

Moment beyond Moment

Transforming photographic meaning through combining representations of the real, remembered and imagined

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Contents

Attestation of authorship	1
Acknowledgment	2
Ethics Application	3
Abstract	4
Research Background	5
Research Aim	7
Research Output	8
Structure of the Exegesis	9
 Chapter 1: The Notion of Moment beyond Moment	 10
1.1. Photographic ambiguity	12
1.1.1. The ambiguity of the moment	12
1.1.2. The ambiguous appearance of 'the photographed'	20
1.1.3. No photographic meaning is absolute	25
1.2. Transformations in the photographic phenomenon of moment beyond moment	29
1.2.1. The 'moment of real-life situation' with the moment of existing image	30
1.2.1.1. The photographed moment and the 'real-life moment'	30
1.2.1.2. The fictive moment and the 'real-life moment'	33
1.2.2. Transformation of meaning in the situation of moment beyond moment	35
1.2.3. Transformation of time in moment beyond moment	38
1.2.4. Transformation of space in an extended photograph	40
1.3. Conclusion	45

Chapter 2: Research Strategies and Methods.....	46
2.1. The method of contrary thinking	47
2.2. Grounding of the concept of ‘moment’	49
2.2.1. Coding data	50
2.2.2. Acquiring concepts	51
2.2.3. Cataloguing concepts	52
2.2.4. Constructing a systematic research theory	53
2.3. Sudden enlightenment	54
2.4. Data collection	57
2.4.1. Data collection procedures	57
2.4.2 The snapshot method	58
2.5. Ethics consideration	59
2.6. Conclusion	60
 Chapter 3: Practical Findings	 61
Chapter 4: Conclusion	66
 References	 69
Bibliography	71
 Appendix	

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment is made in the acknowledgments.

Xie, Jiahua

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Ethics Application

Ethics application (08/124) has been approved on 21 July 2008 by Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee.

Abstract

This practice-based project explores the photographic phenomenon of ‘moment beyond moment’, which refers to the combined representations of an existing image in an environment, together with the real-life situation at the moment the photograph is taken. I call this photograph an ‘extended photograph’.

Employing practical works of extended photographs and focusing on interactions between the moment in real-life and the moment in an existing image, the research explores the transformation of meanings caused by the interactions of these moments in an extended photograph.

The research owes its approach to grounded theory, contrary thinking and Chinese Buddhist ‘Sudden Enlightenment’ to further its aim of exploring the unpredictable interaction of these moments, and to disclose the potentials of meaning transformation.

My research outcome intends to initiate a discourse with photographic practitioners and theorists on the phenomenon of moment beyond moment in a working environment that is encaged by the excessive existence of displayed images.

The thesis is composed as a creative work that consists of a series of photographic images accompanied by an exegesis component. The images represent a nominal 80%, and the exegesis 20% of the final submission.

Research Background

In today's urban environment, images are ubiquitous. Wherever you go, you will be confronted with the excessive display of images, mainly photographic images for advertising display.¹

This situation changes the working environment of a photographer. These images, whether they are photographic or illustrative, have given the environment additional information; and will, when they are included, potentially change the meaning of the photograph taken, whether purposely or not.

Such an environment can, on one hand, restrict the photographer while he or she works; on the other hand, it offers opportunities for the photographer to take advantage of the environment and portray other or additional meanings in his or her own photograph. I consider this approach of using the existing image(s) of an environment as an interaction: an interaction between the past moments in the existing image(s) with the present moment when the shutter clicks. I call such interacting moments 'moment beyond moment' and the photograph as an 'extended photograph'. To be more specific about

¹ The widespread display of the advertising image has become an issue of public concern. Auckland City Council planned to ban billboards in the 'Queen Street valley' in 2006. In the same year, São Paulo banned all outdoor advertisements.

the past moments, I have also distinguished a photographed moment (from a photograph) from a fictive moment (from a painting or illustration, etc.). And in my opinion, the interaction may also lead to the misrepresentation of an environment; I describe such situations as 'meaning leaking' in an extended photograph.

Research Aim

Through a series of extended photographs to experiment the representational interactions between moments of the existing image and that of the real-life situation, the main aim of this practice-based research is to unfold the potential of meaning transformation in the photographic phenomenon of 'moment beyond moment'.

Research Output

The practical work does not intend to give evidence (of success or failure) of meaning transformation, it only proposes consideration of the phenomenon of moment beyond moment. The data analysis process is therefore only intended to provide supporting data for the underpinning theoretical considerations in my practice. To achieve this, the accompanying appendix is the major output that provides an open-ended solution to initiate a discourse. There are two parts in the appendix: contact sheets of photographs of each location and a selected image from each location. A contact sheet as a record represents the consideration of the potential meaning transformation. The selected image gives the transformed meaning of my own view. A limited number of images are selected and presented in the exhibition that represents the findings of my project.

Structure of the Exegesis

This practice-based research has resulted in a creative work of a series of photographic images accompanied by an exegesis component. The selected work in the appendix is the major research output that represents the final submission. A selection of images is displayed in the gallery at AUT University to place my own view of the research work in the public domain and initiate a discourse, and as a part of examination process. These are accompanied by a 12,000-word exegesis that contextualises and places the practical outcome within the relevant theoretical and philosophical contexts.

The exegesis is structured in three main parts: Chapter one discusses the ambiguity of the photographed moment and its consequences for the transformation of meaning in the extended photographs. Chapter two discusses the methodological approaches employed in this project. The theoretical and practical origins of the research that led to the process of development will be addressed. Chapter three provides a concise commentary on the finding of the practical works that responds to the meaning transformation of moment beyond moment. It is followed by a conclusion of the research project.

Chapter 1

The Notion of Moment beyond Moment

In this chapter, the related theories concerning the photographic phenomenon of moment beyond moment will be discussed, as a theoretical approach to unfold the meaning transforming in an extended photograph in which the phenomenon of moment beyond moment is grounded.

To justify the meaning transformation that is caused by the interactions between the visual elements from the two parties in an extended photograph, the research starts with a study of the essences of photography and its photographed moment.

The theory of meaning transformation is illustrated in the following structural diagram (Figure 1.01).

The theoretical structure of meaning transformation

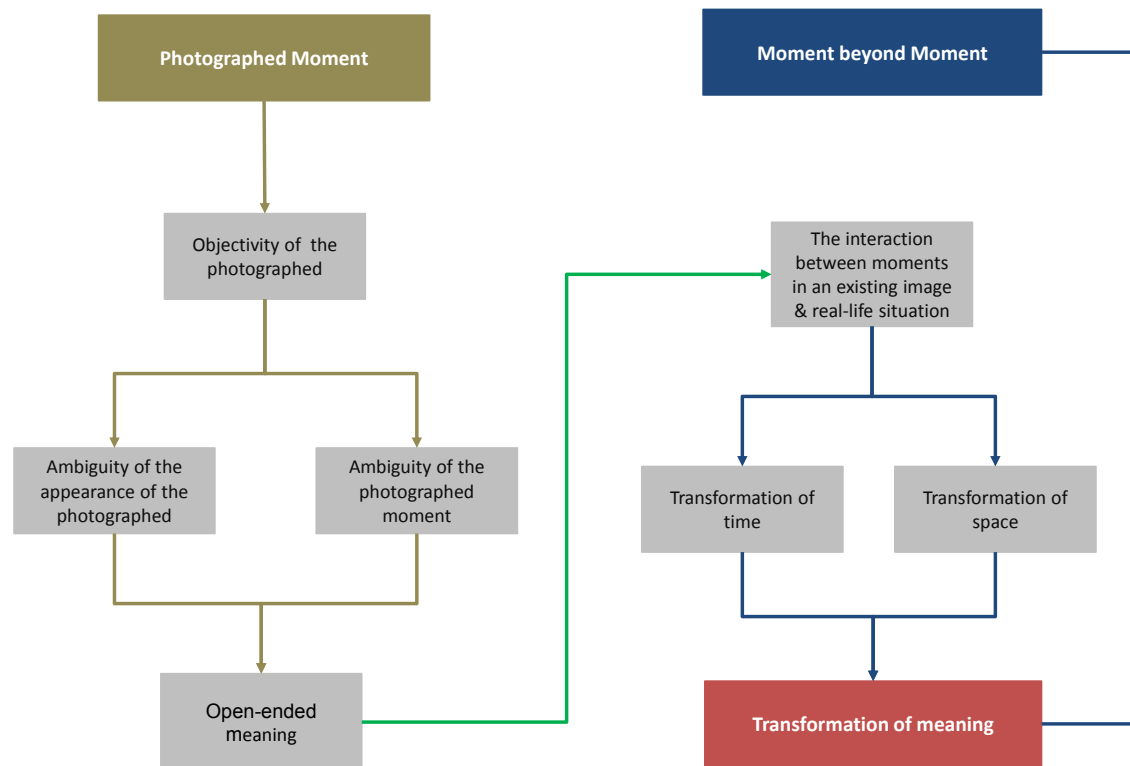


Figure 1.01

1.1. Photographic ambiguity

In a broad sense, ambiguity means doubtfulness or uncertainty of meaning or intentions. It refers to an expression whose meaning cannot be determined from its context, or whose meaning can be interpreted in more than one way. In this project the term 'ambiguity' is needed to describe the uncertain representation of a photographed object, a photographed moment or a photograph.

