



Anthropology & Materialism

A Journal of Social Research

4 | 2019

Art and Technique: A Framework of Unaccomplished Promises

The Tourist and “The One Who Waits”

The Double Time of Modern Photography

Le touriste et « celui qui attend ». Le temps double de la photographie moderne

El turista y «el que aguarda». El tiempo doble de la fotografía moderna

Mauricio Lissovsky

Traducteur : Lucia Leão



Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/am/1019>

DOI : 10.4000/am.1019

ISSN : 2364-0480

Éditeur :

CETCOPRA, CRASSH - Center for Research in the Arts Social Sciences and Humanities, Fakultät Gestaltung - Universität der Künste Berlin

Référence électronique

Mauricio Lissovsky, « The Tourist and “The One Who Waits” », *Anthropology & Materialism* [En ligne], 4 | 2019, mis en ligne le 21 novembre 2019, consulté le 23 novembre 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/am/1019> ; DOI : 10.4000/am.1019

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 23 novembre 2019.

Tous droits réservés

The Tourist and “The One Who Waits”

The Double Time of Modern Photography

Le touriste et « celui qui attend ». Le temps double de la photographie moderne

El turista y «el que aguarda». El tiempo doble de la fotografía moderna

Mauricio Lissovsky

Traduction : Lucia Leão

Introduction

- 1 “History decays into images, not into stories,” says Walter Benjamin in his “elementary doctrine of historical materialism.” (Benjamin 1999, 476). Therefore, as Theodor Adorno concludes, images are “antediluvian fossils” that “bring dialectic and myth to the point of indifferenciation.” (Benjamin 1999, 461). To think of photography as a remnant and as a wait is to think of it as this “reminiscent presence,” tactile and causal, of a past that never ceases to work, never ceases to change the substratum where it imprints its mark (Didi-Huberman 2008, 13-14). One of the most famous prognostications about the “future” of photography was made by Lazlo Moholy-Magy in the 1920s, in the heroic times of Modernism: “The illiterate of the future will be the person ignorant of the camera” (Moholy-Nagy 1947, 208). It was a prediction about the place that technical imagery would occupy in our civilization. But it was also a catchphrase used to justify his campaign to make the teaching of photography a requirement for graphic artists, designers, and architects. A few years later, in “A Short History of Photography,” published in 1931, Benjamin would radically revise this statement and would ask, “But shouldn't a photographer who cannot read his own pictures be no less accounted an illiterate?” (Benjamin 2005, 527).
- 2 The words that disappear from one sentence to the other are precisely “the future.” From Moholy-Nagy to Benjamin, the “future” ceases to be the time to come, in which the illiterate would live, and becomes the object itself that is being read. The illiterate

one is now the photographer who doesn't know how to read the future in its own images; the future that infiltrates there, wrote the philosopher, "in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment" that only now we recognize, looking back (Benjamin 2005, 510). The same requirement was applied to the historian, who should be, as in Schlegel's aphorism, "a prophet looking backward." In the traces of events, a historian should see not only inscriptions from the past but shining fragments of what is yet to come, dreams that never came true, premonitions whose meaning will only be understood belatedly. The time in which photographers and historians—or the photographers-historians imagined by Benjamin—live is similar to that of fortune tellers. It is a premonitory time, always *contemporary*. We are taken by the experience of that time as an interruption, as an explosive charge between the lines of our lives.

- 3 Let's look at a prosaic example, which Benjamin himself offers us in "One-Way Street." We lose an object (a keychain, a note), but its image comes to us along with the conviction that the last time we saw it, we were already sure that we were going to lose it. Yes, it's been mocking us for days, it had "an aura of mockery or mourning about it that gave the secret away" (Benjamin 2004, 483). Isn't it in the form of a photograph that it resurfaces now, in my memory? Now, when it is too late, in spite of all our premonitions? Shocks like these, Benjamin teaches us, are like "silent pauses of fate that only subsequently turn out to have possessed the seed for quite a different lot in life from the one given us" (Benjamin 2004, 271-2). They are predictions that lead to the future of the past.
- 4 When is a photograph ready to embark on its journey to the future? When does our time come to foresee it? My grandmother brought her photo album from Lithuania to Brazil, with pictures of her teenage years. At that time, her husband was already living in Rio de Janeiro, after having worked in Panama for one year. She didn't bother to write captions for any of the pictures, as she must have known them by heart. Today, they are a mystery to me.



FIGURE 1: STREET VIEW IN BERLIN, C. 1912.

Source: Family album, author’s collection.

