

CoMa 2013

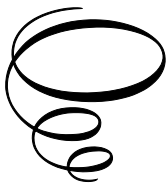
CoMa 2013

Safeguarding Image Collections

Edited by

Hilke Arijs

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



CoMa 2013: Safeguarding Image Collections

Edited by Hilke Arijs

This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-6818-3

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-6818-1

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FOREWORD

This publication contains a selection of the papers presented during the *CoMa: Safeguarding Image Collections. Issues in the Management of Photographic Collections* conference held on 31 October 2013 at the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA) in Brussels, Belgium. More than one hundred participants from seventeen different countries gathered at this event around the central theme of photographic collections.

One of the primary goals of the conference was to bring together professionals with different backgrounds -art historians, conservators, digitization experts, etc.- working with various types of collections -museum, archival, private, etc.- in order to offer them a platform to discuss their daily work. Photographic collections, besides being an important part of our cultural heritage, have a vital role to play in the preservation of our historic and cultural consciousness, which is why this conference also aimed to critically investigate the relationship between collection management and the status of the photographic object within the institution, whether that be a museum, a library, a research institute or an archival repository.

At the colloquium, attention was paid to three different topics: collection management, conservation, and digitization for preservation and access. In specific sessions, authors presented their experiences working with different types of collections, discussed the changes in collection management over the years and shared their view on the future of this important heritage. The selected papers in this publication are presented in four chapters. The first chapter discusses the use and status of photographic collections and their meaning and significance in our increasingly visual societies. As an extension of this first part, the second chapter offers some practical case studies on the changing nature of the management of photographic collections. In the third chapter, a place is offered for the conservator-restorer's point of view. To conclude, the fourth chapter assembles a number of papers on the digitization of image collections. Whereas the varying nature of photographic collections is highlighted in the first parts of this publication, it becomes clear that, despite their mixed origins and uses, diverse image collections do share a common element: their digital future.

The goal of this publication is thus to assimilate all the different aspects -management, conservation and digitization- into a single preservation

practice. It is only by exchanging viewpoints and experiences and by working together that this fragile heritage will be successfully preserved. The intention behind the CoMa conference and this book was and is to tear down the boundaries between the various heritage professions and to set a base for the development of a practical and philosophical framework for the management of image collections in different contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea to organize the *CoMa: Safeguarding Image Collections* conference arose in 2011 during ICCROM's *Safeguarding Sound and Image Collections* (SOIMA) course in Latvia and Lithuania. Focused on collaboration and knowledge exchange, one of the main goals of the SOIMA programme is to further the development of regional networks in the safeguarding of the audio-visual heritage. Inspired by this key message, the idea gradually grew to unite different professions, all with their own specialized networks and conferences, around the common core of their practices: the collections themselves. As such, the CoMa conference and this publication would not have been possible without Ms. Aparna Tandon, course co-ordinator of the SOIMA programme; not only does she play an important role in the training of heritage professionals to safeguard audio-visual collections, but her passion and commitment continue to inspire many collection caretakers worldwide.

I am also very much indebted to my acting General Director, Mrs. Christina Ceulemans, for her constant support in helping me to broaden my knowledge and to care for the KIK-IRPA's collection of over one million photographic carriers. Furthermore, I would like to thank the members of the scientific committee for their feedback on the papers and their suggestions. Without their input, the conference would not have been as successful as it was. Of course, that success is the merit of the speakers, who presented their papers with expertise and a passion for this heritage.

INTRODUCTION

CoMA 2013: SAFEGUARDING IMAGE COLLECTIONS

Today, photographic images account for a large portion of the world's memory and are found in diverse contexts. They form the core of photographic museums, serve as research documents for various types of scientific institutions, register history and provide us with a tangible witness of our most precious memories. Whether autonomous objects or documents, photographic images can be of immense value. During the past few decades, we have seen a significant rise in auction prices for photographs, with as much as 4,338,500 US dollars being paid for German photographer Andreas Gursky's *Rhein II* (1999). As such, photography has established itself as a recognized visual art, not only in terms of artistic value but just as much in economic terms. Besides these artistic and economic factors, image collections are assigned various other, less quantifiable values. A corollary of the most privileged technologies to capture the world, image collections are in a way the visual memory of our past and present. As such, not only are they of great scientific value for various kinds of research, but their social significance is just as important. Image collections present us with an unsurpassed tool to tell stories and strengthen human relations.

