

**The Academy of Performing Arts in Prague
FILM AND TV SCHOOL**

Photography

BACHELOR'S THESIS

'Patience and Paranoia':

The Necessary Art of Observation in a Modern World

Michael Lozano

Thesis supervisor: Mgr. Josef Ledvina, Ph.D.

Awarded academic title: Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Photography

Prague, April 2024

**Akademie múzických umění v Praze
FILMOVÁ A TELEVIZNÍ FAKULTA**

Fotografie

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

„Trpělivost a paranoia“:

Nezbytné umění pozorování v moderním světě

Michael Lozano

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Josef Ledvina, Ph.D.

Přidělovaný akademický titul: Bakalářský titul v oboru fotografie

Praha, Duben 2024

Declaration

I declare that I have elaborated the Bachelor's/Master's thesis or doctoral dissertation entitled

'Patience and Paranoia':

The Necessary Art of Observation in a Modern World

independently, under the expert supervision of my thesis/dissertation supervisor, and using only the literature and sources cited therein, and that the thesis/dissertation was not used within the scope of a different university programme of study or to obtain the same degree or a different degree. I consent to the publication of the thesis/dissertation in accordance with legislation and with AMU internal regulations.

Prague, April 2024

.....
Michael Lozano

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	4
Introduction.....	6
Chapter Overviews.....	7
Chapter 1: Curiosity as the Catalyst.....	8
Chapter 2: Maxwell's Demon, Entropy, and the Photographer.....	11
Chapter 3: Observation's Effects on the Potential in Documentary Photography.....	15
Chapter 4: The Photograph as Data.....	18
Chapter 5: Self Discovery in Street Photography Reflections on "Sonder".....	20
Chapter 6: The Paradox of Overexposure: From Photographic Mediums to Cognitive Overload.....	22
Conclusions or: Embracing the Elusive.....	24
Sources.....	26

Abstract

"Patience & Paranoia" explores the interplay between observation and heightened awareness in what we can deem as 'anticipatory forms' of photography—particularly documentary, street, and journalistic—drawing on themes from Thomas Pynchon's "The Crying of Lot 49." This thesis investigates how a state of mild paranoia, in the form of acute awareness and curiosity, might enhance a photographer's ability to uncover hidden narratives within the mundane.

Incorporating a blend of literary analysis—focusing on Pynchon's depiction of postmodern uncertainty—technological foundations of photography, metaphysical probing, and empirical fieldwork, the research presents photography as a dual tool for historic documentation, and a unique understanding of the human condition.

Abstract

„Trpělivost a paranoia“ zkoumá souhru mezi pozorováním a zvýšeným vědomím v tom, co můžeme považovat za „anticipační formy“ fotografie - zejména dokumentární, pouliční a novinářské - a čerpá z motivů románu Thomase Pynchona „Pláč Lot 49“. Tato práce zkoumá, jak může stav mírné paranoie v podobě akutního uvědomění a zvědavosti posílit fotografovou schopnost odhalovat skrytá vyprávění ve všednosti.

Začleněním směsi literární analýzy - se zaměřením na Pynchonovo zobrazení postmoderní nejistoty -, technologických základů fotografie, metafyzické sondy a empirického terénního výzkumu představuje výzkum fotografii jako dvojí nástroj historické dokumentace a jedinečného porozumění lidskému stavu.

Introduction

Thomas Pynchon's "The Crying of Lot 49" immerses readers in a world of subtle (sometimes extreme) paranoia and unresolved questions, making it a unique metaphor for the art of documentary photography. This thesis explores what motivates photographers to navigate the unknown, drawing a parallel to Pynchon's protagonist, Oedipa Maas, who is unassumingly thrust into a web of conspiracies and unexpected revelations.

Documentary photography is ultimately a combined effort of observation and interpretation, capturing moments that might otherwise pass unnoticed, and presenting them in an attempt to be objective so the reader may complete the life of the photo by giving their own subjective reading of the image. Through this lens based epistemology, photographers reveal layers of reality, each frame a delicate balance between what is shown and what can be deduced, or implicated. Like Pynchon's intricate storytelling, photography is about peeling back these layers, uncovering the obfuscated, and bringing it into focus for the people of this world and any other to reflect on.

This exploration digs into the psychological interplay between curiosity and paranoia. These ways of thinking, seen in this examination as drivers behind the photographer's lens, push the photographer towards unknowns and sharpen their ability to not only discern the enigmatic moments of meaning, but learn to anticipate their coming into existence. Curiosity propels the photographer toward discovery, while a hint of paranoia heightens their sensitivity to the potential messages waiting to be organized and recorded into their frames.

The thesis will explore many topics related to the act of observation, key points amongst them being: the dual nature of photographing as both data collection and experience, the organization of visual chaos through the camera, and how the act of observing can subtly alter the scene being documented. This discussion aims to illustrate the role of the photographer not just as a passive recorder, but as an active participant in framing our perception of reality, and the practice of photographing as a way to examine the human condition.

