

**spectacle and spectres:**  
**London 7 July 2005**

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## **spectacle and spectres: London 7 July 2005**

This essay is prompted by some photographs that have haunted me ever since I first saw them, on a train leaving London on 8 July 2005. They were in the *Evening Standard* newspaper, the day after four bombs exploded on London's public transport system, and they showed the faces of some of the people missing on that day. The same photographs, or photographs very like them, of those people and other people, were published in almost every national newspaper, in one form or another, in the days and weeks that followed the attacks. The faces – pictured on holiday, at graduations, at parties, even the driving licence mugshots – were so vividly alive that they continued to exert a presence even after I knew that almost all of the people pictured had died brutal deaths in a train carriage or a bus that July.

To suggest that these dead still live through their photos, that their photographs remain 'a certificate of presence' even after their death, and that photos are therefore a 'return of the dead', is of course to evoke Barthes's account of photography in *Camera Lucida*.<sup>1</sup> And Derrida argues in *Specters of Marx* that learning to live is precisely about learning to live with such spectral presences. 'The time of the "learning to live", a time without tutelary present, would amount to this...: to learn to live *with* ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts'.<sup>2</sup> But for Derrida, much more explicitly than for Barthes, learning to live with spectral presences is also a question of political responsibility, ethics and justice. Justice, argues Derrida, must at a minimum entail respect for those dead and those not yet born. He thus proposes that any 'being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, of generations':

'No justice – and let us not say no law and once again we are not speaking here of laws – seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those

who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they the victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism'.<sup>3</sup>

But how should we, the readers of the newspapers in which those photographs of the dead and missing appeared, how *should* we be with these particular spectres? How should we understand the effects of these private images, dragged from their usual habitations – the mantelpiece, the album, the computer file – and placed into other circuits of spectatorship by being reproduced in the pages of newspapers? What sort of responsibility, what sort of politics, is at stake here? What do we need to learn?

Certainly, there has been a lot of discussion of the effects of the various images generated by the attacks in New York in 2001, so many of which also continue to haunt. But the notion that a process of *learning* might be necessary, in order to live ethically with those such images, has rarely been addressed. While there have been many accounts of the impact of various of the images generated by the events of 9/11, there have been far fewer discussions of how we *should* be looking at those images, ethically, as an effort to live responsibly with the loss they carry. This absence, I suggest, has been produced at least in part by the theoretical tools currently being brought to bear on those images.

One of those tools is Barthes's concept of the *punctum*, as some critics approach certain of the 9/11 images with *Camera Lucida* firmly in hand. Nancy Miller, for example, has explored the affective power of the photos of the dead and missing after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001: those thousands of family snaps posted onto the streets of New York and subsequently appearing in newspapers, books and exhibitions.<sup>4</sup> She describes their impact as Barthesian *puncta*: as the detail in the photograph and its accompanying eulogistic text that punctures and wounds the spectator. But there are various problems with this analysis, I think, not least that Barthes insisted that the *punctum* of a specific photograph, if it exists, is an intense and private emotion unique to a specific encounter

between a particular photograph and an individual; it is thus not a concept that speaks easily to the shared affect generated from huge numbers of photos placed into various public spaces, as were the photos that Miller addresses. More importantly for my arguments here, it is also an argument that makes it very difficult to think about the cultural or political effects of how photographs are seen, because Barthes's definition of the *punctum* is precisely that which in a photograph exceeds cultural signification. Miller's account erases the possibility of questioning that *punctum*, or of looking otherwise at such photographs; instead they simply hit their spectators with 'raw, pure emotion', to quote Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's account of the same photographs.<sup>5</sup> Affecting as photographs of the missing and dead are in public contexts, describing their effects as *punctal* alone makes it difficult both to assess their affect or to shift it, since the *punctum* arrives from a zone beyond discourse and analysis.<sup>6</sup>

The account of visuality and 'terror' that has incited most discussion amongst critical theorists, however, is, predictably, not a discussion of family snaps, whether 'public' or 'private'. Rather, it's an account of 'capital and spectacle in a new age of war': the book *Afflicted Powers* by Retort. I would argue, though, that here too there is very little sense of the possibility of looking otherwise. In *Afflicted Powers*, Retort argue that the 'world of images [has] long been a structural necessity of a capitalism oriented toward the overproduction of commodities, and therefore the constant manufacture of desire for them'.<sup>7</sup> Following Debord, though, they describe a new stage in this process, characterised both by 'the submission of more and more facets of human sociability... to the deadly solicitations (the lifeless bright sameness) of the market',<sup>8</sup> and by the complicity of the state in maintaining such submission. This is the 'spectacle'. *Afflicted Powers* has many important things to say about geopolitics and 'terrorism'; but its understanding of how people are seduced and produced by the spectacularisation of everyday life is remarkably thin. Show only 'idiot fashions',<sup>9</sup> and people will become idiots who buy and wear them, apparently. But show other sorts of pictures, and people will 'get' them too. Hence Retort claim that 'indominability, over time, cannot be disguised or dissembled'. As an example, they reference the West Bank and assert that

