

Trauma and its Representation: The Responsible Photographer

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of the requirements for award of BA Photography

By

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Declaration

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this dissertation towards award of the BA in Photography is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfilment of the award named above.

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Date 20/01/23

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Abstract

This dissertation sets out to investigate the responsibility of photographers when representing sensitive subjects such as trauma and its effects. To complete this, an examination will take place to compare documentary practices of the past and contrast them to newer modes associated with contemporary documentary practice. This will be done through one key photographer in chapter one, Kevin Carter and three key photographers in chapter two: Boris Mikhailov, Luc Delahaye, and Anastasia Taylor-Lind. This research delves into the critiques of the 20th century, which associated the medium of photography and its practitioners with problematic concepts such as exploitation, aestheticization, and voyeurism. It aims to determine if they still hold relevance in the current context. This dissertation will identify the key modes and appropriate methods for representing trauma in photography such as the development of relationships with subjects, the use of aesthetics, the use of agency and humanity. Furthermore, this dissertation defines a set of methodologies that are employed by responsible photographers who ethically represent marginalized individuals and their experiences of trauma. By comparing the progression of ideologies and methodologies of contemporary photographers to that of the ‘traditional’ documentary practice, the dissertation evaluates if there has been a clear progression of ethical awareness and responsibility in relation to those they aim to represent.

Table of Contents

Title	i
Declaration	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Abstract	iv
Table of contents	v
List of illustrations	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	
1.1 Defining the Image of Trauma.....	3
1.2 The Conflict of Representation.....	5
1.3 Authorship & Spectatorship.....	7
1.4 The Insider vs Outsider.....	12
1.5 Circulation & Consumption in The Digital Age.....	14
Chapter 2	
2.1 Mikhailov: The Representation of Agency.....	16
2.2 Delahaye: The Aftermath Image.....	21
2.3 Anastasia Taylor Lind: The Indirect Effects of Trauma.....	23

Chapter 3

3.1 Revising Traditional Modes of Representation..... 26

3.2 The Methods of The Responsible Photographer.....27

3.4 Identity Positions.....30

Conclusion..... 32

Bibliography.....36

List of illustrations

Figure 1.1: Goldin, N. (1984), Nan After Being Battered, [Online Image]
Available at <<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/102197>> [Accessed
10/07/22]

Figure 1.2: Carter, K. (1993) The Vulture and the little girl [Online Image]
Available at
<https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1098&context=evision>
[Accessed: 13/04/22]

Figure 1.3: Screenshot from the Journal ‘Empowering, invasive or a little bit of
both? A reflection on the use of visual and narrative methods in research with
migrant sex workers in South Africa’ by Elsa Oliviera (2016), p.264 Available at:
< [10.1080/1472586X.2016.1210992](https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2016.1210992) > [Accessed: 03/06/22]

Figure 1.4: Screenshot from the Journal ‘Empowering, invasive or a little bit of
both? A reflection on the use of visual and narrative methods in research with
migrant sex workers in South Africa’ by Elsa Oliviera (2016), p.264 Available at:
< [10.1080/1472586X.2016.1210992](https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2016.1210992) > [Accessed: 03/06/22]

Figure 1.5: Avedon, R. (1974) ‘Jacob Israel Avedon’ [Online image] Available at
< <https://americansuburbx.com/2011/04/richard-avedon-jacob-israel-avedon-1974.html>> [Accessed: 22/05/22]

Figure 1.6: Avedon, R. (1974) ‘Jacob Israel Avedon’ [Online image] Available at
< <https://americansuburbx.com/2011/04/richard-avedon-jacob-israel-avedon-1974.html>> [Accessed: 22/05/22]

Figure 2.1: Mikhailov, B. (1997-1998) Case History, A set of 413 photographs. [Online image] Available at < https://www.saatchigallery.com/artist/boris_mikhailov> [Accessed: 13/01/22]

Figure 2.2: Mikhailov, B. (1997-1998) Case History, A set of 413 photographs. [Online image] Available at < Available at: https://www.saatchigallery.com/artist/boris_mikhailov>[Accessed:13/01/22]

Figure 2.3: Mikhailov, B. (1997-1998) Case History, A set of 413 photographs. [Online Image] Available at https://www.saatchigallery.com/artist/boris_mikhailov [Accessed: 13/01/22]

Figure 2.4: Delahaye, L. (2000) Winterriese, [Online image] Available at < Available at: <https://cabramatta.livejournal.com/24244.html> > [Accessed: 13/01/22]

Figure 2.5: Delahaye, L. (2000) Winterriese, [Online image] Available at < Available at: <https://cabramatta.livejournal.com/24244.html> > [Accessed: 12/01/22]

Figure 2.6: Taylor-Lind, A. (2019) ‘5km from the Front Line’ [Online image] Available at < <https://www.leica-oskar-barnack-award.com/en/series-finalists/2020/anastasia-taylor-lind.html>> [Accessed: 19/11/22]

Introduction

The question of whether photography as a medium can be used as a tool to ethically expose trauma and its effects has always been a topic of debate in the history of the visual arts. Since its inception in the 19th century, the medium of photography has had a long and complex relationship with the representation of pain and suffering. In the early 20th century, documentary photographers played a vital role in bringing attention to the trauma caused by war and other forms of injustice. However these early methods of representation in documentary photography grew questionable. Major critics of the 20th century such as Susan Sontag, Martha Rosler, Abigail Solomon-Godeau and Alan Sekula, voiced their concerns and shaped the attitude towards photography and its representation of trauma. These critiques associated both the medium and its photographer to problematic concepts of exploitation, voyeurism and aestheticization which re-victimised the subject and further prompted the desensitisation of both the viewer and the photographer. When the camera is in distant hands it has the potential to be a tool of violation and exploitation. It is arguable that the specific gaze casted through the lens and the knowledge of the photographer is vital to how the narrative of the other's trauma is told.

The purpose of this dissertation is to evaluate and define the responsible photographer who ethically represents marginalised individuals and their experience of trauma. I will do this through examining the approaches of three contemporary documentary photographers, all who represent the same or a broadly similar issue. Furthermore I will compare the progression of their ideologies and methodologies to that of the 'traditional' documentary practice. This will evaluate if there has been a clear progression of ethical awareness and responsibility in relation to those they aim to represent.

Chapter one will firstly define the image of trauma and how it is communicated in the visual arts. An outline of core criticisms and literature will be presented in relation to the earlier ‘traditional’ approach of documentary practices focusing on Kevin Carter’s iconic image of The Vulture and the girl. Building on these criticisms it will propose fundamental questions of authorship and spectatorship, touching further on the idea of identity relations. Chapter two will examine three contemporary documentary projects: Boris Mikhailov ‘Case Study’, Luc Delahaye ‘Winterreise’ and Anastasia Taylor-Lind and evaluate questions of authorship (Nouzeille, 2016).

