

I'M THINKING
HOW SOON IS NOW?

WHY SHOULD I
DO YOUR JOB?

NOT NOW
MAYBE LATER

It's gone

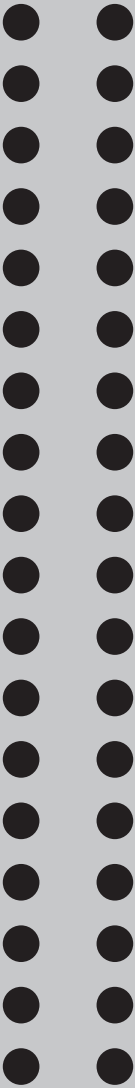
THINK ABOUT IT

I'M SORRY

Who is asking questions about photography and the world? Monique van de Wijdeven? Tanya Habjouqa? Min Jun Kim? Flavia Rossi? Nora Austriņa? Maira Dudareva? Linda Boļšakova? Asya Zhetvina? Oriana Eliçabe? Monika Scherer? Desideria Andreea Petrache? Artem Nadyozhin? Ioanna Sakellaraki? Nastassja Nefjodov? Daria Minina? Svitlana Levchenko? Alexander Anufriev? Anete Skuja? Audrius Kriauciunas? Eli Lea? Inārs Bīрманis? Demelza Watts? Tiago Dias dos Santos? Arta Kauliņa? Anna Niskanen? Evita Goze? Rehab Eldalil? Pēteris Silis? Johanna Rannula? Laima Graždanoviča? Audrey Hoareau? Chandra? Julian Stallabras? Mathieu Asselin? Lars Klingenberg? Sanne Derks? Guna Būvmane? Bartu Kaan Özdişci? Arnis Balčus? Nathalie Bjorneby? Paula Jansone? John Jordan? Caroline Lusseaux? Augustine Paredes? Agnieszka Sejud? Julie Bourges? Marcel Rickli? Teo? Kristine Krauze Slucka? Marc Mouarkech? Aliy Eden? Natasha Caruana? Ingus Bajārs? Anita Pouchard Serra? Adelīna Kalniņa? Alvin Lau? Annika Lehtinen? Francis Belte? Ipek Cinar? Yağız Yeşilkaya? Diana Takacsova? Nico Baumgarten? Raivis Rudzītis? David Vaaknin? Tata Gorian? Andrea Wasaff? Anya Marchenkova?



ISSP 2019 “Photography and the World”

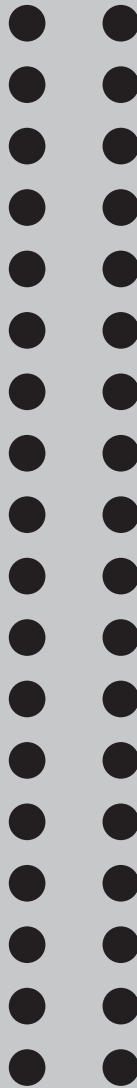


**WE
HAVE
THE
ANSWERS
TO
YOUR
QUESTION
!**

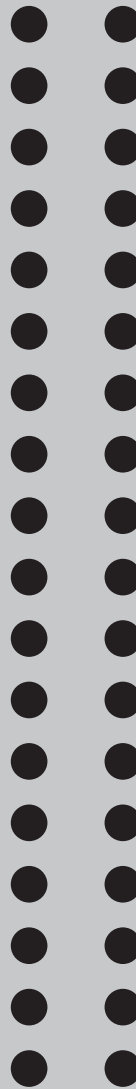
**WE
HAVE
THE
ANSWERS
TO
YOUR
QUESTION
!**



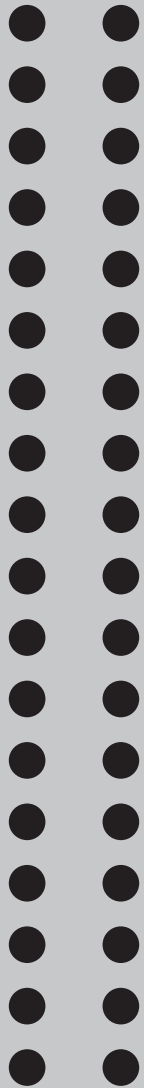
**WE
HAVE
~~THE~~
ANSWERS
TO
~~EVERY~~
QUESTION
!**



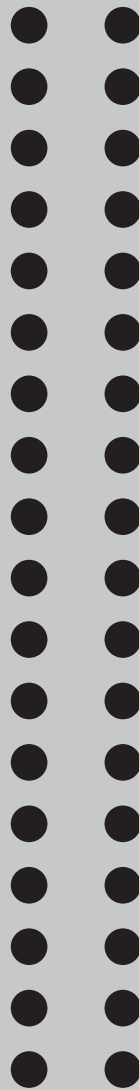
**WE
HAVE
THE
ANSWERS
TO
YOUR
QUESTION
!**

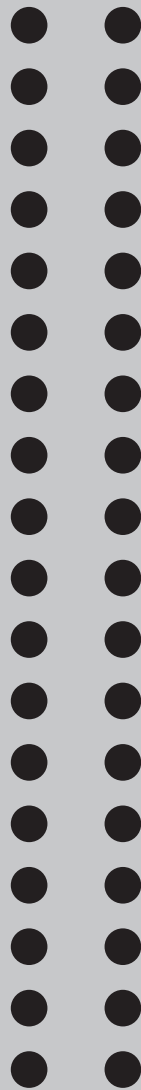


**WE
WILL
THE
ANSWER
TO
THE
QUESTION
!**



WE
HATE
THE
QUESTION





What's where?

- 004 What do you think about this theme, "Photography and the Word"?
- 011 What is ISSP?
- 014 Meaningfulness?
- 018 Why does the world need photography?
- 022 How do you find a story that is worth telling?
- 026 What do you do when you wake up and you don't want to talk to anyone?
- 028 What is more important to you than photography?
- 030 Why the fuck should I care about your dying grandma?
- 036 How do our personal narratives play within greater politics?
- 042 How can you balance a collaborative project with your personal vision?
- 046 Witness less, participate more?
- 050 How do you feel about documenting work?
- 058 How can we (un) make images together?
- 064 What are your working principles?
- 068 How can artists reframe ecological problems as an adventure?
- 080 In exploring ritual in your photographic practice what have been the challenges and revelations?
- 084 How can you make an impact with your story?
- 090 What do you think is wrong with photography today?
- 094 What do you think about the bubbles in which we live?
- 098 How to create a sustainable art festival?
- 102 How do you take responsibility for an archive?
- 106 Who pays for socially engaged work in capitalism?
- 112 How can we combine art and activism?
- 118 Does someone else want to ask a question?
- 124 Activism, urgency and a practice?
- 128 How can you use the camera as a political apparatus?
- 132 How can we turn activism into serious fun?
- 138 Does my story matter?
- 142 What are some self-reflective questions to ask when doing activist art?

The publication “What should the title of the ISSP 2019 publication be?” was created and launched during the International Summer School of Photography 2019 in Zaļenieki.

Printed by NRJ Printing, Riga, Latvia
Edition of 300 copies

Editorial team: Demelza Watts, Helen Korpak, Katherine
Oktober Matthews, Nico Baumgarten, Nicolas Polli

ISSP 2019 has been organised by Association ISSP in partnership with State Culture Capital Foundation, Jelgava District Council, Zaļenieki Commercial and Crafts Secondary School, Zaļenieki parish, VV Foundation, Tandem Network, Higashikawa Town of Photography, NOOR, YET magazine, The British Journal of Photography, FK Magazine, GUP magazine, The Calvert Journal, Satori, Arterritory.com, FOLD, DrukaLabak, HP, SONY.

This publication is produced in partnership with Antalis and NRJ.

antalis^{EM}
Just ask Antalis

NRJ
PRINTING

All text and images remain the copyright of their respective authors. The included speakers and writers come from various locales of diverse English flavo(u)rs, and the editors have opted to preserve these distinctions. Deal with it.
Compilation © 2019 ISSP www.issp.lv

003

Is there a need for a problem?

What do you think about this theme, “Photography and the World”?

A chat session between editors
Katherine, Nico B. and Helen

004

How can we integrate that?

K: So, how do we start? :)
what do you think about
this theme, “Photography
and the World”?

H: It’s the obvious choice, no?
In a good way – where else to start than
from... “everywhere”, which is sort of
what this theme becomes to me

Am I wrong in thinking that for
the majority of people, both professionals
and amateurs, the camera is a way to be
in the world: to depict it, connect with it,
understand it, be in it?

K: Well, I like what you said that
a lot of people use the camera as
a way of “being-in-the-world”
but in my mind, the theme is a
reminder to look beyond yourself...
like, there’s a whole world out
there, don’t lose perspective

“Photography” has quickly
become its own topic, its own field

How would I feel if the
camera was turned around
and pointed at me instead?

of study, its own art form, its own
hobby or passion. And it’s so easy
to get lost in that I think that we
have to keep reminding ourselves
that it’s just one thing and even a
silly little thing. 😊

N: Hm, I agree that “photography and the world”
helps us to get grounded, to be aware that the camera
is only a tool to achieve something. This very basic
thought is often forgotten and things become as if
photography itself was the world.

I remember an opening in Milano of an exhibi-
tion of concerned photography, many black and
white documentary pictures of suffering, mainly
in sub-Saharan Africa. The opening was attended by
well-mannered and well-dressed people, there were
free drinks, free snacks and plenty of discussions
about ...photography! There was no critical
reflection of the status quo.

The photos were mostly shown on big flat
screens provided by one of the sponsors, LG. Under
every screen was the slogan of the company:
“LG, life’s good!”

How do you deal with
numbness?

This is just one of the many occasions where I thought there is too much of photography and too little of the world on people's minds.

H: Yes! I often catch myself reading outraged rants online about everything from tattoos and tv-shows to photography and Foucault... And then I think, "what IS this? How can we all lose perspective so often?"

Details are important but trying to see the bigger picture is the basis for trying to solve problems

N: I am totally happy whenever photography is being used to look at someone/something different or also to just see the bigger picture. As long as it is done with honesty and integrity.

By now every second photography festival/fair/group show has something with sustainability in the title. I would like to think: "There we go, that's great!" But instead, I have the feeling that the crisis is being used to boost attention for the photography event (or the sponsors behind it) and not vice versa. 🙄

K: Photographic green-washing :) I agree with you that a lot of times photography is reflecting "trends" more than it engages with the subject... but this is a question I have often come back to: photography is about "image" — so is it and will it always be inherently superficial?

N: Ha, good one! Maybe yes? I mean photography itself can only show the surface of things, sure. But then it could be the photographers, curators, publishers, writers, gallerists, etc. who provide a context underneath that surface.

I guess what I want to say is that whereas photography itself might be superficial, the experiences built around it don't need to be. And I think they often actually aren't. When I am with students, young and old, that don't have a background in photography or the arts, the discussions about a certain photograph so easily drift off and suddenly we are discussing politics or social issues. I love that!

K: Sure, but that's with people who are studying photography....

not with people looking at an opening with a glass of wine 😊

And honestly I think most of the time that a curator tries to write something to convince us (the uninformed viewers) how deep or meaningful or significant some series is, it's counterproductive: it sounds like snobby artspeak that the public only half-understands

So can photographers say something important about the world?

009

Is it ok to be homosexual in Latvia?

ISSP 2019

“Photography and the World”

12–20 July 2019

Zaļenieki, Latvia

The first thematic edition of the International Summer School of Photography (ISSP) looked at photography as a possible tool for positive change, with reference to global issues the world is facing today. 73 participants from all over the world met in six workshops, exploring the position of photography in relation to political activism, environment, community engagement, social change, and the ritual. The focus of the ISSP 2019 was on reflection, discussion, questioning, imagining and trying out possibilities.

