Download Fever: Photography, Subcultures and Online-Offline Counter-archival Strategies
Paula Roush

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With its point of departure in a box containing Anita Corbin's 1981 travelling exhibition "Visible Girls", this text unveils an art / research / teaching project, with the aim of creating a counter-archive of current youth culture. It describes an artist's engagement with archival practices and the way this presents opportunities to develop personal everyday histories that cross online–offline spaces that work as counter-memory narratives; narratives that are counter to academic, media and state accounts of youth culture as shaped by institutional agendas and moral panics. To locate the archive within the framework of counter-memory and counter-archival practices in this way is to work towards visibility.

Archive Fever (Derrida) has been one of the key texts at the centre of what has been described as the archival impulse (Foster). An impulse felt by artists in their appropriation of archives, either institutional or informal, to develop practices that challenge and play with the documents and traces of the past. The possibility being that the archive's traces might be re-activated so that the past, present and future coalesce in critical configurations. In play here is the document as ideological artefact, and the archive as a nexus of politics and repression. As Derrida puts it, "there is no political power without the control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution and its interpretation" (Derrida 4). Once open and accessible, the archive can become a terrain for biographical, fictive and provocative interventions that challenge what was formerly the safe terrain of the historical document.

In a journey exploring what artists can do with archives, Anita Corbin's informal archive "Invisible Girls" has been at the centre of an investigation into the photographic representation of contemporary youth cultures. It has been used to raise questions about the photograph as historical document and its archival status as a representation of the "other". The interest here is in questioning the power relations at play at the intersection of the archive, the body and online self-publishing cultures. I also offer a perspective in which art practice is constituted as research in higher education. At the same time, in teaching photography using photographic archives and questioning representations of youth culture, I delineate a set of emerging methodologies that, together, create a hybrid discourse arising from the convergence of art, education and research into the social dimensions of media.

CHARIE and JILL   outside the "Ladies" Crystal Palace   nov '80

Anita Corbin, Visible Girls, 1981. One of 26 photographs in the exhibiton panels, with introduction and audiotape Conversation with the Girls, part of the box GS Girls Subcultures, Cockpit Gallery/ Camerawork archives. Copyright: Anita Corbin c/o LSBU BA Digital Photography.

Nicola Penfold, Twin Subcultures, 2007. One of a set of six inkjet photographic prints.
Copyright: Nicola Penfold c/o LSBU BA Digital Photography.

Lee Slaymaker, The Pop Cosmopolitanist: A Blank Canvas, 2009, photobook, 54 pages, 15.24 cm x 22.86 cm, saddle-stitch binding, full-colour interior ink. Copyright: Lee Slaymaker c/o LSBU BA Digital Photography.

Lee 21

May 2007

Karel Polt, Alternative to 'Subculture' Gone Mainstream, 2007, photobook, 88 pages, 15.24 cm x 22.86 cm, perfect binding, full-colour interior ink. Copyright: Karel Polt c/o LSBU BA Digital Photography.

What do you see yourself doing in ten years time?

married with kids and a dog and a cat. my boyfriend wants a monkey but we'll see.

What do you work at now, both creatively and otherwise?

i work at not forgetting that others cant see what is in my head.

Robbie Sweeney, Our Creative Youth, 2008, photobook, 115 pages, 15.24 cm × 22.86 cm, casewrap-hardcover binding, full-colour interior ink. Copyright: Robbie Sweeney c/o LSBU BA Digital Photography.

Jessica Kril, Living for the Camera, 2007,
photobook, 91 pages,15.24 cm x 22.86 cm,
perfect binding, full-colour interior ink.Copyright:
Jessica Kril c/o LSBU BA Digital Photography.

