
Introduction

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Thy Phu is an assistant professor in the English Department at the University of Western Ontario, where she teaches courses on cultural studies. Her research focuses on the representation of race in twentieth-century U.S. photography. Recent articles, on civility and citizenship in Genthe's portrayal of Chinatown, the rhetoric of violence in Black Panther photographs, and landscape ideology in photographs of the Japanese American internment appear, respectively, in *Genre*, *Canadian Review of American Studies*, and *Journal of Asian American Studies*.

Linda M. Steer is an assistant professor at Brock University, where she is cross-appointed to the Department of Visual Arts and the Centre for Liberal Arts. Her recent publications include "Surreal Encounters: Science, Surrealism and the Re-Circulation of a Crime-Scene Photograph" in *History of Photography* and "Photographic Appropriation, Ethnography and the Surrealist Other" in *The Comparatist*. Steer's current research looks at the relationship between photography and the cut-up method in the collaborative work of William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin.

Abstract

This article introduces new research, presented in the journal issue, that addresses recent debates about photography's relationship to affect, as part of an "affective turn," a turn towards the study of emotion and feeling, in scholarship in the humanities. Though conventionally photography has focused on the representation of the expression of emotions in scientific contexts, evident especially in the work of Duchenne, Darwin and Charcot, the authors suggest that more recent attention has turned to photography's affinity with affect. Instead of representing emotions, photography might also provoke and stimulate them, so that affect is the site where the somatic meets the psychic, particularly through its relationship to photography.

Keywords: affective turn, photography studies, history of photography, affect studies

Although scholarship has tended to focus on photography's *effect*, emphasizing context as produced within institutional sites, or constructed through discourse (Tagg 1988; Sekula 1986), there has been little sustained investigation of photography's *affect*. While scholars disagree on what "affect" is, whether working with Freudian psychoanalytic frameworks (Matthis 2000) or those drawn from recent experiments in the physiology of perception (Massumi 2002), most agree that the term "affect" describes a concept that rests on the frontier between the mental and somatic. For this reason, affect has emerged as a productive site of inquiry for understanding how we perceive disparate phenomena, including visual images. Indeed, affect, emotion, and feelings share a special affinity with photography. As theorists from Walter Benjamin (1931; 1936) to Rosalind Krauss (1982) have consistently argued, the most common responses to photographs are based not on aesthetic value but rather in terms of identification; viewers are mesmerized by the images' referents more than by their formal qualities. "Affecting Photographies" provides a new critical framework for investigating photography by bringing debates about the production of photographic meaning into direct dialogue with recent research in the humanities on affect, emotions, and feelings.

The relationship between photography and affect has a long history. Notably, photography was used in nineteenth-century scientific experiments designed

to trace emotion or feeling on the face. During the 1850s in France, the doctor Guillaume-Benjamin-Armand Duchenne used a camera to record his research on the expression of emotions on human faces, which he provoked through electrical stimuli. Duchenne published eighty-six photographs depicting faces contorted with fear, joy or surprise in his book *Le Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine ou analyse électro-physiologique de l'expression des passions* (1862). In England, Charles Darwin conducted similar research, combining it with evolutionary theory. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), Darwin included some of Duchenne's photographs reproduced as engravings, in addition to photographs by Oscar J. Rejlander of children expressing a range of emotions. One of these photographs, of a crying baby, became one of the most oft-reproduced photographs in Victorian England (Smith 2006: 23, n23). Photography was also used to discover and record "pathological" emotions written on the human body or face, such as in Charcot's research with hysterics at the Salpêtrière hospital.¹ Recently, Georges Didi-Huberman analyzed the performative aspects of these photographs and their relationship to the history of art in his important book *The Invention of Hysteria* (2003 [1982]).

The instrumental uses of photography in recording human expressions and emotions demonstrate its importance in capturing external signs of states otherwise conceived as interior, private, and fleeting. While effective in this task, photography's relationship to affect is more complex than this historically scientific focus suggests: besides describing emotions, photography also produces them. The documentary

tradition of photography, for instance, mobilizes photography's ability to move its viewers by depicting the pathos of human suffering, notably by establishing a bond of sympathy between such photographs' audiences and the victims that the images portray. Perhaps the most well-known commentary on photography's solicitation of affect is found in Susan Sontag's writings (1977, 2003). Though her essays are not limited to the documentary tradition, they insist upon photography's affective importance, especially in conscripting ethical action, and her work provides an important touchstone for interrogating the affective dimensions of photography.

