's long-term work in the women's prison system imbues her project with the same kind of patience that informs Frazier's. Both photographers know that the structures of violence against women operate at various speeds—often swiftly in institutional settings, captured by Atwood's photographs of physically punitive force administered to women's bodies; or slowly as policies of economic abandonment and racial violence cripple communities' ability to sustain themselves. Atwood's project engages with research methods that, like Frazier's, trace their roots to feminist research methodologies. While her subject matter and her position as an institutional outsider is similar to an archive of documentary projects that predate her work—for example Danny Lyon's midcentury prison photography—her approach is markedly different. Atwood seems to take on board writer James Agee's intentional reflexivity from his 1930s project with photographer Walker Evans on southern sharecroppers.[53] Agee acknowledges that one's position as a documentarian is inevitably bound up in a complex power relation to their subject and as such can never attain the documentarian grail of objectivity. Rather, the work has to live in a liminal space of constructed truth and reality.

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[53] Published in 1941, James Agee and Walker Evan's book, *Now Let Us Praise Famous Men*, differs from other documentary projects that emerged at the same time, much of them commissioned by the federal government and the Roosevelt administration's reform initiatives. Agee's text functions less as an explicatory supplement to Walker's images, and more as a lyrical, novelistic work that serves to confuse the assumptions about truth, moral responsibility, and superiority embodied by many of the documentary projects of the time. Agee's text "defied the prevailing political rhetoric, challenged benevolent assumptions about reform and prompted moral inquiry about the relationship between benefactors and the people they sought to serve" (Mayer).

Atwood takes Agee's concession about objectivity and his sensitivity to power structures even further. While never able to be an insider of the world she was photographing, she made attempts to stay with the women inside the prisons whenever possible to at the very least trouble the sharp divide between insider and outsider. Her work is decidedly not visual autorepresentation; however, Atwood collaborated with her subjects, including extensive interviews and written autobiographical accounts of the women. Her decision to prioritize the visibility of her own position and the first-person perspectives of the women suggests her awareness of entering into an environment characterized by an extreme power imbalance and pointing a camera at individuals who are vulnerable, compromised, and unable to share in that authorship. It is important to acknowledge that Atwood's work does not transcend the problems of documentary tradition, however, it is a body of work that consciously dwells in the intermediate space of subjectivity and collaborative constructions of truth, and actively questions her own visual perspectives.

Both Atwood's and Frazier's central uses of text speak to Susan Sontag's own preoccupations with the place of text and photography. Sontag fluctuated regarding the ability of images to provoke a moral intervention (*Regarding* 105), and insisted—despite her deep love of photographs—that text was crucial to communicating atrocity and engendering a sense of opposition. She writes: "A narrative seems likely to be more effective than an image. Partly it is a question of the length of time one is obliged to look, to feel. No photograph or portfolio of photographs can unfold, go further, and further still…" (*Regarding* 122). Although Sontag is speaking of antiwar images, and seems to make an exception for Jeff Wall's 1992 image *Dead Troops Talk*, her unease with the desire to supplant image for text—is distilled both in Atwood and Frazier's work. Both photographers have created compelling and powerful bodies of work

that could be argued undermine Sontag's skepticism, creating images that are complex and imbued with historical and formal references while also maintaining an affective tension that denies the viewer reprieve from the political contexts from which they emerge. However, both photographers also insist on coupling their images with text, privileging both; texts accompany rather than caption images. Atwood's work is interview-heavy, relying on first person, subjective, lived experiences and narratives to shed light and perspective on crisis; her texts appear in the subjects' own words, in order to protect against outsider-determined narratives. Frazier's approach is subtler, as she already occupies an insider position: her texts are both poetic and contextually descriptive.

Despite the fact that some of her images and the accompanying texts now date back almost thirty years, Atwood's work continues to be crucial to studies on incarcerated women. While her images visualize a system that consumes American poor and racialized women at alarming rates, the fact that the scope of her oeuvre is unparalleled almost twenty years after completion is an indictment of the persistent invisibility of women's incarceration. Because of this significant delay in the discourse on women's incarceration, scholarship requires updated visual materials that furnish that discourse with some accuracy and insight into the issue as well as images that engage with nuance and the political quandaries of representation. Atwood's work grants some such insight into prison systems, but what might at first look to be a fidelity to traditional photojournalist approaches and aesthetics reveals, upon further investigation, an aversion to clinical representation that operates as visual resistance to the very institutions that she is documenting, as I make clear in the following section.

### *modernist optics of the prison*

Formally and aesthetically Atwood departs from the social documentary genre that often tried to collate as much clear and unambiguous detail as possible into the photographs. Her images are often grainy and gritty, blurred by movement and low light. Some of her photographs have the same hazy quality of pinhole photography, more artistic than evidentiary.[54] She seems to be forecasting the widening of documentary photography in that she recognizes the importance of treading the line between documentary as a faithful rendering of facts and her role as interpreter—a tension that remains at the forefront of debates on photojournalism.[55] She catches women and prison guards in action, in a blur of hair, limbs, and clothes; most often the movement in her images highlight the physical violence and force the women's bodies are made to endure. Atwood dwells on the body as the contested space of intimate and institutional administration and as the recipient of violence conceptualized as 'correction.' Her work holds the tension between the physical bodies of incarcerated women and the metaphorical, national body that their incarceration is meant to defend.

Aesthetically, Atwood's photographs are organized by three major photographic mechanisms that implicate her in and complicate the photographer's relationship to the power structure of documentary prison work. First, the physical geometry of the prison operates as a visually thematic thread that runs through the project. Physical barriers of the architecture mark most images; bars, barbed wire, cinderblock walls, chain link fences, or photographs of women in cells taken through a slot or peephole in the door. While the repetition of visual themes in Atwood's work suggests cliché— the overuse of which Pete Brook has identified as the vehicle

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[54] Atwood's images testify to the conditions of imprisonment in a way that recalls Agamben's discussion of the witness, in which he suggests that witness testimony is in excess of the recollection and communication of historical facts; that testifying is also a responsibility or duty to the truth of experience or of suffering (*Remnants of Auschwitz* 2002). This experiential focus is foregrounded in much of Atwood's work.
[55] Consider, for example, the 2015 World Press Photo controversy discussed in Chapter 1.

of compassion fatigue in much prison photography ("Pinhole Photography")—in Atwood's work

it tends more towards formal pattern than indexical cue. Her images rely on modernist

preoccupations with light—manifest in the shadow of bars, wire, fences, etc.—that serve to reify

as well as to abstract those architectural and perspectival conventions. The use of shadow as an

architectural element suggests the pervasive force of the prison: even in moments that might

seem removed from the obvious markers of imprisonment, the shadow serves as a not-so-gentle

reminder that the women are never out from under administration and surveillance.[56]

Second, Atwood's project is heavily informed by the photographic family album genre of

documentary, most notably Nan Goldin's *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1986). Despite

Atwood's efforts to ameliorate the power inequities inherent in her project, the fact remains that

she is not part of this 'family.' However, aesthetically her project is organized according to a

visual solidarity with the women that constitute both the forced family of the wider prison

population and the intentional networks they forge therein. The revelatory intimacy of the

photographs sutures together the normalcy of these women's daily life and the exceptionality of

their condition vis-à-vis the rest of society—again reminiscent of both Goldin and Diane Arbus

(to whom Atwood credits inspiration) as documentarians of the fringe. The often painful and

discomfiting intimacy is due to the circumstances of the women—the abuse, addiction, isolation,

and oppression—as well as their palpable endurance, sisterhood, and compassion. This tension

provokes in the viewer a sense of voyeuristic unease and a simultaneous recognition that these

women are themselves not exceptional in terms of criminality or delinquency. The images and

narratives also reveal a particular solidarity the women feel towards one another. For example,

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[56] Despite Atwood's thoughtful engagement with these themes, the repetition of these visual elements does suggest a potential weakness in her oeuvre. However, it is necessary to view her work within the continuum of prison photography and understand its contribution to the genre and to possible resistant and alternative approaches to documentary work.

one individual on death row agreed to be photographed anonymously only because she "thought it might help other women" (Atwood 179).

Third, Atwood draws heavily on her formal and aesthetic photographic antecedents, implicating her work in an artistic project that privileges the experiential truth of herself and her subjects over a commitment to photographic objectivity, complicating the purpose of the traditional documentary project. There is a heavy early-mid 20th century modernist influence in her work, in particular the photography of Russian constructivist Alexander Rodchenko and Hungarian Bauhaus artist László Moholy-Nagy. Rodchenko and Moholy-Nagy championed aesthetic movements that understood the image as formally constructed rather than as simply capturing reality, and as a social tool that utilized the technologies and aesthetics of the era in order to reimagine and reconstruct society. Moreover, Moholy-Nagy was a staunch advocate of photography as a fine art, insisting on its subjective and formal qualities above its documentary abilities. Beyond the visual markers of the constructivist and modernist influence—the preoccupation with light and shadow, strong contrasts, linear abstraction, and a flattening the visual plane—the marriage of social documentary and artistic practice is evident in Atwood's work, as is the history of utilizing a visual means not simply as evidence but in an aesthetic attempt to rebuild our relationship to the social world.

Atwood's *Prisoner in the Prison Workshop*, Maison D'Arret de Femmes, "Les Baumettes," Marseilles, France 1991 is a stylistic descendent of Moholy-Nagy's *Head (Lucia)*, 1926 and Rodchenko's *Girl with a Leica*, 1934. The geometric patterns of light and shadow cast across the three women are characteristic of formal mechanisms of abstraction that reveal the photographers' fascinations with social and technological construction; however they also suggest—particularly in Atwood's case—the imminent and ever-present body of the state levied

onto the body of the woman. While the repetition of shadow might operate as prison-photography cliché, it is not reducible to a cheap visual trope; it also ties Atwood's work to the discourse of documentary and art photography, entrenching it in the liminal space between the two, and forcing the viewer to attend to testaments of imprisonment from entry points that range from aesthetic to evidentiary. Although the aesthetics and formal organization of Atwood's work comprise much of its impact as a commentary both on incarceration and on the role of documentary photography, the content of the images and narratives remain central. A recurrent theme in Atwood's images and the women's narratives is the ubiquitous role of abuse in women's incarceration.

### *female incarceration and abuse*

Several of the narratives in *Too Much Time* reveal histories of abuse, addiction, and poverty. "Jill," an accreditation manager interviewed by Atwood writes: "First you have to understand that even the violent offenders aren't violent… women kill people who are hurting them or their children—almost 100 percent of the time. In the ten and a half years I've worked with these women, I've seen only three who hurt somebody who wasn't really close to them" (26). The expansive scope of Atwood's documentary project illuminates the consistent role of abuse in women's incarceration, and gesture towards the underlying structural conditions that usher victims of abuse into the prison system.

On the preceding page appears an image of two male corrections officers struggling with a half-naked woman. The image is blurry, betraying the movement between the three bodies. The caption indicates that the officers are stripping the woman after a suicide attempt. One officer is near her head, holding her arms, and her face is partially obscured behind his elbow. What

remains visible shows strain in her face, the tendons of her neck pulling taught, the corner of her mouth twisted down. The sequencing of this image is no accident; the violence of the photograph lingers amid the words of the following pages. Although its caption explains the particular situation, the treatment of incarcerated women often compounds the violence that they experienced on the outside. Most women in prison come from violent and abusive backgrounds—between 85 and 90% of women sentenced to life without parole have a history of abuse (Pishko; Swavola et al.). The sexual abuse- or trauma–to–prison pipeline for girls and women runs parallel to and intersects the school-to-prison pipeline that channels youth into the prison system. Over 80% of girls in juvenile detention have experienced sexual or physical abuse (Saar et al. 7); one in four American girls experience sexual violence before the age of 18 (Saar et al. 5); and a history of physical and sexual abuse is a prime indicator for future incarceration.[57] Girls' and women's trauma is compounded by a juvenile system and carceral environment that repeats and intensifies trauma, housed in institutions that are ill-equipped with little to no programming in place to rehabilitate abuse victims or facilitate healing. The funneling of girls into the prison system from a young age impacts later outcomes for women who remain in the prison system, and directly affects rates of recidivism, especially for women of color, poor women, and women who have a history of abuse (Talvi xiv). While neoliberal social policies dovetail with drug enforcement to produce a continuous supply of disposable populations, the enduring and intensifying neoliberal masculinity that is predicated on control and access to women's bodies contributes to the prison-industrial complex in overlapping ways.

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[57] Girls who have been abused are overwhelmingly criminalized and incarcerated for crimes in which they are victims, such as prostitution, truancy, or running away from homes in which abuse occurs (Saar et al. 5). The criminalization of this behavior is compounded by race, with higher rates of arrest and incarceration for Black, Native American, and Latina girls. Common reactions to trauma (such as truancy, substance abuse, mental health issues, etc.) are criminalized "and exacerbated by involvement in the juvenile justice system, leading to a cycle of abuse and imprisonment" (Saar et al. 13).

The inextricable link between patriarchal disposability, abuse, and the carceral system is distilled in the cases where victims of abuse kill their partners. Women get longer sentences (average 15 years) for killing their intimate partner than men do (average 2-6 years) (Michigan Ch. 1 sec. C1). The justice system pathologizes women who commit acts of violence[58] and neglects the consideration of the many ways in which women react to trauma, shaped by a variety of factors beyond the abuse itself: economic, social, access to social support, housing, previous experiences of gender discrimination, etc. The legality of killing in self-defense in the US does not stand for most women who face criminal charges, resulting in a 75-80% conviction rate for women who do so (Jacobsen). This is thanks to endemic ignorance and indifference to domestic abuse in judicial and police systems, systems that continue to be male-dominated and traffic in disproven assumptions about victimhood, false accusations, and normalized reactions to abuse. Although it is estimated that 40-80% (Jacobsen) of women charged with murder are imprisoned for defending themselves against an abuser, there is no official count. No agencies track these numbers, and neither prisons nor courts maintain such records (Law, "How Many").[59]

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[58] Despite the fact that the majority of women charged with violent crimes have histories of abuse, introducing evidence of abuse into criminal murder trials of female defendants is particularly difficult for several reasons. First, it encourages juries and judges to craft an idea of the 'perfect victim,' against which most defendants are found wanting. Judges continue to wrongfully disallow evidence of battery in such court cases, although it was established as permissible in 1992 People v. Geraldine Wilson (Jacobsen). Often, attorneys do not produce experts to testify or the evidence of abuse is misinterpreted (Pishko). Many women are discouraged from mentioning the abuse at all, as it can be construed as motive. Using Battered Woman Syndrome (BWS) as part of the defense means admitting to murder, and if they cannot prove self-defense or imminent threat then the defendant is found guilty on all counts (Moscatello). As Sally J. Scholz points out, BWS is problematic because it can contribute to liberal, isolationist interpretations of women's subjectivity that reduce it to individual biology, rendering the woman the pathological victim, while discounting other components of women's subjectivity and the social contexts of domestic violence (137).

[59] Victoria Law writes: "The U.S. Department of Justice has some data on intimate partner violence, but not about how often this violence is a significant factor in the woman's incarceration. In California, a prison study found that 93 percent of the women who had killed their significant others had been abused by them. That study found that 67 percent of those women reported that they had been attempting to protect themselves or their children when they wound up killing their partner. In New York State, 67 percent of women sent to prison for killing someone close to them were abused by that person. But these are just two specific studies; no governmental agency collects data on how frequently abuse plays a direct role to prison nationwide" ("How Many"). Despite statistics that indicate a high percentage of girls in the juvenile justice system have experienced abuse, there is a dearth of information about girls involved in homicides out of self-defense: those numbers have not been updated since a 1992 study, which found

The matrix of abuse, criminalization, and marginalized women becomes further complicated and dangerous for mothers. 80% of incarcerated women are mothers; over 60% have a child under the age of 18 ("Facts"; "Incarcerated"). Not only are particular types of motherhood criminalized, but mothers are also subject to punitive and misogynistic standards, even in the face of male violence. For example, under 'failure to protect laws,' abused women often end up with longer sentences than their abusers who harm or kill their children (Campbell; Figueroa; Hess). Men rarely bear the brunt of these laws in the roughly 30% of child abuse cases perpetrated by women (Campbell; Fugate 274).

Atwood's images betray how the realities of incarceration for women, women-identified, and gender nonconforming individuals are significantly different from the experiences of men. Her images and interviews reveal an overwhelming number of women who have been abused and who struggle with addiction—suggesting that incarceration serves as a catch-all for populations for whom alternatives are not made accessible. The lower numbers of violent women offenders are at odds with statistics about crime rates— research about criminality is based on male individuals specifically and masculinist epistemologies generally. Claims that policies and systems are "gender-neutral" mean they are geared towards men in the same way that "race-neutral" tends to mean white (Bloom and Covington 3). In addition, such inherent biases "do not account for the realities of women's lives… without accounting for gender, programs and practices drawn from studies about what works for men can have unintended negative consequences for the women who also experience these programs and practices" (Swavola et al 2). Because there are fewer alternatives to prison—such as treatment programs for addiction— available to women, especially low-income women, "once incarcerated, women must grapple

that "of the approximately 280 parental killings in 1990, approximately 90 percent involved children who had been victims of constant and severe abuse" (Law, "What Bresha").

with systems designed primarily for men. As a result, many leave jail with diminished prospects for physical and behavioral health recovery, as well as greater parental stress and financial instability" (Swavola et al. 13).

Late 20th-century prison reforms have been influenced more by liberalism than feminism; calls for parity between men and women's prisons generally resulted in the further oppression of women, rather than an expansion of educational and support programs. While reforms and equal protection litigation sought to ameliorate the historically inferior treatment of incarcerated women (Rafter 196), such reforms overwhelmingly won 'equality' for incarcerated women in terms of their ability to receive punitive treatment and violence, operating under the assumption that men's prisons constitute a model of the norm (Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* 75-76). What results is a "double punishment" of convicted women: in addition to sentencing, women are punished further by the injustices and hardships of a system not designed to fit their needs and instead intensifying already systemic violence (Young and Reviere 11).

One of Atwood's images from Central California Women's Facility, Chowchilla, 1995, shows a group of women lined up against a wall in a prison yard, watching two other women get patted down by two guards, one male and one female. The women in the photograph are new arrivals and therefore not yet dressed in the prison-issued uniform— some are in sweats, others in jeans; the woman receiving a pat-down closest to the camera is wearing a short striped dress, socks, and sandals. The ritual is at once humiliating and rote: the two women stand with their arms limply outstretched—imbuing the image at once with crucifixion iconography as well as with the specter of the "hooded man" torture photograph from Abu Ghraib that would be released nearly a decade later— while the guards touch their bodies in an uncontested display of power and access. Their audience waits along the wall in the shade, some of them watch, others

look away or fidget. The caption reads, "Male and female guards pat-search fifty-four new arrivals. Pat searches by male guards are forbidden, yet they occur" (Atwood 49). This image helps illustrate the contemporary feminist analyses that expanded upon the legacy of early 20th-century Progressive prison reform to assert that there are problems unique to incarcerated women, including male surveillance and assault, lack of specialized training, separation from children, inadequacy of health and reproductive care, and general sexism within the system (Freedman 156).

Writers and activists Angela Davis, Michelle Alexander, Victoria Law, Jonathan Simon, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore all detail how the racial and gender injustices of incarceration extend beyond the prison and speak to wider social violence: policy around formerly incarcerated citizens essentially strips them of their civic rights—for example through the loss of voting rights and the ineligibility for public provisions like food stamps, public housing, education loans, and business licenses (Alexander 94-95). This leaves hundreds of thousands of individuals in a state of suspended disposal; released from prison but unable to regain the freedoms and rights guaranteed by their citizenship, essentially occupying what Rancière identified as the "part which has no part" in the community (*Politics* 12-13) or what incarcerated Detroit native Lacino Hamilton calls the "permanent undercaste." This phenomenon is amplified for incarcerated mothers who, for example, must face punitive policies that often prevent reunification with their children (Law, "Double Punishment"). The brutality of a prison system that is ill-fitted to women's needs is underpinned by broader socioeconomic forces:

> The destructive combination of racism and misogyny, however much it has been
> challenged by social movements, scholarship, and art… retains all its awful consequences
> within women's prisons… The increasing evidence of a U.S. prison industrial complex
> with global resonances leads us to think about the extent to which the many corporations
> that have acquired an investment in the expansion of the prison system are, like the state,

directly implicate in an institution that perpetuates violence against women (Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* 83).

Davis' articulation of prisons as an integral part of a system designed to enact and amplify violence against women requires photographers and scholars to think differently about documentary work that attempts to visualize some reality or experience in women's prisons. While prisons are masculinist spaces, documentary projects are overwhelmingly masculinist endeavors: they tend to rely on the penetration of communities by an outside subject, the centrality of a male perspective assumed to be value-free or objective, and narratorial rather than collaborative or deauthorized production. As a result, such photographic interventions may compound the abuses and injustices that incarcerated women face by denying the women control, authorship, or agency in the process.

For all of its traditional documentary underpinnings, Atwood's long-term prison project makes significant moves to imbue documentary with feminist research practices. Her work takes on several related tasks at once: to show a largely unseen world of women's incarceration; to grapple with the artistic and thus narrative functions of documentary photography, providing a commentary on the production and uses of photography itself; and privileging text and first-person accounts alongside her images. While her project importantly illuminates these concerns that range from representational to epistemological, it falls short in its ability to upset tropes of visual representation. In other words, it does little to resist or shift the photographic power triad in the photographs themselves; they are still images of incarcerated individuals, often captured candidly and relying on the visual cues of incarceration, taken by an outsider photographer for a remote audience. A documentarian's ethical responsibility to upset this dynamic remains a subject of sustained debate; however, more recent projects such as Kristen S. Wilkins'

*Supplication* take that responsibility more centrally on board, reconfiguring not only the photographic power relationship, but also the genre of documentary work itself.

**Counter-documentary prison portraits: Kristen S. Wilkins**

Included in Pete Brook's exhibition *Prison Obscura* is Kristen S. Wilkins' work, *Supplication* (2011-2013).[60] A collaborative project with women incarcerated at the Montana State Penitentiary, *Supplication* was conceived as a counternarrative to the mugshots that frequently appeared in local Montana papers (Wilkins, "Supplication"). Unlike Frazier and Atwood, Wilkins does not directly address the wider social conditions that funnel these women into prison; she instead conducts a photographic exchange that addresses at once legacies of misrepresentation, photographic history, and the uses of photography within the prison context. The latter concern opens up a fascinating and charged investigation, one that must attend to photography as pedagogical—within prison and the broader culture—and the persistent power that photographs have, which may suggest something about why image making and proliferation is so tightly controlled within the prison context.

