

**IN
LIM
BO**

	FEATURES
3	FOREWORD by Marcel Feil
5	20/20 VISION IN LIMBO by Deborah Willis
10	ON MY MIND by Marcelo Brodsky
12	ASPHODEL MEADOWS by Elisa Medde
19	WAYS OF SEEING ALGORITHMICALLY by Lewis Bush
29	HOPE IN EMPTY SPACES by Mariama Attah
31	MOURNING LIFE BY LIVING IT by Jaime Lowe

	IN LIMBO
33	ANTOINETTE DE JONG & ROBERT KNOTH Text by Keiko Okamura
49	DANIËLLE VAN ARK Text by Paola Paleari
57	THEMBINKOSI HLATSHWAYO Text by Lekgetho Makola
73	VASANTHA YOGANANTHAN Text by Taco Hidde Bakker
89	IN CONVERSATION Mark Sealy with Elisa Medde
97	PHOTOGRAPHY IN CRISIS by Tanvi Mishra
106	IN CONVERSATION Alec Soth with Marcel Feil
113	WIDLINE CADET Text by M. Charlene Stevens
127	WENDY RED STAR Text by Claartje van Dijk
137	PARTS UNKNOWN
169	FABIO BARILE Text by Taco Hidde Bakker
185	PHELMIM HOEY Text by Hinde Haest
197	SEBA KURTIS Text by Mariama Attah
209	STANLEY WOLUKAU- WANAMBWA Text by David Campany
225	IN CONVERSATION Sunil Shah with Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa
233	NATURE’S LIMBO by Kim Knoppers
241	LAWRENCE LEK Text by Mirjam Kooiman
253	AÏDA MULUNEH Text by Mark Sealy
265	TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS Text by Joseph Dodds
288	COLOPHON
289	VIEW CLOUD FROM EYE POSITION by Eugenie Shinkle

The term ‘crisis’ is derived from the Greek word *krisis* and its verb *krinomai*, to decide, select, judge. Directly related terms include ‘critic’ (one who judges) and ‘critical state’ (a medical condition that could go either way). A crisis can end well or badly, but the point is that the outcome is fundamentally uncertain. The experience of a crisis is the experience of a world that is, for the time being, in jeopardy. That is the world we are living in now. It’s a time of not one but several crises that in some way or another are all connected. The coronavirus has impacted upon the world on a scale never seen before. To an unprecedented, global extent, practically all aspects of life have been dominated over the past few months by a virus of which neither the specific cause nor the liberating remedy are known. Uncertainty prevails. And even though the virus raises its head at different times and in different places, the human response, with its concerns and anxieties, is strikingly universal. Important here is the nature of the crisis. Unlike a war, a terrorist attack or a natural disaster, the coronavirus is invisible and walks abroad like a ghost. At any moment, wherever you may be, it can arise out of nowhere and infect you or those you love. The percentage of people directly affected by the virus is limited in an absolute sense, certainly in light of the bigger picture. Our direct experience is mainly of fear and uncertainty, fed by stories and news reports covering what

the virus is and what it can do. And what the virus can do reminds us inescapably of our human vulnerability and transience. We have tried to arm ourselves against it by bringing life to a standstill. The guidance and the measures imposed create a lockdown of a kind never seen before. Every form of human movement is restricted; cars are parked up, planes are grounded, the streets are empty, shops shut. Most people obey the far-reaching new rules, stay home, and wait in a state of suspense, somewhere between deliverance and doom. That is where we find ourselves now, in limbo, a state of deferral in which we don’t know what will happen or when. We are in a vacuum, in an intermediate phase between heaven and hell, between past and future, without any firm ground under our feet. In that sense this is also a mental and emotional crisis that prompts introspection and forces us to think about the things that are truly important. Because during a life in lockdown, matters we regarded as of crucial importance turn out to be less than essential, and we have discovered a great desire for things to which we never paid much attention before. It’s time to change course and think about how we want to go from here, to arrive at a vision, a strategy for getting us out of the darkness and into the light at the end of the tunnel. The fact that in limbo we are forced to identify our fundamental needs and think about what we require if we are to survive in a worthwhile

and sustainable manner might be the one benefit to be gained from this crisis. In doing so it is good to zoom out and consider that our current predicament is not the main crisis of our time but a symptom of a far larger crisis, of a story that began centuries ago. The demystifying of nature and the emergence of modern individualism led to a fundamental split between humans and the natural world. Nature was no longer God’s holy creation, which we needed to deal with in a suitable way. Instead it could be dissected and analysed scientifically. Science has brought us many good things and in a sense it has only served to increase the magic of existence. But progress is relative. In combination with modern capitalism, science has also created a system in which the natural world can be used and abused for the purposes of perpetual economic growth and unbridled personal profit. It has led to discoveries, knowledge and insights, to ever-increasing prosperity, but also to centuries of Western hegemony, colonialism, exploitation and repression, and to intolerable socioeconomic inequality. The end of that system is now announcing itself loudly and definitively. Nature is increasingly making its limits known, hitting back mercilessly and revealing not just our unparalleled arrogance but our dependency, fragility and mortality. Worldwide we see more and more powerful protests against inequality and injustice. In recent times demonstrations against institutional racism have

been held all over the world. That is no accident. What we are seeing is merely the start of a fundamental political, economic, ecological, moral and spiritual shift, in which the conviction is growing that existing power structures will have to change. Yet we still have no idea how that much needed transition will go from here. Within the bigger picture too, we are in limbo.

A crisis is a moment of discernment and decision. Thinking is well underway about a post-corona society that is less cursory, hectic and materialistic, that has room for slowing down, for a quest for meaning, and for entering into real and significant relationships. What place do art and culture have in that new society? What is the role of photography in a world full of questions and uncertainty, a world in which there is a growing feeling that existing institutions are being called into question or undermined?

More specifically, what role do we want photography to play? What do we want photographic images to do for us? We cannot even attempt to find an answer unless we have an idea of what we want and what we do not want, a sense of direction, a vision of life after the crisis. It is that which forms the basis of this issue of *Foam Magazine*, for which we have relinquished the established format. It felt inappropriate to publish a regular issue in the middle of this global crisis, as if nothing had happened, and a missed opportunity too. *Foam Magazine* offers the perfect chance to pose such questions broadly and explore them in word and image. Not with the intention of arriving at unanimous and absolute answers, but to pose and discuss these questions and thereby plant the seed that will help determine what follows. In that sense it can contribute to the search for a way out of the darkness.

The attempt to formulate a meaningful answer to the question of what we want photography to do for us is made particularly difficult by the complex nature of the medium and the diverse ways in which photography can be deployed. Photography can register and document, as a witness to the events of our day. Photography can channel our feelings and thoughts, or reflect the human condition. It can show beauty, or offer comfort and solace. In combination with social media especially, it can be a significant power broker. The camera, as an accessible and widely distributed piece of equipment, was an essential component in the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement. In witnessing,

sharing and organising, photography is a powerful instrument for giving people a voice and therefore power, especially individuals and communities that are often denied power in its traditional forms. Photography can unite people, but it can also drive them apart. It can be a catalyst for cravings and greed, for an ever-accelerating dynamism of interests driven by commerce and power, for transience and superficiality. Like technology — with which photography is inextricably linked — photography has two faces, one good and one bad. Which of the two comes to dominate is determined by the way it is used, which is up to its users, and therefore in some sense up to each one of us.

Ultimately it's a matter of consciousness, of being aware of the voice we each have in us, and of using that voice carefully and responsibly in a time in which everything is in motion and seems pushed to the brink. In this issue, therefore, we attempt to bring together a diverse choir made up of people from the world of photography whose voices can help us address our needs and wishes.

Compared to a regular issue of *Foam Magazine*, 'In Limbo' has more textual contributions, and they are of a slightly different nature. A wide range of people active in the field — from Marcelo Brodsky to Deborah Willis and from Tanvi Mishra to Jaime Lowe — have each produced unique responses to the question of what photography can do in times of limbo. We thank all of them for their valuable contributions. We also thank Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa, Sunil Shah, Mark Sealy and Alec Soth for their willingness to have extensive conversations in these turbulent and challenging times. Of course there is also a lot of space for photography.

Each in their own way, the portfolios and the types of photographic images included here address matters that form the starting point of this issue. They are visual suggestions for ways in which photography can help us find a path to a new phase in life. They present possibilities, some poetic, some direct and confrontational. They include a number of artistic interventions, by artists Lewis Bush and Eugenie Schinkle, and by students taking the Masters in Photography and Society at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague. They represent the voice of a new generation, a voice still developing and full of potential. A voice of hope.

— Marcel Feil, Director for Artistic Affairs, Foam



by DEBORAH WILLIS

On 5 March 2020 the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a global pandemic. As a photographer, it has been heart-wrenching to see the over 100,000 faces and names of the many who have succumbed to the coronavirus in the United States since that date.