By integrating theoretical examinations with practical examples, the thesis will highlight documentary photography's power to both reflect and shape societal understanding. It will argue that in a world overloaded with information, certain moments might be able to cut through the noise, rendering clarity one frame at a time.

Chapter Overviews

Each chapter of this thesis builds on the notion that photography, like literary narrative, constructs rather than merely records reality, and careful observation can help clarify the narrative:

Curiosity as the Catalyst: This chapter discusses how photographers, driven by curiosity, engage with their environments in ways that mirror the investigative journey of Pynchon's protagonist, Oedipa.

Maxwell's Demon, Entropy, and the Photographer: Explores the metaphorical parallels between the thought experiment known as Maxwell's Demon and the photographer's role in organizing visual chaos.

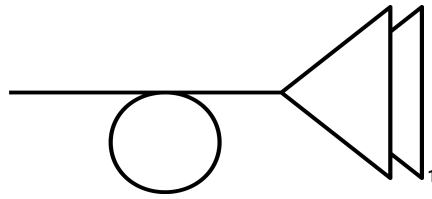
Observation's Effects on the Potential in Documentary Photography: Investigates how the act of observing can alter the subject and the resulting image, drawing parallels to quantum mechanics' Observer Effect and exploring the efficacy of images as documents.

The Photograph as Data: Examines how photographs function as data which photographers share with viewers, who then construct narratives and pose questions about what they see.

Self Discovery in Street Photography: Serves as a reflection for the author of the thesis to examine their closeness to the subjects they photograph and the process which leads them to the moment a photograph is made.

The Paradox of Overexposure: Discusses the challenges of cognitive overload in both photography and information consumption, and its effects on perception and retention.

Chapter 1: Curiosity as the Catalyst



'Hey,' said Oedipa, 'can't I get somebody to do it for me?'

'Me,' said Roseman, 'some of it, sure. But aren't you even interested?'

'In what?'

'In what you might find out.'

As things developed, she was to have all manner of revelations. Hardly about Pierce Inverarity, or herself; but about what remained yet had somehow, before this, stayed away. There had hung the sense of buffering, insulation, she had noticed the absence of intensity, as if watching a movie, just perceptibly out of focus, that the projectionist refused to fix.²

In the very first page of Thomas Pynchon's shortest, yet somehow exceedingly dense, novel, 'The Crying of Lot 49' (later referred to as TCoL49), Oedipa learns of her appointment as the official Executrix of her ex-lover Pierce Inverarity's estate, to which she wonders, "Why me?" while considering delegating the responsibility to someone else—she couldn't decide if "capable" or "appropriate" was more fitting, but she knew enough about the nature and scale of Pierce's habits and wealth to feel that she wasn't either.

Her relationship with Pierce was brief and relatively detached, with several months elapsing between his death and her receipt of this announcement, which ultimately turned into an inherited responsibility. After meeting with her lawyer, Roseman, Oedipa's curiosity becomes more specific, wondering, "Why was I, Oedipa, chosen to manage the countless assets and hidden facets of his legacy?"

¹ p.38 Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. (1966)

- A symbol that Oedipa first discovers in a bar called The Scope, which she eventually comes to understand is a muted post horn, and is used to represent the shadowy Tristero organization, as well as the impossibility of objective interpretation of such symbology.

² p.10 Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. (1966)

- Pynchon's shortest work is a sort of detective story where one Oedipa Maas, an unassuming California Housewife, is propelled into investigating an international postal conspiracy, amongst other things, by way of executing the will of an ex-lover. This work explores themes of observation, interpretation, meaning, and paranoia.

Pynchon's prose, as exemplified in the excerpt above, utilizes Roseman to instigate Oedipa's paranoia and to pose the question: "What else might be out there?" This question hints at potential clarity or meaning her life might gain if these hidden aspects were discovered, specifically in the context of what caused Peirce's death and why she was named as the executor of his will. This 'sense of buffering' she felt, a life that grew to be stagnant and void of purpose and excitement, might still hold potential for great surprise, exploration, and discovery.

Oedipa decides to move forward with executing the will not because of her endearment towards the ghost of Pierce, or even because she's been asked to, she investigates with the intent to understand. Whilst there is a common and understandable explanation that photography exists to preserve memories and to extend the duration of moments to which people have emotional and nostalgic connections, the decision to look beyond the self and try to make sense of what goes on around us, always and everywhere, is something else entirely.

This behavior—this surrender to an indescribable curiosity—is what motivates many, if not all, photographers who work within the lexicon of Documentary Photography at some point in their careers. This way of living is distinct, and worth separating from the other aspects of their lives when they are not engaging photographically. The broad categories of Snapshot and Street Photographers—who often lack a deliberate aim regarding careers or sales, and whose images are not immediately required, demanded, or valued—embody this. These Regular People take up these tools of visual documentation and partake in a seemingly endless game of Photographic Cat and Mouse, or Observer and Subject, driven by the possibility that something photographable awaits just around the corner, across town, or in a distant land they find themselves inexplicably drawn to.