However, archives, museums, libraries and other institutions around the world are struggling to conserve image collections in both analogue and digital formats. Despite multiple tools, international guidelines, ISO standards, etc., the efficient management of photographic collections is a complex task for collection managers and archivists. One of the main reasons for this is the sheer size of most image collections. Collections of more than one million physical items are no exception; but that number is easily surpassed by digital collections. In addition, most physical photographs consist of complex materials, which require specific storage conditions, adding to their fragile and unstable nature, but ideal storage environments are expensive and difficult to achieve. As a lot of these items are already showing signs of decay, most common calculations about their stability and long-term preservation are becoming unreliable.

Besides practical questions of *inter alia* storage, inventory, and digitization, the field is also faced with other, less obvious problems. The management of photographic collections is highly dependent on the status accorded to the photographic image within its specific context. As a result, similar images are subject to different conservation methodologies, depending on their initial purpose and current usage. Photographic collections are frequently considered as ancillary and marginal to the activities of museums, archives and other cultural institutions. Although most images have been created for documentary purposes, many of them are now being preserved for their intrinsic value. Over time, photographs have become more than just carriers of image content; they are now considered as cultural objects and offer significant potential for the general historic consciousness. A reflection on the status and management of photographic collections in various contexts is thus vital for the preservation of these images.

Unlike other cultural objects, moreover, the photographic object is highly complex: apart from its positive/negative facet, it can easily be reproduced, meaning that there can be several “originals” and copies. As digitization becomes an important facet within the activities of many institutions, tension arises between the analogue image (the physical carrier) and the digital in terms of storage, conservation and access. Questions arise, such as “Is it still desirable to store analogue photos when digital copies adequately reflect their content and permit cheaper and less complicated management?”. Or is the digital photo just an intermediate medium that allows photo-editing and fast access? As digitization and worldwide access are gradually becoming key elements in collection management, legal issues such as copyright are often a stumbling block for museums and archives in the care and valorization of their collections. Moreover, underlying politics can be either detrimental to or a positive influence on the care of photographic collections.

CoMa 2013 took the foregoing problem statement as a basis to look for practical experiences and case studies in which these complex characteristics of image collections are reconciled within the framework of daily collection management.

The significance of image collections

Broadly, cultural heritage is defined as the legacy of the physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bequeathed for the benefit of

future generations. UNESCO distinguishes several main categories of cultural heritage:

- Tangible cultural heritage, which includes movable cultural heritage (paintings, sculptures, coins, manuscripts, etc.), immovable cultural heritage (monuments, archaeological sites, and so on) and underwater cultural heritage (shipwrecks, underwater ruins and cities).
- Intangible cultural heritage, which includes oral traditions, performing arts, rituals.
- Natural heritage, which concerns natural sites with cultural aspects, such as cultural landscapes, physical, biological or geological formations.

Image collections have a vital role to play in all of these categories. First of all, they are tangible heritage themselves; as movable heritage they are categorized amongst paintings, sculptures, books, etc., namely as artefacts of the past (fig. 1). Secondly, they play an important part in the documentation of both immovable and underwater cultural heritage. When it comes to intangible heritage, images not only have a purpose in documenting rituals and practices, they are one of the tools to preserve this heritage for future generations. As such, they are among the tangible proofs of the intangible. Often, images and sounds are the only traces preserved that recall past traditions and practices. Images play a similar role in the case of natural heritage: they document and remain a physical witness of what



Fig. 1. Anonymous, *Portrait de jeune fille en veste lacée*, cased daguerrotype, 1854-55. Collection Van den Steen Christian, Javingue.

has been lost. Image collections thus provide us with a unique opportunity to visualize the past; they render (slow) evolutions visible and confront us with the differences between past and present. In this way, they present us with the chance to view, in other sources, less apparent changes.

In addition, our present culture is gradually becoming more of a visual culture. The creation of images and image collections has lain within the reach of almost every individual in our society since the 1900s (figs. 2-3). Images can thus represent the personal history and identity of each and every individual. Moreover, thanks to the technological development of the smart phone, our lives have become increasingly image-based. Events experienced are captured and shared, so much so that image collections now play an important part in our current society and history: they literally represent our visual memory.



Fig. 2. Emile 't Serstevens, *Family Holiday at the Belgian Coast*, ca. 1895.



Fig. 3. Emile 't Serstevens, *Family Holiday at the Belgian Coast*, ca. 1910.

Images also play an important part in the democratization of information: they are immediately accessible and can convey a complex message in the glimpse of an eye. Photographic collections therefore comprise much of our knowledge of the past. Who we are and what identity we adopt are very largely defined by our knowledge of the past and are consequently tied to its tangible witnesses.