Through the investigation of photographic ambiguities, this part of the study outlines three aspects of Berger's (1982) 'photographic essence': the ambiguity of meaning, time, and the visual aspect. As the premise of the research on meaning transformation, photographic ambiguity offers the extended photograph the capacity to transform the photographic meanings through the interactions of photographed objects.

1.1.1. The ambiguity of the moment

The idea of a moment as a significant, essential aesthetic of photography came from the French photographer Henry Cartier-Bresson (1952), when he conceptualized and coined the term 'decisive moment'. He suggests that 'photography is the

simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms that give that event its proper expression.’ He also affirmed that there is only one decisive moment in an event.²

Bresson mentions two aspects. Firstly, the decisive moment concerns the time when the ‘happening’ is captured. He defines a moment in a photograph as the fragment of time when the objects are ‘frozen’. Time is one aspect of the moment. I call it the ‘photographed moment’.

The photographed moment shows things differently from the human vision of actual existence. In real life, there are continuous moments that form a ‘moving image’ narration; the human senses recollect the passing scenes and interweave them to become moving images that are then stored in the human memory. But the photographed moment presents things in a different way: ‘the only time contained in a photograph is the isolated instant of what it shows’ (Berger, 1982, p. 95); it freezes the movement and presents it as a still image. It even records the ‘invisible’. Figure 1.02 is a photograph of the 2006 World Rally Championship (WRC) heat in Hamilton, New Zealand. In reality, a spectator senses the speed of a racing car through the flow of movement of the speeding car and the dust engendered (as well as the noise created). It is an experience of continuous moments, and the spectator is unable to isolate a certain moment. But the photographer only selects an isolated moment to represent the happening. In the photograph, the car does not move, but through the photographic

² This book has no page number, therefore unable to make page reference.

functionality of high shutter speed, the movement of the racing car can be perceived from the still-spraying macadam that it propels and scatters. In fact, the spraying macadam can barely be physically seen by the human eye, but it can be clearly seen when it is frozen in the photograph. From the 'invisible' details, unveiled in the photographed moment, the spectator is able to sense the velocity of the racing car.



Figure 1.02 Xie (2006)

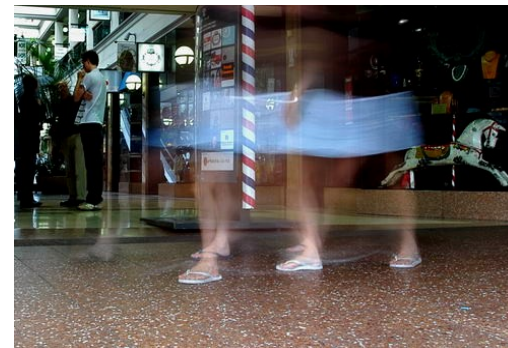


Figure 1.03 Xie (2007)

Susan Sontag (1977) suggests:

All that photography's program of realism actually implies is the belief that is hidden. And, being hidden is something to be unveiled.

Whatever the camera records is a disclosure – whether it is imperceptible, fleeting, parts of movement, an order that natural vision is incapable of perceiving or a 'heightened reality' (Moholy-Nagy's phrase), or simply the elliptical way of seeing (pp. 120-121).

To be more specific about the heightened reality of a movement, my awareness is that photography unveils the reality that is hidden from natural vision. In other words, photography shows a scene that is outside the human experience of its actual existence. In this sense, the photographed moment confronts spectators with the unfamiliarity of its character; it then evolves into possible ambiguities.

Interestingly, although temporally opposite to the short duration of a moment, a longer duration of moment also unveils this invisibility. My other experiment with the photographed moment explores how human footsteps are affected by the long exposure of a photographed moment. The unexpected outcome (Figure 1.03) depicts the orbit of human footsteps. It precisely detects the track of human movement. The concept of movement and 'stillness' in this photograph is represented via the ghostlike figures of the human body with the unnatural formation of multiple feet (these are the 'spoors' of human footsteps isolated and disclosed through the photographed moment), and they interact with the other 'frozen' people nearby and a 'running' wooden horse to form an interpretation of a human movement in a photographed moment. This example illustrates

the ambiguity of the photographed moment through the unnatural display of feet. The presentation of the photographed moment challenges human perception. It is important to note that, in both examples, no one photographed moment is alike.

Each photographed moment represents happenings that are potentially unfamiliar to the human senses. This contributes to the ambiguous quality of the photographed moment.

A second aspect of Bresson's decisive moment concerns the significance of a moment in an ongoing event. Bresson believes there is only one photographed moment representing the significance of an event.

However, the concept of the significance of the decisive moment is arguable. As a photojournalist, I advocate the notion of the decisive moment; this was a discipline in my past career. Yet there are always different opinions among individuals about the moment that represents an event. The circumscription of significance to an event can be explained by its inability to represent a consensus position of the stakeholders involved. Sontag (1977) says 'the meaning is the use' (p. 106). This will be further discussed later. The different viewpoints of stakeholders on the same event contribute to dispute Bresson's belief in one decisive moment for one event.³ The argument offers an insight on meaning misinterpretation, because the isolated moment

³ As a photojournalistic principle, photographers determined to capture a decisive moment are advised to be more objective when they are photographing.

in a photograph is unable to give an event a 'proper expression'.⁴ This opens up a discussion on the ambiguity of the photographed moment.

John Berger and Jean Mohr's (1982) proposal of the phenomenon of ambiguity in the photographed moment⁵ engages my reflective thinking: if a moment is isolated from the event, it is only a segment of an event, even, as Bresson affirms, if it is a moment that documents the significance of an event. However, when the photograph is presented to a viewer who has no knowledge of that event, it becomes problematic to comprehend the meaning of the decisive moment (the photograph). This philosophical reflection propels me to ontologically reconsider my position on the decisive moment, and to explore the ambiguity of the photographed moment.

I suggest that the photographed moment is the meeting place of the photographed objects. The photographed moment constitutes a 'collided relationship' of objects involved. It is the 'geometric figures' (Bresson, 1952) of the objects in a

⁴ Bresson (1952) believes the decisive moment is 'a proper expression' of the event.

⁵ Jean Mohr (1982) employs a method of direct demonstration to illustrate his perspective that photographs are ambiguous. The chapter 'What Did I See' (pp. 41-57) is a questionnaire that examines different meanings interpreted by different people from the same photograph. Mohr suggests that people's social hierarchies and occupations affect their understanding of a photograph. From this result, the author attempts to state that the photographic meanings are not absolute, and normally can be transformed to fit spectators' experiences or knowledge. This is what Mohr and Berger call the ambiguity phenomenon.

photograph that imply the moment (the point of time) when the photograph is taken. The duration of a photographed moment varies and is not limited as long as the recording cycle is not yet completed. The suddenly constructed geometric figures compose the relationship of objects. This relationship may only happen for a short time; it is transient. The photographed moment is never repeatable.

The photographed moment can be considered as the source that causes meaning to be misleading. Berger (1982) calls it ambiguity. He explains that photographic ambiguity is caused by the isolation of the photographed moment; consequently photography reveals that 'a photograph arrests the flow of time'; it presents 'a shock of discontinuity' and causes an 'abyss' between the moment of photograph taken and the moment when it is viewed (pp. 86-87). The abyss may indicate that the message of the event is not fully interpreted in the photograph. When the photographed moment is isolated from the whole event, 'the instantaneous tends to make meaning ambiguous' (p.120); it may not achieve a meaning that represents the proper expression of the event.