'as enough rock-throwing boys confront enough Israeli tanks, eventually they are seen as... tanks against boys – and no amount of casuistry will keep the "security" gloss intact'.<sup>10</sup> Later statements have repeated their belief that what is displayed on the screens of the mass media is the obscene truth of contemporary politics. In 'All quiet on the Eastern front', they claim that 'the reality of "statecraft" and "deterrence" is more and more in view'; in an exchange with the journal *October*, they remark that neo-liberal power is currently 'naked on the stage'.<sup>11</sup> What these claims must assume, of course, is that such images are *always taken by viewers as reality*: but spectatorship, as a complex and often ambivalent cultural and subjective relationship with visual images, is absent from their account.<sup>12</sup>

In both these accounts – Miller's and Retort's – the possibility of seeing images differently disappears into raw emotion or unmediated reality, into the *punctum* or the spectacle. This essay is an attempt to reinstate that possibility, by thinking about how to live responsibly with the ghosts of some of those who died as a result of the bombings on 7 July 2005. My account is specific to those events (and here I am in agreement with Retort when they remark that, if we are to work with the notion of the 'spectacle', it should be applied locally and conjuncturally).<sup>13</sup> The essay thus begins by examining the coverage of the bombs in London on 7 July 2005 by twelve mainstream British newspapers. It explores the dominant effects of that newspaper coverage, paying particular attention to the photos of the missing and the dead. Those spectral images haunted in quite a particular way, and I will suggest they did rather less critical work than Derrida's account of spectres might suggest. This characterisation of the specific ways in which the photos of the missing and dead were framed in those newspapers will then shape a discussion of what a more ethical way of looking at those particular missing and dead might be. I suggest that the same newspapers in fact also offered some resources for thinking the visuality of those photographs differently, in more responsible ways. These resources already exist, in ordinary and everyday practices which are not 'spectacularised' or *punctal*, or at least not only that. And it is looking with those resources that might allow a more just way of seeing those dead.

## **LOOKING AT PHOTOS OF THE MISSING AND THE DEAD**

Four bombs exploded in London within an hour of each other on the morning of July 7 2005, three on crowded underground trains and one on a bus. In all, 56 people died, including four bombers. Press coverage was extensive and sustained, with most newspapers continuing to devote several pages to the attacks and their aftermath weeks after the attack. The newspapers also used photographs extensively. It is in his essay on 'The photographic message' that Barthes argues that the press photograph is 'a message... in a complex concurrent of messages'.<sup>14</sup> And although that essay, written well before *Camera Lucida*, plays with the notion that the photograph itself is 'a message without a code', in the end Barthes argues that, for most photos, the coded meanings that saturate the practices and materialities of their production, transmission and reception are most significant in understanding their effect. Hence press photographs cannot be understood as isolated images. Rather, their framing and layout, the surrounding captions, text and headlines, and other images must be seen as inherent parts of what a particular photograph signifies, and this is the approach taken here.

Photographs of the results of the attacks came from a variety of sources (although the papers were erratic in attributing images).<sup>15</sup> Many came from professional press photographers; some of these were sourced through agencies like Associated Press and Getty. Others came from ordinary people taking photos on their mobile phones or electronic personal organisers. Whatever their source, though, the newspapers offered a limited range of images. Firstly, there were photos of where the bombs exploded. There were only two of these sites: the bus, and an underground train carriage. Secondly, there were photographs of survivors. There were no pictures of dead bodies, which parallels the imaging of the attacks in New York; indeed, there were no photos showing any severe injuries (although some of the eyewitness accounts, especially in the tabloid newspapers, were fairly graphic, and tabloids also used more photographs showing more injuries more clearly). Thirdly, there were many pictures of emergency service workers, especially firefighters and medical personnel in the

immediate reporting one or two days after the event. After that, as the reporting focussed in one way or another on the police hunt for the bombers, many photos concentrated on the police, particularly armed police on the streets of London and other large cities.

Then there were the photos of the 'terrorists', as they were universally called, which emerged bit by bit as the investigation into the bombings proceeded. There weren't many of these photos, and they were of various kinds. One was a photograph from a closed circuit television camera of the four men at Luton station on their way to London, carrying the rucksacks which contained the bombs. The papers also used school photos, or photos from family events; and *The Times* found photographs of one, Mohammad Sidique Khan, at work as some sort of a teacher. These photos were usually cropped into headshots and used again and again by all the papers, in reports, analysis and commentaries. The one place these photos of the bombers never appeared, however, was in obituaries. Although their lives were subject to intense scrutiny, this was not for the sake of memorialisation; none of the bombers were given obituaries. In the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Centre, Butler suggested that 'the obituary functions as the instrument by which grievability is publicly distributed', and clearly no grieving was thought necessary by these British newspapers for the four men.<sup>16</sup>

