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Jennifer Bajorek

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Abstract
This introduction to a special section on 'Photography and the State' reflects on trends in photography theory exemplified in essays by Jens Andermann, Ariella Azoulay, Andrea Noble, and Bronwyn Law-Viljoen. It suggests that the contributors make a powerful argument for photography's emergent contribution to theories of the state and of sovereignty. It situates this work in the context of a growing body of scholarship (by theorists such as Natalia Brizuela, Paula Cortés-Rocca, Clare Harris, Chris Pinney, and Karen Strassler) attuned to photography's role in political imagination in post-colonial and post-imperial spaces, and underscores movement of the field away from inter-subjective conceptions of photographic ethics and debates about indexicality.

Key words
archive ■ photography ■ sovereignty ■ the state

THE ARTICLES gathered here share a sense of contemporaneity and relevance to our time, whether defined as a moment in the use of photography as such, in the unfolding of its 'world history', or as a moment in its theory. In fact, if there is any unity across these pieces, commissioned for this issue from writers and artists who have been working with and writing about photography for many years in diverse geographic and cultural spaces – the early years of republican Brazil, contemporary Israel/Palestine, Mexico in 1968, and post-apartheid South Africa – this may be the first place we find it: all of the articles show and remind us that the data of photography's history have never been clearly distinguished from its theory. In photography, any attempt to distinguish act from image, the event from its speculative reflection, enlightened exposure, traumatic repetition or recorded experience, immediately proves false. Part of

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what we refer to when we speak of 'photography' today is the spreading of this indistinction and its logic to the larger image ecology.

And so there is nothing new, or at least nothing surprising, in photography's frequent appearance, in these pages, as the avenger of the history it depicts. Over recent decades of scholarship, photography has been the avenger of the ongoing civilizational narratives of colonialism, or of the epistemological (if not moral) wrongs of capital. In the case of the articles collected here, photography appears as the avenger of regimes of domestic terrorism, racialized brutality and the systematic exclusion of large masses of the population from meaningful political participation and basic rights. When it comes to this capacity for vengeance, historically and in the present, photography has surpassed the capacities of all other machines of assertion, reference and visualization, all other languages and all other image-making technologies. This photographic avenging power is linked to a related photographic power to vindicate, assert a right or address a claim. We understand this better now than in past decades, and this latter register, of vindication and claim-making, has been particularly central to the ongoing projects of several of the contributors to this section (Ariella Azoulay and Andrea Noble). Some scholars (Geoff Batchen, for example) have even suggested that the desire for photography's supremacy over other machines and modes of assertion or predication pre-dated the invention of what we call photography, and is what spurred its inventors on. A photograph's power to redraw the line or blur the distinction between happening and trace, aesthetics and politics, or (to borrow from Jens Andermann's lexicon) spectatorship and performance, stems from its constant renewal of an original prolepsis and an original temporal transgression.

What is new about this work, lending it, perhaps, a more obvious thematic unity, is less a new theoretical argument than a new way of engaging with constituted knowledge about photography, and a new phase of confrontation with the archive. Beyond a clear and sustained focus on photography's propensity to refract as much as reflect, and thus to do things or exhibit agency as much as record or document the will or action of extra-photographic actors or agents, what do these articles share?

A Focus on Crises of History Linking Photography to the State

Several of the articles collected here are concerned with the state, and collectively they argue for photography's emergent contribution to theories of the state and of sovereignty, placing special emphasis on postcolonial and post-imperial spaces. While this concern may be explained by sheer editorial bias (my own current research looks at this), a great deal of attention has been paid, in recent scholarship, to the importance of the modern state *qua* state in visual matters, deepening our understanding of the modern state's immense resourcefulness in the appropriation and deployment of photography. Notable contributions to this literature include, in addition to Chris Pinney's now canonical work on photography in India, Karen Strassler's recent work on photography in Indonesia, Natalia Brizuela's and Paula Cortés-Rocca's studies of photography in

Argentina and Brazil, Clare Harris's writings on photography and Tibet, and a recent exhibition hosted by Autograph ABP in London on photographs of the 1971 war in Bangladesh; I will not cite the titles of important publications on this topic by Jens Andermann, Ariella Azoulay and Andrea Noble, whose more recent forays into these questions will be found in these pages.

