

Foreword: Frames of Expression

Photography and Other Art Forms

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ABSTRACT:

The editors' foreword situates photography as a practice defined by its historically complex and productive relationship with other arts, emphasising its intermedial and comparative dimensions. It frames the issue within contemporary photography studies and provides an overview of its contents, presenting the set of articles, as well as an interview and two reviews, which collectively explore photography's exchanges with literature, visual culture, and other artistic forms.

RESUMO:

A introdução editorial enquadra a fotografia como uma prática marcada por uma relação histórica complexa e produtiva com outras artes, sublinhando a sua dimensão intermedial e comparativa. Situa o número no campo dos estudos de fotografia e apresenta, de forma geral, os contributos que o compõem — os artigos, uma entrevista e duas resenhas — dedicados às relações da fotografia com a literatura, a cultura visual e outras práticas artísticas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

comparative studies; intermediality; photography and the arts; visual culture; writing and images

KEYWORDS:

cultura visual; escrita e imagem; estudos comparatistas; fotografia e artes; intermedialidade

PHOTOGRAPHY HAS ALWAYS navigated a complex and often ambivalent relationship with the other arts, occupying a position that is neither fully aligned with mechanical reproduction nor entirely assimilable to traditional notions of artistic expression. This dual nature gave rise to a set of persistent questions that continue to inform both photographic practice and theory: can photography be reduced to a technical tool for recording and documenting reality, or does it possess the capacity to transcend representation and assert itself as a fully expressive art form? From its earliest moments, photography has been compelled to negotiate this tension, and it is precisely through its sustained engagement with other media — painting, literature, performance, cinema, and more recently digital practices — that it continues to articulate its shifting identity.

One of the earliest and most explicit manifestations of this dialogue can be found in Pictorialism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, photographers adopted compositional strategies, atmospheric effects, and technical procedures associated with painting in order to align photography with the aesthetic values of the fine arts. Soft focus, manipulated negatives, and carefully staged scenes sought to evoke the visual and emotional registers of Impressionist and Symbolist painting. Figures such as Alfred Stieglitz and Julia Margaret Cameron exemplify this impulse to situate photography within an existing artistic tradition, revealing an early desire for cultural legitimacy that was achieved not through medium-specific purity, but through deliberate cross-pollination. Pictorialism thus illustrates how photography's search for artistic status was inseparable from its dialogue with other visual forms, even as it gradually developed its own distinct visual language.

Throughout the twentieth century, this dialogue intensified and diversified. Avant-garde movements such as Dada and Surrealism provided fertile ground for photographers to experiment with collage, montage, staging, and mixed media, expanding the possibilities of the photographic image beyond straightforward depiction. Artists such as Man Ray and Dora Maar treated photography as a site of experimentation where painting, object-making, and conceptual strategies could converge. At the same time, many photographers extended their practice into other artistic fields, allowing work in film, writing, or music to feed back into their photographic approaches. Robert Frank's engagement with cinema, for example, demonstrates how the sensibility of photographic immediacy and contingency could be translated into moving images and narrative structures. Similarly, Patti Smith's photographic work cannot be separated from her activity as a poet and musician, as a literary and lyrical attention to intimacy, memory, and personal experience deeply informs her images.

In recent decades, interdisciplinary approaches have become a defining feature of photographic practice. Modern and contemporary photographers frequently operate across multiple artistic domains, treating photography as one element within a broader constellation of practices. Luigi Ghirri's background in architecture, for instance, informs a photographic exploration of space, scale, and perception that moves fluidly between landscape, urbanism, and abstraction. Eikoh Hosoe's work integrates photography with literature, theatre, and dance, producing images shaped by performance, corporeality, and myth, particularly through his collaborations with

figures such as Tatsumi Hijikata and Yukio Mishima. Cindy Sherman's staged photographs draw extensively on theatrical and cinematic conventions, using performance as a means to interrogate identity and representation. Sophie Calle, in turn, consistently intertwines photography and writing, constructing narrative and conceptual frameworks in which images and texts are mutually dependent, and where autobiographical material becomes an artistic strategy rather than a confessional mode.

Taken together, these practices demonstrate that photography's engagement with other arts is not merely a matter of influence or stylistic borrowing. Rather, it reveals photography's capacity to exceed the role of passive representation and to function as an active, generative force within a broader artistic field. By drawing on diverse artistic traditions and methods, photography occupies a dynamic and unstable space that resists fixed definitions and rigid hierarchies. It is precisely this instability — between document and invention, between technical process and artistic construction — that allows photography to continually challenge established categories and to renew its critical and expressive potential.