Through the evaluation of these projects we will identify key ideologies and methodologies which developed in order to represent the subjects of trauma as real human beings instead of victimised objects. Each project demonstrates a different relationship with the subjects and this chapter will observe the effects this has on its reading. Furthermore this chapter aims to observe how these photographers, bridge the gap between art and document to break away from traditional distant forms of documentary practice and challenge the critiques of the 20th century. Chapter three will examine the progression of documentary practice through an evaluation of the methods employed by the contemporary photographers in chapter two. This chapter will evaluate the responsibility of the photographer. Conversely this chapter will also evaluate the concept of identity positions and inquire into the ethically anxious photographer which proposes its own problematic concepts (Mallik 2021). The conclusion will outline the findings of the research, and present questions and corresponding arguments that have come to fruition during the completion of this research.

Chapter 1

1.1 Defining The Image of Trauma

Dumith Kulasekara is an accomplished visual artist, researcher, and lecturer in the field of painting and drawing. He deals with a variety of themes including trauma, the human body, the psychological analysis of art, gender, memories, and their impact on and reflection in visual art practices. Originating from Greek history, the term trauma (τράυμα) translates to 'wound', the verb *titrōskein* 'to wound', and *tetrainein* 'to pierce' (Kulasekara, 2017, p.35). Kulasekara's (2017) discourse, while primarily focused on painting, helps to define the general image of trauma within contemporary art, as the communication of one's experience of pain, suffering, and vulnerability, physically and/or psychologically. This understanding of trauma has important implications for the representing artist who seeks to document and bear witness to this pain and suffering, as it highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of trauma and its victims. Arguably, this presents the photographer with further challenges of representation to sensitively but accurately depict the subject's experience.

When looking at how trauma is visually constructed and understood in photographs we must first evaluate Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics (*Camera Lucida*). This theory studies how signs and symbols are used to create denotative and connotative meaning. The denotative meaning of a photograph refers to the literal information the viewer is presented with while the connotative meaning refers to image's further cultural signifiers which evoke an emotional response. Barthes introduces the concepts of "studium" and "punctum." The studium refers to the viewers initial gravitation to the image. It is the general interest a photograph holds for the viewer, based on their cultural background and knowledge, separate from the intent of the photographer. The punctum, however,

is a detail within a photograph that ‘touches’ the viewer. It evokes a personal and emotional response and as Barthes argues, is the element that makes a photograph meaningful.

Maximo Alaez Corral (2018) analyses how pain is constructed and communicated in photography through analysing Nan Goldin’s oeuvre of work. Goldin is a contemporary American photographer. Her photographs are often considered a powerful document of the trauma and suffering experienced by marginalized communities in the 1980s and 90s, particularly the LGBTQ+ community and those affected by addiction, domestic violence, and HIV/AIDS. Her photographs are raw and honest in their portrayal of these difficult subjects, often depicting the gritty reality of the lives of her subjects with a sense of empathy and understanding. The photographs of the *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* are not only a document of the trauma and suffering of the individuals within the photographs, but also an exploration of the photographer's own trauma, as Goldin herself had struggled with addiction. The photographs are also a personal and intimate account of the photographer's own life and the lives of her friends and family and their experiences with trauma and suffering. By depicting these difficult and sensitive topics in a candid and personal way, Goldin's photographs aim to create empathy and understanding and to challenge the traditional representations of trauma, which often focused on the victims of trauma and not on their experiences.

As an insider in these communities her work intimately portrays the lives of her subjects. Corral observes that representations of suffering, both physical and emotional, are common in contemporary art, but notes that these are merely ‘constructions’ that brings us closer to an understanding of pain, but does not fully recreate or communicate the experience of pain itself (Corral, 2017, p.64). Corral quotes Ariel Glucklich who states, “violence is a semiotic event while pain is a subjective experience” (Corral, 2017, p.66). By analysing Goldin's self-portrait, through the view of semiotics (see figure 1.1), Corral contends that the viewer's

experience of witnessing the pain of others is mediated through their own personal conception and experience of pain. This idea of the punctum presents itself in his discussion.



Figure 1.1 Goldin, N. (1984) Nan One Month After Being Battered

1.2 The Conflict of Representation

In 'Re-reading 'impossibility and 'barbarism': Adorno and Post-Holocaust Poetics' Anthony Rowland revisits Theodor Adorno's famous assertion 'Poetry is impossible after Auschwitz'. Adorno considers "The problem of suffering and its representation" primarily through literature. Although this text does not address photography specifically, this analysis offers a deeper understanding of the responses and debates that arose in relation to the representation of trauma in the early 20th century, providing valuable insight into the complex ethical and aesthetic issues that were at play in this context. Adorno's position addresses the act of representing the trauma of the Holocaust (1933-1945) 'barbaric' (Rowland, (1997), p.58). According to Adorno, post-war representations of trauma can create

images that are divorced from the history of suffering and may even prompt aesthetic pleasure in the viewer. He claims that such poetry is inarticulate and insignificant when considered in the context of the Holocaust, and he expresses frustration with the voyeuristic and aesthetically pleasurable responses that these representations can obtain. Rowland quotes Adorno's criticism of artistic representations of physical pain that "elicit enjoyment" in the viewer and highlights Adorno's belief that such representations are infected by voyeurism and aestheticization.

In the 1970's, photography faced major backlash from significant critics such as Susan Sontag, Martha Rosler, Abigail Solomon-Goudeau and Allan Sekula. These critics have discussed key ethical problems and considerations, which all feed into each other, including exploitation, voyeurism, desensitisation, aestheticization, context and consent, and emotional impact on the viewer. In *Plato's cave* (1973), Sontag argues that the proliferation of images depicting violence and suffering leads to desensitization. She suggests that the constant exposure to such images can deaden feeling, which further risks the creation of a "perverse fascination" with suffering. Sontag was concerned about the constant exposure of pain and suffering through the medium and its user, and argued that this use of the medium desensitized viewers and led to the imagery becoming banal.

Martha Rosler (1981) argues that documentary photography often reinforces dominant narratives and ideologies and can be used to reinforce existing power structures and inequalities. She also suggests that the use of the medium to document trauma can risk exploiting or voyeuristically consuming the suffering of others. In her book *'Photography at the Dock,'* Abigail Solomon-Godeau, raises similar concerns about the use of photography to document trauma, arguing that such images can be used to manipulate public opinion and obscure the complexity and context of the events depicted.