- 5 This photo (Figure 1), taken in Berlin in 1911 or 1912, is the one that has always fascinated me the most. Before the war, my grandmother used to spend her vacations in Germany, where she had relatives. I entertained the idea that the famous pharmacy that belonged to her sister used to be in this building. The same place where, 30 years later, the brother-in-law would commit suicide by taking cyanide when the police came to deport him. But, apparently, it is a restaurant. The owner’s family and the neighbors came to the sidewalk to be included in the photo. On every floor, there are people posing in the windows. Were they attracted by the shouts coming from the street? Or did one of the children walk around the building telling everyone that the photographer had arrived? Was one of the boys restless, with no patience to pose for long enough? Unlike the elegant gentleman in a bowler hat, who would never allow himself the indignity of a blurry image, the policeman didn’t interrupt his alert walk, which guaranteed the citizens’ safety. Did they receive copies of the photos? Or was it enough for them to imagine that, one century later, someone would wonder about their dreams?
- 6 They all look happy and relaxed on this summer afternoon, especially the owner, whose smile can be seen behind his mustache, as he leans his cane against the sidewalk. Beside him, his father carries a heavy watch chain in his vest. Soon he will realize the amount of time the slow photographer has robbed him of his business. In many photographs taken by Augusto Malta in Rio de Janeiro during that period, we can see whole families posing in front of their houses and shops. They say the city hall photographer used this trick to hide the true intention of taking the picture, which was to assess the condition of the buildings that were slated for demolition. All for the sake of bringing urban reform to the capital city. Who would happily smile for a photographer who foreshadowed their destruction?
- 7 When my grandmother placed that photo in her childhood album—perhaps amused at seeing her uncle with his mustache and dreaming of the next vacation in the big city—none of the residents of No. 52 could imagine that in just over three decades, Berlin, with all its restaurants and pharmacies, would be in ruins. None of them would imagine that all these children would be dead, in battlefields or in extermination camps. And yet, in each of the 36 windows of that building—windows that opened for the photographer who arrived in daylight—even today, there is someone waiting for us.
- 8 Each picture exudes an ultraviolet radiation that glosses the text of our lives. In each one of them, our fate is inscribed. And our fate is not what we have or haven’t become. Our fate—as Eduardo Cadava taught us while facing the photographs that Fazal Sheikh took of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan—is to learn to read (Cadava 2007). Before the image, before each image, we learn to read the double reading, profane and magical, to read the similarities.
- 9 Since his *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin was interested in methods that would solve the problem of “representation.” His historiographical approach was a kind of short-circuit, a response to the crisis of narrative and experience, “while the relationship of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectic: is not progression, but image,

suddenly emergent” (Benjamin 1999, 462). Such a solution assumed a submersion in the universe of similarities that modernity intended to suffocate: “Only a thoughtless observer can deny that correspondences come into play between the world of modern technology and the archaic symbol-world of mythology” (Benjamin 1999, 461).

- 10 There is a whole mimetic world of culture, a whole world of correspondences and similarities to which we don’t pay attention anymore. Language is the immemorial archive of similarities, but since we practically lost the gift of perceiving them, we need the help of poets to awaken them. In the similarity that inhabits language lies the necessary condition for poetry; and in poetry, as Benjamin writes in “Doctrine of the Similar,” lies “the basis of clairvoyance” (Benjamin 2005, 697).
- 11 We never think of similarities when we compare things that have been to those that are now or the ones that will come into being. On the contrary, it is similarity that persists in the absence of those things, in what is lacking because of their absence, and that endures in the collective memory, as a condition for its readability, the images of what “could have been” (Lisovsky 2014, 43). The history of the un-lived, the history of what “could have been,” history of ghosts.
- 12 For Benjamin, each historical object bears this bifurcation between conscious and unconscious, between lived and un-lived: “In this sense, every present has an element of the un-lived; (...) what remains un-lived in the whole life,” says Giorgio Agamben. He adds: “This means that not only the lived, but also and above all the un-lived, gives shape and consistency to the fabric of psychic personality and historical tradition and ensures their continuity and consistency” (Agamben 2009a, 140). While Hegel had before him the gigantic tapestry of history, in which the plot of passions is subject to the intrigue of reason, Benjamin works with the “text” in which the author doesn’t recall “what he experienced” but rather the “weaving of his memory” itself, doing the “Penelope work of forgetting” (Benjamin 2004, 238). To consider photographs as historical objects is, therefore, to rediscover them in their bifurcations. Let’s visit one of them, the one where we find—sitting face to face, in dialectical tension, immobilized between the eye and the finger of the modern photographer—the “tourist” and “the one who waits.”

I. The Tourist

- 13 The tourist-photographer is a kind of modern fossil, an ancestor who inhabited the very core of the temporal experience of modernity, where work, leisure, and boredom are intertwined and mutually shaped. Before capitalist industrialization, boredom was the privilege of a few, sometimes a character trait inherent to the aristocracy, and certainly a male prerogative. Industrial society democratized boredom and, under the pretext of protecting the labor force from the devils that are inherent to it, created leisure. This reciprocal connection between work and leisure, under the auspices of the former, could not have been better expressed than in the English postcards from the 1950s, which showcased the pleasures of leisure in Brighton through photographic montages (Figure 2). The fun scenes inserted in the big letters of the word “WORK” remind us relentlessly and ironically of what Brighton beaches promise to make us forget: work.¹