Subsequently after that announcement, I have lost seven friends to the coronavirus all artists and writers who reframed visual narratives about race and gender in the arts. I have spent 95 days on Zoom reframing stories of loss while trying to find moments of joy as a mother/scholar/teacher/wife. The last ten days I have been reflecting on the photography of protests in America after the on-air death of George Floyd and the horrific murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and Tony McDade.

Covid-19 has wreaked havoc in many ways as it ravaged us globally, taken that which is most precious; however, as a writer and curator whose works explore how the female body is consumed in contemporary art and history I am also thinking of the experiences of migration and the stories that are developing as I sit in this suspended state — of limbo as the theme of this issue is framed by. It has been a necessary time for me to look back at my own images and written work that explore pain, loss and joy in the midst of commensurate adversity in these 95 days! I have not left my apartment, since the 'Shelter-in-Place' plan was initiated in New York City. In these days I pick up my camera every night at 7pm to photograph from my balcony my neighbours making 'noise', sounding the alerts, reminding all of us to recognise and acknowledge the health care workers and other essential workers who are risking their own lives to protect and care for us against this unknown

'reaper'. As I make self-portraits, I also think daily about my 98-year-old mother, Ruth, and my 17-month-old granddaughter, Zenzi, each and in different ways lead me to the women migrants, and lead me to try to imagine their experiences at the borders around the world and wonder how they are protecting themselves and their families during this pandemic. I believe my photographs will memorialise this experience in a different way and help me reflect on the critical work that needs to be done to create a community that is supportive and more compassionate.

Many healthcare workers here in New York are immigrants; where are they gaining strength? It is no irony, my eyes go to the migrations of the female body. I have been photographing my closets, continuing the new body of work, but in these days I am looking for clarity, a focus — considering the stories of the people we have lost, the lack of mourning focusing on Black death and the ways people are empowering themselves by making masks from pieces of fabric found in their closets. What happens when one crosses borders to seek a new life and opportunities? What objects are carried; what remains; what is sustained only through the experience of memory — dress, food ways, photographs, religious symbols, sounds! The closet is a quiet space that allows me to reflect on dress and storytelling, certainly the continuum of my work, but also investigating the closet as a site where beauty, memory and labour are enacted, as a space of empowerment

**IT'S MY FACE MAN
I DIDN'T DO
NOTHING SERIOUS
MAN
PLEASE
PLEASE
PLEASE I CAN'T
BREATHE
PLEASE MAN
PLEASE
SOMEBODY
PLEASE MAN
I CAN'T BREATHE
I CAN'T BREATHE
PLEASE**

for individuals authoring their own identities contrary to social or cultural convention; the stories of refugee people, the lack of mourning focusing on Black death to cite two examples.

As I reflect on Black death and photography, I see it as my life as a Black woman in America, from lived experience to act of memory. I am troubled by the photographs I've seen during the last two weeks of May, and I have been asked by a number of people what these images mean to me. Black death has been photographed, broadcasted, recorded, and exhibited for the past 95 days and it has been ten days since the on-air death of George Floyd — the callousness of the white police officer, his knee on his neck, left hand in pocket. I watched in horror as another police officer stood guard, protecting his fellow officer even as the 17-year-old young Black girl behind the camera phone screamed and pleaded with the officers to stop. I thought she'd traumatised and will be for life. I heard others begging for George Floyd's life as he pleaded 'I can't breathe' over and over. With his last words circulating on the internet, it included calling for his mother, he expressed his pain, 'my stomach hurts, my neck hurts, everything hurts—.'





The video went ‘viral’! Each time I watched the news, I thought these clips were recorded thanks to cell phone imaging and surveillance footage and because of the camera we are able to see the history of racial abuse repeating itself. Activists, community members, students, government and city officials, family members and others have used the imagery and change began to happen because of the range of these images of injustices. In March Breonna Taylor was killed in Kentucky by police going into the wrong house; in February Ahmaud Arbery’s death was recorded in Georgia by two white men as he jogged through a neighborhood nearby his home. It was not until weeks later, when the video was released by a third man recording the chase that the national news media reported his tragic death.

When I first started thinking about Black death it was well before the global pandemic and global lockdowns and the measures of combating and coping that have become our everyday reality. I had been thinking about the death of my sister from cancer, asking why so many Black women die because of cancer. Something that isn’t photographed or reported and hasn’t gone viral. I have become consumed by a need to consider the act of memory work during this time. Grief grips my heart as I remember the words of my grandmother — ‘Baby, the dead never leave you’. More and more Black men and women experience racial discrimination,

physical and emotional violence, economic rejection, and too often, death.

I will never forget the photograph of young Emmett Till’s brutally beaten and swollen body in *Jet* magazine in 1955. Many young people experienced episodes of hostile confrontation with the police, which intensified over the years because of social protests. Black Americans have been killed, hosed, jailed, and subjected to unjust laws across the country. Since the death of the young Emmett, a diverse group of photographers witnessed brutal and social assaults, creating a new visual consciousness for the American public, and establishing a visual language of ‘testifying’ about individual and collective experiences.

On 27 April 1962 there was a shootout between the Los Angeles police and members of the Nation of Islam Mosque; seven members of the mosque were shot and Ronald Stokes, a member, was killed. Fourteen Muslims were arrested; one was charged with assault with intent to kill, others with assault and interference with police officers. Malcolm X investigated the incident and attended the trial, a year later photographer Gordon Parks remembered his photograph depicting Malcolm X holding up a large photograph of the brutally beaten NOI member in this way:

‘I recall the night Malcolm spoke after this brother Stokes was killed in Los Angeles, and he was holding up a huge photo showing the autopsy with a bullet hole

at [the] back of the head. He was angry then, he was dead angry. It was a huge rally. But he was never out of control. The press tried to project his militancy as wild, unthoughtful, and out of control. But Malcolm was always controlled, always thinking what to do in political arenas.’

I share this history as I am always mindful of the past because of visual culture. I value it, even though I am distressed by this history, even more so in this moment, because the Gordon Parks High School was damaged by fire in St. Paul.

History! James Baldwin said, ‘to accept one’s past — one’s history — it is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it’. The last few months have perplexed me for a variety of reasons, but Baldwin helps, perhaps most because Baldwin was meticulous as a writer; he did not spare words, thus his use of the verbs ‘learn’ and ‘use’ are clear and provide guidance. ‘Learn’ to ‘use’ art (image); and make history right. In 1989, Toni Morrison wrote in *Beloved*: ‘And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up’.

Collectively during this time of uncertainty, we must continue to be reminded that photography can galvanise, incite and question as we hope to make changes in/to the law even as we struggle to find words for this painful moment. I am encouraged by the young activists across America as they photograph and bear witness in this charged moment. I urge everyone to use this incredible energy to vote and to document injustices everywhere — and to be heartened by the voices of people around the world who are supporting and telling this American story globally, who carry the faces of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and Tony McDade on their face masks, shirts, painted murals and signs, to ensure that this time will be the last time. ●



All images © Deborah Willis, courtesy of the artist

DEBORAH WILLIS is an artist, author and curator whose art and pioneering research focuses on cultural histories envisioning the Black body, women and gender. She is an acclaimed historian of photography, MacArthur and Guggenheim Fellow, as well as Professor and Chair of the Department of Photography & Imaging at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. In 2014 Willis received the NAACP award for *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* which she co-authored with Barbara Krauthamer.



In 1968 Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference organized a major march to Washington D.C. to demand economic and human rights for poor Americans of diverse backgrounds. The campaign was carried out under the leadership of Ralph Abernathy in the wake of King's assassination. Photo A.P. 1968 the Fire of Ideas 6/7 Marcelo Brodsky

In 1968 Martin Luther King JR called for a march for rights equality. The Poor People's campaign was carried out in June 1968 in Washington, D.C. by his right hand Rev. Ralph Abernathy and his widow Loretta King, after King's assassination in April in Memphis, TN.

In this Campaign King widened up his call beyond civil rights to include economic justice for all. The action was a multi-racial effort including African Americans, White Americans, Native Americans, Latinos and Mexican Americans, aimed at alleviating poverty regardless of race.

The worldwide marches of resistance and change in 1968 inaugurated a new epoch of changes in political participation of the younger generations, sexual freedom, street action and activism. Culture at large changed after the 1968 street action from Paris to Mexico, from London to Tokyo, Rio de Janeiro, Dakar or Tucumán.

The worldwide marches of 2020 in the wake of George Floyd's murder by a white police officer in Minneapolis triggered an anti-racist movement around the world showing that many of the racial discrimination policies and attitudes are still in place. Today the Black Lives Matter movement continues today the anti-racist and pro equality activism that started in the sixties with the civil rights movement in the United States.