The progression of photography led to its descent into the art discourse through the late 19th century and early 20th century. The merging of art and document plagued the medium with further controversies of exploitation and voyeurism. The critiques outlined above argue the medium's adaptability between art and politics to be questionable and dangerous. As Santasil Mallik reveals in his 2018 discourse, an image remains in a tense state of being either too political or too aesthetic. These 'two categories' control how images are evaluated and classified 'in the modern art discourse' today. As a result, the relationship between the photographer and representation of sensitive subject matter became even more complex. According to Sontag, aestheticizing severe subject matter only added voyeuristic intent and re-victimised the subject. It is arguable that because of photography's close affiliation to reality it "contaminates the real with visual pleasure" (Bal qtd. in David Levi Strauss (2007)).

1.3 Authorship and Spectatorship

Susan A. Crane (2008) takes the Holocaust as an example of this and evaluates how, photographic images became the 'common coin of public awareness and historical information' (Crane, 2008, p.309). However, her argument questions the significance and efficacy for these images to still be circulated and studied in the post-war, present-day context. Crane discusses the ethical considerations of viewing and studying photographs of trauma, particularly in the context of the Holocaust and asks how we, as scholars, can use these images appropriately? Crane addresses the power of the gaze in shaping the meaning and impact of these images. She ponders if the revisiting of such imagery revictimizes the subject. Crane cites Bernd Huppauf, who argues that the Nazi gaze, which rendered victims into objects and bodies, could potentially be revived and remain even after 1945, if students and scholars alike are not careful.

An interesting question is raised within Crane's discourse regarding the context in which such images are viewed and further how this can alter how they are read

and understood. Crane asks who has the right to view the image? Gabriela Nouzeille (2016) in 'Theaters of Pain', looks at this on the flipside –who has the right to take the image and how, in turn, would this effect the spectatorship? Nouzeille, follows the arguments made by critics such as Susan Sontag and introduces Jean Franco with specific reference to her book 'Cruel Modernity (2013)'. Franco, like Sontag worries about images of severity and sensitivity becoming ordinary and over-familiar which would make the horrible seem ordinary and banal. Nouzeille identifies important questions of authorship and spectatorship which become crucial to create context and meaning for the image of trauma as she states:

The question of authorship and the question of spectatorship are fundamental to understanding how images of cruelty signify. Who produced the images and with what purpose? What was the role of the victims portrayed? Who was the intended public? Who framed the images and made them circulate? In addressing these questions we discover that the spectacle of violence is not just a collection of horrifying images but also a political and social relation among people (photographers, political actors, editors, viewers, etc.), mediated by images. (Nouzeille, 2016, p.714).

Kevin Carter's image 'The vulture and the girl' (1993), (see figure 1.2) depicts a young Sudanese boy, initially believed to be a girl, attempting to make it to the nearest food shelter. Evidently malnourished and weak, the young boy struggles to move as a vulture stalks him, waiting to pounce. Initially the image gained widespread recognition for its powerful portrayal of poverty and famine in Africa, leading to Carter's receipt of the Pulitzer Prize in 1994. However, subsequent revelations regarding Carter's lack of intervention after the image was taken raised significant concerns and significant scrutiny. Carter allegedly waited twenty more minutes, scared off the vulture and continued on his journey, leaving the boy and his faith behind. The image then became iconic not for its portrayal of famine but for its insight into the photographer's pursuit of the perfect image, often at the expense of humanity. Four months after winning the prize Carter took his own life leaving behind a note which described how he couldn't cope with all

the horror he had seen. This arguably leaves a gap in such criticisms regarding how images of trauma not only affect viewers but how they impact its photographer.

Carter represents a pivotal point in the authorship of traditional documentary photographic practices. This traditional style often represents the idea of the decisive moment which originated in 1952 from Henri-Cartier-Bresson who was considered the founder of modern photojournalism. This decisive moment waits for the perfect shot to align without any intervention of the scene.



Figure 1.2 Kevin Carter, K. (1993) The Vulture and the Little Girl

Cat Witko, In her article ‘Pulitzer Prize photograph brings awareness—at a price’ (2011) describes Carter’s patience for the perfect shot. Although Carter waited for the right lighting and framing, he ‘ignored his responsibility’ to help the struggling child. His professional detachment seemed to override his own humanity and morals. In ‘‘Our Failure of Empathy’’: Kevin Carter, Susan Sontag, and the Problems of Photography’, Wai Kit Ow Yeong weighed in on this controversial topic. Yeong referenced the St. Petersburg Times (Florida) which depicted Carter as a predator not much different from the vulture depicted at the scene especially when he had to adjust the lens to get the perfect shot of the

child's suffering. Sontag discusses how the act of photographing can impede a photographer's ability to empathize with their subjects. Further, she argues the act of photography is one of non-interference and that the impulse it inspires is not to help others, rather to document their traumatic suffering.

Elsa Oliveira in her 2016 discourse 'Empowering, invasive or a little bit of both? A reflection on the use of visual and narrative methods in research with migrant sex workers in South Africa', expresses frustration with traditional journalistic practices of production and representation of the vulnerable subject. According to Oliveria this 'traditional' journalistic practice we have discussed with Carter, involves little to no interaction with the subject. Due to the distance of the photographer both physically and emotionally, 'incomplete' and 'superficial' portrayals are carried out (Oliviera, 2016, p. 274). The author pushes for the need of new models and methods of representation which will demonstrate range and allow the vulnerable subject to have the opportunity to have a 'photovoice'. Photovoice is a research strategy that was first advanced by Wang and Burris (1997). It addresses social change through participant photography, critical reflection and participant generated photo texts (Evan-Agnew Rosenberg 2016).

Oliveria addresses the importance of this collaboration, describing it as a participatory visual and narrative approach: a conscious interaction between photographer and subject and vice versa. This enables not only the photographer but more importantly, in her case, the subject to use the medium as a tool of empowerment. Oliveria employs this method within her own research projects, which was conducted with a diverse group of adult migrants who sell sex in the provinces of South Africa. Oliveria's 2010 and 2013 projects collaborate with ACMS (African centre for migration and society) and the MPW (Market Photo Workshop). With support from the project team, each participant selected 10 images that they captured, including a self-portrait, along with accompanying

captions that they wrote, and a narrative story that they produced, for public consumption (see figure 1.3 and figure 1.4). Oliveria describes the importance of this project evident in its positive response from the participants who expressed great pride for being a part of such an important project. However, Oliveria does address the restrictions involved in this practice due to censorship of certain images in order to protect the workers. However her discourse evokes an important question regarding the representation of the others' suffering, who has the right to portray another's hardships if not the subject themselves?