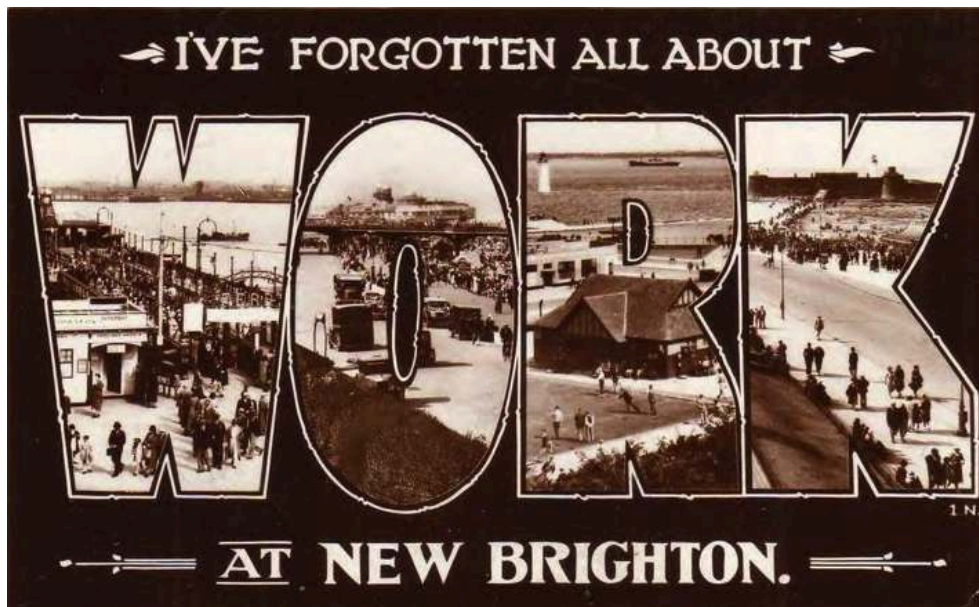


FIGURE 2 : BRIGHTON'S POST-CARD, UNITED KINGDOM, 1950's.

Source: Aquino, Livia. *Picture Ahead: a Kodak e a construção de um turista-fotógrafo*, 2016.

- 14 At the beginning of the 20th century, Georg Simmel had already suggested that no other phenomenon characterizes a city as well as the blasé attitude—a defensive reaction of an overstimulated nervous system of people exposed to urban life (Simmel 1971, 329-30). When, in 1929, Heidegger conducted his famous seminars about fundamental concepts of metaphysics, he devoted the entire first part to boredom. We can imagine the philosopher swamped with parties and dinners, about which he complains, but also with the excessive, ordinary distractions that promise to kill his “free time.” Amid the colonization of time by the ordinariness of leisure, Heidegger would go on to claim profound boredom—the boredom of boredom, or boredom squared—as the necessary condition for metaphysics and as the mood of choice for poets (Heidegger 2015, 174-217). For the masses who have this blasé approach, the ones who are clearly unable to access metaphysics, there will always be photography.
- 15 Heidegger didn't mention photography in this seminar, of course. But it is not difficult to notice the degree to which it was responsible for technicalizing leisure, preventing it from separating itself from work. Through technique—and through the discipline associated with it—it would always be possible to differentiate the leisure of the working masses from vagrancy. Through photography, leisure became *productive*.
- 16 The productive dimension of leisure was a recurring element in advertising campaigns at Kodak throughout the 20th century. Since the 1920s, tourists have been explicitly cautioned by the company that a holiday without a Kodak is a waste (Aquino 2016, 130-142). Wastefulness, extravagance—the evils that threaten workers—should be carefully avoided. The target of this discipline is modern man, the worker who becomes a tourist-photographer. His memories, also disciplined, take the shape of photographs organized in photo albums or slide reels. If amateur photography was a device, in the strict sense that this concept would take on in Foucault's work—i.e., as a positive dimension in which institutions, discourses, techniques, rules, and processes of subjectivization power relations materialize (Agamben 2009b)—its effect was to

reintroduce work and discipline where workers imagined they would be free of all obligations.

- 17 While tours and cruises were dealing directly with bodies, the gaze had now a subtle kind of confinement inside the photographic space. In 1934, Ernst Junger noted that changes in the face were one of the most evident signs of the birth of a new "race," called "worker," who "eyes a fixed point and is unilateral, objective, and rigid." (Junger 1995, 45). From the perspective of waste, the lines between capital and labor tend to blur. The worker on vacation is a manager of his own leisure, master of his free time, and he must take care of it—as paradoxical as it may seem—in the most responsible way possible. The same thing happens to tourist-photographers who are encouraged by Kodak to prepare themselves technically to create the best photos or films, to plan their vacation time according to the images that they intend to make, and to edit them according to the effect they intend to achieve at the time of exhibition. It could not be otherwise because the shadow of boredom threatens not only free time, but also the domestic display of photo albums and the projection of slides and films taken on vacation.
- 18 Kodak's preoccupation with the display of holiday memories takes us to what Walter Benjamin called the decline of experience, the silence of narratives (Benjamin 2005, 731-736). Nothing shows this more clearly than the scene in the Brazilian documentary *Pacific*—highlighted by Livia Aquino—in which a tourist asks a guide how long he can stay at a particular beach, and the answer he gets is, "Here it is really only the photo" (Aquino 2016, 21). According to the temporal nature of productive leisure, the minimum stay time lasts as long as the click of the camera. Under the guise of keeping memories, it creates the illusion of a narrative based on the fragmented features of the disciplined leisure.