Famed Documentary Photographer and Magnum Member Alex Webb was, in a way similar to the motives of this thesis, also photographically driven by a curiosity sparked by fiction:

"I happened to pick up Graham Greene's novel, 'The Comedians,' set in the turbulent world of Papa Doc's Haiti, and read about a world that fascinated and scared me. Within months, I was on a plane to Port-au-Prince." (Webb & Dyer)³

³ Webb, Alex, and Geoff Dyer. *The Suffering of Light*. 2011

The significance of this quote, in the context of this study, is not the contents of Graham Greene's novel, nor is it Webb's interpretation of the work; what matters for our purposes is that a piece of literary fiction could serve as the impetus for a young man to embark on an unstructured international journey, one which he could only guess where it might lead him, and ultimately what body of work and career might stem from investing into such a curiosity.

Webb's work has long been celebrated for its striking complexity and inviting chaos, filled with vibrant colors, wide contrast ranges, and multi-layered compositions that incorporate numerous characters and elements, creating a palpable chaotic harmony. This approach, which embraces enigma, chance, and the ephemeral, is evident in the narrative qualities of his photographs. However, these narratives often circle back to questions rather than answers, much like Oedipa in TCoL49.

If there is a consistent link between Oedipa's curiosity-driven arc, Webb's global photographic explorations, and my use of photography as a coping mechanism for the existential uncertainties of life by probing at my surroundings, it is an active engagement with curiosity and a belief that this curiosity will lead to eventual discovery and documentation of something meaningful. It would be incorrect to attribute primary motivation to the preservation of memory or nostalgia, often cited as the impetus for photographic endeavors. Why preserve images of silhouetted strangers, crumbling construction sites, or dust-laden diner windows? More than why, *which* images to save?



A photograph from an untitled Work In Progress. *Žižkov, 2021*

© Michael Lozano

Chapter 2: Maxwell's Demon, Entropy, and the Photographer

In Thomas Pynchon's "The Crying of Lot 49," Maxwell's Demon emerges not just as a scientific metaphor but as a conceptual pivot that deepens our understanding of information theory, particularly through the lens of entropy. This metaphor is laced into the fabric of the narrative, offering a rich parallel to the role of the documentary photographer, who, like the Demon, attempts to arrest the natural chaos of the world and sort it into coherent, meaningful messages. The photographer is a filter, someone who organizes, and eventually builds up a construction of light.

Maxwell's Demon, as conceptualized by James Clerk Maxwell, is tasked with the seemingly impossible job of sorting faster and slower-moving molecules to decrease entropy without expending energy, seemingly violating the second law of thermodynamics.

Oedipa first hears of Maxwell's Demon as it is personified in the form of an actual device, known as the Nefastis Machine:

Stanley Koteks: "The Demon could sit in a box among air molecules that were moving at all different random speeds, and sort out the fast molecules from the slow ones. Fast molecules have more energy than slow ones. Concentrate enough of them in one place and you have a region of high temperature. You can then use the difference in temperature between this hot region of the box and any cooler region to drive a heat engine. Since the Demon only sat and sorted, you wouldn't have put any real work into the system. So you would be violating the Second Law of Thermodynamics, getting something for nothing, causing perpetual motion."

Oedipa Maas: "Sorting isn't work?"

Pynchon adapts this metaphor to explore themes of disorder and information theory. In the novel, he writes,

"They felt it could have only stood there, invisibly whirring, sorting—not by the usual criteria but by some other, less tangible, less classifiable" (Pynchon, 1966)⁴.

⁴ p.84 Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. (1966)

This notion of sorting the intangible directly aligns with the documentary photographer's quest and process of framing and capturing reality, attempting to find order and meaning in the randomness of everyday life, whether it be in the form of artistically leaning street photography projects, or someone looking to identify and render infinite The Decisive Moment (a concept we will explore in further depth in the following chapter), whilst on assignment in the world of Journalistic/Press or Conflict Photography.

Integrating insights from John Berger's *"And our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos,"* (Berger, 2011) where he notes, *"the traffic between storytelling and metaphysics is continuous,"*⁵ We find a profound connection to documentary photography. This continuous traffic underscores the photographer's role as a storyteller who navigates through the metaphysical aspects of existence, capturing moments that speak to broader truths and human conditions. Each photograph, a frozen moment, is a metaphysical inquiry into the nature of reality and our place within it.

Lee Friedlander's remark that *"it's a generous medium, photography,"*⁶ (Galassi & Benson, 2005) further elucidates this point. Photography's generosity lies in its capacity to capture a multitude of narratives, emotions, and interpretations within a single frame, and in many cases including unintended information, seemingly snuck in for you to find later. This generosity is extended to its ability to transform the viewer from unassuming into something more:

*"in a manner akin to that of detectives and forensic experts, they "read" images as evidence by scouring them for signs pointing to a truth lurking behind what is plain to see on the surface."*⁷ (McKenzie-Mcharg, 2019)

This generosity makes photography a powerful tool for documentary storytellers who sort and select moments that might otherwise be lost in the entropy of daily life. Like Maxwell's Demon, the photographer selectively chooses which moments to preserve and which to let pass, imposing a narrative order on the inherent disorder of visual reality, or the reality which we can easily glean from the surface.