In the context of an already punitive climate, Montana's incarceration record of women is even more amplified than national averages: compared to the 800% increase in women's incarceration since 1980, Montana's has increased by 1,600% (Brook, *Prison Obscura* 17). Wilkins' large-scale formal portraits of incarcerated women include several Indigenous women, who experience a disproportionate intensification of the state violence and punitive policies. In Montana, Native American individuals comprise 6% of the population, but make up 20% of the prison population; Native American women represent 32% of Montana's incarcerated women, with an incarceration rate four times that of white individuals (Rincon). In addition, most crimes

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[60] This series can be viewed on the artist's website at www.kristenwilkins.com/supplication.

committed on US reservations are prosecuted at the Federal rather than state level, resulting in more severe sentencing (Flanagin). Wilkins couples her portraits with photographs of places or things that the women miss and describe. Beyond the research implications of its collaborative process, *Supplication* works to redistribute power in the photographic relationship by engaging with the histories of formal portraiture as well as the historical and quotidian uses of vernacular prison portraits.

Wilkins' portraits of the women are made with a large format camera and instant film, recalling the photographic processes of early 20th-century portraits. One consequence of this choice is that the materiality of the photographs conveys the importance, time, and tastes of the sitter. Formal photographic portraits in the early 20th century were the more accessible descendants of the previous centuries' painted portraits, which were expressions of the sitter's significant economic and social power. Painted portraits reached the height of their popularity in the 17th and 18th centuries as one of the most prominent declarations of class and worth. Photography democratized this elitist mode of representation to a great degree, and the formal portrait studio emerged as a space in which individuals could insist on parity and reverence before the camera. Several early 20th-century photographers, such as James Van Der Zee or Mike Disfarmer, began to focus on formal portraits, particularly within communities that were marginalized socially and economically. The representational veneration in these portraits documented "aspirations for upward mobility, equality, and inclusion" (Fleetwood 490).

Portraiture conventionally requires an anticipation of being seen, which implies self-consciousness. Women generally—and incarcerated women especially—live in a highly mediated environment marked by continuous surveillance, punctuating their lives with an awareness of being seen and being watched, with incarcerated women holding little control over

their image. In Wilkins' work, the portraits are weighted with the women's autonomy, palpable in their ability to present themselves in an authorial way, rather than at the mercy of a police booking room in the case of mugshot photographs. Clad in prison uniform—khaki pants and maroon or black T-shirts—and photographed in a room with a low-pile dark green industrial carpet and a brick wall, the women are limited in their outward expressions of individuality. Yet, the portraits are varied and complex. Some of the women make use of a few objects as props (a pink blanket, a small table, a drum, and a cow skull); some portraits are full body while others are busts; some women look into the camera while others gaze beyond the frame; some embrace dogs that are part of the "Prison Paws" dog training program; some smile, others are stoic. Most significantly, the scale and materiality of portraits themselves attest to the importance and individuality of these women—contrasted to the publicly proliferated mugshots in which they are reduced to tropes of female criminality.

In one portrait, a young Indigenous woman sits on the small wooden table, hands folded in her lap, gazing past the camera out of the left side of the frame. She sits stoically, quietly. Her shoulders are slightly hunched, her head lifted. She wears a baggy maroon T-shirt and baggy khaki pants. We cannot see her feet; the photograph ends just below her knees. The top half of her hair is pulled back tightly except for a sweep of bangs that hang down across the right side of her face. A small tattoo descends from the outer corner of her left eye to the top of her cheekbone—a few other small tattoos are barely discernable on her left wrist and hand. The downward sweep of her mouth acts as a visual foil for the upward arch of her brow, creating a dynamism in her face that, although seemingly expressionless, intimates movement.

This woman's posture is the most formal of the series and most resembles an early 20th-century portrait. While it may be tempting, it would be an error to analyze her person based on

her posture; a facile interpretation would only serve to recapitulate assumptions about who these women are. However, we can examine how her portrait, whether intentionally or not, speaks to histories of portraiture and how that may relate to the politics of prison portraiture. We do know that she decided in what position and with what available props she would be photographed. Her expression is both placid and stern, a convention of early portraiture that was upheld for technological reasons in the early days of photography (in the 19th century, exposure times were too long to hold a smile), as well as for social and economic reasons: not only was stoicism modeled as an expression of upper-class propriety, but the "portrait was never so much a record of a person, but a formalised ideal. The ambition was not to capture a moment, but a moral certainty" (Jeeves). The assumption of moral rectitude is something uniformly denied to incarcerated individuals, in particular women—who, as previously discussed, are judged on moral grounds for criminality with greater scrutiny than their male counterparts.

Adriana Cavarero examines the relationship between moral and postural rectitude, asserting that the political implications of upright posture foreclose a collaborative or interdependent political subjectivity. The upright posture, according to Cavarero, positions the subject as an autonomous individual, with emphasis on autonomy rather than an "altruistic" political ethics (11, 43). As such, she suggests that the greater possibilities of rethinking an embodied space of political relations is through the inclined body posture; interestingly, a posture most often inhabited by female subjects in art history and visual culture. Inclination, or the leaning towards another, is a gesture of openness and presupposes the relation to the other, not only to the self. The choice of several of the women in Wilkins' portraits to inhabit a vertical posture is particularly suggestive of the dissonance between the socio-historical implications of

postural rectitude and the inconsistent and gender-biased morality rubrics by which these women are often judged and convicted.

This subject, however, addresses these very contradictions and constructs a complex composite of morality in her portrait, both personal and social: not only is she choosing to represent herself according to the conventions of formal historical portraiture, but she also introduces Christian iconography into the diptych. The text of her instructions to Wilkins for the second photograph, included opposite her portrait reads, "A cross. The biggest one you can, maybe on a hill. They're so beautiful" (*Supplication* 2015). The resulting photograph is indeed of a large cross on the grassy crest of a hill, framed against the drama of a rising or setting sun amidst grey clouds. Wilkins includes no commentary of her own on this coupling of photographs, however, the juxtaposition of religious iconography inextricable from the subjugation of Indigenous populations across North America and the contemporary arm of racially motivated campaigns of disposability and extermination—the prison—poses a powerful problematic that extends beyond physical institutionalization. In this way, Wilkins too gestures towards historical and sociopolitical factors that have come to shape the realities and multidimensional subjectivities of these incarcerated women—realities and subjectivities that might be glimpsed in the diptychs.

There is always something artificial about a posed portrait: the awareness and intentionality counteract the feeling of spontaneity and candor that documentary photography has cultivated as its marker. However, the wider scope of Wilkins' project—including the unseen and undocumented conversations that she first has with her subjects about portraiture and power—serves to marry the formalistic, staged attributes of portraiture with the authenticity and unpredictability of the documentary intervention. These portraits are also an abnegation of

disposability, regarding both the subject and the photographic object itself. As Wilkins states on her website, her work strives to "challenge universal assumptions of values in history, places, and relationships… highlighting places and narratives that have become disposable" ("Artist Statement"). Wilkins' portraits complicate the relationship between a politics of disposability more generally and the uses of vernacular prison portraiture specifically. Her slow, large format process and the subjects' control over the portrait emphasize the value of the resulting image and her subjects' time. Additionally, Wilkins' project takes the rich history and practice of prison photographs on board in her portrait series, attending to the significance of self-representation and the sense of subject ownership that is often lost or subordinated in traditional documentary work. Her portrait series borrows from and reimagines the longstanding practice of prison portraiture, which continues to be important practice of the social and visual life within prisons.

### *social life of prison portraiture*

The only places in prison that permit photography (aside from administrative or sanctioned documentary projects), are makeshift studios where portraits are taken by an incarcerated individual who act as the prison photographer, or in visiting rooms, where the same person takes Polaroids of fellow incarcerated individuals with their visitors (Brook, "Polaroids"; Fleetwood 488, 492). However, not all prisons permit photography,[61] and even in those that do, photographic procedures vary greatly ("Pic From Visitation"). Some facilities require prepurchased photo tickets prior to visitation; in others, visitors can purchase photographs, generally costing a few dollars each (Brook, "Polaroids"). Prison visiting room Polaroids are

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[61] Not only is the practice of photography tightly controlled, but the circulation of photographs is as well. For example, Lancaster County Prison in Pennsylvania stipulates that individuals may have no more than five 5x7 photographs in their possession at any time ("Mail Policies"). Other mail policies prohibit sending Polaroids to incarcerated individuals because the layers of the Polaroid provide the opportunity to smuggle in contraband ("Are Polaroid Pictures Allowed"; "Mail Policies"; "Visiting a Friend").

often an incarcerated individual's first chance to self-represent after a publicly disseminated mugshot (Brook, "Prison Photography" 18:30). These photographs are particularly significant in an environment that strips individuals of their control over themselves and their image as an extension of their agency and identity, as discussed above. In 2009, Brook noted the unparalleled dialogic potential in the dispersed archive of prison Polaroids, suggesting that they may constitute one of the largest and most significant sectors of vernacular photography ("Polaroids"). These scattered archives contain not only visual meta-narratives and the photographically codified existences of prison populations, but also indicate the sociological ability of photography to permeate the institutional boundary of the prison. In 2012, Brook began to notice collections of such Polaroids emerging online, and in 2013 one such collection was sold to a private collector at Paris Photo LA for $45,000 (Brook, "Prison Yard"). Significant in this sale is the speedy journey of these documents from private circulation and obscurity to art-world recognition, raising questions about the objectification and commodification of intimate vernacular photography and the evacuation of its intrinsic or original purpose. The sale of this particular archive in a sense re-privatizes the images—removing them from the context in which they are imbued with personal meaning and depositing them in an individual's private collection. However, overall vernacular visiting room images remain predominantly colloquially private articles, "visual and haptic objects of love and belonging structured through the modern carceral system" (Fleetwood 490). They function simultaneously as formal and informal images, treasured physical objects, and a means of connection and communication between family members and loved ones. Prison Polaroids have been the only consistent and steady photographic production inside the US prison system.

In recent years, several prisons have switched from Polaroid[62] film to digital cameras to take visiting room photographs ("No More"). However, the use of Polaroids persists in prisons in part because of their instantaneity and singularity, thus avoiding security concerns stemming from reproducibility with digital imaging (Brook, "Photos Beyond"). In general, cameras, recording devices, and cell phones are prohibited in prisons—including in visiting rooms—so the process necessary for incarcerated individuals to procure photos of themselves and with their loved ones is an endeavor of great significance.

The immediacy of Polaroids speaks to their material importance to the individuals that possess them. The fact that Polaroids are produced without a negative—meaning that they are singular and unique—also contributes to their nostalgic quality; they gesture towards a more tactual, analog era in photography when personal photographic prints were treasured and unique artifacts. Precious to the families and individuals who appear in them, prison Polaroids are often the only visual tether between long gaps in visitation. However, to the institutions that produce them, they are entirely disposable, convenient in their absence of a footprint or record. The instability between reality and its photographic capture is distilled in the Polaroid; the prints are articles that at once suggest faithfulness to an authentic and deeply intimate moment, and simultaneously are characterized by their distance from representational reality. The images are generally marked by hazy colors and a soft focus that is the hallmark of self-developing instant film—an aesthetic that has come to be considered "retro" but not one that is particularly clarifying as an indexical record. The prison Polaroids are usually taken against a mural or

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[62] Responding to a significant drop in demand, in 2008 Polaroid announced that it would be terminating production of its instant film. In its wake, The Impossible Project was born—an organization that leased the last remaining Polaroid factory, purchased its machinery, and reverse-engineered its discontinued film. In 2014, the Smolokowski family, the largest shareholder of The Impossible Project, bought a majority stake of Polaroid for $70 million, and in May 2017, they purchased the Polaroid name and brand (Zhang). For Polaroid's 80th anniversary in September 2017, they launched a new generation of instant cameras and film, signaling a return for instant photography, rebranding themselves Polaroid Originals ("Spirit").

backdrop—often hand painted by incarcerated individuals—which serves the dual purpose of suggesting a more whimsical or recreational environment as well as obscuring any identifying details of the specific institution for security reasons.[63] While some visitors laud the different quality of the new digital images ("No More Polaroids"), the singularity and unique materiality of the Polaroids have a long history in these contexts and remain important. Fleetwood writes that the practices of vernacular photography that circulate within and through the prison "operate as practices of intimacy and attachment between imprisoned people and their loved ones, by articulating the emotional labor performed to maintain these connections" (490).

Prison photography of any kind is always in conversation with the quotidian uses of photography that are available to incarcerated individuals themselves, either through its engagement with the subjects' complicated relationship to self-representation and the visibility of their lives, or through its denial. In Wilkins' images, and in many vernacular prison portraits, "imprisoned people work to produce themselves as subjects of value against the carceral state that defines them as otherwise" (Fleetwood 492). This performative quality in photographic representation is partly why the state maintains such a tight control of the production and circulation of photographs. In 2011, California lifted a 25-year ban on prison portraits of incarcerated individuals held in solitary special security housing units. The end of the ban meant that family members were finally able to receive photographs of incarcerated loved ones, often

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[63] Alyse Emdur's project *Prison Landscapes* is a collection of prison portraits in front of murals and backdrops. She corresponded with hundreds of incarcerated individuals who contributed photographs for inclusion in her project. Emdur's focus is on the dislocating practice of photographing individuals and their loved ones in front of backdrops—which she also photographs—and the quotidian use and circulation of these images.

With the advent of digital image editing, services like Photos Beyond the Wall have emerged to digitally alter prison portraits. They offer "Composite Magic" photographs to remove subjects from the prison context and place their portraits into one of over 100 backgrounds, from a driveway with a Jaguar sedan to a gazebo on the Hudson River. The Photos Beyond the Wall website advertises: "We'll take your image out of those prison photo backgrounds, and place you and yours **"inside"** the romantic or exotic location that has previously been outside your reach!... **ESCAPE** from the confines of those boring "click click" backgrounds, and be released to the free world ... right into the photo location of your choice!" (emphasis original, Photos Beyond).

the first photographs they had seen of them (and that the individual had seen of themselves) in decades (Montgomery). Prisoner advocacy groups such as the ACLU's National Prison Project called the restrictions "unjustified" and "extraordinary," and suggested that such measures had no precedent in the United States (Montgomery).

The portrait ban is reminiscent of Didi-Huberman's ruminations on photographic life and death; that to truly extinguish a person, their image must also be eliminated. The implications of this ban surpass the already cruel limitations of contact between the incarcerated and their loved ones: they hinge on a denial of personhood, prohibiting even a representation of that person to exist in the world. In this instance, incarcerated individuals are relegated to a space of half-life, or ghost-life: Madeline Sartoresi, whose son is imprisoned at Pelican Bay State Prison in Crescent City, CA says, "That's what they call a ghost. It's just a thin line between life and death. He's alive, but you can't touch him, you can't hear him, you can't see him," (quoted in Montgomery).

Even in general prison population and in the aftermath of the ban, between the limited and fraught documentary projects conducted by administration-approved photographers and the visiting room Polaroid exists a wide gap that highlights the absence of images made and controlled by incarcerated individuals themselves. Unfortunately, and tellingly, this gap is maintained by stringent regulation. Kristin Lindgren, director of the Haverford Writing Center, writes about photographic restrictions in the State Correction Institution at Graterford, PA:

> The circulation of images is controlled even more tightly than the circulation of visitors. No cameras of any kind are allowed inside. The only photos that leave Graterford are those taken in the official visiting area by a prisoner employed as a photographer, in front of a painted or digital backdrop that erases any visual cues of the prison. All of the men keep precious personal photos—sometimes a handful, sometimes hundreds—in their cells. Childhood and family photos connect them to the past and to life outside the walls of Graterford. But visual records of their lives inside, and of the architecture and environments that shape their days, are largely absent ("Picturing Incarceration" 4).

Wilkins' images engage in a dialogue with these vernacular archives and the social consequences of their dissemination. Vernacular images build up a resistant archive against the indexical force of photography and surveillance used as a mechanism of control, and notably, against the anti-photographic climate of incarceration. Wilkins' portraits also operate as resistant photographic practices, grappling with both the representational heft and the limitations of formal portraiture within the prison context.

The other part of Wilkins' project—the photographs of particular objects and locations made upon the subjects' behest—functions as a reparative measure of granting further control of the photographic process to the women. This part of *Supplication* is based on exchange by photographing a place or object that the women miss and describe in writing.[64] Wilkins then gives that photograph to the individual, completing the visual-epistolary circuit. Hers is a project that refuses the boundary of carceral interiority, as the photographer acts as an extension or vehicle of the incarcerated individuals' desires and volitions rather than—as it more commonly occurs—the other way around.

The title itself—*Supplication*—calls into question the relationship between incarcerated individuals and photographer. Supplication means an earnest or humble petition or prayer, entreating someone in power for assistance. Wilkins seems to be acknowledging the inherently fraught and uneven distribution of power in the photographer-subject relationship, and in particular with incarcerated women. Perhaps the title is an unexpected inversion of the power of

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[64] This component of *Supplication* is reminiscent of photographer Mark Strandquist's *Some Other Places We've Missed, Windows From Prison*, an ongoing project where incarcerated individuals are invited to answer the question, "If you had a window in your cell, what place from your past would it look out to?" Strandquist or a volunteer takes the resulting descriptions of scenes and instructions for the photographic composition, photographs the desired object or location, and delivers the images to incarcerated individuals.

A similar project, *Photo Requests From Solitary*, invites individuals held in long-term solitary confinement to submit a request for a photograph, and enlists artists to make the images which are then sent to the incarcerated individuals.

representation, a nod to the historical implications of formal portraiture—subjects that Wilkins discusses with the women before they decide on how they wish to be represented (Brook, *Prison Obscura* 17). Perhaps the plea is not between photographer and subject, but to an indifferent public that chooses to ignore tragedy and injustice within the bounds of its communities.

The title also forces us to consider the relationship between the photograph itself and its constitutive parties—photographer, subject, audience, and in this case, the prison. The prison as a subject in the photographic relationship means that it too directs the distribution of power within photographic production—moreover, it shapes the photograph as a supplicatory gesture. The photograph as a supplication invites the viewer to understand it as a risk taken, a testament, a speculation—a gesture that does not depend on reciprocity, but that is wagered *in spite of* the possibility that it might not be validated, or worse, that it may incur harm to the supplicant. In other words, the photograph as supplication is an act of faith, one that assumes vulnerability and exposure to danger—a vulnerability that could form the basis for solidarity and present the opportunity for mutual care (Butler 2004). Supplication as the foundation for community is in a sense antithetical to the ethos of the carceral state, which relies almost entirely on privation, physical and psychic. So while Wilkins' project is constituted by images that upset the conventional distribution of power in the photographic relationship, its process itself enacts a kind of address to the prison system and the context of contemporary photographic production. However, instead of supplicating or begging for mercy from the prison system, these images position the women as subjects with the power to self-represent while reminding us that they are also objects of state violence. The photographs are themselves wagers, asking us to consider what these women risk by posing, by asking for license, and by participating in a political and creative relationship.

Supplicatory gestures are a kind of disposable gesture, a throw-away, casting the plea out into the ether without the knowledge that it will land, much less effect any kind of response. Yet, these supplications—the photographs themselves and the actions of the women in their creation—are intentionally weighted with the complex relationship photography has with the disposable, lending these gestures some kind of stability and endurance. Wilkins' work rallies against the conception of the photograph as disposable, relying instead on the notion of the photographic as a slow, ritualized, and historical process. Her images reconfigure the supplication as a weighty process, one that has value in and of itself, and grants the supplicant their own power and agency. While the supplication is a vulnerable move, a giving over, these images cannot be reduced to blind willingness to enter into a mortal exposure; perhaps supplication is not characterized by *faith* in the whim of a more powerful party, perhaps instead it is simply assuming the risk of loss and entropy. Conventional understanding of supplication often implies extreme humility—a groveling, humbling plea—and yet the women in Wilkins' images take up space rather than fold over themselves; the photographs may act as a petition, but their subjects are agented in the photographic relationship and portray themselves as such.

## Counter-histories and alternative documentary practices

Like the slow and sustained approach of Frazier's work, projects like Wilkins' and Atwood's require a patience to unpack them. While superficially they may appear to document prison life and its people, upon further investigation it becomes clear that they also address our collective relationship to documentary images. All three artists consider the implications of

making images and contribute to what Foucault would call a genealogical[65] examination of

subjugated history or counter-knowledge (7) rather than proliferating the dominant illusion of

impartial knowledge. The bodies of counter-knowledge that these artists contribute to resist the

composite, often fictitious public image of prisons—a visual fantasy that robs those affected by

incarceration of the recognition or space to narrate and represent their experience. The

hypervisibility of this imagined reality of prisons in popular culture and media succeeds in

rendering the realities themselves illegible, or hidden in plain sight. The artists discussed in this

chapter use their images to explore the wounds left by state violence and incarceration, crafting

work that takes on board the personal resonances of Barthes' punctum; but they also make

images that operate beyond the ruptural moment. Their projects affirm and establish

counternarratives, supplanting the images we think we know about struggle and incarceration,

and resisting by simply existing.

At the same time, these artists are careful to resist the documentary trap that so many

projects fall into: the convention of characterizing documentary (and even participatory) work as

'giving voice'[66] or 'restoring humanity,' as though the individuals have neither until it is

bestowed upon them by a (usually) white outsider—claims which are of course riddled with

colonial connotations. Such project aims, while often well intentioned, operate under the

assumption that their subjects are beginning from a lack or deficit. Such reversed visual logic

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[65] Genealogies, as Foucault defined them, are the "coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories, which allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics" (*Society* 8).

[66] Youth educator Jamila Lyiscott writes of her work with incarcerated youth at Rikers Island: "The idea of 'giving' students voice, especially when it refers to students of color, only serves to reify the dynamic of paternalism that renders Black and Brown students voiceless until some salvific external force gifts them with the privilege to speak. Rather than acknowledge the systemic violences that attempt to silence the rich voices, cultures, and histories that students bring into classrooms, this orientation positions students, and by extension, the communities of students, as eternally in need of institutional sanctioning… When the young men at Rikers share their work, I am fully intimidated by their uses of extended metaphors, similes, and other literary devices. But all we did was lend them an ear. They woke up like that. We did not give them a voice. We gave them space to be heard. *We need educators who are down to* **create space** *for the rich identities of their students to thrive,* **and** *who are down to be schooled by their students as authorities of their own voices and narratives in the classroom"* (2016, emphasis original).

perpetuates the uneven burdening of some to prove their humanity. Frazier in particular shows the already-human, insisting on humanity even in moments and places where acknowledgement is withheld or denied. By addressing such subtleties amidst photography genres, these artists address the endemic violence against women while simultaneously examining the optic reinforcement of such violence.