Much of this recent scholarship on photography and the state emerged directly from an earlier phase of work on the iconographies of nationalism, and it develops earlier insights into the widespread reliance of both state *and* nation on the mobilization and invention of new visual technologies. At the same time, this phase of writing on photography and the state is clearly distinguished from important early work by its preoccupation, precisely *not* with the nation or with nationalist visions and imagination (be they inspired by the 'political nationalism' of postcoloniality and independence movements, to borrow a phrase from Partha Chatterjee, or more arcane expressions of nationalist sentiment), but with the state form as such. Whereas the links between nationalism and its visual or optical manifestations have been primarily analysed as manifestations or 'representations' of phenomena existing elsewhere, the resourcefulness of the modern state in relation to photography lies, these scholars suggest, on another plane, infecting 'the totality' (as Jens Andermann points out in his article) and provoking a crisis in the Kantian apparatus of judgement, with all its pretensions to universality and to an ethical foundation of political life (as suggested by Ariella Azoulay). For all their differences, both scholars and their texts take as their object new social, technological, spatial and temporal extensions of politics or, if you like, politics carried out by other means: by means of photography.

It is worth underscoring the 'crises' organizing both Andermann's and Azoulay's texts. Both authors treat photographs and photography in states in profound moments of transition, or in the midst of protracted conflict: in the oscillation between Empire and Republic (Brazil in 1894) and in the impossible articulation of the occupied territory with the sovereign state (Israel/Palestine). In the first pages of his article, Andermann describes what he calls a 'crisis of history' that opens in the gap between the temporality of photography and that of spectacle in Juan Gutiérrez's photograph of the Triumphal Arch in Rio de Janeiro, taken on the occasion of the Republic's fifth birthday. This crisis is uncannily attuned to the temporal predicament of the fledgling Republic, which, as Andermann deftly demonstrates, Gutiérrez's photographs of the Brazilian national celebrations both expose and support. This predicament is at least potentially generalizable to that of other states, which can be said to be in transition or malformed. Indeed, if we accept Azoulay's definition of the political or political space as 'potentially present whenever people assemble together', then the clearly problematic distinction between the aesthetic and the political – which Azoulay undoes by conjugating an elastic understanding of the role of the gaze in the realization of the potential of human relations with a highly specific interpretation of the *vita activa* in Hannah Arendt – is revealed to

have been born from an originary crisis. Before the state, and running counter to it, the aesthetic and the political are conjoined in the coming together of a plurality of actors or agents, citizens and non-citizens, in a public space that is co-extensive with photography.

The intense pressure put on photography in both Andermann's and Azoulay's theories does not limit either the authors' or our own analysis of photography to a single, self-identical technology or to a bounded historical epoch. Rather, this insistence on the state opens, in both texts, a vast and unstable horizon. If, as Andermann suggests, there is an unwonted co-presence of the state in the totality, in Brazil this was a consequence of the modern state's ability to insinuate itself into the panorama of nature and of history, presented as external givens. Yet the modern state does not do this *only* in photography, and, in the case explored here by Andermann, the state, precisely by apprenticing itself to photography, is able to take on an increasingly cinematographic form. Hence Borges's Aleph is, on Andermann's reading, a black box generating cinematographic paradigms, and also therefore new habits of expectation and new appropriations of what he calls the 'spectator-performer'. Lest we mistake the Aleph for the movie theatre of our childhood, this is not a cinema that unfurls in real time, but 'one of the points in space that contain all space' (Borges) and thus 'a point of absolute visibility within a space of darkness'.

An analogous structure can be traced through Azoulay's discovery of the political in the expanded field. If we take seriously the terms of Azoulay's analysis, in which photography inaugurates new conditions of visibility of the political as such, the space of the political is, it turns out, more portable than we may once have thought. The absolute point is readily communicated, rapidly and across great distances, and it is downloadable. Neither timeless nor immobile (like a monument), it is rather subject to the lapses, blind spots, and types of erasure associated with the corruption of memory, the loss of our essential files.