- The Camera as Political Apparatus
by Mathieu Asselin & Sergio Valenzuela Escobedo
- (Un)Making Images Together:
Photography and Collaboration
by Anthony Luvera & Vincen Beeckman
- Astronauts vs. Poets:
Utopia, Dystopia and Visual Ecology
by The Cool Couple
- The Personal as Political – by Natasha Caruana
- Photography and Ritual: The Revealing Machine
by Alfonso Borragán
- Storytelling as a Tool for Social Change
by Tanya Habjouqa

010

Is my voice being heard?

What is ISSP?

ISSP is the possibility to take the time to reflect, to explore, to stop the routine and have a look at what we are doing, at what others are doing in a sort of international intimacy, putting people from all around the world in the same room. It's also kind of a horizontal and friendly space where even if we are doing hard and powerful works, we still can laugh and entertain ourselves.

Anita Pouchard Serra

ISSP is something suspicious...

Gathering masses of people on some strange locations in Eastern Europe... People are often seen walking around with cameras, taking pictures of the surroundings.

I don't know... I would suggest that someone do an investigation on them. Maybe a documentary photography project would be a great way to do it.

Paula Jansone

ISSP is a chaos of synergies!

Johanna Rannula

It's a photography blast in the middle of the woods.
Krzysztof Candrowicz

011

Can we be ironic?
Are we allowed to laugh?

I think it is a multidimensional experience that reaches much higher and further points of reality than that which we usually think photography can. Somehow in ISSP, photography is everything and everything can be reached through photography. It is more a metaphor than a practical technique.

Laima Graždanoviča

Wind of change.

Artūrs Orenīts

I have been taking part in the ISSP for 5 years now, as part of the staff. Although I have never participated practically in any workshops in my career as a photographer, because I do not believe that such short-term experiences can actually help students to carry out interesting works on the place or to learn some methodologies to be applied to their artistic practice, I was able to see how an experience like ISSP is something different, beyond the simple formative/academic aspect.

ISSP is a family that has met every year for 13 years, in which there are people like staff members and some guests and tutors who meet every year, and others like the students who come here for the first

012

How do you create a safe
space to talk about intimacy?

time and immediately feel part of this family. The strength of ISSP is precisely that of being an experience different to the majority of educational experiences in the field of photography. The fact of finding yourself in a situation of virtual isolation, in forced contact with and exclusively with the members of the "family" is the key. The expression of renunciation, the discovery of new practices dictated by the denial of previous ones. Connections that go beyond the mere academic and formative aspect linked to photographic practice are born and develop continuously.

ISSP is something that, I can affirm from direct experience, stays inside you and makes you build that desire of transformation, so essential for the growth of every human being, and even more for the career of an artist.

Valentino Bellini

ISSP is like a braid - people from all over the world with very different life experiences coming together for an intense week in summer, to then go off on their own to possibly meet again. ISSP is the most exciting event of photography (and the world) of the year, that takes place in Latvia and brings together fantastic people from everywhere.

Nora Austrina

013

Why is it so easy to lose perspective?

Meaningfulness?

Interview with Julija Berkovica

014

WTF?

How did the urge to change something about ISSP's well-functioning and well-established structure come up?

I think it just became boring to do the same thing over and over again. It's still the same format, we've just done a slight shift. The format of ISSP itself works very well and makes sense, but the whole structure just started repeating itself. At some point, you understand that even though what we are doing here at ISSP is at the fringe of the photography world it still fits into the same industry of photography. So people come here, they make contacts that are useful for them in order to climb up the career ladder and it's only that: they get contacts, they may be exhibited somewhere else, they maybe make a book, and at some point you just naturally start asking yourself: what's the point of it?

So what's this "something more" that you were trying to do with this new edition?

I think all of us are looking to do something meaningful and the ISSP just feeding into the industry of photography stopped being meaningful for me. At

015

Is anybody listening?

the same time, all the human interactions around ISSP were still very meaningful. And it is a structure and a platform and a format that can be used to shift the focus a little bit, to produce a discussion which I think makes more sense and that is more honest.

Where do you personally find the meaningfulness?

Well, it's anything that is beyond and that is asking the question why? I don't think I'm interested in art for the sake of art, I don't see it as my religion. I'm interested in how art processes can change people's lives on an individual level, and that is something that happens within every artist we meet. But I'm also interested in how the art can fit into the world, the structures, the systems. In how we interact in a broader context.

Can you sense some differences in this year's ISSP comparing to earlier editions? Do you think it has a different dynamic or atmosphere?

Yes, I think so because we already figured out that people are asking themselves a lot more questions.

016

Why do I doubt myself for never being or doing "enough"?

We've arrived at the point where the whole edition is about asking questions and about being critical towards oneself, towards the art world and its role... Looking beyond the art world. I think already that shift is productive.

After some years of steady evolution, there was an idea to have a little bit of a rupture and to try to innovate the ISSP concept a little bit. How do you think it could further be developed to give space for questioning?

I think we'll all have to process it. There's certainly the feeling that there's not enough time during this week to even raise all the possible questions, so we could easily make another edition of the theme Photography and the World!

017

Am I doing enough?

Why does the world need photography?

018

Am I doing too much?

Photography lies behind almost every imaging-practice and technology we're using nowadays. We're not sure the world needs photography, perhaps the world takes for granted that photography is everywhere like the air we breathe.

Simone Santilli

We need photography to see connections between the world and ourselves.

Yagiz Yesilkaya

Images create spaces we have not observed or encountered before; make us see through dreaming. The nature of photography itself, as a disruption of time and space, challenges the power of the vision today as one of the ways to escape the metaphysics of presence opening a conversation between seeing, language and thinking.

Ioanna Sakellarakis

The world probably does not need photography. Although I need photography as a photographer, it is probably arrogance to think like photography is one of the necessary elements for everyone living in this world.

Keiji Fujimoto

019

Who cares?

Documentation of the moment that will never happen the same again, ever.

Minjun Kim

Because it can show how a person views the world and efficiently communicate with other humans.

Francis Belte

We tell each other in our own way, through photographs, that the view of the world has our original view. I think that it will be more necessary in the future to express one's identity. Photographs reflect reality, so there is a more realistic representation than literature and films. In the future, the virtual world and the artificial computer will dominate us more and more, I think that photography is a necessary thing as a media that we are aware of in the real world as a reality.

Kai Yokoyama

From my point of view, the world needs stories and storytellers. Stories to identify with, stories to make sense of the world, stories to give comfort, joy and hope, or to give the frame to things which are hard to process or listen to, stories to help healing and to motivate to get active.

Nastassja Nefjodov

020

Who am I ignoring?

When future civilizations don't understand the spoken language anymore, they are still able to read the pictures of our world today.

Marcel Rickli

Photography may not be able to change the world, but it can change our view of it. Photography is a field of research and creation that brings a new vision to the World, and it can have an impact on the way society evolves. Photography can lead to spiritual revolutions.

Caroline Lusseau

It's an informative, emotive, visual language, with the ability to express complex events, thoughts and ideas

Megan Wilson-De La Mare

Because it has the ability to change our way of seeing. Maybe photography is what can't be seen.

Alfonso Borragán

To understand, to meditate, not to forget, to meet.

Andrea Wasaff

021

What am I missing?

How do you
find a story
that is worth
telling?

Ideas from “Storytelling as a Tool
for Social Change” workshop participants

022

Are my obsessions important?

First and foremost it has to matter to myself. It starts from a personal connection in some way, whether the location or the people. That way you have an emotional involvement, you automatically care a lot more and want to represent it in the most sincere and honest way.

To create a story that matters, I start from the closest, most personal point of view possible, and then of course it's good to expand and include a group of people wider than that.

In this world there's a lot of repetition, and things tend to repeat themselves in history or in different locations. It's never just one person experiencing something—there are others going through the same thing even if you don't know about it. That commonality might be painful—it can be trauma—but it can become what connects you to others.

Linda Muižniece

In my case, it's the pictures that make my heart feel sentimental or sad. It's difficult—very difficult—to tell a sad story in a way that is not too obvious, but this is what I want to do, what I want to share.

Kai Yokoyama

023

Does this make you laugh?

It depends on the story, but sometimes there are some situations which are connected to me personally with my friends or relatives, or sometimes situations just affect me because it's so strong in emotions. There are different cases. I did a story on missing persons, and another on sex slavery. Maybe because of the problems I work with, they're social problems, they connect to a lot of people.

Ekaterina Balaban

First, I find stories that matter to me, and then I try to see if the story is somehow relevant to a bigger audience or if it's just a personal project that doesn't really concern others and is more like personal therapy. If there's an element that's universal or global, then there are probably other people that have the same feelings, and there's a story that matters. You find stories by talking to people, and by showing it to see the reaction, if people are engaged by it or if they don't really care. Feedback is important.

Anna-Tia Buss

I focus a lot on participatory and collaborative work so, for me, to see if it really matters, I feel that it should start with the people who are actually featured in the project. When I see this dynamic of

024

Should this be funny?

collaboration between the author and his or her participants or subject-matter in some cases, this is when I feel that the work does matter, and I want to see and understand more about what the photographer wants to say through the work.

In my case, I feel like I'm a facilitator. What I try to do first is, through research and interviewing, to understand my specific focus, and then I start to facilitate the process of the people who are trying to tell their stories through our collaborative photos. I consider it their process to be able to represent themselves, and hopefully I am able to create a platform without any interference—of course, as an artist, I always have an interference but at least I try to be considerate of this situation.

Rehab Eldalil

025

How can you expand your gaze?

What do you do when you wake up and you don't want to talk to anyone?

Reflections by Vincen Beeckman

I try to create an exchange with the people I work with – it's not only about photography but about sharing moments together. There are a lot of ways to interact: speaking, taking your time, doing things together like playing chess... Little by little you see where the relationship goes, taking as much time as possible. It's about trying to find a good way to collaborate, about doing and trying different stuff. I'm experimenting and I'm doing it in a sort of naive way, trying to make it about emotions and feelings. I'm very motivated and willing to do that. It's about love for people - I like to see what they do and to connect with them.

026

What is my impact on the world?

What I mean when I say that I work in a naive way is that I don't try to put words to my photos or to define them. I'm working in a more punky way. I have different approaches with different people I work with but it's not academically defined and there's no text to it. Each time meeting somebody new it's a different challenge, but it's not only the first contact that is important. The last contact is very important – for these kinds of projects, you are obliged to keep in contact if the people you collaborate with want to. Sometimes you wake up and you think that you don't want to talk

to others but it's more enriching connecting with people. If you are going through a difficult time you also become happier through building something with someone.

What is more important to you than photography?

My mum
Bartu Kaan Özdişci

Thinking things
Kristine Krauze-Slucka

My 20 month-old son, Kasimir
Meindert Peirens

The connections I create with
other people, without having
technology get in the way
Linda Muižniece

Love, and living
a good life.
Simone Santilli

Family, Science
& Technology
Minjun Kim

Ecology
Ally Eden

Faith and potatoes
Nathalie Bjørneby

My garden
Loïc Seguin

To be able to live in a habitat
worth living
Marcel Rickli

To be fully in a moment and
to share experiences
instead of being an observer
Nastassja Nefjodov

Literature
Franziska Rieder

I'm struggling with this question -
I'd prefer to pass on it
David Vaaknin

Social contact
Anna-Tia Buss

Curiosity
Ivan Petrokovich

Human contact
Alessandra Sharani Zadeh

Desire
Yağız Yeşilkaya

029 Are you still convinced
that you have an
“objective” viewpoint?

Why the fuck
should I care
about
your dying
grandma?