Figure 1.3 Image by Modise, a male sex worker in Oliveria's 2013–2014 project 'Volume 44: A Participatory Photography Project with Migrant Sex Workers'

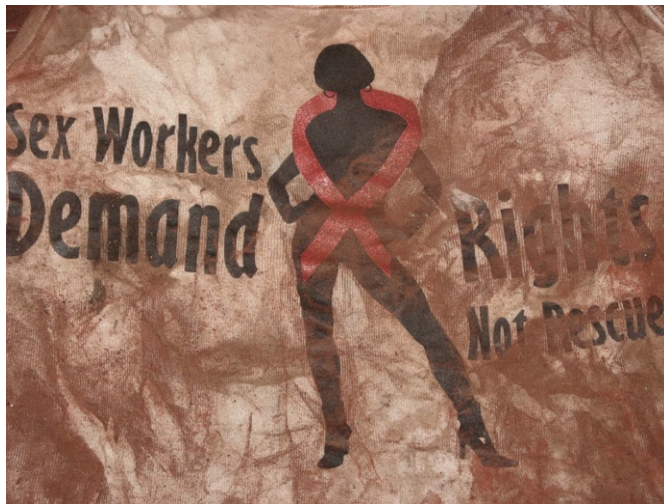


Figure 1.4 Image by 'Confidence', a female sex worker in Oliveria's 2010 project 'Working the City: Experiences of Migrant Women in Inner-City Johannesburg'

1.4 The Insider vs Outsider

In 'Sontag's Lament' (2008), Sarah Parsons observes Sontag's own bias in analysing photographic work through the idea of the 'insider/outsider divide' (Parsons 2009 p.298). For Sontag, the insider is considered to be someone who comes from the same cultural background, or someone who lives within the same community as the subject of their photographs. Sontag argues that this insider perspective have the most potential for creating images that have more authenticity and reality, by having direct contact with the subjects. Parsons cites Richard Avedon's emotional work 'Jacob Israel Avedon', depicts his dying father from 1969 until his death in 1973. He approaches an intensely personal subject matter and makes it universal. According to Parsons, Sontag seems to take no issue with the idea of Avedon as an "insider" taking the image. However, it is worth noting that this series does not depict any visible or graphic signs of injury that would allude to trauma, instead it focuses on building up subtle nuances such as weak facial expressions (see figure 1.6) or a glimpse of hospital clothing (see

1.7). Although a sense of unsettling is created within the images, without context, these signifiers would arguably remain unresolved to the casual viewer.



Figure 1.5 Avedon, R. (1974) 'Jacob Israel Avedon'



Figure 1.6 Avedon, R. (1974) 'Jacob Israel Avedon'

Santasil Mallik in his journal 'The Anxious Photographer' (2021) argues that the significance of "identity positions" must be put under scrutiny. He references Parsons to discuss this insider/outsider breakdown through viewing context.

Parsons studies elaborate on how, although the relationship between father and son may be understood in a small viewing context of a gallery, it may not be apparent to the viewer in a wider context (i.e., in the mass media we are developing into today where one image can be seen away from its context and widely spread and consumed). Mallik argues that the relationship between father and son is unimportant as it may not be acknowledged or understood by the viewer especially in a context divorced from its origin. Although this is a strong point his discourse misses to touch upon or deepen the significant role that this relationship between a photographer and their subject can play in shaping the final image. On one hand we can argue that the insider can see and feel much more intensely, and this intimate treatment of the subject will be understood and felt unconsciously through the nuances within the image. Conversely it is also possible to argue for a photographer who is too close to the subject to notice the details that the outsider potentially could. Mallik does, however, address and argue the main aspect of consideration for the image of trauma to be how the subjects are treated, portrayed, and framed with dignity and unbiasedly.

Images of Trauma: Their Circulation and Consumption in The Digital Age

In an age where images are constantly consumed, Ariella Azoulay in 'The Civil Contract of Photography' argues that to understand a photograph, one must not only identify what is depicted in it but also consider the context and circumstances surrounding the event. She encourages the act of 'watching' a photograph, over 'looking' at it. This idea is usually associated with moving image as it allows for the interpretation of the photograph in terms of time and movement. According to Azoulay, 'civic responsibility' is activated when one recognizes that citizenship is not a status or possession of a good (the image), but a tool for struggling against trauma and suffering inflicted on others. The citizen has a duty to use this civic skill when encountering images of trauma in order to understand how they are being governed. Furthermore, she argues it is the citizen's duty to understand the context and meaning of these images, rather than just appreciating their aesthetic

formation. She suggests that the role of the photographer is to present the information to the public and it is the responsibility of the citizen to understand how and why these images are being presented to them. (Azoulay 2000, pp.14)

Michael J. Shapiro, (2008) similarly evaluates the need for slowing down photographic reception, especially in an age where the representation of the trauma image is both 'partial and brief' in mass media. Taking for example the images of starving children of Africa 'whose name is already forgotten ravaged by war'(Shapiro, 2008, p.181), Shapiro suggests that this content is fleeting as it leaves the viewer as soon as it leaves the screen. Shapiro evaluates the necessity for 'Slow Looking' in reference to Milan Kundera's novel. The author speaks of the importance of the temporal aspects of the image and goes on to compare the experiences between gallery and screen. Talking of Mieke Bal images in 'Beautiful suffering' he suggests the 'enduring effects' of exhibitions and how it promotes 'slow looking and thus extended reflection'. In this space, he argues, the image of pain is digested instead of mindlessly consumed. One must ask how photographers can introduce new methods to encourage slow looking when creating such sensitive images.

Chapter 2

In this chapter we will investigate the make-up of the contemporary image of trauma. This will be done through asking and answering questions of authorship and spectatorship which has been addressed by Gabriela Nouzeilles in her 2016 piece 'Theaters of Pain: Violence and Photography'. This the idea of identity positions or the 'insider vs outsider' discussed by both Sarah Parsons (2008) and Santasil Malik (2021) will be briefly touched upon. This chapter will consider the controversies of critics such as Susan Sontag and Martha Rosler discussed in chapter one. However through the evaluation of three photographers who represent a progression of contemporary documentary practice, the aim of this chapter is to challenge if these controversies are still relevant. We will focus on identifying the methodologies employed by the contemporary photographer and evaluate how these methods come together to make meaning and influence the viewers experience and response to the traumatised subject.