Richard Harley, When the Pin is Pulled., 2008, photobook, 20 pages, 22.86 cm x 17.78 cm, saddle-stitch binding, full-colour interior ink. Copyright: Richard Harley c/o LSBU BA Digital Photography.
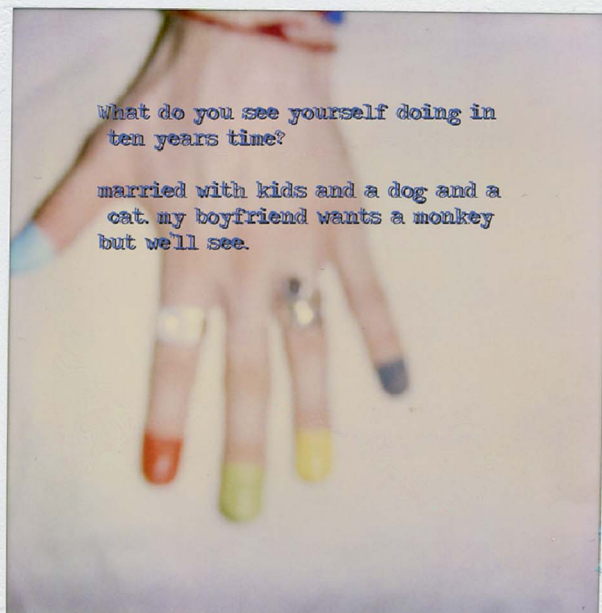
Paula Roush, Post-Subcultures in Second Life: 1 – entering the Media Zoo (MZ) where initial in-world training takes place; 2 – "offline-online" photography on MZ Island's media screens; 3 – SL-activities: applying the snapshots as textures to 3d story cubes and developing a group narrative out of each researcher's images, screengrabs, 2009. Copyright: Paula Roush c/o LSBU BA Digital Photography.

Paula Roush, Post-Subcultures in Second Life: Researcher Doing Fieldwork in the Media Zoo, screengrab, 2009.
Copyright: Paula Roush c/o LSBU BA Digital Photography.

We ask questions about the photographic archive that are positioned at the intersection of three research areas. First, that of visual culture and its study, where the subject of youth culture appears as a contested field; second, the historical and institutional archival practices which contribute to the documentary status of the photograph together with new engagements with the archive in the form of the book and digital self-publishing practices; third, the teaching of photography in projects which involve archival art practices, and which explore situations and networks in Real Life and in Second Life.

Meeting the girls

I first met the "Visible Girls" in the Cockpit Gallery/Camerawork archive, currently held in the Arts, Media and English Department at the London South Bank University (LSBU). This happened in the winter of 2007, whilst I was preparing to teach a Level 1 unit – "The Photographic Index" – and a Level 2 unit – "Photographic Cultures" – for the first time. I was immediately interested in the box labelled GS (Girls Subcultures) containing the project "Visible Girls" by Anita Corbin. Dated 1981, it consists of thirteen laminated panels, each one containing two photographs of two girls, sharing a subcultural style, posing side by side, including Mod, Rockabilly, Punk, Futurist, Soul-funk, Rasta, and Feminist-activist girls. Each image is accompanied by a caption, written with the assistance of an alphabet stencil ruler and a marker, indicating the girls' names, and the photos' dates and locations. The box is part of a set of twenty boxes, made out of black cardboard and measuring approximately 1 m×1.50 m. Each contains a different photographic exhibition, made out of a series of laminated panels, containing photographs and captions, dealing with themes of power, representation and participation, including women's work, social activism, young people and urban subcultures.

Having previously worked with archives within site-specific and relational artistic approaches,[1] I hoped the archive of Anita Corbin's photographs might become the focus for a research project. However, when I inspected its contents more closely I realized that I had happened upon a rich artistic, social and curatorial resource, capable of feeding into several strands of my interests, whilst at the same time providing the basis for a student project which would fulfil the learning outcomes devised for the units. The boxes represent the outreach programme developed by Cockpit Gallery between 1978 and 1985 to bring conceptually and socially engaged photographic practices to schools, youth groups, community centres and libraries in the London area. They were designed as travelling exhibitions, which could be cheaply transported through Red Star post. Initially produced and toured by the Cockpit Gallery, they were later transferred to Camerawork's touring operation in 1987, when the Inner London Education Authority and the Cockpit were dissolved. When Camerawork closed they were stored by Four Corner's Film (in Manchester) and when they moved office in 2007, Shirley Read and Claire Grey[2] proposed that they be stored temporarily at LSBU.

As has been the case with other travelling photo exhibitions, which came eventually to be housed in institutions once they ceased to tour (as DuBois 1900 Georgia

Negro photographs, studied by Shawn Michelle Smith), the collection, despite its small size, comes to be deemed an archive; a preserved, received, and apparently ordered collection of artefacts or images. Hence, it is important to consider this context of the archive, to which the particular images have been assimilated, in order to recognize that the photographs contained in the box are also a counter-archive; to recognize its contestatory signifying practice in relation to patriarchal bias in the representation of youth cultures, and to open up artistic, curatorial and pedagogical spaces where other visual histories and discourses can be recovered and generated.

