

Forget Photography

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1

Forget Photography

The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language.

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852 (MECW 11), pp. 103–106.

'Theoretical production, like material production,' Baudrillard wrote, 'loses its determinacy and begins to turn around itself, slipping en abyme towards a reality that cannot be found.'

Sylvere Lotringer. 2007. 'Exterminating Angel', introduction to Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e).

The book argues that if we wish to understand the politics of representation in the post-photographic era, or, more specifically, the image under the conditions of capitalist, computational reproduction, there is a necessary prerequisite, and that is the need to 'forget photography'. The very term photography is a barrier to understanding the altered state of the default visual image. The central paradox this book explores is that at the moment of photography's technical replacement by the screen, algorithm and data flow, photographic cultures proliferate like never before. Photography is everywhere, but not as we have known it; for some time it has been an undead, a zombie, in which the established language, thinking, meanings and values of photography now stand as an obstacle to grasping the new condition. The current mode of image production and circulation turns visual representation on its head and with it is changing how we think about humanness and the world. The image has fled its analogue forms and now haunts the opaque intimacy of the screen and its algorithmic abstractions, creating new questions of how to understand visual meaning, indeed all meaning, in computational and network culture. But, as this book takes up, it also bequeaths us the question of how to regard photography's afterlife. Forgetting photography is not a simple injunction, made at the outset in order to move on to accounts of photography's replacement by the computational networked image. True, the computational networked image is now the default of reproduction and the visual in culture and therefore is the new locus for understanding the power and agency of images. However, the afterlife of photography, residual as it might technically be, also maintains a powerful representational hold on culture and upon reality, which it is important to understand in relation to the new conditions. It is not a question of one medium superseding another, in a teleological version of technical development, nor even finally a question of the remediation of the medium of photography by computing. Both exist in the same temporal space and the effort is to understand the conditions that maintain their state and the relations between them.

Forgetting photography is a strategy to reveal the redundant contemporaneity¹ of the photographic constellation and the cultural immobility of its epicentre. Forgetting photography attempts to put photography into historical perspective and to liberate the image from these historic shackles, forged by art history and photographic theory. More importantly, perhaps, forgetting photography also entails rejecting the frame of reality it prescribed and delineated and in doing so opens up other relationships between bodies, times, events, materials, memory, representation and the image. Forgetting photography attempts to develop a systematic method for revealing the limits and prescriptions of thinking with photography, which no amount of revisionism of post-photographic theory can get beyond. The world urgently needs to unthink photography² and go beyond it in order to understand the present constitution of the image as well as the reality and world it has shown and continues to show. Forgetting photography will require a different way of organising knowledge about the visual in culture involving crossing different knowledges of visual culture, science, technologies and mediums. It will also involve thinking differently about routine and creative labour and its knowledge practices within the institutions and organisation of visual reproduction and will therefore inescapably entail politics.

The need to forget photography is now overdue and the need to start somewhere else is urgent if we are to understand current ways of seeing and the reality they conjure up. Forgetting photography can be understood as looking back on photography and laying to rest its place in the culture of twentieth-century industrial capitalism. It can also be understood as the making of a new clearing from which we can look at the present and the interconnections between finance capitalism, proxy wars fought for resources, ecological damage and the new default structures and apparatuses of knowledge and communication with which we think and act. The book is a long argument about forgetting photography and a series of essays about how and where to start building a practically useful and politically engaged different account of the part played by technologies in reproducing reality. The choice between continuing to resuscitate photography in various post-embraces and forgetting it is stark. Forgetting is not easy, not least because it is tied to remembering, but the starting point for this enquiry is an insistence that a decisive break with photography's mode of being, thinking and language is required. Forgetting photography is the hypothesis upon which the book is based and forms the methodological approach in setting out not only why we need to forget photography but in practice how it might be done and what new vistas and approaches it affords. Forgetting photography as we will see has a methodological logic which is polemical, transdisciplinary and transactional in pursuing a problem across intellectual fields and institutional settings and can become a practical way of thinking and doing things. Forgetting photography ultimately seeks to align a knowledge of the image in culture with all progressive struggles for emancipation.