— MARCELO BRODSKY

Washington, 1968. From 1968, the Fire of Ideas, visual essay by Marcelo Brodsky

MARCELO BRODSKY is an artist and political activist that investigates broader social, political and historical issues through his work. After many years of exile, Brodsky returned to his native Argentina in 1994, having fled during the years of the so-called Dirty War — a decade of state-sponsored terrorism in which opponents of the military dictatorship were 'disappeared'. In 2014 he initiated Visual Action, an organisation dedicated to incorporate visual culture in human rights campaigns and to work on visual education.



ASPHO DEL MEA DOWS

by ELISA MEDDE
images by AARON SCHUMAN

The year 2020 introduced itself with a variegated set of emergencies worldwide: from wildfires to strong political crises, straight into a global state of emergency due to a deadly virus, that quickly spread and became a pandemic. Not that things were idyllic before, let's be honest (Hello climate emergency! Hello kids held in cages at borders, and rubber boats filled with humans sinking in silence in the Mediterranean!). Yet, within the first quarter of the year, events aligned in a way that was unprecedented for the largest part of the living human population on the planet. An inexorable domino effect moved from China, to South East Asia, to Italy, Europe, the American and the African continent, to which the whole planet became familiar with terms such as RT Index, mortality rate, oxygen saturation and lockdown (of various degrees of claimed intelligence). Each country addressed the issue differently, separately and mostly inadequately: years of cuts to health systems presented their tolls, with hospitals largely struggling to contain the spinning numbers of infected.

The visual storytelling in those moments was a long list of exhausted people covered in protective gear trying to contain something that seemed uncontainable, army trucks loading the unmanageable number of coffins, and the infinite, heartbreaking list of individual stories of people who could not even say goodbye to their loved ones. Long, festering social inequalities showed how not even a deadly pandemic could make all men equal: the wealthiest have proved to be better protected, being able to work from the comfort of their homes while pontificating about home schooling and bread baking techniques while essential workers, mostly from minorities and lower sectors of society, had the infamous responsibility of 'keeping things running'. At a certain point, social unrest exploded. A long, painful list of Black men, women murdered by white police officers in the USA culminated with the horrific killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

Almost instantly a video went viral on the web, showing the 8,47" agony of a man slowly choking to death, begging for air, calling for his mother and for the mercy of the police officer who was killing him in cold blood by pressing a knee over his throat. This triggered what has been described as the largest protest movement in the United States history, with the Black Lives Matter committees and their many sister associations keeping the momentum alive and demanding justice for their communities and the long list of murdered individuals whose killers were known but untouched: George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, and many others. The US protests quickly spread their energy worldwide, from Europe to Asia to New Zealand, with Black communities organising protests and forcing postcolonial countries such as Britain or the Netherlands to start coming to terms with their past, the origin of their wealth and the racial biases within their societies. The visual storytelling at this point brought images of protests, demonstrations, defaced statues — a definite change of visual

pace from images of silent struggle to a very loud, potent, liberating uprising. A surge in reaction that could not be avoided anymore, and forced people into action. All of a sudden the individualistic bubble in which many of us were dealing with the pandemic exploded — the vacuum was interrupted.

The health-related part of the state of emergency we are still living in at the moment I am writing, July 2020, is very specific: there is something incredibly subtle about it, draining mental and emotional energy. Considering the larger scheme of things and the proportions of tragedies affecting periodically many parts of our planet (from famine to war, to health crises, such as Ebola) the percentage of people directly affected by Covid-19 is rather small: for the majority of humans on the planet the experience of it is mainly (and thankfully) made of echoes, third person accounts, new social rules and fear of what it could be. It is not a war, something very visible and tangible, but it has to do with health. Health is something we normally just take for granted, until we can't. It's that invisible necessity that makes everything work, and we only notice when it goes missing, or gets damaged. When health is in danger, we are immediately, suddenly and with no mercy, shattered and confronted with our fragility and temporality. It is a bit like we as a society have been diagnosed with a terrible illness before developing large scale symptoms. Someone tells us we are very ill — even if we don't feel it — and that we have to start incredible and painful treatments in order not to die — maybe. So, we do it diligently, and wait for the moment someone in charge tells us you are good to go for now. In a way it's that dual citizenship Susan Sontag wrote about — only applied to masses rather than individuals. Yet, while being locked in there we have little if no agency — we must follow rules, and wait. To be IN LIMBO suggests being in a state of in between, suspended.

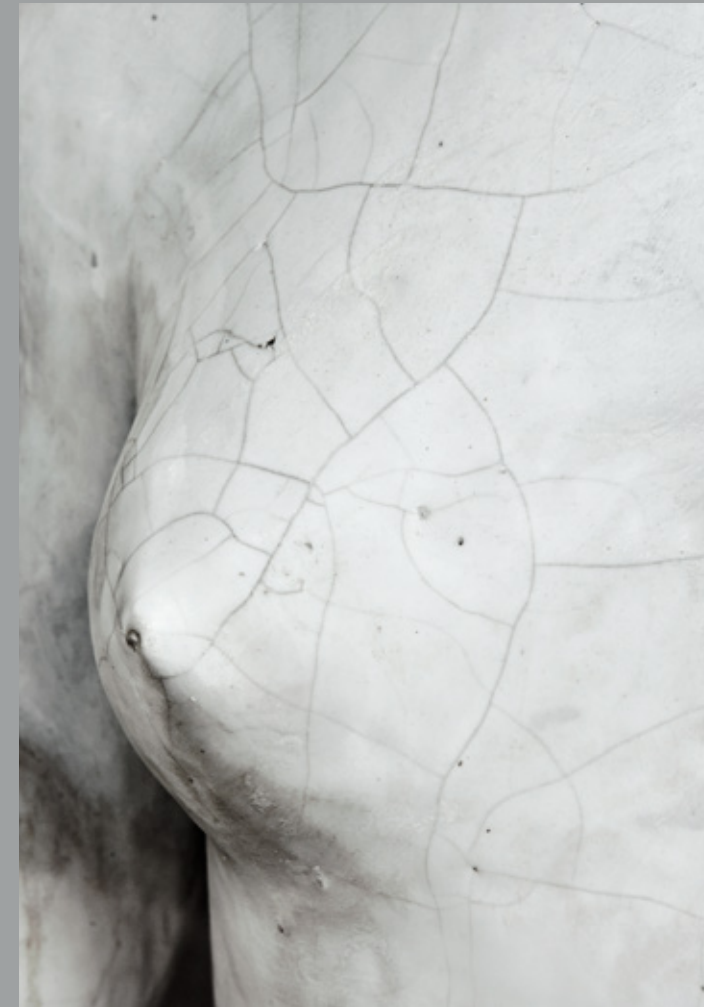
The word 'Limbo' comes from the Latin *limbus*, meaning edge, limit. It suggests the boundary of hell, pictured according to a medieval Catholic point of view as the idea of the nothingness between damnation and salvation. We are not in hell, but also very far from heaven — albeit in very good company: the limbo hosts the non-baptised, but most importantly, all that came before the coming of Christ. Theoretically speaking, anything between Pitagora and Confucius. Yet the concept of Limbo, this idea of a suspension, intermediate state between death and whatever comes next, is present in pretty much all mythologies and organised religions, from Islam to Buddhism. According to Homer, who writes about it in the Odyssey, the afterlife meadows were covered in asphodels. It is unclear whether those meadows were a passage, or a stable place for certain types of souls, but the image itself is very powerful, evocative. We do not know exactly what comes next, when stuck in the Limbo. There is no promise of a happy ending or forecast over the size of the storm and assessments of its consequences. The Limbo is a vacuum, seemingly without agency: a state of being that

forces introspection rather than outwardness. Still, it encompasses our longing for outwardness, our drive and desire to move out of the vacuum. In fact, this sort of agency vacuum contains *in fieri*: the raw ingredients, the seeds for a resurrection, for a rebirth. Trapped in this bubble, we not only find strategies for survival but also assess how we want to survive. We declutter a bit, we realise there are things we do not miss at all, and others we surprisingly have a desperate need of. Not a mere Marie Kondo moment, but there is a strange version of mental clarity setting in, a certain zen determination. We are able to gather a very small amount of light in the darkness, because our eyes adjust, and we naturally and instinctively start elaborating strategies. The questions that we start asking at this stage are the seeds, and are what will inform and shape whatever comes next. We can then address the emotional limbo, the political limbo, the sudden silencing of all the background noise that put all of us still — and forced us to listen.

During these months, all fields of human creation have gone through some sort of personal and collective assessment and evaluation. How did we get here? How do we move on from here? What do we bring with us, and what can we get rid of? What brings us joy? It seems as though this deep unrest is finally bringing those fundamental questions of being to the forefront, that were too long sacrificed at the altar of productivity, materialism and capitalism. It frankly seems undeniable how the questioning of the capital as the foundation of our societies is the mother of all struggles — and the relation between photography and capitalism a fundamental one to address.