Frazier talks about the power of photographs of working class people—how truly revolutionary and threatening it is to insist on narrative, on writing one's history, and on demonstrating certain truths and realities about one's life: that appearing and remaining present and insistently human in the face of forces that are relentlessly trying to disappear you is political. She says, "not anywhere in the history of America, or even in the library in Braddock, Pennsylvania is there a record that three women like us ever existed in these types of socio-economic conditions. How is that possible?" (Lindquist and Schultz). By making those images, she, along with Atwood and Wilkins are flying in the face of the authors of colonial, dominant history and the agents of disposability.[67] August Sander's portrait work from *People of the 20th Century* was banned in Nazi Germany for those very reasons, and stands as a photographic antecedent acknowledged by Frazier (Lindquist and Schultz).

Frazier, Atwood, and Wilkins all exercise this powerful political threat with their photographs in several ways. First, simply by virtue of showing the lives of individuals that are normally un- or misrepresented, they insist on their humanity, their realness, and their right to take up space, physically or in the photographic canon. Second—particularly in Frazier and Atwood's work—they operate as evidentiary documents, by demonstrating and revealing

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[67] This idea is distilled in other artists' work as well. For example, Brooklyn-based documentary photographer Radcliffe "Ruddy" Roye's describes his recent exhibition, *When Living is a Protest* (Steven Kasher Gallery, 2016): "The fact that [people] refuse to go under, refuse to give up, that is a protest to me" (Villasana). Roye has taken to Instagram to share his images in the hopes of sparking conversation about racial injustice and structural inequality. Like the photographers examined in this chapter, he also pairs his images with text.

injustices. Third, by being women, and by making work that reflects upon this photographic subjectivity, they each insist on their own importance as artists within the image-making community, and resist the white masculinist approaches and narrative devices that have in many ways become synonymous with documentary photography. Fourth—and most overtly in Wilkins' formal portraits—they reinforce the value of who appears in their photographs; to photograph something is to choose it over everything else and proclaim its worth.

The commitment to collaborative, feminist, and inter-generational production is what makes these bodies of photographic work visual activism in and of themselves. Frazier's process of creating her photographs stands in the way of neoliberal disposability, not only by insisting on the already-existing humanity for herself and those that appear in her photographs, but by claiming artistic, activist, academic, and political authority on behalf of herself and her mother—a woman who exists on the margins of the academic circles and art institutions that Frazier frequents. Frazier seems intensely aware of how powerful these systems are, and how her inclusion into recognition or celebrity can obfuscate the material and ideological reality of marginalization rather than change the structures that left her family marginalized and targeted to begin with. As a result, Frazier's work not only documents but *includes* her community, and she remains tethered to her roots and community, determined to whittle away at the neoliberal politics of disposability by exposing and producing work that is antagonistic to its internal logic. Atwood refuses to detach her images from their textual contexts and narratives of their subjects, insisting on the authority of her subjects to narrate their own realities and decentralizing her own perspective. Like Frazier, Wilkins relinquishes much of her authorial control, coauthoring her portraits with the women, determined by their decisions about how to represent themselves and about what to photograph in the portrait's accompaniment. All three projects question the

authority of traditional documentary work by unsettling its presumed objectivity and intervene into the gendered and uneven distributions of violence upon some of the most vulnerable segments of the population.

In a country that presents itself as progressive and democratic but whose social policy is largely characterized by punitive force and militarization, and in light of a new administration committed to bolstering the prison-industrial complex,[68] we must consider how images of incarceration and injustice operate socially, intersect with human rights issues, activism, and public pedagogy. We need to pay attention to intersectional feminist interventions in prison photography as a collective force producing bodies of work that function as objects and practices of resistance; we need to excavate and interrogate the genealogy of images from within the prison context and in the context of women and disposability, and finally, we need to approach these bodies of work as dialogic archives that can help us establish visual, theoretical, and anecdotal discourses with which to resist the policies, practices, and ideologies of disposability. The three artists examined in this chapter all provide different strategies for addressing these concerns, creating work that serves to resist dominant narratives about women's incarceration and that entreats viewers to interrogate their images with care and an openness to alternative photographic approaches.

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[68] On February 23, 2017, the Trump-appointed Attorney General Jeff Sessions sent a memo to the Bureau of Prisons "rescinding the Obama administration's Aug. 16 order advising the bureau not to renew any contracts with private prisons," citing the need to consider the "future needs" of the prison system (Wheeler). In May 2017, Sessions outlined a harsher drug sentencing policy that triggers mandatory minimum sentencing, harkening back to the late 90s and early 2000s that saw a steady increase in prison populations (Tanfani and Halper). The implication of both of these actions is the Trump administration's commitment to grow rather than reduce the number of incarcerated individuals, and continue to position the private sector as central to that growth.
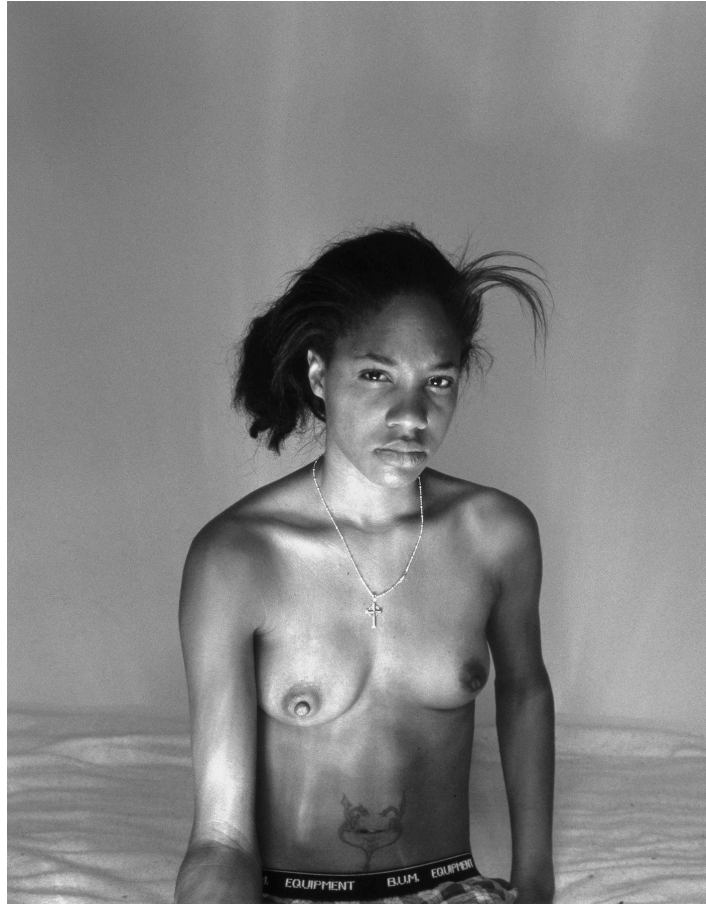
LaToya Ruby Frazier. *Self-Portrait October 7 (9:30 a.m.)*. Braddock, PA. 2007. ©LaToya Ruby Frazier; courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York/Rome



LaToya Ruby Frazier. *Momme (Shadow)*, from Momme Portrait Series. Braddock, PA. 2008. ©LaToya Ruby Frazier; courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York/Rome

LaToya Ruby Frazier. *Momme*, from Momme Portrait Series. Braddock, PA. 2008. ©LaToya Ruby Frazier; courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York/Rome



LaToya Ruby Frazier. *Grandma Ruby and Me*. Braddock, PA. 2005. ©LaToya Ruby Frazier; courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York/Rome

Jane Evelyn Atwood, *Prisoner in the Prison Workshop*. Maison D'Arret de Femmes, "Les Baumettes," Marseilles, France, 1991.
© Jane Evelyn Atwood/Contact Press Images, from the book *Too Much Time*; courtesy the artist
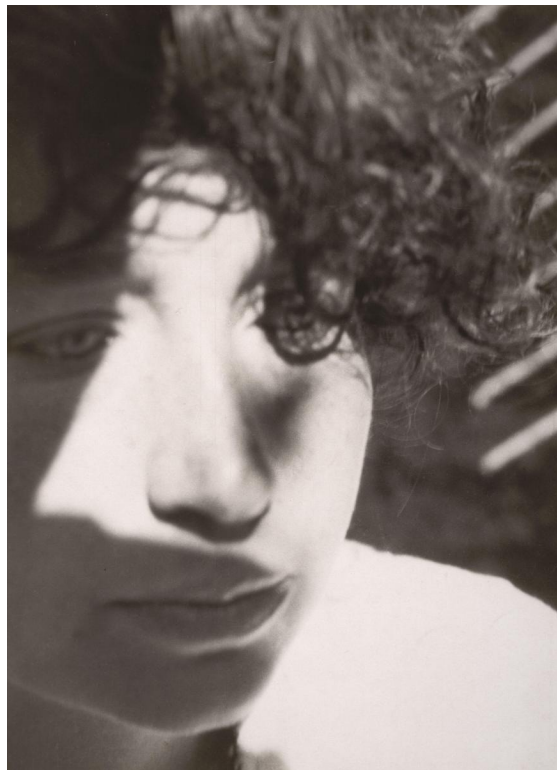


László Moholy-Nagy. *Head (Lucia)*. 1926. © Moholy-Nagy Foundation; courtesy Moholy-Nagy Foundation

Alexander Rodchenko. *Girl with a Leica*. 1934.



Jane Evelyn Atwood, *Male and female guards pat-search fifty-four new arrivals. Pat searches by male guards are forbidden, yet they occur.* Central California Women's Facility, Chowchilla, California, U.S.A., 1995. © Jane Evelyn Atwood/Contact Press Images, from the book *Too Much Time*; courtesy the artist

CHAPTER THREE
YOUTH, DIGITAL PLATFORMS, AND PHOTOGRAPHY OF THE COMMONS

**Pepsi, the commons, and the space of appearance**

On April 4, 2017, Pepsi launched a multi-million dollar video ad campaign starring 21-year-old reality star and model Kendall Jenner. The ad, entitled "Live For Now Moments Anthem" is soundtracked by Skip Marley's song "Lions," and features a storyline that has been widely accused of being not only tone deaf but also appropriative of political activism, in particular, of Black Lives Matter (Bowen; Elizabeth; Victor).[69] In the ad, a multiracial throng of attractive young people is seen demonstrating in the street, holding signs painted with innocuous and vague slogans such as "peace," and "join the conversation," flanked by heart shapes and peace signs. Jenner is on the sidelines, modeling for a shoot, when a young man with a cello beckons to her, at which point she rips off her blond wig (hurling it into the hands of a young Black woman), wipes off her lipstick, and joins the crowd. The crowd, with Jenner at the helm, faces off with a police barricade. Jenner grabs a can of Pepsi, and hands it to an officer, who takes a sip, cracks a smile and shrugs as if to say, "we're really all in this together, right?" causing the whole crowd to erupt in cheers. Not only does this ad trivialize extreme police violence in response to protests and portray political activism as a diversion—complete with elated musicians and dancers performing in the street—but it also capitalizes on a climate of political oppression and struggle to sell the product of a mega-corporation. The ad, without irony, was released on the 49th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in Memphis, TN, and prompted a storm of intense criticism, including a tweet by King's daughter

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[69] Director Spike Lee commented, "'[The Pepsi ad] was a complete appropriation of Black Lives Matter, and Black Lives Matter is not a joke. Black people getting shot down left and right, and cops are walking and they are going to make a commercial out of that?'" (Setoodeh).

Bernice King, who captioned a photo of her father being pushed by a white police officer with, "If only Daddy would have known about the power of #Pepsi" (@BerniceKing).

Bernice King's wry tweet gestures towards the way that visual culture is inextricably bound to what Cedric Robinson (1983)—and Angela Davis after him—calls racial capitalism. The term signals to the ways that neoliberalism and capitalism have always been white supremacist projects; how while capitalism has shaped racism, racism has in fact structured the history of capitalism. Racial capitalism can be understood more broadly as "the process of deriving social and economic value from the racial identity of another person" (Leong 2152). The Pepsi commercial is a vivid example of the continued concomitance between racism and capitalism, particularly as it manifests in visual culture. Pepsi capitalizes on cultural, political, and indeed, racial currency in its video while simultaneously minimizing the material realities of those whose lives hinge upon the successes and failures of asserting political visibility.

The Twitter backlash that prompted Pepsi to pull its ad the following day and issue an apology is indicative of an accelerating popular interest in the visual representation and investment in politics. While coopting contemporary social issues to paint a company—and by extension their consumers—in a sympathetic or earnest light is not new, the glaring incongruity between Pepsi's commercial and Black Lives Matter, Occupy, Women's March, and anti "Muslim ban" protests is particularly glaring. The advertising strategy of transforming "real moments of high tension into an opportunity to celebrate commerce and fame" (D'Addario) emerges here as a consequence, in part, of neoliberal social values shaping visual culture, but also as evidence of the extent to which youth, protest, and new media are sutured together and position photography and other visual media as a part of the frontlines of the war on youth.[70]

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[70] As Pasi Väliaho explains: "images today proliferate and evolve in parallel with the production and promotion of the neoliberal way of life, with its notions of threat, contingency, and emergency" (xii). This phenomenon is evident

This chapter traces the connections between emerging photographic practices and platforms and the violence of disposability directed at youth, manifest both in this generation's unprecedented economic precarity as well as the physical and sociopolitical violence wrested differentially upon particular segments of the youth demographic. The photographic response to intensifying the biopolitics of disposability in general and the war on youth in particular presents a tension as well as a productive exchange between participatory, 'democratized,' citizen-production and the professional, artist-driven image production.[71] By examining collaborative online production, in particular the work of photography collective Echo/Sight, I outline the relationships between images of protest, the performative possibilities enacted through protest and its visualization, the appropriative undermining of photographic resistance, and between professional and amateur image-making in the context of political protest. The meaning and significance of visual literacy has changed dramatically in the last decade, moving beyond

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in the ubiquitous use of the photograph in advertising—including repurposing documentary images with political, social, and affective histories in order to sell products. In the 1990s, clothing brand Benetton inaugurated an advertising campaign spearheaded by photographer Oliviero Toscani that showcased documentary photographs of tragedy, suffering, violence, and catastrophe. Defending its campaign as an articulation of social responsibility, Benetton's administration of politically charged imagery to sell clothes "provides an object lesson in how promotional culture increasingly uses pedagogical practices to shift its emphasis from selling a product to selling an image of corporate responsibility" (Giroux "From Benetton"). Benetton's campaign underscores a culture in which corporate actors facilitate the consumption of aesthetic suffering alongside the consumption of goods, arguably depoliticizing the former to fuel the latter.

Therese Frare's now iconic photograph of AIDS activist David Kirby in a hospital bed shortly before his death from AIDS-related complications in 1990 became one of Benetton's most remembered ads. In 1992, under the direction of Toscani, Frare's photograph was colorized, stamped with a Benetton logo, and released as an advertisement for the brand. The originally black and white photograph showed Kirby surrounded by his distraught family— Kirby's father Bill cradles his son's head in his arms, a look of anguish on his face, while Kirby gazes beyond the frame. The photograph resembles the Pietà—after which Toscani named the ad—a recurrent compositional and iconographic theme in photojournalism. Toscani felt that the photograph needed color to be more "realistic" (Genova), or perhaps more accurately, the colorization situated the photograph more squarely in the optical realm of advertising media. While Kirby's family supported the ad, feeling that it brought attention to the AIDS crisis, many others felt that Benetton had violently appropriated suffering to sell clothes (Genova). Pepsi's advertisement, while it employs similarly appropriative mechanisms to capitalize on contemporary sociopolitical struggles, effectively *de*colorizes its advertisement. The video presents an approximation of protest in a postracial setting—race in Pepsi's ad is merely decorative, a visual device to signal "diversity" in its most banal and depoliticized sense, while the political and material consequences of race are erased.

[71] Although there is significant overlap between the two, both in terms of content and aesthetics, the specifics of production and distribution raise important questions about the spaces of production and distribution of photography.

political and economic semiotic significance to an integrative communicative and social language, wherein photographs are increasingly public, their production autodidactically harnessed, and as a result, their proliferation vast and their effects largely unpredictable. From within this seemingly unstructured and overwhelmingly apolitical and diversionary body of images emerge critical interventions that take up photography not only as a material pursuit, but also a political, economic, and—in the spirit of this chapter—activist endeavor.

In order for photographs to be performatively activist, that is, for them to move beyond depicting or representing activism to enact a form of resistance in themselves, they need to be understood as inextricably bound up in political and pedagogical discourses, as the previous two chapters have demonstrated. This activist capacity of photographs could be understood as belonging to the *photography of the commons*, in the productive sense that Michael Hardt conceptualizes the latter term. He posits the commons as two possible things: the earth and its natural resources, to which all people should have equal access, and products of the biopolitical economy, including "images, information, knowledge, affects, codes, and social relationships," derived largely from "service work, affective labor, and cognitive labor" (*Commonwealth* 132). The latter, immaterial understanding of the commons corresponds with Hardt's assertion that under late capitalism, the question of material vs. immaterial property (and labor) overtakes Marx's preoccupation with mobile vs. immobile property, and the value of these immaterial products and creative forces are shaped primarily by concerns about exclusivity vs. reproducibility (Hardt "Reclaim"). He asserts, furthermore, that attempting to force exclusive ownership—that is, wrangling these products and forces into a neoliberal capitalist relation of property—ultimately reduces their productivity and benefit ("Reclaim"). Such immaterial and

affective kinds of production are "necessarily *social* forms of production, which constantly rely on and generate the common" ("Production" 50, emphasis original).

Photographs, particularly in their various contemporary formations, fall both into material and immaterial categories, adept at reproducing the immaterial products (ideas, affects, and so on) of the biopolitical economy, rendered simultaneously reproducible and scarce, and as such, thrust into a direct and complex relationship with this biopolitical articulation of the commons. The immaterial products of cognitive and affective labor are largely what Hardt identified as the manufacture of the subject itself; that in the biopolitical economy, "the *object* of production is really a *subject*, defined, for example, by a social relationship or a form of life" (*Commonwealth* 133, emphasis original).[72] According to this understanding, images are in the business of shaping subjects—not only through an indexical representation *of* a subject as a particular *kind* of subject, but also somewhat paradoxically, by eking out a visual-political space within which subjects can emerge.

The concerns of immaterial products and the proliferation of ideas, labor, and ideologies—or public pedagogy—is something that Hardt recognized as a condition of late capitalism and neoliberalism, as well as a potential spring of dissent. The ways that photographs blur the barriers of materiality and are available for use beyond mere production and consumption suggests that they are poised to harness Hardt's articulation of the commons and deploy it in formations that resist neoliberal forces of privatization and depoliticization. For example, how might a photograph's reproducibility (but simultaneous deterioration and devaluation in the reproduction of its digital forms) make it precious and disposable at once?

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[72] There is a vast literature on culture and its production of the subject that ranges from Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams to Louis Althusser and C. Wright Mills. However, Hardt's crucial contribution here is in his articulation of the immateriality of the biopolitical economy under neoliberalism—for example the particular ways that the flex-time economy, precarious labor, and the maximization of particular lives over others shape the production of particular subjectivities unique to this historical conjuncture.

How might disposability and superfluity be mobilized precisely in response or resistance to those same markers in the broader culture as they are applied to precarious populations? And how might collections of images, proliferated through new digital and social platforms, constitute spaces of resistance and perform a kind of recognizability that is often denied in broader public spheres?

Nicholas Mirzoeff calls such a space of resistance the "space of appearance," a space "where you and I can appear to each other and create a politics" (17). Mirzoeff appropriates Hannah Arendt's "space of appearance," by which she describes the ideal *polis* in which men appear to one another in a practice of politics (198-9). This space similarly hinges upon Rancière's distribution of the sensible (what is visible and to whom), as well as, Mirzoeff notes, Butler's "right to appear," which emerges as one of the demands of publicly assembled bodies (*Notes* 26). Butler's analysis rethinks the embodiment of discourses and how particular embodiments, *in public*, become an act of politics themselves: through assembly, people demand that they belong there, that the space belongs to them, or that the space is and must be public. Both intimate that the ability to appear is both a matter of one's presence and one's legibility, that is, appearance hinges on being recognized or witnessed by others.

While Butler's focus is on the performative, or the enactment of politics through physical presence and behavior, Mirzoeff's space of appearance translates this physical performativity into the photographic: He acknowledges two spaces of appearance—one constituted by live, physical bodies assembling together publicly, and the other mediated photographically (34). The latter space is conjured by creating photographic documents that operate as demands to be seen; people that are publicly, socially, and politically illegible enact a space in which they *do* appear and are legible, performing and thus manifesting appearance writ large. He suggests that such

images potentially emerge as their own political and visual language that is to some degree outside of mediation, enacting their own form of resistant and generative politics. Such spaces act as ruptures in the privatized, militarized, visually hegemonic order, reifying counterhistories and alternative futures within a devastating present, and by performing appearance as if it were so everywhere, one makes it real (Mirzoeff 33). The space of appearance allows critique and its other half, the possibility for an alternative future, to emerge together.

Although Mirzoeff uses the space of appearance (and non-appearance) to discuss the visual rendering of Black Lives Matter protests as well as police violence (19), it remains unclear precisely what visual work constitutes the space and how it rewrites the language of politics. I will argue here, extending Mirzoeff's analysis, that in order to conjure these spaces of appearance, the conditions of image production, proliferation, and consumption must be such that these photographs operate publicly, performatively, and pedagogically as the photography of the commons. As Rosalyn Deutsche asks,

> How do images of public space create the public identities they seem merely to depict? How do they constitute the viewer into these identities? How, that is, do they invite viewers to take up a position that then defines them as public being? How do these images create a 'we', a public, and who do we imagine ourselves to be when we occupy the prescribed site? (286).

In order to fully articulate the right to appear, these bodies of photographic work must be able to make a claim to and inhabit a public space, and emerge as corrective practices resistant to a present that fails racial, gender, and economic justice.