The title of this book is as serious as it is playful and is a direct reference to Jean Baudrillard's (in)famous essay *Forget Foucault* (2007) originally published in 1977, in which Baudrillard declares Foucault's writing to be 'too perfect' in giving an account of what it proposes. Baudrillard argues that as a discourse of power, no longer based on a despotic or catastrophic architecture, Foucault's writing is a seamless, meticulous unfolding of a narrative without origin, in which power 'seeps through the whole porous networks of the social, the mental and of bodies infinitesimally modulating the technologies of power' (2007, p. 29). In short, Baudrillard sees Foucault's discourse as a mirror of the powers it describes and cannot be taken as a discourse of truth, but a mythic discourse, which has no illusions about the effect of the truth it produces. The polemic advanced over the course of this book is that photography, in its analogic perfection, like Foucault's writing, has been 'too perfect' and, in the same manner as Foucault's discourse of power, photography reinforces objectivity and ensures the reality principle. Foucault's too-perfect discourse maintains the principle of objective reality in the same manner as photography, through its exactitude, whereas Baudrillard argued that both power and reality have been disseminated and dissolved by simulation, creating a state of hyper-reality.

The book takes on a number of practical and personal challenges of different scales in order to articulate a different way of thinking about photography, the image and the visual world in networked culture. In making this attempt the biggest challenge and indeed the goal has been to overcome the stubborn, familiar and ingrained lexicon of photography and its visual taxonomy. This is an important task to attempt, not because photography is at stake, but because, more importantly, reality is at stake. This is the existential and affective reality of all human beings on the planet, who make their own lives, but not in circumstances of their own choosing. Such circumstances are given, transmitted from the past and present in the material organisation of the ceaseless forces of accumulation and labour upon which national states, their laws, institutions, military and civil societies have been erected and continue to be maintained. Photography takes part in these arrangements and has prescribed and shaped a representational reality of the twentieth century, a reality that can and needs to be questioned. More to the point is that the image of reality bequeathed by twentieth-century photography was not only ideological and cruel, but no longer matches the conditions of representation, and conceals the conditions of the twenty-first century. The photographic image remains the cultural default for reality, even though the systemic default of the visual image has moved to a nonrepresentational system. The consequence is that the subjective, social and scientific reality that photography encodes seriously occludes the emergent reality of computation and misses the greater present chaos of reality. This is the reality of the interrelationships between human and other-than-human things, what Bruno Latour and others have called hybrids and in other ways what Jean

Baudrillard has called simulation and hyper-reality.³ It is also the reality of social democratic nation states colluding with capitalism in forms of systemic global oppression in which broadcast media has little or no insight into its own complicity. It is, finally, a reality of the paradoxical present, which, as will be seen, shapes the argument of forgetting photography.

Recalibrating the Visual

One of the main problems the book examines is that photography, as it is still known, takes part in reproducing the reality of the everyday life world whilst appearing to stand apart as a representation in different registers of that reality. In addition, on a common-sense view the photographic image is taken as synonymous with the spontaneous bodily reflex of sight, as natural seeing, and yet the photograph is far from natural; it is overwhelmingly a graphic artifice, a two-dimensional pictorial code of symbolic communication. Photography as part of the reproduction of ways of seeing has, over the course of the twentieth century, become naturalised in the everyday life world as a transparent window on reality, as well as being adopted as a scientific measure and an aesthetic expression. Photography also reproduces itself unknowingly as the unity which is photography. Beyond the practices of everyday life, the production of social and scientific knowledge related to reproduction is formalised at a tertiary level of commercial, state and educational research, in which photography is also involved. Disentangling ideas about photography, ways of seeing and the visual in culture is one of the tasks set out in what follows. The visual in Western culture contains a paradox in which human seeing is both an evolutionary property of the eye and brain as well as something humans collectively construct. The human infant's adjustment to seeing the world is therefore biological and cultural. Seeing is both prewired and learnt. Reality is overwhelmingly remade through routine habits of thought and action within the given conditions of the

everyday life world. Jacques Rancière's idea of 'the distribution of the sensible'⁴ is a more abstract and political way of putting this (2004, p. 12). The ways in which photography is practised and thought about are also a routine and a habit. The immediate human life world is shaped and constrained by complex interactions of global geo-political and bio-political forces and complexity is what we need to contend with. Photography, as it continues to be understood, takes part in these larger systems of relations of power. Individuals creatively struggle to make sense of their life world and to realise and channel agency in which common ways of seeing are involved; to change the world is to see differently. The formalisation of knowledge produced through disciplinary institutions is selectively distributed in culture through commercial application, compulsory education and broadcast and online media. In the case of photography its knowledge domain is constituted and distributed primarily through practice and education. The relationship between the everyday and formal knowledge transmission about the changes taking place in visual culture needs questioning and challenging, not only from the position of peer review but from the politics of everyday life, because it is an alliance which extends the afterlife of photography.