Within the field of photography studies, this sustained attention to photography's relations with other arts reflects a broader methodological tension that has long structured the discipline. On the one hand, photographic theory has been deeply invested in questions of medium specificity, indexicality, and the technical and ontological conditions that distinguish photography from other forms of image-making. On the other hand, and increasingly in recent decades, scholarship has turned toward comparative, interdisciplinary, and intermedial perspectives, recognising that photography has always developed in close dialogue with other artistic practices and cultural forms. Rather than treating these approaches as mutually exclusive, contemporary photography studies often navigate between them, understanding medium specificity itself as something that emerges through relation, exchange, and historical entanglement.

From the standpoint of comparative studies — and particularly of research with a focus on intermediality — the contributions assembled here approach photography as a relational practice, articulated through its encounters with other media and forms of expression. This issue follows directly from *Compendium* No. 2, on the "Materialities of the Photobook", edited by José Bértolo and David Campany, which focused on photography's relationship with materiality, paper, objecthood, and editorial form. While that issue foregrounded the photobook as a privileged site for thinking about photography's material and tactile dimensions, the present issue expands the scope of inquiry by turning to photography's broader intermedial relations. Together, these two issues form a sustained editorial trajectory within the journal, addressing photography as a practice that is constitutively relational and inherently comparative, shaped not only by its technical conditions, but also by its exchanges with other media, artistic traditions, and cultural forms.

The current issue of *Compendium* positions itself within this critical landscape. By bringing together contributions that approach photography through its intersections with literature, writing, performance, drawing, exhibition practices, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century visual culture, this issue seeks to contribute to

ongoing debates within photography studies, foregrounding intermedial relations as central to how photography has been produced, theorised, and understood.

Compendium No. 8 opens with an article by Luís Mendonça, which examines the relationship between an iconic figure in the history of photographic theory, Roland Barthes, and a writer whose importance for thinking about photography has only more recently begun to receive sustained critical attention, Hervé Guibert. Starting from the biographical, temporal, and intellectual proximity between these two authors, Mendonça develops a comparative reading of their respective poetics, both of which are grounded in first-person writing while simultaneously seeking to elaborate a rigorous reflection on the ontology and affective force of the photographic image.

Central to this comparison is the figure of the mother, and more specifically the image of the mother, which occupies a decisive place both in *La chambre claire* and in the short text that gives its title to *L'Image fantôme*. In Barthes's case, this is the well-known photograph that is described but never reproduced; in Guibert's, it is an image that never comes into being at all due to a technical failure that leaves the film blank. These two absent images function, in different but closely related ways, as "ghost images": they mark photography as a site of loss, desire, and temporal disjunction, situated between the familiar and the uncanny, and between document, memory, and affect.

By placing particular emphasis on writing as the primary medium through which both authors reflect on photography, Mendonça demonstrates how Barthes and Guibert transform the photographic image into a literary and conceptual problem. In both cases, writing becomes the space in which the photograph is activated, displaced, and reworked, allowing thought to unfold in proximity to the image rather than in direct commentary upon it. Photography thus operates as a catalyst for an experimental, self-reflexive mode of writing in which the authorial subject is continually reconfigured. The article situates the work of Barthes and Guibert at the intersection of photography and writing, arguing that their most significant contribution to photographic theory lies in writing's capacity to extend, complicate, and critically rearticulate the photographic experience.

Sandra Camacho then examines a specific case study, focusing on the work of the Portuguese artist Daniel Blaufuks. Through a close reading of several of his projects, the author uncovers the dense literary network upon which Blaufuks's artistic practice is constructed, showing how photography in his work is inseparable from language, narrative, and rhetorical structures. Rather than functioning as a self-sufficient visual object, the photographic image emerges as a site of mediation, where meaning is activated through reference, citation, and textual association.

By analysing key works by Blaufuks, Camacho situates his practice within a broader framework characteristic of contemporary art, grounded in referentiality, homage, and forms of pastiche. Blaufuks's work unfolds within a continuous circuit between literature and photography, in which books, editorial formats, and literary procedures play a constitutive role. This circuit mobilises international literary figures such as W. G. Sebald, Georges Perec, Italo Calvino, and Gonçalo M. Tavares, as well as institutional references such as Penguin as an editorial and cultural model. Camacho argues that it is within this sustained movement between media that

Blaufuks's work articulates its reflection on memory, exile, and the archive, positioning photography as a practice shaped as much by reading and writing as by the act of image-making.