An important part of this publication focuses on the significance of image collections and their preservation. A first paper, by Johan Swinnen, evokes the importance of image collections in the history writing of societies shaped by recent conflicts, such as the case in Bangladesh. Furthermore, he also offers us a European example where image collections act as witnesses of history: the photographic archive of one of the first female photo-journalists, Germaine Van Parys.

Aparna Tandon in her turn offers us a perspective on the role image collections have to play in the reconciliation of societies that were torn by conflict or war. She not only points out the historic meaning of the photographic proof of hidden conflicts and human disasters, but illustrates how images can help societies overcome past traumas and face their taboos. Secondly, she focuses on the role of collections in the emancipation of certain groups within society, and how collections and collection care can play an important part in the integration of, for instance, immigrants and the adaptation of new economic models.

In a second paper we look at how we can analyse the significance of image collections and tap into new values and uses. Indeed, understanding the value of a collection can serve as a base to the valorizing of not only a collection, but also its stakeholders. One of the main goals of the methodology presented is to develop a common practice within various contexts and to visualize the changing nature of the status of the photographic image. In a way, this is a first step towards building bridges between collections and offering a view on image collections as global heritage.

Collection management

Since its invention in the 1820s, photography has been one of the preferred technologies to document all kinds of phenomenon. Soon after the development of the technology as a commercial product, the first campaigns to constitute large documentary photographic collections got under way. An early example of such an initiative is represented by the *Missions Héliographiques* commissioned by the French *Commission des Monuments Historiques* in 1851. Although originally intended to serve as work documents in determining the nature and urgency of the preservation and restoration of work required at historic sites, these photographs now have immense value for the history of photography and are considered to be heritage themselves.

Many photographic collections had their creation within the framework of the building of reference collections of research documents. Over the years, these collections have proven to be more than just research documents and carriers of information. As examples from the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD), the Rubenianum and the Institute of Art History at the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (IAH-ASCR) will illustrate, they are also interesting as physical objects. Especially in the case of historically assembled collections, a lot of such research sources comprise

a large variety of photographic processes and technologies. Moreover, the physical manifestation of those processes and technologies offers new reference points that provide us with a better understanding of the image content.

Likewise, a lot of these documents are proof of the origins of the collection. They often contain annotations on the back of the print, for instance, which adds value to the image content, as well as to the photograph as an artefact itself. A photograph collected by Max J. Friedländer for example, is thus of greater significance than the same image outside this context. As such, the value of many of these research collections lies in their so-called ensemble value and the context-specific physical manifestation of the photographs.

When awareness of such values arises, the collection often undergoes a change in status. Such change has a huge impact on the way this heritage is both accessed and preserved. However many of these collections still have an active use as research collections, and preserving them as objects with intrinsic value is a difficult task. The only way forward is thus to find a feasible compromise between the collection in terms of its historical and research value and the collection in terms of its active use as a documentation source.

The collection of the *Société française de photographie* (SFP) is in many ways concerned with the preservation of the photograph as a research document and as a physical object. In her paper, Luce Lebart illustrates how the collection originated from the need to preserve the photographic image through technological and scientific research, and how the photographs of the collection have become heritage objects themselves.

Conservation

The main goal of heritage professionals involved with photographic collections is the conservation of this heritage. Because of their previous use and status, most photographic collections have been conserved in less than ideal conditions and many of them show signs of decay. Given their vastness and the complex nature of their material components, the accent in the conservation of photographic collections lies on a preventive conservation approach. In other words one of the main tasks of the photograph restorer has become not to fix damage, but simply to prevent it from happening.

In his contribution, Herman Maes, senior conservator of the *Nederlands Fotomuseum* and established tutor in the restoration of photographic materials, points out the changing role of the conservator over the past few

decades. He also expresses some interesting thoughts on the future of our photographic collections in our increasingly digital world.

The contributions of Ann Deckers and Tamara Berghmans (FoMu, Antwerp) and Marsha Sirven (ARCP, Paris) focus on preventive conservation measures. The case study of the FoMu provides us with a practical compromise in the planning of new storage facilities, one between ideal climate prescriptions and an ecological way of building. The ARCP contribution concentrates on preventive conservation measures in respect of single objects, through the development of new ways of packaging and exhibiting photographs and through the establishment of procedures for monitoring.