If photography is no longer photography, then what is it we are doing on our smart phones, cameras and computers, uploading, scrolling, swiping, saving, sharing and printing? Image making has become inherent to life itself. If this is not photography, then what is it? We will see that a number of new terms have come to the aid of the photographic image to help describe its current state, such as the technical, unfettered, fluid, soft, operational, machinic, non-human and, the preferred term here, the networked image. These adjectives are reached for to describe what has been called expanded photography on the one hand, and the computational or algorithmic image on the other. Such linguistic qualifiers of photography betoken the central fact that whatever it has been has changed and that such a situation throws us back upon language as the means by which the visual image has to be rethought. The apprehension of the photographic image cannot easily be divorced from the language used to conceive it and reinforces an understanding that images have a social ontology. The relationship between the image and word and more abstractly the presence of the image in thought through language comes into contention with ideas about the primacy of vision and the acknowledged ascendancy of the visual in culture since the second half of the twentieth century, when photography, film and television were seen to be predominant. Popular or mass media have been studied as 'language-like', even up to and including new media (Manovich 2001), in which a science of signs, claimed, with justification, increasing dominion over how meaning operated in visual images. Images were taken as texts to be decoded and thus foregrounded a literary tradition and the centrality of the logos in cultural analysis. Images were also recognised to be part of the psycho-social world, circulating in the unconscious, as much as in media culture, and provided fertile ground for thinking photography in terms of psychoanalysis and semiology (Burgin 1982). Now, the mathematical logic of the computational image seriously disrupts the semiological analysis of the photograph and calls for a new way of understanding the nonrepresentational basis of the image and the new practices it invokes. And yet the photographic image is still, for the most part, received in culture as a representational system of meaning. It is representation, rather than photography, that needs critical attention and the effort to separate the two is part of making the space to consider visual representation in its transmedial and multimodal forms.

The language used to interpret the photographic image and the idea of a photographic language are deeply entwined and rooted in Western philosophical thought and, in the dominant representational mode and its allied ways of seeing, language is deeply embedded and inextricably linked to the visual image. One of the unavoidable problems encountered in attempting to see the historical limits of the language of photography is therefore how to move beyond it – how in effect to account for visibility and representation in common culture in ways which connect the new technical condition of the image with the political traditions of critical analysis and cultural activism. It is still the case that progressive identity politics as well as the environmental activist movement continue to employ the photographic image in representational terms, in contrast to the neo-fascists, who have learnt to 'successfully' exploit network communication as fake news and alternative facts. Recently published academic work points to the fact that the massification of photography is being rethought and recalibrated primarily in relationship to the functions of technology. Such projects inevitably test the boundaries of concepts and language within which newer technologies of vision are accounted for. As yet the language of vision relies on the limited lexicon of the key terms seeing, image, picture and photograph, in themselves complex abstractions, to do a great deal of work in accounting for such major changes, and which are being qualified even more in relationship to technologies of measure and scale (Dvorak and Parikka 2021). As a qualification to the current emphasis upon technologies of vision, W.J.T. Mitchell reminds us that 'The image never appears

except in some medium or other, but it is also what transcends media, what can be transferred from one medium to another' (2005, p. 16). The image then is as much a mental process as it is a material arrangement. To paraphrase Mitchell, a photograph is something you can frame and hang on a wall, but the photographic image is what appears in a photograph and, I would add here, both the photograph and the photographic image are constituted as the image of photography. The method of forgetting photography developed here recognises technical and formal distinctions between vision and language, the photograph, word and image, but adopts a pragmatic position in which the relationships between word and image, language and photography are experienced in their encounter and practical uses. The agency of each element is constituted by a network of active associations in which language is always entailed.