FIGURE 3 : THE LAST CHIEF. KODAK AD FOR BRAZILIAN COSTUMERS

Source: Aquino, Livia. *Picture Ahead: a Kodak e a construção de um turista-fotógrafo*, 2016.

- 19 In an advertisement broadcast in Brazil in the 1920s, the “last tribal chief,” i.e., a native hounded by the “unyielding law of progress,” sits on a rock as if he wants to tell us a story (Figure 3). But no one else is there to hear him, except a white tourist who is too concerned with fixing his camera. Could there be a better illustration of Benjamin’s claims about the crisis of narrative in modernity? Along the same lines, in an advertisement from the 1960s, native men from New Mexico wearing feathers wave their arms to the white family on vacation who is recording everything with a movie camera. The text that accompanies the image displaces the ritual that will soon disappear and takes us to the living room of a middle-class house in the suburbs where he is reunited with his cyclic nature: “Picture it now ... see it again and again” (Aquino 2016, 121). But there is no better example of the role that photography plays in replacing traditional narratives than a Chevrolet ad from 1952 showing a father and his son holding a huge fish so that the mother can take a picture of them (Aquino 2016, 43). The photograph here records not only the boys’ capture of the big fish, but also the fact that the fish fits in the family’s new car – despite the universal wisdom that one should never believe the stories that fishermen tend to tell about the size of their fish. The survival of the tourist-photographer even after Kodak ended its operations shows, in my opinion, that the processes of subjectivization that produce this persona have a long-lasting effect and are, to a large extent, still in force. I believe that the modern tourist, as a producer/exhibitor of photographs, is the paradigm of the postmodern consumer, its direct ancestor; photography is, in turn, the blueprint for the new merchandise. Subject and object are fictitiously dissociated from work, and their value is now derived from their effects on imagery.
- 20 Benjamin suggested that capitalism is a religion (2004, 288-290). Tourists are its pilgrims, as the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2007, 73-74) has recently added. Kodak was their catechism, one could say now. That is why the shaping of the tourist-photographer is basically a teaching, an educational and civilizing action. When faced with the wild and the exotic, as well as the animal and the monument, the tourist learns to keep a distance, they learn a separation, which allows them to consume without interruption because nothing else is actually to be *used*. Thanks to what he learned from Kodak, the consumer knows now that his personality can be expressed in poses, that the value of a merchandise is equivalent to its image, and that the importance of a story is equivalent to what can be shown. Finally, he learns to make himself into this being that produces and consumes images in a simultaneous and indistinct manner.
- 21 Like every pilgrim, the tourist-photographer also had his own vision of Paradise. Kodak was able to synthesize it in the term “Cameraland.” In this triumphant campaign, in 1961, the map of the United States is both the promised land, where tourists and cameras are distributed, and the window from which the tourist-photographer looks at the world (Aquino 2016, 185-189). Soon after that, the American intellectual Daniel J. Boorstin reacted, writing that the images had become so intertwined with the “American dream” that, as individuals and as a nation, the country was suffering from a “social narcissism.” However, as Blake Stimson notes, the endless and omnipresent flow of photographs brought with it the notion that it would be possible to create a

kind of collective self-understanding, from which a new citizen could emerge out of the postwar and postmodern world (Stimson 2009, 13-15).

- 22 We can see the expansion of the borders of Cameraland in the ads promoting the expansion of Kodak around the world. In the empire of the photograph, the whole world would enjoy the *pax kodakiana*, whose greatest expression was the exhibition called *The Family of Man*—registered as a UNESCO world heritage site alongside the Egyptian pyramids and the Eiffel Tower.²
- 23 We are certainly a product of this imaginary nation. Kodak’s catechism has converted us (and our parents or grandparents), in one way or another. We are citizens of Cameraland, whose passports are constantly being issued and reissued with each selfie. However, not all of us are tourists. The utopia promised by Kodak hasn’t been totally fulfilled. Legions of refugees, hordes of homeless and hungry people, watch the civilized tourism parade go by. It is no coincidence that hotels, buses, airplanes, airports, trains, fairs, restaurants, and museums—as opposed to military or government facilities—have become the preferred targets of contemporary terrorism.
- 24 There was always something paradoxical in the tourist-photographer concept, since the *pax kodakiana* required keeping a safe distance at all times. Don’t touch! Don’t disturb! Don’t feed the animals! However, Emmanuel Levinas has shown that peace has little to do with “tranquility and repose,” with keeping a respectful distance from the Other—the focal distance—and even less to do with preserving the radiant display case where the merchandise makes seductive somersaults—the framing. Levinas taught us that peace is proximity, the uncomfortable and nauseating proximity of the “unassimilable other” that awakens us to its precarious nature (Levinas 1995, 162-166) —a “troubling presence of a radical alterity that cannot be assimilated, brought home, or interpreted within the order of the same” (Kenaar 2013, 4). That peace, therefore, cannot take place in the Cameraland paradise, which the photo album emulated.