This essay is particularly concerned with photographs of those who died who were *not* bombers, however, and this emphasis perhaps needs further discussion. Many accounts of visuality and spectrality in relation to contemporary globalised violence have focussed on the continuing vigour of orientalist imaginings in the 'colonial present',<sup>17</sup> in which the deaths of Westerners are seen as more important than the deaths of others. Many commentators on the attacks in New York and London have remarked on the discrepancy between the mourning demanded on behalf of the dead in those attacks, and the uninterest in, for example, the Afghans, Iraqis and Palestinians who have died violently in the Middle East in the same period. And the various accounts of modern haunting are structured around the spectres generated by the less powerful, by those unmourned by the powerful, by the 'disposable'.<sup>18</sup> Derrida's spectres are typical here; they are the ghosts of the marginalised, the 'victims', victims 'of wars, political or other

kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism'. Avery Gordon's are also the ghosts of figures produced as Other by modernity. And for both Derrida and Gordon, it is their status as the revenants of victims that gives spectres their ability to 'disjoin' or 'conjure otherwise'.<sup>19</sup>

But it seems to me that the questions of justice and responsibility are also raised, and with equal weight, when the spectral dead are not, globally speaking, marginalised. They are raised as much by the photos of the dead and missing in London and New York as they are in relation to the prisoners in Abu Ghraib or the corpses in Haditha. The photos of the dead and missing in London and New York do demand my grief. Barthes was right, I want to say; photographs are 'the exorbitant thing', they do 'fill the sight by force'.<sup>20</sup> But relying on exorbitant or forceful content, whether raw emotion or naked reality, is not an adequate response to these particular photos of the dead, I think. As well as asking what ends are served by public invitations to condemn 'terrorists', we should also be asking what ends are served by public invitations to grieve their victims. What is it exactly we are being asked to mourn? What effects does that particular mourning have?

Patricia Yaeger has noted that 'the empty space left by a [person's] death becomes frighteningly co-optable, available to others'.<sup>21</sup> Peter Brooker offers an example of this co-optimability in his essay on the New York imaginary after September 11 2001. After discussing a range of cultural responses to the World Trade Centre attacks, he is forced to conclude that 'we should think again about how notions of community, home and belongingness continue to be articulated' in reactionary ways.<sup>22</sup> Were the photographs of the dead and missing after the London attacks also deployed in the media to construct notions of 'community, home and belongingness', then, rather than to 'disjoin' or 'conjure otherwise'? Learning to live with these particular ghosts as part of an effort to make the world otherwise might well mean understanding less-than-critical co-options of their spectrality, and imagining appropriate resistant tactics.

This is particularly the case since we live in a place and a moment when emotions are an increasingly integral and overt part and parcel of

political and cultural life. Lauren Berlant and Wendy Brown have dissected this shift in political discourse in the United States.<sup>23</sup> In the UK, the increasing importance of the emotional in the public sphere has been more fully traced in the circuits of popular culture: confessional tv shows, the fascination with celebrities, and all the permutations of reality tv. But there are signs here too that, in Roger Luckhurst's phrase, a 'traumaculture' is emerging which centres the self as the conduit of the political through the performance of emotional display.<sup>24</sup> 'Publics' are now constituted through discussion and debate but also through the collective experience of 'feeling'.

The publication of photos of the missing and the dead by the newspapers in July 2005 must be seen in this context. Photos of those missing or dead after violent events are not new in the British press. But it wasn't until the bomb in Omagh in 1998 that every victim of a single event was pictured by almost all newspapers. And in July 2005 the photos of the dead and missing were printed again and again by the papers, as part of their news reporting, as elements of their commentaries and analysis, as part of obituaries, even in a free supplement to the *Evening Standard* – and the photos also all appeared again on newspaper websites. Might this widespread reproduction of photos of the dead and missing that summer say something about a contemporary cultural desire for spectral images which produce shudders of grief and fear and horror in those who see them? Shudders which acknowledge ghosts only insofar as they effect a suitably nuanced emotional topography for the viewing public? Shudders which produce a specifically *sentimental* political subject?<sup>25</sup>

And here I have to recall that I didn't buy that *Evening Standard* with those photographs – I picked it up from where it had been dropped by whoever did buy it – which suggests that all those spectral presences can also be discarded as easily as the trash left after fast-food meal. Avital Ronell perhaps describes looking at photos like those of the missing and dead in the *Standard* most precisely. In relation to watching television in the United States in the 1990s, she says that 'seeing *itself*, without the assistance of cognition or memory, suffices to make the subject responsible. It is a responsibility that is neither alert, vigilant, particularly present, nor informed'.<sup>26</sup> That is, some images attract us, engage us, compel us to look,

but to no particular end. They evoke no sense of responsibility to different, even unknowable others, in the sense implied by Derrida. We don't know what to do once we've seen them, apart from feel something. So we might decide to throw them away, or indeed to write an essay about them.

All these concerns serve to concentrate my concern in this essay with the photographs of the missing and dead who were not bombers. What were those photos doing in the newspapers in July 2005? What effects were they having? What politics were being mobilised through the paper's invitations to mourn the people they pictured? What sense of responsibility?

