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The Persistence of the Documentary Photobook in the Age of the Web

Abstract: Several artists who take into consideration the existence of the Internet in their process of documenting the world remain faithful to the photography book. They find in the codex an experience that a screen remains incapable of providing. The adoption of the book by some documentarist artists engages appropriation practices from an ancient documentary project. *War Primer 2* by Broomberg & Chanarin and *Less Américains* by Mishka Henner reproduce pre-existing books, respectively *The ABC of War* by Bertolt Brecht and *The Americans* by Robert Frank. The renewed interest of artists and photographers in books can be explained by a logic of comparison between the two media: the emergence of the web, with its formats and specificities, makes it possible to better appreciate, by analogy and distinction, what characterizes books and the web, and what makes their respective languages.

However, rather than thinking of the modes of publication as alternatives, some of the artists merge their logic by resorting to online self-publishing platforms that allow the self-production and self-distribution of books. The artist Mishka Henner stands out in particular for his systematic production of books on self-publishing sites.

Keywords: appropriation; documentary; quotation; recycling; self-publishing.

If by books you are to be understood as referring to our innumerable collections of paper, printed, sewed, and bound in a cover announcing the title of the work, I own to you frankly that I do not believe (and the progress of electricity and modern mechanism forbids me to believe) that Gutenberg's invention can do otherwise than sooner or later fall into desuetude as a means of current interpretation of our mental products.¹

In 1894, in *The End of Books*, Octave Uzanne imagined a society in which the codex had disappeared and had been replaced by voice content recorded on cylinders and broadcast by cable. Despite his prophecies and those that came with the advent of digital media much later, the book is still very much alive. Even though the printed press has been weakened by a shift in readership to online reading and a shift

¹ Octave Uzanne, Albert Robida, *The End of Book* (1894), <https://vestiges-journal.info/CSACMonog/Uzanne/uzanne.html>, acc. on March 13, 2022.

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in advertising revenue to websites, books are still being published, magazines have not disappeared, libraries and bookstores are still open, and many artists continue to produce printed works. “Photobooks are the new cats”,² writes Dan Abbe in an article dedicated to websites presenting books of photographs. With this joke, the author highlights the recent craze for this sort of work and draws an incongruous relationship between the countless internet photos of pets (e.g. “lolcats”) and the proliferation of sites dedicated to the editing of photographs. Indeed, artists who use the medium of photography in the digital age find an experience in the codex non-available with a screen. The scrolling of the digital page by an index finger positioned on a mouse eventually differs from pages flipped by the same damp index finger. Reading on paper offers an interface considered as more comfortable. The paper, the ink, the smell of the print, the size and weight of the object, the bookbinding are sensory experiences that a laptop and a smartphone are unable to provide. While the Web, as we know it, was formalized in the early 2000s, there was an unprecedented enthusiasm for books made by photographers. Major Western cities began to have specialized fairs, and the major photographic festivals began to host their own publishing fairs. In the more theoretical field, several works on this theme were published.³

Through many examples, this article shows the persistence of the photobook among artists with a documentary practice. These artists seem to be engaged in a practice of appropriating old documentary projects to reflect on the relevance of the photobook as a medium in the internet age.

I – A Game of Quotations

Some artists’ embrace of the book involves a game of citations from a previous documentary photography project, which has become well-known due to its dissemination in edited form. For example, Mishka Henner’s *Less Américains* is a reworking of a seminal book in the documentary photography community, *The Americans*. The story is well known⁴: a Guggenheim fellowship obtained with the support of Walker Evans allowed Robert Frank to travel across the United States in 1955. The photographer made a road trip in the spirit of the beat generation. Imbued with disillusionment, his documentation of the North American people is achieved in a context of strong racial segregation, far from the glossy and polished idea of the American dream. He offered the reader an affirmed subjectivity made of cut and blurs, thus renewing the documentary aesthetic that was mainly characterized by the frontality and the sharpness of the documentary style.

² Dan Abbe, “2012 Is the Year of Photobooks Online,” *Popular Photography* (March 2, 2012), <https://www.pop-photo.com/american-photo/2012-year-photobooks-online>, acc. on March 13, 2022.

³ Andrew Roth, ed., *The Book of 101 Books: Seminal Photographic Books of the Twentieth Century* (New York: LLP/PPP Editions, 2001). Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, *The Photobook: A History – Volume I* (London: Phaidon Press, 2004).

⁴ See W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *Que veulent les images? Une critique de la culture visuelle* [2005], ed. by Maxime Boidy, Nicolas Cilins, Stéphane Roth (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2014), 289.