The visual in all forms of media operates as a zone of social contact and symbolic exchange between the body, memory and phenomena, or what is lived and felt as the world of external events, and the world as imaged, pictured and represented. Over the course of photography's history, the photographic image has come to occupy a position of unbridled authority in and over the social and scientific real. During the latter part of the twentieth century the veracity of the photograph, founded on its supposed indexical link to external events in time and space, became increasingly contested in practice and theory. In the twenty-first century, concern over the veracity of images has become more muted and mutable through the immersion with screens and graphical user interfaces. This is a moment of the fully fledged post-photographic and as insisted so far there is a pressing need to move beyond it.

The main strategy of the book lies in adopting the view that photography is no longer the active organising mode of the visual image, in effect to see photography as redundant, but still exerting an influence in an after-life. The afterlife of photography is cast as the fictional figure of the zombie, which is of course playful, but also a serious methodological ploy designed to discuss the limits of photography's academic theorisation as well as its contemporary cultural institutional practices. It is important to stress that the project is not about announcing another 'death' of photography, but rather bringing its afterlife into focus. Photography has been a living dead since the last quarter of the twentieth century. Geoffrey Batchen noted as far back as 1994 that a number of distinct points of death have been plunged into the body of photography, even though he continues to take this as a sign of life in photography (2021), but the argument here is that the totality of these deaths has been for some time photography's after-life. This is an exploration of what this more-than-symbolic death of photography means for knowledge and understanding of the image and as an encouragement to move on. If we want to understand the vexed relationship between image-representation-reality, photography can only assist in this task now as a ruin and an archive, as something whose outlines and conditions only memory can recover.

Photography is a ruined territory populated by archaic knowledge practices bounded by a computational network of relations between images, humans and machines. Such a stark, if not bleak, perspective will, it is hoped, become clear in what follows. Since its inception photography as a transactional information system has been deeply imbricated in military, industrial, commercial, scientific, medical, national, domestic and arts networks of associations, flows and reproductions. The import of such an understanding here, however, is not to repeat this perspective in order to extend the photographic map, nor to inventory the ways in which photography has been and continues to be constituted as a practice field. Rather, it aims at the opposite, to deterritorialise⁵ photography, to flee photography in order to force a new view of the image. But in order to do this, to forget photography, it cannot simply be abandoned, even though it has already been lost. There is as yet no outside to photography because it continues to be taken as a default of representation. The way out of photography proposed here is through remembrance, witnessing the trauma of photography's several deaths, from the perspective of its after-life. This is achieved by a trick, by adopting the future present from which contemporary photographic knowledge practices of collection, exhibition and archiving appear as photography's spectral self. It is in institutional knowledge practices that the order of simulation can be identified: the order of representation, modernism, technology, heritage and finally post-photography. By looking at the contemporary state of photographic difference(s) the argument about why we need to forget photography emerges. It is an argument which claims that photographic discourse now conceals more than it reveals about the state of culture, society and the agency of the image. Forgetting photography calls for a more productive discourse in which the hybridity of the networked image, inequality, racism and climate damage stand at the centre of concern.

The approach taken to the task of forgetting photography is to ground speculative and conceptual thinking in the practical affairs and everyday arrangements in which ideas are produced, circulated and received, to see what purposes, functions, connections and advantages are served by the unintended conspiracy to perpetuate the photographic universe. The strategy of the book involves identifying how ideas and practices of what is still taken to be photography move seamlessly across time, the body, everyday life and formalised culture. The overriding conceptual challenge the book takes on is how to intervene productively in the interstices of these related domains and fields of enquiry in order to open up a different way of thinking about the current state of the visual in culture. The argument for forgetting photography is made primarily as an intervention into the (re)production of academic knowledge about photography and this comes with a cost in terms of what has to be taken on, the breadth of material which has to be covered and the technical language required. But writing into academia was not the original hope of the book, which aspired to speak more broadly and accessibly about photographic cultures under the new conditions of computational networks. In completing the book, I realised that making the metaphorical 'new clearing' from which a new theory of the visual image in culture might emerge required much more hacking through the dense undergrowth of academic writing about post-photography than I had anticipated. In attempting to forget photography the book has had to engage just as much with the technical apparatuses of knowledge production as it has with technologies of seeing and, of course, the two are centrally linked by the common condition of commodification and instrumental datafication. Holding the technological apparatuses of both seeing and knowledge together essentially frames the main object of this enquiry as the reproduction of the idea of photography and explains why the lengthy discussions of how to unthink photography's history and theory are necessary.