If we transfer these observations to our field, visual culture and specifically photography, and ask ‘what can we do, and what is there to do?’, I would argue that an important, fundamental step is to stop asking *What Photography Is?* and start discussing *What Can Photography Do?* — and perhaps more appropriately *What We Want to Do With Photography?* What do we want images to do for us? What do we want to do with them? Are we able to look and assess the possibilities of photography at large, and consequently consciously choose what to do with it according to the directions we want to take? Do we want images to witness, testify, show and state that this has happened? Do we want them to be agents of change? Do we want images to give us a way out? Solace, peace? Comfort in the unreal? Channel and address our feelings? Or simply, and instinctively, offer beauty and relief? How can we do that all at once? And also, are we even equipped to deal with the images?

How deep is the gap between authorial and curatorial visual strategies and their potential audience? And how deep is the gap between the authors and the curators? How has whiteness shaped and informed all of this, from the institutions to the strategies, and how can that be dismantled and made right? If we then look at our education system, how are we teaching younger generations to read the images surrounding them? How are they producing the visual representations of themselves and of their lives? Can this be taught? And even more, if we look



into more functional photographic strategies, ones that have a more manifest communicative necessity such as photojournalism or what NGOs do with photographs, what is our agency there? Our ethic, fairness, or our statement?

What at first sight looks like a big existential crisis, at closer inspection takes the shape of a rite of passage. At the core of all these factual, intellectual questions, there is a seed that says: and what about beauty? What about the beauty of images, their poetry, their resilience. If images are nothing more than what we can create, feel, experience, where is our sense and capacity to see and perceive beauty, poetry, resilience? Are we allowing enough space at all for them to be present, to have a role? If all signs points towards a new and renewed attitude towards the (photographic) image, one that needs to go through some sort of unlearning process so to allow a deeper experience of it, a deeper connection to the idea of images as living organism, as hyper-images, then it is probably not inappropriate, but essential, to include (or re-include) words such as beauty, healing, pleasure in our hyper intellectual vocabulary.

The images adorning these pages come from a very recent body of work by Aaron Schuman, that goes under the title *Sonata — Et in Arcadia Ego*. Based on his travels to Italy and to the idea of the Grand Tour as a moment of research, discovery, and passage, Aaron mentions a quote from Goethe's *Italian Journey* (1786-1788) as inspirational for his work:

'At present I am preoccupied with sense-impressions...The truth is that, in putting my powers of observation to the test, I have found a new interest in life. How far will my scientific and general knowledge take me: Can I learn to look at things with clear, fresh eyes? How much can I take in at a single glance? Can the grooves of old mental habits be effaced? This is what I am trying to discover.'

These images, together with the precious line-up of visual and textual contributions in this issue of Foam Magazine deeply inspired us editors during these months, and allowed us to raise questions, offer opinions, elements, seeds and ingredients to see the limbo and hopefully also start seeing its limits, its edges, and cross them. Not towards any sort of salvation, or damnation, but bright new beginnings. Walking through asphodel meadows.

ELISA MEDDE is a photography editor, curator and writer. With a background in History of Art, Iconology and Photographic Studies, she worked for various cultural institutions, publishing houses and non-profit organisations as project and research co-ordinator as well as independent curator and editor. Her academic research reflects on the relations between image and power, particularly in the context of contem-

porary photography. She served as juror for many prizes, including the Luma Rencontres Book Award, Copenhagen Photo Festival, Premio Celeste and Lens Culture. She has been nominator for the Mack First Book Award, Prix Elysée, MAST Foundation for Photography Grant and Leica Oskar Barnack award amongst others. She joined Foam Magazine in 2012.

All images from the series SONATA, 2019-2020 © Aaron Schuman

AARON SCHUMAN is an American photographer, artist, writer and curator based in the United Kingdom. His latest photographic monograph is *SLANT* (MACK, 2019) — which was cited as one of 2019's 'Best Photobooks' by numerous photographers, artists, critics and publications.

W O S A R M
A F E L I I
Y E G T C
S I O H A
N G L L Y



by LEWIS BUSH

It is an avowed goal for many photographers, but in truth very few creative works have a wide and lasting impact on the way people think about the world. In 1972 however a small book called *Ways of Seeing* achieved this elusive goal.¹

Written by the painter and critic John Berger and a small group of collaborators, *Ways of Seeing* examined the ways that representational art creates meaning in a viewer's mind. In particular, Berger wanted to show his readers that our own vision, and more specifically our understanding of the significance of what we see, is never neutral. It is something profoundly shaped both by the specificities of our biology, our lived experience, and by the technologies that mediate it. If viewers take away a single thing from Berger's book, it should be the idea that looking, and more precisely *seeing*, these most innate and unavoidable of things, are always political acts.²

What I describe may sound less like a creative work, and more like a work of art history. Putting aside the tired assumption that only fiction writing is creative, *Ways of Seeing* was in many ways as much a work of visual art as it was one of artistic criticism. Berger and his collaborators, in particular designer Richard Hollis and the artist Sven Bloomberg, drew on a range of strategies to fracture the structure of the book, combining images and texts in playful and imaginative ways, even including three visual essays composed solely of images. The book's chapters themselves have no predefined order, and readers are encouraged to approach them however they wish.

In the 48 years since Berger's book was published it has become nothing less than a canonical text, rarely missing from the reading lists of art and design courses in anglophone countries and beyond them. It has sold millions of copies, and it has been republished in at least a dozen languages, including Czech (Způsoby vidění),

Turkish (Görme Biçimleri), Russian (Искусство видеть), Bengali (ওয়েজ অব সইং), Chinese (觀看的方式) and even as an illicit Farsi edition (زندگی یاهویش).³ Perhaps as a consequence of its prominence, *Ways of Seeing* has come to occupy an almost unassailable position even in the allegedly critical and iconoclastic halls of photographic academia.⁴ It is seldom critiqued or discussed in terms of the ways that it has very definitely dated in the half a century since its publication, and almost never in terms accessible beyond a narrow audience.

This lack of critical analysis does not reflect an absence of shortcomings, one could take issue with Berger's unquestioning reliance on an intellectual framework derived from the now rather battered tenets of Marxism and Structuralism, his relatively brief engagement with gender, and almost complete overlooking of race. Equally glaring is his predilection for spinning a grand narrative of art's complicity with the rise of modern capitalism, while at the same time appearing to take issue with conventional art history's own soft spot for overarching, all-encompassing histories.

1

Originally published in conjunction with a four-part TV series also presented by Berger, the book has in many respects eclipsed the original series.