Inspired by the recycling gestures characteristic of post-photography, Henner says he applies the idea of “taking photographs,” as if it were already there⁵ and combines French and American editions of Robert Frank’s seminal work. The original book was published by French publisher Robert Delpire in 1958. The 84 photographs selected by the artist are presented on the right-hand page accompanied on the left-hand page by texts relating to North America by authors such as Simone de Beauvoir, William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, Henry Miller, and John Steinbeck. The following year, the American edition was published by Grove Press. The layout is identical, but the texts are replaced by short captions indicating the locations of the photographs. The photographs are preceded by a preface written by Jack Kerouac. From the first edition, Henner preserves the cover illustrated with lines of notebooks, which he pulls from Saul Steinberg’s drawings. From the second, he uses the preface by Kerouac, and some of the words in the captions. After borrowing the book from a library and scanning the pages, he integrates the elements that make it up into various independent layers using an image-processing software. He removes or keeps each layer after testing different combinations until the final selection. The result is fragmented and scattered forms. The essay by Jack Kerouac that introduces the book in English is now credited to the Dutch artist and poet Elisabeth Tonnard, who eliminated the letters from the word A.M.E.R.I.C.A.I.N.S., leaving an incomprehensible sequence of vowels and consonants. Henner’s title combines in a play on words *Less*, and *Américains* in French to emphasise the gesture of erasure made throughout the pages. On the cover, “Photographies de Robert Frank” is replaced by “Images par Mishka Henner”. The terminological shift testifies to a new status for representations that no longer seem to be able to claim the status of photography.

The technical image, considered as a visual object that is already there and reproducible, is at the heart of the *appropriationist* approaches of the 1970s and 1980s, by Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince and Cindy Sherman. Under the name Picture Generation, these artists turned away from a project of *tabula rasa* promoted by modernist as well as conceptual artists. Post-modernist photography was regarded not as a medium of depiction of reality, nor even as an autonomous medium in which an artist could investigate essence and limits, but rather as an instrument of replication and appropriation, and as an agent of deconstruction of modernist philosophy.⁶ In this connection, Robert Rauschenberg is considered a precursor. It is from this artist that Henner claims to have taken up the gesture of erasure:

I saw an interview with Robert Rauschenberg, and he made a piece in 1953 called *Erased de Kooning* where he took a painting by Willem de Kooning and erased it. It was a time when abstract expressionism had kind of really dominated the art world and dominated notions of what

⁵ Robert Shore, *Post-Photography: The Artist with a Camera* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2014), 8.

⁶ Douglas Crimp, *Pictures, S'appropriier la photographie. New York 1979–2014* (Cherbourg-Octeville: Le Point du Jour, 2016).

art should be, and I felt like I really thought that it could be an interesting thing to explore.⁷

With *Erased de Kooning* Rauschenberg created an artwork by removing the original creator which only the title added by Jasper Johns makes visible. This act was a striking challenge to the sacred figure of the author. By “attacking” such a canonical photobook, Henner was asking, in a postmodernist attitude, what to create after Robert Frank. With Rauschenberg, however, the gesture was revolutionary because it destroyed the piece forever. In the case of *Less Américains*, Henner altered digital copies of a book with a print run of several thousand copies, which itself was composed of photographs that could be copied by nature. So, the subversive impact is very weak. Moreover, the gestures of appropriation and modification have become a common language in the age of digital reproducibility. However, Henner recounts that he provoked strong protests by altering the famous work and concludes that “there’s a fetishization of vintage work where the images are seen as untouchable”⁸. By applying to a canonical creation gesture that have become ordinary with the help of a recent widespread technology, Henner allows us to grasp how much the notion of property, when it concerns digital data, has dissolved in favor of a collective conception of goods and how much these now commonplace uses contradict older systems of thought.