⁵ Berger, J. *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief As Photos*. (2011)

⁶ Friedlander, L., Galassi, P., & Benson, R. *Friedlander*. (2005)

⁷ Andrew McKenzie-Mcharg. *Experts versus eyewitnesses*.

Or, how did conspiracy theories come to rely on images? (2019)

In the context of informational entropy, Claude Shannon's theory illuminates that information is a measure of one's freedom of choice when selecting a message; Shannon's 1948 paper "*A Mathematical Theory of Communication*" explains communication in terms of five basic components: a source, a transmitter, a channel, a receiver, and a destination. This concept is crucial in understanding the role of the documentary photographer, as one can break down the relationship of making a photograph as:

- **Source = The subject.** This includes assigned events and scenes, posed subjects, and candid moments from everyday life.
- **Transmitter = The photographer.** This is the stage in which the visual and thematic messages of the real world are translated into photographic elements by way of camera settings, composition, timing, etc.
- **Channel = The medium.** This might be a silver gelatine print, a photobook, or perhaps a digital platform where the work is prepared and brought to life for reception.
- **Receiver = The audience.** Regardless of how direct or ambiguous the photographer's work is, or the presentation of said work, the reception and interpretation is ultimately up to the audience, whoever that comes to be.
- **Destination = The impact.** In most cases, the goal is to pose a question, provide some form of journalistic evidence, or elicit some emotional response to what is being portrayed in the image.

Shannon states, "*The fundamental problem of communication is that of reproducing at one point either exactly or approximately a message selected at another point*" (Shannon, 1948).⁸

The documentary photographer, through the act of selecting and framing shots, exercises this freedom to reduce informational entropy, making sense of the chaos. This act of selection is a bid to communicate something essential about the world—a form of storytelling that is both an artistic and a metaphysical activity.

In essence, the act of documentary photography can be seen as a practical application of Shannon's theoretical frameworks. Photographers reduce informational entropy by making selections from a plethora of visual stimuli, using their skill, perspective, and intent to impose order and communicate insight.

⁸ C. Shannon, and W. Weaver.

The Mathematical Theory of Communication (1949)

This artistic manipulation of information mirrors the theoretical processes described by Shannon, making the chaos of the visual world comprehensible and meaningful through the lens of the camera.

The convergence of Maxwell's Demon with the role of the documentary photographer highlights an essential tension: the struggle against the natural drift towards disorder. Photographers, in their efforts to document reality, engage in a delicate dance with entropy, constantly sorting visual data to construct narratives that resonate with truth and authenticity.

As we transition into Chapter 3, "Observation's Effects on the Potential in Documentary Photography," this conceptual groundwork allows us to explore further how photographers not only observe but actively engage with their subjects. This interaction often alters the scene, reminiscent of the observer effect in quantum mechanics, where the act of measurement itself changes the state of the system being observed. Here, the photographer's presence and decision-making process can influence and sometimes alter the unfolding events, a nuanced echo of Maxwell's Demon at work in the real world.

This chapter positions the photographer not just as an observer but as an active participant in the continuous traffic between the visible world and the metaphysical interpretations of it, crafting stories that aim to make sense of the entropic world around us.

In sum, Chapter 2 bridges the theoretical underpinnings of entropy and information with the tangible practice of documentary photography. By drawing these connections, the thesis underscores the profound role of documentary photography in sorting and interpreting the chaos of human experience, akin to the mythical task assigned to Maxwell's Demon.

Chapter 3:

Observation's Effects on the Potential in Documentary Photography

Efforts made through scientific research, philosophizing, religious devotion, and artistic expression often overlap as people all the world over attempt to make sense of living, society, and existence as a whole; this chapter explores such intersections, particularly focusing on how Social-Documentary Photography attempts to interpret the seemingly random nature of life through everyday snapshots. This effort can appear nonsensical when viewed through the lens of certain research models and tests. Henri Cartier-Bresson, renowned for his concept of “the decisive moment,” has profoundly influenced this field both in theory and in practice. His seminal work, initially titled *Images à la sauvette* (translated as *Images On The Run*), has become a foundational text, teaching many how to discern aesthetic traits that elevate photographs to art, as well as popularized his choice in using Leica rangefinder cameras (as well as the acceptance of the 50mm focal length as the default ‘normal’ lens), and an ironic influence on the way that contemporary “street photographers” like to dress and be perceived. This chapter seeks to recontextualize the ‘decisive moment’ within the framework of quantum mechanics, exploring the cause-and-effect relationship between the act of observing a subject and the resulting empirical data.

Cartier-Bresson described photography as “*the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression*” (*Images on The Run*)⁹. This perspective underscores the potential of photography to capture life authentically, contrary to the myth that photographers would effortlessly encapsulate a perfect scene with a single shot. One look at any photographer’s contact sheet would disprove this myth and reveal the true nature of a street photographer’s process, and way of seeing. Bresson, like most (if not all) of his colleagues, had a tendency to “work the scene”. This work consisted of waiting and watching, reacting and photographing, adjusting composition and exposure settings, perhaps photographing again, but definitely still watching. It was a way of actively seeing the fluidity of life, the traces it leaves behind, and trying to anticipate where those traces become trails to what happens next. These details, as minute as they may be from frame to frame, are clearly registered in the contact sheet; a sort of preview that allows a photographer to see all of the images taken on one roll.