Organisation of the Book

The book is organised conceptually according to the advice I offer research students, which is to identify a problem in the world, locate its practical and intellectual context, define key questions, work out a method of analysis, apply it to specific situations and report on the results. In trying to follow my own advice and supported by critical comment from colleagues and friends on earlier drafts, the book has finally fallen out in three parts, or, in more dramatic terms, three acts, if not psychological moments, not completely under my control, but of my own making, which, somewhat unevenly, structure the arc of the argument. Emotionally, the book has been motivated by an enduring frustration with successive deformations of the revolutionary spirit of modernity since 1968, then living through and embracing the condition of postmodernity, only to find myself back in a culture of deep conservatism and reaction. The book strives to employ the central analysis and political spirit of Marx and the intellectual movements his work led to and its creative reformulations and adaptations. More specifically, it has been influenced by the ideas of Bruno Latour, Jean Baudrillard, Paul Ricœur and Gilles Lipovetsky, amongst others – a male cast and a strange combination with differing perspectives on the world. Latour was critical of Baudrillard for losing touch with reality, Lipovetsky shared Baudrillard's sense of hypermodernity, whilst they would all share Ricœur's anthropological and phenomenological view that the self is not immediately transparent to itself, but that individuals are agents responsible for their actions. What unites my reading of their different work is an overriding sense that the present is above all paradoxical in terms of both individual life and its multiple and contradictory positions and the general social and global uncertainty about the future of the planet. There is a practical utility in the idea of the paradoxical present, which gives cause for hope in moving away from worn-out certainties and binary conceptions towards a greater understanding of hybridity and hypermodernity. The concept of the paradoxical present is also a productive challenge to the older certainties upon which most socialist and revolutionary movements remain based. Certainly, the argument for forgetting photography is paradoxical since photography is more extant than ever, as well as because forgetting involves remembering. However, making the argument for forgetting photography opens up other productive ways of seeing the current image culture as well as offering different ways of looking at photography's history. The paradoxical position embraced by the argument creates a particular problem of its paradoxical nature. It is argued that photography no longer exists, but at the same time finds signs of its (after)life everywhere. It is argued that the new default of the reproduction of the image requires a new conceptual language, yet continues to use an older set of linguistic terms. The paradoxes abound and, according to the logic of the paradoxical present, can't be otherwise, which makes forgetting photography a provisional and paradoxical enterprise and possibly only a thought experiment. However, the structure of argument is not only a speculation; it is also grounded in analysis of photographic practices. [Part II \(Chapters 4, 5 and 6\)](#) attempts to reveal photographic theory, exhibition and the archive as monuments to photography's past life, erected and maintained through the institutional disciplinary practices of research and curating.

Seeing photography as already part of the past opens up space in [Part III](#) to attempt to define a situation beyond photography and offer a provisional and imperfect outline of the territory.