A discussion among
“The Personal as Political” workshop participants

030 Who cares how your
father looked?

Creating personal work is an act of healing ourselves. If we heal ourselves we will have more energy to join the bigger movement by not being so overwhelmed by our own experiences.

Doing personal work means representing and accepting and putting out your story in the hope that other people could relate to it. There is only so much artists can do, but what's beautiful is that we have that luxury and privilege to actually talk about the inner struggles that we are going through and the struggles that are surrounding us in the way that we see it. It is beautiful to think that we are not alone within a struggle. Once we put our personal work out there, people will relate to it one way or another and that is also healing; I feel it makes the world better. Art / Photography defines those words and feelings into images so that people would understand it more.

There is guilt to focusing on yourself but, in a way, it's rebellious to do personal healing work and to not buy into structures of capitalism by trying to always do the "big" things. It is important to find a balance

to work with the guilt without being overwhelmed by it.

It is hard to understand how your personal work can make a difference when you are so insignificant – being one tiny little speck on this earth when there are thousands of life forms around us. It's quite overwhelming.

How can we tell these stories? People need to have access to them – or they won't see and experience these stories. How can they be seen beyond the photo gallery or the photo-book? We need to take on some responsibility to share our stories.

Yes, it's the responsibility of the maker to share.

Maybe sharing the story goes against the idea that within personal work you're healing yourself. But maybe the healing process happens within the act of making the work and then you're able to share it.

You share because the story will become richer as other people add

their own story when it's viewed. They will relate to what they see within the personal works. As storytellers, it is important to know that once we produce work and once we are ready to let go of it and show it to the world, it's not ours anymore. It belongs to the world. We don't own it. And once a picture is out there, it's open for interpretation and our words, our captions, our letters can only say so much. This is a blessing and a curse for an artist because maybe some people say that the work is selfish but, for other people, the work can offer hope. It can be a way of telling a story for someone who didn't know how.

I feel like guilt is the hardest part of our personal work but it is also important because it forces us to have a message. It doesn't need to be a grand message; a form of activism could be as small as selecting a certain type of font. But if we share it we can reach and help more people.

But let's flip the coin: Why do we always feel we need to have a message?

033

Why should I care about your instagram account?

Why are we putting such responsibility onto us when the work is ours and why does it have to relate to other people?

It is the time that we are in: the world is on fire and we have limited time to make a difference. It's so much responsibility and we as artists are very sensitive to the pain of the world. I can't move big things and it makes me feel stuck and paralyzed, and then I can't see that even with a small individual personal work I can have an impact. Maybe that impact doesn't stop the construction of an airport but it could help someone who has never talked about his trauma to be able to now find the words for it. This is a big impact but I don't count it as a big impact because the world is on fire and it just makes my work so irrelevant and introspective.

Just because we do personal work doesn't mean we have to do something for the world, like about plastic or taking care of an old person. As an artist, you are even more sensitive about what is going on in the world because you are interested and you are making an individual contribu-

034

Have you seen my instagram?

tion to a better world. I feel my work is always changing and you have to go through some experiences step-by-step – it's ok to start small. You can start alone. But if you make connections and create a community and you can get bigger with momentum.

I agree it's a way of walking through life. Maybe it's a very romantic idea but I feel like everything we are working on and putting out there is honest and comes from a certain urgency. It's important to not question changing the world that much – but to just do it. And by making work that is honest, it increases the chances and potential that it might reach someone else.

Even within your own practices, you find little corners of resistance – of what you say “no” to – to ensure decisions still feel genuine to you. You define your own set of rules, regulations, working practices, methodology. Principles: each of us will have a different set of working principles.

Yes, each of us has the freedom to define our own principles.

Let's all write down some working principles for our practice.

- I will look after my own mental health
- I won't let fear stop me – I will use it
- I will maintain an open and honest practice – sharing and revealing how the creative industries work
- I will continue to turn the camera inwards to shine a light on identity and sexuality
- I will challenge inequality
- My dying grandma is important to someone going through the same experience
- I will trust my instincts
- I won't use the word “stress”, I will use the word “focus”
- I will ask for equal pay
- I will share vulnerable stories – they may give a voice to someone who is unable to share the story themselves
- I won't forget that my own story is important
- I will be mindful when sharing the story of others
- I will continue to use photography to reclaim the street of my hometown

037

Who is my audience?

It's like we're all in bubbles trying to feel our way around the world. You can sometimes see the limits of your bubble and you can see other people's bubbles. You are trying to pierce other people's bubble but you can't even pierce your own.

Audrius Kriaučiūnas

038

Why should you care about me?

How do our personal narratives play within greater politics?

Thoughts from “The Personal as Political” workshop participants

Our personal narratives give access points to create a relationship between the personal and the larger scope of politics.

Our personal narratives serve as representations and reflections of the communities that we are part of, these tiny stories make up a bigger picture. By sharing our own stories, we shine a light on others that do not have the voice and means to express their stories.

By including our personal point of view in the project, we can build a stronger emotional connection with the subjects within the communities in which we belong.

By telling intimate, individual stories, I also tell the story of someone else and I make room for others to relate and see their own stories reflected.

I don't believe that art can change anything, but it's hard not to make art.

I believe every personal story is political.

I want to show what is often pointed out as "different" in a universal and poetic manner. I want to believe that by analyzing and challenging the basic mechanisms of our interactions and the powers behind it, we can slowly build a new kind of non-anthropocentric worldview that will benefit both humans and our environment.

Telling personal, vulnerable stories that often are treated as a taboo in society is a rebellious act by not giving in to silencing. It is an act of healing ourselves and contributing to healing others.

By telling our narratives we are validating our experiences, our feelings and the feelings of those around us. It's a way to put ourselves on the map and say "We are here." There's a proverb that goes, "Horses for courses." It means, to each their own—so, by nature, as a photographer who uses the personal as a subject matter, I should rather serve my story than serve some other bigger story.

As artists, we are already sensitive to the world and contribute to daily life. By making personal work and reaching others, we create small thoughts or

suggestions to help find ways through something or to inspire people to lead another life.

People are the problem and people are the solution. It's all just people. Individuals. Sometimes a personal narrative is what is necessary for a person to connect to a cause.

041

How can I bring it all together?

How
can you
balance
a collaborative
project with
your personal
vision?

Some thoughts from Constanze Flamme

042

Where does my work belong?

I have been asking myself a lot lately how I can balance community engagement with my visual style or personal authorship. I do some projects as a documentarian, but then I still want to be able to approach certain topics in a more liberated way maybe—more metaphorical, using a subjective and personal approach.

At the moment, I'm doing a work in Beirut in which I visually extract sculptures out of daily life—so it's not documentary, it's my vision of the city. I digest information and I kind of corrupt reality for a visualization or translation of what I saw and felt. This feels ego-centric, of course, whereas other projects take more of a community approach and I'm basically a facilitator. I'm more a host of the space and I take myself out. I've been wondering how I can do both, to bring the two tracks together somehow. Then, today, I had a portfolio review with Anthony Luvera and he suggested that I might just treat them as two elements in the toolbox. It felt a bit like a liberation, the idea that I may be able to just pull out the right tool at the right time, rather than deliberating over it.

Maybe the answer, then, is also that not every single project has to have a huge scope, together with all

043

Does it feel good?

the complications of the rules of representation and the determination to fully tell the story. These boundaries are sometimes traps that we intellectually stumble over. Instead, maybe it's okay to say that sometimes I can take a broader political scope, but also sometimes I can let myself go down a rabbit hole.

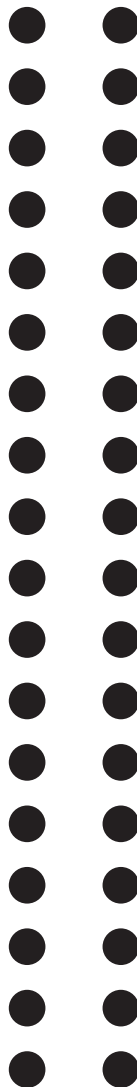
It's interesting to remind myself of something Tanya Habjouqa brought up in her talk, giving yourself permission to narrate. I have to learn to allow myself to fall into these rabbit hole projects, which are not about having to fulfill the ethics I set for myself. I don't betray those ethics, but there can also be a moment of engaging only visually.

Documentary for me is living with dilemma. When you want to invite someone into your story—or to be the protagonist of their own story—it becomes a problem. The person who presses the shutter is the author and the other ones... somehow participated. That has also been part of the thinking this week of ISSP, how to bring the variables of authorship and togetherness into our act of creation. Who has the copyright, indeed who is the author? In this current world, it's the photographer.

044

What do you want me to do with this?

I don't want to see myself just as an author but as a host of an encounter. I'm hosting a time and space where a person can formulate something. Maybe I take a photo as a witness of this encounter, but way more social interactions happen beyond the photo. Sometimes the photo shows the least engaged moment of the encounter. This is when I want to see myself as something other than an "author" but as a "host". But, still, what I love about photography is that it allows encounters. The hosting of the space is a political act—this is my part of wanting to contribute to an open society, by mediating different voices coming together. It's not always high art, but that's not what it's about.



Witness
less,
participate
more?

045

How can I combat cynicism?

046

Are my feelings relevant?

An approach by Anthony Luvera

Questions about if and how a collaboration is ethical are really interesting to me. They strike at the heart of the power dynamic between an artist and the people they work with. I don't think there's a recipe or a solution to the problems of representation, but I do think one should be open to those questions. The reason I'm interested in collaboration is not about empowering anyone, it's more to do with finding out about experiences that are different to my own. And to hopefully bring a more nuanced representation of the systems and services the participant is affected by and the positions they occupy in society.

I don't feel I'm in a position to talk about the way that the work I do is experienced by the people I work with. The participants are the people to talk to about this. When I'm working with participants, I try to be as clear and transparent as possible about my intentions and the conditions I'm responding to. When I say conditions, I mean things like commissioning, funding, resources, and the contexts of the work being shown to audiences. Short-term projects can be just as valuable as long-term projects, but there are different challenges and opportunities with both. Inviting a participant to be involved in either requires clarity about what you are asking them to take part in and for what purposes.

047

Are feelings facts?

As a socially-engaged artist, the process of working together with participants is as much the work as any finished outcome shown to audiences. While the conversations, materials, questions and experiments may not be directly visible in what we create, the complexity of this dialogue drives the making of the work. One of the things I'm interested in is finding ways to represent this process and to somehow weave it into the work. In doing so, it makes sense to me to involve participants as much as possible in representing the process, so it's not just me affirming the thing that I'm saying I'm doing. And I want the representation of process to be as polyvocal as it can possibly be, and that's one of the reasons why I've co-created blogs and sound recordings with participants. Another way I've attempted to provide some indication of this process is through writings, situated within or alongside the work or published independently of it. It's a way I can explore the opportunities, challenges, questions and intentions I'm noticing within my practice of attempting to witness less and participate more.

048

Am I in control?

Use the strength of the enemy
to act against them

049

What more can I do?

Oriana Eliçabe

How do you
feel about
documenting
work?

Interview with Alfonso Borragán

050

How do you know
when you've failed?

What's the main reason
behind your work?