To illustrate the ambiguous quality of the photographed moment, Berger draws the diagram in Figure 1.04 below:

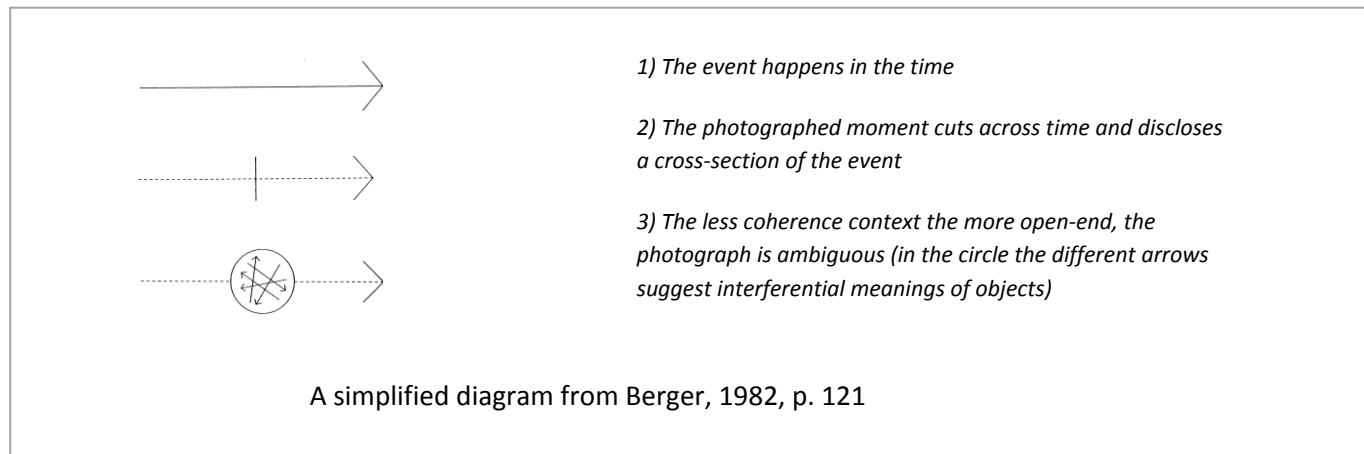


Figure 1.04

From the diagram, the photographed moment as a 'segment' is cut off from an event and this process may cause the absence of the sequence and less 'coherence context' of an event, thus the photographed moment may not be able to precisely carry the proper meaning.

Photographic ambiguity is not simply caused by the cutting of time (the moment), but also by isolating objects' appearances, with suddenly formed 'visual accidents of a world' (Arnheim, 1986, p. 111). According to Berger, the isolated appearances of

objects in the photographed moment may mean the viewer is unable to interpret the event. Yet, in a photographed moment, ambiguity constitutes the open-ended, temporal and limitless qualities of photographic representation or interpretation. Therefore, another argument in this research emerges: a photograph is the geometry of a certain moment, and the instantly formed geometry is an image of the objects from actual existence. So, essentially, what is the relationship between the photographed object and the object in actual existence? And how do these appearances of objects as visual elements in a photograph represent their origins?

1.1.2. The ambiguous appearance of 'the photographed'

This sub-chapter departs from the arguments of two opposing viewpoints on the photographic essences of representation or reproduction in order to disclose the ambiguity of the appearance of the photographed, which is the source that leads the transformation of meaning happening in the situation of moment beyond moment.

One viewpoint suggests that on the one hand, when the focus is on the object(s) in a photograph, consideration of the objectivity of the photographed object(s) is significantly 'highlighted', and the consequence is that viewers are persuaded that a photograph is the agent of an unmediated copy of actual reality. Sontag (1977) asserts 'having a photograph of Shakespeare would be like having a nail from the True Cross' (p.154). Benjamin (1939), Barthes (1993) and Scruton (1983) make similar propositions. The other viewpoint suggests that if the standpoint sets expression as the reason for the photograph taken, the object in a photograph is recognised as the element that forms the representation of an expression; as a result, the subjective

representation of the photographed object is more convincing. Howells (2003) and Bazin (1967) focus on photographic representation.

There is no doubt that the appearance of 'the photographed' is considered a copy of the actual object. But is it a copy of a photographer's expression, or an unmediated copy of the reality? The debate over photographic reproduction or representation is a major source of disputation. This project does not involve itself in the debate, however, but both viewpoints are reviewed here in order to disclose the causality from which photographic ambiguity in the aspect of photographic appearance emanates.

It is said that a painting of battlefield can even be beautiful, but a photograph of battlefield is often terrifying. Unlike painting or other art forms, photography is considered a mechanical medium. Walter Benjamin (1939) believed that as a mechanical 'substitutive' reproduction, a photograph is 'a plurality of copies for a unique existence' (p. 223). For Benjamin, the 'real' death of the soldiers in the photograph gives the spectators the experience of witnessing the impact of the carnage.

Roger Scruton (1983) alleges that photography lacks transcendentality, and is not representative. He suggests that a photograph 'is recognized at once for what it is – not as an interpretation of reality but as a presentation of reality', and that 'in some sense, looking at a photograph is a substitute for looking at the thing itself' (p. 111). This is an echo of Roland Barthes' position that by looking at a photograph, he cannot see a photograph, but only can see the object (1993, pp. 6-7). Barthes explains that painting, theatre and cinema have their own code, but photography does not. A photograph '*is a message*

without a code; from which proposition an important corollary must immediately be drawn: the photographic message is a continuous message' (ibid., 1987, p. 17). This is an unyielding assertion that the persuasion of a photographed object is the object itself. A similar viewpoint can be traced to one of the inventors of photography, Fox Talbot. Talbot thought of photography as the pencil that can 'draw' nature, and photographs as 'the sun-pictures themselves, and not, as some persons have imagined, engravings in imitation' (Gernsheim, 1986, p. 40).

To consolidate the above ideas, a photograph does not create and represent; it simply reproduces what is photographed. A photograph is considered mechanical reproduction: a reproduction of the appearance of the object. However, in saying a photograph is only a mechanical copy of reality, the substitute of existential objects, I am aware that it is the photographer that examines the objects and the movement, frames the fragment of the reality, and captures the moment.

My proposition is that an apple in a photograph is neither sweet nor fragrant. The photographed object is never the actual object itself. Barthes could not actually hug his mother in a photograph⁶, although the objectivity of the appearance of 'the photographed' bestowed this illusion to Barthes. It is the nature of photography, as a two-dimensional medium, that a photographic unmediated copy of reality gives its spectators the unique perception that they are viewing the object's actual

⁶ This refers to Barthes' recounting of how the memory of his mother's soft silk clothes and fragrant face powder was immediately 'awoken' in him when he came across a photograph of her hugging him when he was a child (La Grange, 2005).

existence. This photographic message is the visual appearance of the actual object: a display of a 'real' object. An unmediated copy of an actual object is free of limitation, and causes inability to form a proper interpretation. The appearance of the photographed becomes ambiguous; it offers an opportunity to be 're-formed' when it is reunited with other objects.

Richard Howells (2003) registers his objection, arguing as follows: 'most obviously, a beautiful subject-matter does not guarantee a beautiful photograph. In order to render a beautiful scene beautifully, it is necessary for the photographer to make a number of both technical and creative choices' (p. 160). Clearly, a photograph is a manmade art work, or a record of memory that represents human intention. Howells' argument that photography is representative echoes that of Roger Fry (1957): art 'is an expression and a stimulus of' 'imaginative life, which is separated from actual life by the absence of responsive action' (p. 20). And Fry calls on viewers to 'give up the attempt to judge the work of art by its reactions on life, and consider it as an expression of emotions regarded as ends in themselves' (p. 29). I would only partly agree with Howells' argument, and Fry's discussion of the emotional elements disregards the mechanical reproduction aspect of photography. Photography for the most part does not necessarily create 'imaginative life'. Any art work is an expression, but photography is not separated from actual existence, it uses elements of actual existence. Even Jeff Wall whose work is considered to be form of fictional photography (cinematography), explains his 'micro-gesture' as a 'mechanical, automatic or impulsive' moment of 'stress, stimulation or provocation' (Burnett, 2005, p. 19). Wall takes the position that his fictional photographs are representation of street life in actual existence. My proposition is that a photograph is a creative expression that is based upon

the process of copying the actual object. It only separates its visual element from actual existence through an expressional form.

The photographer's creative engagement relies on the choice of angle, decision of the moment and any other arrangement such as lighting or posing of the object. A photograph is a record of how an object is presented in a photographed moment. Yet it is just a reproduction of the appearance (whether bearing an intention or not) of objects in that moment when the shutter is released. In short, photography as a mechanical medium records an objective reproduction to represent the subjective and pre-arranged intention of the photographer. Photography provides an honest but selected appearance of the photographed.

The photographic appearance of the photographed is the visual presentation of the actual object. Howells (2003) calls it the 'impression of reality' (p. 166). Bazin (1967) regards this impression of reality as a 'fingerprint', and says 'the photograph as such and the object in itself share a common being' (p. 15). The photographed is made by the object itself, not human imagination or memory. Furthermore, Bazin believes that 'photography can even surpass art in creative power', because in a photograph 'the logical distinction between what is imaginary and what is real tends to disappear', and it becomes the case that the photograph is 'an hallucination which is also a fact' (ibid., p. 16). I extend his idea that an extended photograph is a hallucination that is real but transformed in appearance.

1.1.3. No photographic meaning is absolute

Photographic meaning is generated by the appearance of the photographed, which is vitally influenced by the ambiguity of photographic appearance. In this part, the discussion focuses on photographic meaning. It sets out from the argument of photographic objectivity and subjectivity. The fact that the photographed has 'no single absolute meaning' (Price, 1994, p,1) leads to the incapacity of definite meaning and causes photographic ambiguity; this opens up the capability of meaning transformation of the photographed in an extended photograph.