⁹ Cartier-Bresson, H. (1952, January 1). *Images à la sauvette*.



Contact sheet from Henri Cartier-Bresson in Seville, Spain, 1933.

© Henri Cartier-Bresson / Magnum Photos

For instance, a contact sheet from Henri Cartier-Bresson's 1933 work in Seville, Spain, illustrates his method of capturing quiet, candid moments—what he considered the 'inevitable truths of everyday happenings.' These moments are what I find most compelling in his work, often prompting me to seek similar serendipitous scenes in my own photography. It seems less like a gamble that one might or might not find their own enigmatic photographs when you pair words like 'inevitable' and 'everyday' . . .

The concept of observation affecting outcomes—a principle vividly illustrated in the Hawthorne Effect and quantum mechanics' observer effect—raises profound questions about the nature of documentary photography. The Hawthorne studies, which began in 1924, demonstrated how workers' productivity changed under observation. Similarly, the famous dual-slit experiment revealed that light behaves differently when observed, a phenomenon that challenges our understanding of reality.

Freddy Reidenschneider, a fictional defense lawyer from the film *The Man Who Wasn't There*¹⁰ (2001), encapsulates this paradox: "The more you look, the less you really know". He postulates that one's guilt can't be determined by examining it in the court of law, and in fact, the truth is likely further than it was at the start, as the examination has inherently altered the study. A compelling enough argument for the sake of his client's case, as it proves to be enough to instill some form of reasonable doubt, which is all that's ever needed to incite a search for clarity.

¹⁰ Coen, J., & Coen, E. (Directors). (2001). *The Man Who Wasn't There* [Film]. USA Films.



Installation view of "Photographic Potential" in Prague, Czech Republic, 2022.

© Michael Lozano

In the project titled "Photographic Potential"¹¹ Michael Lozano explores this enigma by using a 35mm LomoKino camera, allowing for up to three frames per second, depending on how rapidly the film is advanced via the manual hand crank. This tool enables an extended engagement with the unfolding scene, capturing multiple potential outcomes within a single encounter. Such a technique challenges the traditional notion of the 'decisive moment' by embracing a continuum of moments, each with its unique narrative potential. The 'usual' behavior one might engage in when insistently searching for the singular 'correct' image—one which is categorized by either the fast paced camera whips and flash pops from someone like Bruce Gilden, or the quick fidget-and-fire ala Gary Winogrand, as well as the slower paced methods employed by those working with larger format cameras, which simply demand a decrease in speed in place of an increase in intentionality and patience—must be modified when accepting Potential as a merit. One must simply let go of the assumption that there is only one 'Decisive Moment' waiting for them, and instead begin to probe at the possibility that there are an infinite number of them, those which existed before our arrival to the scene, and will persist long after our departure.

Ultimately, documentary photography teaches us to observe quietly and blend into the background, hoping to allow life's subtleties to reveal themselves to whichever recording medium we are prepared to document with.

¹¹ Lozano, M. (2022)

Photographic Potential. Prague.

Chapter 4: The Photograph as Data

A frequent point of commentary related to the archiving, preservation, and periodic interaction with photographs as documents is that one might be able to pull new data from the image further into the future, either through the most basic effects of distancing oneself from something they're too familiar with, or something more nuanced, like how the passage of time allows the observer's lens to have been re-sculpted by social changes and historic events.

In John Berger's "Understanding a Photograph", a visual analysis is performed on André Kertész' photograph 'A Red Hussar Leaving, June 1919, Budapest', in which Berger asserts that viewers who are reading photographs of the past, and are trying to relate to what's depicted in the photograph, "need to know something of the history of that past"¹². (Berger, 2013).



'A Red Hussar Leaving, June 1919, Budapest' © Estate of André Kertész

This examination, that one might be able to better perceive old data in the future, is not one which is exclusive to the arts. One can find similarities in the fact that 99.9% of human DNA sequences are the same in every person,¹³ Though the knowledge that enough of the DNA is different enough to distinguish one person from another instills a faith in investing into and

¹² p.74 Berger, J. (2013, November 7). *Understanding a Photograph*.

¹³ Saad R. *Discovery, development, and current applications of DNA identity testing*. Proc (Bayl Univ Med Cent). 2005 Apr;18(2):130-3.

utilizing DNA profiling as a forensic technique in criminal investigations, as well as paternity testing and genealogical and medical research: all forms of truth-seeking.

In Berger's reflection on Kertész' photograph, he posits the idea that the title itself becomes an extension of the photograph, and can serve as a function for setting the contexts for which the viewer will view and process the visual data of the photograph. In the case of this image, Berger notes that through his knowledge of the region's history, the location and date included in the title add layers of meaning to those depicted in and affected by the events contained in the photograph, particularly the clothing of the woman and child as opposed to the soldier's uniform. There is a clear distinction that these people are setting out on different paths, and their clothing makes clear who will be off to serve, and who will return home and await the other's arrival, or eventual death.