To invert reality. I think I'm obsessed with this idea to find a kind of crack or gap in reality and give the possibility to everyone to experience that somehow. To let it happen in a special moment and celebrate it, like, "We made it! Here we have in a new reality within this reality." And we can do that all the time. We all live a daily life, each of us has a different one, but we all have normalisation in our lives. And it's about breaking this normalisation. To find new ways in which these cracks could happen and in which reality could be shaped in a different way.

How do you first encounter
the places and people
you work with?

Sometimes it's because somebody invites you to places, other times you just find them. Usually, it's because you get deep into a place. I approach the community and talk, and then I research after which I go back to the community and all these things start to play in the relations of the community, in the relations between me and the community or the place. And then altogether it's shaped, from the tensions between the

051

Should I apologize?

people, the place and me. Putting all that together. Time is essential because if you do something very quickly in a short period of time, you won't have the gaps that give you the space to lose power over the place and the people. I think this digestion is really important. It needs to cool down before you go back. Sometimes they welcome you, sometimes they don't want to engage anymore with anything, and you realise you have to move in a different way or that it's not happening anymore.

If something is not absorbed and appropriated by the community it doesn't work. It's something that happens a lot, that the actions don't happen if the community does not appropriate them. Their involvement is necessary to make something happen. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. And sometimes it's the other way around: the people find things in you that they are really interested in appropriating. So you are playing with the situation and then things are starting to happen and they shape it. But it's very difficult to keep the balance, so it's about being responsible and sensitive with the situation. And giving them the option all the time to take control. Expectation is important because it's what brings the people to the action. It's really important to create expectations, it's a kind of seduction that makes

052

What am I waiting for?

people open up to transformation. The action is really important because it is everything, but then what happens after is not that important for me. It's important what happens in them, but not what I get from that, in terms of physical work or imprints or documentation.

If you want to multiply that experience, at least up to a certain extent, through documenting it - how do you feel about the process of documenting itself? Do you think it takes a bit of immersion away from those people who are directly participating?

That's a big question for me. That's very related to the documentation of the work and how it is narrated. And the thing is, I don't think they have to be documented. Documentation should be very invisible because it shapes how things are happening. But I keep forgetting everything I do. I forget and forget and forget... And I go back to my projects I did maybe 5 years ago and I don't remember the details of them. So I have to have a way to remember the knowledge that was produced during

053

Should I embrace doubts?

earlier projects. And it's not the action, it's just all the thoughts, the strategies, the things and all the relationships that were created. And the tensions.

You've said that on some occasions you think documenting your art in the form of a film, but rather than film the action you would document a reenactment. That would mean that in the original work the action would be a central result.

Then the action would be like if you were making a film but never filmed it. You did all the scenes: the horses were running, fireworks were exploding, people were flying. But you never film it. What do you do when creating a film? You have to shoot each shot seven times, so it is never live, always fiction. For me filming a reenactment would be related to that and in fact, would hardly have anything visually in common with the original action. It would be about documenting the knowledge and the information that was important in the original action, and not about the real experience. The reenactment would be about the knowledge that was produced through the experience.

054

How do you know when something is just personal therapy and not a project?

For example, if we reenact the action of Argylito, the ingestion of silver grains. The fact that it took place in silver mines was essential, so maybe we need to shoot the film in the silver mines. Maybe it would be a kind of performance with actors, or just miners working. Or it could be about the light inside the mine, and the kind of fluctuation of light in silver. We would also maybe need something about the stomach and the cells absorbing the silver ingested in the original action. And maybe the silver in the reenactment is not being eaten by twelve persons at a table, but rather being consumed as a ritual?

Something I found out in an archive was an illness from people eating silver. I don't know what it was, but through ingesting silver people become blue; they become photosensitive because the silver goes to their skin. The human body becomes photosensitive itself. Then you are the picture, you are the silver. A smurf! I think that all the knowledge should be included in the reenactment: all those materials and those characters that were not seen in the action, they need to be seen in the film.

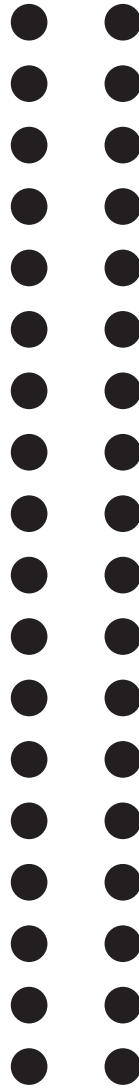
In a certain way, your work is something continuous. Your first project brought you to the

second project, the second to the third and so on. Maybe you have done just one project in your life.

That would be so beautiful. I've never thought about that before in this way. During the last year, I have been thinking a lot about the fact that maybe what I am doing is reenacting the archive. The real project is the archive, and the action is just a product of this archive.

“Knowing about other people’s work and research empowers your own work because you see the traps and you see what’s being covered there and what then you can cover. Because obviously everyone has their own voice.”

Demelza Watts



How can we (un)make images together?

Discussion points
by Anthony Luvera

1 Aesthetics and Ethics

- What are aesthetics in a participatory practice?
- What are ethics in a participatory practice?
- What is the role of aesthetics in a participatory practice?
- What is the role of ethics in a participatory practice?
- What does a participatory practice look like?
- Who made it look like this?
And how did they make it look this way?
- Does the same code of ethics apply to all participatory practices?
- How are these ethics defined?
Who defines the ethics of the practice? Can these ethics be perceived in the work?
- Is it important that they are?
- Can a methodology employed an artist enable or limit the agency of the participant?
- How does this methodology register in the work?

- Is it possible for a participatory practice to be successful?
- Can there be a best practice for a participatory practice?
- Should there be? If so, how?
- If not, why not? In either case, what might this look like?
- What happens when you leave?
What are some of the considerations when the work is shared with audiences not involved in the creation of the work?
- What ethical concerns are important when exhibiting or publishing the work?

2 Process or Product?

- What is most important in a participatory practice, the process or the product?
- Is there a difference?
- Who is the process for?
- Who is the product for?
- How can an artist retain agency throughout the process of creating work? How / by what might this agency be affected?

- How can a participant retain agency throughout the process of creating work?
- How / by what might this agency be affected?
- What are some of the considerations when the work is shared with audiences not involved in the process of the work?
- How can the process of a participatory practice be documented?
- What purposes, and for who, can this documentation serve?
- Which is better, a long-term process or a short-term process?

3 Intentions and Benefits

- Who's getting what from who?
- What is the intention of the artist?
- What is the intention of the participant?
- How do we know this if we are not the participant?
- Is a participatory artist / practice able to impart value or benefits to a participant? Is this important to consider? Why?

061

How do I document this?

- Is a participant able to impart value or benefits to an artist? Is this important to consider? Why?
- What does the term 'giving voice' mean to you?
- Who gives who a voice?
- How are participants elicited and acknowledged? Why?

4 Represent or Engage?

- Is there a difference between documentary photography and a participatory practice?
- What does authorship mean in a participatory practice?
- Who is the audience of a participatory practice?
- Where does the artist disseminate the work, and how do these contexts affect the representation of the participant?
- Is it important to make the questions, problems, constraints, subjectivities, relationships and dialogue explored through the process of the practice explicit? Why?

062

Can photos change the discourse?

- Can engagement be documented?
Should it be? Why should it be?
- What purposes can this documentation
serve? For who?
- Are there responsibilities involved
in representing participants?
- Are there responsibilities involved
in engaging participants?
- Are these the same thing?
- Is there an ethics of representation?
If so, what is this?

063

Is image-making inherently
superficial?

What are your working principles?

Ideas from “The Personal as Political”
workshop participants

064

How can we use our cameras
to imagine the future we want
to see?

I do think about the position we're in collectively and I'm really passionate about bringing that into my work. This industry is really difficult. Photo-journalism is male dominated. That's why we do a session in my workshop asking, "Why the fuck should we care about your dying grandmother?" Essentially, why should personal work be important and how is it important?

We saw that amazing talk yesterday about changing the world from an activist perspective, and after that session I felt crippled. I thought, "I can't show my work, it's nothing. What's the point of it?" I do have to give myself a bit of a confidence boost about that actually, and remind myself that personal work is important—because it allows you to have a conversation.

Self assessment and personal inquiry.
Self critique.

I should work within the context of affection and the efficacy of affection, power of memory, knowing possessives and the importance of belonging and

065 Is the idea we have of
"nature" still useful?

belongings, to produce work that is honest, pure, and non-exploitative.

My principle of working is to be mindful and to build trust.

To stay true to the story by being honest and strict with myself, and constantly double-checking my position.

Remember the audience, the work is for the viewers. Engage in activism. Speak about politics. Don't overproduce. Lower the level of consumption. Do no harm. Respect others and the world. Be honest. Question inequality.

Be authentic. Always reflect and question yourself.

Keep a caring attitude toward the people I photographed, be honest with them and myself.

Be mindful of your surroundings and expose the subtle mechanisms behind it.

Question and challenge existing narratives. Share vulnerable stories, and work with stories which

066 Which is more important,
the product or the process?

are close to my heart. Be mindful with the world around the stories of my protagonists.

My principles of producing work are to create something honest and personal, but also that defies stereotypes inflicted upon female Egyptian photographers, to not be defined as "the other" or "exotic", and instead to build bridges and to show that, in the end, we are all somehow the same.

Don't hesitate about taking a photo just because it may be uncomfortable. Trust your intuition that some things are important to just do, even if you don't yet know why. Always bring a camera and enough space on your SD card.

Always be authentic and honest. Be self-aware in the process: know why you're doing a project. Never let fear stop you. Trust your instincts.

067

Why do we always feel we need to have a message?

How can artists reframe ecological problems as an adventure?

An interview with sociologist Ruben Jacobs
By Katherine Oktober Matthews

068

Should you only photograph what you know?

"We're hardwired for adventure," argues Dutch sociologist and art lecturer Ruben Jacobs. Therefore, when it comes to the pressing issues of our time, like confronting our dysfunctional relationship with tech and our alienated relationship with nature, we need to reframe our perspective: they're not only problems, they're also adventures. In his new book *Artonauts* (currently only in Dutch), Jacobs presents some artists who work as a new form of '-naut', voyaging into the unknown creative plane in search of discoveries for our world. In this interview, he speaks about the allure of adventure and the embodiment needed for new knowledge.

Artists have always been known to stand at the forefront, or at least the outer limits, of society. What you mean by "artonauts" and how are they different?

Well, around two years ago, I was invited to give a talk at an event about the "future of art," and I wrote a column about my idea, introducing this concept of "artonauts." At that time, I was fascinated with some artists who were working in different locations and with different methods, but who all had something in common. I was looking for a word to describe this, because they weren't typical to what we think of as an "artist." It was something really different, and I was looking to find the red thread between all these practices.

The main resemblance that I saw was with adventurers from former ages, the nauts. Essentially, these artists are acting more or less like researchers of the physical world around them. They're behaving in some ways like a scientist, however not from a really scientific point of view. They did make use of scientific insights or knowledge, but they were researching it more from an aesthetic point of view, in the sense that they all made something that was meant to trigger the imagination of how to understand the world outside of ourselves.

In my first chapter, *Nautology*, I give a small history of the nauts of the 19th and 20th centuries, who were all kinds of eccentric explorers of the air, the ocean, or outer space, and really captured the public imagination. The nauts of air balloons excited people in the 19th century by giving them the bird's eye perspective, and the train made it possible to go through the landscape very quickly, and the same in the ocean with Jacques Cousteau and the famous films he made, and of course people were terribly excited about space and many films have been made about that. The artonauts continue in that same tradition, essentially.

What is it that they're exploring?