On the other hand, the connection between *Erased de Kooning* and *The Américains*, invites us to analyze Frank’s images through the perspective of erasure. Frank already proceeds by cutting out the events: from the parade or the rodeo, the reader sees only the audience attentive to a spectacle that escapes him, from the funeral, he perceives only the drivers of the cars waiting in the background for the end of the ceremony, from the motorama, he discerns only the young boys sitting in a vehicle. More radically according to W.J.T Mitchell, Robert Frank operates by decapitation.⁹ The photographer’s work is thus singularized by a loss of visibility, which Henner’s gesture of suppression manifests and radicalizes. In his remake,¹⁰ as he calls it, there remain silhouettes, U.S. flags have lost their stars, forms have become unrecognizable. The preserved elements, which float in the white space, constitute only thin clues that do not allow to restore the scene. The captions contain only generic place or big city names. The artist explains in an interview that he worked at Panos Picture, an agency that produces reports with a social dimension for the media. He adds that he began to doubt the documentary efficiency of photography, particularly its capacity to “change things and perceptions”,¹¹ and that he then oriented his activity towards art. He creat-

⁷ Mishka Henner in Stacey Baker, “Erasing the Americans,” *The 6th Floor (The New York Times Magazine)* (2012), <https://6thfloor.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/28/erasing-americans>, acc. on March 13, 2022.

⁸ Mishka Henner in Collin Pantall, “Less Is More,” *British Journal of Photography* 159, 7799 (April 2012), <https://www.carrollfletcher.com/user/library/documents/main/less-americains-pantall-bjp.pdf>, acc. on July 11, 2022.

⁹ Mitchell, *Que veulent les images?* 289.

¹⁰ <https://mishkahenner.com/Less-Americains>, acc. on March 13, 2022.

¹¹ Joël Vacheron, *Pouvez-vous nous parler. Mishka Henner. Interview par Joël Vacheron* (Le Locle: Musée des Beaux-Arts Le Locle, 2016), 4, <http://www.mbal.ch/mbalwp/wp-content/uploads/MBAL-HENNER-FR.pdf>, acc. on June 28, 2022.

ed *Less Américains* the same year that he left his agency, testifying to the confusion he felt about the documentary process that Frank had already explored.

While differing in many ways, particularly in that it proceeds by addition rather than by subtraction, Broomberg & Chanarin's *War Primer 2* has in common with the precedent work to engage in a reflection on the present based on the appropriation of an old book. *War Primer 2* proposes an extension of Bertolt Brecht's *War Primer (Kriegsfibel)*. The German playwright produced the book with his collaborator Ruth Berlau from 1944 and presented what he called "photo-epigrams": images of the Second World War taken from the press and put in relation with quatrains that extend the meaning of the photographs.

The reworking by the artist duo is based on the English publication of 1998, published by Libris and edited by Brecht scholar John Willett. The artists added to this edition textual elements such as the title, quotes by means of silk-screening, and eighty-five photographs printed in color by collage. These digital photographs were gathered from soldiers' or civilians' blogs, among the results returned by typing Brecht's poetry¹² into the Google search box.¹³ By drawing iconographic material from the Web, Broomberg & Chanarin update the way images are obtained:

We first read an essay about it by David Evans and then got the original book which loitered around our studio for years... [...] We began as Brecht did, cutting out images from broadsheets but soon realised (and following his dictum to not 'follow the good old things but the bad new ones') that if Brecht was alive he would be trawling the Internet, not sitting in the British library. The book is really about how photographic strategies (particularly in documenting war) have changed in just 50 years. Now everyone has a camera, from drones, to grandmothers, and each offers another political view of the same event. We wanted to analyse this new playing field.¹⁴

In the 1940s, in the era of mechanical reproducibility, Brecht cut out images from the printed press. At the age of digital reproducibility, it is inevitably on the Web that the duo recovers images. The two artists also reveal a new iconography. While the Second World War was marked by aerial photography, it is the imagery from video surveillance that characterises the 'war on terror,' as the administration of President George W. Bush called the military campaigns conducted in response to the attacks of

¹² Brad Feuerhelm, "Broomberg & Chanarin Discuss God, Human Suffering and the Act of Divine Violence," *American Suburb X* (May 20, 2013), <http://www.americansuburbx.com/2013/05/asx-interview-broomberg-chanarin-divine-violence-2013.html>, acc. on March 13, 2022.

¹³ Alex Jackson, "Deutsche Börse Prize: Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin," *Port Magazine* (April 26, 2013), <http://www.port-magazine.com/art-photography/deutsche-borse-prize-adam-broomberg-and-oliver-chanarin>, acc. on March 13, 2022.

¹⁴ Jörg Colberg, "A Conversation with Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin," *Conscientious Photography Magazine*, (July 22, 2013), <https://cphmag.com/convo-broomberg-chanarin>, acc. on March 13, 2022.