2

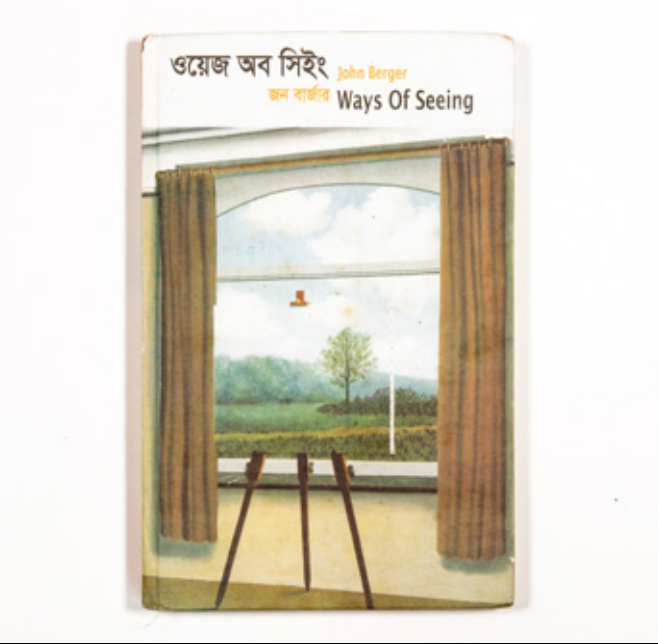
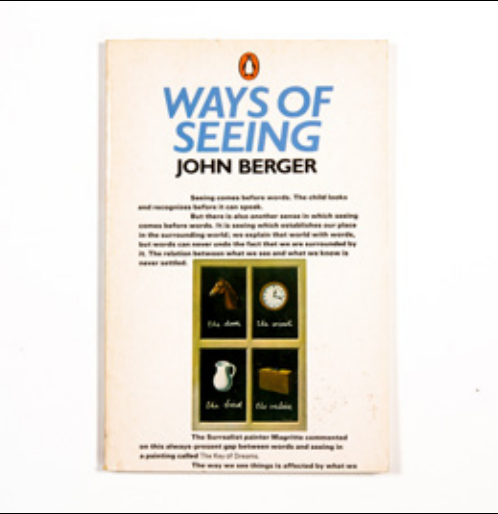
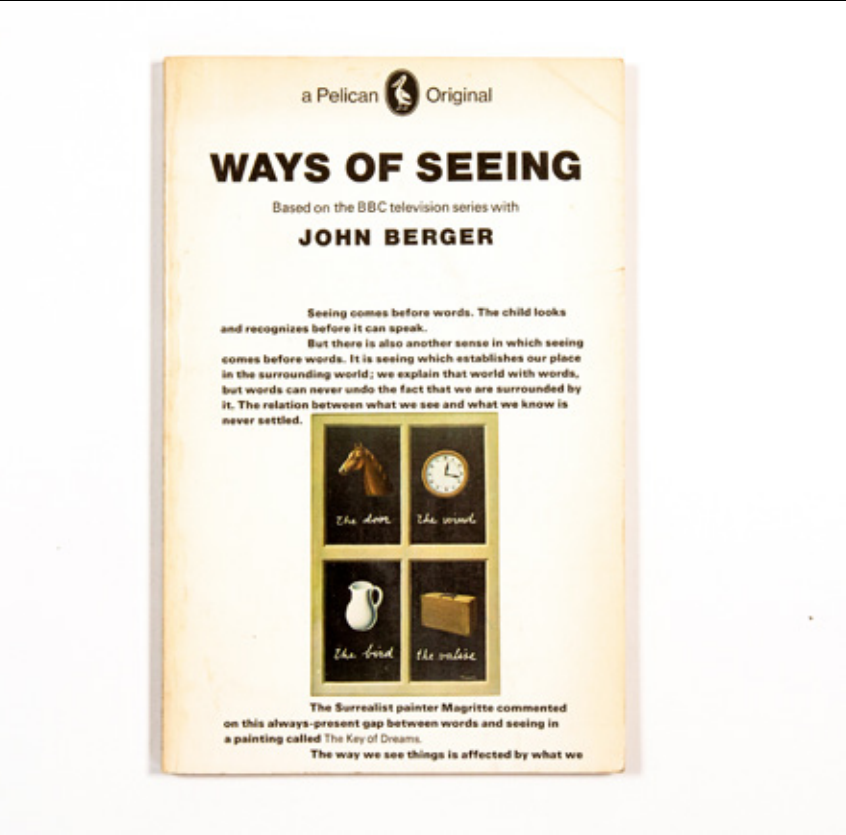
Worth perhaps noting is that there is a subtle but significant difference in English between 'looking' which implies merely directing one's eyes in a particular direction, and 'seeing' which implies the above but also perception, insight and understanding.

3

Illicit in so far as Iran is not a signatory to the Berne convention and so does not respect copyright, as far as I have been able to determine this edition is not produced under licence from Penguin, the original publisher.

4

Perhaps it reflects the fact that photographic academia isn't actually that academic, but there is stunning reliance on aged texts of dubious relevance today, references to Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* for example border on the Pavlovian at times.



The difference is that today these systems are operating outside the theoretical realm of the laboratory and inside the real world (or ‘the wild’ as AI researchers sometimes disconcertingly refer to it). The answers to these questions are often being found not in contained, controlled experiments, but in live deployments of these technologies, and the shortcomings of AI are being discovered today at significant cost to human lives, whether that is the offender sentenced to a disproportionate prison term by a system reliant on historically racist police data,⁵ or the pedestrian killed by a driverless car that fails to recognise her.⁶ These experiments are simultaneously reaping great wealth for those who oversee their development, and if we continue on our present course, tomorrows world seems likely to be a profoundly divided one of technological haves and have nots, of those who reap the benefits of AI, and those who are subjected to its most aberrant tendencies.

We live in a time when greater power is concentrated in fewer hands than perhaps at any other time in human history, and when the ability of that power to be used is augmented by a range of far reaching technologies, organisations, and practices. Yet the formal study of power is fragmented, and even a clear consensus on how to define power has largely eluded the few contemporary thinkers who have committed themselves to a broad study of it. Visually the representation of power is extremely limited, and what little there is remains as it has for millennia, largely commissioned and controlled by the powerful themselves. At a time of innumerable man made crises, from rampant climate change to systemic racism, I believe that the motivations, actions, and means of the powerful demand attention and accountability, and that an important stage in that is to make them visible.

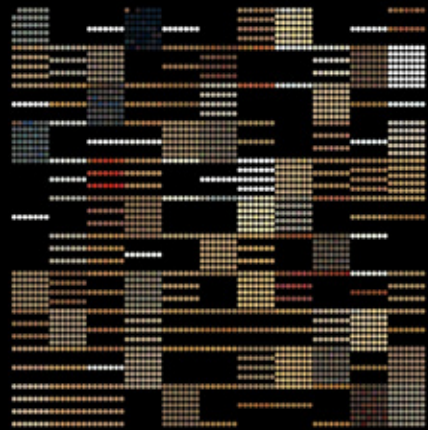
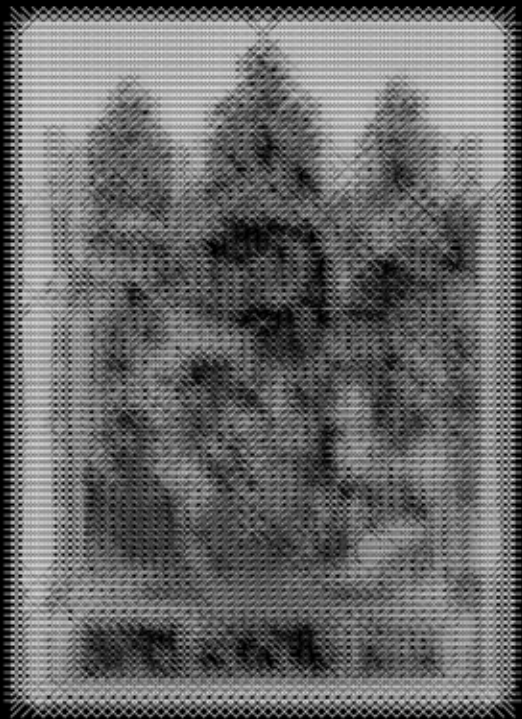
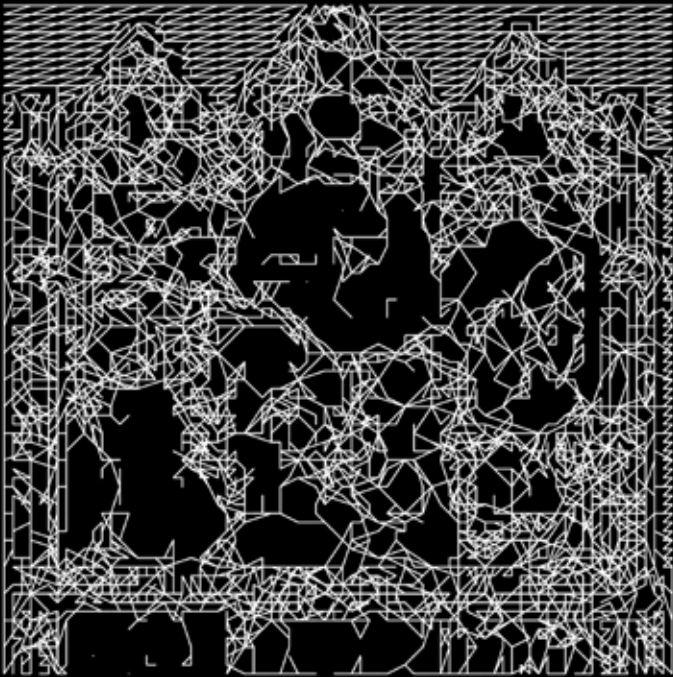
Several years ago, I began exploring the idea of what it meant to exist in a world where machines can see, and where these machines are for the most part servants to inscrutable forms of power. A number of different outcomes have emerged from this, some more creative, including a variety of video and image-based works, and other elements which are more research orientated, including a series of interviews with AI researchers, and PhD research into the cultural formation of these technologies. One creative example to touch on briefly here is an ongoing collaboration with creative coder and generative artist Matt DesLauriers. Together we are developing a system which ‘recodes’ photographs into new visual forms. These outputs appear highly abstract and semiotically without meaning, but contain essentially the same data as the source image, only re-rendered in a way which is unrecognisable and unintelligible to human visual cognition. The outputs from this system are still, in a very literal sense, photographs, but in rendering them in this way we hope that human viewers will start to appreciate some of the ways that computer vision is very different from our own. In par-