The sections that follow will outline the practices of production and dissemination that make the photography of the commons—and the space of appearance—possible. Within their claim to public space, the photography of the commons must also employ a practice of optimism or what Henry Giroux calls "educated hope" (*America's Education* 153). A true photography of

the commons in its most critical and productive sense succeeds pedagogically and politically in speaking trans-temporally—uncovering and re-narrating occluded and invisible histories, combating and resisting present injustices, and proffering space for alternative futures. We need to demand more from our visual culture, as it carries both a big burden and a promise: perhaps the visual realm is capable of presenting a kind of maturity and nuance that may not always be present in the conventional realm.

The aspect of the photography of the commons that will seek to clarify Mirzoeff's articulation of the space of appearance is grounded in the political economy—that is, the way that photography can form or contribute to spaces of appearance is largely contingent upon contemporary means and sites of photographic production. The photography of the commons as it pertains to youth and protest emerges out of a critical techno-political conjuncture. I will illustrate how particular uses of digital platforms enact a political and public sphere through photography's peculiar entanglements with discourses of truth, visibility, representation, immateriality, and narrative. Certain photographs produced and proliferated across new platforms participate in Hardt's immaterial commons, and as such, hold significant implications for their public and political function.

## Youth and Technology

Contemporary examples of the photography of the commons created by and shared by youth is impactful in part because of its technology and opportunistic adaptation of particular photographic platforms. A wide range of photographs might participate in the photography of the commons, including the work discussed in the previous chapters: LaToya Ruby Frazier's resistant and corrective photographic interventions; Kristen Wilkins' redeployment of

portraiture; and Josh Begley's assemblages of surveillance imagery to illustrate and complicate police violence. Begley's *Officer Involved* is perhaps most similar to Mirzoeff's photographic preoccupations; Mirzoeff's own project, a visual and theoretical descendent of Josh Begley's, consists of police dash cam footage stills from which he edits out the victims' bodies in order to illustrate what he terms the "space of nonappearance" (118), the space where Agamben's state of exception and Mbembe's necropolitics govern extrajudicial violence. Begley's images of visualizing nonappearance are themselves committed to cultivating spaces of appearance in Mirzoeff's sense. Begley's version of averted vision is articulated in a way that is not turning away but highlighting what is unseen, effectively turning nonappearance—or more specifically, disposability—onto itself.

For the purposes of this chapter as it pertains to youth and protest, the photographs parsed as part of the photography of the commons are not strictly images *of* protest, but images that enact protest. They certainly include, as Mirzoeff suggests, evidentiary images and videos proliferated online like Diamond Reynolds' unprecedented Facebook Live video, or the self-representative images like those disseminated with the hashtag #iftheygunnedmedown; however, they focus specifically on images that use new platforms and diverse cultural apparatuses to demand space in discourses—the limits of which are no longer solely determined by former institutional gatekeepers of visual culture like museums, collectors, and critics.

Mirzoeff does not fully explain the means by which a space of appearance is shaped or how it inhabits various institutional and public spaces, however, examining the movement of photography into extra-institutional spaces is a crucial component in articulating how the photography of the commons is formed. In part, this shift echoes similar avant-garde responses to commercialization and institutionalization in the art world over the previous century.

However, photography's push into new spaces is distinct and significant precisely because of its adaptability as a medium, and until relatively recently, its status as an outlier in the art world. This shift comes on the heels of photography's hard-won entry into institutional art spaces, and its rapid diffusion into online terrain and across user-determined platforms presents a challenge for photography critics and professional photographers. Simultaneously, such a movement forms a kind of scaffold for new mechanisms of visual resistance to a disposability politics that focuses on youth, and to the distinct social and economic pressures borne particularly heavily by this generation.

These pressures and policies converge in what Giroux has identified as a "war on youth," in which young people have become "increasingly defined, if not assaulted, by market forces that commodify almost every aspect of their lives and lived relations, though different groups of young people bear unequally the burden of a ruthless neoliberal order" (*Youth* 13). Young people in the US are subject to unprecedented amounts of physical, social, and economic violence at the hands of institutions that are meant to serve their interests. Economic and social welfare policy cuts—such as the repeated attempts of the Trump administration at repealing the Affordable Care Act—affect those already vulnerable, including the young and the poor, most brutally. Children represent 23 percent of the population, but 32 percent of those living in poverty; the percentage of children living in low income families has grown from 39 percent in 2008 to 44 percent in 2014 (Jiang et al., Table 1). Youth are increasingly subject to extreme scrutiny, criminalization, and biopolitical control; Giroux notes that what Victor Rios refers to as a "youth control complex," in particular affects poor youth of color and is manifest in the ways that schools operate as feeder systems for prisons, for example through the analysis of student reading scores to estimate future prison populations (*Youth* 73; "The United States"). Even very

young children are increasingly subject to criminalization and corporal violence for things like dress code infractions or classroom disruption ("Cops"; Lee "Chokeholds"). These examples speak to the significant gap between legal protections for people and the state structures and systems that exploit their vulnerability, particularly young people who often lack legal, social, and financial recourse. For young people in postsecondary education, degree inflation and predatory lending practices have resulted in a national student debt of $1.3 trillion (Quarterly Report 2). In the work force, a lack of opportunities in the job market are coupled with hostility towards progressive labor reform and policies that amplify the precarity that young people face regarding their health options and right to safety, for example the defunding of gender equality initiatives, access to health care and childcare, and the removal of protections for LGBT workers and transgender students (DeJean; Palmeri; Peters et al.).

Simultaneously, part of the violence faced by youth is in the way they are visualized and represented; this generation is subject to significant public scrutiny and is the target of ridicule and misrepresentation, evidenced by the trends of labeling the millennial[73] generation as hypersensitive, lazy, and entitled. Such characterizations, of course, stem from a reluctance or outright refusal to examine the underlying neoliberal factors that contribute to socioeconomic instability and the precarious conditions faced by youth, as well as from the neoconservative backlash against this generation's vociferous engagement with social justice initiatives. Meanwhile, studies show that millennials are harder working and more inventive than previous generations (White), quite possibly because they are faced with more crushing obstacles and worse odds for socioeconomic success. The combination of such pressures and violence produce a generalized hostility towards youth whose subject positions are complicated by race, class,

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[73] A 'millennial' is defined as anyone born between 1982 and 2004. Researchers Neil Howe and William Strauss named the Millennial generation (Bump).

gender, sexuality, and ability. On one hand, this hostility forecloses the ability of such youth to thrive, while on the other, it results in a culture that celebrates the neoliberal subject's flexibility and self-help measures in the face of precarity.

This flexibility is how young workers are forced to contend with the gig economy, which has been shaped by steady privatization and market deregulation and is characterized by the casualization of employment, lack of benefits, dwindling public support structures, and coupled with crippling personal debt. Buttressed by ideologies of neoliberal individualism, stories of juggling multiple jobs, sleep deprivation, and lack of access to public services are recast as inspirational, dressed up as a celebration of hard work, dedication, and ingenuity; in essence, economic precarity is rebranded as a moral disposition and a lifestyle choice[74] (Tolentino). The subjects formed through the cinching together of entrepreneurialism and identity is something that Foucault called "entrepreneurs of the self" (McRobbie "Re-Thinking" 32). This is the model for today's younger generations in the gig economy, while they are simultaneously lambasted for their laziness, inability to find steady work, and 'failure' to embody the traditional and stayed markers of middle-class success. The labor precarity faced by this generation is echoed in the creative sector. In the art world, it translates into trenchant accessibility and fair pay problems that foist a particular precarity on already marginalized workers.

Because of significant shifts in the creative economy, including widening wealth disparities reflected in the art world[75] and the casualization and undercompensation for artist

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[74] Tolentino writes, "At the root of this is the American obsession with self-reliance, which makes it more acceptable to applaud an individual for working himself to death than to argue that an individual working himself to death is evidence of a flawed economic system. The contrast between the gig economy's rhetoric (everyone is always connecting, having fun, and killing it!) and the conditions that allow it to exist (a lack of dependable employment that pays a living wage) makes this kink in our thinking especially clear."

[75] Artist Andrea Fraser noted in an essay about her participation in the 2012 Whitney Biennial that art prices rise drastically with income inequality. She writes that the most significant booms in the contemporary art market have coincided with the sharpest spikes in inequality, a relationship that indicates how the market (and the corporate and private interests it serves) benefits from the exploitation of inequality (187).

labor,[76] access to exclusive institutions and career-making opportunities has steadily diminished as hopeful professionals continue to enter into the workforce.[77] As a result, artists generally and photographers specifically are creating their own networks and platforms outside traditional institutions, and harnessing photography and politics in unforeseen ways to speak back to their own marginalization and oppression—both in the political economy of the art world as well as in the broader culture. These alternative platforms are not a broad-sweeping panacea; however, they can help to alleviate some of the entrenched institutional barriers that prevent equal participation contingent upon race, class, and gender. These networks not only strive for greater inclusivity— evidenced for example by research that indicates new media is less hostile to youth and women (Schilling), and by photojournalist Daniella Zalcman's platform Women Photograph, designed as a support and job network for women photographers—but they also create conditions for a different type of image proliferation that provides both opportunities and significant challenges for contemporary photography.

Online platforms are evolving from social entertainment sites to networks for the dissemination of art and politics. More established photographers like Magnum members Gueorgui Pinkhassov and Alec Soth upload images and videos to their Instagram accounts alongside younger artists like Amalia Ulman, who curated her Instagram feed as a year-long cultural performance piece about online tropes of femininity. Between 2015 and 2016, the

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[76] Data from The National Endowment for the Arts shows that 46.6% of professional photographers are self-employed with a median income of $26,875, half of the national median income, and according to national government data, women photographers earn 74% of what men do, the lowest ratio in the arts (Jackson 2016). World Press Photo's second annual survey reported that 85% of professional photojournalists are male; 54% are self-employed; and a 10% jump from the previous year in photographers who supplement their photography income with other work (Hadland et al., 2016 5). The 2015 study, which was conducted by World Press Photo and the University of Oxford's Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism concluded that 75% made less than $40,000 per year and 33% earned less than $10,000 per year (Adrian Hadland et al., 2015 6-7).

[77] According to BFAMFAPhD's 2014 national study on the political economy of art education, there are two million art school graduates, only 10% of which make a living working as artists; only 16% of working artists are art school graduates, likely because of debt; and the median income for working artists is just above $30,000 per year (BFAMFAPhD 3, 7, 8).

percentage of photojournalists for whom Instagram is the social media platform they relied on most for work jumped from 9% to 19% (Hadland, et al. 2016). With 700 million users, Instagram provides an opportunity for contact with wider audiences and more interaction with photographers' followers. The format lends itself to storytelling narratives and also allows photographers to be found more easily by audiences.

It is, however, important to remain aware that neither social media nor the Internet is inherently synonymous with the public sphere or the commons. While connectivity and new technologies make online production and sharing possible, it does not replace the work of individuals in a professional capacity, nor do these platforms guarantee political results. While new networks emerge in part as a response to labor precarity and corporate gatekeeping, they also contribute to the climate of unpaid and casual creative labor that relies on networking (McRobbie "Everyone"). Furthermore, networked technology allows new configurations to emerge— and while they can be political and in service of building a public sphere, more input does not necessarily mean equality; they speak to the aggregation, not automatically to the quality of the narratives.

Of course, one must also remember that these networked platforms are not value-free themselves; rather, many are still overwhelmingly corporate and are still negotiating their relatively new role as political or news platforms. For example, Instagram retains the ability to selectively censor content according to unclearly defined "community standards" (often choosing to censor women's nipples or breastfeeding images), and Facebook is having to make new decisions about its evolving role as a news platform (for example, it first removed Diamond Reynolds' video before putting it back up). Because of unreliable content mediation on such platforms, activists and others are saying they need their own. Ashley Yates, a Black Lives

Matter activist says, "we have to consider what it means for companies to hold our stories—our next move is to make sure that we have Black platforms, to make sure that we have Black autonomy, to make sure that we have Black media that we own, to control our stories" ("How Social Media" 4:40). Additionally, public platforms that rely on social media's open structure leave contributors vulnerable to harassment and surveillance (Stephen).

Despite inherent drawbacks, the online shifts in photographic distribution are significant, and their relationship to youth activism is no coincidence: not only is it a utilitarian move, but this generation understands the visual component in asserting political agency in the face of diminishing resources, prospects, and an increasingly precarious economic existence, responding to this endemic hostility on a visual front as well. Giroux has identified a reduction of positive representations of youth in the media, noting that "complex and productive representations of young people have gradually disappeared from public discourse only to reappear within the demonizing and punishing rhetoric of fear and crime" (*Youth in a Suspect* 72). While all youth are subject to diminishing economic opportunities and lack of public concern for their welfare, segments of the youth population—most notably, poor youth, queer youth, and youth of color—are particularly vulnerable, and such punishing representations are especially amplified for youth marginalized by intersections of these subject positions.[78] In recent years, youth participation in politics has become more mainstream, gaining public visibility with the Occupy Movement and more recently through Black Lives Matter. As a backlash, physical violence against youth in those spaces as well as derogatory forms of representation have also intensified.

In response to this visual component of violence against them, youth are harnessing the means of their own visual production, thanks in part to these previously discussed shifting

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[78] Consider the previous chapters' examinations of classed, racialized, and gendered representations of particular subjects, for example, the teenage "superpredator," or the "welfare queen," tropes borne out of white, middle class anxiety about safety, supremacy, and public resources.

technologies within photographic production and proliferation. Online platforms have become

hospitable terrain both to amateur or lay photographers responding to economic pressures and

exclusivity in the creative sector, and also emerge as a crucial component of new forms of visual

activism. The success of these alternative platforms is of such a significant degree that

institutions are looking to extrainstitutional sources of work in order to remain current.[79] While

many see online organizing and self-publishing as a direct affront to the sanctity of photography

and the art world at large, more savvy photography institutions like ICP and Aperture realize that

the paradigmatic shifts in photography, its production and distribution, are central to the political

concerns of today's conjuncture and in order to participate in a productive relationship with

politics, youth, and artistic development, they must be in critical conversation with the new

techniques, discourses, and physical-digital manifestations of the photographic discipline.

Because photography and youth communication have quickly become so enmeshed,[80] the

visual aspects of activism must be examined according to the means of image distribution. The

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[79] The International Center of Photography's 2017 exhibition, *Perpetual Revolution: The Image and Social Change* drew heavily from nontraditional online sources, rather than only established photographers, locating social media as of the most immediate and impactful intersections of activism and visual culture. Mark Lubell, executive director of ICP noted, "Today, millions of people carry image-making devices in their pockets, photography is disseminated instantly and virally, and the media landscape grows larger and more complex to navigate. *Perpetual Revolution* simultaneously underscores our commitment to exploring educational and historical imagery while acknowledging the game-changing impact that image-making and sharing are having in our modern day world" ("ICP Presents" 2). Similarly, recent issues of Aperture's quarterly publication focus increasingly on the role of online sources of photographic work, for example exploring the "emerging guard of young, female photographers [who have] carved out a new brand of feminism" through online platforms ("On Feminism").

[80] In conjunction with the dominance of digital photography and the increasing emphasis on social media, as well as networked, virtual connectivity, photographs have branched out in utility from objects in their own right or sources of communication to processes of communication and identity formation (Dean, 2016; Hariman and Lucaites, 2007; van Dijk, 2007).

The particular ways that photographs are combined with language through virtual networks and photo sharing are now ubiquitous and constitute a type of communication that theorist Jodi Dean calls a "second visuality" (after Walter Ong's idea of second orality, by which he meant the communication of spoken language in print culture). Second visuality signifies the imbrication and intersubstitution of text and image through mediated, networked, personal communication ("I. Images"). This is what André Gunthert calls the "conversational image," animated by the mobility and elasticity conferred by digitization and social media platforms ("Conversational"). Images in the form of photographs or GIFs become statements and substitutions for reactions, exchanged and employed as memes. Photographs have transformed into a sort of currency, used to present and perform representations of self, taking on an epistolary function contingent more on the mode of their deployment than on

political implications of the production and circulation of images does not begin and end with representation or representative justice; rather, following Rancière, image control is a form of biopolitical control. As Pasi Väliaho explains, the control or censorship of images is a "governmental logic that exercises power by preempting possible future actions and reactions through appearances—that, in other words, captures and administers potential movements of people by managing the movement and circulation of images" (3). This suggests that while the propagation of images do not replace physical activism they are a crucial part of it.

Critics caution against the depoliticizing feedback loop of "slacktivism"—the strictly online support of political causes (sharing images, clicking 'like,' using hashtags)—and cast it as a predominantly millennial activity, contributing to the perception that millennials are lazy, entitled, and disengaged.[81] While it is important not to equate online activity with or substitute it for physical participation in political activity and protest, such broad-sweeping critique of online proliferation is in danger of dismissing the important pedagogical and political role that images play online, both by buttressing physical action as well as by recasting knowledge on representative and ideological fronts. While Butler's central assertion is that being in a physical space together engenders activism because collecting is performative and the embodied experiences of the group make political demands even without speech (Berbec), images too can

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their content. That is, photographs used in this way—in the task of identity formation and communication— are less important as objects to be viewed than they are as part of an activity of circulation. Users of social media or networked messaging services use images as part of language, not necessarily replacing particular words, but combined with video, words, photographs, emojis, etc. Dean sees this as unique; different from the proliferation of photo-sharing or selfie culture in the way that communication itself becomes a sort of bricolage.

[81] Although much of the press on "slacktivism" warns that people who champion causes online feel that they have done their part, feel morally validated, and are less likely to contribute to political causes in more useful and meaningful ways, a study conducted by Georgetown University's Center for Social Impact Communication in 2011 suggests the opposite to be true. Findings revealed those who championed causes online were just as likely to donate money as those who did not, twice as likely to volunteer time, nearly one and a half times as likely to take part in an event, and more than four times as likely to recruit others to sign petitions or contact their political representatives ("Dynamics" 6).

participate in a similar form of demand by appearance or embodiment, as long as they gesture towards a movement and not simply a moment.

The youth-generated and assembled images and networks examined here move beyond cyberspace simulations of community and activity. They are carving out space that enacts or performs a photographic commons; by privileging particular images, makers, and narratives that are otherwise occluded, and disseminating them beyond the purview of conventional organization and curatorial institutions, these networks of images construct a new means of conversation and propagation of imagery. These new strategies of producing and sharing photographs on digital platforms succeed in taking up space—cyberspace, headspace, and the field of vision—insisting on their right to appear and cultivating the room in which that is possible. This space of appearance is the emergence of a new public sphere, one that responds to the shrinking opportunities to engage in public in the broader culture. It is a space "where a crack in the society of control becomes visible. Through this crack, it can become possible to look back and discover new genealogies of the present that were not previously perceptible, as well as look forward to the possibility of another world(s)" (Mirzoeff 33). These images are making demands upon society—to be recognized and witnessed—just as collected bodies do.

**Instagram and Echo / Sight**

One such networked project is Echo/Sight, a photographic collaboration on Instagram that employs the elasticity of new technology to make sense of the state of photography while carving out space amid the deluge of online images for thoughtful image making. Founded by photographers Daniella Zalcman and Danny Ghitis, Echo/Sight began as an experiment in collaborative photography; the two artists created double-exposures by combining their

photographs, shot in London and New York respectively, a purely online collaboration that had been heretofore largely unexplored. Zalcman, who is a member of the Boreal Collective and the founder of the women's documentary photography platform Women Photograph, currently runs Echo/Sight. Her own work as a photographer tarries with questions of the responsibility of representation. Zalcman's most recent work draws upon her preoccupation with representative justice and her politico-aesthetic fascination with multiple exposures. In a thoughtful New York Times profile, Teju Cole examines how the form of her 2016 project and book, *Signs of Your Identity*, works to address and temper the potentially appropriative or exploitative endeavor of photographing Indigenous populations in Canada. Wary of being an outsider and aware that the traditional portraits with which she began another project could further stigmatize the community, and considering the genealogy of photographers like Edward Curtis who exoticized their subjects, Zalcman decided to employ the strategy of double exposure (Cole, "Getting Others Right"). The project is about the memories of individuals who are affected by their experiences with the residential school system, and the images she created were intended to be a mechanism of visualizing the narratives and memories from the dozens of interviews she conducted. The double exposures perform a destabilizing and complicating function; they suggest, it is neither simply *this* nor is it simply *that*, but both, as well as some other image, experience, or truth that emerges out of the combination.

It is this potential otherness created by the liminal space between images that make the double exposures of Echo/Sight powerful. They function to decentralize the photographer as the objective, impartial artist by privileging the spaces and times in between and around the event, complicating our reading of the image, and making space for narrative in the same way that averted vision does. Such work cultivates an *averted photographer*: they practice in spaces

around events, institutions, etc. not only documenting the liminal and the populations Fred

Ritchin refers to as "those who endure the traumas of war once the spectacle has faded" ("Why

Violent"),[82] but who are themselves members of trauma, involved in their own work of healing,

of critical memory, and of prevention.

In 2013, Zalcman and Ghitis opened up Echo/Sight to guest collaborators, stating it was

their hope to connect visual communities around the world in "an attempt to slow the

photographic process and force people to engage thoughtfully with not only their own work, but

the work of their peers" ("About"). Since, Echo/Sight has been hosting week-long international

guest collaborations from different places worldwide to contribute to the catalog of images that

raise questions about place and documentary photography in an age of instant connectivity.

Because of the flexibility of smartphone technology and social media platforms, the adoption of

Echo/Sight into visual lexicon was nearly immediate—other photographic pairs began to create

their own double exposures and cataloguing them under the hashtag #echosight. By using

Instagram, Ghitis and Zalcman are claiming an often-depoliticized space to create work that

addresses the nature and limits of phone photography itself.

However, beyond the complex aesthetics and the conscious engagement with the

possibilities of shared platforms and technologies that dis- and re-locate images from their

contexts, Echo/Sight has emerged as a platform for projects that address the politics of neoliberal

violence and disposability, through a slow, collaborative visual ethic that prioritizes

understanding how images communicate, are mediated, and produce space for difficult and often

suppressed knowledge.

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[82] Ritchin's suggestions about thoughtful and effective photography of violence coincide with the strategies of averted vision outlined in Chapter 1. He advocates for making "'photography of peace' and not only that of war—the beauty of the ceasefires, and of healing, and of some of the horrors that were prevented from happening" ("Why Violent").