September 11, 2001. On an aerial photograph of the German army bombing London, a still from a surveillance video shows one of the 9/11 terrorists (plate 24), and the routed German army soldiers are concealed by a still from the CCTV identifying the perpetrators of the London attack (plate 71). By showing this system of visualisation applied to the search for terrorists, the artists reveal the rhetoric justifying mass surveillance. For the viewer attentive to current events, many of the added images are recognisable. The retouched photograph of Iranian missiles, released by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in 2008, crosses the portrait of Goebbels under which is written “even my club foot seems a fake today” (plate 31). David Surowiecki’s photograph of falling bodies from the burning World Trade Centre covers part of the original plate by aligning the walls of the New York monument with those of the ruined buildings in Brecht’s chosen photograph (plate 75). The shot taken at Abu Ghraib prison of Lynndie England holding a detainee on a leash, masks the image of other political prisoners: the French captives of the Germans, back in their country (plate 76). In addition to the violence of war and war photography, the authors target the control of our perception of conflict through images and more generally the impact of media images in structuring our view of the world. Already Brecht wrote:

The tremendous development of photojournalism has contributed practically nothing to the revelation of the truth about the conditions in this world. On the contrary, photography, in the hands of the bourgeoisie, has become a terrible weapon against the truth. The vast amount of pictured material that is being disgorged daily by the press and that seems to have the character of truth serves in reality only to obscure the facts. The camera is just as capable of lying as is the typewriter.¹⁵

Brecht then develops a pedagogical approach which is reflected in the title of the work. He proposes to question the representations of the press, but more largely those which dominate the social relations. Thus, we discover the dialectical approach that is the foundation of Brecht’s epic play. The Brechtian dialectic maintains a principle of uncertainty in which the montage is the apparatus since this one “makes any authority of message or program equivocal, improbable, even impossible. It is because, in a montage [...], the elements – images and texts – take position (*prendre part*) instead of constituting themselves in discourse and taking sides (*prendre partie*).”¹⁶ The addition of images by Broomberg and Chanarin extends the Brechtian project. It is no coincidence that the artists refer to this work as a sequel.¹⁷ This word, which comes from the field of cinema, designates a suite, which is also indicated by the English title of Brecht’s book followed by the number 2. In *War Primer 2*, silkscreen and collage,

¹⁵ Bertolt Brecht in Bernadette Buckley, “The Politics of Photobooks: From Brecht’s *War Primer* (1955) to Broomberg and Chanarin’s *War Primer 2* (2011),” *Humanities* 7, 2 (2018), <http://www.mdpi.com/2076-0787/7/2/34/html>, acc. on March 13, 2022.

¹⁶ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Quand les images prennent position* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2009), 118.

¹⁷ <http://www.broombergchanarin.com/#/war-primer>, acc. June 18, 2018.

which proceed by overlapping, form new layers of images and texts like geological strata. The initial data remains discernible under this new information creating a dialogue. Plate 23 of *War Primer 2*, presenting an aerial view of a cloud of smoke escaping from several destroyed buildings, is partially covered by the photograph showing the arrival of the second plane on the burning Twin Towers. Brecht's epigram: "A cloud of smoke told us they were here. /They were the sons of the fire, not of the lights. They came from where? They came out from the darkness. /Where did they go? Into eternal night" is then frighteningly revived. On plate 49, the body of the Japanese man that a GI has just killed is extended by the superimposition of the image, taken at Abu Ghraib, of the corpse of an Iraqi man next to whom, almost sixty years later, another American soldier proudly poses. The images show that the same smoke rises from the bombed rubble and that soldiers are still killing supposed enemies.

Aside from paying respect to Brecht, who succeeded in closely blending creative and political demands, it is an issue of thinking about the present through the lens of the past. At the beginning of the 20th century, in the age of mechanical reproducibility, the generalization of halftone made possible an unprecedented presence of images in newspapers, publicity and the political sphere. A century later, in the era of digital reproducibility, images are produced and disseminated by *amateurs*, cameras film the street we cross 24/7, and the Web is the dominant source of information, making images captured by satellites or drones equipped with cameras accessible. Brecht was attentive to the role played by the photographic medium in capitalist ideology. He wrote "The new overcome the old but it must contain within itself the old that's been skipped over, it must sublimate it."¹⁸ The work of Broomberg and Chanarin is undoubtedly a judicious formulation of this conception of critical knowledge.