II. The one who waits

- 25 We will stop in front of the face of the Other and hold this last click. It is time to go back to the original bifurcation from which we started, to that place where boredom still haunts us. In *Convolute D* of *The Arcades Project*, the chronological references to the triumphant entrance of boredom into culture coincide with that of the invention of photography. He copies a sentence by Lamartine from 1839, “France is bored” (Benjamin 1999, 110), and notes that “boredom began to be experienced in epidemic proportions during the 1840s” (Benjamin 1999, 108). Then the philosopher wonders, “What is the dialectical antithesis to boredom?” (Benjamin 1999, 105). In contrast to boredom and monotony, the predominant topic in *Convolute D* is “waiting.” What is at stake, from the beginning, is the conflict between the moment and the event. The epigraph from Victor Hugo was there to warn us: “Waiting is life” (Benjamin 1999, 101). It matters not what the object of this waiting is, but rather only the subject, the one who knows that “boredom is the threshold to great deeds” (Benjamin 1999, 105). For waiting plays a dual and ambiguous role here. Waiting, says Benjamin, is “the lined interior of boredom” (Benjamin, 1999, 118) and, as we would say today, an interface with the “unconscious events” (Benjamin 1999, 106). The dialectical antithesis of boredom emerges from the tension between waiting for what we don’t know—the event, the difference, which is always overdue—and waiting for what we already know,

that which always returns, disguised as something new. At this crossroads between these two kinds of waiting, modern photography rediscovers its origin. We rarely have managed to catch it at the exact moment when this bifurcation happens. One rare example can be found in the final pages of the Spanish edition of *Photographie et Société*—the classic book by Gisele Freund that she started to write while sitting at a desk next to Benjamin at the National Library in Paris (it was Freund who took some of the most widely seen pictures of Benjamin). It is a picture taken by Cartier-Bresson (Figure 4)—and rarely reproduced—that it used only to illustrate a chapter about amateur photographers and tourism (Freund 1983). Camera in hand, a woman prepares to photograph a *touristic souvenir* and her friends get all excited about it. She both looks at her friends and, through the camera, *reveals* her gaze. The women twist their bodies, fall to the ground, and protect themselves. They fall one on top of the other. How long can this situation last? How much longer will it be possible to put up with this situation?



FIGURE 4 : A TOURIST PICTURE. HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON.

Source: Freund, Gisèle. *La Fotografía como documento social*, 1983.

- 26 It was French critic and curator Régis Durand who first noted that the act of photographing was anything but instantaneous. It was more similar to a polarization, a tension in which the instant is simultaneously desired and delayed. In this sense, everything the photographer does, “such as setting up the scene, framing, printing, etc.,” would only be “retarding” operations, which would work as “a kind of delayed action in relation to the actual present” (Durand 1995, 147). Cartier-Bresson’s picture puts into play, as well as any other photograph, the complex forces that shape the waiting. The French photographer is positioned at one of the vertices of the triangle of gazes animating the photograph (and we are there too, observing the scene, through him). His wait for the instantaneous to happen is crossed by the women’s waiting, the way they wait for their photographer friend to take the picture. She, meanwhile, waits until she can find the best pose for her friends. The modern photographic wait is this openness to a multi-durational world that is always about to collapse.
- 27 To view photography from this perspective means to stop seeing it as a given instant. Instead, it means to see the instantaneous itself as a horizon of instantaneousness that every photograph has before it at the moment someone is about to take a photo. Thus, photography ceases to be the *tempo forte* that consumes an event or the cut that gives it

a meaning and becomes something that happens with varied degrees of time lag, at a rhythm and for a duration that the wait itself creates.

28 From the mid-1920s, when the instantaneous became mixed up with the very nature of photography, cameras became more clearly what they had always been. Not only "clocks for seeing," as Roland Barthes had defined them (Barthes 1989, 33), but "machines for waiting," machines for hesitating between "it is now" and "it is not now," between "I will wait longer" and "I will stop waiting." Photographers only exist in this indefinite gap that is created between the eye and the finger. Everything the photographer leaves of himself, in the image that he has just made, is traces of his own wait, remnants of his expectation. An instantaneous photography happens only because time and movement have been extracted by the photographer *while* he or she waited (Lissovksy 2008).

29 It is because photographers wait that photographs look into the future, as Benjamin had noted. It is through this expectation that the future enters them. To look for the readability of photographs is to look for traces of this waiting. But after all, which wait is that? Is it similar to waiting for a bus or for service at a bureaucratic office? Heidegger waits for the train in a "tasteless station of some lonely minor railway." Let's sit at the bench and wait with him:

It is four hours until the next train arrives. The district is uninspiring. We do have a book in our rucksack, though—shall we read? No. Or think through a problem, some question? We are unable to. We read the timetables or study the table giving the various distances from this station to other places we are not otherwise acquainted with at all. We look at the clock—only a quarter of an hour has gone by. Fed up with walking back and forth, we sit down on a stone, draw all kinds of figures in the sand, and in so doing catch ourselves looking at our watch yet again—half an hour—and so on (Heidegger 2015, 123-124).