2.1 Boris Mikhailov: The Representation of Agency

Boris Mikhailov's is a prominent Ukrainian artist and photographer. His most notable photographic work 'Case History' (1997-1998) delves into the traumatised human conditions as a result of the Post-Soviet era. In this work he examines the social, political and economic changes that have taken place and how it has affected the lives of people. This series will help us to mark an important shift in the practice of contemporary documentary photography. In her 2016 journal article Ingrid Nordgaard observes Mikhailov's series in its representation of the trauma and suffering endured by the homeless in a Post-Soviet society. She argues that he does so without dismissing their agency and dignity, rather enforcing it.

At first glance, Mikhailov's 'Case History' resembles traditional documentary photography no different to that of Walker Evans. However it is Mikhailov's

careful compositional choices and collaboration with the subject that adds clear artistic intent to the series, which places his work between the realms of art and document. Although this merging of aesthetics and politics is often criticised, it is arguably one of the very methods which can aid the ethical narrative of trauma. This is seen in 'Case History' through how the careful composition explores the symbiotic relationship between the decay of the city of Kharkov and the struggles of its inhabitants. An example of this connection can be seen in the image of a man lying in a hole in an asphalt road (see fig 2.1). The hole, or wound in the pavement overrun by plants and trash symbolizes the neglect and abandonment of the city. The man, who placed within this hole symbolises the vulnerable inhabitant who is also left neglected. He is dressed in smart attire, yet his face is covered by dirt and an evident wound is exposed on his hand. This can be assumed to be one of the city's newest inhabitant subjected to homelessness. His suit communicates he shouldn't be there but yet, he is. The juxtaposition between the damaged road and the distressed man, arguably symbolizes the overwhelming trauma that followed the collapse of the Soviet-Union.



Fig. 2.1 Mikhailov, 1997-1998 *Case History*, A set of 413 photographs

However his gaze wide and jarring stares straight into the camera.

In figure 2.2, Mikhailov portrays a woman with a significant abdominal hernia (a painful physical ailment). The woman, placed in the centre of the frame bares her body, standing straight in a side profile, with a stern expression. The pose appears unnatural in nature, 'suggesting that she is aware of being photographed' (Nordgaard 2016 pp.92). The composition presents the spectator with the best view of her deformity, 'satisfying' viewers 'morbid fascination' with graphic detail but simultaneously confuses and challenges the viewer through the woman's lack of shame and sense of agency (Nordgaard, 2016).

Taking a closer look at the compositional strategies used by Mikhailov she observes how the image begins to portray more than just 'a pathologized body' (Nordgaard, 2016 p.92). The architecture parallels the woman's body. The bricks are infected with their own wounds and deformities where the paint is seen to chip off. The right wall showcases a failed attempt at covering-up its imperfections. Arguably this could be read as the city's failed attempt to hide its own suffering. The general colour of the left wall mimics that of the woman's complexion. As the sunlight harshly hits her body it exposes not only her hernia but the aged and worn condition of her skin which is complimented by her background. Where the paint chips off, it resonates with the darker shade of her nipples, scars and mole above her right knee. The patterns in the stone resemble the shapes made by the prominent veins in her hand, the creases in her elbow, and the wrinkles on her elbow and neck. According to Nordgaard, the hernia becomes less notable as her body and surroundings blend together into the frame and the image begins to signify the scars that time leaves on everyone. Nordgaard now proposes Mikhailov is not interested in shocking the spectator, but wishes rather, to challenge them to look beyond the explicit exhibition of cuts and bruises, and to view bodies that have experienced trauma, as worthy agents of contemplation instead of passive victims.



Fig.2.2 Mikhailov, 1997-1998 Case History, A set of 413 photographs

In figure 2.3, a man obviously poses, roughly holding his mouth open to reveal his missing teeth. Nordgaard argues that this display depicts an image of pain and suffering but it also represents an active participant who allowed such an image to be taken. The man stares directly into the camera and at the viewer, his gaze signifying he is not ashamed of his pain, instead demonstrating ‘a matter of consensus, agreement, and mutual recognition between the photographer and the subject’ (Nordgaard, 2016, p.95). Nordgaard acknowledges that his personal suffering still remains but explains that in ignoring such an expression of personal agency, would lead to further victimization of the agent subject. However, one could raise the issue here of sound mind and consent, which Nordgaard doesn’t address. It is unknown if the participants were sober and in a state to consent or fully comprehend the context in which their image would be used.

Nordgaard focuses on the argument that Mikhailov has accomplished portraying his participants as active agents through his collaboration with them. The participants re-enact situations or scenes they had witnessed, or Mikhailov asked them to strike a pose of their own design. While Nordgaard affirms she does not propose viewing Case History as performance art, she suggests the staged

elements of the works, and the complicit contribution of the homeless should not be understated. She observes how Mikhailov's work often verge on the line between theatrical performance and documentary.

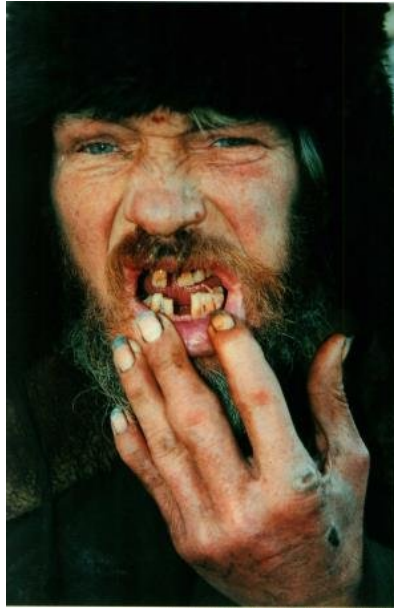


Fig.2.3 Mikhailov, 1997-1998 Case History, A set of 413 photographs

Mikhailov's accounts of the making of Case History focus on this element of collaboration between himself and the homeless. The homeless individuals in 'Case History' as argued by Nordgaard should not be viewed simply as objects of a social documentary, but as co-creators in an aesthetic production. This point is communicated even clearer when examining the connection between the documentary and performance in the work. Commenting on the process of making 'Case History', Mikhailov states that he approached the subjects from a journalistic point of view, but continued by saying he wanted to avoid pure journalism' defined by the him as 'taking snapshots of events without interfering.', as seen in the likes of Kevin Carter. With this work Nordgaard demonstrates how visual storytelling like that found within Mikhailov's 'Case History' series can serve to challenge our perception about what the traumatised subject should look and act like. She raises the interesting question in situations

like this, who revictimizes the subject? The photographer or the viewer? Mikhailov often paid the homeless for their participation or exchanged food and water. This can re-enforce unequal power relations, as the dynamic between the photographer and the subject captured in the photograph is complex and raises significant ethical and issues (Nouzeille 2016). However Mikhailov's project is worth noting as the beginning of an understanding and relationship between the photographer and participants. Mikhailov's compositional strategies compel viewers to look more closely and consider the stories of the individuals photographed in relation to their surrounding environment. Although Mikhailov is not living among the homeless, his own Ukrainian identity arguably draws him to politically comment and document his own city falling apart.