In more detail, [Chapter 1](#), 'Forget Photography', outlines the polemic of why continuing to think with photography masks the objective state of the current mode of capitalist reproduction, and indicates what is at stake and how the currencies of photography are reproduced. One of the main affordances of the argument is that it opens up two new spaces of thought, to consider how new ways of seeing might be elaborated without the historical baggage of photography and how the history of photography can be revisited to reveal its relationship to capitalism and imperialism. In [Chapter 2](#), 'Zombie Photography', I am indebted to Paul Ricœur for giving me the tools to think of what is involved in the memory of photography, a task which led me via Ariella Azoulay and Jonathan Beller back to Alan Sekula. There has, of course, always been a sporadic socialist history of photography, one which examines photographic practice in relation to the exploitative system of capitalism. However, the strategy of photography's afterlife opens up new and surprising avenues for the remapping of histories. [Chapter 3](#), 'Post-Photography', lays out the academic development of image studies across art history, cultural and media studies and new media studies from the 1990s. It charts how the object of the idea of photography is both parsed and reconfigured as it travels across fields and sub-fields of knowledge, creating the problem of a lack of cohesion when it comes to understanding the new computational image condition. Post-photography is taken as an inclusive term for all photographic theory since Mitchell coined the term in the 1990s, because essentially the development of the digital image is the backstop to the zombie condition photography finds itself in. For the position of after-photography, post-photography has to be understood as the inclusive term for the continuation of photography. Having made the case for forgetting photography and seeing its affordances, [Part II](#) of the book, 'Remembering', constructs three 'case studies' to look in detail at how photography's afterlife masquerades as the default of the contemporary cultural image in the cultural practices of academia and museums. In [Chapter 4](#), 'Philosophy, Technology and Photography', the most difficult to write, I look at the production of knowledge about photography and in particular focus on phenomenological philosophy's continued influence upon thinking about the ontology of photography, arguing that using the abstractions of phenomenology to understand photography elides it with the wider computational apparatus and hence makes no distinction between its material and historical specificity. Another elision, this time between photography and the contemporary, is examined by looking at the exhibition and collection practices of Tate Modern and Tate Britain, arguing that in framing photography as contemporary art they exclude the new contemporary situation of the network image and its Internet ecology. A similar situation unfolds in [Chapter 6](#), 'Photography and Heritage', which examines the expanded collection and photographic galleries at the Victoria and Albert Museum in terms of an equally unresolved view of wanting to collect contemporary digital photography by suturing into a continuous history of photographic art and science. In [Part III](#) ([Chapters 7](#), [8](#) and [9](#)), the address is unequivocally upon the contemporary condition and offers a view of the condition of the network image, a view of the politics of photography and the image and a view of the condition of hypermodern culture and the hybridity of all media images. [Chapter 7](#), 'The Image after Photography', sets out a series of 'transitional steps' in the formation of the image after photography – from analogue inscription to digital dataset, from image apparatuses to social performances and from the discourse of photography to the discourse of computing – landing upon the network image as a provisional definition of the new condition of the image. [Chapter 8](#), 'Hypermodernity', starts with Lipovetsky's idea of hypermodernity, the paradoxical present and the strategies of chronoreflexivity as a way of characterising everyday life in advanced capitalist societies, before discussing the image in various contemporary instantiations of capitalism and what that means for traditions of radical cultural practice which attempt to critically engage with the new image condition. Finally, [Chapter 9](#), 'Hybridity', attempts to return the various strands of the argument to its main arc, reinforcing why we need to forget photography and what can be glimpsed of new ways of regarding the image in culture.

The Reproduction of Knowledge

Focusing upon the problem of knowledge production in the academy might be considered something of a detour from the narrative of forgetting photography, but it is necessary to consider here because the generation of knowledge of photography is a central means of maintaining the contemporary fiction of photography. Importantly for the specific horizon of this book, disciplinary distinction and academic specialisation play a significant part in how photography and its relationship to representation in and of the world is 'reified'⁶, in the Marxist sense, or taken as an autonomous ontological unit, or simply taken

for granted. In the current system of knowledge, the photographic image is constituted as a relative object within taxonomic regimes and optics of attention, such as everyday life, aesthetics, collection, display, media and technology. These regimes and optics are organised within the discursive boundaries of art history, anthropology, contemporary art, philosophy, cultural studies and media and communication. In broad terms, knowledge has been commodified and functionalised within systems of information. Jean-François Lyotard predicted in his seminal paper on *The Postmodern Condition: A Report of Knowledge* (1976) that knowledge which cannot be translated into data will disappear. Since the publication of Lyotard's report on the future for knowledge, universities have been corporatised, monetised, expanded and differentially globalised. Academics have been de-skilled and stratified in a neoliberal division of labour and knowledge, both in terms of knowledge production as research, and in its dissemination as learning and teaching. Essentially, knowledge has been privatised and what has been lost is the shared and public use value of knowledge.⁷ In universities, postdoctoral researchers will mostly likely work on insecure teaching contracts, with limited opportunities for tenure where an average of 40% of teaching is delivered on short-term contracts. Midcareer scholars wrestle with stark choices between management, teaching or research pathways, increasingly defined by separate contracts, whilst older academics have most likely arrived at a destination and paid off their mortgages prior to retirement. One's position in academia can be measured by a property value. As Mark Fisher observed, 'New bureaucracy takes the form not of a specific, delimited function performed by particular workers but invades all areas of work, with the result that – as Kafka prophesied – workers become their own auditors, forced to assess their own performance' (2009). This discussion may seem an overly grand and distant perspective from which to begin a book on the place of photography in contemporary visual culture and, of course, on the established view of knowledge and its taxonomies, photography would rank very low on any scale of planetary urgency. But that's the point – as long as academia and education more generally continue to approach the world through ever greater hierarchical sub-divisions of instrumentalised subject knowledge, the more the paradox of an excessively knowing world, knowing it needs to change but collectively not knowing how, is replicated.