All of this data waiting for eventual discovery and analysis echoes Friedlander's remarks on the generosity of the medium; a practice which works in the singular, as each photograph is treated an independent entity whilst shooting, and only gaining contextual value when edited and sequenced amongst other images from the project to which it belongs, is somehow teeming with details and narratives should one make the effort to dig beneath the surface.

Another moment of similarity in regards to Oedipa's own relationship with discovery, as she takes a rental car from her home in Kinneret to the far more elusive and stimulating city of San Narciso., and stops on the highway overpass to get a better look at things:

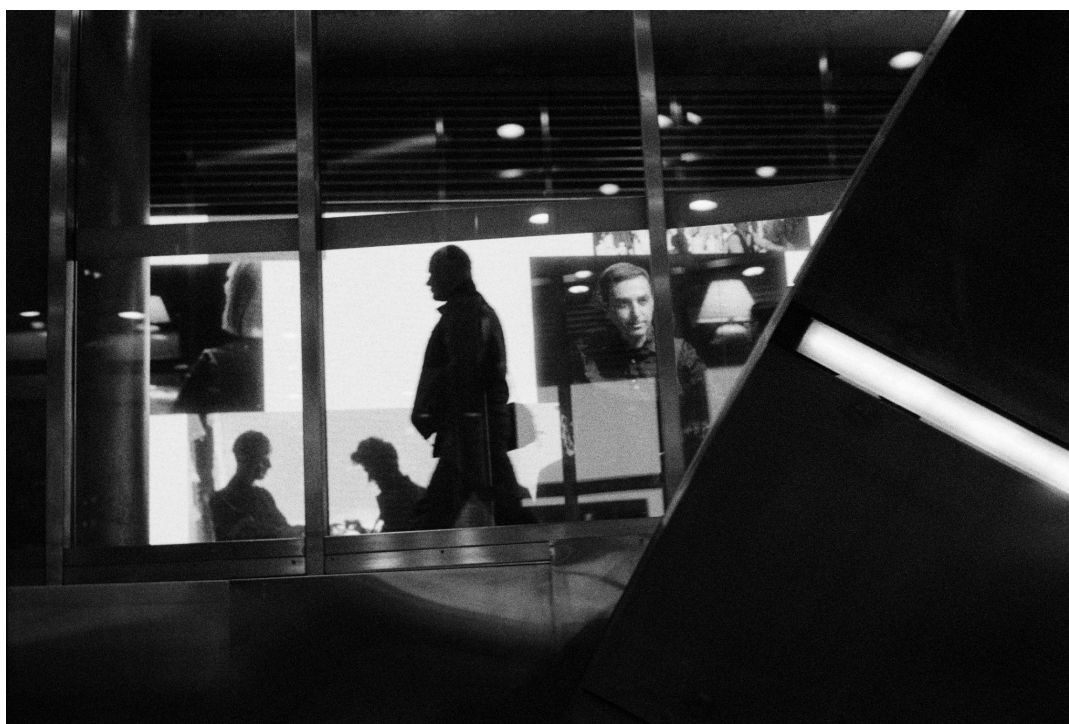
"(...) she thought of the time she'd opened a transistor radio to try and replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. There'd seemed no limit to what the printed circuit would have told her (if she had tried to find out)."¹⁴

This reflects the act of reading a photograph with the intent of extracting what data there might be to process, if one wants to. This might be the photographer reflecting on their work, an editor assisting in the completion of a project, or someone who accidentally crosses the image via a book or exhibition. The viewer must simply try to know.

¹⁴ p.14 Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. (1966)

Chapter 5: Self Discovery in Street Photography

Reflections on "Sonder"



A photograph from an untitled Work In Progress. *Warsaw, 2021*

© Michael Lozano

This project started out with no direct initiative, overarching outline, or grand scheme; in fact, I can not recall the moment it officially 'began', but I do recall specific moments of intrigue, eureka, and joy through discovery. In September of 2021 I decided to move away from the United States of America, specifically South Florida, in pursuit of something different, and romantically european. This broad curiosity was likely rooted in and fueled by my consumption of media and arts from regions all over Europe (and its previous member, the United Kingdom); the music videos and films led to an intrigue in cinematography, which upon deeper investigation and studying ultimately pointed towards documentary photography. It's no surprise that filmmakers study the work of other image makers, like photographers and painters, to develop and inform the visual languages which they can employ as craftspeople trying to construct a larger narrative. I sought to understand the construction of the image, so I put my faith in the camera and the unknown, and set out for four months alone.

My photography for a long time was no more than an astonishment with the recording devices; every photograph recorded felt like a magic trick. I could come home after visiting some foreign land, and have evidence not only of what it looked like, but some implied evidence that hinted at something going on behind the camera. Beyond the fundamental technical considerations of making a photograph: understanding the elements of exposure such as Shutter Speed (duration of exposure), Sensitivity (ISO/ASA), and Aperture (quantity of light over said duration), and the nature of their codependent relationship, I started to learn to look, and in turn began to see.