These works are close to artists' books as defined by Anne Moeglin-Delcroix:¹⁹ the formalization of the project of one or several artists. Contrary to the illustrated book, the artist's book does not proceed from a collaboration between a writer and a visual artist, which often supposes a relation of subordination of the image to the text, sometimes the opposite. Far from the books of bibliophily, rare, and artisanal, it is produced industrially like an ordinary work. It does not maintain an aesthetic of the handmade and displaces rather the mechanical logics of the classic edition in the field of art.²⁰ This form was thought by many artists, critics and theorists as an alternative to the exhibition by proposing distinct modes of visibility of the art, but also an economy of production and diffusion other. This conception of a radical political opposition to the exhibition was since nuanced.²¹ However, it would be tempting to consider the

¹⁸ Bertolt Brecht in Tom Kuhn, Steve Giles, ed., *Brecht on Art and Politics* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 235.

¹⁹ Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, *Esthétique du livre d'artiste* [1997] (Marseille, Paris: Le Mot et le Reste; Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2011), 443.

²⁰ Leszek Brogowski, *Éditer l'art, Le Livre d'artiste et l'histoire du livre* (Châtou: Les Éditions de la Transparence, 2010), 26.

²¹ Cf. Jérôme Dupeyrat, "Les Livres d'artistes entre pratiques alternatives à l'exposition et pratiques d'exposition alternatives" (PhD diss., Université Rennes 2, 2012), 579.

books of contemporary documentary artists from the perspective of the alternative to digital. Indeed, Broomberg and Chanarin, create books that position themselves as edited, printed, materialized art in the form of the codex. However, these printed works do not really elaborate themselves in opposition to the digital. On the one hand, the interest of artists and photographers for the book can certainly be explained by a logic of comparison of the two media: the emergence of the Web, with its formats and its specificities, allows us to better realize, by analogy and by distinction, what characterizes books and the Web, and what makes their respective identity. On the other hand, some books constitute one of the modalities of existence of the work declined under other forms, thus participating in the variability of the works in digital condition. For example, *War Primer 2*, published in its paper version by Mack, was for a while available for free in PDF and EPUB format, distributed by the publisher's digital branch, MAPP.²² The different ways in which the work exists are not thought of in terms of competition, but of complementarity. The digital version, whose number of pages is not a financial variable, is supplemented by several analytical texts on the photobook, Brecht's work and the approach of Broomberg and Chanarin. The printed version, on the other hand, offers the physical experience of reading and induces a more concrete kinship with Brecht's book.

Other artists merge the logic of the Web and of the book by using self-publishing platforms that allow self-production and self-distribution of books.

II – Un Medium to Experiment with

If the death of the book predicted by Octave Uzanne has not come true, his prediction that “the author will become his own publisher”²³ has been accomplished. However, self-publishing did not wait for the development of digital technology and the Internet. Alessandro Ludovico, a researcher in art, design and media, reminds us that even before Gutenberg invented the printing press, alternative editions of the Bible were multiplied thanks to woodcuts, which popularized illustrated passages. Contexts of political agitation, such as the French Revolution, led to an intensification of self-publishing, which is in fact strongly linked to social protest. In the field of art, William Blake published his own poems, before the avant-garde of the beginning of the 20th century produced their Futurist or Dadaist tracts. In the 1930s, workers' unions and radical left-wing groups took up the mimeograph, a mobile press that facilitated clandestine printing. Offset printing and even more so Xerox duplicators allowed artists in the 1960s to self-produce their books. We can add that the actors of the Punk culture also used photocopiers to produce their fanzines. Following these changes, digital technology revolutionized printing. In the mid-1980s, the commercialization of Computer-aided manufacturing software made the design phase accessible. Since the beginning of the 2000s, self-publishing sites and the existence of

²² In 2021, the digital book is no longer available, whereas it was available in 2018.

²³ Uzanne and Robida, *The End of Book*.

digital printing have made it possible to produce books with very small print runs.

Mishka Henner produces books via self-publishing sites. This is a way for him to produce them in small quantities, not with a view to rarity, but rather by integrating the logic of mass publishing while conforming to his scale of distribution. His approach comes not from the photobook, but from his discovery of artists' books, particularly those of Ed Ruscha:

Learning about artists' books was the catalyst for me to start working in this way. The genre has a rich history that's resulted in a freedom of content and form that photobook makers are still catching up with.²⁴

The artist's book medium is linked to a renewal of the documentary perspective:

Ed Ruscha and a number of other artists showed me that the documentary form is far more malleable than some would have us believe. As documents and statements, Lewis Baltz's industrial parks and Ed Ruscha's gasoline stations are as powerful to me as Robert Frank's *The Americans*. Purists of the documentary form might disagree but the way these artists used photography spoke to me and offered another language for describing the world. There was no drama it and no hyperbole. It seemed like an attempt to present nothing but the facts.²⁵

The arrangement of photographic series devoted to vernacular architecture over the pages is part of the documentary approach of the artists cited by Henner. Doing away with the publisher does not establish an institutional critique. The democratisation of art through the artist's book no longer primarily motivates those who are now initiating it, the sharing of content made possible by the Internet relativising this opportunity. The book is of greater interest to Henner as a form that allows for variations and attempts to say something about the contemporary world.