30 However, on the other bench of the same station, Walter Benjamin is seated. He yawns and realizes that "when yawning, the human being himself opens like an abyss. He makes himself resemble the time stagnating around him" (Benjamin 2006, 184). But he keeps quiet since he suspects that "if sleep is the apogee of physical relaxation, boredom is the apogee of mental relaxation." Boredom "is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience. A rustling in the leaves drives him away" (Benjamin 2002, 149). It is not, therefore, a question of waiting for something, but of the opening of the duration for the one who waits, facing the multiple durations that surround him: "my own duration," writes Deleuze about Bergson, "such as I live it in the impatience of waiting, for example, serves to reveal other durations that beat to other rhythms that differ in kind from mine" (Deleuze 1991, 32). If we think this way, we go against common sense as it relates to photography. The instant is no longer the artificial interruption of the duration, but is now produced by it, born inside it. And instantaneous photography ceases to be an image devoid of time (as is the cinematographic frame, condemned to the regularity of the number of frames per second) and becomes a particular way in which time manifests itself by the remnants of its absence. It is, thus, a matter of looking at the photograph backwards, before it becomes a now-past, when it is still a now-future.

31 "The one who waits" was certainly the conceptual character least developed by Benjamin, but it is the main character of the "profane illumination," of the surrealist instantaneous (Benjamin 2005, 216). In *Convolute D* of *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin noted:

Rather than pass the time, one must invite it in. To pass the time (to kill time, expel it): the gambler. Time spills from his every pore.—To store time as a battery stores energy: the *flâneur*. Finally, the third type: he who waits. He takes in time and renders it up in altered form—that of expectation (Benjamin 1999, 107).

- 32 The one who waits invites time and welcomes it. The one who waits, the modern photographer, from the moment he waits, *ex-pects*. The time it then restores no longer passes, no longer flows. It *flows back* toward the present until what remains there is only an instant marked by the wait that generated it. As Bergson declares, “True duration is essentially that which bites things and which leaves on them the imprint of its teeth” (Bergson 1979, 49).
- 33 Siegfried Kracauer defined this waiting as a “hesitant openness,” which implies an “alert sense” of “one’s own time” (Kracauer 2009, 149-160). Ernst Bloch also insists that it is not a “blind confidence in the promises of the future,” but “a tense hope like a bow” that points to the unexpected (cf. Bensaïd 2011). Kracauer didn’t realize—and Bloch even less so—that photographers may have been the waiting companions among the intellectuals of his time, but Benjamin saw in *the one who waits* the spiritual condition of the reader, the photographer and the historian. In 1931 he noted that photographs were able to “nest” the future (Benjamin 2005, 510). From this truly disturbing metaphor it follows that the future inhabits the images from the past like an “egg” in its nest. It is covered by a shell and its contents, therefore, can only be guessed. However, as long as this does not happen, the future is being hatched. It is there, asleep, waiting for the moment of its awakening. This moment is always a now. The now of a reciprocity between past and future that has no scheduled date to happen. The now of a correspondence, of a similarity, the now of a recognition.

III. The Waiting Work: History

- 34 Let’s sit next to Benjamin again on the bench of a train station and silently watch the birds of dreams hatch their eggs, for in dreams images are *visibly* in action. In dreams images *work*. Freud noted that “dream-work” doesn’t immediately reveal itself in its manifest content unless we break down its condensations and displacements (Freud 1981, 516-552). Similarly, in each photograph there would also exist a “waiting work”—the work of time or a metamorphosis of the object, the work of memory or of obsession—as Didi-Huberman wrote about minimalism (Didi-Huberman 1998, 39). A work, therefore, which is as much that of “figurability” as of “disfiguration,” where every resulting form equally bears its own “deformation process” (Didi-Huberman 1998, 217).
- 35 Let’s look at Hiroshi Sugimoto, a photographer of long-duration exposures. He was preparing the dioramas for a museum of natural history when he began his famous series about cinema, in which the exposure time of the photographs coincided with the duration of the film. The series that followed the cinema series began in 1985 and has hundreds of images. It is called *Seascapes*—photographs where the only elements, sky and sea, are equally distributed on the surface (Figure 5). A reader of the Book of Genesis might say that *Seascapes* captures the Creation moment when the fundamental division between the waters and the firmament happened. But our eyes, inundated by boredom, allow us to see something else: maybe Noah, after the deluge, waiting for the waters to recede; or Ulysses, at the beginning of the Odyssey, abandoned on the island

of Calypso, after all his fellows had already returned. Ulysses scanning the horizon, "as if the island of Ithaca were to rise out of the air by the sheer power of his impatience" (Schweizer 2010, 50). Sugimoto says he wants to depict the "prehuman state" of the landscape, as if he were the first man who "discovers his first landscape," thus devoid of all "human trace" (Fried 2009, 294). However, each photo has a place and date attached to it: *Lake Superior, 1995*; *Ligurian Sea, near Savio, 1993*; *North Atlantic Ocean (Cape Breton Island), 1996*; *Baltic Sea, near Rügen, 1996*. What difference do these captions make, anyway, if there is no sign, no characteristic that justifies the reference or makes it necessary? This does not mean that all *Seascapes* look alike. They are different, but they are indifferently different. What is the importance of places and dates if we are so distant from the picturesque? They are important because they don't capture images from Genesis, but rather they capture effects of extremely long duration. After registering in a single photogram all the history of a film, Sugimoto expanded his waiting to the end of time, until when, by the infinite sedimentation, accumulation and overlap of their movements, all the places and all the dates would have converged. Their seas are the result of the insistence of the waves on the retina, which embraces all the movement of the waves until it becomes one single line on the horizon of human history. (Lissovsky 2014, 165)



FIGURE 5 : AEGEAN SEA, PILÍON I, 1990. HIROSHI SUGIMOTO.