As discussed, unlike painting or other art forms, photography is a medium that usually relies on the employment of actual objects to interpret a photographer's expression. I suggest that the unmediated photographic copy of objects is always objective. Conversely, photography also represents a photographer's opinion (or even passion), and depicts his or her subjective intention. Howells (2003) suggests that, in a photograph, 'it is the emotional elements of design that carry the meaning of a work of art, and this meaning is communicated not so much by content as by form' (p. 160). My understanding of 'content' here is the photographed, and to be specific, the photographed object. Howells denies photographic objectivity, saying the photographed object is not the matrix of the meaning.

My objection to Howells' position is that if the content of the photographed is 'not so' meaningful in the photographic communication, in what way is the form to exist? There is a Chinese idiom which asks, 'Without the skin, what can the hair adhere to?' The photographed as the content is the element that endorses the form. I do not deny that the photographic

meaning yields to the form; it is the form of a photograph that is controlled by the photographer, for creating meaning. But what is the form of a photograph? It is also arguable. Allan Sekula (1982) introduced the notion of the cultural aspect of photographic discourse as a way to explain the photographic form.

Sekula (1982) believes photographic meaning 'is inevitably subject to cultural definition' (p. 84). He regards photographic discourse 'as an arena of information exchange...a system of relations between parties engaged in communicative activity' (ibid.). He considers 'the notion of discourse is a notion of limits' (ibid.). In fact, such limits are common in most media for composing and delivering meaning. The meaning of a photograph is not specific when it is involved in communication between cultures. This is the important inspiration that this project owes to Sekula. He points out that photographic meaning works by means of photographic discourse, which is an example of information exchange in a social system. In my project, the information from the existing image and the real-life situation in an extended photograph may cross over two or more cultural elements. In the content of an information exchange, the system of relations is between parties engaged in communicative activity; however, the formulated photographic discourse of an existing photograph may be unable to contribute to the information exchange (meaning providing and receiving) in an extended photograph. The formulation of the discourse in the extended photograph replaces the original discourse of an existing photograph. In this situation the transformation of meaning emerges (ibid., pp. 84-85).

My view is supported by Sekula's idea of an incomplete photographic 'utterance', which he believes is 'a message that depends on some external matrix of conditions and presuppositions for its readability' (ibid., p. 85). Thus, photographic discourse is not concrete; the photographic meaning is transformable.

As to the relationship of the photographed objects in a photographed moment, objects affect each other and form the photographic discourse that is contingent upon their cultural and social conventions. Together they create meaning which represents the intention of the stakeholder (in most situations, the photographer). However, objects in photographs are mostly recognisable by their organic appearance. When the relationship between photographed objects is disconnected, the photographic discourse will fall apart. The meanings of the photographs or the photographed objects have the potential to be transformed. Sontag (1973) insists that 'any photography has multiple meanings; indeed, to see something in the form of a photograph is to encounter a potential object of fascination', and she states that 'photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy' (p. 23). Accordingly, to view a photographed object, the spectator simultaneously interprets it from real life, and brings his or her own knowledge and experience into the photograph. The meaning of the photograph is then extended and transformed.

Another viewpoint on photographic meaning is based on utilisation. Mary Price (1994) affirms that 'the use of a photograph determines its meaning', and (as already mentioned above) 'no single meaning is absolute' (p. 1). In my project, whether the

existing image is an advertisement or for another purpose, the original utilisation is changed. The meaning is consequently transformed when it is involved in the interaction in the extended image.

Barthes (1987) suggests that photography has no code. As discussed earlier, the photograph is an unmediated copy of the actual existence. The meaning in a photograph is established by the form (or discourse), which refers to the suddenly united relationship of objects in a photographed moment. The form (or discourse) of photography as a language for expressing meaning is contingent upon cultural and social conventions. But Barthes believes photographic meaning is not associated with any code for its communication. 'The photograph professing to be a mechanical analogue of reality', therefore, 'the photograph appears as the only one that is exclusively constituted and occupied by a "denoted" message, a message which totally exhausts its mode of existence' (1987, p. 18). As a photograph is a mechanical analogue of reality, photography is a non-verbal medium. A verbal (or linguistic) meaning is generally anchored in the code of the language system. Photography has no systematic code. The photographed meaning yields to the photographic appearance at the moment it provides to its spectators, because the denoted message itself actually is the analogical content. This is another consequence that leads to the ambiguous quality of photographic meaning.

I conclude this part of discussion by quoting Barthes: 'the description of a photograph is literally impossible' (1984, p. 18).

As a medium for constructing and communicating meaning, photographic reproduction is the cutting of time and the cropping of appearance of existence to form its photographic discourse. Accordingly, photographic discourse is a cultural formulation

that is generated for photographic communication. 'But if the fundamental premise is that information is the outcome of a culturally determined relationship, then we can no longer ascribe an intrinsic or universal meaning to the photographic image' (Sekula, 1982, p. 86). This is a paradox; if the meaning of the photographed object is extended to a particular cultural content, it may no longer represent the meaning of the object itself. As such the organic meaning of an object in a photograph may not be able to be interpreted. The object instantly loses its organic meaning.

1.2. Meaning transformation in moment beyond moment

In this part of research I explore the photographic transformation of meaning of moment beyond moment. The research seeks the consequences of the photographic ambiguities that initiate the various transformations of space, that cause the interaction between the visual elements of the real-life situation with that of the existing image in the extended photographs. In the following discussion, I establish my notion of photographic transformation in the photographic phenomenon of moment beyond moment. I also justify the transformation of photographic meaning that is brought about by the ambiguous photographed moment and the unmediated objectivity of the photograph.

1.2.1. The ‘moment of real-life situation’ with the moment of existing image

This part outlines the core research question and discusses the interacting phenomenon of an existing image in an environment with a real-life situation. It also discusses the representational differences between a photographed moment and a painted moment.

1.2.1.1. The photographed moment and the ‘real-life moment’

In this research, I call the moment of taking a photograph a ‘moment of real-life situation’ or ‘the real-life moment’. For instance, in Figure 1.05, the moment of capturing the four people walking in the street, is a moment of real-life situation. The moment in an existing photograph in an environment (in Figure 1.05 below, the image of three people at the top) is a moment of an existing image. In this photograph, there are two photographed moments from different times that interact. When the interaction of photographed moments initiates the transformation of meaning, it is called an extended photograph.

Figure 1.05 is an experiment on the interaction between two photographed moments. In the advertisement the existing image on top of building suggests a cheerful and energetic group of youngsters. It represents an isolated moment that lasts, though in stillness and is intended to attract the eyeball.⁷ It is constructed alongside a slogan purely in the interests of its stakeholder,

⁷ ‘Eyeball’ is used in the contemporary sense to refer to the attention of the viewer or audience.

the advertiser. However, when I cropped off the words of the advertisement, the intention became illegible. Now it has become an isolated moment of open-ended meaning that is ambiguous. Though it continues to connote the vitality of youngsters, the meaning is fragile and unstable. When this existing photographed moment interacts with the walking people in the real-life situation, meaning is transformed. Although these two moments did not exist at the same time, together they are interpreted as a single moment. Sontag says, 'one of the perennial successes of photography has been its strategy of turning living beings into things, things into living beings' (1977, p. 98). The 'regensis' of youngsters from the existing photographed moment was transformed and became part of the real-life situation. This is an example of the phenomenon I call moment beyond moment. More experiments on transformation in the phenomenon of moment beyond moment will be discussed.



i. extended photogrpah



ii. a moment of an existing photograph



iii. a moment of real-life situation

Figure 1.05 Xie (2007)

1.2.1.2. The fictive moment and the 'real-life moment'

This research also includes painting, illustration and drawing as existing images. However, the different natures of these media in themselves already lead to a different perceived representation. Walton (1984) believes:

There is one clear difference between photography and painting. A photograph is always a photograph of something which actually exists. Even when photographs portray such nonentities as werewolves and Martians, they are nonetheless photographs of actual things: actors, stage sets, costumes. Paintings needn't picture actual things. A painting of Aphrodite, executed without the use of a model, depicts nothing real. But this is by no means the whole story. Those who see a sharp contrast between photographs and paintings clearly think that it obtains no less when paintings depict actual things than when they do not, and even when viewers fully realize that they do (pp. 250-251).

As I have discussed earlier, although a photographed moment is fictive, the objects are copied from actual existence. The construction of objects depicts a fictive story, but 'the camera does not lie even when it is used to quote a lie' (Berger, 1982, p. 97). However, painting has no such attribute of 'realness'. Even though the event, the people, the scene and the object exist, the visual elements that apply to a painting are not materially related to its actual existence. An association of reality in a painting may never exist. So, the transformation that a painted moment initiates is not as 'genuine' as a photograph. As such it will tarnish the integrity of the interacted moment. The transformed meaning relies to a great extent on the viewer's imaginative engagement.