Photography and the archive

It is worth noting here the relationship between photography and the archive. Ricoeur suggests a view of the archive as synonymous with historical practices that tie it in with an organized set of documents, resulting from institutional acts of preservation. The notion of the trace, as testimony to the past, is a fundamental link here, if we want to follow the process that attributes historical legitimacy to the documents in the archive. The document contains traces of knowledge or facts that were once organized as part of a larger ideological narrative. Following Ricoeur, Merewether notes the indexical character of the photographic document and suggests "photography and the archive function interdependently in so far as both entail transferring the world to image. Tied to the referent, the photographic trace secures its livelihood and becomes critical to the practice and authority of the modern archive" (Merewether 122).

In the case of the photographic portrait in particular, the relationship between its indexicality and the constitution of archives dates back to the nineteenth-century projects of Galton and Bertillon who constructed composite portraits and photography-based typologies which were used to identify specific ethnic and (re)offending criminal types. According to Sekula, these portrait archives "constitute not only the two poles of positivist attempts to regulate social deviance by means of photography, but also the two poles of these attempts to regulate the semantic traffic in photographs" (Sekula 373). This idea of photographic records as static identificatory objects remains dominant, despite a paradigm shift in how we understand archives as "dynamic virtual concepts; a shift away from looking at records as the passive products of human or administrative activity and towards considering records as active agents themselves in the formation of human and organizational memory" (Cook para. 2).

Representing post-subcultures

The "Visible Girls" box is in fact best understood as a mnemonic product of its times and in relation to sociological studies of youth in the 1980s. It was, at that time, a reaction to the context of seminal subcultural studies then taking place and their focus on male subcultural style (see, for example, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* by Dick Hebdige). Anita Corbin argues in "Visible Girls" that girls had been largely underrepresented in subcultural studies. She states in the set's introduction panel: "I have chosen to focus on girls, not because the boys (where present) were any less stylish, but

because girls in subcultures have been largely ignored or when referred to, only as male appendages." This echoed the 1980s feminist critique of subcultural studies by Angela McRobbie.

Organizing the project around the box GS (whilst leaving the other boxes for other semesters) encouraged me to think about youth cultures in the present and consider ways to reinterpret the subcultures of the 1980s, almost three decades later. Issues surrounding the representation of female culture, and the visibility of the female body particularly in the youth cultures of the 1980s in the United Kingdom, resonated with me. As a Portuguese teenager in the 1980s, like most members of my generation, I had been influenced by the same musical subcultures reaching Lisbon in the same period and dealt with similar issues of female in/visibility in relation to both my male peers and the mainstream culture. Now, applying a feminist perspective to the reinterpretation of the box GS meant a number of things as proposed by Angela McRobbie: a continued investigation of patriarchal meanings in representations of youth cultures; a questioning of rigid dualities in gender definitions; the implications of ambiguous sexuality; and a continuing questioning of gender identities and "moral panic" about youth (McRobbie 61).

Earlier subcultural theory with its reliance on the relationship between social class, style and spectacular fashion has been reworked into what is now normally acknowledged as a post-subcultural studies framework. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl suggest that the days "of working class youth sub-cultures 'heroically' resisting subordination through 'semiotic guerrilla warfare'" are long gone (Muggleton and Weinzierl 3). Instead, the more fluid concepts of "tribes" (Maffesoli) or "neo-tribes" (Bennett) have been capturing the experience of fragmentation, flux and fluidity that is central to contemporary youth cultures and the way "global mainstreams and local sub-streams produce new, hybrid cultural constellations" (Muggleton and Weinzierl 3).