### **THE LIVING, THE DEAD AND A COMMUNITY OF NORMALITY**

As I've already noted, photographs of these victims of the bombings came from a variety of sources. Some were holiday snaps, or family photographs; others suggest driving licences or work permits; others are formal portraits taken at graduation. The newspapers almost always cropped them, however, so that all that was left was a picture of the face of the dead person: dead but looking so alive.<sup>27</sup> The papers also usually showed groups of these photographs together. The faces in the photographs were thus both decontextualised and serialised. They were also accompanied in every paper by a few key facts about the person they showed – facts which on the one hand served to give some detail to their lives, but on the other, and more effectively, I think, served to emphasise what they all had in common. And what they all had in common was that they worked, that they were travelling to work when they were killed, and that they had family and friends desperately concerned for them. Indeed, it was striking just how much these individuals were made part of their family by the newspapers' reporting. Only three of the dead were given any sort of public, political life in reports about their lives.<sup>28</sup> Everybody else was described by and through their families, and to a much lesser degree their work.

The dead were repeatedly described as 'normal' and 'ordinary' by the broadsheets; 'innocent' was the term preferred by tabloids. The obituaries printed in the *Guardian* were headed 'ordinary lives', for example. The

ordinariness of the dead who weren't bombers was also established by the ordinary, normal photographs of them that the newspapers reproduced. In the case of *The Times*, obituaries of those killed by the bombs were added to its usual obituary columns over several weeks. The obituaries in that paper are usually of public servants, or influential cultural or political figures, and are usually accompanied by some sort of portrait photograph which gives a clue as to their public activities. On 16 July, for example, the main obituary was of the founder of a well-known pub theatre, and he was shown in a large photograph in the bar of the pub. In contrast, the five photos that accompanied the much shorter and more crowded obituaries of the bomb victims on the same day were small and head-only, suggesting that they were ordinary folk who had no broader, public importance. *The Sun* produced this ordinariness (of photos and people) in a different way, choosing to mimic loosely the format of a family photo album on the pages where they printed twenty photos of the missing on 10 July; the pages were black, the photos were framed in white and put at angles to each other, and under each picture the name of the person was written in a font that looked a bit like handwriting. In both cases, the photos of the bombed dead were photos just like you and I take, and the people in them look just like you and I do when we are photographed: happy, exuberant, a bit self-conscious, red-eye-d, awkward, smiling dutifully, over-exposed.

The ordinary, innocent normality of the bomb victims, then, was established by the newspapers in both their text and images. But the papers also attempted to enrol their readers into the same normality that the bomb victims had apparently occupied. *The Sun's* family album pages, for example, emphasised the similarities between the dead and its readers, or at least between the family snaps of each. *The Sun* also directly exhorted its readers to take part in the two-minute silence that was to be held in memory of the dead on 13 July, urging us to 'play your part in the United Kingdom'.<sup>29</sup> It was the *Evening Standard*, though, that displayed the greatest range of tactics to pull its readers into a certain sort of relationship with the dead.

*The Standard* is London's commuter paper: it's published in the late afternoon and early evening for people to read on their journey home. Textually, it actually did rather less than some other papers to emphasise the

unique character of London and how it would pull through this latest attack; it wasn't until two weeks after the attack that its running header for its reporting of the bombs and their after aftermath changed from 'London Bombings' to 'London United', and that only for a few days. However, in terms of interpellating its readers into an imagined community with the bomb victims, it was particularly active. It used several strategies, including posters and projecting the posters onto London landmarks, but I want to discuss just one. It was its most subtle – and the reason I've just used the term 'imagined community'. Benedict Anderson, writing about the emergence of nationalism in the eighteenth century, remarks that one of the most important ways in which people could imagine themselves as part of what he called the 'imagined community' of a nation was by envisaging shared practices that all of a nation's citizens could participate in.<sup>30</sup> One of those activities was reading a newspaper, 'performed in silent privacy', says Anderson, but with an awareness that the same ceremony is being 'replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others'.<sup>31</sup> So, one of the ways in which the *Standard* aligned its readers with the dead who were not bombers was by asking them to read interviews with commuters undertaking their ordinary journeys just as the dead had done on the morning of 7 July. In these interviews, commuters repeatedly insisted that they weren't especially brave but that life had to go on, they weren't going to be disrupted from their routines by the threat of bombs, that normality should prevail. These words were read by commuters undertaking their own routine journeys, sitting on trains and buses, reading these words, seeing others read the same words in the same newspaper, and by participating in that routine performing the very normality the interviewees were describing.

So the framing of the photographs in the newspapers insisted powerfully on the ordinary normality of both the dead who weren't bombers and the people reading the newspapers. Clearly, this emphasis on their normality erased a great deal of the specificity of the lives of the dead. All the dead were discursively reduced to the status of victims with grieving families, killed on their way to that most normal of activities, work.