Source: Städel Museum (digital collection). <https://sammlung.staedelmuseum.de/en/work/aegean-sea-pilion-i>

- 36 Benjamin defined historic time as "infinite in every direction and unfulfilled at every moment" (Benjamin 2004, 55) That infinitely delayed waiting gives us those "sabbath eyes" Adorno speaks about in *Minima Moralia*—eyes set on the threshold of history with its endless sequence of ruin and destruction (Adorno 2005, 76). But there is a point in this crossroads of space and time that Ulysses watches from the beach and that we

know by the name of "cardinal"—a point in the line where sky and Earth, sky and sea, connect. The hinge of the door in front of us at the most crucial moments of our lives is in that point. It is in this direction that Sugimoto points his camera, aiming at the same point as did the surveyor of Kafka, a character in *The Castle* whom Benjamin considered the exiled soul of his body (Benjamin 2005, 805) and whom Agamben considered the one who wishes to question borders and to make the limits useless (Agamben 2010, 48).

- 37 What is this place, paradoxically proper and limitless? Benjamin provides a good description of it. It was located at the back of the Berlin zoo and was the otter's house, "the sacred animal of the rainwater":

Docile as a young maiden, it bowed its head under this gray comb. And I looked on insatiably then. I waited. ... In a good rain, I was securely hidden away. And it would whisper to me of my future, as one sings a lullaby beside the cradle (Benjamin 2002, 366).

- 38 Keeping an eye at the basin where the otter lived, the boy waits:

And so time and again I would remain, endlessly waiting, before those black and impenetrable depths, in order somewhere to catch sight of the otter. If I finally succeeded, it was certainly just for an instant, for in the blink of an eye the glistening inmate of the cistern would disappear one more time into the wet night (Benjamin 2002, 366).

- 39 But the boy remained there, paying attention to the slightest sign of the otter's return, because he had learned from the small animal that rain made one grow. The "waiting" is this place that can protect, the present made denser by the expectation, the immunity from the future. The waiting is a reserve of the future inside a time that insists on passing homogeneously. The ethical and epistemological task of waiting, the ethical task of the instant in cultures that have become increasingly instantaneous, is to safeguard the future and, within it, the adventitious temporality of the event and of the difference.

- 40 History—and this is precisely what Benjamin teaches us—is not the past, but rather that which is always in the process of disappearing (Cadava 1997, 66), like an old photograph, like a traveler's footsteps on the sand dunes in the desert, like the diving of the little otter in the dark basin. This place of disappearance and prelude of the return, this whirlpool of space and time that the remnant of a light undulation marks, this point toward which the photographer directs a gaze of reluctantly being-open, this is the place of origin of all waiting.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

Adorno, Theodor. 2005. *Minima Moralia*. London: Verso.

Agamben, Giorgio. 2007. *Profanações*. São Paulo: Boitempo.

Agamben, Giorgio. 2009a. *Signatura Rerum; sobre el método*. Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo.

- Agamben, Giorgio. 2009b "What is an apparatus?" In *What is an Apparatus? and other essays*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Agamben, Giorgio. 2010. *Nudez*. Lisboa: Relógio D'Água.
- Aquino, Livia. 2016. *Picture Ahead: a Kodak e a construção de um turista-fotógrafo*. São Paulo: Ed. do Autor.
- Barthes, Roland. 1989. *A Câmara Clara*, Lisboa: Edições 70.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1999. *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Benjamin, Walter. 2002. *Selected Writings v. 3*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Benjamin, Walter. 2004. *Selected Writings v. 1*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Benjamin, Walter. 2005. *Selected Writings v. 2*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Benjamin, Walter. 2006. *Selected Writings v. 4*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Bensaïd, Daniel. 2011. "Utopia y mesianismo: Bloch, Benjamin y el sentido de lo virtual". In Cohen, Esther (ed.). *Walter Benjamin: dirección múltiple*. México: UNAM.
- Bergson, Henri 1979. *A Evolução Criadora*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar.
- Cadava, Eduardo 1997. *Words of Light*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cadava, Eduardo 2007. "Lectura de la mano: la muerte en las manos de Fazal Sheikh. *Acta Poética* 28 (1-2): 13-47.
- Deleuze, Gilles 1991. *Bergsonism*. Nova York: Zone Books.
- Didi-Huberman, Georges 1998. *O que vemos, o que nos olha*. São Paulo: Ed. 34.
- Didi-Huberman, Georges 2008. *La Ressemblance par contact*. Paris: Minuit.
- Durand, Régis 1995. "How to see (photographically)." In Petro, Patrice (ed). *Fugitive Images*. Indianápolis: Indiana University Press, 141-151.
- Freud, Sigmund 1981. "La Interpretación de los Sueños". In *Obras Completas I*. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva.
- Freund, Gisèle 1983. *La Fotografía como documento social*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gilli.
- Fried, Michael 2009. *Why photography matters as art as never before*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin 2015. *Os Conceitos fundamentais da metafísica*. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2015.
- Junger, Ernst. *Sobre el dolor*. Barcelona: Tusquets, 1995.
- Kanaan, Hagi 2013. *The Ethics of visibility; Levinas and the contemporary gaze*. London: I.B.Tauris.
- Kracauer, Sigmund 2009. *O Ornamento da Massa*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify.
- Levinas, Emmanuel 1995. "Peace and Proximity." In *Basic Philosophical Writings*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 161-169
- Lissovsky, Mauricio 2008. *A Máquina de Esperar*. Rio de Janeiro: Mauad X.
- Lissovsky, Mauricio 2014. *Pausas do Destino: teoria, arte e história da fotografia*. Rio de Janeiro: Mauad X.
- Moholy-Nagy, Lazlo 1947. *Vision in Motion*. Chicago; Paul Theobald.