Painting and drawing by hand are fictive; they are not reproductions of actual existence. 'In photography, the hand does not become the primary instrument of registering or creation' (Price, 1994, p. 29). This is the key difference between photography and hand drawings. Price believes that 'the eye is dominant in the way a photograph is conceived'; that it sees 'the segment of reality'; the camera is the instrument of exposure (in producing a photograph), and 'the agency of the hand is comparatively minor' (ibid.). In short, human eye sees the segment of reality, the camera 'draws' it on film. But, in the process of drawing, the hand is the main instrument, it 'translates' what the eye sees and the painter's opinion of objects. Objects in a drawing may exist in real life, but in drawing, there is no actual evidence representing the object, space, moment and activity of their actual existences.

What is a moment in painting, illustration or any other drawing? Similar to photographs, paintings, illustrations and other drawings are still images; they create meaning via a moment as well, but this is an artificial moment, not a real moment captured from real life. The creation of a moment is widely used in paintings, illustration and other drawings, and this was especially so before the era of Modernism. Such moment represents an artist's impression or imagination of his or her narration. It may not exist in real life or it may be a moment of compounded and interpreted materials from real life.

The painted moment (a moment in painting) is different from a photographed moment, in that it is a fictive moment. Berger (1982) discourses upon the difference between moments in painting and the photographed moment. He says 'a drawing contains the time of its own making, and this means that it possesses its own time, independent of the living time of what it

portrays' (p. 95). It is significantly different from the photographed moment, because a photograph captures an instant moment of real life. In a photograph, time is uniform; objects are captured in a moment. Every object of the image is formed in a uniform duration and in a certain moment. In the process, the revelation of all parts is equal. It is the important difference between the times contained by the two kinds of images.

1.2.2. Transformation of meaning in the situation of moment beyond moment

Pictures have been known to depict meaning at least from the time of Paleolithic cave paintings⁸ (about 35,000 to 8000 BC). Researchers consider Paleolithic cave paintings are symbols that are more than mere depictions or decorated objects that were created in inhabited caves, but are also 'the clarification of the meaning, of documents which stand at the beginning of a type of expression' (Leroi-Gourhan, 1982, p. 7), and signal the evolution from pictures to letters or characters, as a part of language system. Chinese characters are the 'living fossil' of the evolution of the interlinkage between pictures and meanings. It is a paradigm example of how human consciousness links image to meaning. Russian film director and theoretician, Eisenstein, explores the theory of montage in which two pictorial elements are combined to make a third idea. He is inspired by the system of Chinese characters. In Chinese characters, 'rain' and 'hand' are synthesised to mean 'snow' and 'mouth', 'dog' to mean 'bark', and 'mother' and 'child' to mean 'good' or 'love'. 'The study of Chinese characters was to serve later as a

⁸ Marcelino Sanz de Sautuola first discovered the Magdalenian paintings of the Altamira cave, Cantabria, Spain in 1879.

cornerstone for his Eisenstein film technique of “montage”, as it gave him the idea of combining two separate images to create a third image that was greater than the sum of

the two’ (Nakamura and Nakamura, 1995). Chinese characters are hieroglyphics. There are six methods (六书, Liu-Shu) or categories for creating characters. The pictograph (象形, Xiang-Xing) is the primary picture of nature; it was the first category of characters, and would later form a basis for constructing more complex ideas. The category ‘logical aggregates’ (会意, Hui-Yi) refers to words made by combining two or several characters. Their signification results from the meanings of the different elements, and is one method that expresses complex ideas; it combines two or more pictures to form a new meaning. But the third meaning⁹ may not exactly reflect the original meaning; Figure 1.06 is an example of ‘logical aggregates’.

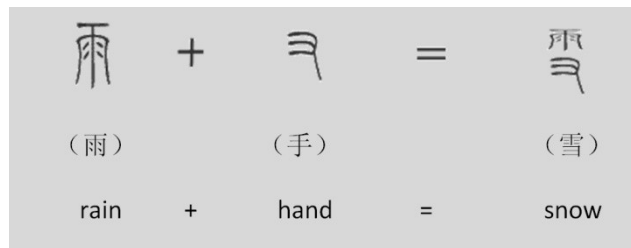


Figure 1.06

⁹ Here, the ‘third meaning’ is a new meaning created by the ‘logical aggregates’ method; it is not Barthes’ (1987) ‘third meaning’ which is about ‘obtuse meaning’ (pp. 53-68).

There is no direct reference to the association of falling rain on hand with snow. Logically it may be associated with a wet hand. Those who are familiar with the Chinese thinking pattern will grasp that snow, as a different form of rain, will stay and be held on the hand. The combined pictograms and their meanings are transformed into a new meaning of snow. The transformed meaning is developed through imagination and making reference to then-existing knowledge. I do not necessarily agree that Eisenstein's idea of montage is related to the method of logical aggregates for the creation of Chinese pictograms. I believe cinematic montage makes new meaning by the management of the sequence of moving pictures, whereas Chinese characters are still images.

The logical aggregates method is more akin to the transformation of meaning in an extended photograph in the phenomenon of moment beyond moment. Both situations refer to the human consciousness of configuring images to make new meaning. In the phenomenon of moment beyond moment, objects from the two moments (past or fictive, and present) of the extended photograph are combined. They together potentially form a photographic discourse that constitutes the transformation of meaning. The transformed meaning of the extended photograph is contingent upon the happening in the present moment of real-life situation, which in turn may change the meaning of the existing image, and destroys the original discourse of the existing image. In other words, the objects in two different moments interact and reform to give new interpretation to the extended photograph.

As still images, the Chinese pictogram and the extended photograph have an affinity in that they similarly transform objects' meaning. However, an extended photograph is an unmediated copy of reality that is influenced by time, perspective, illusion and the inter-relationship of objects.

1.2.3. Transformation of time in moment beyond moment

According to Berger (cross reference, p. 121), the photographed moment cuts off time from an ongoing event and makes the moment ambiguous. It offers the potential to transform its object from one meaning to others. In my project, the photographed moment in an extended photograph also transforms time and combines the unrelated moments in an extended photograph, the consequence of which is a paradox of a fictive story made by the photographic quality of 'the unmediated copy of the reality'.

Barthes (1993) believes 'every photograph is a certificate of presence' (p. 87), but is the presence of the past, it is the 'reality in a past state: at once the past and the real' (p. 82). In the extended photograph (Figure 1.07 below), if the objects in both the real-life situation (present moment) and the existing image (past moment) are 'real' because they are all photographed objects, then the time distance between two moment is obscure, and the interaction becomes 'real'. As discussed earlier, Barthes believes a photograph is invisible; he cannot see the photograph, he can only see the photographed (cross reference). Applying his idea to the extended photograph, we can only see the objects of both moments. The interaction between the moments forms a 'combined moment'.



Figure 1.07 Xie (2008)

I have already discussed Price's (1994) and Berger's (1992) ideas of the moment in painting or illustration compared with the moment in photographs: a drawing or painting contains the time of its own making, and is independent of the living time of what it portrays; it is not uniform, and is significantly different from the uniform photographed moment. However, in an extended image, the time is also not uniform. In the process of revelation of meaning in the extended photograph, all parts are equal. In appearance, they are all two-dimensional pictures, and imply a moment of the depicted objects.

The transformation of time in an extended photograph is about combining the moments and connecting the actions that happened in different times and places (space). The transformation reforms the different moments, which become an extended photographed moment, and extends the photographic meaning.

1.2.4. Transformation of the space in an extended photograph

This part of the research explores the photographic transformation of space by the combination of an existing two-dimensional image with a real-life situation (the three-dimensional actual reality).

Restricted by the physical form of the medium, 'an image is an abstraction of the world in two dimensions. It takes away a dimension from the real world, and by this very fact the image inaugurates the power of illusion' (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 9). I would extend this to say that the illusion is mainly caused by transformation of space.

In reality, an object occupies a space, and features a three-dimensional structure. A photographed space is formed in two-dimensionality. Through color and line and a variety of geometric visual elements, it is translated and perceived as a three-dimensional space. The photographic space represents the actual space in reality, and the geometrical structure of the photographic space is recognised as the unmediated copy of it.

In fact, photographic space could not reproduce the actual physical space and it could not produce the perceived depth in a two-dimensional image. The photographic space is only a reconfiguration by human perception. It has no actual stereognosis for its spectators.