We live in a more or less scientific world, which is to say we've gotten to know and understand a lot about the Earth, but now we have come to this point that we actually don't understand our relation to it. We are very confused about the relation we have with the Earth. I saw, in all these different practices, some kind of artistic creature who uses science but also design and technology to re-investigate the relationship with the Earth in general or focused on a specific thing, like animals for example. They all connect to the natural order or the natural world, and use imagination to re-investigate that relationship, which seemingly can no longer be understood through the data.

This is key for me: they're not shying away from science or technology, but are actually embracing it as a way to understand the natural world even better, rather than, for example, to just go back into nature and to sit on a rock somewhere and try to feel something. That's more a Romantic perspective, which these artists actually do not have. At least not in the classic sense.

Is it then more for you about their approach or about their discoveries?

Well, let's take a step back. None of this is really new, in the sense that there have been artists occupied with science in the past, but over the last two centuries these fields have been separated. In earlier centuries, art and science were very close to each other. Think of Da Vinci for example, who combined disciplines, and there was no problem with that. There is now a kind of Renaissance of that approach—the crossover between disciplines—and for these artists it's not that big of a deal but it makes them harder for others to grasp. Ok, what is this person actually doing, is it art? Is he an inventor, or what?

Art has always been a way of trying to investigate into reality, in a different way maybe than science, but in the 20th century it was also

071

Why bring photographers together?

a dominant mode of expression. Like, "I want to express myself as a being and as an individual." In this practice, that kind of approach has less importance. It's much more about expressing their relationship with the world. It's much more about the relationship between me and the world and not so much about me, and to me that's interesting and inspiring. I think that's what we need now: people asking not "Who am I?" but "Where am I?"

The subtitle of your book is 'On Expedition in the Anthropocene,' which places an emphasis not just on our relation with the Earth, but on the impact. Tell us more about that.

The Anthropocene reality is a new way of thinking that has been embraced by segments of both science and art. In short, we as a species have become more or less a force of nature ourselves, rivaling other forces of nature, and that means that we have to re-think the idea of Earth as something transcendent, something above us that we don't control at all. We don't control it, but we do have a lot of impact on it. Many have thought that this couldn't be true—that we as a small species could really change the Earth's course—but that idea is outdated. Of course as an individual we are nothing, but as a collective species, together with all our technology, we are changing the Earth.

That idea makes no real distinction between nature and technology, so then we have to consider: is the idea we have of "nature" still useful? Maybe the word itself keeps us from understanding this new relationship.

How do you see this concept expressed in the art?

These artonauts I'm talking about are not so much directly concerned with the Anthropocene as a concept, but they operate in that reality

072

How do you know when a project is done?

by investigating specific, detailed aspects of it. For example, one artist I write about is John Luther Adams, an American musician, who is concerned with translating landscapes into sound. His piece *Become Ocean*, which won the Pulitzer, is an attempt to reconstruct the ocean by sound, using sound waves in which three orchestras play as a triangle into each other, to try to mimic the ocean flows. In another work, *The Place Where You Go to Listen*, he engineered a room in Alaska to translate all the seismographic data from the Earth system to certain sounds. There's all this data that our senses can't even register, for example an earthquake which is so slight you wouldn't even perceive it, and he renders it into sounds and lights. He uses this technological mediation to make you sensitive to something you can't normally register.

That's what all of these artists in my opinion do: try to make you sensitive to something about Earth that we, humans, aren't able to understand or feel or hear under normal conditions. There's a whole black box of things we don't understand, and these artists help us into the darkness by making it a bodily experience. Scientific data can't really help us. We can see graphs of temperatures warming, but how should we incorporate that into our understanding of life? It takes years of training for geologists to understand the scale at which they're working. We can hardly conceive of what "millions of years" means, and we ask normal people to get it by reading a couple of articles and seeing some charts. It doesn't work.

It takes talent and study to be able to think in the scales of the Earth, and I think for these artonauts, imagination is a really important part that helps people reach for certain aspects of reality.

I think every artist loves the idea that someone who encounters their work has some sublime revelation, but the reality is often far less significant. What do you think we can reasonably expect from art?

073 If photography is about "image", is it inherently superficial?

You shouldn't have too many expectations that one artwork can change your life. Normally it doesn't. But all these works, all these little pinches, do help the collective body to arrive at a new understanding or consciousness. What I'm focusing on in particular are the artworks that when you see it or hear it, it really does something to you, even if you're not trained as an artist.

One of my favorite examples is Thomas Thwaites, a British artist and designer, who did a project called *GoatMan*. He went to the Swiss Alps and tried to investigate as much as possible what it would be like to be an animal, and eventually wrote a book about the experience called *How I Took a Holiday from Being Human*. He worked together with biologists and technologists to develop a suit that would replicate the physical experience of being a goat, and then went to live among the goats for three days. He was totally immersed, eating grass and so on, and so after a few days he was exhausted and couldn't go on anymore.

The thing is, there are all these pictures of him in the beautiful Swiss Alps in this really high tech, futuristic goat suit. If I show it to my grandmother or my uncle, or anyone who's not occupied with art, they all have immediate reactions to it. They're curious, they're amused.

And it holds up a funny kind of mirror to us as humans. We are technological beings as part of nature, and our feature is that we are so artificial that we have to find all sorts of ways to get to understand the reality around us because we don't have the instincts for it. Or, we have some instincts, but we have more freedom about them: we can suppress them. Whereas my dog has very basic instincts that are always on, and always at the front. It makes us a bit like a freak of nature, but it gives an advantage as well, that we have to reinvent them all the time to bypass a certain instinct poverty.

That's for me an example of an artist that triggers all kinds of reactions immediately. Some artworks you look at and you think, "I don't

074 How much control does an artist have on how the work is received?

understand it at all,” and you have to read something that explains what it’s about. That’s common with modern art, and you still see this at so many museums. I like work that triggers an immediate reaction in people, even those who have no training, but also has layers built into it so that people who are trained can engage with it even deeper.

I see a connection here with what you argued in your last book, *Everyone Is an Artist*, which is that the qualities that used to be the domain of artists, like the pursuit of authenticity and personal expression, are now considered part of mass culture. How should we take Artonauts in this context?

Yes, so if we look at what’s happening now with those who are occupied with creative expression in any way, as opposed to being a “professional artist,” so to say, we can say that they’re mainly occupied with the self and how to express or present themselves. The artonauts have a quality that I think we could use a bit more in the world, which is being curious and investigating the world around you, and then as a by-product understanding what you are actually doing in that world, or what your position is in that world.

It boils down to a philosophical discussion on individuality, or what it means to be a person in the world. Do you really only have to pursue freedom, artistry, and autonomy? And if so, how do you achieve that? Is it just by not listening to other people, “doing your own thing,” and trying to cut yourself off from the influences around you? That’s the way we tend to think about “being yourself,” but most people don’t know what they really want, so they end up looking to the outside world for material and inspiration.

The thing is, it’s not a problem to look to the outside world to know what you think and what you want, we are social creatures. It becomes a problem when you try to ignore this. I mean: you’re actually con-

075

At what point should you ask for feedback?

nected all the time to forces around you (especially in the digital age), and if you don’t see those forces you’re actually less autonomous than if you see those forces and find a way to navigate them. The way I see it is: You’re in a big spider web and you can’t get out of it, but if you say all the time, “I’m not in a web,” you get blinded to all the spinning threads that steer you. To understand “I am not free” is the beginning of a relative form of freedom. That’s the paradox to me.

If you want to understand yourself, you have to first look out into the world you’re in. Then, as a result of your investigation of the world around you, its history, and all the moving parts, you gain a better understanding of what and who “you” are.

Well, to be fair, you are a sociologist, so this outside-in approach does strike me as a sociologist’s way of engaging with the world.

Of course. But I do have this perspective. People are bound to each other regardless, and even if you isolate yourself from the world around you, you’ll always be connected. Some people have more steering possibilities than others, and the question is, how does that work? When it comes to artists, they find some new perspectives by where they put their creativity, and I’m interested in how that can help us to direct our own lives.

As you mentioned earlier, one thing we can observe in society is a separation between arts and science, and so it’s actually rather intriguing that artists are now helping us to understand what’s typically been the domain of science. Especially when I think of climate change, there has been quite a bit of public distrust or open hostility for science. Let’s get a

076

How do you deal with criticism of your work?

bit deeper into how art might help us with the science.

Over the last thirty or forty years, we've collected an enormous body of science on climate change, and we finally have a kind of wider understanding on what it all means and the gigantic consequences of it all, while at the same time there's been a growing form of denialism. The problem is, it's so big that it's not possible to totally oversee, and also gives this clear message that we have to transform entirely the world we created. You see many people rejecting that message at a deep level, and therefore rejecting the science. Many others understand the message, but they feel too overwhelmed or confused by it, so they just move it to the back of their minds and go on with their lives.

Science itself, the domination of science in the modern world, has come to a certain limit. We have to figure out a new way to make a connection between what are the learnings of science and what it means for us in a practical way.

For example, if you look at the Romantics of the 18th and 19th century, which I wrote about in the first book, they did a lot of painting and writing about nature and the sublime. Nowadays, when people think about "nature," the idea in their mind has its origins in the Romantic imagination. The imagination in the long term is a powerful thing. It really lodges itself deep in our brains and becomes difficult to change. Hard-core data doesn't.

Ideas have to be embodied, not only rational. I think that's what most of us experience: I understand climate change, but I don't feel it. This year, with the European heat wave and the droughts and forest fires, people do understand it a bit more: "So, this is how it feels." That's different than having an intellectual understanding of it, it's a physical, emotional understanding. Art is also a way of getting that future closer, earlier. That's the important thing about this, too, we can't wait for this slowly evolving process to play out. Then it's too late.

As you just said though, even though some people seem to "know," they're too overwhelmed by the scale of the problem. How might the imagination trigger action?

Many scientists and journalists have been creating a picture of doomsday, or the apocalypse. That has some effect, but it is definitely not enough and, when used too much, even dangerous. Doomsday has become the dominant imagination: at some point in the future it will be hell, and we're just moving towards it slowly. Well, if the only thing we can see in the future is darkness, it makes sense that people look away. I'd rather go into the darkness with my back to it.

Art or even visualization can help people to see another possibility, though. For example, in Almere, there has just started a project called the ReGen Village, which is a proof of concept of a self-sustaining, regenerative village model in which people live, grow their own foods, and have their own energy supplies, all built upon and regulated by modern technology, like artificial intelligence and so forth. Last year, I was trying to talk with my students (at the Utrecht University of the Arts) about these ideas in an abstract way, and they couldn't quite get it, but when I showed them this project, it enabled them to conceive of it as one way we might possibly live in the future.

I don't understand these things either, I need to see a picture of it. Imagination is very crucial for us to find openings, and lights in the darkness. Some ideas are very practical, like that village. Others could be more abstract, maybe even existential. If I want to talk about who we are as species, and say that we're a strange kind of animal, it's a bit too abstract. But if I show a picture of GoatMan, people understand what eccentric animals we are.

And that's something else that art does, it engages with empathy. If you want to change human behavior, you have to be able to look at your own species with a certain mildness and compassion, instead

of just pointing out everything that people are doing wrong. Some people, especially activists who are fighting against climate change, tend to become really skeptical about the human species—disappointed in them, like they're useless—and people feel that on a deep level. That's not the way to reach anyone. If you don't believe in us anymore, why should we listen to you?

Do you have hope for
the Anthropocene?

We can't stop it altogether but we can prevent it from becoming a disaster. We have to shift away from thinking of it as only a burden, though. This is why I emphasize that a mindset to "save our asses" isn't enough, we have to start thinking of it as an adventure.