Likewise, Joana Silva and Élia Roldão investigate how chemical degradation mechanisms can be studied in order to safeguard acetate film. With their research, they try to bridge the gap between theoretical predictions about the stability of film by using aged materials. A similar practical approach of using available material from the field is offered by the research of Céline Quairiaux. In her paper, she discusses how photographs can be safely labelled by using widely available techniques and materials.

To conclude this chapter, we chose to include a short paper about the conservation of a rare albumen print of Mecca. This example shows us not only the complexity of photographic materials, but also the immense value of historic images. As such, the albumen print of Mecca is more than a mere image, it is a cultural object itself.

Digitization for preservation and access

Digitization has become a widespread practice in the management of photographic collections. Both as an effective mean to grant access to image collections and as a tool to preserve fragile image contents, many collections are being digitized at a rapid pace. Notwithstanding its widespread use, digitization requires specific skills and ideally forms part of a broader collection plan.

The example of the Polish National Film Archive provides us with a nice case study of where digitization is part of a “preservation to enable access” chain. Monika Supruniuk illustrates how conservation of the analogue material is inseparably linked to digitization. Likewise, she also points out how digitization changes the way audio-visual heritage is experienced and thus, in a way, has an impact on its meaning. Nevertheless, digitization puts large collections, as it were, in our pockets. Thanks to mobile technologies,

it has become easy not only to access collections, but also to share them. Consequently, these new developments offer new possibilities to valorize image collections and to reconnect past to present. Both Juozas Markauskas and Bruno Van Den Bossche point out some interesting possibilities modern access technology has to offer.

Digitized photographic images have equivalent status, whether they originate from museum or archival collections, whether they are conceived as works of art or research documents. As digital objects, they have all been transformed into the same intangible manifestation of simple bits, and they are all faced with the exact same weaknesses and risks. Given the fragile nature of many analogue processes, such as nitrate film, it is likely that many images will have only a digital future. As a result, the management of photographic collections will become partly the management of digital data. But such data are also fragile, and, just like the commonly known negatives and photographic prints, need proper storage conditions and preservation systems in order to stay “alive” for future generations.

In work with various types of image collections, it became clear that the only way to provide a sustainable framework for the preservation of photographic images is collaboration between the different heritage professionals. As the contributions in the publication illustrate, all aspects of preserving image collections are linked in one way or another. The status of a collection will influence the conservation measures taken; digitization cannot take place without proper conservation of the original and has in its turn a major impact on access to the collection. In this respect, all of the elements discussed in this publication are part of a cycle with the preservation of our visual heritage at its core.

In her closing remarks, Aparna Tandon summarizes the importance of more collaboration by advocating broader societal participation in the preservation of this heritage. Moreover, she invites us to reflect on the questions “What does conservation entail?” and “Why are we safeguarding image collections and for whom?”. The purpose of our conservation efforts is ultimately to keep the collections accessible for current and future generations. Given the fact that images are important for the “creation” of modern history and culture, preserving and granting access to, for instance, photographic collections plays an important part in the global emancipation of culture. Image collections have an unquestionable potential; it is our mission as heritage professionals to discover this potential, to communicate it and to make sure that it flourishes in the future, and this for the whole of society.

Part I
The Significance of Image Collections

THE VISIONARY GAZE AND THE MYSTERY OF
THE LIGHT ROOM. THE “NEW PHOTOGRAPHY”
THINKING: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF PHOTOGRAPHY
IN HERITAGE,
TOWARDS A NARRATIVE IMPERATIVE

Johan Swinnen

The history of photography is now well established as a respectable scientific discipline in art history, a discipline that has produced a stream of scholarly works on the lives and works of photographers, as well as on the impact of photography on art and society. What is the role of education in the management of photographic collections in a globalized world? Let us outline a kind of nomadic practice that is characterized by pleasure in dialectical transformation, mobility and cross-fertilization, as well as the transcultural element. Our research work on the 35,000 glass plates of Germaine Van Parys (1893-1983) regarding the critical history and the heritage of photography was guided by the idea of translation to a different medium. We connect this research with the study concerning the theory of photography within a broad social, political, and cultural framework that led to the PALIC (Photography-Anthology-Learning-Methodology- International Conflict) approach developed as a new research and educational tool in which the arts and social inquiry merge.