In an extended photograph, when the spaces of existing image and real-life situation are combined, both the two-dimensional existing image, and the three-dimensional real-life situation becomes a part of a two-dimensional extended photograph. The

interaction between the conflicting spaces transforms the meaning of the extended photograph. Barbara E. Savedoff (2000) explores a similar situation to my extended photographs. She suggests that when 'pictures appear in photographs...they have the power to disturb us,' that the 'grotesque effect' of a particular photograph¹⁰ is caused by the 'equivalence between photographed object and photographed picture of an object [which] is achieved primarily through the photograph's flatness'. She believes objects in pictures 'are put on the same footing, they cannot be distinguished by the type of space they occupy' (pp. 51- 53). My perspective on Savedoff's conception of 'equivalence' is that the spaces of the existing image and the real-life situation are merged and interacted. The transformations of spaces are illustrated in the diagram below (Figure 1.08). In this extended photograph, the space of the existing image reproduces and retains its two-dimensionality, but is read as three-dimensionality (if it is a photograph, it appears as a reproduction of 'real' three-dimensionality); and the space of the real-life situation as a three-dimensional environment in an extended photograph is represented as two-dimensionality, but read as three-dimensionality.

This situation allows the interaction between the space of existing image and the space of real-life situation to happen in the extended photograph. The combined and transformed space brings about meaning transformation. There are two examples that explain the transformation in the extended photograph.

¹⁰ Walker Evan's *Torn Movie Poster* of 1930 (Savedoff 2000 p. 50)

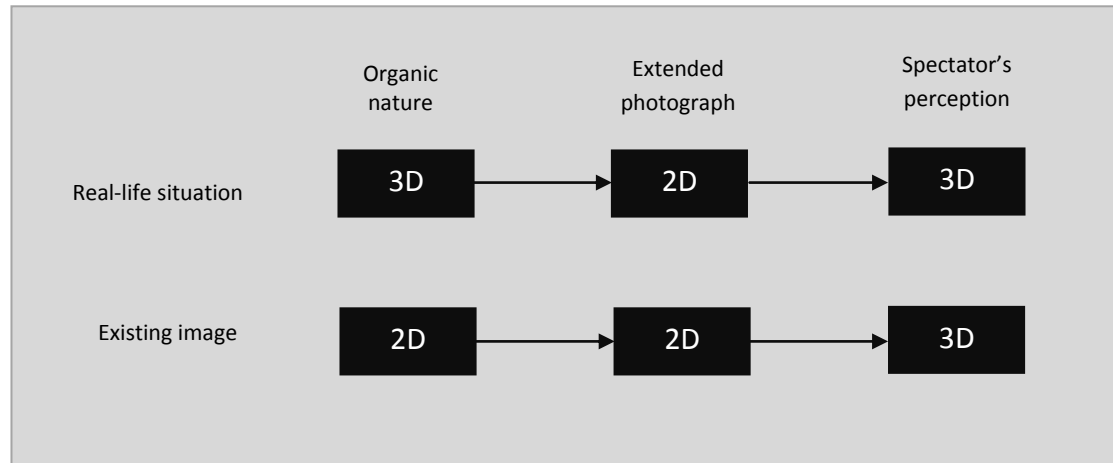


Figure 1.08 Transformation of Space in an Extended Photograph ('D' is an abbreviation of 'dimension')

In Figure 1.09, the man with his 'shadow' is a two-dimensional drawing on the door, and his gesture portrays a door-opening action. When it interacts with a passing woman (in the real-life situation), the meaning is transformed. It is perceived as the man tugging the women's upper back. This illusion is caused by the combined space in a two-dimensional photograph. As Baudrillard (1997) has pointed out, illusion occurs by 'taking away a dimension from real objects ... [which] highlight[s] their

presence and their magic through the simple unreality of their minimal exactness' (p. 9). As such, the interaction and transformation appear distinctly.



Figure 1.09 Xie (2007)

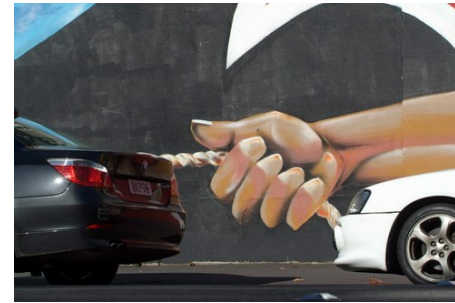


Figure 1.10 Xie (2007)

Figure 1.10 is another example of the transformation of the illustrated and the realistic spaces. In this extended photograph, a hand and a rope in a two-dimensional image interact with the three-dimensional cars, and they are equalised in the same space to become two-dimensional objects and give the illusion of the car being lifted by a huge hand.

The transformation of space between the photograph and the real-life situation in Figure 1.11 is created by the car, which is in the space of the real-life situation, hiding a part of the space in the existing photograph. The interaction 'crosses' the spaces,

transforming the meaning of the photograph. Differently from Figure 1.09 and Figure 1.10, in this extended photograph both of the spaces from each of the two parties represent actual existence; the transformation happens between two real spaces.

The image of two women 'sprinters' on the roadside billboard is an example of the creation of illusive three-dimensional space in a two-dimensional image (Figure 1.13). When the billboard interacts with the bus in the real-life environment, the meaning in this extended photograph is given a new interpretation, which is that the bus is competing with the sprinters (Figure 1.12). The transformation of space in this example is also affected by the camera position, and the intentional use of a wide-angle lens to change the perspective of the existing photograph and expand the distance between the two 'sprinters'.



Figure 1.11



Figure 1.12 Xie (2007)



Figure 1.13 (a part of advertisement)

1.3. Conclusion

The ambiguity of the photographed moment is rooted in photographic reproduction. When an ambiguous photographed moment in the environment of an existing photograph is combined with a moment of real-life situation to produce an extended photograph, it potentially brings about meaning transformation to the extended photographed moment; when the visual element(s) of the existing photograph united with the visual element(s) of the real-life situation, the photographic discourse is reformed to suggest new meaning in an extended photograph.

Time and space are the main factors that affect meaning transformation, through the interaction between the objects from the combined moments, irrespective of the nature of the moments.

Chapter 2

Research Strategies and Methods

The research strategies and methods are constituted of four main areas, namely contrary thinking, grounded theory, snapshot photography and Buddhist 'sudden enlightenment'. Contrary thinking is introduced to establish my own insight on the concept of the decisive moment. Grounded theory allows me to locate, discipline and develop my research content. Snapshot photography and sudden enlightenment strategies are applied to execute my practical research. They are discussed in detail in this chapter, together with the ethics discipline I am obliged to adhere to.

2.1. The method of contrary thinking

Throughout my career as a photojournalist, the main method that I have been employing in my practice is rooted in a self-reflective critique of my own work. As a self-trained photographer, this method has developed the individual character of my journalistic photographs. Capturing an objective decisive moment and avoiding any misleading meanings in my photographs are my working disciplines. But I had not considered the other factors leading to 'meaning misleading'.

The meaning misleading (or 'leaking') happened continually in my photographic practice. An example is a photo-essay on the subject of Auckland's ultraviolet pollution, produced at the beginning of my postgraduate study at AUT University. Since then, I started to employ the method of contrary thinking as a way to analyse the causality of meaning misleading. However, contrary thinking in this instance is not used for the purpose of minimising meaning misleading, but for developing new concepts. As the research has progressed, my research focus has shifted to explore the phenomenon of photographic ambiguity that is caused by the isolated photographed moment.

Contrary thinking is a method that develops new ideas by taking an opposite perspective to approach the problem rather than taking a traditional position or solution of routine accord. Contrary thinking requires critical thinking about an established theory. It is an open-minded thinking solution, as opposed to the closed thinking of a supposedly agreed solution, in order to turn the negativity to positivity.

Humphrey B. Neill (1997) suggests that, 'The art of contrary thinking consists in training your mind to ruminate in directions opposite to general public opinions; but weigh your conclusions in the light of current events and current manifestation of human behavior' (p. 5).



Figure 2.01 Xie (2007). *UV Pollution*

In my first experiment with the photo-essay (Figure 2.01), the subject of UV pollution in this series of decisive moments is not actualised, therefore the opposite indication of photographic ambiguity emerges. The photographs can be interpreted as representing a leisure life style. This project questioned my belief in the objective representation of the decisive moment of an event from the perspective and discipline of photojournalism. Contrary thinking inspired me not to avoid the ambiguous

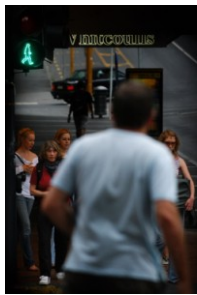
representation of the photographed moment, but to take advantage of it so as to develop an alternative approach to photographic practice and representation.