Returning to the context in which the book has been produced, whilst it is still arguably the case that universities, however differentially, remain home to independent critical thought, Lyotard's questions about the effects of datafication and audit metrics on universities still stand. The commodification of knowledge also presents the problem of how to reconnect critical knowledge or scholarship of a field to the practices it speaks of and to the world. What is specifically at stake in knowledge of contemporary visual culture is the need to bring critical understanding in theory and practice about the image back into the world and into a collaborative, transdisciplinary field and conceptual framework, something which has been previously achieved for cultural practices at a number of critical historical conjunctures. Stuart Hall and Doreen Massey (2010) usefully refer to cultural conjunctures⁸ to identify a constellation of opportunities in which formal education met with a larger desire for knowledge and understanding, such as the start of the Open University. The task of achieving a unified and accessible knowledge and understanding of the contemporary image will therefore involve disciplinary knowledge translation and recalibration in order to develop a new common vocabulary about contemporary ways of seeing. This can be achieved through shared criticism and scholarly review, but it also needs to be carried out in wider public contexts and across a broad range of cultural practices. Essentially, the task is to achieve a new public educational perspective on the place of the image in communication in the age of the Internet and computation. How to do this is, of course, not simply a matter of identifying the need, but many elements are already at work at many levels of cultural communication and some kind of inventory of current initiatives might be needed. The challenges of this project can therefore be summed up as establishing more than a degree of epistemological critical self-reflexivity in setting out a conceptual frame of reference. To overcome discipline boundaries and preserves whilst not falling back into or privileging a preferred disciplinary position. To make productive and playful use of the obvious paradox of offering what is inescapably another critique whilst claiming a position of post criticality. To direct the analysis to positive and practical possibilities and to make forgetting photography a productive exercise.

Notes

1 Contemporaneity is used here precisely to indicate the disjuncture between the medium of photography and present time. It is also used with reference to the 'fiction' of the contemporary discussed by Peter Osborne in relationship to contemporary art (2013, p. 24).

2 Unthinking photography is the title of a blog started by the Digital Programme at the Photographers' Gallery, which overlaps with the discussion here regarding the new conditions of the computational image. It is also an oblique reference to the seminal photography theory title *Thinking Photography* (1982), edited by Victor Burgin.

3 Bruno Latour's analysis of the separation of human and non-human in modernist ontology is taken up at several points across the book and his account of the paradox of the modern is discussed in Chapter 6, when looking at the curatorial practices at Tate. Jean Baudrillard's reversal of signification to suggest that it is not reality which underwrites the sign, but the sign which guarantees the real, leads him on to suggest that reality is now a simulation. This idea is adopted to define the photographic image as a construction of the real.

4 Rancière defines the distribution of the sensible as, 'the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it' (2004, p. 16).

5 Deleuze and Guattari use the terms deterritorialisation abstractly, as in leaving a plane of thought, a process always accompanied by reterritorialisation, as simultaneous process, rather than in anthropology as the material disconnection between place, dwelling and tradition and in the sociology of Anthony Giddens as a consequence of the global effects of migration. In photography deterritorialisation involves the uncoupling of the several material and cultural elements which maintain its unity and identity.

6 Reification. In the argument of the book, photography is a relational entity, whereas in common use it is turned into a fixed thing, with inherent attributes, as a consequence of what Marx defined as commodity fetishism in *Capital* Volume 1, chapter 1, section 4.

7 Knowledge considered as 'really useful' is an important emphasis in British cultural studies, particularly in the research undertaken at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University in the 1970s, informed by the work of Richard Hogget, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall. It was expressed in Richard Johnson's chapter 'Really Useful Knowledge: Radical Education and Working-Class Culture, 1790–1848' in Malcolm Tight's *Education for Adults* (2014 [1983]).

8 Stuart Hall and Doreen Massey in conversation (2010).