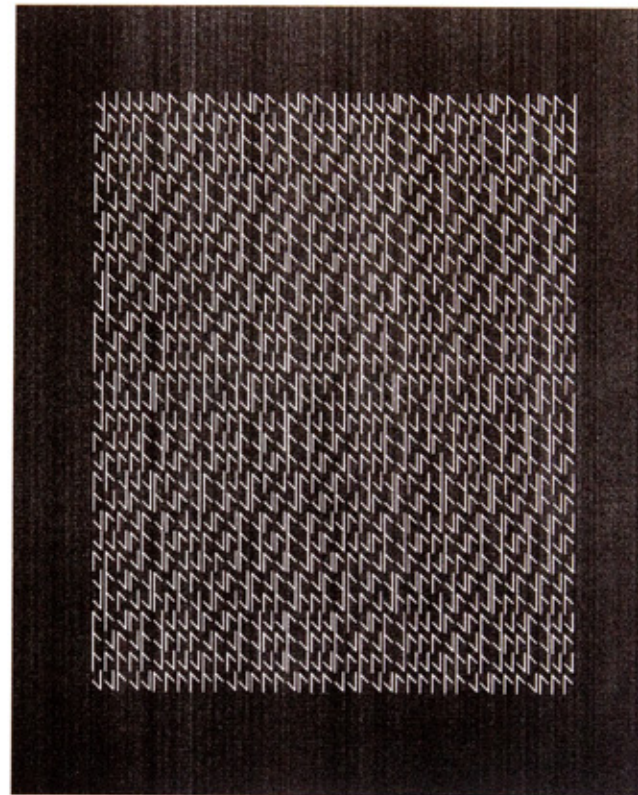
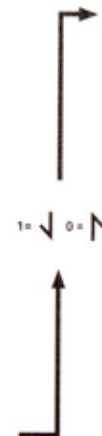
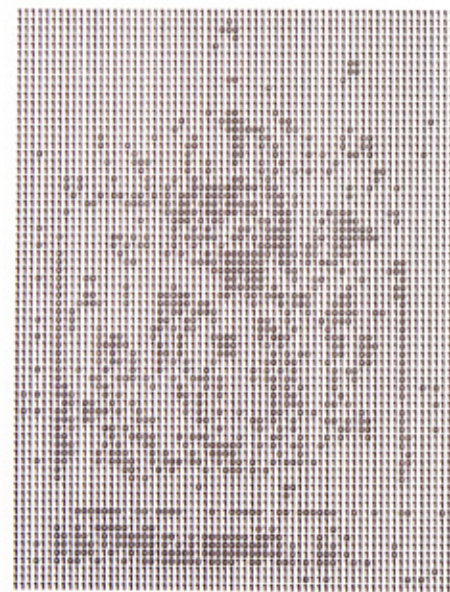
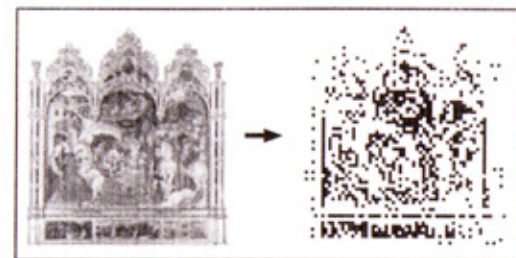
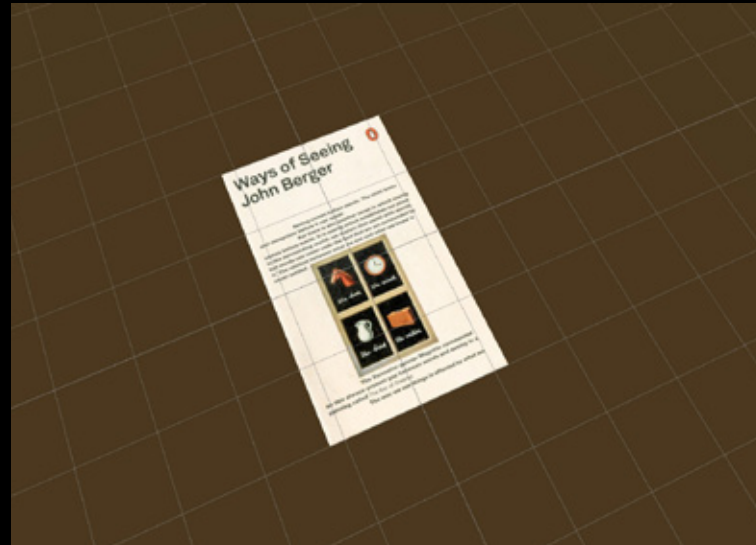
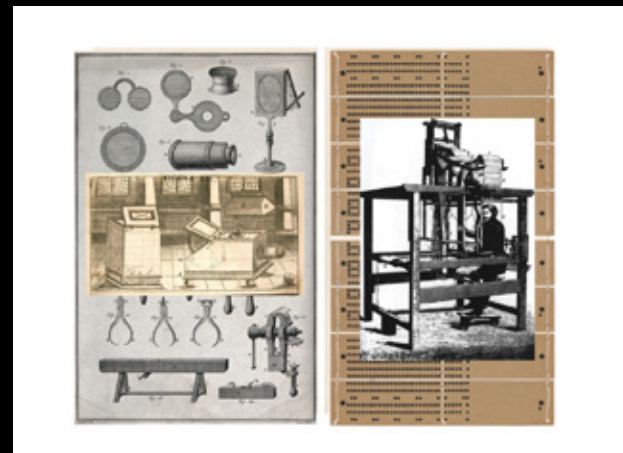
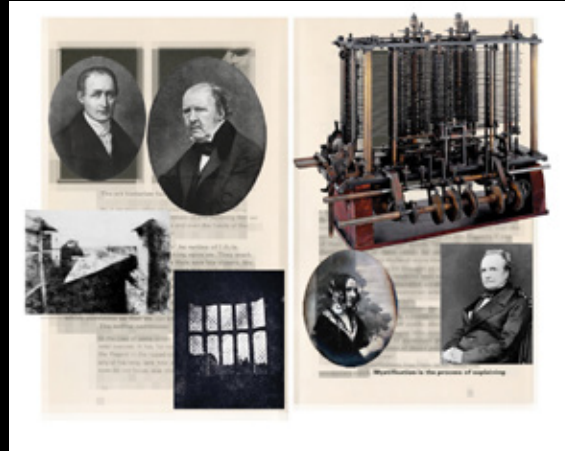
ticular the way that these systems see images not as a series of symbolically significant visual elements adding up to sum greater than their parts, but as an impersonal aggregation of tonal, chromatic and spatial information.

In any multi-faceted project there is always a question of how to unite these different elements, and in this case the core element of *Ways of Seeing Algorithmically* around which all these other elements revolve is a reworking of Berger’s original book. In *Ways of Seeing* I see a structure or scaffold, on to which a new narrative about these new ways of seeing can be constructed. Just as Berger had shown readers that their own seeing was shaped by very specific ideas, I want to show my viewers that the conclusions of computer vision systems is also the product of a set of assumptions about the world. Indeed, the sight of these systems is made all the more problematic because of their foundational reliance on a union of two already flawed representational systems, the written word, and the photographic image.

Many of my past projects have ended up as books, including several that have involved reworking and reshaping existing publications. In 2013 I appropriated Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin’s 2012 book *War Primer 2*, reordering the pages and adding new material over the old in order to turn it into a discussion about economic inequality and the anonymous workers of the world, like the unpaid and uncredited interns that those two artists had used to make their books. With *Ways of Seeing Algorithmically* I was keen to continue this idea of exploding and rebuilding an existing work to say something new with it. However to just remake Berger’s book as another physical publication seemed to me to be missing an opportunity to do something more in line with the spirit of the original.

5
Karen Hao, *AI is sending people to Jail and Getting it Wrong*, MIT Technology Review, 21st January 2019, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2019/01/21/137783/algorithms-criminal-justice-ai/>
6
Why Uber’s self-driving car killed a pedestrian, The Economist, 29th May 2018, <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2018/05/29/why-ubers-self-driving-car-killed-a-pedestrian>





Instead I decided to use the same technology that I am interested in critiquing to create a virtual book which would inhabit the existing physical book. Augmented reality, the technology that powers apps and games like *Pokémon Go*, encompasses a simple form of computer vision, using a camera to detect particular objects in the world. Using this technology, the application I am creating searches its environment for the pages of Berger's original book. When it recognises a page, it then begins to virtually overlay it with new text, imagery and video, collected from a variety of sources, online and offline, historic and contemporary.

In the process a three dimensional, moving collage is built up on top of each page of Berger's original book, sometimes interacting with the existing page, sometimes obscuring it entirely. Across the span of each of the original book's seven chapters, these collages form seven new chapters, about different aspects of computer vision, from the parallel histories of imaging and computing technologies, to the hidden environmental and human costs of developing them. The eventual app will be free to use, and to discover this new work and it's new narratives, a viewer only needs a copy of the original *Ways of Seeing*, widely available in bookshops, libraries and homes around the world.