In 2016 Echo/Sight hosted a collaboration between photojournalists Brittany Greeson in Flint, MI and Demetrius Freeman in Brooklyn, NY. Greeson, who began documenting the crisis in Flint, MI in 2015 through her project "We Fear the Water," has focused on visualizing the narratives of those living through the water crisis and bringing it to the public's attention. The collaboration with Freeman resulted in a project focused on "exploring race relations and black activism amidst the Flint water crisis and protests surrounding Trayvon Martin and Ferguson" (Echo/Sight, "@brittanygreeson + @demetrius.freeman"), blending images of people and events separated by time and geography, but connected by state violence. The importance of projects like Echo/Sight and collaborations like Greeson and Freeman's is that as they link visual communities, they are also venues for historical context and memory, connecting discourses about violence and power; by visually overlapping the crises of environmental racism and racist police violence, they are creating a discursive space poised to address the multiple manifestations of neoliberal disposability. Greeson and Freeman engage new forms of content creation, dialogue, and merging visual strategies and aesthetics. The resulting images are what the Echo/Sight founders describe as "reimagined memories" ("About"), suggesting on one hand that these images are doing the work of exhuming marginalized narratives, and on the other, that the narratives of those that witness and survive violence are not only authoritative, but also integrative with one another, removing the 'isolated incident' characterization and instead weaving them into a web of similar and related truths.

The image posted on Echo/Sight's Instagram on February 25, 2016 is the most aesthetically straightforward of the five posted by Greeson and Freeman. While still a visibly layered image, it reads more as a diptych than a double exposure, with two vertical registers separated in the middle. On the left, a woman bundled in a winter coat and hat carries a case of

water bottles. She pushes open a door with her back, as one does when carrying something heavy. The caption reveals that it is January 12, 2016—four days before President Obama declares a state of emergency in Flint—and she has collected the water from a fire station. Her face is illuminated by the daylight pouring in through the partially opened door and into the dark interior from where the photograph was shot. She gazes out beyond the left side of the frame, turning away from the other side of the image, where in New York, a woman peers out of a tall, vertical window.

The woman in the window is standing, bracing her body against the windowsill, her torso framed by the right side of the glass. With one hand she holds a phone to her ear; the teal of the phone case repeated in the teal of the window frame. She wears a sleeveless patterned dress that echoes a bit of the green too, and an earring hanging from her right ear catches the light. The caption tells viewers that she is watching the Trayvon Martin protest in New York City on July 15, 2013—in the earliest days of #BlackLivesMatter—and she gazes straight out of the frame, past the viewer at something we cannot see. Stuck to the base of the windowpane is a 2012 Obama/Biden bumper sticker, and one cannot help but be reminded of Jordan Peele's 2017 *Get Out*, a horror film about racism that exposes the often-lethal violence hidden behind Obama-era liberalism.[83] The woman is white, and her positioning behind the Obama campaign sticker, her expression of detachment, and her physical distance away from and above the struggle, are striking, and perhaps not coincidental.

Of course, we know nothing about this woman, who she is speaking to, or what her relationship to the protest is. However, visually, the positioning of these two women as they relate to the current of state violence is as humanizing of them as individuals as it is an

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[83] The film stars Daniel Kaluuya as a New York photographer who goes on a weekend visit to meet his white girlfriend's family. After voicing his trepidation, she assures him that her father "would vote for Obama for a third term if he could" (Peele).

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indictment of inaction, liberal distance, and the optics of (un)involvement. The space around and between the rectangular openings through which both women appear is filled with the brick pattern of the New York building. The top of the window falls just outside the frame, as does the bottom of the door in Flint, creating an oppositional visual movement in the image, as though the two sides are gliding past each other. Similarly, the women look past each other; because of the subtlety of the layering, they almost appear to occupy the same plane, making their lack of engagement with one another all the more palpable.

The editorial choice that led Greeson and Freeman to superimpose these two images is significant because it draws focus to the visibility of particular populations that are rendered disposable within the current neoliberal conjuncture, specifically youth of color in the contexts of Flint and Trayvon Martin's murder. In Freeman's image from New York, he chooses to show us what is just beyond the action; unlike in most of his other images for this collaboration, where he photographs protesters and police, in this image he faces away, forcing the viewer to consider what this young woman is seeing, but simultaneously, and most importantly, compelling the viewer to consider the sort of distance that guides much of the country's response to violence against youth of color. Freeman's decision in this image is one of averted vision: to turn his back on the immediate action and direct his audience's gaze, not at the spectacle but at the structure, ideology, and embodiments that support and determine the conditions under which people are compelled to protest their own disposal.

In August of 2015, Echo/Sight collaborated with Al Jazeera America, who commissioned photojournalist Michael Thomas in Ferguson, MO and portrait photographer Glenford Nuñez in Baltimore, MD to document their communities in the wake of Michael Brown and Freddie Gray's deaths at the hands of police. The commission marked the first anniversary of Michael

Brown's murder, and Al Jazeera provided the photographers with the following prompts: "Who is working to improve [your] communities? What do the former protest sites look like now? How is the community memorializing such a tragedy and moving forward?" ("Life After"). Zalcman combined the two photographers' images into Echo/Sight mashups and posted them on the Instagram feed from August 4 - August 10, 2015.

In Thomas's image from the double exposure posted to Echo/Sight on August 6, a man walks past Cathy's Kitchen, a diner on West Florissant Avenue in Ferguson, just three doors down from the police station and the site of several protests the previous year. The man carries a blue plastic bag, umbrella tucked under his arm, and looks at his feet as he makes his way down the sidewalk. The street is empty except for a car passing in the opposite direction, and one can almost hear the sound of tires on wet pavement. This photograph is quiet, different from the images that came out of the Ferguson protests the previous year, in the days following Michael Brown's killing, and different from the ones that would be taken during protests only a few days later, on the anniversary of his death. This image from Ferguson, although it is not clear when exactly it was taken, appears in a moment of suspense and pause—a trough in between peaks—eerily removed from and yet imbued with the energy and violence that came and would come to pass in that very place. In the way that photography has a power to dislocate moments out of linear time, impregnating scenes with the knowledge and weight of hindsight, this quiet image holds within itself the sounds of the quiet street as well as its Janus face—the sounds of confrontation, chants, tear gas canisters, and screams.

In the other layer of the image, police in riot gear stand looking off the right side of the frame. Following the arrest and death of Freddie Gray, the protests and the corresponding police action in Baltimore resulted in enduring unrest. After several days of protests, Maryland

governor Larry Hogan signed an executive order on April 27, 2015, declaring Baltimore City to be in a state of emergency, deploying the National Guard to address the protests (Declaration). Protesters initially gathered while Gray remained in a coma after he sustained severe spinal injuries while in police custody.[84] Behind the lines of riot police is a CVS pharmacy, suggesting this image was taken at a protest after Freddie Gray's funeral on April 27th, during which a protester set fire to a CVS at the corner of Pennsylvania and North avenues, an event considered a "symbolic flashpoint" of the protests (Hennigan and Duara).

The police appear in motion, even in their relatively stationary positions. One officer adjusts their helmet shield; another holds a canister of pepper spray at arm's length. Their armor, helmets, and padding render the officers disproportionately armed compared to the civilian protesters, many of them the young residents of that neighborhood. The previous day, city police ordered the Metropolitan Transit Authority to shut down the Mondawmin Mall bus hub and dispatched riot police in response to a rumored "purge"[85] call to action that was supposedly circulating among high school students on social media (Green). When the area schools let out, high school students who relied on Mondawmin Mall transit found themselves stranded at the hub, forced off buses, and corralled by police without alternative transportation home; forcing a standoff between students and already-assembled riot police (McLaughlin and Brodey). That afternoon, the Baltimore Police Department released a statement that said it had "received credible information that members of various gangs…have entered into a partnership to 'take-out' law enforcement officers" (quoted in McLaughlin and Brodey), in keeping with how police and other arms of the state have consistently characterized youth of color as "thugs" and "gang" members (Gude). Eyewitnesses reported that most of the students were simply trying to get

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[84] A cell phone video of his arrest, recorded by a bystander, shows Gray with limp legs and screaming in pain as officers drag him head first into a police van ("Raw Video").

[85] A reference to a 2013 dystopian horror film of the same name in which all violence is permissible for one day.

home, many were afraid and not looking to engage with police. Meg Gibson, a teacher at

Belmont Elementary School reported, "The riot police were already at the bus stop on the other

side of the mall, turning buses that transport the students away, not allowing students to board.

They were waiting for the kids…Those kids were set up, they were treated like criminals before

the first brick was thrown" (quoted in Scocca). One Baltimore resident tweeted: "These are not

gangs. These are children. You close Mondawmin, close the metro stop. And wonder why

children are just 'around' Mondawmin" (@seabethree).

In the image, the officers in riot gear layered over the man walking down the street alone

shows the disproportionate force deployed to govern the lives of those the state deems

disposable. Another image, uploaded on August 4, layers a group of young men playing

basketball in Forestwood Park, Ferguson, over a mural depicting police in riot gear in Baltimore.

Thomas writes that the park is "one of the few open places of recreation in the community,"

while Nuñez explains that the mural is part of a larger piece dedicated to the memory of Freddie

Gray ("Life After"). Zalcman's thoughtful layering of the images, however, position the police

figures above the jumping bodies of the basketball players—effecting a sense of ever-present

surveillance and police oppression, even in moments of joy and recreation. The handprints that

pepper the mural are echoed in the ball players' outstretched hands, and echoed too in the now-

ubiquitous raised arms and chants of "hands up, don't shoot" that emerged as a protest action and

symbol in the wake of Michael Brown's killing and that appeared in both the Ferguson and

Baltimore protests, as well as in countless actions since.

"Hands up, don't shoot" developed as a response to the eyewitness reports that Michael

Brown was shot with his hands raised, a gesture of surrender in exchange for a caesura of

violence, or what Mirzoeff identifies simply as a "command to the police that says 'when people

have their hands up, don't shoot'" (102). By using the verbal and visual "hands up, don't shoot" in protests, activists redeploy of a gesture of surrender into a performative action; it enacts a shared vulnerability that transforms through solidarity into "a paradoxical strength" (Mirzoeff 102). Mirzoeff describes the use of "hands up, don't shoot" as the "appropriative reversal of vulnerability"; that, as "embodied performances reclaim the right to existence" it engages the participants first "through bodily mimesis, and then by making their body political" (96). For Butler, vulnerability is maximized for some—through norms, through material conditions, and through the biopolitical management of lives, the shared vulnerability or precariousness that characterizes the human condition becomes *precarity*; rendering particular people dangerously and exponentially more vulnerable to the actions of others, institutions, the distribution of capital, and to neoliberal politics. Precariousness then, is not just an inherent condition but also an opportunity for social and political ethics—by acknowledging and participating in an interdependency we are then tasked with particular political and ethical responsibilities towards one another (*Precarious Life* 16).

What the symbolic and performative "hands up, don't shoot" action accomplishes is to reclaim precarity and transform it into the potentially positive registers of precariousness—the mutuality, responsibility, and opportunity for solidarity, and thus, power—in shared vulnerability. Its heightened visibility in protest and in the media that documents these actions operates as a sort of performed proof that young people and people of color are not the threats that the state characterizes them as, while simultaneously acting as an action of embodied resistance to police and state violence: "'Hands up' was not in this sense addressed to the police at all but to the protesters, naming political bodies that can be wounded, even die, but who do not submit and are open to others" (Mirzoeff 102).

At the same time, Thomas's comment about the park as a public space for young, marginalized people speaks to the systematic neoliberal extermination of public space, only further constricting where and how people can move and occupy space freely. As a result, existing publicly becomes an embodied form of protest. As Butler suggests, the body in public is a political act: "the body is not just a vehicle for the expression of a political view, but it's the common corporeal predicament of those who need to be supported by proper infrastructure or social services, proper economic conditions and prospects" ("Demonstrating"). By physically occupying a space that it claims, the body in turn embodies that claim. As physical, public space is diminished, and the state disallows certain bodies to move through that space, the concept of the commons is both tasked with reasserting itself in a physical, spatial sense, as well as in its affective, qualitative dimensions as Hardt conceptualizes it.

Following the concept of the commons as outlined by Hardt at the outset of this chapter, these images emerge in service of photography that aids in the articulation of such a commons. These images from Echo/Sight, for example, are themselves protest imagery that exceed the limits of what it might mean to indexically represent protest. Instead, they are politically performative, teasing out more complex narratives and engage in photographic conversation that connects violence and political solidarity across geography and time, as well as across aesthetics—pushing themselves into a relation with other digital users, expanding the borders of photographic genres, and participating in a moment in photography that is increasingly constituted through methods of bricolage and experiential narratives, while upsetting scopic regimes that pretended an impartial visual knowledge.

As Bijan Stephen writes, "A huge reason for [Black Lives Matter's] success is that, perhaps more than any other modern American protest movement, they've figured out how to

marshal today's tools… Technology has helped make today's struggle feel both different from and continuous with the civil rights era… Black Lives Matter has changed the visceral experience of being black in America." Online platforms and mechanisms for creating and disseminating images form a new discursive zone, not insulated from activist networks but as part of a feeder system to them. The visual work of Echo/Sight addresses precarity and disposability on several levels: on the economic, as platforms emerge out of necessity to alternatives to exclusive institutions; on the practical, as they are used to quickly and efficiently rally input, support, and solidarity with causes (drawing upon the organizational strategies of the Arab Spring); and on the ideological, combined with physical activism, such images organize on the front of a soft war. Echo/Sight explores the utilization of platforms like Instagram that can produce states of passivity and alienation, but which can also be mobilized in ways that harness social media to contribute to a growing body of critical art in the networked age through new modes of connection and collaboration.

The images resulting from the Greeson/Freeman and Thomas/Nuñez collaborations operate as locations of resistant practices in and of themselves by making legible the relations between crises and implementing new visual modes of politicizing virtual space. Other collaborations on Echo/Sight range from photographers addressing border violence in the US, Mexico, and Central America (Echo/Sight, "@iampablolopez + @maruiciopalos") to photographers grappling with the disconnect between biotech agricultural research and food insecurity in urban areas (Echo/Sight, "cerronephoto + @tkgphoto"). In May 2017 Echo/Sight featured a collaboration between experimental documentarian and filmmaker Sophia Nahli Allison and editorial photographer Oriana Koren. The two photographers describe their collaboration: "As visual storytellers our focus is empowering black folks and marginalized

communities by reimagining a future of liberation" (Echo/Sight, "@yagurlsophia + @orianakoren"). The opening image for the collaboration shows a Black woman with natural hair, seen from behind and slightly below layered over a cloudy LA sky. We can see the woman's shoulders, draped in a white tank top, and the back of her head, the articulations of her hair echoed in the clouds. The sky image is reflected onto itself across a horizontal axis: the top of a building and palm tree that protrude from the bottom left edge of the picture frame are mirrored, softly, hanging down from the top right edge of the frame. Telephone wires cut across the woman's head and upper back; the palm tree graces the back of her left shoulder; flying pigeons dapple the image. The ethereal and magical quality of this photographic mashup punctuate the rest of the week as well—perhaps more than many of the other collaborations, Allison and Koren's images are less about the relationship between two autonomous images than they are about the emergent combination of the two. Their images effect a kind of mythical proclamation; they do not document what there is but rather what there could be. The May 8$^{th}$ image is accompanied by a James Baldwin quote: "The place in which I will fit will not exist until I make it" (Echo/Sight, "@yagurlsophia + @orianakoren" May 8), an apt description for the work that these and other collaborations are doing on Echo/Sight: carving out space, visual and discursive, in which marginalized communities, radical emancipatory politics, and manifestations of a photography of the commons can emerge and converge.

Such projects illustrate what Leslye Davis, a young photojournalist, sees as an optimistic future in photography: as technological shifts make the medium more hospitable to those traditionally excluded, indigenous photographers are connected globally and have greater opportunities to share their stories, and photographers increasingly shape the narratives in journalism, acting as storytellers rather than illustrators (Estrin "Photojournalism's"). While

Davis's account glosses over issues of economic precarity in the creative economy, her interviewer, James Estrin suggests that increased diversity and access has a complicated relationship with deprofessionalization and a decrease in assignments (Estrin "Photojournalism's").

Similarly, a purely optimistic view of technology not only misjudges the politico-economic implications, but also the politico-aesthetic ones. Work that operates at the intersection of art, technology, and documentary can also be a political failure—not because serious images about violence should not be beautiful as Jim Lewis argued in 2003 ("The Art"), but because a move towards spectacular images without a rigorous analysis of them as a device is depoliticizing at best. For example, Richard Mosse's most recent photographic and filmic project *Incoming* uses a thermal military camera to document the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean. Mosse previously documented the ongoing war in the Democratic Republic of Congo with Kodak Aerochrome film, a military infrared reconnaissance film from the 1940s, designed to visually render parts of the light spectrum normally invisible to the human eye, turning greens into lurid reds and violets. Mosse's arresting images show normally verdant landscapes turned a lush magenta, replete with red foliage and purple military uniforms.

The stunning work won Mosse immediate recognition, but as Lewis Bush notes, the images also embody "an uncomfortable metaphor… for a still lingering European view of Africa as a 'dark continent' stained in blood." Bush suggests that this same visual tactic in *Incoming* speaks to how "creative photography [has] become a sort of technological and visual arms race, where surface appearances and the instant attention they attract matter much more than what those appearances say about the subjects they represent." New and unexpected visual and technical combinations hold potential for seeing problems in new ways, making visible things

that become invisible due to the overuse of a particular approach—but it would be a mistake to ignore that new combinations in photographic practice also engender "the new problems, the new uncertainties, the new loyalties it demands, and the unclear question of which rules we should ask it to abide by" (Bush). What this suggests is that the focus on aesthetics to the exclusion of other photographic and political considerations runs the risk of becoming spectacle. As such, making important or compelling photographic work is not simply a question of creating visually novel images or harnessing new technological applications for its production and dissemination. Rather, the projects that perform and constitute a commons necessarily open photography up to examination itself, questioning what it can accomplish beyond representation, and renewing its responsibility to the politics of visual production and proliferation.

Such responsibilities towards the use and afterlife of photographs of the commons are particularly salient, as photographs can reinforce hegemonic order as readily as they can contest it. Robert Hariman and John Luis Lucaites write, "A photograph captures a tiny sliver of time and space yet can reveal in a flash the social order… Any photo can be an invitation to participate in a way of life and also a vivid reminder that others—you, perhaps—are not welcome, perhaps not even thought possible" (287). The result, then, of images like Freeman and Greeson's, is they tarry not with what is merely visual or representational, but with the *possibility* of appearance; the right to appear. Hariman and Lucaites examine the visual rhetoric of iconic images, those that define particular historical moments in public memory, persist over time, and produce emotional responses that locate individuals within a social context (3-6). The question vis-à-vis the space of appearance might be how these protest images operate differently than icons; what about them determines that they operate collectively, *beyond* the aesthetic and the commodifiable? The photography of the commons, constituted by social forms of production

relies on a resistance to privatization to remain productive. Of course, like Nilüfer Demir's photograph of Aylan Kurdi (discussed in Chapter 1), iconic photographs can be hugely powerful politically, but they do a different sort of political work. While Hariman and Lucaites focus on the communicative work of iconic images over time, it is also useful to consider the potentially detrimental effects of recycling iconic images, moving them out of the photography of the commons and into a predominantly commodifiable visual context.

However, the relationship between the photography of the commons and the iconic image is not inherently antagonistic: David Campbell, secretary for the 2014 World Press Photo contest jury says "protests understand the power of visuals—that's not a cynical idea… [they] are public performances. They're designed to be visual, they're designed to be recorded," and they are mobilized in large part by powerful and in some cases iconic images (Miller). The antagonism, however, emerges from the push to capitalize on and privatize the photography of the commons.

**The photography of the commons and appropriation**

The complication and dismantling of the photography of commons, as illustrated by Pepsi's commercial, is enacted through the appropriation of the aesthetics of the spaces of appearance. This appropriation is not only a coincidental commercialization of socially relevant or timely imagery, rather it occurs as part of a larger and directed set of mechanisms that are designed to constrain public space, particularly as those spaces disrupt "the privatized enclosures of neoliberalism" (Mirzoeff 27). This is the threat that Hardt examines, wherein neoliberal capital attempts to privatize and monetize immaterial production ("Production" 50), turning the commons into property and moving to constrict and undermine the very qualities of public exchange that make a commons possible.

Over the last several years, the increased participation in protest and activism has predominantly been spearheaded by youth, racialized, differently gendered, and queer populations. Since Occupy, student protests have experienced a "renaissance," responding to specific issues like debt, racism, wealth disparity, and climate change, but also in response to a generalized feeling that their future has been foreclosed (Wong, "Renaissance"; Buckley). Black Lives Matter has led a significant surge in protest activity since 2013 (Lowery), and the election of Donald Trump has sparked another upswing. As a response to political activity in the months following Trump's election, several states proposed legislation designed to restrict and criminalize protest participation. The UN says the proposed bills are "incompatible with international human rights law and would unduly restrict the possibility for individuals to freely exercise their rights to freedom of opinion and expression, and peaceful assembly" ("Mandates" 12). According to the Crowd Counting Consortium (CCC), a public research group founded as a result of the Women's March in January 2017 and dedicated to collecting data on political crowds in the US, protest and public action participation is steadily rising. In April the CCC counted a 62% increase in public participation from March ("New Data"), and found that more people participated in June than in any month since the Women's March, a 900% increase from May ("More People").

This upswing in public action and protest participation is accompanied by a parallel movement to transform this action into a marketable aesthetic. This reaction speaks to the multivalent violence that marginalized populations face in the battle over public space. The appropriative transformation of a lived reality into an aesthetic is nothing new; much has been written about the appropriation of Black culture for example, an action that is accompanied by indifference to racialized material realities and violence. Similarly, interlocking mechanisms of

the creative economy and gentrification coopt working class struggles and the aestheticized optics of poverty, again without an engagement with the economic, social, and physical violence that these communities face. LaToya Ruby Frazier's work addressing the Levi's campaign in Braddock, discussed in Chapter 1, addresses both of these mechanisms of aestheticization and appropriation. The corporate sector's appropriation of protest follows a similar tack, and the photographic implications—for the work discussed above as well as singular, iconic images—are entrenched in the fight over a visual commons.

The push to commodify and appropriate is multifaceted: not only is it a question of monetizing artistic or public production, but also of the erasures and disposals that accompany that effort. While appropriating the optics of protest, as Pepsi did, they obscure the context and the consequences of the violence from which it was born; protest becomes a costume devoid of any question of power, while state violence fades into the background. Youth and resistance are portrayed overwhelmingly negatively in the media—peaceful assembly is described as a riot; stranded high school students are portrayed as "thugs"—while their visualization is exploited and simultaneously restricted. What became known in right-wing media as the "Ferguson effect" following FBI director James Comey's unsubstantiated claim that the protests and their visual publicity had resulted in a crime wave, led to the suggestion that police cannot serve the community if subjected to video and photographic surveillance (Lichtblau). Thus images of protest are only permissible in a depoliticized context, where youth are positioned as commodities, and images that perform protest are impermissible altogether.