Crucially, as Brian Wilson argues, there is a need to acknowledge the political reach of young people's cultural practices:

> studies on youth, to date, have tended to focus on the symbolic, stylistic, apolitical, and local ways that young people respond to their feelings of marginalization and social concerns. Moreover, those who study youth resistance have not investigated in any depth the identified link between the rise of Internet communication and the emergence of various (transnational) social movements.
>
> (Wilson 320)

The impact of networked forms of sociability upon youth cultures is an emergent topic. Paul Hodkinson asserts that in contemporary translocal groupings, technologies may also contribute to the creation of "subnetworks" with the "potential of internet technology to enforce and maintain (sub) cultural boundaries rather than their disintegration" (Hodkinson 291), as in the Net.Goth scene and other recent subcultures. This makes it important to explore the relationships between young people's online and offline activities.

Such lines of enquiry were initiated with a mixed group of female and male student-researchers of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. With Corbin's "Visible Girls" at the centre of the project, the question we addressed was how to create possibilities for a post-subcultural photography. This raised two central questions: "who participates in

contemporary youth post-subcultures?" and "are girls still invisible and if so how can we articulate this in/visibility in the light of the impact of global networked technologies?"

In the archival process, gaps and erasures occur in the archived materials. The challenge then becomes to "(create) ways to bring amnesia and forgetting out into the open", reasons Helene Shulman Lorenz. This is achieved through the work of "counter-memory" or "effective history" suggested by Michel Foucault to deal with "events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations" (Foucault 154). Similarly, Hal Foster sees artist-archivists approaching the archive as a space of creation and a "construction site" for "alternative knowledge or counter-memory" (Foster 22). For Sue Breakell this means exploring the archive as a site for personal research and self-discovery (Breakell para. 42) and for Charles Merewether artists' publications offer counter-archival strategies and ways of registering the lived and the "everyday" (Merewether 13).

In our work, the format of the photobook is suggested as the ultimate virtual archive where exploratory forms of knowledge production combine with the performative, the poetic, and the fictive. As counter-archival practice, the photobook offers a way to contest dominant representations of youth and subculture. To rethink "Visible Girls" in the form of self-published, downloadable photobooks facilitates the entry of counter-archival practices into the realm of networked sociability.

Photobooks as counter-archives

In 2007, in the first iteration of the project, the box's contents were uploaded to the photo-sharing site Flickr; the "Visible Girls" archive was now available online.[3] The aim was to work in the "classroom of the read/write web" (Richardson), making the contents of the box and responses to it available on the net, and to provide an opportunity to rethink the impact of Internet technologies on curatorial practices. Bruns suggests that photo-sharing environments such as Flickr are conducive to an "art of produsage" where flexible creative commons licensing encourages engagement with the available content, and creates opportunities for digital as well as manual curating.

The second iteration of the project, in 2008, resulted in artists' publications, with the first reinterpretations of "Visible Girls" becoming photobooks, which allowed an exploration of book art in a self-publishing environment. "Print-on-demand" platforms like lulu.com offer similar produsage environments, the social features in their software providing opportunities for photographers to publish virtual archives of their immediate practice, with opportunities for online collaboration, peer review and feedback via features integrated in the software (Roush and Brown).

The youth cultures photobooks project now includes two sets or volumes. The first contains twenty-one publications produced in 2007, and the second consists of twenty-eight publications released in 2008. In terms of workflow, in order to provide enough time to create a new photographic work and then edit it into a book, the project took place across two semesters. During the first semester, in Year 1, the research was developed around the theme of youth cultures. In the second semester, in Year 2, the photographic projects were edited into artists' publications. The focus was on the digital press and the possibilities afforded by emerging self-publishing technologies in the dissemination of a young researcher's practice. All the books were published using the

online platform lulu.com and are now publically available with a flexible creative commons licence, both as free download pdfs and as print-on-demand paper books.

Globalized cultural strategies that link online–offline relationships and practices are studied in "New Media Baby" photographic series and in the photobook "Pop Cosmopolitanist: A Blank Canvas", both by Lee Slaymaker, examining three cosplay-like characters developed and maintained by a female artist in her everyday life. In "In Real Life", Christopher Kamper meets three young people who spend 24/7 online, and in "When the Pin is Pulled . . ." Richard Harley challenges prevailing myths on the causal relationship between online games and offline violence. Young entrepreneurs who build their fan and customer base via the Internet are the topic of "Entrepreneurial Youth" by Jo Castle. Youth-led political networks appear in the study of "Young Female Feminist/Activists" by Jonathan Dodds and in "Love Music Hate Racism" by Tim Boddy, a photobook that portrays young activists involved with anti-racism resistance.