We're hardwired for adventure. It motivates us. This is why you still see so many people traveling by plane now, even though we know the environmental damage of flying. It's not airplanes that we need, it's exploration, but they just happen to be there and available. We would all be better off, however, if we redirected that urgent biological drive for adventure into something beneficial.

Scientists have done their part of the work, which is to show that there is a problem, and now others need to be involved by taking into account the way we think, beyond the science and data, to activate the collective imagination. Yes, there are some people who will always doubt the science but we don't have to convince everyone, just the critical mass. That's enough to make a change. The rest will follow.

This article was originally published on *Riding the Dragon*.

079

What are my working
principles?

In exploring
ritual in your
photographic
practice
what have been
the challenges
and
revelations?

Insights from "Photography and Ritual:
The Revealing Machine" workshop participants

080

Whose laptop is this?

I am interested in topics that deal with collective memory, traditions and emotional geography. So exploring the importance of ritual with Alfonso has been amazing. We learn from him how to work respecting and including the community. According to me, the main revelation is this country and its recent independence. People from Latvia had to hide, maintain or discover again their traditions.

Flavia Rossi

Inspired by the writings of Roland Barthes and Maurice Blanchot, I can only agree that the essence of the image is to be completely outside, without intimacy, and nevertheless to be more inaccessible and mysterious than the thoughts of our heart - meaningless, but invoking the depths of all possible meanings. However, it can be clearly seen with their presence-absence, which is the attraction and charisma of the sirens. The image revives, possibly illuminating the footprint of feeling - the discovery of subjective experience. Illumination is not a principle of photo techniques, but a philosophical view that shows the inner light of thinking and explanation - that is what creates an illuminated room. The gaze complements what is seen, not with knowledge but with experience.

Kristine Krauze Slucka

081

How do I fund this?

I can't answer about ritual and photographic practice. It's too difficult of a topic for me. I just don't know. But in the process of making a camera obscura, my perspective on the camera has changed. It used to be something that super high-tech guys have magically made and presented to us. Now by rebuilding it in a low-tech way, I've got to think about its essence from a fresh perspective.

Min Jun Kim

One of the biggest things I have taken from the workshop with Alfonso is that work can and should come freely. We have explored this beautiful location, met with locals, learned history and tradition - through this, a collective artwork has formed. It is all too easy to overthink, to try to force a piece of work and obsess over the result. This workshop has shown me that the land/space can produce the work in an organic process.

I have been able to re-form my thoughts about the images itself, with constant discussion on what makes an image - we have endlessly thought about whether an image needs fixing, needs documenting in some way to be a photograph but perhaps not. Maybe an image that is fleeting and not fixed, only able to be viewed in the instant it is created, still remains to be a photograph.

Sammie Masters-Hopkins

082

Who paid for this?

Just finishing crying. Something broke inside only in order to create something stronger, something new.
Svitlana Levchenko

How can you make an impact with your story?

083

Why isn't this project accessible?

084

A few words from Tanya Habjouqa

What do you have for me?

Your projects take different forms. What's your approach to thinking about how to package a story so it has the most potential to touch other people?

If you're engaging with deep, meaningful, long-term personal projects, it's very much like a pregnancy. And you don't want to fucking be pregnant forever, it sucks. At some point, you feel a psychological need to disengage with it somehow, so a lot of people rush into this idea that it needs to take a form, but you just need to wait and let that pregnancy happen in its own time. This is one of the biggest mistakes that I see: People rushing to finish a project when it's just not the right form, it's not the right time. As we say in America, don't go home with the first guy who buys you a drink.

I think the harder question is actually: Do you have a story that is worth packaging? It's important to be honest with yourself—you know when you have something special. First, just wait until you've found your unique entry-point into the story. Then, think about what form it should take.

There are so many photobooks in the world and not every project should be a book. For example, in my

085

Do you care, or do you want to care?

project, Tomorrow There Will Be Apricots, it could never be one book or one photo essay, because it's five years of intensive material taken at different times and circumstances. So then I have to ask myself: What does the work want to be?

What kind of work do you think makes a good book?

I don't gravitate to the books by the "masters" we were raised on. Nor the "book as an extended photo essay." I've realized over the years that there are very few books that I'll go back to; a lot just sit on the shelf. But, for example, Carpe Fucking Diem by Elina Brotherus, about her experiences while trying to get pregnant, is a book that every single time I go back to it I'll have a new insight and a different experience.

It's important not to try too hard. It's not like a book needs to have an over-the-top design that unfolds and you can play it like an accordion. Those things can be surprising and nice, but it just needs to be genuine and well thought out.

What do you suggest for how to think about the right format?

086

Is it right?

You have to question why you love storytelling. Permit yourself to daydream about all the formats possible, without limitations. It might be more than one thing. It might start with recognizing the limitation of photography and using a secondary or supplementary platform. It's thinking outside of the box, and asking yourself: How do I want people to feel and encounter this work?

When putting the work out into the world, what control do you think you have as an artist as to where and how the work is received?

Well, you have control in the sense that you can say "no" to a publication that you don't trust. I've been screwed over enough to have learned that. You can choose to only grant permission to show the work when they use your captions. That's the first level of control. When it's out in the world, you can't be in every room that's going to receive the work, but you can give the nuance to the work and the detail to send together with it.

And you should test the work before it goes into the world. I'm very aware of the fact that I live and

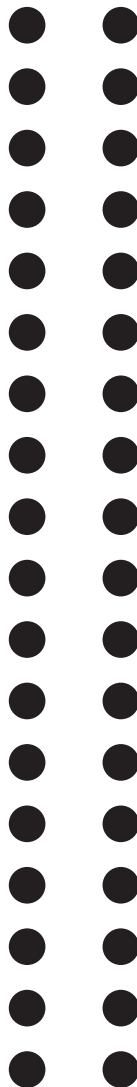
work in a place that is not my community. I don't send work out into the world until I've shown it to a core group of people who I trust, including the people who are in the work, and ask, "How do you perceive this?" That doesn't mean I have to agree with them, but I listen to what they say and agonize over it. It's an extremely long process.

My creed is this: if the people in the community that I'm documenting don't recognize themselves in the work—they may not agree with it but if they should recognize themselves—then I've failed.

Some people are quite shy or hesitant to share their work before it's "ready." What advice do you have about showing the work and asking for feedback?

The majority of students have the opposite tendency of wanting to send it out into the world and get an immediate reaction. Usually, if there's a compulsion in something, you need to analyze it. When you unpack the reasons behind your compulsions, it could lead you to engage more meaningfully with the work.

It could be that you're afraid to share the work for a good reason, because you haven't found the right form yet, or you're thinking of protective measures because you're afraid that it could hurt someone. And then there's insecurity. There are some students, quite often females, who are dabbling with projects but who are too insecure to share it. Often the answer is to find a community, or make a collective, and do little interventions. Because, at the end of the day, it's that engagement with others that you're craving, whether you know it or not.



What do you think is wrong with photography today?

A survey of ISSP participants

089

Why do we have
gendered toilets?

090

Is it private?

Taking pictures of one's experiences becomes more important than the experience itself.

Agnieszka Sejud

I don't think that anything is wrong with it.

Linda Bojšakova

Today the world is full of images. The multiplicity makes it hard to estimate the value of a photo.

Sanne Derks

A lack of emphasis on creating and maintaining a supportive community, that fosters mutually empowering collaborations and friendships.

Demelza Watts

The photographic platform is dominated by a specific category of people putting their practice in a privileged perspective. As a North African Muslim woman, I grew up seeing my people represented as closed off, oppressed and inferior through the lenses of western visual storytellers. This has had a very negative impact on me personally & professionally. I think the global photographic platform needs to welcome more women & more ethnically diverse visual storytellers.

Rehab Eldalil

091 Is it public?

It's self-destructing with the self-exploiting of the unreal

Meindert Peirens

With photography itself is nothing wrong, it's the people who might use photography in a wrong way. They might use it to show a different, biased, fake news story. Either by changing the photographs (with photoshop) or prohibiting pictures from being shown, giving a wrong perspective of what happened with a biased edited series.

Petra Kroon

I don't think that there is anything wrong. I think it is always important to look for good things.

Kai Yokoyama

With approximately 95 million photographs uploaded on Instagram every day, photographs on social media are in their majority a setting of a perfect life, which leads to a lot of young people comparing themselves to made-up perfection, which is not healthy and can be psychologically devastating. At the end of the day, the excessive use of photography and need to create a seemingly ideal life through photographs leads to people losing touch with reality.

Mariei Kouveli

092 Are you important in my work?

I reckon the problem lies in the use of the images,
not in the photographs themselves.

Nicolò Lucchi

What's wrong today is that we are flooded in a
world of images and so few people really learned
how to read images. Learning about photography,
how images are made and used should really be part
of children's education.

Julie Bourges

Documentation of all kinds (data collection, news
coverage, fine art) has a history of disproportionate
omission and/or exploitation of marginalized pop-
ulations. In this sense, photography has also (and
continues to) perpetuate existing systems of domi-
nance and oppression.

Ally Eden

093

What is outside the bubble?

What do you
think about
the bubbles in
which we live?

Some thoughts from The Cool Couple

094

What is a better bubble?

The universe is a bubble inflated by dark energy.

The bubble is like a marble. Like a struggle. A bubble is a safe place and so dangerous. You may kill yourself in the bubble. Die inside. And it's gonna be totally fine since your body can be recycled properly. If you feel like a bubble just give your bubble a name. A name is really important. It's something you need to take care of.

I try to pierce or exit my bubble to talk to others – to understand them and to make them understand me. I struggle, I fall and I can't get up. I can't move in my bubble let alone get out of it to reach others.

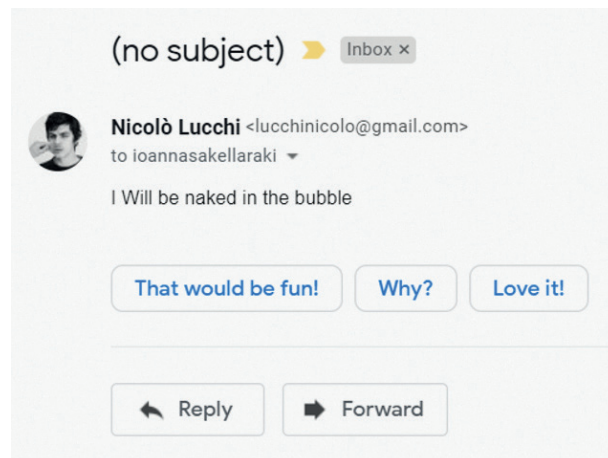
They are probably one's habitat and actually may have cloud-like structures.

Every person and community is like a bubble. A thick, heavy bubble separates us from everyone else around us. But we don't notice it because the bubble is transparent. It can be said that the entire Earth and all of humanity are contained in the broth of a huge bubble. Maybe the mission of each human and community is to break their bubble.

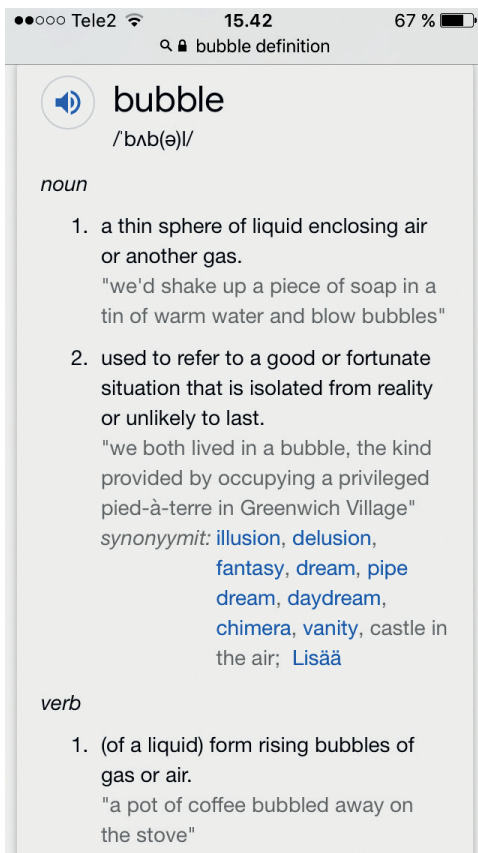
095 Whose opinion matters to you?