Parallels that have rightly been drawn between the moment in the Pepsi commercial where Jenner engages the police officer and Jonathan Bachman's viral photograph of Ieshia Evans's confrontation by swat team officers in a July 2016 Black Lives Matter protest in Baton

Rouge. Pepsi's capitalization of the optics of a now-iconic photograph that stands as a symbol of heroism and Black resilience in the face of a violent, white supremacist police state is symptomatic of a larger relationship between neoliberal disposability and the potential threat that images represent to the state order. The imagery of Bachman's photograph was first entirely decontextualized, pulled out of the conditions under which it was born, replacing Evans with an ultra-privileged white woman to broker a saccharine 'peace' while trivializing the legacies of racist and classist violence that punctuate the current political moment. This visual substitution is also of note because many significant political and social movements were started by working class, trans, and queer women of color.[86] Jenner is white and cis, which not only undermines or obscures these historical narratives, but it also lends itself to easy marketability, a condition that dominates at the expense of any political or historical concerns.

Bachman's photograph of Evans won first prize in Contemporary Issues—Singles at the 2017 World Press Photo contest. Evans, a nurse and mother from Pennsylvania, drove to Baton Rouge to participate in the protest following the police killing of Alton Sterling. The myriad histories—photographic, political, and racial—that cohere in this image are what make its impact so profound; its visual genealogy of political defiance is what generates its expansive reach, referring to its own moment and specific conditions as well as to the profundity of its historical legacy.

The image recalls other moments of protest captured on film. From the rich photographic archive of the civil rights movement emerge the 1957 school integration photographs of Elizabeth Eckford in Little Rock, AR and Dorothy Count in Charlotte, NC—both women are surrounded by screaming and jeering white mobs and both display the remarkable calm stoicism

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[86] For example, Black Lives Matter founders Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors began the movement as action entrenched in recognizing the labor of queer women of color; and trans women of color, most notably Marsha P. Johnson were the leading force of the Stonewall riot, kickstarting the contemporary LGBT movement.

that is also reflected in Evans' face. Bachman's photograph also recalls mythology; the figure of Evans has been widely referred to in the media as superhero-like. Cole writes, "The most successful of these images have relatively simple compositions, featuring a single protagonist alone or contending with a number of adversaries. The images, which play into our collective desire for defiance, look like things we've seen before" ("The Superhero"). Cole explains that these images bring an important "counterweight" to the Black Lives Matter visual archive, one that began with evidentiary cell phone images and videos of extrajudicial violence and murder ("The Superhero"). Bachman's photograph also recalls images that illustrate resolve in the face of a militant and militarized police state, best visualized in photographs like Marc Riboud's image of Jan Rose Kasmir grasping a flower in front of a long line of soldiers with bayoneted rifles during a 1967 anti-Vietnam War protest, or the infamous 1989 "tank man" photograph by Jeff Widener, depicting a man facing off with a military tank during the Chinese protests in Tiananmen Square. (The man, like Evans, was quickly arrested and removed, although the man was never seen again.) A lesser known version of Riboud's photograph is perhaps even more striking, and even more closely linked to Bachman's: Kasmir faces the line of armed soldiers, arms outstretched to the sides, palms open; her gaze calm and soft. The frame of this image is wider than its more famous version and the viewer can see space around and behind Kasmir, highlighting the sense of the lone individual and her massive, militarized adversary. Cole explains the effect of this visual device in the Bachman photograph: "She is unarmed and unafraid (the open space behind her emphasizes her singularity); they are militarized and unindividuated" ("The Superhero"). Kasmir's outstretched arms also reach forward half a century reconstituted in "hands up, don't shoot"; Evans's gently presented arms function too as

proof of being unarmed and as a protest to the violence of the riot police as they rush forward to apprehend her.

Nevertheless, when the image is sanitized and divorced from its complex politico-visual lineage—that which is both explicit and implicit, seen and unseen, studium and punctum—and rendered as a mere outline of what it was, it is left as shell in the *shape* of politics, something that smacks of protest and revolution but is orphaned from its own context. Some argue that the recycling and reuse of iconic images aids in critical reflection, as Hariman and Lucaites suggest, and that how we use iconic images is an important process in visual and cultural democracy. While cultural use of iconic images does reveal important information about national identity and public memory, it is important to attend to the political effects of such use.

Hariman and Lucaites argue that iconic photographs or popular media images need to be considered carefully and seriously as a response to the iconoclastic logocentrism that they identify throughout the history of western culture (39). The authors seek to dispute the wariness of spectacle and reproduction with the acknowledgement that one of the primary characteristics of images today is that they circulate, and their circulation, adaptation, and cooption is part of what constitutes our visual culture, and as such, a great part of our public sphere. While Hariman and Lucaites suggest that the proliferation of icons throughout culture and media is not necessarily negative, but rather that such reuse reinforces the status of the original image, it is also important to remain cognizant that such proliferation is never neutral. The "varied appropriations by diverse actors, all within a rich intertext of images, speeches, commentary, and other texts'' (Hariman and Lucaites 9) are willful, directed, and occur according to the ability to appear, and indeed determine the nature of the images' visual proliferation.

Hariman and Lucaites reject the hermeneutics of suspicion that typically guides cultural studies and media studies approaches to image analysis, much like Susie Linfield rejects what she calls the "pathological" hostility of postmodern photo critics (8). Hariman and Lucaites write that "in order to critically assess public culture on its own terms one cannot be content with analysis in terms of social categories of race, class, gender, or ethnic identity, nor should one rely on standard critiques of media spectacle and the power of visual technologies to counterfeit reality and fuel illusion" (28). The authors suggest that these approaches to analysis offer "accurate depictions of mechanisms of social control" but also a "persistent misrecognition of public communication" (29). Their consequent fixation on the fluidity of images as integral components of communication, public participation, and thus, citizenship is an intuitive predecessor of Jodi Dean's analysis of how images have, in the Internet age, become more entrenched in intertextual practices of communication than constitutive of a purely visual sphere ("I. Images").

Hariman and Lucaites, Linfield, and Dean's contributions to understanding culturally constitutive image use are significant, in particular in any attempt to understand the life of images that live predominantly on the Internet and the ease with which they circulate. However, it is equally vital to remain critically aware of the ways that they circulate and are appropriated, and of the ways in which they are able to articulate space within the tidal motion of images online. Additionally, it is important to remember that the online circulation of images within modes of public communication is not inherently democratic; simply because photography has moved predominantly online does not mean that it is liberated from material and social conditions that imply occlusions, crises in visibility, and disposability. These conditions are mimicked and repeated in new spaces and on new platforms: "New technologies also magnify

inequality, reinforcing elements of the old order. Networks do not eradicate power: they distribute it in different ways" (Taylor 108). The emancipatory and political potential of online networks and platforms is the restaging of power rather than its eradication; analyses must thus take into account how images proliferate through spaces and to whom those spaces are available.

The replanting of images into new contexts is therefore also a question of politics, ideology, and subjectivity— in the case of Pepsi and Ieshia Evans, who is in a position to appropriate, and who, conversely, is unable to divorce imagery of violence or protest from their material and physical realities? For Pepsi, the imagery is an expression of social cache or visual relevance; for so many young people, people of color, women, queer and trans activists, etc., these images are both a necessity and a liability.[87] The privilege with which those who have the political distance to remain unaffected by imagery appropriate it is exemplified in a recent controversy where video artist Jordan Wolfson refused to discuss or acknowledge the politics inherent in his artistic choices. One of his works, "Riverboat Song" (2017) shows YouTube footage of a white man beating a black youth. In another piece, "Real Violence" (2017)—part of the 2017 Whitney Biennial—viewers wear a virtual reality headset and enter a scenario where they, as a white man, beat another white man into unconsciousness or possible death. When questioned at a June 2017 screening and Q&A at the New Museum, Wolfson explained his use of violence was purely aesthetic, refusing to acknowledge the social implications of such violence, his privilege as a white male, or his role as an artist to address issues in the broader culture (Da). In an article for *Hyperallergic,* Mengna Da writes, "Not only does Wolfson's

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[87] In an article for *The Fader*, Doreen St. Felix notes how the cultural production of young people online— particularly youth of color—is widely shared, appropriated, but rarely credited: "Cultural sharing is ancient. That the speed and relative borderlessness of the internet makes cross-platform, global dissemination seem like a consequence of tech is a convenient amnesia… Intangible things like slang and styles of dance are not considered valuable, except when they're produced by large entities willing and able to invest in trademarking them."

reluctance to discuss white violence enhance a public dismissal of the problem, but his formalist approach indulges our culture's fascination with gore and death while ignoring its causes and consequences in the real world." Such irresponsible use of images of violence and the commensurate irresponsibility in their discussion displays and contributes to the closing of spaces of appearance, replaced by spectacle, potentially fostering the numbness that Sontag feared and the fixation with violence wrested on others articulated in previous chapters by Giroux ("Instants") and Seltzer ("Wound Culture").

Similar instances of white artists using visuals of racialized violence in their work have sparked significant pushback. In the summer of 2015 audiences protested Ti-Rock Moore's exhibition at the Guichard Gallery in Chicago that included a lifelike sculpture of Michael Brown's supine, dead body. While Moore says she conceived of the exhibition as a commentary on white privilege, many questioned the ethics of harnessing the optics of Brown's murder and spectacularizing it in a private, for-profit sector (Stafford). Similarly, in March of 2015, less than a year after Michael Brown's murder, conceptual poet Kenneth Goldsmith performed a reading of Brown's autopsy report remixed as a poem. The reading sparked an online debate that played out largely across Twitter, and considered Goldsmith's use of the report within the context of discourses on colonialism, socially and within the art world (de Lima). P.E. Garcia writes, "If, as [Goldsmith] says, we are to look at this as conceptual art—if we are to believe the audience is in charge of this interpretation—then Goldsmith should accept the context of his performance… He should accept that we might look at him and only see another white man holding the corpse of a black child saying, 'Look at what I've made.'" Poet Kima Jones tweeted that Goldsmith "did a thing...made a thing...for a crowd…out of a black boy's dead body...he performed...and was paid well" (@kima_jones).

Most recently, at the 2017 Whitney Biennial, Dana Schutz's painting "Open Casket" (2016) has inspired continued and heated controversy. The painting is an abstract rendering of the famous photograph of Emmett Till's grotesquely disfigured face after his body was retrieved from the Tallahatchie River. Till's mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, demanded the photograph be taken and published, just as she demanded her son have an open casket funeral. She insisted that the mourning of his death be public. As Claudia Rankine (2015) puts it, "Mobley's refusal to keep private grief private allowed a body that meant nothing to the criminal-justice system to stand as evidence… The spectacle of the black body, in her hands, publicized the injustice mapped onto her son's corpse."

These three examples differ distinctly from the art controversies during the culture wars, as they are less about artistic license or "difficult art," and more about where such images or visual works can appear and who is the beneficiary of that appearance. The debate about who has access to what imagery and subject matter is complex; in these cases, white artists use the visual representations of lethal violence against black bodies within predominantly white art institutions and institutionalized disciplines. The debate about these works is complicated by claims of artistic license and calls for their removal and even destruction.[88]

On the one hand, the central problematic in Moore and Schutz's work appears to be the fissure between who holds the right to appear publicly and politically, and who has right to use the appearance of others at will. In Moore's work, the public display of the replica of Brown's body in a sense extends the police's actions of leaving Brown's body on the street for four hours

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[88] In artist Hannah Black's letter to the Whitney Biennial curators, she writes: "Although Schutz's intention may be to present white shame, this shame is not correctly represented as a painting of a dead Black boy by a white artist—those non-Black artists who sincerely wish to highlight the shameful nature of white violence should first of all stop treating Black pain as raw material. The subject matter is not Schutz's; white free speech and white creative freedom have been founded on the constraint of others, and are not natural rights. The painting must go." (Greenberger).

before it was removed. The police controlled the visibility of the body, at once displaying it and then concealing it behind barriers and under a sheet; keeping the body from his family for two weeks after his death (Rankine); and months later, attorneys for the police force attempted to block the release of photographs of Brown's body (Suhr). These moves are all an expression of the police exercising their authority to control what is seen, when and by whom; the police order of the regime of the sensible, restricting the possibility of public witness, and thus, the space of appearance.

In contrast, Mamie Till-Mobley's decision to have an open casket funeral for her son and to publicize his post mortem photograph encouraged a process of witnessing and public testimony to violence, laying claim to the space of appearance. This claim, however, is potentially lost and depoliticized in Schutz's painting. Her use of the image—despite her promise that the painting is not for sale—still operates on a commercial register, garnering recognition and prestige for Schutz. However, it also serves a more surreptitious function: by incorporating small bits of critique or revolutionary elements into mainstream discourse, the formative culture effectively desensitizes itself to the work of revolutionary and critical practice.

On the other hand, artists and critics have resisted the attacks on Schutz's work, cautioning against calls for censorship and defending artists' rights to subject matter of their choosing. Performance artist Coco Fusco writes: "presuming that calls for censorship and destruction constitute a legitimate response to perceived injustice leads us down a very dark path… There are better ways to arrive at cultural equity than policing art production and resorting to moralistic pieties in order to intimidate individuals into silence" (Fusco). Polar expressions of support or condemnation for work such as Schutz's and Moore's both fail to engage with the political and aesthetic nuance of these controversies. Not only is it a question

of understanding the legacies of oppression that permit situations in which individuals can capitalize on stories and histories that are not theirs, effectively exploiting the optics of representation. It is also a matter of recognizing that sweeping impulses to censor have their own deep roots in oppression, neoconservativism, and depoliticization, while remaining aware that controversies like those around Schutz's painting move well beyond what Fusco describes as "audience offense."

As many of the vociferous critics of Schutz's work have pointed out, the problem remains in part an issue of white artists profiting from what Rankine refers to as the "unending spectacle" of the killing of Black people in America. However, it is not *solely* that. It is also a question of how and in what context images are reconstituted, and what sorts of work they do vis-à-vis the heightened visibility of violence at the expense of the visibility of personhood and of subjugated histories. While Kara Walker's hopeful mediation was that "artwork that gives rise to vocal outrage… [p]erhaps [also] gives rise to deeper inquiries and better art," (Tomkins) we must also scrutinize the conditions of that vocal outrage. How are these images and visuals reproduced and to what effect? To whose benefit? While Fusco's worry about censorship and hope for emergent discourses and scholarship are certainly valid, there is something more insidious at work here, a pattern that is not reducible to Schutz's painting, Moore's installation, or Goldsmith's poem as individual instances of conflict. Rather, these moments bring into relief the deeper and longstanding issue of racial capitalism as it converges with a crisis of witnessing.

Racial capitalism is not only a question of labor and capital in the contexts of the political economy, but also in the affective and immaterial economies, when, as Nancy Leong explains, predominantly white institutions extract value from racialized individuals and collectives (2174). As such, these artworks must be scrutinized not only as creative acts, but also as products of

systemic cycles of violence, exploitation, and expropriation. While on the surface the conversation lingers on individual rights to creative license, underneath these works depend upon the perpetuation of injustice, manifest in enduring modes of visual and representative violence. Hardt's caution against the commodification of the immaterial commons signals to how structural phenomena like racial capitalism deploy visual culture and cultural production.

Another issue inherent in these works is that the optics of violence and racialized struggle are being supplanted into institutional spaces in which the individuals depicted—displayed in utmost and terminal vulnerability—already have little traction. The relationship between state power and the visual control of art institutions was described by Tony Bennett in the late 1980s as the "exhibitionary complex." The concept describes the role of the state—via private and public institutions—in shaping public culture and spectacularizing or displaying particular narratives about progress, nation, and culture. Bennett juxtaposes Foucault's analysis of the panoptic surveillance of prison with an examination of the Crystal Palace from London's Great Exhibition in 1851, which effected similar self-regulation through an inversion of visibility; everyone could see the exhibition and be simultaneously visible to each other. This model of exhibition also fomented a sense of cultural progress and narrative about communal citizenry under the guidance of the state and industry,

> plac[ing] the people—conceived as a nationalized citizenry—on this side of power, both its subject and its beneficiary. To identify with power, to see it as, if not directly theirs, then indirectly so, a force regulated and channeled by society's ruling groups but for the good of all: this was the rhetoric of power embodied in the exhibitionary complex—a power made manifest not in its ability to inflict pain but by its ability to organize and co-ordinate an order of things and to produce a place for the people in relation to that order (Bennett 80).

The public museums that developed after the Great Exhibition would serve to educate, regulate, and "inscribe" the public into new regimes of visibility (Bennett 85). What remains particularly

relevant about Bennett's analysis is that alongside the rise of the punishing state's overt and coercive uses of power, public institutional displays of art continue to participate in the affective, soft imposition of ideology, pedagogical in function, and as Bennett points out, seek "rhetorically to incorporate the people within the processes of the state. If the museum and the penitentiary thus represented the Janus face of power, there was none the less—at least symbolically—an economy of effort between them" (99). These sorts of rhetorical mechanisms simultaneously perpetuate and reproduce inequalities and lack of access in the broader culture. The modern art museum and the discipline of art history as an academic and cultural practice hail from the 18th and 19th centuries, concurrent with the development of modern racial hierarchies (Wong et al., "Can Art"), explaining why the two are still so intertwined, and why the art world continues to reflect demographics framed by exclusivity and privilege. So as much the above examples of artworks hinge on questions of race and responsibility to narrative, they are similarly about the artists participating in larger practices of pedagogical and regulative state power as well as having access to spaces in which the right to appear is granted differentially.

In response to this threat of appropriation and incorporation, the space of appearance housed in the photography of the commons seeks other distributive channels to make legible that which is disappeared by the state, that which is hidden in plain sight, and the appearances that are denied, and—like in the case of so many evidentiary cell phone videos—subsequently depoliticized. The unique reproducibility of photographs, both in their analog and digital forms, lends itself to circulation, widening spheres of affect, and its integration into visual and political culture. However, this circulation also makes it flexible and available to adoption, appropriation, decontextualization, and redeployment as seen in the Pepsi commercial. Far from a condemnation of the varied uses and engagements with photographs, this critique focuses rather

on their removal from a productive circulation in the commons and recirculation in private spheres outside spaces that are committed to addressing injustice, in ways that permit those very injustices the images visually resist to be recapitulated in their name.

**Appearance and the commons: what can be witnessed**

In order for someone or something's ability to appear to become politically substantiated, it must be recognized, which depends on those who can and will see them, suggesting in part that appearance can be understood as that which is available to be witnessed. In photography studies, several conceptualizations of the witness extend this requirement of sociality to ground the photograph in a triad relationship of photographer, subject, and viewer. Ariella Azoulay explains this mutual responsibility between the three as the civil contract of photography, in which citizenship is legitimized through a set of practices that connects the participants in the act or event of photographing. Within this relationship, participants are not mediated or regulated by a sovereign power, rather, it is through consent and knowledge that each has a political stake in the performative, photographic relationship (110, 117). Azoulay's supposition suggests that regardless of violence or injustice represented in the photograph, the photographic relationship itself erects a space of political intervention and investigation. Based on this premise, within the (material and virtual) political space of photography, participants have an established claim to visibility in the public sphere. We must, however, expand the conception of visibility beyond literal vision to include being recognizable, and as such, dependent on the other; the political space of appearance depends on a demand to be legible, presupposing an equal commitment to recognizing that legibility. Of course, visibility raises questions about how we see before we can be seen, and who grants the official frameworks of vision. Or as this chapter has examined, how

might new re-distributions of aesthetic regimes through artistic production and forms of collaboration engender new distributions of legibility and visibility?

Many suggest that visual studies focuses too much on the treatment of the visual media and largely ignores the examination of visibility itself (Berger 41; Mitchell, "Showing Seeing" 90). Visibility refers not only to the seen or unseen, but is politically concerned with the distribution of the sensible: what is made legible through reordering regimes of the aesthetic, or what is available to the senses. "It is on the basis of this primary aesthetics that it is possible to raise the question of 'aesthetic practices' as I understand them, that is forms of visibility that disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they 'do' or 'make' from the standpoint of what is common to the community." (Rancière, *Politics* 13). In other words, the practices of the photography of the commons transcend what is represented in the images; rather, they enact or perform an assertion of legibility and public space. Part of its work is moving individualized issues and representations into the public sphere.

The weakness of Azoulay's civil contract in the context of the photography of the commons is that it naturalizes a complicity or cooperation between subject, audience, and photographer, while assuming that photographs are purely representational. This assumption leaves an unreconciled group of images that are not indexically representative of their subjects (the averted vision discussed in this and earlier chapters) and reifies the subject-audience-photographer triad as the premise for photographic politics, while failing to consider what sort of political promise a destabilization of that relationship may proffer. What remains especially useful, however, is Azoulay's conception of photography as a political space that both precedes and exceeds the boundaries of citizenship as determined by the state and market, making possible a solidarity between those denied citizenship and subject to particular abuses by the

state, and those whose citizenship is "unimpaired" and recognized by the state (24). As Azoulay argues, images can themselves be brought to testify, often in different ways than those for which they were originally produced (423), highlighting the dialogic nature of photographs, contrary to the "assumption that photographs show or perform something that is already over and done, [which] foreclos[es] the option of watching photographs as a space for political relations" (20). The possibility of solidarity suggests that witnessing is the necessary subject position for viewers—and as a witness one transcends spectatorship, taking on an active, participatory role and investing in the educability of the viewer. Part of witnessing, as Roger Simon explains, is an active countering to the pull of historical amnesia (25) or of willful indifference, but it also opens a space for resistance in the face of the assertion that there is nothing that merits witnessing.

This requisite recognition draws from Butler, who articulates her right to appear on a scaffold of gender identity, but acknowledges this is but one example of embodiment and point of departure regarding the "struggle against the normative construction of the human" (*Notes* 38). She writes, "if we accept that there are sexual and gender norms that condition who will be recognizable and 'legible' and who will not, we can begin to see how the 'illegible' may form as a group, developing forms of becoming legible to one another, how they are exposed to differential forms of living gender violence, and how this common exposure can become the basis for resistance" (*Notes* 38). The space of appearance is regulated, as Butler explains, by the norms that determine who is "eligible for recognition," and as such, the limits of recognizability determine what and who can be seen, and indeed, if there is *something* or *nothing* to see here. By recognizing the other, and by becoming legible to one another, the right to appear is underpinned by Butler's suggestion that norms are themselves impossible to be completely embodied, and as a result, the normative parameters of who and what is recognizable "fail to control the sphere of

appearance, operating more like absent or fallible police than effective totalitarian powers" (*Notes* 39).