In *Ways of Seeing Algorithmically*, the choice of an augmented reality application is partly a reflexive choice, but it is also in many ways a reaction to the very glaring limitations of the photo book, and the culture around them. In the last two decades photobooks have risen to a position of remarkable prominence, they are enthusiastically published, awarded, and collected by institutions and individuals alike. This clamour at times reaches a fervour, with the more agitated proponents of photobooks describing their ascendancy as nothing less than a 'revolution'⁷ and publishing dogmatic 'manifestos' on the subject.⁸ But it is a truism noted by many historians that the stronger revolutionary rhetoric becomes, the more likely it is that the insurrection has already begun its slide into conservatism, inertia, and ultimate irrelevance.

This is what I largely see when I survey the field of photobooks, a great mass of publications that claim to be new and revolutionary, but which in fact make only very superficial attempts to reinvent a form as old as photography itself. When people speak of a photobook 'revolution' I suspect what this language hides is in fact a deep-rooted angst about the status of the photographic image, an anguish ironically engendered by the same glut of imagery that facilitated the rise of computer vision. In a world where photographs are ubiquitous, immaterial, predominantly without meaning and largely without value, photobooks give us some consolation. It is no wonder that the main market for photobooks are photographers themselves.

⁷
<https://www.huckmag.com/art-and-culture/print/best-self-publishing-offprint-london/>

⁸
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Self-Publish-Happy-Photobook-Manifesto/dp/1597113441>

When people speak of a photobook 'revolution' I suspect what this language hides is in fact a deep-rooted angst about the status of the photographic image.

A final point that seems important to discuss in relation to this work, is the efficacy of creating critical work like this in the context of an artistic residency sponsored by a multi-national corporation, in this case the car manufacturer BMW who support a residency at Paris’s Gobelins, L’École de L’Image, which I was lucky to be offered in 2019 and where I spent two months researching the project. I have spent a lot of time over the last year thinking about the minefield of artistic sponsorship, and while the issues are far more complex than I can examine here, my conclusion has been that it is not impossible to reconcile it with the aims I stated above. Put another way, there are distinct limits to always being on the outside of powerful enterprises, shouting in.

As part of the residency I was able to spend time at BMW’s headquarters and manufacturing plant in Munich, Germany. This was fascinating not only in terms of the things it taught me about computer vision technologies, but also in terms of the insights it offered into the ways that technologies emerge not just in response to pure technical need, but also as a result of the cultures and conversations around them. It is easy to say that to critique high capitalism while engaging with it in this way is a hypocrisy. A simple riposte to this argument is to note that it is the logical equivalent of saying that we must all stop breathing out carbon before we can critique climate change. Capitalism is not a choice; it is a pre-determined and all-encompassing reality. In this context, to believe that one must be entirely outside it in order to engage in a critical discussion about it demonstrates a lack of thought about what this means.

Returning finally to where we began, with change. Everything I have learnt in the eight years I have been working with visual representations of power make me highly circumspect about this ideal and how it is achieved. Evidently, as humans we can change the world, for better, and often for worse. We have already changed things as intangible as the structure of atomic particles, and as massive as the climate of our very planet. But photographs clearly do not change the world in this direct way, and anyone who expects them to intervene to end wars, or stop rampant wrongdoing will continue to be disappointed. What creative works do, and what I think Berger and his collaborators recognised, is they act as a conduit for an irresistible idea, a carrier that implants it in the mind of those who encounter it. And in the final reckoning it is human minds, not art or photographs, that change the world. ●

All images © Lewis Bush and Matt DesLauriers

LEWIS BUSH is a photographer, writer, curator and educator that exposes forms of invisible power using photography, text, video, data visualisation, books, films, and apps. His work has been nominated and shortlisted for prizes including the Kassel Book Dummy Award (2019), Tim Hetherington Visionary Award (2018 and 2017) and the Luma Rencontres d’Arles Dummy Book Award (2018). In 2019 he was BMW artist in residence at Gobelins — École de l’image (Paris), where he created the augmented reality app about computer vision and artificial intelligence, titled *Ways of Seeing Algorithmically*.

HOPE IN EMPTY SPACES

Passivity and peace go hand in hand, but at what cost? To turn one’s cheek, to forgive your enemies, to absorb hatred and neutralise it with endless reserves of equanimity and grace. This has always fallen on the shoulders of the most burdened of society: minorities and those who are pinned at the intersections of race, gender, class, disability, religion and more. We are the model minority who never makes you uncomfortable by talking about race, the token black friend who can take a joke, the young working class woman who fits in surprisingly well, the gay but not too political or earnest acquaintance – we are the many hands making light of the burden of assimilation. In making ourselves palatable or invisible so that we — and only we, the minorities — feel uncomfortable is somehow used as a measure of success. This well rehearsed *pas de deux* that we are born knowing how to dance to allows us to nimbly navigate around each other, stemming the spread of guilt and accountability.

This laborious, tedious, unending role is in aid of maintaining the illusion that instances of discrimination, implicit bias, inequality of opportunity, and systematic oppression and abuse by those who are tasked and paid to protect us, are few and far between. Even if you delicately picked your way through history, blindfolded and shielded from all external stimuli, facts and personal accounts, you still couldn’t be forgiven for believing that this blissful ignorance and peaceful existence is the lived experience of everyone.

We have been pulled out of limbo, some more harshly than others. We have graduated from silently, individually absorbing traumas to current worldwide anti-racist demonstrations reminding ourselves that Black lives matter, and that they should have always mattered. This is a collective awakening.

We are moving from one global crisis that we knew one day would strike again and bring the world as we knew it to a halt, to another deep seated crisis of moving from covert racism and microaggressions to out and out violations and murders. The sentiment hasn’t changed, but the action and scale surely has. And here, Covid-19 presents us with a dilemma. In this suspended time balanced between

life as we knew it and an uncertainty of what is to come next, it has given us the space and time in our non-working days to read, watch, listen, teach, educate, refine arguments and take to the streets. Lockdown has given us this limbo time and this is how we’re using it. Because of this, we have also seen a shift from face coverings being banned and deemed unpatriotic, to wearing a face mask being seen as a sign of compassion and care for your fellow citizen. This need to protect our health neatly overlaps with our need to protect our identities as we weigh the consequences and decide to gather *en masse*.

This particular moment of social unrest and rage was sparked as we watched yet again as another police officer murdered a Black man. George Floyd’s life was taken and now we protest in the streets with signs painted with his name to make sure we never forget. George Floyd’s name is being added to collective memory that goes back as far as Rodney King’s brutal beating, Emmett Till’s lynching and beyond to the time when slaves were thrown

overboard during middle passage. How do we grieve without being able to touch each other? How do we reassure ourselves and our friends in this time of sadness and anger, and how do we assert ourselves in spaces without a tactile element?

Limbo is the word that I have been using to describe my feelings while having conversations with friends in different parts of the world as we look at the same images. Limbo is the empty space where statues used to stand, glorifying and praising slavers who drove their wealth from human life. What do we do with these empty spaces, and how can photography be used as a way of immortalising this moment? It’s astonishing how quickly a photo, especially now and of this time, can become iconic.

I am so intrigued by the images of statues being pulled down and defaced. In particular, the now empty plinth where slaver Edward Colston once stood, who was explicitly involved in the slave trade and profited from kidnapping and enslavement. How fitting for this slave trader who saw human life in terms of resale



value, and profited from the sea as a way of transporting his cargo, that his likeness was rolled into the waves. Now nothing stands in his place — but we can’t sacrifice ourselves to these empty stages, to act as stand-ins or reminders of past wrongs. How do we approach these raised positions of power that are now empty, and how do we reconcile our histories with our futures without reverting to revisionism?

There are endless images that fall into this category of newly opened positions of power. Limbo is in waiting to see how history will retell this story. It is photography’s responsibility to not let us forget what once stood in this place.

Photography has an overbearing habit of telling people’s stories for them. A tendency to present narratives as fixed ideas and classifying people and ideas in neat and orderly ways. But photography is also making space for us in ways that other mediums are too slow, too cumbersome, too rigid to achieve. What will the purpose of photography be, not only during

Black Lives Matter demonstrations that remind us that the ambition of achieving equality for all is to be shared by the thousands and not the few. It is the images of scattered protest signs left behind to mark our territory and place in history. We are also rediscovering and embracing archives as they are now finding broader audience bases. Decades-old images of black and brown people and their allies, shutting down streets, defying segregation laws, staging sit-ins, showing us starkly that equality is a long term position to be fought for and defended, not a brief swell of consciousness and empty slogans.

History is being written and recorded through the images that we’re taking. Who gets to have an active voice in this? Who is being left out of history? Whose stories, faces, experiences are being prioritised or ignored? It has often felt that in learning about Black history, the onus is on the individual to teach themselves. That to learn about where we have come from, what we have endured, and what we

We are reasserting our place in history through these images.
We are revising history so that it includes all of us.

these times of civil and social unrest, uncertainty and fear, but also of afterwards?