In the third article, Humberto Brito offers a reading of Franz Kafka's canonical story "The Metamorphosis". Rather than being deterred by the fact that this is one of the most extensively studied literary works in the academic canon, Brito proposes an interpretation that, while firmly hermeneutic and attentive to questions of textual construction and meaning-making, is prompted by a close attention to two photographs that appear within the narrative itself.

Starting from these two photographic images, and from the frames that contain them, Brito extends his analysis to a wider system of literal and virtual frames that Kafka progressively constructs throughout the text. These include figures positioned within doorways, windows, walls, beds, and other rectangular or delimiting structures that repeatedly organise perception and point of view. Through this network of frames, "The Metamorphosis" is read as a succession of images arranged in sequence, a structure that can productively be approached as a kind of photobook, understood here as a montage of images whose meaning emerges through juxtaposition and seriality.

At the basis of this reading lies a fundamental tension in Kafka's text between meaning and opacity, visibility and obscurity, silence and interpretation. These tensions, Brito argues, resonate strongly with the logic of the photobook itself, an object that invites reading while simultaneously resisting full legibility. By approaching Kafka's narrative through the conceptual lens of photographic framing and sequential imagery, the article opens a space in which literature and photography illuminate one another, and in which writing becomes a means of thinking visually about textual form and interpretation.

Continuing within the field of comparative literature also understood as the study of relations between literature and the other arts, the article by Bárbara Sexauer examines *Un monde sans rivage*, a novel by the French writer Hélène Gaudy. The novel is grounded in the historical expedition undertaken in 1897 by Salomon August Andrée, Knut Frænkel, and Nils Strindberg, who attempted to reach the North Pole by hot-air balloon. Following the failure of the expedition and the death of its members, their bodies were recovered in 1930, along with Nils Strindberg's photographic negatives, which had been preserved in the ice in an advanced state of deterioration. Originally intended as visual documentation of the journey, these images survived only in fragmented, damaged form.

Sexauer's article explores the double perspective on photography developed in Gaudy's novel. On the one hand, photography functions as a literary theme, articulated through the figure of Strindberg as photographer, as well as through the narrative reconstruction of other photographic and exploratory ventures. These include the experimental photographic practices of August Strindberg, Nils's uncle, the aerial photography of Félix Nadar, and a broader constellation of polar expeditions that situate photography within the scientific, technological, and imperial imaginaries of the late nineteenth century. Photography thus appears as a historical practice tied to ambitions of knowledge, visibility, and conquest.

On the other hand, photography operates as a technical and formal model for writing itself. Gaudy's prose assimilates photographic processes and materials, producing a textual fabric that echoes the condition of Strindberg's recovered images: eroded by time, marked by gaps, shadows, and areas of illegibility. Significantly, the photographs that activate Gaudy's writing do not appear in the novel itself. They remain absent, inaccessible, or only indirectly evoked through description and speculation. As in Barthes's meditation on the unseen photograph of the mother in *La chambre claire*, and in Guibert's account of the image that never came into being in *L'Image fantôme*, photography here functions as a missing image whose absence generates writing, interpretation, and narrative invention.

Sexauer shows how this damaged photography, rather than fulfilling its original documentary function, becomes a generative site for imagination, speculation, and narrative reconstruction. The degradation of the negatives, caused by the same extreme natural conditions they sought to record, opens the novel to uncertainty and indeterminacy, allowing photography to be rethought as a space of opacity rather than transparency. In this sense, *Un monde sans rivage* proposes a model in which the failure of photographic representation becomes the very condition for literary invention and for a renewed reflection on the limits of documentation, memory, and representation.

The articles section concludes with a contribution by Marcos Flamínio Peres devoted to *Senhora*, one of the major novels of Brazilian Romanticism by José de Alencar. Combining a strongly historical perspective with sustained close reading, Peres situates the narrative within a nineteenth-century visual culture in which windows increasingly entered fiction as symbolic figures of the frame. Windows, like pictorial and photographic images, are approached as *dispositifs* of seeing and being seen, spaces in which visibility is organised and meaning is produced. In this sense, the novel is read against the backdrop of a century in which representation becomes profoundly shaped by imagistic paradigms.

From the window-as-frame, Peres moves to the portrait, anchoring his analysis in a crucial narrative detail. After having been married for some time, the protagonist Aurélia commissions a painted portrait of her husband. The image she is presented with, however, proves unsatisfactory, precisely because it remains too close to the man she encounters daily. Peres reads this episode through the growing influence of photography, and in particular of the daguerreotype, on nineteenth-century painting, bringing to light the tension between Realist and Romantic worldviews. While the former privileged exteriority, visibility, and positive documentation, the latter sought access to interiority, invisibility, and forms of spectral presence that exceeded empirical appearance.