2.2 Delahaye: The Aftermath Image

Luc Delahaye is a French photographer who has worked on a variety of documentary projects throughout his career, however, he recently came out to say he no longer saw himself as a photo journalist, instead an artist. One of his most notable works which depicts this shift is 'Winterreise', a series of photographs taken in from November 1998 - March 1999. Delahaye represents the same subject matter as Mikhailov, the traumatic aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union. Delahaye captures this trauma and its effects through the revelation of society in a state of upheaval, with many of its under privileged inhabitants losing themselves through addictions and malnourishment along the way (see figure 2.4). However unlike Mikhailov, Delahaye's photographic process is one of an outsider (Parsons 2008). However he gains an insider perspective through the accompanied of a befriended Russian novelist. Delahaye gained consensual access to the homes of strangers on the neglected suburbs of Dzerzhinsk, Novgorod, Perm, Omsk, Noriilsk, Novosibirsk, and Krasnoyarsk. He described his process of one of solitude and silent observation 'I was always there,' he states, 'Up to the moment, and even beyond the moment, when it was decent to be

there.’ (The Guardian, 2004). This idea of staying is also a significant development from the traditional snapshot method.

His images are notable, not in the way of Mikhailov’s agency, but in its raw execution of human emotion and the subjective experience of suffering. Figure 2.4 arguably depicts the manifestation of suffering through substance abuse. It echoes the painterly like frame of a diptych. The man to the left foreground is the focal point. He aggressively abuses alcohol in an obvious state of turmoil. The men to the right loom in the background. They seem to be offering gazes of both concern but disassociation. Figure 2.5 captures a worker sitting down to have what we can assume one of his or even his only meal of the day. The meal looks unappetising and the man looks as though to have no appetite, but maybe not just because he isn’t hungry. His expression can be read as mixture of melancholy, exhaustion and defeat. The lighting and colours of the space he is situated in communicates an isolated and cold environment which ultimately communicates the main themes of this collapse of society.



Figure 2.4 Delahaye, L. (1998-1999) Winterriese



Figure 2.5 Delahaye, L. (1998-1999) Winterriese

In her (2018) thesis 'Thinking the 'Event' of War in the Photography of Sophie Ristelhueber, Simon Norfolk and Luc Delahaye', Emma Crott argues that this divergence from the presumed 'apex' of the event' (Crott, 2018, p.69) results in this type of work being placed within the genre of 'aftermath' or 'late' photography. She defines the imagery of the genre to be 'slow' in contrast to the 'fast paced' depiction of traditional conflict imagery. On page 56, She cites Sarah James in "Making an Ugly World Beautiful? Morality and Aesthetics in the Aftermath," (2013), who writes: "In moving against the shocking televised images that are assumed to have lost their power, these careful, slow photographs force a deeper kind of reflection on important subjects too often lost in the media's glare". This implies that images that depict trauma but almost from a distance in terms of its less confrontational stance with the bodily trauma, can prove to be effective for viewers as it promotes slow looking.

2.3 Anastasia Taylor-Lind: The In-direct effects of Trauma

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine, known as Europe's "forgotten war," has been ongoing since 2014. However, it gained international attention in February 2022 when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of the country. However the British-Swedish photojournalist, Anastasia Taylor-Lind has been covering the conflict

since. Her work, which has been featured in major publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *National Geographic*, has earned her numerous awards including the World Press Photo, Alexia Foundation, and the Carmignac Gestion Photojournalism Award. Taylor-Lind works closely with Ukrainian writer Alisa Sopova to effectively document the trauma of war and the resilience of civilians. War is personal: a mindset which influences and defines her approach which, breaks away from traditional norms. As she explains, 'The work I'm presenting on Ukraine is not really traditional journalism anymore. My research here at Harvard is how I can tell war stories in a more personal way, in a way that moves people, that really touches people.' Figure 2.1 is part of Taylor-Lind's project '50 km from the Frontline' which portrays Anna Dedova, 75, at the of her son who was accidentally killed in 2018, when he unknowingly set off a hand grenade he found near Opytne, his home village. Talor-Lind's representation

Anna Dedova, 75, at the grave of her son. He accidentally killed himself last year, when he opened a hand grenade he found near his home in the village of Opytne. Anastasia Taylor-Lind's representation of the war in Ukraine challenges not only traditional documentary practices but also the concept of desensitization to images of war put forth by Susan Sontag. Instead of depicting the war itself, Taylor-Lind focuses on the real and personal effects of the war on individuals and communities in its aftermath. This approach aims to move and touch people, focusing on the human aspects rather than desensitizing them to the tragedy of war.

Taylor-Lind begins to question her role as an outsider in the representation of a war that is not hers. She states, 'It's important to tell war stories as an outsider, as a stranger, to see something for the first time and to react to it creatively. But it's also important for people from those communities to tell their stories. One finds that a city like Donetsk looks different to foreign correspondents, to the people who are living there, and to the people who are fighting there. Photography plays a role in history, right? And so, who records history? Who gets to tell their story?'

(Anastasia Taylor-Lind, 2016, HURI). We can argue here that if Mikhailov was still a practicing photographer, his specific insight and representation of this ongoing war especially most recently in 2022 would be very profound and one would wonder how he would comment on the state of trauma and its effects in the country at this time. However he questioning of her own significance is problematic and begs other questions of what it means to be an insider or outsider.



Figure 2.6 Taylor-Lind, A. (2019) '50 km from the Frontline'

Chapter 3

3.1 Revising Traditional Modes of Representation

From the detailed analysis of work from the contemporary photographers in chapter two: Boris Mikhailov and Luc Delahaye and Anastasia Taylor-Lind, we can suggest that there is a clear progression of ethical awareness from that of traditional documentary practice. To revise on this traditional documentary practice, we will take Kevin Carter and Dorothea Lange as our main examples. Carter and Lange demonstrate little to no involvement with the subject neither before, during or after their process. This is evident even in the title of Carter's work 'The vulture and the little girl' (1993) as the viewer is later informed the child was in fact a boy. Carter's practice was defined by the Henri-Cartier-Bresson's decisive moment that entailed waiting for the perfect image to present itself without any intervention from the photographer. Arguably in his context this made Carter as much of a predator as the vulture (Witko, 2011). Lange's 'Migrant Mother' (1936) is similar to that of Carter's in its lack of information. The photograph was of Florence Owens Thompson, whose name was not known by Lange, as Thompson claims she never asked. Thompson who was photographed with her children, depicted in the heart of poverty, became an icon for The Great Depression. Thompson expressed her frustration over the inaccuracies and "commodification" of her image, implying she felt used by Lange (Harriman and Lucaites, 2020).