Limbo is this waiting to see how the cards fall. Feeling scared, hopeful, sceptical that something monumental will occur, and fantasising about how this change could be made permanent. Shifting how the majority of people around us in our daily lives, in our personal and professional spheres see us, acknowledge us, understand us. There is something powerful and unsettling about the idea of limbo, depending on your perspective. In one sense, it looks like all activity has come to a halt; that it’s a time of reflection, suspension, and contemplation in isolation while you await your judgement. Here, it is a fragile sleep state that can’t be disturbed or disrupted for fear of breaking the pretence of placidness.

Another perspective is that it is a time to quietly coordinate action, make new connections, question existing structures, and set things in motion. There is a discretion that disguises limbo as it moves from a passive state of inaction to the coordinated strike that we’re seeing at the moment. It is the images trading amongst friends in group chats and circulating online. It is seen in the candid photos of

still have to achieve in order to arrive at a fair starting point hasn’t been deemed worthy to include in the history books. Now, every demonstrator has the power to contribute through the images they take, share and talk about afterwards.

Limbo is in waiting to see how history will retell this story. We are reasserting our place in history through these images. We are revising history so that it includes all of us. ●

— Text by Mariama Attah

Image: *untitled* © Felix Russell-Saw, courtesy of the artist

MARIAMA ATTAH is a photography curator and editor with a particular interest in overlooked visual histories, and in using photography and visual culture to amplify under and misrepresented voices. Mariama is curator of Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool. She was previously Assistant Editor of Foam Magazine. Prior to this, she was Curator of Photoworks, where she was responsible for developing and curating programs and events including Brighton Photo Biennial and was Commissioning and Managing Editor of the yearly magazine Photoworks Annual.

MOURNING
LIFE BY
LIVING IT

Every day in isolation feels like a loss. When I lived in the world, I asked photography to remember for me. I still do. I don’t journal. I don’t have the patience or diligence. My only archive is photographs and bits of phrases that I might write down in haste — twin ways to sketch what has passed, what I can’t remember. The phrases, the images, they stay with me, embedded, sometimes independent of each other, sometimes working in concert, sometimes creating a fiction of emphasis.

I can look back on my roll and see signs mid-March. One shot, a meme, of a WU-TANG acronym: Wash hands, Use mask properly, Touch nothing, Avoid large crowds, Never touch your face with your unclean hands, Go to the hospital if you have severe symptoms. Some shots of meals I made. Some of flowers that were riotous in bloom. It was spring to them, even if it was hibernation for us.

I can see exactly when I got sick because I took pathetic selfies of tea bags on my eyes, some ad hoc remedy to make swelling and styes less painful. More pictures of food, overly seasoned because I’d lost taste and smell by then. A picture of a mask I tried to make out of a wash cloth and elastic bands. Utter failure. More blossoms, more masks, more meals. A video of the time my key didn’t work in our lock. I was stuck outside, my partner stuck inside. There was a fire in the building behind ours, I took pictures of that. By May, the CDC reported that there had been almost 20,000 Covid-19 associated deaths in New York. I hadn’t seen much mourning. But on 13 May, hundreds of people gathered outside the building across the street, lighting memorial prayer candles. Hundreds of glass vessels containing flames, burning at various heights. Bottles of Champagne, Don Julio and Patron. Behind the memorial, a poster board memorialising Nick Blikxy, a 21-year-old rapper who had been shot to death a few blocks away. The morning after the mourning, I took a picture. There were so many candles still lit, on fire for a different pandemic, lives lost from gun violence.

May threatened to slip into June much the same way — eating, counting deaths, flowers. But on 25 May, George Floyd was killed. By the end of the week, my photos shifted to protests I was going to daily.

To link where I was, to where the country was, to where the world was. Thousands of people bonded by images. My partner mentioned in passing that he wished everyone could be in one space, gathered together, a show of force. I thought the gatherings happening everywhere, simultaneously, taking over the streets in cities, suburbs, international venues, connected by rapid fire posts, felt monstrous. A network of organic rage and movement. We were separate, but after months apart, we were there marching together. We were mourning dual tragedies. One spread through breath; the other a shocking and brutal display of breath stolen...again.

Photography augmented what was happening but also propelled it forward. Not to be a shill for a company I despise, but Instagram connected us all. For each photo I took, I saw hundreds more that expanded my consciousness. Though I know his work from *The New York Times*, Anthony Geathers photos were different when scrolling through the months. He posted photos that evolved from looking back, to looking out, to looking everywhere, to looking at the power. He must live near me, I thought. He always seemed to trail where I’d been but showed me far more than what I’d seen. The first photo he posted in March was of Ghostface Killah, an experiment in red, usually Geathers works in black and white. He was inside his archives, expanding out.

By the end of March, Geathers posted a photo of a group of men posed in a stairwell, with a caption that included, ‘We seeing that all of a sudden the government pulled 2 trillion dollars out they ass, but black folks can’t even get reparations despite having built this country with our blood, sweat and tears.’ Then he posted a washed out portrait of the RZA, looking priestly, hands together in prayer... remember RZA’s battle against DJ Premier, the one when he used *Brooklyn Zoo* to win even though technically True Master produced the track? That battle was on Instagram too, entertaining us all. By the end of April and early May, Geathers was posting action shots — archival images of his fencing series, Black bikers in Brooklyn, BMX riders mid-flight, a skateboarder in overalls carrying groceries and listening to music.

When he got to the protests, his feed exploded — fists clutched, furious and raised high. Walls of activists marched into militarised cops in riot gear. Bus drivers leaned on their horns in support with *their* fists in the air. Black people from the Caribbean, across the diaspora, crowded Grand Army Plaza with truck-sized flags and signs that said, ‘Black love is a revolutionary act’. Then the protest photos paused. And Geathers posted a series of girls jumping rope, defying gravity, double-dutch all day. He showed the necessary complement to death — life.



He showed movement, joy, culture and levity. And the next day, he posted shots from a vigil for Oluwatoyin Salau, the Los Angeles activist killed during the protests. On his June 27th post, Geathers wrote, 'We can't forget about those who come from where some of your favorite rappers come from, but aint been back to. We can't forget about those who been asking for assistance but aint being helped. We can't forget about the political prisoners of the past and present. And we can't forget about those who had to flee this damn country after their fight for Black liberation. We cannot forget who this fight is for.'

We are looking at photos in real time. We are looking for people to gather with. We are feeling the weight of history. We are doom scrolling to see what injustice unfolds next, certain there will be another. We are looking for a foundation, for something to hold on to, for something seise-

What do photographs do? Can they possibly communicate this disparity? Can they possibly show numbers? Can they show death and inequality? Can they show what's happening and happened — the same thing over and over again since the founding of America — without numbing the rage? Is it possible to be the generation of loss while producing so much content? So many images.

What should
photography do?

It should do what it always has. It should do what Geathers does — provoke, expand, capture, continue, link, humanise and preserve. It should breathe life. It should memorialise. It should also instigate revolution. Each still forms a movement, each movement evidence of what was, of how many people gathered, how many people died, how many people are brutalised.

We are looking at photos in real time. We are looking for people to gather with. We are feeling the weight of history.

mic to indicate real change. For every half measure, and symbol of progress, the reality of what has been, unfolds. NASCAR publishes a picture of a noose intended or not intended for driver Bubba Wallace. Trump pretends to care with a photo op holding the bible upside down. It's constant and unrelenting, as it has been for so many Black Americans. There is grief, there is mourning, there is anger, and there is inequality. In Kansas, Black Americans are dying at seven times the rate of whites. And who is bearing witness?

Photography helps us remember, but also generates the new monuments we need to see — two ballerinas fists in the air, on toe, on top of a graffitied Robert E. Lee statue with BLM messages gorgeously stroked over his hateful gaze. The crowds of people marching for the future. The yellow block letters taking back the streets. It's impossible to take a picture without thinking, someday, someone will see this. On their feed, online, on a whim from a hashtag. Someday, this frame will be meaningful. Someday, what I see, what you see, will matter. It won't just be a personal journal of loss, but a documentation of movement. ●

— Text by Jaime Lowe

Image: *untitled* © Anthony Geathers, courtesy of the artist

JAIME LOWE is a writer living in Brooklyn, New York. She is a frequent contributor to *The New York Times Magazine* and her work has appeared in *New York magazine*, *Esquire*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Maxim*, *Gawker*, *The Village Voice* and *LA Weekly*. Lowe is the author of *Digging for Dirt: The Life and Death of ODB*, and founding member of the Wu-Tang Clan. In her book *Mental* (2017) Lowe shares and investigates her story of episodic madness, as well as the stability she found while on lithium.