There was also another reduction at work in the newspapers' reporting, however. This was a temporal and spatial 'fixing' of the dead at

specific times and places; the bomb victims were fixed at the time and place of their death. The press obsessively repeated at what times the bombs went off and maps of their locations. Repeatedly, reporting was structured around the locations of the bus and the three underground stations. There was something of a problem here, though, because of course many of the dead were immigrants to London from elsewhere and many had family and friends abroad. The fact that so many of the victims were from, or had close connections with, other parts of the world was discursively negotiated by the newspapers by arguing – with help from a speech by mayor of London – that such cosmopolitanism was in fact a quality unique to London.<sup>32</sup>

This fixing of the dead at the time and place of their death meant that there was very little reporting of any of the funerals. And this reinforced their fixing in London between 8.51 and 9.47 on the morning of 7 July 2005, because reports of funerals would have been spread out over weeks (it took a long time to identify bodies), and would also have had to spread beyond London and the UK as the families of the dead who were migrants took bodies to funerals elsewhere in the world.<sup>33</sup>

(And while the dead were positioned in London as Londoners, the ‘terrorists’ were given global connections. This was particularly clear in the maps of each produced by the newspapers. Maps demonstrating the bombs’ locations where so many died only showed central London; but maps accompanying stories about the bombers consistently showed their purported links with different locations: London, Leeds, Lahore, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Egypt. This effort to place the bombers abroad was made rather difficult by the fact that the bombers were actually all born in the UK, of course; indeed, all the newspapers felt compelled to print photos of the birth certificates of the four bombers which confirmed their British citizenship, as if their readers just wouldn’t believe this unless they saw firm evidence.)

Those killed by the London bombs were placed in specific spatialities and temporalities, then. The dead who weren’t bombers were fixed as normal with jobs, families and friends; fixed in a specific time, the moment of their death; and fixed in a specific place, the place of the bombs. In all that fixing, their specificity was erased. The question of *responsibility* in relation to these dead was framed by the newspapers only as a question of ‘carrying

on as normal' ('it's what they would have wanted'): that is, again making us as normal as they apparently were. These efforts to place us, newspaper readers, in community with them, as the same as them, the same because we live as they lived – these were attempts to erase differences between us and them. And it's that erasure that makes looking at the photos of the dead compelling, but in the end, not so scary, so that the newspaper with those photos can be thrown away, so that the photos can be repeatedly copied and even given away in a free supplement to the *Evening Standard*. They look like us, they lived like us: the only difference between us and them is that they died and we are still alive. And nothing can be done about that one, brute difference allowed to remain. So their photos become no more than 'poignant' (the term used by *Daily Mail* to describe its website display of dead and missing photos).<sup>34</sup> They become an experience not to be missed, but, in the end, just another disposable experience.

Thus the photos of the missing and dead were framed in such a way as to demand attention but also passivity; we were being asked to be moved, but then to move on. But as I've said, I think it's necessary to make looking at those photos much more of a problem: to resist incorporation into a normal which can only grieve its same; a normal which, while it might be superficially multicultural, is certainly not open to the radical differences of a globalised world; a normal which insists that violent death must come, in part at least, from elsewhere; a normal which, in a world in which vulnerability to death is highly unequally distributed, reasserts the privilege of the global North even if it requires a fantasy of hard, armoured police bodies to do it.

I think it's necessary to learn to look differently at the dead.

## **LEARNING TO LOOK DIFFERENTLY**

What then might be a more critical way of looking at those killed by the bombs than the constitution of the a-responsible community of normality described above? This section will suggest that the newspapers themselves also offer some resources for learning another way of seeing those photographic spectres.

But first it's important to say a bit more about what a more responsible way of looking might consist of. In her book *Threshold of the Visible World*, Kaja Silverman develops what she calls an 'ethics in the field of vision' which is helpful here.<sup>35</sup> Writing from a Lacanian position, she suggests that ways of seeing are so deeply embedded in the dynamics of our subjectivities that we cannot rely on images alone to shift them, although images do indeed offer resources for other ways of seeing. Instead, learning to see differently is something to be worked at: 'the ethical becomes operative not at the moment when unconscious desires and phobias assume possession of our look, but in a subsequent moment, when we take stock of what we have "seen", and attempt – within an inevitably limited self-knowledge – to look again, differently'.<sup>36</sup> Silverman's discussion suggests that ethics in the field of vision has two key components. Both focus on problematising the relation between the spectator and the image. Firstly, ethical looking should 'respect the otherness of the newly illuminated bodies'.<sup>37</sup> That is, the specificity of those pictured should be recognised. Silverman also argues that the limits to our understanding of that uniqueness should also be acknowledged. Looking ethically should constitute a modest witness, not an all-knowing one whose own subjectivity becomes more powerful for claiming to know others. And this modesty is the second component of Silverman's visual ethics: ethical looking should not work to shore up the subjectivity of the person looking at the expense of the person being looked at. Some disjoining *should* be at work. Silverman's 'ethics', then, flesh out what this essay has so far been describing as 'responsible' looking.

In relation to the photos under discussion here, disjoining seems particularly necessary as a tactic that resists *both* their co-option into that community of normality *and* ours. If those photographs are to be spectral in Derrida's sense as well as Barthes's, if their ghosts are to 'give notice that something is missing',<sup>38</sup> we need to look at them in a way that interrupts the communalities between us and them, that opens a gap both between and within.