Transcultural youth networks that are potentially sustained via the Internet, but for whom the streets, urban entertainment centres and vacant buildings are essential places of gathering, are represented in photobooks about street dance in "Dance . . . Life" by M. J. Gumayagay; the youth from South London and their love for Streetball, an informal variant of basketball played on playgrounds, in "All Day, Every Day" by Natalie Cheung; an alternative way of living in "Alternative Culture" by Samy Groen; the exploits of BMX riders in "The Featherstone Locals" by Richard Johnson, and in "Southbank" by Mark Westlake; the lives of a group of skateboarders in the town of Maidstone in "Go Paintboarding" by Luke Aveil; the squatting movement in "Our Underground Haven" by Rachael Johnson; gothic Lolita style in "Gothic Lolita" by Parveen Sahota; college musicians in " Beat – A Study of Musical Youth" by Jenny Dale; three East London chavs in "Youth Culture" by Richard Harris, and a day in the life of two South London chavettes in "Chavettes" by Paul Lincoln; graffiti work in "Generation G" by Lucy Brooker; a coffee shop after-hours in "The Third Space" by Sindy Püssa; university students in their bedrooms in "Students' Rooms" by Davide Ferrari; and street fashion styles in "Street Fashion" by Amanda Carter. Global travel as "a route of passage" is present in "Moroccan Travels" by Alastair Sanchez, and the experience of inter-railing is explored visually in "My Europe" by Nikki Goodban.

Young girls' experience of growing up is another strong strand of works. They appear in the in between stage of maturing from a teenager into an adult in the photobook "The Adolescent Adult" by Emma Coleman, in their bedrooms, along with accompanying questionnaires in "Girls in their Bedrooms" by Charlotte Miceli and also in "Girls, Girls, Girls" by Nicola Goodban and "Women in Relationships" by Keyan Reynalls. Young girls' perceptions of their bodies and identities, revolving around make-up, appear in "Performing Identity" by Evi Kemmer. Obsession with fashion and diet is talked about in girls "Aged 9" by Jennifer Ballard. Teen mums are discussed in "Teenage Girls on Motherhood" by Dana Mendonça. Bengali girls from the London's East End feature in the series "Palon Kor" and the photobook "Journeys" by Kate Anthony. Being under the surveillance of her own camera is the theme of the mockumentary "Living for the Camera" by Jessica Kril.

Queer creative lives are the subject of "Our Creative Youth" by Robbie Sweeny; "Alternative to 'Subculture' Gone Mainstream" by Karel Polt; and "A Day in the Life of Cameille" by Christopher Talbot. Media perception of teenage culture is approached in "The Front Page Story" by Anita Lasocka; in "Positive Youth: An Antidote to Negative Press" by

Artemis Meereis; and in "Stereotyping the Youth" by Katrina Cadogan. A young couple's emotional strain under the military contract is the theme of "Tour of Duty" by Esther Gray.

Emerging situations

An audio cassette entitled *Conversations "with the girls"* (quotes in the original), also included in the box "Visible Girls", contains a soundtrack of music provided by the girls, mixed with edited extracts of them talking about their daily lives as members of a female subculture. As Anita Corbin wrote in her statement: "The project involved two different approaches. One; my immediate impressions of the groups in their clubs and pubs or in the street and the second based on interviews with some of the girls in their homes."

This multimodal approach, which I tend to favour in my own artistic and teaching practices, provides an entry point into methodological issues and the hybrid research practices that we thought adequate to the topic of youth cultures. I am interested in the "emergent methods", which are often "discovered as a result of modifying more conventional research projects when traditional methods fail to 'get at' the aspect of social life the researcher is interested in" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 3). Emerging practices, such as the a/r/tographic approach are for me the most sustainable way to avoid the split between the identities of the artist, the educator and the researcher that so often occurs once an artist needs to follow a curriculum-based approach. In artography "arts and education complement, resist, and echo one another through rhizomatic relations of living inquiry", using "a politically informed methodology of situations" (Irwin et al. 70). My own identities as artist/researcher and teacher (a/r/t) are all allowed to be present simultaneously and I encourage the younger student-researchers I work with to think and act along the same lines. Moreover, "the acts of inquiry and the three identities resist modernist categorizations and instead exist as post-structural conceptualizations of practice" (Irwin et al. 3).