Increasingly, scholars in the humanities have noted an "affective turn" (Clough and Halley, 2007), a turn towards the study of emotion and feeling. Often drawn from Freud's early work on hysterics, provocative recent research interrogates the relationship between touching and feeling (Sedgwick, 2003); the importance of the emotions in constituting the racialized psyche (Eng and Kazanjian, 2003; Gilroy, 2005); and a renewed attention to the political dimensions of public feeling (Cvetkovich, 2007). While this exciting body of scholarship has, in turn, inspired vigorous debates on the significance of psychic life for the social realm, little if any of these critical conversations has investigated photography's role in navigating these two fields. This volume contributes to these debates by providing new research on the relationship between affect and photography.

Sarah Parson's comprehensive study of Sontag's approach to the affective dimensions of photography as well as its ethical implications uncovers an often contradictory

perspective that offers a new reading of Sontag's canonical essay *On Photography*. In his review essay, Matthew Brower surveys a rich set of writings on animals in photography, to contend that its emergence as a focus of the camera coincides with its disappearance from human life, and the feelings that attend this loss not only define our humanity but are also enabled through and dependent upon the figure of the animal. Laura Levin's review essay takes up the performative aspects of affect, especially in relation to J.L. Austin's important work on speech acts, reviewing recent scholarship on photography, feelings, and performativity by theorists Diana Taylor, Susan Ash, and Ariella Azoulay.

Deepali Dewan and Sophie Hackett, both curators, discuss the affective dimensions of curatorial practice, with an emphasis on the Cyrus Jhabvala collection of South Asian portraits newly acquired by the Royal Ontario Museum. Whereas Dewan and Hackett focus on the collecting of photographs as an affective practice, Sarah Bassnett investigates the relationship between the desire to archive and the affective force of photography in the work of two contemporary artists, Arnaud Maggs and Greg Statts.

By contrast, Sharon Sliwinsky examines the use of a photograph in the absence of an archive. Focusing on a photograph found by photojournalist Ron Haviv during the Bosnian War, Sliwinsky explores the nuances of negative affects such as hate and aggression as imprinted on this otherwise banal family photo. This physical imprint, she argues, is an extension of the brutal logic of ethnic cleansing, so that symbolic violence towards the image needs to be

understood as continuous with the violence of war. The eradication of the archive helps to consolidate the community by eradicating, in turn, the traces of its rejected members. The affective contours of statehood similarly concern Lily Cho. Her essay explores the history of theories of citizenship, demonstrating a profound contradiction between the unfeeling citizen, on the one hand, and the feeling human, on the other hand. The disavowal of feeling from the conceptualization of citizenship is, she reveals, evident in its most visible document, the passport photograph, which requires that subjects be, or at least appear to be, affectless. Nowhere is this contradiction laid bare more compellingly than in the case of the diasporic subject who is caught between states, neither unfeeling nor, in many cases, a citizen.

Affectlessness in photography is also a prominent theme in Elspeth Brown's article on Baron De Meyer's fashion photography. Drawing on scholarship on public feeling, Brown contends that De Meyer develops a style marked by "queer excess" that not only is racialized but also corresponded with Condé Nast's ambitions to expand *Vogue* into a premier fashion magazine. Characterized by an accumulation of detail that was contrasted by the mannequin's performance of restraint, De Meyer's photographs, in drawing on the conventions of Pictorialism, helped to develop an aesthetics of consumption that was, at the same time, queer and racialized.

Examining the under-theorized link between the effect and affect of photography, the essays in "Affecting Photographies" have been prepared in anticipation of an international, interdisciplinary conference on

the topic of "Feeling Photography" organized by the Toronto Photography Seminar, and co-sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Munk Centre for International Studies. The Toronto Photography Seminar is a research group organized by Elspeth Brown (Associate Professor, The University of Toronto), Sarah Parsons (Associate Professor, York University), Thy Phu (Assistant Professor, The University of Western Ontario), and Linda Steer (Assistant Professor, Brock University), and comprised of twelve scholars working on the history and theory of photography at the intersection of a broad range of humanities disciplines.

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Note

- 1 The Salpêtrière hospital had its own photographic studio where Paul Régnard, the staff photographer, would photograph hysterics. Neuroscientist Jean-Martin Charcot used these photographs both to codify the stages of a hysterical attack and to promote his research in the illustrated journal *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1870s).

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