2.2. Grounding of the concept of moment

When there is no preconceived theory, it is an important strategy to keep the research in a specific location until the final research question has been found. Grounded theory is a research method emphasising the generation of theory from data in the process of research. Strauss and Corbin (1998) believe research should begin as an area of study that allows the theory to generate and develop from the data. (p. 12). The utilisation of contrary thinking inspired me to change the direction of my research; grounded theory confined my research to continuously explore the photographed moment. The method of grounded theory helped me to generate theory to justify my research project. As a practitioner, with no preconceived theory, I did not know how to analyse the data. I kept up the cyclic process of collecting data through photography (practice) and literature review (theory) to locate my research goal. As the practical data accumulated, the ambiguity phenomenon emerged. From the exploration of photographic ambiguity the research developed into an experiment on situations where an existing image is in an environment as a part of the extended photograph. This led to an investigation on meaning transformation that was initiated by the interaction between moments in an existing image and the real-life situation. It further developed into my thesis of moment beyond moment. The grounded theory approach is divided into four stages in the research.

2.2.1. Coding data

This is a process that allows a researcher to identify and mark the collected data with a series of codes. In grounded theory, 'code' is a term that refers to ideas about the collected data as the first step of growing a certain theoretical proposition. Through this process, the research achieves the primary sorting of collected data and prepared to next stage of grouping these data.



A



B



C



D



E

Figure 2.02 Xie (2007)

At this preliminary stage, my research question started out from the debate over whether a photograph is a reproduction or a representation of actual object(s). My intention is to identify the essence of the photographed in the photographed moment.

In this stage I gathered practical data through vigorous practices to test the appearances of the photographed in the photographed moments; simultaneously I gathered ideas from photographers, critics and theorists on different sides of the debate. These two kinds of data produced many-sided outcomes in the area of the photographed moment, and allowed me to distinguish and arrange them into different codes. I divided my photographs into two parts; some were intentional shots (the photographic meanings were controlled, e.g. Figure 2.01); others were shot with no interference (I did not control the photographic meanings, e.g. Figure 2.02 A & B). The collected theories were categorised as either 'representation' or 'reproduction'. These grouped data formed the infrastructure of the development of the research project, providing a ground for the research departure.

2.2.2. Acquiring concepts

Acquiring concepts is a process of grouping all codes with similar content, and then analysing these different grounded data to develop concepts.

At this stage, I started to acquire concepts through analysing codes in groups. The result of this process showed that during the practice and subsequent analysis, although I had intended to underpin an idea or certain meanings in the extended photograph, the photographed still appeared to be the reproduction of the actual object. The findings in both groups support the concept of photographic ambiguity. The concept of ambiguity as one of the core concepts of this project underpinned and generated the research.

2.2.3. Cataloguing concepts

The process of cataloguing concepts is about grouping similar or related concepts into categories that form the creation of a theory.

Based on the concept on the ambiguity of the photographed moment, at this stage my project was extended to an exploration of two photographed moments in an extended photograph (see Figure 2.02 C, D & E). It explored the combined representation of a moment in an existing photograph and a moment in the real-life situation. Continuing the research on my practice and in the literature review, I found the interaction between the combining moments in the extended photograph.

Furthermore, the data also revealed another situation, which is that the existing image may have a fictive representation originating from the nature of media such as painting, illustration or other hand drawing. These hand drawings do not have the quality of reproduction of actual existence. However, the method of grounded theory can be recycled in a project when a new question appears. I started over with the process of exploring the fictive photographed moment and its interaction with the real-life situation (Figure 2.03 A). I continued my practice on the photographed moments concurrently. At this point, my research consisted of two parallel incentives executed through the same approach and sharing the same goal.



A



B



C



D

Figure 2.03 Xie (2007)

2.2.4. Constructing a systematic research theory

Through further practical and theoretical experimentation on the concepts and review of the growing body of data, the theory of the project was completed.

In this final stage of employing grounded theory, the research validated the hypothesis that interactions between the moments of the extended photographs initiated the meaning transformations (see Figure 2.02 C, D, E and Figure 2.03 B, C, D). The research demonstrates how the achievement of transformation of meaning always happened when two moments in an extended photograph were combined.

2.3. Sudden enlightenment

Sudden enlightenment is applied to allow the transformation of meaning to happen without my interfering when I am capturing the moment of interactions of the extended photographs; it also works at the stage of data analysis to enlighten me with new meanings from the transformation.

Sudden enlightenment is advocated by Huineng [慧能] (638-713), the Sixth Patriarch of Zen Buddhism. He believed that using current existing knowledge together with tradition to explain and understand the world is a barrier which blocks one's thoughts. Huineng suggests the concept of sudden enlightenment as a way to attain one's Buddha-hood; by suddenly awaking the Buddhist discernment one may achieve the direct perception of one's true nature (where the Buddha-hood sets).

Sudden enlightenment as a methodology in this project works at two particular stages: First, it works at the moment when I click the shutter. During the clicking, I let go of my own idea, interpretation and thinking; I empty my mind. This approach allows the unpredictable transformation of new meanings or representations in the extended photographs to happen without my interfering. Secondly, it works at the stage of data analysis: to be enlightened suddenly with the new emerging meaning(s) when reviewing the data.

The essence of sudden enlightenment is the 'three 'no's' ['三无'] doctrine. 'No-thought' [无念] is the doctrine suggests 'not to think even when involved in thought' (Huineng, 1967, p. 138). Huineng believed that people, in what he calls their delusion,

have thoughts in relation to their particular environment, and when ideas stemming from these thoughts arise, passions and mistaken views may be produced (ibid., p. 139). No-thought allows people to be 'unstained' in all environments, instead of being contaminated by knowledge, information and ideas from their environment. Freedom from thinking allows meaning to happen naturally without being interrupted by ideas or passions from delusion. Bresson (1952) suggests, 'perhaps someone suddenly walks into your range of view. You wait and wait, and finally you press the button – and you depart with the feeling (though you don't know why) that you've got something'. Sontag (1977) criticises this: 'Cartier-Bresson has likened himself to a Zen archer, who must become the target so as to be able to hit it'. She quotes Bresson in supporting her criticism, "thinking should be done beforehand and afterwards" he says, "never while actually taking a photograph" (p. 116). The no-thought doctrine is used in this project for capturing data objectively without anticipation, in order to facilitate the happening of the unpredictable transformation.



Figure 2.04 Rene Magritte (1952)
The Listening Room
Oil on canvas 18 x 22 inches



Figure 2.05 Xie (2008)

‘Non-form’ [无相] refers to being outwardly separated from all forms, ‘to be separated from form even associated with form’ (Huineng, 1967, p. 138). When one is separated from form, the substance of one’s nature is pure. It means that, in my research, if I detach my substance from cataloguing, I may achieve discernment when photographing and analysing data.¹¹ From this perspective, using the example of Rene Magritte’s painting ‘The Listening Room’ (Figure 2.04), if I stick to associating with the form (size and function etc.) of an apple and a room, the interpretation of the painting will be restricted, but if I don’t even think about the form of the apple or the room, I may receive an inspirational idea or understanding. It opens up my mind and enlightens me. My practical work (Figure 2.05) shows that, although people in the advertisement appear incommensurately larger in size, the photographic reproduction (an unmediated copy) allows people in the existing image to be recognised as real people in the existing environment. Detachment from my subjectivity is crucial to achieving the unpredictable transformation of photographic meaning.

Huineng said that ‘Non-abiding [无住] is the original nature of mankind’ (ibid.), and that abiding by present knowledge and tradition is a barrier to creativity. This seems to contradict grounded theory: I have abided by the photographed moment as the root of this project, and employed grounded theory to develop the theory of moment beyond moment. ‘Non-abiding’ only works for data collecting, and analysing the meaning transformation in the later stages.

¹¹ The term *cataloguing* refers to grouping the substance of photographed objects. It is not the meaning of ‘catalogue’ in grounded theory, which refers to group data or concepts.

Sudden enlightenment denies the usefulness of current knowledge and common tradition as these will block one's thoughts. Interestingly, contrary thinking is a method for freeing one's thinking from a particular direction, taking a contrary position against rigid thinking and routine solutions. It provides possibilities for taking advantage of negativity to create development. Together, sudden enlightenment and contrary thinking have established an open-ended perspective to approach works in my project.

2.4. Data collection

This practical research based its primary data collection on street photography. As every moment is unrepeatable, and I had no intention to post-manipulate the data (except colour-tonal adjustment of the photographs), the data collected in every photographing session are therefore necessary to represent the final practical findings.

2.4.1. Data collection procedures

There were two procedures, the first was to locate an environment consisting of an existing image; the second was to capture the moment of interaction between the existing image and the real-life environment. The selections of existing images were precise, as the visual elements contained are stimulators to initiate meaning transformation. The public domain was the only geographic context for collecting data (with reference to ethics consideration, see discussion below), such as urban streets,

public parks, public transport (bus, train) stations and shopping centres (outside the buildings and in public properties), mainly in the CBD areas of Auckland and occasionally in shopping districts in nearby suburbs. I have collected data related to people and their activities that provide potential contributions of new meanings when interacting with existing photographs and artworks. The critical self-reflective process during data collecting is therefore crucial in that the photographer, myself, constantly engages with a repetitive cyclic procedure of searching for new environments, observing interactive happenings of meaning transformation, capturing the transient moments and reflecting upon the data.