In line with a feminist and rhizomatic relationality, the group placed their own experiences of youth culture at the heart of their projects, bringing their own ethnic and migrant backgrounds, gendered roles and sexual orientations into an academic framework, making us aware that the "traditional bifurcation" between the personal and the academic can be resisted (Wilson Mackay and Baxter 50).

Weaving visual and ethnographic methods, in "The Pop Cosmopolitanist: A Blank Canvas", Lee Slaymaker approaches the phenomenon of "pop cosmopolitanism" which Henry Jenkins defines as: "the ways that transcultural flows of popular culture inspire new forms of global consciousness and cultural competency" (Jenkins 156). He worked in collaboration with female artist Alex Saunders and his research includes site-specific online and offline activities in order to capture the varied components involved in the development of Saunders' cosplay-like characters. Cosplay (or costume play) is in itself a contemporary subculture sustained by the rise of Internet and fan fiction. Cosplayers develop their characters based on their favourite film, television and game characters and join web forums to chat about their characters and organize offline meetings. However, as shown in the book, Alex's role-play also presents similarities to the "Visible Girls":

> The characters she portrays are not technically fictional. They are representations of her different moods and styles. Each character has a well defined background

and individual style of clothing, so you are able to ascertain her mood on any one day by the character she chooses to portray. This could be seen as a heavily intricate form of theatrical exhibitionism; however it is very akin to the way that the girls in Corbin's archive portrayed themselves.

(Slaymaker 48)

Equally interested in the effects of networked practices, Christopher Kamper in "In Real Life" photographs three young people whom he knew from online chat and discussion boards but had never met in real life: "Ever since reaching their adolescence, the world wide web became the very centre of their social lives. One is an Otaku (a Japanese term used to refer to people with obsessive interests, particularly in anime, manga, and video games), another a Lolita (a Japan-based fashion subculture that is primarily influenced by Victorian children's clothing as well as costumes from the Rococo period) and the other a LARP-gamer (LARP or live action roleplay is a form of role-playing game where the participants physically act out their characters' actions)" (Kamper 7). To capture their hobbies, Kamper follows them offline where the intersection between their extraordinary practices and the everyday takes place.

Choosing Polaroid's imminent disappearance as a photographic technology to speak for the ephemeral condition of youth, in the photobook "Our Creative Youth" Robbie Sweeny placed the camera with a ten exposure film in the hands of five collaborators, and gave them free reign in answering the same three questions: "When you were a child what did you dream of becoming?" "What do you work at now, both creatively and otherwise?" "What do you see yourself doing in ten years' time?" In the photobook, the answers are digitally typed onto the images: "Both Polaroid and the participants in this project are going through a transition; they are passing from the now. In the case of Polaroid, it seems there will be no future, at least for the participants in the project, there is a hope that they will continue on their creative path" (Sweeny 3).

In his photobook "Alternative to 'Subculture' Gone Mainstream", Karel Polt splits the publication into two sides, re-creating for each of his subjects a space, much as they create place for themselves within a larger visible mainstream "subculture". Commenting on contemporary queer identity, Polt states:

In the mainstream gay world, there are people who do not feel part of the group. They could be part of a larger visible subculture, but have chosen to be different. They can be described as minority within minority. That is why they are photographed alone and not in pairs.

(Polt)

In other photographic work it is the photographer who places herself under the scrutiny of her own camera. In "Living for the Camera", Jessica Kril creates a self-referential mockumentary of her life. Using the format of a photo journal she explores the thin line between the fictive and intimate diary and asks:

How would you define a pose for the camera? Can a pose be truthful and a pose the truth? Can a documentary be fact or fiction? Or both? All of the events depicted

here happened and all the participants knew of the camera but not all of them posed. How can one distinguish between an assumed pose and a natural one?

(Kril, Foreword)

In her series of "Twin Subcultures", Nicola Penfold created a set of double self-portraits that play with masquerade and the duplication of the self via digital manipulation. She dressed up in some of Corbin's 1981 subcultural styles, such as Mod, Hippy and Punk, adding other modern-day subcultures such as Goth, Geek, Rich Bitch, and Daddy's Girl, sourced from the subcultural looks popular in today's social network sites such as Deviant Art:

But instead of using two models, I decided to use myself to model both girls. Once two photographs were chosen, I set about merging them into one frame. The final result . . . like a set of twins from the same subculture sitting for a photograph.