I. Introduction: a mind in the clouds

The preservation of photographs has become a matter of concern for a civilized society that appreciates and is fascinated by them. Over the past few decades, scientific research has advanced considerably in its efforts to understand the deterioration of nineteenth-century photographs and to find more effective methods of preserving them. As indicated above, our research on the critical history and the heritage of photography was guided by the idea of translation to a different medium. This critical and endless adventure

may be described as an attempt to conceive photography as an allegory of an unattainable, but constant “presence”, the photographic image giving that intangible “presence” a degree of tangible form. To move towards such a criticism implies avoiding any canonization of the photographic image and consequently any historicist and formalist approach. Here, rather, photography is to be approached through literature, music, sculpture and numeric cryptology.¹

The aim is clearly to integrate the heritage of photography into public education at all levels. The technological impact of the medium of photography on society is conceptual, in that an appreciation of the importance of technology is clearly required. In the European education system, neither in Art academies nor in universities is photography considered of any importance. If, for the future, we conceive an aesthetic education as being the basis for the critical understanding of the “infospheres” and the information age, as well as for the political responsibility of the community, photography, as the oldest form of New Media, has to be at the forefront of any educational project that, by means of the medium of photography, brings together advanced technology and cultural heritage.

This is why a philosophy of heritage photography comes down to the classic quest: the search for a historical infrastructure.

At the edge of the light

Historical photographic collections are an essential part of our cultural heritage. The growing interest in photography as a form of artistic expression, as well as a visual record of past times, has raised questions about how to treat photographic material in a responsible way. These questions are relevant not only to curators in archives, museums and libraries, but also to anyone with old, family photograph albums at home. Photography is a combination of two scientific processes: an optical and a chemical one. The development of the modern camera took place over hundreds of years, starting with a pinhole, progressing to a simple lens projecting on to a wall, and to our modern cameras today.²

Whatever the individual concept of it is, photography has not only become our most common resource, but since its birth has shaped our world and our perception of it. It has also mirrored every aspect of man’s development, spiritual, social and scientific. It has become one of our most valuable resources, as well as one most vulnerable to social and environmental pressures and the ravages of time. To appreciate something

of its unique sensitivity and vulnerability, it is important to grasp something of the essence of the medium.³

Imperfectly unknown

1839 is generally considered as marking a milestone in the development of photography, as it was in that year that the “Daguerreotype” was publicly announced at the Academy of Sciences in Paris (the same year indeed saw Henry Fox Talbot reading a paper before the Royal Society in London about “the art of photographic drawing”). What greatly contributed to the success of the daguerreotype was the French government’s purchasing of the rights to Daguerre’s process and giving it to the world free.

Daguerreotypes are positive images on copper plates with a highly polished silver surface, although they can only be seen as positives from a certain angle (moving the image slowly reveals the negative). They are delicate and, moreover, unique, since they cannot be reproduced. Improvement of the process, especially the reduction of exposure time to less than one minute, led to the opening of many portrait studios in all the major cities of Europe and North America. Travelling daguerreotypists set up their equipment in inns or local shops, recording their journeys, events, objects and people on a massive scale. The pictures were mostly kept in a protective case, often padded with velvet or silk. Daguerreotypes stayed popular until the 1850s, when photographs on paper gradually displaced them, images that were much cheaper and, more important, capable of being reproduced.⁴

Our starting point was to think through images, to stand still by photographic images that suggest time has been frozen. We live in a visual world in which we see a shift from words to images, an evolution that brings new possibilities in the photo-history field, implying new art-critical needs.⁵

Education in the management of photographic collections

A number of critical signs are also apparent in our ideas concerning the importance of art education: to a certain extent, they mirror those in art. First and foremost, art education will have to choose between technique and idea, between craft and artistry, and between skill and creativity. One should read up on Thierry de Duve (*Faire l'école*), who studied the difference between the academic model and the Bauhaus model. It is this difference which

creates such a strong divide between the different forms of art education. I would like to argue for broader art education, with an emphasis on the artistic craft, and for a preliminary selection based on motivation, openness and the desire to enter the world of art. The highly romantic demand for passion is not only unrealistic, but also inhuman towards future graduates. The task of art education is to dedicate itself to equipping well-educated and eager young people with cultural knowledge and artistic skills enabling them to practice their artistry to everyone's satisfaction, including their own. Not only does the garden of art education need plenty of sun and water, but, if it is to flower, pruning, too, and this applies to content, artistic level and policy.

The values of HAFACA. A new educational concept in education in the management of photographic collections art academies

The aim for the Art Academy is to be an essential participant in the artistic and scientific debate and to set up a broad discourse on a concept that we term HAFACA (heritage, authenticity, focus, artistic liberalization, confrontation, anarchy of openness).