Sontag discusses how this act of photography can impede a photographer's ability to empathize with their subjects. Further she argues the act of photography is one of non-interference and that the impulse it inspires is not to help others, rather to document their traumatic suffering. However we can contest this statement in relation to contemporary photographic practice of Mikhailov, Delahaye and Taylor-Lind. Based on the research of this dissertation we can also present the

argument that this discussion is not solely about representation, rather responsibility. Furthermore, we can argue that this responsibility implies that it is not just about the image but rather the photographers approach and relationship with the subject.

3.2 The Methods of The Responsible Photographer

Considering what we have discussed so far, it is arguable that the act of photographing those who have or are experiencing trauma, can present unequal power dynamics, be invasive in nature and expose subjects to exploitation and voyeurism which both anesthetises and aestheticizes extreme subject matter. We can argue however, that these critiques have helped shape the photographers use of the medium in order to construct the morally appropriate image of trauma or further the responsible photographer.

The one element that was demonstrated clearly in all three photographers and their specific work referenced, was their framework of time and more notably time passed. There is a sense that these photographers spent time with the subjects and waited, not for the perfect image but for the story of trauma to unravel. This is also suggested in the repetition of the subjects in the images. An evident sense of time further demonstrates the subjects consciousness of the photographer around them. For example, most of Delahaye's work takes place inside the homes of his subjects, this signifies the door to be open for him in the first place. Similarly in both Taylor-Lind and Mikahilov's projects we begin to become familiar with and recognise the repeated faces of the subjects. Moreover this impression reads as a form of consent.

In Mikhailov's work consent is visibly read through the individuals active posing and direct eye contact with the camera. His work, in contrast to that of Delahaye's and Taylor-Lind's, actively engages more with the subject for the image. Ingrid Nordgaard refers to this as active performance (Nordgaard 2016). This

performance presents a distinct agency in the viewer which is at first confusing upon its encounter but empowering for the subject. This is because their trauma is evident, they are homeless, malnourished and enduring the effects of poverty, but they wear it with no shame. However Mikhailov represents them in a way that embodies their trauma as part of them. This contrasts the normative views that victims of trauma are passive objects wasting away. What Mikhailov does and arguably does it well is present us with real human beings, active agents instead of pitiable objects. Mikhailov's refusal of the depiction of any sorrow more of a political statement made that they are to be seen and heard. By often depicting the subject with visual markers that demonstrate the trauma such as the hernia he confronts the viewers morbid fascination (Nordgaard 2016) but inflicts agency through their framing. Although it is a stretched argument we could argue that this is related to Elsa Olivera's claim for the significance of conscious collaboration and relationship between the photographer and photographed (2018).

The utilization of aesthetics as a tool in the representation of trauma has also been a controversial topic of debate especially due to the practice of contemporary documentary photography which is known for the merging of art and document. Critics like Sontag and Rosler have argued that this approach leads to the aestheticization of pain and exploitation. However, based on the examples extensively described in chapter two I would argue that the photographers use of aesthetics and composition as a way to juxtapose statements and give subjects humanity. Through careful composition and attention to aesthetic detail, these photographers have arguably constructed a powerful visual language that implicates the subject as human rather than object.

The progression of traditional documentary photography into contemporary documentary photography has resulted in a shift towards more nuanced and ethically sound ways of representing vulnerable subjects and imagery of trauma. This shift has been facilitated by various techniques including collaboration with the subjects, contextualization through the inclusion of text, and, in a more

debated approach, the utilization of aesthetics. Furthermore Gabrielle Nouzeille in her (2016) journal article 'Theaters of Pain: Violence and Photography' advocates for the answering questions of authorship and spectatorship. Who makes the image? How is the image made? Why? What is the relationship between the photographer and photographed, Who will views these images? How will they view them? Why? Her argument states that in answering these questions we can situate the image of trauma and its response in political and social relation. Her argument refuses objectivity of photographers and viewers and looks at how their own subjectivity plays a part in constructing 'societal norms' and attitudes. From this research we can argue that the contemporary documentary photographers discussed, begin to identify the general ideologies and methodologies of the responsible photographer. These methods of representation include collaboration, the use aesthetics and composition to represent the subject as a human with subjective experience instead of an object.

Luc Delahaye's series 'Winterise' (1999) and Boris Mikhailov series 'Case Study' (1997-1998) specifically represent the beginning of this shift in documentary discourse. Both photographers sought out to document the hardships faced by individuals in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union in Russia, and they employed distinct strategies to achieve this goal. Delahaye, gained consensual access to families' homes alongside a Russian writer and observed and recorded the events that unfolded naturally. Delahaye captured the raw moments of life but managed to portray his subjects with humanity instead of objectivity. Mikhailov on the other hand engaged his subjects through active performance, eliciting constructed situations to depict the impact poverty had on their lives. His work confronts the viewer through depicting the subjects with their visible vulnerabilities and trauma. However his presentation of them is one of strength and agency which arguably confronts the viewer (Nordgaard, 2016). Despite their different methodologies, both Delahaye, Taylor-Lind and Mikhailov portrayed their subjects, consensually, with a sense of depth, thereby transcending their experience from objective trauma into human experience. This enforces the

notion that the traumatised body should not be looked upon without agency (Nordgaard (2016). One could argue that Delahaye and Taylor-Lind observed and captured the play whereas Mikhailov directed it with the help of its actors.