Henner plays with the reproducibility of the book and the photograph in *_IMG*. Under this digital file name is a series of two editions. These contain the source codes of photographs of historical events. Each book also includes a silver print of the corresponding photograph. On the last page, the only truly 'readable' alphanumeric portion of the book, we learn that for the first volume, the photograph taken by James Francis Hurley on October 29, 1917, depicts five Australians at Chateau Wood, including four named soldiers who served in artillery units of the 4th Australian Division during World War I. The last man in the group is unknown. Book *_IMG02* contains the code for a photograph taken near the Berlin Wall by Hartmut Reiche on January 5, 1990, during the reunification of Germany. The photographs selected

²⁴ Mishka Henner in Darius D. Himes, "Case Study: Mishka Henner," March 19, 2014, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0mxn7BUlcSUEU03UnQ2MjdtMHc/view>, acc. on March 13, 2022.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

by the artist engage in a relationship with the documentary by recording a historical event and questioning the role of photography in this recording. James Francis Hurley, whose photograph opens the series, covered the First World War for the Australian Army. Dissatisfied with the photographic medium's limited capacity to capture the reality and violence of conflict, he resorted to staging and created composite images by superimposing several negatives. Only these arrangements allowed, according to him, to deliver a true documentation of the war: "Am thoroughly convinced that it is impossible to secure effects – without resorting to composite pictures";²⁶ he wrote in his diary. Without being a composite photograph, Henner's selected photograph was taken in this context. The book as a medium is appropriate for documentary storytelling, as it facilitates the arrangement of a series for typology, comparison, or narrative purposes, and facilitates the articulation between text and image, but the artist seems to end the documentary significance of the selected photographs by choosing to feature their encoding rather than their visual appearance on the pages. In pocket format and offering an alpha digital content, the edition resembles a novel, which nevertheless resists ordinary reading. The artist restores the documentary dimension by the print slipped into the book and a text in English mentioned on the last page. This text is a reprise of the captions mentioned in the databases from which the images come: the Australian War Memorial for the first one and the German Federal Archives for the second one. The artist thus creates a game of disappearance and appearance of the documentary dimension of these photographs. Although he assures us that he did not know Hurley's story before making the book,²⁷ his gesture resonates with those of the Australian photographer and the latter's perplexity regarding the documentary power of a "simple photograph". In contrast to this unlimited duplication of images, while the work could never be exhausted by the possibility of printing on demand, the artist provokes its forthcoming breakup by setting the number of copies for the first volume at 97 and 25 for the second. These quantities of prints, not common, are determined by the number of years separating the original photographs from the publication. To continue this interplay of infinite reproduction, multiple printings on a reduced scale, and uniqueness, Henner signed each copy of the book *_IMG* and slipped the photograph onto the last page in the form of a silver print protected by a slipcase. The addition of these manual interventions does not give a luxurious dimension to the book which remains, like the other works mentioned, at a price quite affordable for an art lover (20 euros).

By articulating words and images, the photobook can contribute to the mechanics of documentation. It is one of the ways in which art exist today, and it describes the logics of the Web and printed materials without excluding them.

Continuing to utilize the book as documentarists and artists do today is not a sign of conservatism or hostility, but rather a way of revisiting a more ancient

²⁶ Frank Hurley, "War Diary, 21 August–28 October 1917," http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au/_transcript/2012/D14653/a2826.htm, acc. on May 14, 2022.

²⁷ In a July 23, 2019, Henner wrote in an email: "I didn't know until after publishing the work that Frank Hurley manipulated his photographs. And I know very little about the Berlin wall photograph."

documentary reference and critically analyzing the media modalities offered by the Web without dismissing all its potential.

By appropriating existing photographs or famous books (we know how Brecht and Frank are essential references in the history of photography), the artists do not wish to make a radical break with the past. They testify to the heritage that runs through them. By updating these references, they show that they are not blocked in the past and have taken into consideration the media changes brought by the web.

With thanks to Catherine and Marion Guiral

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Article received: March 31, 2022

Article accepted: June 21, 2022

Original scholarly paper