This fallibility suggests that the terms that limn the space of appearance are up for negotiation; however for Butler her project is, in part, an attempt to understand "how the human is differentially produced, and at whose cost. Those who bear the cost, or who effectively 'are' the cost of the human, its refuse or debris, are precisely those who sometimes find themselves unexpectedly allied with one another in a bid to persist and exercise forms of freedom that overcome narrow versions of individualism without begin collapsed into compulsory forms of collectivism" (*Notes* 41-42). This allyship is in a sense what Azoulay had in mind and what can be enacted to produce photography that engages not only with what it represents but also with how it might perform legibility through collaborative production and distribution.

In the face of a politics of disposability, the collaborations of Echo/Sight operate as proclamations and processes of allyship, overcoming, as Butler says, the "narrow versions of individualism" by presenting an opportunity for communal witnessing. The constitutive photographers in the mashups reciprocally bear witness to one another, as do their images. The compositions, furthermore, grant audiences a chance to witness what is depicted in each image (and its attendant political context) as well as the performative proclamation of the image, which operates both as an act of political solidarity and as a symbol of collectivism in public space.

In Thomas and Nuñez's August 6th mashup of the man walking past Cathy's Kitchen in Ferguson overlaid by Baltimore riot police, viewers have a particular opportunity to apprehend the image itself as a testamentary document, and participate, through witnessing, its work of constituting a photographic commons. The combination of the two images presents the riot police as surveillant— the double exposure concretizes the very physical way that the punishing

state imposes upon civilian populations. As viewers of this image, we have the opportunity to act as bystander-witnesses, much in the same way that people record interactions with police to document violence and as an attempt to insure against misconduct; we police the police. Simultaneously, the political capacity in proliferating this and other images in public space hinges upon its recognition and visibility in order to eke out space in which things *can* be witnessed. As a result, viewers also participate in the movement of the image from representative object to political process.

While Butler's analysis rest upon the possibility of mutuality through vulnerability and its recognition, Mirzoeff articulates his space of appearance by drawing from Rancière, whose encounter with police is governed primarily by their determination of what is available to be seen. This role of the police contrasts Louis Althusser's conceptualization of ideology shaping subjectivity, exemplified by being "hailed" by the police ("Hey, you there!") which he called "interpellation" (131): "The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing" (131). Ideology is thusly addressed to individuals, and it transforms individuals into subjects through its appeals and practices in which the individual recognizes themself as a subject. Rancière, on the other hand, asserts that the police say, "Move along! There's nothing to see here" (*Dissensus* 37), conscribing what is available to be witnessed, or what Rancière refers to as the sensible.

The sensible is the field in which Rancière's definition of politics can emerge, politics that are not under the purview of the state but rather belong to everyone and are premised on equality. As a field, the sensible is open to be reconfigured in order to disrupt the unequal distribution of the police order and enable the excluded to be heard. The police's order to "move along!" attempts to determine what is relevant to the public and reduces public space to a space

of "circulation" exclusively, foreclosing the ability to use a space to pause and deliberate (*Dissensus* 37). This order ensures that the viewer cannot witness, and is at best an uninformed spectator, one who does not know what they are (not) seeing. "Nothing to see" also suggests that they are out of time, they have missed the action, or more accurately, that they do not have license to partake in it. Rancière writes that politics is the refiguring of the space of circulation into "a space for the appearance of a subject" (*Dissensus* 37). His interest is in how the police order can be reversed or refigured, resisting the assertion that there is nothing to see.

The images of Echo/Sight do precisely this work of resisting the police order by insisting that there *is* something to see, and furthermore, that these acts of witness must be collective. In other words, the things we bear witness to must be understood as related to one another: the viewer's relationship to Nuñez's image of Baltimore riot police is necessarily connected to our ability to witness Allison and Koren's images of empowerment and self-representation of marginalized communities. The images demand visibility of the injustices they depict as well as of the appearance of individuals and their optical language within contexts that are hostile to that very visibility. Even in critical readings of images such as the Pepsi commercial we can find emergent resistance: the woman into whose hands Jenner thrusts her wig becomes symbolic for the expropriation of Black struggle upon which the whole advertisement hinges. The woman's expression of shock illustrates the ways in which she is treated as a menial and peripheral but upon whose labor Jenner's walk to self-discovery and socio-political triumph depends. In this instance, the commercial unwittingly contains within itself its own critique, and the image becomes witness to that critique.

Suturing together Butler's demand for recognition and Rancière's assertion that politics are performed by insisting that there *is* something to witness and deliberating about it, the

photography of the commons must also engage with the (im)possibility of witnessing at all. Sharon Sliwinski's examination of viewing photographs in relation to the development of human rights discourse frames the viewer in a productive capacity: the witness is articulated through their reaction and engagement with photography of human rights struggles. What is at stake in the aesthetic experience is bearing witness to the *différend,* that which cannot be expressed, or is beyond our experience. This witnessing is an act of judgment and also of morality (Sliwinski 33). While Sontag questions whether any good comes from the experience of viewing images of atrocity— in her it provoked distress, discord, and disruption— it is possible that these emotions connect us to the experience of witnessing, and that grappling towards naming the unnamable is a way in which we constitute collective humanity (Sliwinski 33).

Beyond the problems of representing the unrepresentable or expressing the inexpressible, Rancière also questions how to witness and whether it is possible when confronted with images of atrocity upon which we foist incredible political responsibility. He suggests that the intolerable represented in images is transformed into the intolerability *of* the image, implicating viewers in an ethical tension between participating in spectacle and being moved to act. Engaging in this intolerability is what Sliwinski suggests engenders witnessing as an act of morality. Although Rancière refers to photographs as generally being asked to serve as proof, while witnesses give testimony, perhaps, in the above configurations, the photograph itself can stand as witness, and the photographs proliferated collectively may form a sphere of communal witness. The intolerable image is dialectical, that is, it represents a truth or a moment, but not in its entirety—its inherent paradox is demanding too much and simultaneously too little of photographs; while they fail at showing the entire truth, they also fail if they are disregarded (*Emancipated* 90). As such, witnessing in its full impossibility is nevertheless a condition of our

engagement with photographs as a practice of justice, knowing that "an image never stands alone. It belongs to a system of visibility that governs the status of the bodies represented and the kind of attention they merit" (Rancière, *Emancipated* 99).

While the question about the ability to witness that which cannot be expressed in an image undergirds much photographic discourse, in this discussion the question is not only about bearing witness to atrocity or injustice, but bearing witness as a condition of a photograph's performativity. In the social life of the image, by enacting the witness and demanding the right to appear, politics happen in real time, and as Azoulay suggests, do not merely depict events that exist in the past. As such, we resist the idea that we can know ahead of time what sort of work images will accomplish, and what sort of witnessing we will be called upon to perform: "Images change our gaze and the landscape of the possible if they are not anticipated by their meaning and do not anticipate their effects" (Rancière, *Emancipated* 105). However, we can presume that by witnessing or recognizing the right to appear, and simultaneously asserting that there is indeed something to see, the politics of disposability fail at total erasure—in other words, this utopian moment in representation takes as its target the politics of invisibility. The photography of the commons not only shows what has been disposed or excluded while making visible the mechanisms of disposal, it also resists the assertion that there is nothing to show. Although showing injustice does not guarantee that justice will follow, the photography of the commons resists visuality "as a means to justify authority as the imagining of history" (Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look* 277). The simultaneous work of reordering the police order, locating politics beyond the boundaries of the state, reinterrogating history in order to enact a more just relation to the future, and asserting photography's ability to perform the right to appear converge in novel ways across media and new platforms, redrawing the limits of documentary photography in the 21st century.

The immaterial commons shift the politics of visibility or recognizability from the spheres of material production and consumption, and as a result move, as Azoulay suggests, the reifying mechanisms of recognition into the hands of a solidarity network premised on mutual vulnerability and the collective rise of political engagement. The rubric of recognition that emerges is of course shaped by the state, norms, and ideology, but as part of a hopeful pedagogy, the visual networks discussed here continue to push that space into a truly mutual, communal zone, beyond the boundaries of the state or market— and perform legibility that may translate that legibility into wider and wider spheres.

New forms of production and distribution in documentary photography have opened up the possibility of the photography of the commons, a utopian and activist moment in photography that holds significant implications for popular and political culture. By carving out spaces of recognition and legibility across and beyond institutionally recognized platforms and optic norms, the photography of the commons suggests a new form of political solidarity premised on the image as performative and constitutive of public spheres. This suggests that the photograph holds the capacity for a new political language, one that extends beyond the civil contract that Azoulay has articulated, to also harness non-representative visual registers. Because of the immaterial and affective nature of biopolitics under neoliberalism today, the injustices that characterize a politics of disposability are in part visual problems that develop across both physical and virtual spaces. As a result, photographs play a central role in reasserting a democracy built around the language of the commons and in articulating new modes of resistance to a visual politics of disposability. In examining these politics and injustices it is important to take images seriously, not only in their roles as tools of oppression and

misrepresentation, but also as active in forming new approaches to political resistance and

cultural production.
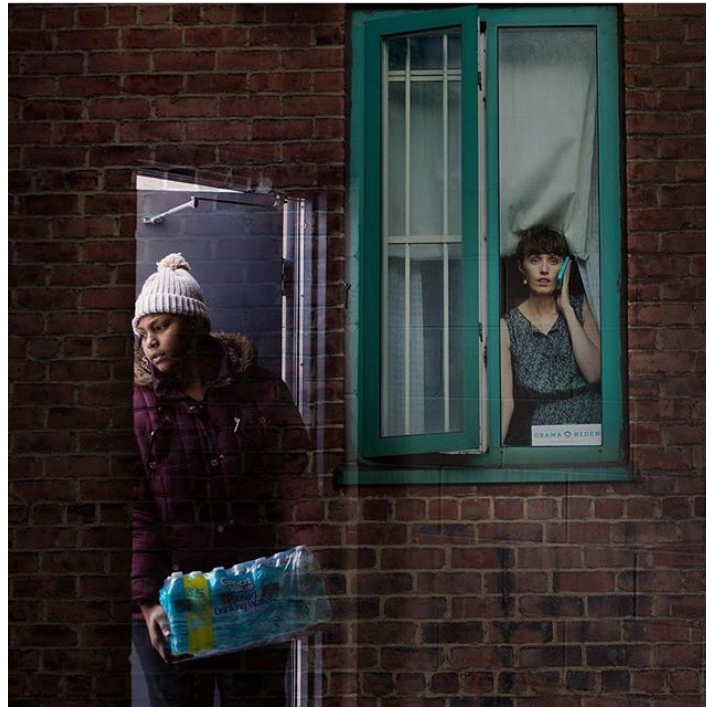
Brittany Greeson and Demetrius Freeman. "A woman carries water from a fire station to her car on January 12, 2016 in Flint, Mich., as a woman peaks [sic] out her window to watch the Trayvon Martin protest in New York City on July 15, 2013." *Echo/Sight*, 15 Feb. 2016. © Brittany Greeson, Demetrius Freeman, Echo/Sight, courtesy Echo/Sight.
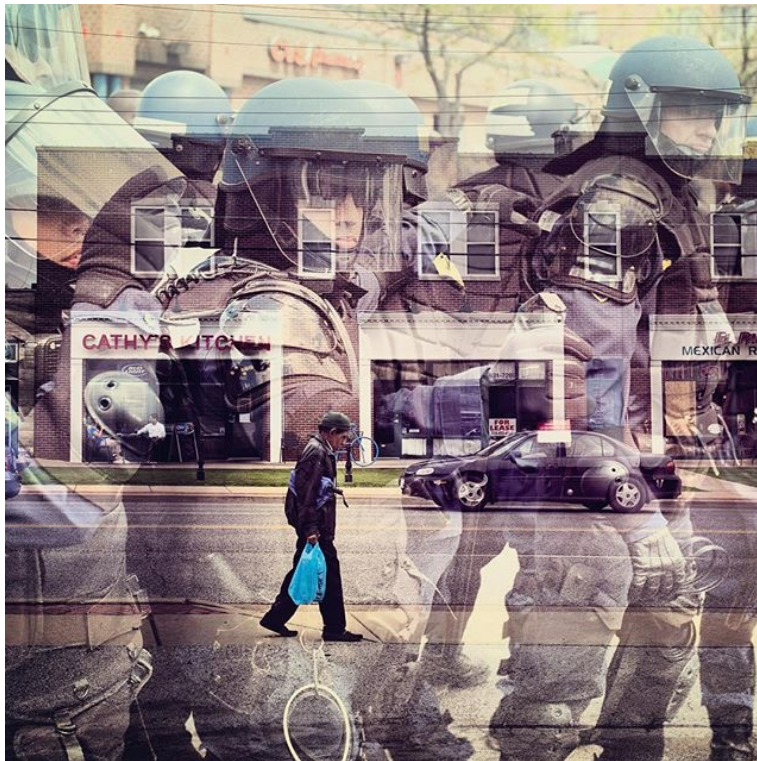


Michael Thomas and Glenford Nuñez. *Echo/Sight* and *Al Jazeera America*, 6 Aug. 2015. © Michael Thomas, Glenford Nuñez, Echo/Sight, courtesy Echo/Sight.

Michael Thomas and Glenford Nuñez. *Echo/Sight* and *Al Jazeera America*, 4 Aug. 2015. © Michael Thomas, Glenford Nuñez, Echo/Sight, courtesy Echo/Sight.
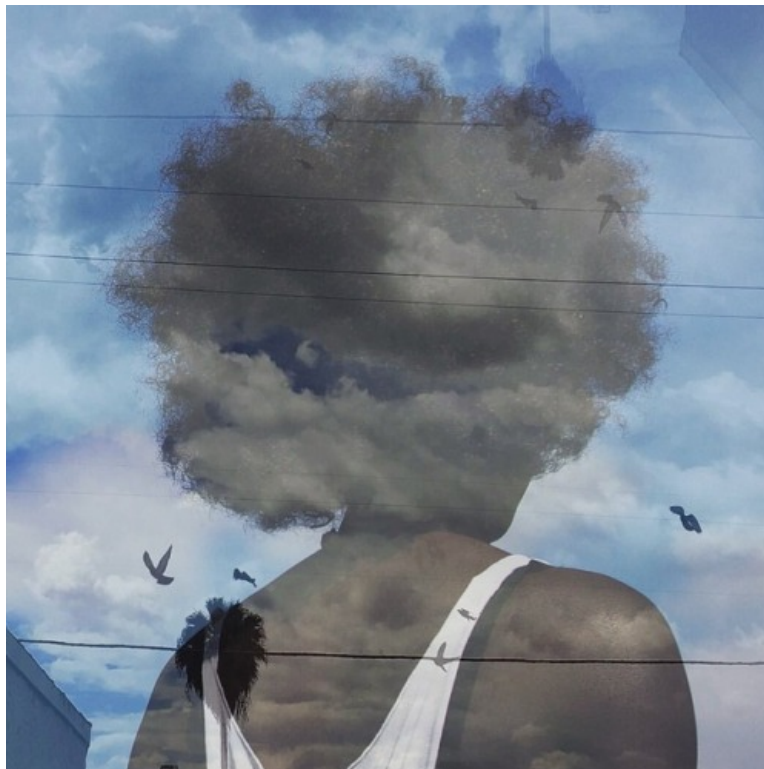


Sophia Nahli Allison and Oriana Koren. "'The place in which I will fit will not exist until I make it' - #JamesBaldwin." *Echo/Sight*, 8 May 2017. © Sophia Nahli Allison, Oriana Koren, Echo/Sight, courtesy Echo/Sight.

CONCLUSION
ARCHIVAL ETHICS AND THE PHOTOGRAPHIC UNKNOWN

The photography explored in this dissertation belongs to a particular kind of archive, one that is varied in its material and procedural techniques but nonetheless bound together in spite of its heterogeneity. The wide selection was intentional: the variety of photographic work with which we are confronted on a daily basis is rivaled only by its quantity, presenting the viewer with profound challenges as well as tremendous opportunities to find order and meaning in it. In closing this dissertation, it seems helpful to reflect upon the photographic archive in its material and digital manifestations, both as an instructive approach to considering the photograph's relation to history and longevity, and as a guide for thinking about the future in light of today's political conjuncture. I ask: how can the form and use of the archive serve as a safeguard against a politics of disposability? How can our strategies of mobilizing archival contents resist legacies of oppression and occlusion? At the same time, how does the nature of the archive resist rewriting and occluding those same legacies, maintaining the simultaneous visibility of disposability and new political formations? Finally, how do photographic archives function, both inside and outside formal institutions, to reanimate historical discourses and provide narratives in service of social justice, and not just remembrance?

While it has become fashionable to refer to any grouping of objects as an archive, just as it has become fashionable to refer to any organization of things as their curation, the question of the archive and its role in making sense of this photographic moment begs a deeper consideration of its makeup and function. What will likely always remain true about archives is their capacity for discovery, that, like photographs, they contain multiple narratives and truths in their contents as well as in their omissions. However, it also remains true that, like with photographs, we must

consider the structural factors that shape and constrain their form. Foucault understood the archive as both a material collection or institution and an ideological construct, at once regulatory—drawing things together in relation to one another while leaving others out—and illuminating—rendering ideas and details proximate to us—determining that its contents

> do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents; but they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 129).

Foucault was particularly attentive to the archive's taxonomic and biopolitical functions: the longstanding use of the photographic archive as a means of management and consolidation through surveillance, indexing, and record keeping. As Sekula points out in "The Body and the Archive," the late 19th century "merger of optics and statistics was fundamental to a broader integration of the discourses of visual representation and those of the social sciences" (18). For example, Alphonse Bertillon's Parisian police archives used photographs to augment the anthropometric measurements of criminals, the images functioning as a precursor to the contemporary mugshot (Sekula, "The Body" 18). The archive in this case performs a self-substantiating function, reifying images and information through their inclusion. Similarly, Jean-Martin Charcot's late 19th-century photographs that purported to document the hysteria of his female patients at the Salpêtrière psychiatric hospital incorporated the patients into a closed circuit of proof through the concretization of psychiatric infirmity as a regulatory mechanism. In other words, "photography was in the ideal position to crystallize the link between the fantasy of hysteria and the fantasy of knowledge" (Didi-Huberman, *Invention* xi).

These biopolitical measures of archival control are held in tension with the photographic archive's other functions. Gilles Deleuze's reading of Foucault characterizes the archive as

analytic, belonging to the historical past (164). Okwui Enwezor, curator of the International Center of Photography's 2008 exhibition *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art,* contributes two further conceptualizations of the archive's functions. The first is diagnostic, in which the archive is an entry point into the layers of knowledge and narrative, available only through excavation: "the deep time of the archive surpasses the temporality of the archive as a thing that one can immediately have access to" (Enwezor, *Live from the NYPL* 12:30). The diagnostic dimension suggests, blurring the boundary of Deleuze's idea of the historical analytic, that the archive can be used to understand contemporary conjunctures. Enwezor's second archival function is prognostic, which describes how we make use of the archive, what kinds of new knowledge and meaning can be created in concert with it, and "how… the archive engender[s] positions of reflection" (*Live from the NYPL* 13:05). By engendering reflection and simultaneously stimulating the social imagination, collections of photographic work deploy history as a tool with which to guard against historical amnesia and to politicize narrative.

The three dimensions of the photographic archive—analytic, diagnostic, and prognostic—position it as a space of continuous encoding and decoding, both affirming and destabilizing history; uncovering new narratives and resisting the reification of dominant ones. The archive is anything but inert: its animation lies in uncovering and creating new knowledge while resisting the ossification of historical discourse and challenging the use of the archive as a tool of control. However, those biopolitical and regulatory uses of the archive are also instructive, and important to examine—the photographic collections of Charcot and Bertillon shed significant light on the discursive genealogy of illness, feminism, eugenics, surveillance, and disposability as a biopolitical concern. Critical examinations of these archives result in a

historical understanding that brings to light but deviates from the purpose for which they were intended.

Such emancipatory and pedagogical uses of an archive suggest that it can "proliferate new ideas about history and the collective responsibility to that history" (Enwezor, *Live from the NYPL* 8:32). Instead of the viewer or a single image testifying as witness, the archive can testify to what official accounts omit or suppress. Ariella Azoulay points out that no one owns a photograph exclusively: "The photograph is out there, an object in the world, and anyone, always (at least in principle), can pull at one of its threads and trace it in such a way as to reopen the image and renegotiate what it shows, possibly even completely overturning what was seen in it before" (13). As a collection, bodies of work can forge these alternative readings of history, and furthermore, establish previously unexamined relationships between its contents. The analysis of an archive must always be attentive to the archivist, or the context in which the archive was formed and by whom, and how these factors influence decisions of inclusion and exclusion.

The photography in the preceding chapters is important to this examination precisely because of its contextual function within the neoliberal conjuncture. The projects are in conversation with one another and with work that both predates and follows it. It would be an error to consider any such project in a vacuum, formally or culturally; rather, a multi-dimensional map emerges through each project, one that extends geographically to connect to its contemporaries, as well as temporally through past and future. As Foucault suggests, the archive is not entirely quantifiable, its limits are not always definitive; it is indescribable in its totality (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 130). Nor does the archive organize its contents into linear, temporal regularity. Rather, it "determines that they do not withdraw at the same pace in time, but shine, as it were, like stars, some that seem close to us shining brightly from far off, while others that

are in fact close to us are already growing pale" (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 129). This inconstancy and variability is not in spite of but thanks to the multiple ways that the parts of an archive interact with each other and with the whole. However, we must also recall that these interactions and emphases are also conditioned by wider networks of vision and legibility. As a result, images and the relations between them work to consolidate our construction of identities and social relationships, and at the same time serve as means of resistance to the neoliberal sensibility and hegemonic articulations of history.

Perhaps we can articulate the archival as an ethics, rather than as a repository or even simply as a source. On the one hand, underlying the archival impulse are relational and preservational drives, manifesting in the desire to position material together in order to save it from its own loss. The archive thus presents a particular kind of selection or care—one that is intrinsic to the photographic process itself and that articulates a definitive resistance to disposal. On the other hand, the interplay between the analytic, diagnostic, and prognostic functions of the archive presents an opportunity to frame the engagement with history as a process of justice. This entails reading visual history in ways that are critical, in particular listening and making room for alternative narratives that both reveal and rethink the politics of disposability. However, it also means engaging with history as a *means* to frame the future justly. Derrida suggests, "perhaps… the question of the archive is not a question of the past… It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow" (*Archive Fever* 36). Perhaps this means that the archive can emerge as a photographic commons, a space of appearance, or a public sphere in which the photographic relationship is guided by an ethics of solidarity, grievability, and recognition.