3.3 Identity Positions

Despite these photographers efforts to progress the medium, the ‘colonial gaze’ exhibited in early ethnographic photography is argued by critics to still manifest itself in contemporary documentary today. This concept of the ‘colonial gaze’ in early ethnographic photography, portrays people and their cultures as exotic objects rather than complex individuals and communities. In "Field notes on Othering" (2019), Adira Thekkuveetil and Amarnath Praful argue this concept through Soham Gupta work ‘Angst’. This work entails the homeless of Calcutta and their daily suffering. Lit strictly by the night and his flash Gupta echoes the work of Mikhailov through collaboration and performance. Santasil Mallik (2021) does recognise that in certain instances that there can be clear problematic representations of power dynamics between the photographer and photographed. However he argues that this cannot be solely used as a measure of determining ethical and moral ‘“correctness” of a particular photograph’ (Mallik, 2021, p.26). He argues that this harsh critique of the colonial gaze against Gupta’s series contributes to the growing "anxiety" for photographers regarding their ethical responsibility for their images. As Mallik argues, Gupta's justification of his right to represent others’ trauma due to his close affiliation with his own childhood trauma, creates a blurring of boundaries between "self" and "other", and interiority and exteriority (Mallik 2021 p.23) begin to become blurred. However, we can argue that this blurring of boundaries of the insider and outsider as referenced by Mallik calls for its own definition. What do we call the in-between photographer? The photographer who is an outsider but is triggered by their own resonance of memory. Or the insider who is so emmeshed in their reality that they begin to disassociate. I am not suggesting that any form of representation is more

important that the other, but I am calling for an evaluation of the in-between photographer. Mallik acknowledges that ethical considerations are crucial for portraying subjects who deal with and experience trauma, he goes on to argue that this unease within trauma and its representation may lead to rigid guidelines for photographers. This in turn, he maintains will create a photographic censorship that will inhibit new creative modes of representation. This is already being seen as briefly discussed in chapter two by Taylor-Lind. Although Taylor-Lind explains she values the outsider perspective, she begins to doubt her role as a British photographer representing the conflict of Ukraine.

Conclusion

The representation of trauma through photography is an ongoing, complex and multi-faced debate in the discourse of the visual arts. The critiques originating from the 20th century, concerning concepts of exploitation, aestheticization and voyeurism still haunt the medium and its photographer today. Although this research initially sought out to define these critiques as dated, which in nature they are, my research suggests that they should not be entirely dismissed, instead acknowledged. For example the arguments put forth by Susan Sontag (1980) and Martha Rosler (1981) have made me come to the realisation that unequal power dynamics between the photographer and the photographed will arguably always be present within this discourse. As Santasil Mallik (2021) argues, the component of power relations alone shouldn't decide what makes up the ethically responsible image or photographer. Based on the research of this dissertation we can present the argument that this discussion is not solely about the photographic representation of the image of trauma but rather the responsibility held by the photographer. So how do we define the responsible photographer? From my research I have learned that there is no rigid answer right now, but I can propose the general ideologies and methodologies that begin this discussion. This generalisation will only depict what I have seen demonstrated by all three photographers from chapter two and then go into specific detail of what each photographer brought to the ethical table so to speak.

First I argue that in order to hold the photographer responsible to representation, a relationship must be established between the photographer and the photographed. This relationship will help to hinder the invasive and exploitative nature of photographing. Secondly the subjects consciousness of the photographer presence is needed. This consciousness is implied through the subjects invitation or willingness to be photographed. Thirdly, the representation of subjects as human beings with real emotion. This will alleviate the voyeuristic depictions of the

subjects as passive victims who are objectified through the lens. Furthermore, despite critiques, I argue that the use of aesthetics is fundamental to framing the traumatised subject. I will state however that this doesn't mean the depiction of trauma and its effects in all its blood and glory. As I have successfully proved in chapter two it is this careful consideration of the signs and signifiers of pain and suffering and how they are composed in the frame that narrates the overall depiction of pain. This is seen in Delahaye and Tylor-Lind from a distance and up close and personal with Mikhailov.

In the work of Boris Mikhailov 'Case Study', the photographer collaborates with his subjects through active performance. This delegates a certain degree of power to the subject which has can arguably resonate back to Elsa Oliveria's 2016 discourse of empowerment. Ingrid Nordgaard (2016) argument contests accusations of exploitation and aestheticization, she states Mikhailov's work demonstrates the marginalised as active agents and co-creators of the work. While Nordgaard raises strong points she doesn't address the concept of sound mind that does leave a question regarding did the subjects realise the context that this work would be produced for. Although it does challenge these critiques made by Sontag, it simultaneously re-iterates the relevance it still holds. In the cases of Delahaye and Taylor Lind, depicting subjects with humanity and emotion is crucial.

This research has informed how we as photographers and/or viewers should think about the representation of trauma. We would argue with all things considered that the nowadays the most effective method of constructing the image of trauma and communication is focusing on the humanity and agency of subjects instead of focusing solely on the trauma graphically which often turn viewers away (Sontag, 1980). Signs and signifiers are crucial to communicate trauma. However this does not have to be done so shockingly. Even how one reacts to graphic 'shock' images is to turn away or be shocked into numbness and over- familiarity. Ariella Azoulay in 'The civil Contract of Photography' (2000) and Michael J. Shapiro In

‘Slow Looking’ (2008) both present similar arguments to invite slow reading of images, to watch rather than to look. This is evident in the photographers discussed in chapter two. In Delahaye and Taylor Lind they promote slow looking through their distance of trauma but its representation is still evident. Mikhailov in contrast promotes slow looking through confronting the viewer with the confusion of active agency.

Gabriela Nouzeille’s proposal prompts the asking and answering of questions surrounding authorship such as, Who has the right to take this image of trauma and why? Sarah Parsons (2008) and Santasil Mallik (2021) raise important and provoking arguments here regarding Sontag’s own bias of identity positions. They argue that Sontag is comfortable when the photographer is considered an insider of what they represent. However this can have controversies of its own. With reference to the photographer Soham Gupta and his project ‘Angst’ Mallik addresses the problems that manifest within this idea of the insider being more ethically accepted when representing images of trauma or suffering. Mallik furthers this conversation of identity positions stating that the definition between the insider and the outsider become blurred. This arguably calls for its own evaluation of the in-between photographer. The photographer who is on the outside but is compelled to look in, or the photographer that is on the inside but is too close, therefore turning away from the hard questions for themselves.

In conclusion I would argue that this research has only touched upon the surface of the responsible photographer. I suggest that this dissertation begs another question of the reflective photographer. What I mean by this, is the photographer who examines their own emotional state when representing trauma. This would involve the photographer to evaluate how they feel before, during and after they have taken images. Furthermore, I suggest applying Barthes’ ‘punctum’ not just in terms of the viewer, but in terms of the photographer. Why are photographers such as Gupta, Delahaye or Taylor-Lind compelled to this specific subject matter of trauma? What, if any, resonance does it hold for them? What is their emotional

state like when representing the subject or taking a specific image? What arises when reflecting on not only the images taken but the experience itself? If we, as photographers, can begin to address and reflect on these questions, I argue that we can overcome the anxiety (Mallik 2021) of ethical representation and develop further modes of representation when dealing with this multi-faced topic of trauma.

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