It has to be said that looking again, differently – indeed, the act of looking at all – was remarkably unproblematised in the British newspapers after the bombs. The emphasis in all the papers immediately after the

attacks was on eye-witness accounts, the reliability of which was never questioned. There was also an enthusiasm for the photos sent in to websites (particularly the BBC news website) from survivors' mobile phones, for their immediacy and authenticity; most papers printed phone photos of people walking along the underground tunnels away from the bombed trains. The papers were also struck by the missing posters that appeared on the walls at Kings Cross station, noting that these copied the posters that appeared after the plane attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001 and after the tsunami in December 2004.<sup>39</sup> Although the technology and formats of photography were acknowledged to be changing, then, nonetheless these were all photos being used in time-honoured tradition of photojournalism, as seemingly transparent windows onto the world, turning those of us who weren't there into apparent witnesses of places and people. Yet despite this lack of reflexivity, and despite all their work of fixing, incorporating and disposing, some of the newspaper photographs do hint at ways of looking responsibly that don't erase the specificity of those killed by the bombers or make the images that tell of their death so unproblematic.

This is the case for two reasons, both to do with the specificity of newspapers as a certain kind of media. Firstly, newspapers work with a different temporality from other news media. Several commentators have noted the importance of speed, immediacy and liveness to both tv and web news reporting.<sup>40</sup> Newspapers, in contrast, now very rarely break news. Instead, they offer description but, more importantly, reaction and analysis to things that have already happened, and about which they often assume their readers will already know the bare facts. Newspapers thus occupy a somewhat more reflective position in relation to events than do screen-based media. The still images that they carry, then, also allow a different relation between spectator and photo than do photographs on a screen. They allow the possibility, at least, of pausing, reflecting, and looking again at what you've already seen.

Secondly, newspaper photos do indeed show us things, which we can then respond to in various ways. And some of the photographs carried by the newspapers after the bombings last July show me a very different

relation to photographs than the one the newspapers themselves were enacting.

On 23 July, page 9 of the *Daily Express* carried a photograph of the funeral of David Foulkes, who was buried the previous day in Oldham, near Manchester. It suggests a quite different relation to a photograph than the one used in the press. It showed his girlfriend crying, and holding a large framed photo of him, face out and obscured by her arms. This was not a photo acting as a window onto the world. It looked much more like a tangible memory of something irrevocably lost. It wasn't on display, it was not being looked at and could not be; but it was being held, tightly. And this wasn't the only photo of a photograph being held rather than looked at that the papers printed. There were many others, particularly of friends and family with photos of the missing people they were searching for immediately after the attacks.

Photography is often discussed as a purely visual phenomenon. Photographs are equated with images. Barthes, though (like the woman holding onto a photo at a funeral) knew differently, as he sorted through his mother's photograph collection in the flat they shared after her death. Sitting at a desk, he says, under a lamp, turning over photo after photo. This is not an account of photographs as disembodied images. Rather, it is an account of photographs as visual objects that are collected, stored, touched and held. It is an account of the materiality of photographs as well as an account of their visuality. And what I want to suggest, learning from that *Daily Express* photo as well as from Barthes and others, is that thinking through the materiality as well as the visuality of photographs might be a way in which I can learn to see certain photographs a little more responsibly.

Thinking about photos as objects instead of images – or, rather, as objects as well as images – can be a way of engaging with them responsibly, it seems to me, because, following the work of a number of anthropologists like Arjun Appadurai and Nicholas Thomas, objects are deeply imbricated in social relations.<sup>41</sup> To explore the ‘social life of objects’ is thus also to examine the webs, fractures and ambivalences of human sociability. So here goes. Photos are like other objects: they have shape, form, weight, durability, pattern, colour and texture. They are objects, like other objects,

entangled in the practices of people and indispensable to some of those practices; objects whose specific qualities are animated when things are done with them; objects which, through such doings, participate in the constitution of subjects. And the most significant anthropological insight for this project is that photos can be thought of as objects, like other objects, with which *different* things are done and *various* demands and responses are made. Objects may have inherent material and visual qualities, but how these are drawn upon can vary immensely: Thomas remarks that 'objects are not what they were made to be but what they have become'.<sup>42</sup>

This argument liberates those photographs of the missing and the dead from their normalising by the newspapers by insisting that their use there was just one use of the many they might be put to. And thinking about their many other possible uses, I suggest, is one way to return some specificity to the missing and the dead. When and where were the photos that the newspapers reproduced taken? Where were they kept? A photo for a work pass: what job? Where? What other jobs had that person held? Who did they work with? What other photos did they carry to work in their purse? Of who? What other photos did they come home to? A holiday snap. Where? When? Who took it? Who else has copies? Who has framed it, forgotten it, defaced it, stuck it under a fridge magnet? Such, well, *practical* questions may be far removed from punctal shudderings or Milton-esque pronouncements on the spectacle; but they may also do an effective job in resisting the erasure of differences between the missing and the dead, and between them and us, their newspaper viewers.