Heritage. A photograph is many things to many people: a memory aid, an object of beauty, an irreplaceable historical document, a portrait of a loved one, a scientific tool or a mere conveyer of information, to name but a few. Historical photographic collections are an essential part of our cultural heritage.

Authenticity. The Academy sees itself as a peninsula in the education world; it is more than just an academy and does not work according to classical educational methods.

Focus. The Academy is situated and operates locally in a city, but is also linked to the wider world. The Academy has a network extending in all directions, and operates at local, regional, national and international levels. A number of critical signs are also apparent in our ideas concerning the importance of art education: to a certain extent, they mirror those in art.

Artistic liberalization, innovation. The Academy creates time and space for deepening and broadening talent. The Academy teaches its future graduates to live in artistic freedom and intellectual solitude, which can be liberating but requires motivation, personal involvement and perseverance.

Confrontation. The Academy mirrors talent. Self-reflection,

concentration and discussion occupy a central place here. The Academy offers guidance to its future graduates by way of expert stimulation and advice, which, besides being theoretically substantiated, is also critical and confrontational.

Anarchy of openness. The Academy does not acknowledge any ideology and refuses all overtures from organs of power.

The Academy provides scope for openness, humanism and freethinking; only the future graduate can transform chaos into order. More than ever before, art education has to do with the fostering of self-expression, self-awareness and self-respect, all of which are prerequisites for what could ethically be termed “responsible humanity” or “responsible citizenship”. I would even go so far as to say that, with an eye to art education, this cultural policy forms the essence and driving force of a broader social policy.

Indeed, I see this policy mainly as a tool for creating and securing “conditions”. However, I feel that, more than anything else, art education should stimulate discussion on fundamental standards. After all, it is the right to self-development, self-expression and education for all that is at stake. It is what is known as “lifelong learning”!

As far as our ideas on art education are concerned, we find ourselves in a period of confusion. However, the confusion is not only true of art education; for some time now, it has also borne on the hopes and expectations that govern our ideas about art and education individually. A new perspective is needed. The confusion is evident in other areas of society, and there is a reorientation. When we talk of art education and the two fields the term refers to, namely art and education, we are struck by a number of symptomatic questions. What is the role of the art student in conservation and restoration in a globalized art world? What are the conditions of art education within the capitalist commercialized media? Let us outline a kind of nomadic practice, favoured by our practice and other critics, that is characterized by pleasure in dialectical transformation, mobility, cross-fertilization, transculturality. Let us finish with statements and questions because it is not easy to see the power structures of photography and heritage. Who are the picture’s editors? Who gets commissioned? Today, the photographers of the Majority World fight against the Europe-/US-centric nature of photography in the field of writing the history of photography, the teaching of photography and the demography of conferences. Do photographers have the same relevance across cultures?

II. The “New Photography” thinking. Observations on the perils (and rewards) of Majority World Photography

“Earlier much futile thought had been devoted to the question of whether photography is an art. The primary question -whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art- was not raised.”
Walter Benjamin (1936)⁶

Introduction

Images shape our perceptions. The manufacture of consent has rarely been more engineered. With everything from wars to presidential campaigns being stage-managed, and with mainstream news reports becoming increasingly fed by official sources, reliance on standard sources of news images has gradually become more precarious. Because of this, the majority of countries around the world suffer, particularly from stereotypical representations. With Getty and Corbis controlling the stock market and Reuters, AP, AFP, BBC and EPA dominating the wires, communities in the West are looking for new ways to challenge established media, especially through citizen journalism. The only way in which this can be challenged is through alternative sources that are independent of Western and corporate media.

Anthology of the photography of Bangladesh: southern exposure

DRIKNews, International News Photo Agency and, in its footsteps, Pathshala, The South Asian Media Academy and Institute of Photography in Dhaka, Bangladesh, are designed to fill this void for alternative sources. Both were established in Dhaka in 1998 to fulfill the long-desired need for providing an institutional education and policy on photography in the region. Shahidul Alam founded the DRIK Picture Library in 1989; the Bangladesh Photographic Institute in 1990; Pathshala, the South Asian Institute of Photography, in 1998; Meghbarta, Bangladesh’s first webzine, in 1999; Chobi Mela, the first festival of photography in Asia, in 2000; and the Bangladesh Human Rights Network in 2001. He is currently involved in setting up a regional centre for investigative journalism and public-information-access kiosks in Bangladesh. A prominent social activist, Alam

is also a promoter of new media and helped introduce email to Bangladesh in 1994. He also created the first web portal in the country. Alam has lectured and published widely on photography, new media, and education all over the world. He tells us:

“The word *Pathshala*, a traditional Sanskrit word for a seat of learning, was generally associated with the shade of mango trees in open fields. There were no walls, no classrooms, no formal structures, but children gathered to listen to wise folk. It was wisdom being shared. Having decided that the language of images was the tool to use to challenge western hegemony and to address social inequality within the country, DRİK had begun to put in place the building blocks to make it happen. The agency was serving people already in the trade, but opportunities for learning had to be created. There wasn't a single credible organization for higher education in photography in the region. One had to be built. Taking advantage of a World Press Photo seminar on 18th December 1998, the school was set up. A single classroom was all that was available. The visiting tutors Chris Boot (formerly with Magnum, then with Phaidon) and Reza Deghati (National Geographic) conducted the workshops. I continued as a lone tutor. Kirsten Claire an English photographer whom a friend had recommended, came over soon afterwards and stayed for a year. We paid her a local salary, the best we could afford. I worked for nothing. The two of us formed the faculty.

The school was initially called Pathshala South Asian Institute of Photography, but as the school gained prominence, local media professionals demanded a similar facility for other media forms. So the school now functions as a media academy, and is officially called ‘Pathshala, South Asian Media Academy’, with the former school of photography as one of the departments. The school offers a three-year BA in photography, a two-year advanced diploma in photography, a one-year diploma in photography, a three-month foundation course in photography, a one-month basic course in photography and a video foundation course. Four new modules are currently being set up, three related to TV production: Editing, Camera, Reporting and, the fourth, Multimedia Journalism. An initial investment of approximately 8 million euro is being provided personally by me, which will be used to set up two buildings which will house the complex as well as providing residential facilities for scholars.”⁷

In drawing up the programme, emphasis has been placed on inculcating professional rigour without compromising creativity or passion. Recognizing that a vibrant and responsible media is crucial to a country's development, the school places particular emphasis on photo-journalism. In the region, it is a leading institute for research and programmes about the theory of photography, criticism, and policy that address critical issues relevant to

the public and private sectors and to the dissemination of research findings. Students have won major international awards, such as World Press Photo awards, and have taken on assignments for some of the most prestigious international publications, *Newsweek* among them. There is an open mentality towards visual culture. Within a short period, Pathshala has established itself as a regional centre for excellence in photography, with contacts in Nepal, India, Bhutan, and Miramar. There is, however, a lack of resources to archive the collection of these historical photographs, bringing with it the danger that the collection will be destroyed, due to insufficient conservation resources. The collection needs to be conserved, since it is a valuable source to trace the history of the country. There is almost no methodology, only very poorly equipped libraries and a lack of researchers and teachers. This lack of human resources has always been compensated for by inviting specialists (Sebastião Salgado, Martin Parr, Raghu Rai and others) from abroad, instead of investing in the training of potential trainers. However, there is strong scientific and artistic collaboration with international institutions in Australia, Norway and Belgium. Again, Alam says:

“Pathshala has a long-term ongoing relationship with Bolton University and Sunderland University in the UK. Currently, we also recently started working with Falmouth College and London College of Communication. Faculty members and students of Falmouth College visited the last Chobi Mela. Our strongest partnership is with Oslo University College (OUC) in Norway, and their students have been doing their course on International Photojournalism at Pathshala for the last seven years. Several of our students have also been to OUC. We have a similar arrangement with Edith Cowan University in Australia. We also have an exchange programme with the Danish School of Journalism, but that has so far only involved students, whereas faculty members have also been involved in all the other exchanges. These are academic collaborations, mostly at an artistic level, but the module we are currently developing with Falmouth College will also involve scientific exchange.”⁸

Project: the Majority World looks back

I could develop, with the support of the academic institutions, a study concerning research programmes on the history, the reception, and the theory of photography within a broad social, political, and cultural framework that leads to the PALIC (Photography-Anthology-Learning-Methodology-

International Conflict) approach. The PALIC approach was developed as a new research and educational tool in which the arts and social inquiry merge. It is aimed at building a dialogue among culturally diverse groups and at examining the perceptions of individuals of their own social reality. It is, based on the principles of participatory research, the counterpart of “the Western eye visits the Majority World”. The concept of “Majority World” is used in countries such as Bangladesh at an academic level, in order to describe populations in Asia and Africa, which belong to non-Western countries, and which have a quantitative majority in total world population. It is with this in mind that the department intends to develop diverse training and research, especially now with the introduction of the Internet and digital photography in cellular phones, even in a country like Bangladesh.