(Penfold)

In "Palon Kor", Kate Anthony shows images "that represent the variety of dress styles seen worn by Bengali girls in Shadwell. This area was chosen as it was one of the first locations of mass surveillance and archiving of a youth culture in the 1850's." Regarding her research methods, she says:

Much of the information that is within this essay is word of mouth and not referenced from academic text, talking to the local girls and women has given answers as well as two years of observing this community as a neighbour and as someone who attended the local mosque to learn a bit about the culture. It has been hard backing up these statements with pure academic facts, giving reason to think that there is room within the academic field to study this group of females more to record what has been observed.

In "The Front Page Story", Anita Lasocka attempts to show two contradictory images of youth culture, one created by newspapers and media, another by young people themselves:

I asked them to take 20–30 photographs which can in the best way possible show what young culture is for them and how do they see themselves in this cultural phenomenon. All photographs were submitted in digital form by email or on CD.

(Lasocka 7)

The resulting photobook is structured around these voices, offering a critical remix of mainstream media and auto-ethnographies.

SLubcultures

Recently the project was extended into Second Life, using photography in our search for methods capable of exploring online subcultures. Second Life is an online 3-D Immersive Virtual World (IVW) and its cultural practices have been the subject of academic interest and wider fascination, with images (digital snapshots) of Second Life's

residents' spectacular fashions circulating in the news (Good). Oppositional subcultures have been identified and studied by Bakioglu who draws parallels between emergent Second Life "griefer" subcultures (those engaged in the act of causing persistent grief to other members of the online community, intentionally disrupting their immersion in the game play) and Punk's vernacular creativity in Real Life. Additionally, Second Life's everyday life has been the topic of anthropological study as undertaken by Tom Boellstorff, who suggests that the challenge of ethnography in Second Life consists in capturing the flow of daily life; not the unique memorable moments that make it into the headlines but the way its residents go about re/creating their cultural practices in a virtual world.

Within this research and debate on youth cultures and subcultures, including other reports of artists using art as research approaches in Second Life (Nash), I took up a residency with two collaborators from the University of Leicester in the "Media Zoo",[4] inviting six participants from the BA in Digital Photography (Year 2), researchers who had previously published their photobooks on subcultures, to meet us face to face in the LSBU media-lab, to work synchronously in Second Life. We wanted to research the potential of Second Life to continue our reinterpretation of the box "Visible Girls" within a 3-D IVW. We wanted to find out more about the impact of IVWs in the development of post-subcultural practices, the relationship between immersive online–offline activities and, finally, to explore research practices that may emerge from Second Life situations, whilst facilitating collaborative group work and reflective learning.

To structure the group work and facilitate a mixture of individual and collaborative tasks, three Second Life-based learning activities or SL-tivities (Wheeler, Nie, and Salmon) were developed for this project (Roush, Nie, and Wheeler). In SL-tivity 1 (week 1), "Snapshot Tools in Second Life", the purpose was to introduce participants to the basic use of the snapshot tool and photography as a social practice in Second Life. In SL-tivity 2 (week 2), "Virtual StoryCubes", participants were asked to produce their own cube of digital images relating to the snapshots they had taken of subcultural communities in Second Life. In SL-tivity 3 (third and final week), entitled "Explorations", the aim was to further explore and debate the wider potential of 3-D IVWs for digital media and digital photography in relation to research into youth cultures and subcultures.

We identified visible links between subculture, identity and place in the images taken in Second Life. The photographs show avatars that use spectacular fashion and differentiate themselves through their visual style. In parallel, they reveal distinct places, with spectacular locations visible both as background for the avatars' poses and as spaces in their own right – locations that might represent the uniqueness of cultural practices in Second Life. These include clubs, shopping malls, and Second Life replicas of real-life sites, like the Second Life Globe Theatre, a virtual reconstruction of the original London Globe. The place could thus become a crucial entry point into a study of Second Life subcultures; as a participant-researcher stated: "The existence of replicas like this in Second Life indicates that it is not only about fantasy world and there is a lot of copy of the real world."