Moreover, asking such questions entails recognising that photographs are mobile objects. They travel. They travel with people (and increasingly now, in digital form, without them). They are often photos of travellers (passports, driving licences), and people carry photos of those they are leaving or those they are joining. People send photos of their children to friends and family, they display family photos of family far away, or dead, in their homes; photos are looked at, in returns to other times and places.<sup>43</sup> So what would happen if, instead of fixing the photos of those faces of the missing in the specific times and places of the London bombs, I learnt to see them on the move? This would mean asking questions about where

particular photos were taken, produced, reproduced, disseminated. In other words, what circulations might we imagine? Indeed, what circulations actually exist? What spatialities and temporalities might they rely on and produce that would challenge their fixing by the newspapers? Placing photos in their patterns of circulation would be another way to begin release those pictured by the papers from their fixing in London and the morning of 7 July 2005.

Photographs, then, could be seen as dispersed and mobile presences, found on mantelpieces and in wallets, on t-shirts and posters in the streets of London as well as in newspapers. In these places, they substitute for absent people – they give them presence, in ways that Barthes emphasised – and because of that, they participate in complex relational geographies of memory, desire, love and loss, ageing, change and grief. Indeed, family photographs can be particularly powerful materialisations of relations and emotions (as well as the most banal of everyday objects). It's for this reason that it was hard to know where to look when faced with some of those photos in the newspapers of a woman or man holding a photo of someone they were searching for – at the face of the person who might be dead or terribly injured, or the face of the person often distraught with not knowing. The grief of those people holding the photos reminds me of Butler's remark about 'the thrall in which our relations with others holds us'.<sup>44</sup>

'I think I have lost "you" only to discover that "I" have gone missing as well. At another level, perhaps what I have lost "in" you, that for which I have no ready vocabulary, is a relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor you, but is to be conceived as *the tie* by which those terms are differentiated and related'.<sup>45</sup>

Butler may lack a ready vocabulary for that tie, as do most of us, but what many people have are photographs. And when that tie can no longer be articulated corporeally, then photographs are held, touched, hugged and clutched. Writing this essay, I've learnt that it's not only the faces of those who died that have been haunting me: it's also the spectral ties they trail, the

broken ties, the grief and mourning that surrounds them, the invisible people who haunt these photos, who come from many different places, whose ties no longer bind in the ways they once did. Their grief will always place a limit on what I can think and say about the photos of their dead by reminding me that I will never be able to look at them as they do.

I've suggested here that thinking of photographs as mobile objects, dependent on what is done with them for their specific and variable effects, might be one way of resisting the incorporation of both those who died as a result of the bombers' actions, and those who were shown pictures of them in the papers, into a community of normality in which the question of responsibility is irrelevant. It resists that incorporation by evoking both the specificity of, and the complex geographies and histories through which, those lives were lived. It establishes differences among those who died, as well as between them and those who looked at their pictures after 7 July 2005. My own knowledge of those specificities and circuits will never be complete, and acknowledging this incompleteness is also a necessary component of a more responsible way of seeing those particular photos.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The *Evening Standard* on 8 July 2005 showed its readers pages of ordinary, everyday photos. What I've been arguing is that their haunting presence, in that newspaper and others, was mobilised to constitute a particular community of 'us', the normal, against 'them', the 'terrorists'. 'We' were a community because all of us in it were produced as the same. And that sameness served to erase questions of responsibility. 'We' did not have to think about how to negotiate 'our' relation to the dead, because the only difference between us and them was that we were still alive. Hence 'our' looking at the newspaper photographs was never made difficult.

In the face of this particular effect of a certain way of seeing, my questions have been – how might I learn to look at those faces differently, in a way that acknowledges both difference and a responsibility to engage modestly with that difference? How should I learn to live with these particular

*revenants?* What relation to these ghosts in particular should I try to cultivate?

The answers offered here have been tentative, and specific to just some photographs and their discursive and performative fixing by British newspapers last summer. Drawing on both critical theory and what people do with photos, I've argued that we need to make a space for looking again, for seeing and thinking and feeling differently about these photos. And that for all their efforts to constitute the photos of the dead as unproblematic to look at, newspapers might offer some sort of that space, because they don't rush their readers through events. Newspapers are places where pictures can be looked at and looked again – as well as discarded.

I've suggested that thinking of photos as objects, in use, travelling, shadowing the fluid and dispersed geographies of lives, might be a way of returning some specificity to the dead. And lest too detailed maps start to be drawn of those journeys, in case we start to appropriate and benefit from those journeys ourselves, we should remember that the photos are themselves haunted, since they also circulate in a far-from mappable affective circuit of presence and absence, life and death, mourning and loss. They are haunted by those who still cling to those photos as a trace of a togetherness that once was different. Their grief, which doesn't need to look at their photos while simultaneously holding on to them, is finally what halts me.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, translated by Richard Howard, 2000, London, Vintage, p87, p9.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning, and the New International*, translated by Peggy Kamuf, 1994, London, Routledge, pxviii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pxix.