The Dislocation of the So-called Evidentiary Qualities of Photography from the Physio-chemical to the Transnational Arena

Two other articles written for the section also treat photography's relationship to the state and might be analysed from a similar standpoint, yet they share a slightly different emphasis worth drawing out here. Both Andrea Noble's discussion of a series of images taken in Mexico City in 1968, capturing evidence of the brutal state-sponsored suppression of student uprisings, and Bronwyn Law-Viljoen's discussion of the complex interrelation of photography and violence in apartheid-era South Africa are inspired by legal theories and texts of philosophy that see photographs as social actors or agents in their own right. Both emphasize photography's power to do its work and produce knowledge beyond the intersubjective level. While this excess of the intersubjective in photography may in certain respects seem obvious, it is worth underscoring how different this type of theoretical

undertaking has become since the waning of an orthodox Marxo-Foucauldian paradigm. The era of polemical oppositions between photography's value as a critical weapon for the analysis of class and power relations and its status as an aesthetic object is thankfully receding. These are the same oppositions that led to the abjection of Barthes on the basis of positivist misreadings of the indexical nature of photographic reference, and to the abjection of Sontag on the basis of her allergy to photography's bad ethical sliding. These debates begin to seem increasingly perverse and may well be endless, and there is a growing consensus as to their diminishing stakes. Such debates contribute little to our analysis of a photograph's material force, not only as 'sensible objects' (cf. Elizabeth Edwards) but as a force of social and historical inscription, giving rise to its own spatial and temporal coordinates. Our desire better to understand the *nature* of this force will not be furthered by a decision on the nature of photographic inscription, reduced to its physio-chemical facts.

In the place of the index, and in the margins of the debates about the nature of photographic reference, new physio-chemical facts are emerging. Their ethical and political reverberations are increasingly felt on the level of the archive. Both Law-Viljoen's and Noble's articles look at archives of violence from an earlier date which have been re-opened and are subject to recirculation. Florencio López Osuna, a leader in the Mexican Student Movement of 1968 and the subject of the photograph which Noble takes as her starting point in this article, was found dead a few weeks after his photograph was reprinted in *Proceso*, in 2001. A cautionary tale for all who would scoff at the power of what lies buried in the archive, the example chosen by Noble also reminds us that both democracy and the resources of resistance begin with the archive, and are never free of it. It is in part the archival impulse that allows the photograph to explode its association with a particular moment, a particular injustice – in this case the beating and torture of student leaders by their own government, left unacknowledged and unpunished – and enter into the transnational space, presented to the eyes of a 'global imagined community'.

Lest we feel tempted by the liberal fantasies of shame and exposure – based on the idea that all it takes for an injustice to be addressed is for it to hit the front pages in a photograph – we are chastened by Law-Viljoen's article on the long-standing link between photography and violence in South Africa. Sixteen years after the transition to democracy, this is one state in which the legacy both of systematic state-sponsored brutality *and* its meticulous documentation in photography has yet to settle. If both documentary photography and art photography in South Africa have been identified with images of violence, this is due, in Law-Viljoen's even-handed analysis, not only to the prurience of an international public and the lasting power of stereotypes, but also to the fact that the transition to democracy in a post-apartheid society may not entail a reduction of violence at all. Whereas the texts and concepts most closely associated with the name of Walter Benjamin in photography theory still resonate throughout the

pages of this section, Law-Viljoen underscores the interest of another text by Benjamin for thinking the legacy of apartheid in this context: the 'Critique of Violence'. Driving a resurgence of interest in both the state's monopoly on violence and the tools appropriate to its analysis, Benjamin's insights (articulated here with those of Sartre and Mbembe) remind us that a sustained analysis of the nature of this monopoly is the bare minimum requirement of a deeper and more sustained inquiry into the nature of democracy, and, in oblique relation to this, the nature of the human as such.

Jennifer Bajorek is Senior Lecturer in Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths College, University of London, where she teaches on literature, philosophy and photography. She is also a residential research fellow at the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University for the 2010–11 academic year. Her publications include *Counterfeit Capital: Poetic Labor and Revolutionary Irony* (Stanford, 2009); with Eric Trudel and Charlotte Mandell, an edition and translation of the literary theory and political writings of Jean Paulhan, *On Poetry and Politics* (Illinois, 2008); essays in *Critical Inquiry*, *Diacritics*, and *History of Photography*; and translations of Sarah Kofman, Bernard Stiegler, and Jacques Derrida. Her current research is on aesthetic and political dimensions of photography. In addition to a book on the Bamako photography biennial, co-authored with Erin Haney (from which an essay appears elsewhere in this issue), she is currently writing a book on photography and political imagination in Senegal and Benin.
[email: j.bajorek@gold.ac.uk]