In our description of the context, we can see that the development problems of a country should be seen within the specific context of Bangladesh, a country that became officially independent and recognized as it is today only in 1971 (it was a British colony until 1947 and subsequently part of Pakistan until 1971), and one that became a democracy in 1991, with Islam as state religion. The country is ranked amongst the ten most populous countries in the world and also one of the poorest and most densely populated in the world. Frequent natural disasters, widespread poverty, combined with bureaucratic corruption, disrupt most government plans to bring the poverty rate down. The democracy is, to a certain degree, considered endangered by the military, which assists in the drive against corruption, but demands a share in the control of the country. The collaboration with the Liberation War Museum is also an important fact. As Alam says:

“The archives of 1971 form the single most important source segment of Bangladesh’s history. They are a record not only of the birth of the nation, but also of the earliest record of the nation’s documentary practice. The photographs, taken by both amateurs and professionals (though none of them commissioned) represent a source of pride to the nation. The collaboration with the Liberation War Museum is a natural linkage through which the visual archives can be combined with scholarly research and literary contributions, enriching the nation’s history.”⁹

Mission

To collect oral histories from those people who have photographed Bangladesh since its independence.

There is a documentary heritage of the territory that goes back a few decades before 1971. That heritage should be identified and made available to the general population, in order to show past, present, and future images. This could have many concrete applications, such as using photography to highlight the need for birth control and the prevention of illnesses such as AIDS. Topics would include: frontier and pioneer life, The Liberation War, The war of Language, the Women's Movement, and the various ethnic groups. The PALIC project could collect, archive, and make available to the public oral histories on historical and contemporary photographers on all aspects of daily life. The goal is to preserve the testimonies of the Bangladeshis who were unjustly incarcerated during the Liberation War. These first-hand accounts, coupled with historical images and teacher resources, explore the principles of democracy, human rights and equal justice. Providing an informative and engaging publication will help promote the country and educate people worldwide about the richness of the nation's culture and heritage. Today, the political situation is stable, highlighted by the democratic elections of December 2008. Alam:

“Though Bangladesh was under a military regime until 1990, since then there have been four successive free elections, with the most recent election in December 2008 having had a record turnout. In relative terms, there is also a fair amount of press freedom. This is not to say things are perfect, much still needs to be done, but there is a stable political system, besides a well-established, functioning, electoral system for the handover of power. The tremendous increase in free media has led to far greater participation in decision-making processes by the common people. Significant gains in primary education, gender reforms and basic health are all signifiers of the stability of the nation.”¹⁰

Goals

Bangladesh is a young country and the information generated by this research will effectively become a visual history of the nation and a segment of its body of artworks. One goal is to create the first-ever published anthology of photography. Despite Bangladesh's remarkable achievements in the field of photography, there are no comprehensive publications on the subject. The existing publications are largely monographs presenting the work of individual artists, or state-sponsored collections that do not reflect the breadth and diversity of the medium. Another goal is to develop the visual history. The publication will also add to the global literature on

photography, as the established literature has glossed over or overlooked photographic practice in this region. One or more of the following topics will also be researched:

- The role of new technologies and technological convergence in depicting conflict.
- The visual economies that translate and regulate the value of images of conflict and suffering.
- The role of news organizations and NGOs in the global distribution of images.
- The effects of imagery on government policy and NGO activity.
- The visual construction of humanism.
- The tenuous relationship between image and Islam. The histories and genres of photographic depictions of conflict.
- The ethical and legal function of images as evidentiary representations of human suffering.
- Writing a new photo-history of world photography.
- The role of humanitarian and cosmopolitan frameworks in “Western” genres of documentary photography.

Since the summer of 2010, the scholars Muhammad Aminuzzaman and Hasib Zakaria have been conducting research for a PhD in the History of Photography/Visual Culture at the *Vrije Universiteit Brussel* in Brussels. It is important to have an academic staff, a network, and well-trained people. Alam:

“Muhammad Aminuzzaman and Hasib Zakaria are amongst the early graduates of Pathshala. They have both been teaching for several years, and are committed to the development of the organization. Bangladesh does not yet have a single PhD in photography. Both candidates have represented the organization overseas and have been good ambassadors. This PhD will not only help develop their research techniques, but also expand their networks. Hopefully, they will also develop a peer group, which will be the basis of an expanded network that they will be able to utilize to increase the reach of Pathshala.”¹¹

Challenges

One challenge is to provide an authenticated research resource: the problems faced in formulating the photography section in *Banglapedia*