

An attempt at exhausting an archive/ Found Photo Foundation

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From its beginnings, photography has had to carry the burden of being an objective art, in the main, due to the technical capability of capturing the visual world. Reality is thus equated with the visible, which is in contradiction with the fact that a photograph exposes ideas, values and concepts, and is constantly finding itself in the phenomenological world. What, in terms of human judgement, is objective? And, what is a fact? According to Nietzsche "facts are precisely what is lacking, all that exists consists of interpretations. We cannot establish any fact 'in itself.'"¹ The *Found Photo Foundation*/FPF, under the patronage of Paula Roush, deals with visuals suitably named 'orphan photographs' and explores this very possibility of walking the line between temporal and spatial domains, where the empirical and the surreal grow surprisingly close.

The FPF can also be read as an artistic experiment of twisting the document value of an archive beyond its

proverbial linearity of causes and consequences. As the connection to the real is often lost, the project is above all a platform of invented spaces that suggests taxonomical methods of artistic research deep into generations and the unknown. It comprises socially charged phenomena, such as agenda, paradigm and (political) propaganda, while in the individual works themselves these concepts are met through their more intimate antidotes. Like imagination, the project offers possible alternatives to what we understand to be a safe entry to everyday experiences. Expectedly, the exhibited works question the very notion of such transparent normality and provide visual answers that belong to the incredible or the invented. Through the shift from actual to fictional, the artists create a tension between the possible and the conclusive, hence communicating the multiple realities to be central to their artistic research.

QUESTION: Thinking through the FPF projects brings me closer to the idea of photography as an event; as the thing/event/situation that is about to happen with the use of images anew. Nothing is still either. It is a 'liquid' moment that seems to grow over the idea of archival and archived rigorousness. The author, however, is the centre of this event. What is the analogy between found photographs and the narratives of your projects? Is there a final stage to your archives?

Paula Roush: FPF's found archives and singular photographs have lost their connection to the real: the link between author, subject matter, place

and owner in these cases cannot be traced back to the past. The archive I deal with here has a distinct referential relation to the place and time of their finding. There is a focus in photographic objects that were found and acquired in flea markets and car boot sales from Portugal. There are multiple reasons these photos became orphan: they may have been abandoned following the death of their owners, they may have been stolen, or they may have simply ceased to be useful and thrown in the garbage, from which they may have been rescued and put back in the market. The FPF workshops open up these images to multiple methods of appropriation including re-photography, narrative fictionalization, experimental autobiography, editorial authorship, as well as exploring representational intersectionality of class, race and gender in a (post) colonial perspective. In the context of these publishing workshops where participants remix FPF material with photos sourced from other contexts, they acquire successive layers of narrative and allegorical meaning, coming close to an “archeology of the recent past,” a practice that consists in recuperating the ruins of the everyday for a dialectical and alternative relationship between the past and the present.²

The exhibited projects exemplify, that a camera-image is reliable in the sense of its representational possibility but not as a representation itself. An image of likeness is true in its phenomenological sense, in the sense that it is – that it is defined through language and meaning or that it is capable to gather informative value of the recorded as a

vehicle of suggested meanings. It functions as an example upon which possible meanings can be projected or applied. Indexical images and photography in particular, are messengers of an instant carrying with them a promise of eternity.

QUESTION: “If so, is a photograph less rewarding in terms of its original indexicality than it is in relation to other photographs?”

John Berger, for instance, suggests that photographs do not in themselves preserve meaning, that images as such are always half empty. It also means that the process of photographic representation indicates the replacement of authority with the represented subject. In a similar context, Walter Benjamin talked about (documentary) photography where individuals or photographed groups are subjected to much larger political powers, which constructed them in the first place. Within a documentary tradition, representation means the absence of *the one* the photo represents in a political sense. Once again, the invisible too, becomes a part of an archive.

PAULA ROUSH: The archive contains thousands of photos from the Portuguese dictatorship-era, including personal snapshots of government officials, photographs of family life, bureaucracy-type photos made for workers’ identification, that unearth a period of collective amnesia and censorship that lasted until 1974. In formerly fascist southern Europe, particularly in Portugal, where photo archives were maintained by the state police as a way to keep its citizens in control, archives were at the service of widespread repression, and

both political and sexual normativity. So, unfolding these hidden narratives can be seen as a gendered interpretation of the archive³ that is also an attempt at an-archiving a notion of national archive, as a repository of absolute historical truth, for example about national and gendered identity and the construction of European empire. Rather I attempt to base the appropriations of images on unstable assumptions that do not usually penetrate the official archives, in order to represent, for example, desiring women and the colonial gaze.

1

Friedrich Nietzsche:
*The Will to Power—
An Attempted
Transvaluation of All
Values – Vol. II,
Books III and IV: 2,*
1910, republished
2008, p. 12.

*Memories: Family
Pictures in Private and
Collective Memory,*
Budapest 2010.

2

Victor Buchli: „Archa-
eology of the recent
past, notes on know-
ledge production“,
in: *Fugitive Images*
(ed.): *Estate*, London
2010, p. 105–116.

3

As suggested by
Suzana Milevska in:
“Eventfulness: family
archives as events/
folds/veils”, in:
Zsofia Ban and Hedvig
Turai (eds.): *Exposed*



fig. 1



Paula Roush