In terms of research practices, the participants reported that if this were a twelve-week, semester-long project, they would plan to spend more time in Second Life doing fieldwork, getting to identify the groups they would be working with, building relationships, and working towards a more complex form of representation, including

interviews collected via the chat tool. Different forms of participant observation were suggested, along a continuum that included total immersion in Second Life culture. One of the participants suggested he would work with a distinctive group of Second Life entrepreneurs and live with them to document their cultural practices.

> I would be interested in following someone who is really serious about Second Life, someone who spends a lot of time there, and has an occupation, and would follow him for days, photographing and interviewing, that would be my kind of approach. Doing more ethnographic work.

Another interesting reflection concerns the group's self-representation as a group, intersecting online–offline photographic practices. Their favourite image is one in which the group visiting the Media Zoo Island looks at a large screen displaying a black and white photo. In it, a skeleton lies in an open grave in a Kalash village cemetery. They referred to the cognitive meta-levels embedded in the image:

> What attracts me is the connection between us who don't appear real but the photo that appears very real . . . what I like is the striking contrast between the fact that we knew we were in Second Life, and the photo represented real life . . . We are all avatars in a 3-D world looking at a picture in real life.

Second Life is characterized by the creative collaboration of its residents. One of the most visible outputs is their appearance and built environment, constituting a collective work of art that provides a prolific site to extend our previous work with photography and subcultures. In the words of one of the participants, this might lead us ultimately to ask: "Is every location in Second Life related to a specific subculture? Or, are we taking Second Life as a subculture in itself? Or alternatively, is there anything like a mainstream culture in Second Life?" Another participant noted: "One can create one's scene, start a new tribe, and this can become a project in itself."

As non-conclusion

The work developed in response to the box GS is a contribution to contemporary research on the meaning of archives for current artistic, educational and curatorial practices. As stated by Barbara Vanderlinden:

> The documents of an exhibition should not be thought of as a dead mass of deactivated records or a closed history no longer of use. Even though they are the vestiges of past activities, exhibition archives can remain active resources for curators, artists, students and researchers involved in exhibition projects to come.
>
> (Vanderlinden 235)

Today, the read/write web represents an open classroom for our student photography researchers to interrogate institutional archives and publish their enquiries. This essay proposes that the photographic series and books developed in response to the historical

exhibition "Visible Girls" are part of a counter-archival strategy, achieved through an engagement with situated counter-narratives. The researchers created new sites of resistance where fixed notions of youth identities and cultural practices are resisted and destabilized.

Situating the photobooks within a wider network and in the online "produsage" environment was also counter-archival. The self-publishing practices that occurred, mediated as they were by the social software that facilitates participation, allowed the projects to be constantly edited and revised, further delaying any ready archivization. Additionally, with the introduction of Second Life as a learning environment, there is the potential of immersive social worlds for researching into the online–offline nature of contemporary youth cultures.

Notes

1   I worked with Biscuit Town photographic archives to create the project SOS:OK Emergency Biscuit, Coleman Project Space, 2004 and ongoing. For more information visit the project's website at <http://msdm.org.uk/sos_ok>. In 2005 I launched the Protest Academy as a performative archive of tactical audio, and published its four-track collective score as a vinyl record (http://www.msdm.org.uk/protest-academy).
2   Shirley Read is a freelance photographic researcher who was a member of the Camerawork Collective and Claire Grey was a project worker at the Cockpit Department of Cultural Studies.
3   To see the whole set visit <http://www.flickr.com/photos/photographicindex/sets/72157594538834312/>.
4   This resulted from a collaboration with the University of Leicester's Beyond Distance Research Alliance MOOSE project (MOdelling Of Secondlife Environments). The University of Leicester opened up its Media Zoo Island in Second Life in December 2007.

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Paula Roush is an artist-educator-researcher. She is a lecturer in digital photography at the London South Bank University where she teaches courses on the archive and post-subcultures, photobooks, the digital press and self-publishing, performativity and surveillance space. She also teaches art theory in the MA in Art and Media practice at the University of Westminster. She is the founder of msdm (msdm.org.uk), a platform with a fluctuating body of collaborators exploring mobile strategies of display & mediation. With a focus on performative installation, msdm has developed a hybrid practice that encompasses online technologies and site-specific approaches to participatory art. The latest project (premiered at Radiator Festival 09) explores the world of home webcamming and web spectatorship through a live stream of synchronized webcam channels.