'Sonder' began unintentionally, same as most of my other projects, as the revelation instilled in the first images which began to "work" indicated that there were others, like these and sharing in topic and theme, out there and hoping to be culled into the same batch, eventually elucidating on this current chapter of my life's story: the commitment to move to Prague and to study photography. I had spent the previous ten years insisting that I wasn't a photographer, but a cinematography student learning to compose and expose light. I was training my eyes, but had no further intentions.

Similar questions were asked of this commitment to Prague, by myself and those around me; could I speak Czech, why did I switch to photography, and how would I manage being so far from home? I wasn't sure I'd ever be able to answer these questions with rational answers, but the euphoria experienced from making a photograph which seemed to capture a perfectly timed, placed, and observed moment felt like a miracle, in TCoL49 it is described as,

"(...) another world's intrusion into this one.

Most of the time we coexist peacefully, but when we do touch there's cataclysm".¹⁵

One could imagine that Cartier-Bresson felt a similar sensation when the photographic practice brings you so close to something organically beautiful and enigmatic. Each successful photograph, however deemed later on, but initially felt by the photographer in question is enough to propel them towards the next one. Something along the lines of finding a clue whilst playing a mystery game; uncertain how the game ends, but determined to collect clues until the time comes for reflection and reconciliation in the hopes that it might all make perfect sense.

¹⁵ p.97 Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. (1966)

Chapter 6: The Paradox of Overexposure: From Photographic Mediums to Cognitive Overload

“Oedipa wondered whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory to hold; which must always blaze out, destroying its own message irreversibly, leaving an overexposed blank when the ordinary world came back.

[...]

She glanced down the corridor of Cohen’s rooms in the rain and saw, for the very first time, how far it might be possible to get lost in this.”¹⁶

In the realm of photography, overexposure occurs when a photosensitive medium—be it a CCD camera sensor, a cyanotype emulsion, tintype collodion, 35mm negative, 4x5 positive film, or any other—receives too much light. The excess light obliterates the nuances of the image, leaving behind a blank slate where details should have emerged. This technical failure in photography serves as a profound metaphor for cognitive and social experiences where too much information can overwhelm and inhibit understanding, rather than enrich it. Overexposure in photography, regardless of the medium, results in a loss of detail that is essential for forming a complete and coherent image. Whether through digital sensors or chemical processes, each medium has a threshold for how much light it can effectively use to render an image. Beyond this threshold, the medium is no longer able to translate visual data into a meaningful picture; instead, it renders a washed-out or entirely white space where detail and texture are lost to the glare. This phenomenon is universally understood among photographers, or at least should be, and serves as a caution in the practice of recording images.

Philosophically, this concept of overexposure parallels the cognitive effects of being bombarded with excess amounts of information. In the information age, individuals are often inundated with data, ideas, and sensory inputs that exceed our cognitive capacities to process and integrate them effectively. Like a piece of film that receives too much light, a mind overwhelmed with information struggles to retain or comprehend that information meaningfully. This can lead to a state of confusion or a sense of being lost, much like the blankness of an overexposed photograph.

¹⁶ p.10 Pynchon, T. (1966, January 1). *The Crying of Lot 49*.

Drawing from the epistemology of knowing, the act of acquiring knowledge involves an optimal balance of exposure to new information. Just as a photographer adjusts the camera settings to suit the lighting conditions, so too must individuals and societies calibrate their engagement with new information. Knowing too much, too quickly, or without adequate context can be as counterproductive as knowing too little. It can lead to decisions made in haste, misunderstandings, or burnout, where the mind, overwhelmed, opts to shut out further information altogether—a protective blankness akin to the overexposed photograph.

The concept of overexposure thus invites a deeper exploration of how we engage with the world around us. It challenges us to find a balance in our consumption of information, advocating for a measured approach that respects our cognitive limits and seeks quality over quantity. It also raises questions about our societal tendencies toward saturation coverage—be it media, celebrity culture, or constant connectivity—and the potential for such practices to obscure rather than illuminate the deeper values of living.

In conclusion, overexposure, whether in a photographic or cognitive context, illuminates the importance of moderation and mindfulness in how we capture and consume visual and intellectual content. Just as a skilled photographer learns to harness light judiciously to preserve the integrity of the image, so too must we learn to manage the flow of information we receive to maintain our cognitive clarity and understanding. This balance is crucial in a world teeming with light and information, where the right amount of exposure can mean the difference between receiving the transmitted miracle, or missing out on its divinity by absence or sheer ignorance.