If everyone lives in their own bubble, what can be done to the bubble to better the communication? You have to break through your own bubble first to demand the same from the other.

We all are living in bubbles. Sometimes they overlap.



096 Why can't we communicate?



How to create a sustainable art festival?

Interview with Krzysztof Candrowicz

How do you reach people through the curation of a big festival of photography?

To me, the biggest question to answer is how to show a different perspective to people that are not already involved in the discussion. It's very easy to spread messages among people that are already very self-aware and aware of certain processes of society. These people are already the audience of most of the art festivals, biennales, triennials... So how do you reach a new audience? And how to really inspire those people that are not actually participating and questioning the political and social situation?

I think a festival has the structure and the tools to potentially attract people into certain participation because it's an event and it's cool and it's something that you really want to go to because your friends are going. At the Hamburg Triennale, there were hundreds of thousands of people seeing the exhibitions on the streets and in our containers, so for me, those were as important as the exhibitions that were held in the museums.

Something that I have observed during the past five to ten years is that at most of the important festivals

099

Can I give you my card?

and events – like Documenta, Manifesta, the Berlin Biennale – every single event was related to equality, ecological crisis, the rise of nationalism... it's not anymore only about photography or visual arts. We are not discussing the medium anymore, we are talking about the real situations that we face, there is a really deep profound message behind. I think this is kind of firestarter. Festivals are great places to start certain discussions. Of course, it's still existing mainly in the intellectual part of society, but it's still important to have these firestarters.

I have my doubts about the general character of events in terms of sustainability if you think about what it causes...

...like how many people have to fly in, and how much carbon dioxide is emitted into the atmosphere... We are wasting lots of plastic every day, people are smoking and eating meat... It should be more integrated. The photo festival in Łódź is a good example: we started to think in an integrated way, and we tried to bring in as many people as possible via trains, we got rid of plastic, we tried to consume less energy... We tried to do the festival in a really sustainable way.

100

Where is the money supposed to come from?

Photography should be about contradiction.

Duane Michals

101

Does the world need saving?

How do you
take
responsibility
for an archive?

Marc Mouarkech
on the work of The Arab Image Foundation

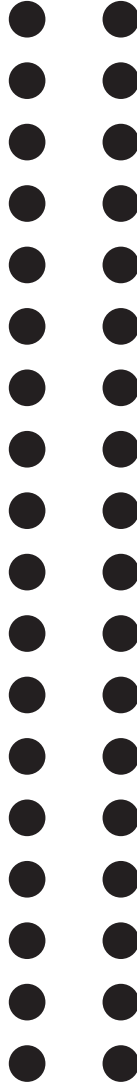
102

Maybe I can show you
my work later?

What do you do?

The Arab Image Foundation is an independent association and archive of photographic objects based in Beirut. The foundation's collection includes over 500,000 objects from and related to the Middle East, North Africa and the Arab diaspora, and has been gradually assembled over the last 20 years by artists and researchers and through donations. Here, the foundation's Managing Director Marc Mouarkech expands on the questions that arise when dealing with archives.

For us—eight fairly young people—to have a major archive in



our hands is a major responsibility. How do we deal with it?

How do we think of an archive linked to our region, taking into consideration the context in which we are based: we are in Beirut, and it's an archive that represents different communities and the diversity of cultures of the region. How should we actually take all of this and think about it in a way that puts into the spotlight that diversity?

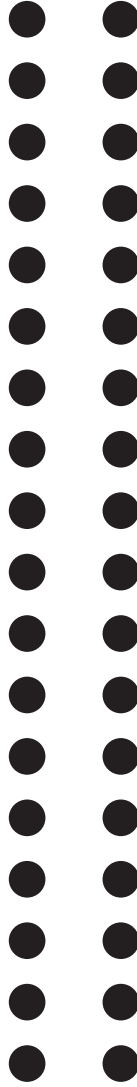
How do we shift the perception of the archive? The archive in our case is a collection of the truths of so many different persons. The photographic objects contain their histories, their memories, they are

What is this worth?

the ways in which all these people represented themselves. It's also about all the ways in which people have dealt with their own archives, about the ways they dealt with a camera, how they've recorded their environment, how they registered their daily lives, even how professional photographers took images of the people who lived around them. We want people to think of these things when they look at those images.

How can we think responsibly and ethically about how we can use this material? We know that at the foundation we cannot study each and every collection in our archive, there is too much material, so the

idea is to create opportunities. We give access and allow for people to use those images. We consider what the archive might instigate and how it might plant seeds in people's imagination and people's way of thinking about history. An archive of photographic objects such as ours allows us to write many different histories and see things in so many different ways. Through archives, we can promote diversity.





105

Does it succeed because
good intentions are
irreproachable?

Who pays
for socially
engaged work
in capitalism?

A campfire-conversation
between Lars Klingenberg and Constanze Flamme

106

Should I be selling this?

Lars: I find it problematic that within our field there is such a lack of funding. Everybody applies for the same scholarships, residencies and grants. This creates such a competitive culture, and then we all get together at events like this and talk about how things work inside our bubble – but there are so many completely different ways to go. And I am much more interested in those alternatives that also work when you are fine with a more modest lifestyle. For example, in a way, getting unemployment from the state is like a scholarship. If you know the system, you can go on welfare, and if that's not stressing you too much than you can live your life and do your stuff without needing to apply for money from organizations.

Constanze: I think that's fair enough. If we don't get financial compensation for contributing to society with our practice, why shouldn't the state enable us to do our work?

There should be some sort of social credit system, where you get benefits for unpaid social work.

Yes, and without all the constraints that are usually put on unemployment, like required documentation and proof.

The problem is that most people are too afraid to consider that option because of all those requirements, but you just need to do your research, then it's really easy. Many look down on people who are receiving welfare, but if you just say "Fuck it, I don't care about that, I just want to do my stuff." then it's a valid way to go. So many people talk about where to get funding for their projects, but this is also an option and it is just one of many.

The appreciation for the kind of work that we do is very limited in mainstream society. It's the same with nursery-school teachers, caretakers and so on. People who work with human values are constantly being underpaid, while other people might work for example in finance and juggle huge amounts of money and crash entire economies – and they even get rewarded for that! Don't get me wrong, I'm fine with living on a low level, economically speaking. From an ethical point of view I wouldn't even want to be in a different situation.

Me too, I think it is great to have little. I mean, we have our time and how is that not the biggest luxury? Quite a while back I was a real workaholic, working ten to twelve hours every day. For ten years. And then I finally arrived at

the point where I asked, "What am I doing all this for?" I didn't even do it for the money, I did it because I somehow thought that was my dream-life, but I was only destroying myself. I gave all that up and went in a different direction. I have a lot less now and I'm happy with it. Of course, each person needs to see if that is a possibility for them or not.

And, for me, I want to spend the time that I have as someone committed to humanistic causes. I see myself as an activist and the camera as the tool of my activism. I see everything as political: my work is political and I want it to be political. I want to change something, have an impact, or at least make a statement. There is just no other way anymore. Globally we reached a point where the environmental situation is so urgent, we are really close to triggering a chain-reaction that cannot be stopped. I mean, why would I produce a pretty picture today if I don't know if anything at all will still be here some years from now? I think we should all get politically active now. We need to take a stand. Everything else became less relevant for me personally.

And there the aspect of solidarity comes in again. I want to be able to create good work and I want to direct my potential towards a good time collaborating with people. I don't want to spend my time competing. In competitions it's all about proving that you are "better". But that is not what it is about, it's about everybody doing their part. We end up reproducing the same elitist dynamics that govern the rest of capitalistic society. All these open calls and residencies where you have to pay for applying, that is the exploitation of a group where so many desperately hope for more visibility.

Sure. But in capitalism, social matters are just not very high up in the list of priorities. If it was, our work would have a whole different level of appreciation.

I can't change a lot in the world through my money, I don't have much of that. What I can offer is my time, my commitment, and my generosity to create a space for people to be seen, to feel a little bit happier or more empowered. We as photographers have to reach for solidarity. We need to be able to talk about our shared fears, realizing that we are all humans and that we should shape the time that we have on this planet in the best possible way.

Should we smile in front of this situation?
Can we be ironic? Are we allowed to laugh?

Simone Santilli, The Cool Couple

How can we
combine
art and
activism?

111

Where have you exhibited?

112

What is the photography world?

Break the spell of separation

Live now as if you were free

Sense worlds

The power of an audacious
act, that becomes a story...

Embody your principles

Refuse representation

Wear the cloak of invisibility

Embed yourself

Direct action

Don't show the world to
people, transform it together

Escape from the prison
of the art world

Adventure is addictive
Reframe their story

Never go home!

Don't pretend to do politics
in the art world

Abandon your cultural
capital

Least effort for maximum gain

115

What do you mean when you
talk about truth?

Become the territory
Desert and withdraw consent

Use a diversity of tactics

Never give in...

116

Who are photobooks for?

“Collectivity always ends in drama.”

Alfonso Borrágán

117

How do you deal with criticism?

Does
someone else
want to ask
a question?

Frequently Asked Questions – a collaborative project
between Anthony Luvera and Gerald McLaverty

118

How many women photographers do you like?

Frequently Asked Questions is a collaborative project with Gerald Mclaverty. Our idea was to gather information about the support and services available to a homeless person, but through a direct request from someone experiencing homelessness and in need of answers. Our work together began with sending email correspondence to council representatives across the United Kingdom, written from the point of view of a homeless person, requesting information about services provided in each locality. At the heart of this email are a number of questions that enquire about a homeless individual's right to access basic living provisions such as shelter, personal safety, health, food, and communication. Through participative research and the facilitation of creative dialogue, Frequently Asked Questions seeks to map, document and enable conversations about the rights most people take for granted.

Anthony Luvera

Where can I go
for something to eat or drink?

Where can I find shelter
when it is raining or snowing?

Where can I go to a toilet
during the day?

Where can I go to a toilet
during the night?

Where can I get
a bath or a shower?

Where can I get clothes,
footwear and a blanket?

Where can I sleep
during the night that is safe?

Where can I go
to use a computer?

121 Who are you referencing?

Where can I go
to use a telephone?

Where can I go
to see a doctor?

Where can I go
to see a dentist?

122 Who profits from your work?

“Break the wall of shame.”

Oriana Eliçabe

123

Why should I do your job?

Activism, urgency and a practice?

A conversation with David Vaaknin
around John Jordan

124

What do you say “no” to?

John Jordan who joined us via skype talked mostly about the content itself, him being someone who feels quite an urgency when it comes to the ecological situation that we are facing. How do you feel about that?

David: A lot of what he said resonates with me. In a way, it's inspiring that he does what he does, but the way he does it is very extreme also. I'm not sure about the way that he talks about activism and one's role in changing or helping change the world. During one of our lessons Matthieu Asselin basically said that if you want to change the world, photography might not actually be the best choice. So if you want to change the world then maybe John Jordan's attitude is the way to go. And not photography.