It is for this reason, Peres argues, that Aurélia commissions a second portrait, one that departs from contemporary likeness and instead seeks to incorporate the idea of the man she loved in the past and who doesn't exist anymore as such. Reluctantly, the painter, whose practice remains aligned with positivist ideals of fidelity and resemblance, produces this so-called "fantasy" portrait, which the protagonist comes to cherish, even as she increasingly rejects her living husband. Through this triangulation between subject, image, and desire, the novel stages a conflict between

representation and the *ideal* that resonates deeply with nineteenth-century debates on art and photography.

Drawing on thinkers such as Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin, the final article in the dossier thus approaches photography as a key paradigm of nineteenth-century realist positivism, one against which Romantic and, later, Decadent poetics articulated their aesthetic and ethical positions. In doing so, Peres's analysis situates *Senhora* within a broader reflection on the crisis of representation inaugurated by photographic technologies, and on the enduring tension between visibility, imagination, and the desire for an image capable of preserving what has been lost.

The dossier also includes a conversation between José Neves and Clare Grafik, Head of Exhibitions at The Photographers' Gallery, focused on *Double Take: Drawing and Photography* (2016). The discussion revisits the curatorial premises of the exhibition, tracing its origins in Grafik's interest in the photographic surface, materiality, and inscription, as well as in dialogues with artists such as Jan Svoboda and Běla Kolářová. As a joint exhibition of The Photographers' Gallery and Drawing Room, the project brought together historical and contemporary practices in order to examine how drawing and photography intersect, overlap, and challenge medium-specific definitions. Throughout the conversation, Grafik reflects on key themes structuring the exhibition, and drawing and photography are discussed as practices that, in *Double Take*, exchange roles: drawing becomes mechanical, repetitive, or mediated, while photography appears slow, tactile, and materially engaged.

The first review included in this issue, by Nadya Ismail, is devoted to the exhibition *Francesca Woodman and Julia Margaret Cameron: Portraits to Dream In*, curated by Magdalene Keaney and presented at the National Portrait Gallery in London in 2024. Bringing together more than 160 works, the exhibition proposed a dialogue between two photographers separated by a century, geography, and historical context. Ismail carefully reconstructs the curatorial logic underpinning this encounter, showing how the exhibition moves beyond an obvious comparison based on medium alone to reveal deeper aesthetic and conceptual affinities between Cameron's Victorian pictorialist portraits and Woodman's highly experimental, autobiographical practice. Central to this dialogue is the notion of the dream, understood as a mode of imagining photography at the threshold between visibility and invisibility.

Ismail's review traces the exhibition's thematic organisation and highlights recurring concerns shared by both artists, including theatricality, performativity, myth, femininity, and the dissolution of boundaries between subject and image. At the same time, the author attends closely to the historical and technical differences that distinguish their practices. As Ismail argues, the exhibition stages a productive tension between these differences, allowing the photographs to resonate across time. The issue concludes with a review by José Bértolo, devoted to *Japanese Photography Magazines, 1880s to 1980s* by Ivan Vartanian, Toda Masako, and Kaneko Ryūichi. The review highlights the book's remarkable combination of scholarly rigour and visual richness, noting its large format, careful layout, and extensive translations of magazine texts. It situates the volume as a landmark contribution to the study of Japanese photography, emphasising the centrality of periodicals in shaping photographic practice, discourse, and aesthetics over more than a century. The book is

presented as an indispensable resource for scholars, with an obvious appeal to any reader interested in the history and culture of photography in Japan.

Globally speaking, *Compendium* No. 8 explores photography as a relational practice, shaped through its encounters with other arts, media, and “frames of expression”. Through their interplay of images, writing, and material forms, all contributions illuminate new dimensions of meaning, fostering reflection within comparative, inter-artistic and intermedial approaches to the study of photography, literature and visual culture.

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José Neves is the Assistant Curator at The Photographers’ Gallery, where he actively contributes to shaping its exhibitions. Before this role, he was a curator at Belfast Exposed Photography in Northern Ireland, organising exhibitions featuring the work of artists such as Jo Spence, Frits de Ridder, Arpita Shah, and Yvette Monahan. He earned a PhD in Photographic History from Ulster University in 2017, with a focus on photobook history. Prior to that, he studied Photographic History and Practice at De Montfort University in Leicester and worked as an Assistant Curator at the Wilson Centre for Photography in London. His interests include the history of photobooks, artist’s books, photographic printing techniques, and storytelling through images. Recently, he has been exploring the depiction of HIV/AIDS through photography during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

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