What sort of past resides in photography, and what sort of photographic present can we demand of it? We can understand images as being born in the past, representing something from the past, but in our examination of them they are no longer entirely *of* the past. Beyond photography's uncanny ability to destabilize temporal linearity, the photograph's relationship to the past is a political question of inheritance, describing the way particular narratives are hitched to photographs and are thus reproduced by them. However, photography can unfix those same histories, unyoking itself from particular narratives and ideologies, and positioning the reterritorialization of history as a visual problem.

Archives are often the means through which public memory is consolidated, for example through institutional archives that house versions of collective histories or iconic photographs that frame collective memories. Unfixing the archive, and approaching it as a living, dynamic site of continuous revision allows the possibility for the reexamination and renarration of public history. Derrida's observation, however, that forgetting is a crucial component of the archive holds true—it can permit us to rely on the archive to remember *for* us. As a result, collective memory hinges in large part on the intentional repression of particular historical narratives. This act of collective forgetting is facilitated by stagnant attitudes and the willful, moral disengagements with history (Giroux, *The Violence*).

The act of remembering, however, is not enough to counteract the moral catastrophe of forgetting; it too, can consolidate particular and uncritical narratives, stories we tell ourselves as a society. The German word for memory, *Erinnerung*, means to internalize, indicating an appropriative making-personal of the object of memory. In the act of remembering, the subject takes something exterior and makes it interior: re-membering, the making something whole or part of the body, or re-collecting, a reconstitutive act in which something external and separate is

compiled in relation to the subject engaged in the act. "*Die Erinnerung* is the kind of memory that… is prereflexive, precritical… [It] always already has posited a self's relation to its memory and to the object of its mnemonic act: it propels the self to incorporate the objects of the mnemonic act so that it becomes coextensive with it" (Richter 195). In this way, archiving is an act of remembering, incorporating fragments into the whole. However, as the memory becomes integrated into the whole, it reaffirms and reproduces particular narratives about collective identity, a circular process in which the identity in turn determines the proper memories to substantiate itself (Vergès 9). Françoise Vergès—following Maurice Halbwachs who coined the term—writes that collective memory is thus "profoundly anti-historical: it does not accept multiple perspectives, it rejects the ambiguous, the uncertain, the indeterminate. The temporality of collective memory is a timeless present, i.e. a time in which the past and present are in a continuous sign-chain" (10).

As a result, collective memory often loses its sense of nuance and can be dangerously uncritical, spurring forms of collective forgetting. As we have seen in this dissertation, certain photographs and photographic practices can disrupt this cycle, insisting on divergent histories, identities, and perspectives. The archive too, through its analytic, diagnostic, and prognostic capacities, can provoke us to rethink the self-affirming narratives, compelling us to reconsider our collective identity and relation to the past. Archival and curatorial practices can position the archive as a site of testimony and memorial, poised "against the tendency of contemporary forms of amnesia whereby the archive becomes a site of lost origins and memory is dispossessed… it is also within the archive that acts of remembering and regeneration occur, where a suture between the past and present is performed, in the indeterminate zone between event and image, document and monument" (Enwezor "Archive Fever: Photography" 47). While Enwezor is correct that the

archive can be a site of memory, the archive is not reducible a place of memorialization or remembrance, nor are such acts in isolation productive in the pursuit of justice.

Public mementos of the past are not intrinsically reflexive or pedagogical; as Simon (2014) insists, remembering is not the same as justice. He located the educative potential of engaging with historical photographs in archival and curatorial practices, suggesting it is precisely the excavation, the contextualization through reading and re-reading, and the thoughtful presentation of material that renders it useful to practices of justice. Our responsibility in examining bodies of photographic work is not just to commemorate or commit to remembrance, but, as Simon suggests, to commit to social justice and "to generate critical insight into the complex, often contradictory terms and conditions of everyday life" (*Pedagogy* 5). Often, efforts to memorialize result in further erasure, suggesting that in order to do justice the engagement with memory must be accountable both to the present and future. Such accountability entails showing and recognizing the past injustices and the structures that made those injustices possible, as well as providing an opportunity for more just future strategies to emerge.

Ranjana Khanna details a particularly evocative example of erasure enacted through reconciliatory attempts at memorialization. In 2005, several states began memorialization initiatives for the unclaimed and forgotten cremated remains (or "cremains" as they are called) of mental health patients at state facilities. Critics of the projects worry that such memorialization initiatives obscure the legacies of disposability that governed those and thousands of other patients, and as such are inherently deceitful. One such critic, Grace Heckenberg, a former patient of the Oregon State Hospital, suggests that memorializing the cremains in a cemetery plot enacts a lie about the realities and lives of the patients, a move that under the guise of honoring

them actually acts to conceal the centuries of indignities and violence wrested upon them (Khanna 183-184). Heckenberg's argument suggests that the spectral haunting of the un-memorialized cremains functions to attest to histories of injustice and insures against historical amnesia. This story bears significant implications for the remedial and truly memorial work that photography is capable of, while cautioning against attempts at erasure that parade as visibility.

A true archival ethics, however, entails more than the care for the archive's contents or historical engagement as a practice of justice. It also requires the capacity to leave room for the unknowable; that in certain cases, allowing the photograph its refusal, or the archive its silence, is also a practice of justice. It requires the acknowledgement that the archive is not merely a place to *mine* for material, it is also a place to generate new lines of questioning that may not result in definitive answers. Scholars, critics, and individuals often turn to photographs to unpack and understand the past, revealing our commitment to the hope that photographs will elucidate more than they will obscure. While we most often ask photographs to affirm the existence of certain kinds of narratives and archives, poised to fill in gaps and repair history, they may actually complicate our understanding of the past; they remind us that the past is not entirely knowable. Photographs are in some way temporally irreverent, unbeholden to official histories, permitting multiple pasts to exist. Kate Palmer Albers writes, photography "do[es] not necessarily convey the truth. It does much more than this, particularly as it engages questions of the many-faceted and complex ways that photographs can, often simultaneously, succeed and fail to engage viewers with history" (5). The photographers in this dissertation couple photography's capacity to illuminate history with an attempt to unhinge photography from its naturalized or assumed relationship to the past, lending the medium to a more discursive engagement with the

future. They allow photographs to refuse to show, a strategy that can be just as instructive and illuminating as direct representation.

Beyond permitting photography such visual refusal by strategically employing averted vision, some of these photographers use this device to represent the failed *attempt* at vision. It is not merely *not* showing something, but showing the unclear or unrepresentable, a visual ethics that underpins their commitments to showing *disposability*, rather than only the disposed. The disposability that then becomes the subject is often the underlying reason for the visual failure or the inability to articulate in the first place. These photographers approach these inchoate visual slippages in various ways: the deep darkness in some of Frazier's work which speaks to socio-visual omissions as well as the racial biases in film inadequacies; the visual entropy or loss that occurs between the double exposures on Echo/Sight, a visual sacrifice made in order to permit the dialogic image to emerge; and the inability to show the victims in Begley's work and the temporal instability spurred by the juxtaposition of the Google images.

These strategic visual failures and refusals reveal, slowly, the complex way that disposability underpins our relationship to history and vision, and that these blind spots are not truly blind—the spaces are actually full of information and are recentralized by their invisibility. They function as kind of negative evidence at the same time that they eschew the traditionally evidentiary. The occlusion or inadmissibility of evidence becomes the evidence itself, a Gordian knot that these photographers circle around. As Sarah Ahmed suggests,

> the evidence we have of racism and sexism is deemed insufficient *because* of racism and sexism. Indeed racism and sexism work by disregarding evidence or by rendering evidence unreliable or suspicious – often by rendering those who have direct experience of racism and sexism unreliable and suspicious. This disregarding – which is at once a form of regarding – has a central role in maintaining an order of things ("Evidence").

These photographers focus attention to the moment in which the disregard becomes the regard, when the disavowal becomes affirmation, drawing disposability out of itself and into relief against itself. The photographic archive reflects these resistant visual practices and become sites for the patient decoding of the interstices and gaps in history that are ultimately anything but empty.

Daphne Brooks (2017) suggests that what we know, do not know, and cannot know about photographs must be considered together: that the unknowable represents a kind of loss, and loss remains a central aspect of the archive. She proposes, furthermore, that the only way to approach the unknowable of history and of the archive is by acknowledging it, and by doing so, the discourses of loss insulate themselves from asserting histories that we cannot confirm. Brooks furthermore cautions us that visibility is not always possible nor is it always desirable: that the liberal enthusiasm about the archive—particularly regarding photography and ephemera that belong to a marginalized history—can quickly devolve into fetishization, an often well-intentioned but nevertheless refashioned form of oppression. Parts of the archive resist their incorporation into a cohesive whole, and it is often in these moments of disjuncture or protest at their inclusion that we can distinguish a space through which a new narrative can emerge. The images are, after all, objects in their own right, ones with histories and social lives of their own. The challenge is how to "tease out" the dormant aspects of archives without stifling them anew with well-meaning shaping and presentation which can result in a casual erasure of the material realities of those lives (Brooks). This point is particularly important, especially in broad and largely vernacular archives, like the informal collections of prison Polaroids. There is a shift in their nature when they are formalized and monetized like the collection that was sold in Chapter 2.

What we know and do not know about photographs also depends on their materiality. We can gather certain things about physical photographs by way of their condition just as we can deduce certain things about digital photographs by way of their online life (Brooks). While Derrida and Enwezor after him emphasize the theoretical, temporal, and emancipatory potential of the archive, there is of course a very material concern that endures. The question of how to preserve and organize components of the archive has been complicated by the digital era, in which the immateriality of objects and their duplicate, often degenerate iterations can be nearly infinite and exceedingly difficult to control. Derrida's insight that "the archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed" is especially true now (*Archive Fever* 68). Postmodern instantaneity and the digital proliferation of images present new conditions for understanding and creating visual archives. In light of intense visual consumption and disposability, in which collective space for cultural production and meaning-making is the germ for resistance to neoliberal modes of engagement and simultaneously under threat, the ability to organize and make sense of images takes on a particular urgency.

The hyperaccessibility of photographs online and within digital modes of information storage makes collecting and sharing images a condition of visual communication. The contemporary digital impulse is to document and preserve nearly everything, and to make massive quantities of the photographs available. This impulse of over-production is both countered and sustained by the notion that much of it is also disposable—it is an easy decision to take multiple digital photographs of one thing because they can always be thrown away again. In some sense, the nearly infinite online repositories of images are themselves archives, or perhaps sort of proto-archives—not quite articulated, but available and waiting for interpretation. While these archives have not yet been consciously assembled according to a particular logic or criteria,

and are lacking in some of the conscious and selective care that archiving entails, they do embody some of the more theoretically generous aspects of the term that Foucault gestures towards. They are amorphous and impossible to accurately delimit, with parts that push to the fore and others that recede to the background; archives envelop us in them too, disallowing a cleanly objective analysis; their boundaries can only be approximated by our own discursive limits; the archive is not a single entity but a "general archive system" (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 130-131). The scope and ambiguity of these digital archives account for their difficulty: as the amount of accessible work increases, so does the dilution of images. How can we address digital and networked imagery in a way that ensures innovative and important work does not get lost in the fray?

In his 2011 installation "24 Hrs in Photos," artist Erik Kessels printed out all of the photographs uploaded to Flickr, Facebook, and Google in a single day—one million of them—and placed them in a gallery, resulting in mountains of photographs, piling from floor to ceiling, through which viewers waded. While the piece demonstrated the overwhelming volume of images that exist online, and the logistical impossibility of understanding them, it also suggested something about their general disposability. There is no way to care about every image; the boundary between treasure and refuse becomes unstable and we respond by learning to disengage for efficiency's sake. Because of what he diagnoses as the overconsumption of images, Kessels' observation that we have become "remarkable editors" is not without what he sees as a significant loss of criticality:

> We have developed the ability to filter images; to discern in a split second… which are interesting to us and which ones to discard. Thanks to this remarkable skill, the bulk of these images wash over us… we barely register most of them. The downside is that this current image culture is potentially breeding a generation of visual illiterates, passive consumers who don't read, interpret, or process the bulk of images they are force-fed on a daily basis (6).

Kessels' other work attempts to recoup some of this lost care and attention, reifying images that are otherwise forgotten or viewed only cursorily. Instead of making new photographs, he searches through and organizes already existing ones. His *In Almost Every Picture* series, Kessels looks for patterns in bodies of vernacular photographs and organizes them in groups according to a specific criterion, creating mini collections or archives in which disparate photographs are bound together, opening the possibility for other connections to emerge.

With perhaps more optimism than Kessels regarding our ability to manage the deluge of photographs, Fred Ritchin suggests that we will need an "assertive *metaphotography* that contextualizes, authenticates, and makes sense of the riches within this highly visible but largely unexplored online archive" ("What a Photograph"). He projects that the need for photographers will be eclipsed by the need for "metaphotographers" to sift through and contextualize the billions of photographs, most of which exist in binary code, dwelling somewhere in the information cloud (*Bending the Frame* 6).

The majority of the work directed at sorting these photographs does not accomplish the critical organization that Ritchin may hope for; much of it, while it is often referred to as "curating," is more aptly described as filtering, devoid of the analytic functions of curation. Curation has become a term that is applied to all kinds of activities, from adding images to a Pinterest board to putting songs together in a playlist. As Erin Kissane points out, these sorts of activities are better defined as "filtering, selection, remixing, or mosaic," whereas curation can be more carefully defined as the "collection, preservation, and ongoing stewardship" of content or materials ("Curating"). Ongoing stewardship implies that the curatorial is necessarily oriented towards the future, mirroring to a certain degree the means by which an archive moves between analytic, diagnostic, and prognostic. If, while resisting the banalization of curation, we can

expand our understanding of where and how curating can happen in its most critical and thoughtful capacity, we can also expand how archiving might be done and where archives can be constituted.

Part of doing so must centralize the consideration of how archives develop extra-institutionally and in immaterial dimensions, and how particular archives can be shaped to constitute the sorts of spaces of appearance explored in Chapter 3. However, as Brooks' examination of the recontextualization of photographs and ephemera suggests, the material archive remains in dialogue with the immaterial, and materiality continues to press upon contemporary scholarship. While Enwezor is somewhat dismissive of this idea of the archive, writing that "the standard view of the archive oftentimes evokes a dim, musty place full of drawers, filing cabinets, and shelves laden with old documents, an inert repository of historical artifacts" ("Archive Fever: Photography" 11), these sorts of collections—even in their weaknesses and failures—are informative, providing important contexts that shape and drive the creation of new work. For example, Frazier's research in the Andrew Carnegie Library and her subsequent realization that Black contributions were completely excluded from official Braddock history helped direct the arc of her own project moving forward (American Academy 9:00). Immaterial archives—while they do encompass new mediums and are constituted at unprecedented speeds and dimensions—are neither independent of nor at odds with their analog counterparts. Enwezor cautions us that the conditions of the archive are such that even as they are proliferated in these decoded versions and instant interfaces, the archive is never as transparent as we may like it to be. This "instability of the archive" is thanks to the slippage between the material and the interface, namely in its translation (*Live from the NYPL* 14:48), and this translation determines the difference between archiving, curation, and mere filtering.

The challenge remains how to simultaneously translate between materials and platforms, accounting for the new immaterial dimensions and political implications of online photographic proliferation. The expansion of what archives are and how to constitute them instructs viewers to consider the prognostic, forward-thinking dimension of the archive. However, the significance and function of the archive moves beyond the prognostic—it does not merely forecast what is to come, it imagines and constructs a future beyond what appears to be possible. Just as Mirzoeff's space of appearance is performative in the sense that enacting visible justice in one space can manifest the same in the broader culture (33), the photographers examined here participate in creative thinking as much as they do in critique. As they draw upon and depart from various archives—Begley from the wealth of online images that illustrate death; Wilkins from historical portraiture and contemporary mugshots; Frazier from the negative space in Braddock's history as well as the legacies of social documentary photography; van Agtmael from the failures in the war photography genre; Atwood from the gaps in the knowledge about women's incarceration; Echo/Sight from the impossible number of images that appear online and yet remain isolated from one another—their historical work includes a certain amount of speculation and so too, creation in service of a more thoughtful and just future. Through their diverse processes, these photographers continuously question how resistance can be generative, and how they might maintain a commitment to making, to being moved, and to moving others in the face of oppression. Their work suggests that a politics of resistance or critique is not enough—it must also imagine beyond, generating alternatives, not only in response to existing problems, but also nourishing humanity in its potential to be more just and compassionate. The photographers' willful engagement with the unseen and unseeable is what permits such concern for the future to

gain purchase in their work, bringing me, in a concluding move, back to the unknown and the role it plays in photography, the archive, and politics.

What I have endeavored to do with this disparate collection of photographers and their work is to examine practices that break open, rather than consolidate discourses as a way to address very specific and oppressive politics. The photograph's task of doing so rests as much upon its concealment as upon its disclosure: the "photographic paradox… hinges equally on knowing and not knowing, on definitive proof coupled with uncertainty, on abundance of detail being met squarely with its own inadequacy" (Albers 4). Photography's ability to dwell in uncertainty, doubt, and indecision suggests that it is equipped to aid us in our pursuits of knowledge and justice, pursuits that are themselves exercises in conflict and contradiction. Artistically, this means that photography's aesthetic dimension remains poised to rupture and transform our stale perspectives and subject positions as Marcuse (1977) suggested. These artists remind us that to pursue such work is to pursue understanding even if it does not necessarily result in resolution. However, they also move past understanding for its own sake and towards a future-oriented politics and practice of justice.

The photographers embody what Ernst Bloch and others after him called the *principle of hope*—a Marxist utopianism that concerned itself with a lack of anticipation and imagination for the future. Rather than tethering critique to a description of the past—as one might be tempted to consider a photograph to be—this form of utopianism is concerned with the state of perpetually becoming, of *noch nicht* (not yet). The unfinished nature of humans and of culture opens up the political possibility of a dialectical relationship with the past: the past becomes a "repository of possibilities that are living options for future action, therefore what could have been can still be" (Kellner). By extension, and perhaps because of the way in which the photograph always also

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references the archive, it emerges as a concatenation of events, past and possible, rather than the fixed representation of one event. The utopian dimension of artistic practices that engage both the past and the future resists what Didi-Huberman (2008) and Giroux after him call "disimagination"—the anti-criticality that neoliberal politics sow, engendering the sense that the future is not a place for politics, possibility, or agency.

In response to the disimagination distilled by the 2016 presidential election, Junot Diaz wrote in The New Yorker: "what I'm trying to cultivate is not blind optimism but what the philosopher Jonathan Lear calls radical hope… Radical hope is not so much something you have but something you practice; it demands flexibility, openness, and what Lear describes as 'imaginative excellence.' Radical hope is our best weapon against despair, even when despair seems justifiable; it makes the survival of the end of your world possible" ("Radical"). So while the image contains many simultaneous possibilities and narratives, it is not merely the image itself that determines its emancipatory potential, nor is it simply the context, the volume, composition, aestheticization or de-aestheticization. Rather, it is the set of conditions under which we view images, the political forms we believe are possible, and the limits that neoliberal ideologies impose on our reactions, actions, subjectivities, and ultimately, imaginations. Images that rupture with the conditions that govern the regime of the visible are a primary front to push back against such limits. Nine months before Diaz's piece was published, civil rights activist Diane Nash gave a lecture at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, on February 17th, 2016. At the end of her talk, she said to the room, "I had you in mind when I did what I did; I already loved you" (@daughterofelsie). Both Diaz and Nash articulate how urgently we require a political discourse that centralizes alternative political formations and possibilities beyond the

neoliberal conjuncture; they also offer invaluable insight into what photographs can do to advance those discourses, in service of future realities and the people that live there.

In "The Creative Process," James Baldwin wrote that it is the artist's responsibility to take nothing for granted and to make visible what we are blind to. These photographers remind us that their work in confronting disposability entails but also exceeds this concern: their work is not only about revealing what exists in the blind spot, rather, it is equally about drawing attention to blindness itself. Our work as viewers is to be patient but persistent with vision. We must not demand to be shown everything at once, but must simultaneously examine for ourselves the relationships between images, their unconscious and unseen dimensions, the archives within which they reside or *could* reside, and the historical and imaginative labor that these photographs perform.

CODA

I return to the photograph from New Orleans, rewritten by Katrina, to reconsider it in light of this body of work. The question that lingers from the beginning of this dissertation is how this photograph can be more than a token of voyeurism; how can it stand for justice and not only for the disposability that it embodies?

Perhaps by caring for the photograph, by keeping it and thinking about it, I can animate my own archival ethics—by preserving it and privileging the stories it contains even as it refuses to disclose them. I hold Daphne Brooks' caution close to heart: I want to give this photograph space to be both known and unknown and to stand (sometimes quietly) for the narratives and truths that converge across its surface. I want to patiently distinguish the residual trail it leaves— and that I might trace—into its history. I remember Brooks' challenge and hope for archival ephemera, that we can coax out their dormant dimensions without prescribing and suffocating them. It reminds me of something a friend said the day after the 2016 US presidential election: "listen to those who are quietest today."

Instead of ending up as refuse in the ongoing efforts to rebuild, instead of being swept up in the receded waters, piled amid mildew and mold, this photograph exists refigured but intact. I think about how it sits in relation to other photographs—intentional or not—as an archival object, and how this photograph informs and is informed by other objects in other archives. I wonder how it managed to end up here. My inability to absolve myself in its unrighteous possession serves to keep it present, in tension, a reminder that it is unfinished; it cannot be wrapped up or justified away. The violent and controversial conditions of its production and subsequent dislocation render it always in flux, at least in my mind. The photograph forces a kind of accountability and honesty around it, and through its preservation it enacts the promise

that artifacts of injustice contain—that if paid attention to, listened to, and considered, carefully and repeatedly, they resist their own tidy erasure. Maybe this photograph works to keep me honest, compelling me to examine my own complicity in violence, in silence, and in the lifelong education in knowing when to use my privilege to speak and knowing when to listen. Sometimes photographs are teachers, sometimes they are ciphers, and rarely, extraordinarily, they are both.

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