<sup>4</sup> Nancy K. Miller, "'Portraits of Grief': telling details and the testimony of trauma', *Differences* 18 (2003), 112-135.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Kodak moments, flashbulb memories: reflections on 9/11', *TDR The Drama Review: Journal of Performance Studies* 4 (2003), 11-48, p30, quoting Maya Lin.

- <sup>6</sup> For a similar critique, see Mieke Bal, 'Light writing: portraiture in a post-traumatic age', *Mosaic* 17 (2004), 1-19.
- <sup>7</sup> Retort Collective, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, 2005, London, Verso, p21.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., p19.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., p21.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., p127.
- <sup>11</sup> Retort, 'All quiet on the Eastern front', *New Left Review* 41 (2006), 88-91, p.88; Retort, 'An exchange on *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*', *October* 115 (2006), 3-12, p.8.
- <sup>12</sup> Other critics have suggested that Retort are themselves too dazzled by the spectacular to imagine other ways of seeing: see Gopal Balakrishnan, 'States of war', *New Left Review* 36 (2005), 5-32, and Julian Stallabrass, 'Spectacle and terror', *New Left Review* 37 (2006), 87-106.
- <sup>13</sup> Retort, 'An exchange', p7.
- <sup>14</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, translated by S. Heath, 1977, London, Fontana, 15-31.
- <sup>15</sup> On photojournalism, see Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye*, 1998, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- <sup>16</sup> Op. cit., p34.
- <sup>17</sup> Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq*, 2004, Oxford: Blackwell.
- <sup>18</sup> Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, 1997, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- <sup>19</sup> Op. cit., p28.
- <sup>20</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p91.
- <sup>21</sup> Patricia Yaeger, 'Consuming trauma; or, the pleasures of merely circulating', *Journal X* 1 (1997), 226-51.
- <sup>22</sup> Peter Brooker, 'Terrorism and counter-narratives: Don DeLillo and the New York imaginary', *New Formations* 57 (2005/6), 10-25, p25.
- <sup>23</sup> See in particular Lauren Berlant, 'Poor Eliza', *American Literature* 70 (1998), 635-68; Wendy Brown, 'Wounded attachments: late modern oppositional political formations', in J. Rajchman (ed.) *The Identity in Question*, 1995, London, Routledge, pp.199-228.
- <sup>24</sup> Roger Luckhurst, 'Traumaculture', *New Formations*, 50 (2003), 28-47; and see Nigel Thrift, 'Intensities of feeling', *Geografiska Annaler* 86B (2004), 57-78.
- <sup>25</sup> The phrase 'sentimental politics' is from Berlant, op. cit. See also Gillian Rose, 'Who should care for which dead and how? British newspaper reporting of the bombings in London, July 2005' (forthcoming) *Geoforum*.
- <sup>26</sup> Avital Ronell, *Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium*, 1994, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, p305.
- <sup>27</sup> An exception to this was *The Mail on Sunday*, which tended to use the full photo; this usually meant that family and friends were pictured with the dead man or woman.
- <sup>28</sup> One had been active in the Polish Solidarity Campaign in the 1980s; another was an anti-poverty campaigner; and a third was a community activist.

- <sup>29</sup> *The Sun*, 13 July 2005, pp6-7.
- <sup>30</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 1983, London, Verso.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp39-40.
- <sup>32</sup> Brooker talks about how after 11 September 2001, New York was imagined through a 'combined sense of local belonging, patriotism and global centrality' which effectively assimilated the radical cultural differences within the city: op. cit., p17.
- <sup>33</sup> Differences in funeral practices were also denied, with the *Evening Standard* claiming after one funeral that there would be '51 other funerals just like Ms Brandt's': *Evening Standard*, 29 July 2005, p7. Exceptionally, the *Guardian* reported on a funeral in Turkey: *Guardian*, 21 July 2005, pp12-13.
- <sup>34</sup> *Daily Mail*, 9 July 2005, p8.
- <sup>35</sup> Kaja Silverman, *Threshold of the Visible World*, 1996, London, Routledge.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., p173.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., p2.
- <sup>38</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p15.
- <sup>39</sup> *Daily Mail* 9 July 2005, pp2-3.
- <sup>40</sup> David Campany, 'Late photography', in D. Green (ed.), *Where is the Photograph?*, 2003, Brighton, Photoforum, pp123-32. I am referring specifically to news reporting here; there are certainly other sorts of websites which have hosted discussions about the London bomb photographs.
- <sup>41</sup> Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction: commodities and the politics of value', in A. Appadurai, (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, 1986, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp3-63; Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture and Colonialism in the Pacific*, 1991, London, Harvard University Press. See also Christopher Pinney, 'Introduction: how the other half... photography's other histories', in C. Pinney and N. Peterson (eds) *Photography's Other Histories*, 2003, Durham, Duke University Press, pp1-14; Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World*, 1997, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., p4.
- <sup>43</sup> Peter Osborne, *Travelling Light: Photography, Travel and Visual Culture*, 2000, Manchester, Manchester University Press; Gillian Rose, 'Domestic spacings and family photography: a case study', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 28, 1 (2003), 5-18 .
- <sup>44</sup> Op. cit., p23.
- <sup>45</sup> Op. cit., p22.