Schweizer, Harold 2010. *La Espera*. Madrid; Ediciones Sequitur.

Simmel, Georg 1971. *On Individuality and social forms*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Stimson, Blake 2009. *El Eje del mundo: fotografía y nación*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili.

NOTES

1. About the tourist-photographer, see AQUINO 2016. The following observations were a result of the researcher’s thorough work at the Kodak archives, in Rochester (USA)

2. Inaugurated at MoMA in 1955, with Edward Steichen as curator, the exhibit consisted of 503 photographs taken by 273 photographers from 68 countries, accompanied by 50 panels with written material. The exhibit traveled through more than 70 countries and was seen by 9 million people. It was a humanist masterpiece in which the photographic image worked as a universal signifier capable of welcoming all cultures and revealing fundamental similarities among human communities. It was later deemed by critics and historians to be one of the most successful pieces of US propaganda in the context of the Cold War. See Stimson 2009, 97-160, for an analysis of the exhibit from the perspective that this article suggests.

RÉSUMÉS

Considérer les photographies comme des objets historiques consiste nécessairement en les redécouvrir dans l’une de ces bifurcations où, comme le suggérait Walter Benjamin, le conscient et l’inconscient – l’être et le non-être – se font face. Dans la liasse D du *Livre des passages*, le jalon chronologique que le philosophe attribue à l’entrée triomphale de l’ennui dans la culture coïncide avec l’invention de la photographie. Ce qui, dans la liasse D, contraste cependant avec l’ennui et la monotonie, ce n’est pas le loisir ou la distraction, mais le thème prédominant de « l’attente ». Sur cette base, cet article suggère que c’est dans cette bifurcation où naît la photographie moderne que nous trouvons, dans une tension dialectique, le viseur qui cadre le monde et l’obturateur qui interrompt le flux temporel : d’un côté, le « touriste » ; de l’autre, « celui qui attend ».

To consider photographs as historical objects is necessarily to rediscover them in one of those bifurcations where, as Walter Benjamin proposes, the conscious and the unconscious—lived and unlived—come face to face. In convolute D of *The Arcades Project*, the chronological milestones the philosopher assigns to the triumphal entry of boredom into culture coincide with the invention of photography. In contrast to boredom and monotony, however, the predominant topic in convolute D is not leisure or entertainment but rather “waiting.” Based upon this premise, the paper suggests that it is in this bifurcation, where modern photography is born, that we find, in dialectical tension, the viewfinder that frames the world and the shutter that interrupts the temporal flow, the “tourist” and “the one who waits.”

Considerar las fotografías como objetos históricos es, necesariamente, redescubrirlas en una de esas bifurcaciones en las que, como lo propone Walter Benjamin, lo consciente y lo inconsciente – vivido o no vivido– vuelve cara a cara. En el convoluto D de su proyecto sobre los pasajes

parisinos, los hitos cronológicos que el filósofo asigna a la entrada triunfal del aburrimiento en la cultura coinciden con la invención de la fotografía. Sin embargo, en contraste con el aburrimiento y la monotonía, el tema predominante en dicho convoluto no es el ocio o el entretenimiento, sino más bien la "espera". Basado en esta premisa, el presente artículo sugiere que en esta bifurcación, en la que nace la fotografía moderna, encontramos en plena tensión dialéctica el visor que enmarca al mundo y el obturador que interrumpe el flujo temporal, esto es, el "turista" y "el que aguarda".

INDEX

Keywords : Walter Benjamin, Modern Photography, Kodak, Wait

Palabras claves : Walter Benjamin, fotografía moderna, Kodak, espera

Mots-clés : Walter Benjamin, photographie moderne, Kodak, attente

AUTEURS

MAURICIO LISSOVSKY

Professor of Visual Studies and History of Photography, Escola de Comunicação, Universidade Federal de Rio de Janeiro