I'm a concerned citizen who's doing photography. I have to find my voice to balance these things. I can't be an activist, because I guess that's not who I am, but I want to do photography that maybe encourages people to do activism. I'm not delusional in any way, thinking that I'll change the world. But maybe I can change my own backyard.

John Jordan also said in his talk that not everyone can be an activist and that it's okay that you do

125 Who's getting what from whom?

what you do. But make sure you do it for a cause! Do your own thing, you don't have to be an activist dealing with global issues. Among the other talks this week, Anthony Luvera's was maybe the one that touched me the most even though everything he does in his artistic practice is different from what I do. But he showed me what it means to care. It can be staying in your own backyard, helping your local homeless or poor people. Just make some change. For me, Anthony's talk really gave me the most inspiration of all the lectures: the way he makes change locally, within the community. He really believes in what he does, and he empowers people through his work.

I've noticed a difference in the talks we've had. Some people try to make a change through the end results of their work. For instance Natasha Caruana's work: she puts it up and it full-on triggers reactions and she makes a change through her final work. Whereas she – as far as I understood it – is not looking to make a change to those married men she depicts. That was not her agenda. Whereas I have a feeling after Vincen Beeckman's talk that his main intention is not to show a picture of a homeless person that will have this huge effect. Rather he has a process in which he interacts with

126 Whose voice is amplified?

people; he changes and touches the lives of some of the people he photographs. It's also an option to try to make a change through the artistic process. It's not always about publishing something for millions of people to see.

That relates to what Matthieu and Sergio have been talking about in our classes, which is basically “don't focus on the consequences”. Focus on the process. As in Matthieu's Monsanto-project: focus on why this company is killing people. Don't just show dead and sick people, but try to show the process that lead us to this point. If we just show consequences and end results we stick to stereotypical representations and we're not gonna change anything. But if we try to ask why are we here? What process lead us to this point? What are the stages along the way? That way we can maybe make some change in how people think. Even reaching that maybe is a big change. That's probably THE change.

How can you use the camera as a political apparatus?

- Make a photo essay on a social topic, uncover local or international problems
- Use the camera as a tool to gain access to hidden or restricted places
- Take pictures of people, objects, or landscapes experiencing the consequences of a political situation
- Attract people's attention using the beauty of the images
- Create images that can become a part of a larger movement
- Use visual language as a subtle way to criticize

- Use your capabilities and influence as a photographer to give a voice to those who can't speak out freely
- Join an activist group or take part in campaigns as a photographer
- Use surveillance imagery, Google Street View, archives, or other photography captured of the public to find or make new narratives
- Portray alternate ways of living or envision new possible realities



131

How do I break into your
safe space?

How can we
turn
activism into
serious fun?

A conversation with Oriana Eliçabe
on radical imagination

132

How can we think responsibly
and ethically about how to
use this material?

Oriana Eliçabe is an independent documentary photographer and a member of Enmedio, a collective of image-makers who seek to create connections between art and social action. Together, they explore the transformative power of images and stories through spectacular interventions using all the means within reach: photography, the media, design, performance, and more. Oriana tells us more about how to create interference in the dominant narrative.

One of the goals of Enmedio is to “create interference in the dominant narrative.” That sounds quite serious but the activities you organize are far more fun. Tell us about your approach.

Sometimes when we want to communicate with people, we realize that we don’t share a common ground for understanding. But we don’t want to talk only to ourselves or like minded people, we also want to talk with people who don’t share our ideas. Things like humour and pop culture—what we call the “cultural grammar”—can work as a shortcut to connect with people through images, rather than boring discourse. Through this connection, we create a shared “cultural terrain”—meaning everything like history, art, photography, memes, celebrity gossip, sports spectacles.. everything. This is the starting point for communication.

When you use things like humour and pop culture for activist purposes, how do you ensure it keeps the depth and meaning of the message?

Well, what is a joke? How does a joke work? It connects based on something that feels bad or is going wrong inside of you or the world. To share a joke with someone, you have to share the same cultural terrain, otherwise, you don't laugh. The joke connects with something painful, and then you laugh—and you're not laughing about poor people, you're laughing because you recognize something in the joke that is real.

So, you must give the audience the space to think, you don't have to give them the answer. You can let them figure out the punchline themselves.

What is the ultimate goal of action like this? To raise awareness? To provoke action?

It's to try to inhabit a better space. We are building a new space with these kinds of narratives. It's important because capitalism doesn't give us any space. Through our work, we open a new space where we can live: space where we can talk about what has happened to us, for self-representation, to talk about our way to see the world and how to make a better world. We do this through images and actions, and of course, it's to seduce the people

and to show them that it's possible to use art for social change.

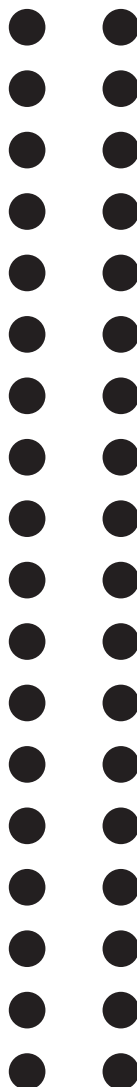
How did you personally come to this approach of combining art and activism to make serious fun?

Art and activism are part of my life. If you take life very seriously, you'll be depressed or end up full of regret. You must have a radical imagination. You have to imagine a different way to live and write your own script for your life.

In some ways, neoliberalism gives us the chapters of your life readymade: you must grow, you must study, you must get married, make a family, and of course you must work and work and work in order to pay your bills. We don't accept that narrative. We want to create a new narrative, and the only way to make possible another narrative is to do it together, with more people, in a collective way. And because we work in this way and try to open this narrative, people come to us, and we continue to grow, and that's the way we change things. First, we start with ourselves, and then other people see what we're doing and join us.

What do you think is the best way to get started with radical imagination?

The best start is to knock on the door of your neighbour and say, “Hello, would you like a coffee?” and just start to talk. Or maybe, rather than a coffee, a beer. Because the best ideas come up when you’re drinking a beer in a bar, or when you’re with a group of people in an informal setting. There’s not a recipe, it’s just to listen to yourself and to try to be consequential with your ideas and what you do. For us at Enmedio, we’re professional image-makers but we broke off from our official jobs and created a new space in order to live in another way. For us, this is what’s meaningful: that our images, our production, our work, our art becomes something useful, something funny, something collective.



Does my story matter?

A reflection from Augustine Paredes

137

Is it possible to have a truly reciprocal partnership with a community?

138

Who do you support?

One thing that I've asked myself all throughout my practice is: does my story matter? And in which way will it matter if it matters? How will it matter to a wider audience? Does my story as a homosexual matter? I know that it matters, but a part of our practice as artists is to doubt ourselves, it's part of the process when we are thinking of the things that we're putting out. At the end of the day, we're just tiny specks of dust in the universe.

I was asking people on Reddit if it's okay to be homosexual in Latvia, and they were like "yeah yeah, it is!". But there are a lot of buts: you can be gay but you can't get married. You can be gay but you can't be showing it off... You can be gay, but... That's also one of the reasons why I ask myself: does being a homosexual really matter when you can't change things? When you're crippled by the societal pressure? What will your personal story do? Even though I know that in the greater picture it will matter. I know that if a young person follows me on Instagram where I talk about my queerness a lot they will be inspired, right? But in what way? As artists, we have a responsibility, because whatever work we put out in the world may or may not shine a light to other people. And not a lot of people have the privilege and the voice to share their stories.

My questions don't really have any answers. The answer is within. That's why introspection is important for us artists. I wake up every morning and think why the fuck am I doing this? I'm just making life so hard for myself.

I embrace these doubts but I don't want to embrace them to the point that they cripple me. Just enough for me to be mindful of the people around me. As a queer person, safe spaces are very important to me, so in order for me to achieve that I ask the question: will this change the perspective or the safety of the place that I belong in? Asking these things is healthy for my mind and for the people around me.

Who am I exploiting?

Should we take pictures
when the world is on fire?

What
are some
self-reflective
questions to
ask when
doing
activist art?

- Who benefits from your work being in the world? Who is making a profit? Who is getting “exposure”? Who is seen? Who is acknowledged? Who is empowered? Who is elevated? Whose name gets repeated? Who has the potential to earn prizes or opportunities? How do you protect yourself from being co-opted? How do you prevent yourself from becoming corrupt?
- Who is harmed by your work being in the world? Who is disempowered by the work? What stereotypes are upheld? Who is portrayed negatively? Who is at risk? Who is the most vulnerable to backlash or reprisals for the photographs being public? Who has rights to the images and who does not? What is your responsibility to protect your subjects? Who has a right to privacy?
- What is the ecological impact of producing and distributing the work? What materials are being used? What travel is required and by whom? What is the risk of causing damage to the environment or causing stress to animals? What waste is produced? How can you ensure your values are also demonstrated throughout the process?

- Who controls the narrative? Who is funding the work? What role do the participants or subjects play in deciding how they are represented? How much influence do external parties have on what is photographed? What is your motivation in telling the story a certain way? What have you not seen?
- How do you find allies? Who else is working toward similar goals or with similar interests? Where can you find communities of like-minded people? What strengths do you have to offer others? What are you lacking that other people, communities, or organizations may have? How can collaboration amplify your message?
- What resistance or criticism is expected? Who has a vested interest in the status quo? What forces keep existing systems in place? What effect could disruption have on the world? How can you prepare for and mitigate criticism? What approach would best help to reduce resistance?
- Who has the power to decide where these photos are seen and in what context? Which gatekeepers can prevent your work from being

seen? What platforms would be supportive of the work and why? What power do you have in distributing the story independently or by word-of-mouth? Who pays to produce the work or to send it out into the world? What are your responsibilities when considering publication of the work in different contexts?

- Why are you interested in this story? Do you really care? What trends are influencing you? Why does this feel urgent to you? To what extent is this story “yours”? What are your personal strengths (or weaknesses) that make this appropriate (or not) for you to tell? Who else has the right to tell this story? What responsibilities do you accept for telling the story? How can you take your personal interests out of the work?

Ivan Petrokovich? Sergio Valenzuela
Escobedo? Mariel Kouveli? Helen
Korpak? Kristīne Madjare? Krzysztof
Candrowicz? Evgenia Chernovskaya?
Duane Michals? Dania Hany? Anna
Denisova? Monika Orpik? Joe Magowan?
Gintaras Česonis? Emma Bowkett?
Sintija Mikanovska - Mikalovska?
Anna-Tia Buss? Lys Arango? Niccolò
Benetton? Vincen Beeckman? Katrīna
Sauškina? Iveta Gabaliņa? Elizabete
Mežule-Gricmane? Linda Muižniece?
Andrejs Strokins? Inga Linda Tilgase?
André Alves? Uģis Ozoliņš? Petra Kroon?
Laima Buša? Viola Karule? Katherine
Oktober Matthews? Liāna Ivete Benķe?
Roman Sokolov? Artūrs Orenīts? Keiji
Fujimoto? Atis? Nicolò Lucchi? Nicolas
Polli? Simone Santilli? Selen Solak
Sevinc? Franziska Rieder? Alessandra
Sharani Zadeh? Constanze Flamme?
Jūlija Berkoviča? Lesia Poliakova?
Anthony Luvera? Kai Yokoyama? Jessica
Wolfelsperger? Annemarija Gulbe? Loïc
Seguin? Ekaterina Balaban? Alfonso
Borragán? Sammie Masters-Hopkins?
Meindert Peirens? Megan Wilson-De La
Mare? Valentino Bellini?