Conclusions or: Embracing the Elusive

Throughout this thesis we have embarked on an investigative journey akin to that of Thomas Pynchon's protagonist, Oedipa Maas, in *"The Crying of Lot 49."* Our exploration has not only mirrored the thematic paranoia and curiosity of Pynchon's narrative, but has also paralleled the investigative process inherent in documentary photography, and how both outcomes for the photographer and Oedipa are seemingly ambiguous. Oedipa is last seen at the auction in which Pierce's estate will be cried out for bidders, where she is still hopeful that a representative of one of the many conspiracies she'd accidentally stumbled upon might reveal themselves, just as the photographer is left to ruminate on and connect images from a time and place now removed, but clear enough to be able to piece some narrative together. This final chapter aims to synthesize our line of questioning, connect the accumulated insights, and reflect on the inherently elusive nature of objective truth in the art of observation.

Our investigation began with a curiosity that morphed into a meticulous scrutiny of the environments in which photographers operate. By immersing oneself into the psychological interplay between curiosity and paranoia, we recognized these emotions as dual forces driving photographers towards and away from their subjects. This dynamic, much like Pynchon's depiction of postmodern uncertainty, illustrates that the search for meaning—whether in literature or in life through a lens—is fraught with complexity and contradiction, and an eventual impasse.

The act of observing, as we have dissected it across various chapters, is intrinsically linked to the observer effect—a phenomenon where the observer inevitably influences the subject of observation. In the context of documentary photography, this effect is profound; each photograph, each frame captured is a product not just of the scene or the subject photographed, but of the photographer's presence, perspective, and choice. This thesis has established that while the photographer aims to capture reality, the very act of aiming a camera introduces a variable that alters the outcome. Objectivity evades the lens.

In subsequent chapters, we explored how documentary photographers, much like Maxwell's Demon sorting molecules in a thought experiment, attempt to organize the visual chaos that surrounds us. They strive to create narratives from the entropy, to find signals in the noise. Yet, as Maxwell's Demon suggests, the very attempt to reduce entropy without expending

energy is a paradox. Similarly, the photographer's attempt to capture pure, unaltered reality is inherently paradoxical because the act of capturing reality influences it. Yet, each photograph, with its composition, its timing, and its framing, also raises questions about what is left out of the frame—what is excluded, either by necessity, choice, or even chance. The meaning is fractured.

This leads us to the crux of our thesis: the realization that the objective truth or meaning we seek through the lens of documentary photography is elusive. It is shaped by countless variables—cultural, personal, and contextual. The very essence of observing and recording life introduces distortions, nuances, and subjective overlays that make absolute objectivity unattainable. The observer effect in photography is not merely a physical influence but a metaphorical one, impacting how subjects are perceived and understood, a case of being too close to see the big picture.

In conclusion, while our quest for understanding through documentary photography may never yield the complete truth, it provides a valuable perspective on the human condition, and an ability to leave clues so a photographer, or their audience, might be able to trace the narrative of their life better. It highlights the beauty and the tragedy of seeking understanding in a world where absolute truths are evasive. By embracing the enigma and recognizing the inherent biases and limitations of our observational tools, we can approach documentary photography not only as a method of capturing reality but as a form of art that celebrates, and even romanticizes the complexity and ambiguity of human experience. This thesis does not conclude with definitive answers but opens up a space for contemplation and ongoing dialogue about the nature of truth, observation, and the human desire to find meaning in the chaos.

One of Oedipa's earliest suspicions about her quest resonates strongly at the end of both hers and our journeys, as she is left waiting to discover if this whole journey was something of constructed value, or perhaps something she stumbled upon, entirely unrelated to her, and "*visited upon her from outside and for no reason at all*":

"Having no apparatus except gut fear and female cunning to examine this formless magic, to understand how it works, how to measure its field strength, count its lines of force, she may fall back on superstition, or take up a useful hobby like embroidery, or go mad, or marry a disc jockey. If the tower is everywhere and the knight of deliverance no proof against its magic, what else?"¹⁷

¹⁷ p.12 Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. (1966)

Sources

1. PYNCHON, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition. New York: Harper Perennial, 2006.
2. WEBB, Alex and DYER, Geoff. *The Suffering of Light*. New York: Aperture, 2011.
3. FRIEDLANDER, Lee; GALASSI, Peter and BENSON, Richard. *Friedlander*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2005.
4. MCKENZIE-MCHARG, Andrew. *Experts versus eyewitnesses. Or, how did conspiracy theories come to rely on images?* *Word & Image*. 2019, vol. 35, no.
5. SHANNON, Claude E. and WEAVER, Warren. *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. 1949. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
6. CARTIER-BRESSON, Henri. *Images à la sauvette*. Paris: Verve, 1952.
7. BERGER, John. *Understanding a Photograph*. Penguin Books edition. London: Penguin, 2013.
8. Saad R. *Discovery, development, and current applications of DNA identity testing*. *Proc (Bayl Univ Med Cent)*. 2005 Apr;18(2):130-3.
9. COEN, Joel and COEN, Ethan. *The Man Who Wasn't There*. 2001. United States.

List of the Student's Own Artistic Works

1. LOZANO, Michael. *Sonder*. 2023. Unpublished manuscript.
2. LOZANO, Michael. *Observation's effects on the potential in documentary photography*. 2022. Unpublished manuscript.
3. LOZANO, Michael. *Memory, temporality, and the misguided truth of the image*. 2022. Unpublished manuscript.