2.4.2. The snapshot method

‘Snapshot’ is a method that refers to taking photographs without any particular pre-arrangement with the participants and even without informing them. This method enables me to capture the natural moments of authentic interaction in an environment. But my snapshots are not taken purely without intentional arrangement. I select an existing image as a background in an environment, then I wait for random happenings in the environment in a state of empty mind (using the method of sudden enlightenment) to capture the moment.

I considered different approaches for snapshot photography. Bresson (1952) recommends getting closer to the photographed. However, for this research, I have mostly retained a distance from the subject, thus keeping my interference to a minimum. To correlate with the strategy to allow the meaning transformation to happen, I have photographed extensively in each environment to collect data.

2.5. Ethics consideration

Ethics consideration is a professional discipline for practitioner and researcher, especially when it involves human participants. During my practice I must respect the individual's human rights. I also follow the photojournalist's discipline as set out by the New Zealand Press Council, New Zealand Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU), International Federation of Journalists and National Press Photographers Association (American). I outline some basic disciplines which I follow. I must not photograph on private property, and must not photograph any private incident. When I photograph without informing the participants, I have to be fair to them. Therefore I only capture their daily behaviour in public environments that constitutes the natural disclosure of their daily life and routine. I do not photograph any intentional or unintentional inappropriate human behaviour (such as quarrelling, fighting, protesting, committing a crime, or being in a state of drunkenness etc.) that would cause embarrassment or discomfort to the participants.

In the process of data selection, I have eliminated any data that have the risk to cause embarrassment, discomfort or damage in any way to the participants. To further monitor my ethical discipline, I also formed an ethics review group that includes my primary supervisor, an AUT staff member and two peers to evaluate my work before submitting the research (at the time this exegesis is submitted to the examiner, the ethics review process has not been completed as the research is still in progress. It will be carried out prior to the exhibition). I have constantly referred to the ethics discipline throughout the research.

2.6. Conclusion

Contrary thinking and grounded theory were employed to develop the research aim and theoretical structure of this project. Snapshot photography and sudden enlightenment were employed as methods of my practice. They are designed to fulfil the specific nature of the research. Together they formed a structure of discipline to facilitate the effective execution of the project.

Chapter 3

Practical Findings

This chapter gives a concise reflective commentary on the practical findings arrived at through responding to the established theory and research methods.

I have adopted contrary thinking as a method to approach the function of ambiguity in the photographic phenomenon of moment beyond moment, to establish and justify my theory of meaning transformation. The outcome of the research is the discovery that photographic ambiguity initiates interaction between moments in an extended photograph and potentially causes transformation of meaning in the extended photograph.



Figure 3.01 Xie (2007)



Figure 3.02 Xie (2008)



Figure 3.03 Xie (2008)

I set out from an investigation of Bresson's concept of the decisive moment and Berger's concept of photographic ambiguity. The research has justified the ambiguous quality of the photographed moment, which is caused by the photographic reproduction (or unmediated copy) of actual objects. Time and space are the two major aspects that constitute meaning transformations. I have carried out extensive practical work to test the objects that appear to be ambiguous. In Figure 3.01, I was attracted by this advertisement on Queen Street, and captured the image. When I reviewed the photograph, I could not distinguish the existing image from the real-life situation. The existing image seemed more 'real' to me when it had become a part of the real-life situation. I consider this significant evidence that it has lost its connection to its original event. In Figure 3.02, the long duration of the exposure caused the object to lose its original appearance as a result of the transformation of time. In Figure 3.03, the space in the existing image has been extended to that of the real-life environment, and as such the

three human figures (in the existing image) are transformed to exist in the real-life environment. In Figure 3.04, the human figures in the fictive wall painting are connected to the objects (sports car and passer-by) in the real-life environment through the matching lighting. It has an affect on the spectator's perception and also engages the spectator's participation in constructing his or her own interpretation.



Figure 3.04 Xie (2008)



Figure 3.05 Xie (2008)



Figure 3.06 Xie (2007)

My research has set a new position in the debate on the essence of photography, with its exploration of photographic representation (subjectivity) and reproduction (objectivity) from the perspective of the photographed moment. The practice also validated the dual nature of photographic objectivity and subjectivity, meaning that while the photographed is the

objective reproduction of actual objects, it also represents the intention of the stakeholder (photographer, client or interested parties). In Figure 3.05, the photographer has transformed the objective representation of the two existing images to speak for his subjective representation.

Moreover, the research has found out that the photographic representation can be transformed through deconstructing its discourse (form) in the situation of moment beyond moment. In an extended photograph, the formulated discourse of an existing image is lost and the objects in it become unmediated copies existing in the environment. As such the objects exist as visual elements and have the potential to be transformed. This may produce new meaning in the extended photograph. Figure 3.06 is a typical example of the deconstruction of the original discourse of the existing image to establish a relationship with the real-life environment and thus to form new meaning.

Sudden enlightenment as a photographic method not only allows unpredictable representations to emerge, it also facilitates the photographer's detachment from his or her routine thinking pattern during the practice and review of the work. Contrary thinking serves a similar purpose and has a similar effect, but works in a different way; it encourages the photographer to dispute his or her routine thinking pattern instead.

The project also questions and challenges my view of the ethics discipline I observe as a photographer. Today's working environment is a more vulnerable environment for any participant who is included in a photograph, either willingly or unwillingly. I believe I will be more cautious in my future practice approach and in the selecting of photographs. At the time

this exegesis is submitted, the ethics group has not reviewed the photographs. I am interested in what will happen. The evaluation of the ethics review will be added to this exegesis before submission to the university.

In summary, the proposition of the notion of moment beyond moment has developed potential solutions for photographers to take advantage of existing images in their working environment in order to extend their creative arena. From a personal perspective, the exploration of meaning transformation is only a catalyst to offer an opportunity to critically review my past practice approach and my established vision of photography.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

This project aimed, through a series of theoretical and practical investigations, to unveil the phenomenon of moment beyond moment and the way that meaning transformation happens in an extended photograph. Through exploring and analysing the discussion in the literature on photographic reproduction and representation, I have established the concept of photographic ambiguity as a means to underpin my research on the interaction between moments of existing images and moments of real-life situations. My research outcome shows that the transformations of time and space are significant in leading to meaning transformation. The visual elements in the extended photograph affect each other in the process of meaning transformation. New meaning (if any) is open-ended; it is often contingent upon the moment of happening in the real-life situation, and it is often interpreted differently. The discovery of the transformation of meaning in the extended photographs has also addressed the considerations of meaning misleading in photographic representation, and the practice of ethics.

The intention in the practical outcome is not to give evidence of the new meanings produced, but only to propose the consideration of meaning transformation in the phenomenon of moment beyond moment. The whole process of practical

experimentation is the major output, which provides an open-ended solution by initiating a discourse and raising awareness of this photographic phenomenon.

The method of contrary thinking carried the research focus from the concept of the decisive moment to the concept of the ambiguity of the photographed moment. Grounded theory located my research in the area of the photographed moment and in the further developed photographic phenomenon of moment beyond moment. The employment of snapshot and sudden enlightenment as action methods served to collect data: snapshot was the method used to locate potential environments and to capture the natural moments of interactions. Sudden enlightenment allowed the unpredictable interactions to be captured with the least interference from me; they also allowed me to be enlightened of the new meanings that emerge in the later stage of analysing the extended photographs.

The exhibition display is designed to represent two aspects of my research output. First, a selection of photographs is enlarged for display in the AUT gallery (Figure 4.01). These photographs represent my own view of meaning transformed in an extended photograph. Secondly, they are accompanied by the exegesis and appendix (Figure 4.02), which contextualise the research project.



Figure 4.01



Figure 4.02

In conclusion, through the research project, I have proposed a new concept; the concept of meaning transformation in the photographic situation of moment beyond moment. This offers insights to photographers in that they may become aware of the potentials of meaning misleading in an environment that involves an existing image, and take advantage of the phenomenon to extend their photographic representation. The whole project is rooted in the theoretical discussion of the photographic moment and is exemplified through vigorous and extensive photographic practice. The above are consolidated in evidence to support my concept of meaning transformation in the phenomenon of moment beyond moment.

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Appendix

Contents

Contents

Introduction 1

Part One 2

Part Two 115

Introduction

The appendix is a documentation that represents the selected output of this research project. It consists of two parts:

Part 1 includes a series of contact sheets of photographs of a range of locations. Each contact sheet as a record of photographs taken in a location provides consideration of potential meaning transformation of moment beyond moments. One photograph is selected from each contact sheet; it gives the transformed meaning of my own view and is placed on the left side of the contact sheet.

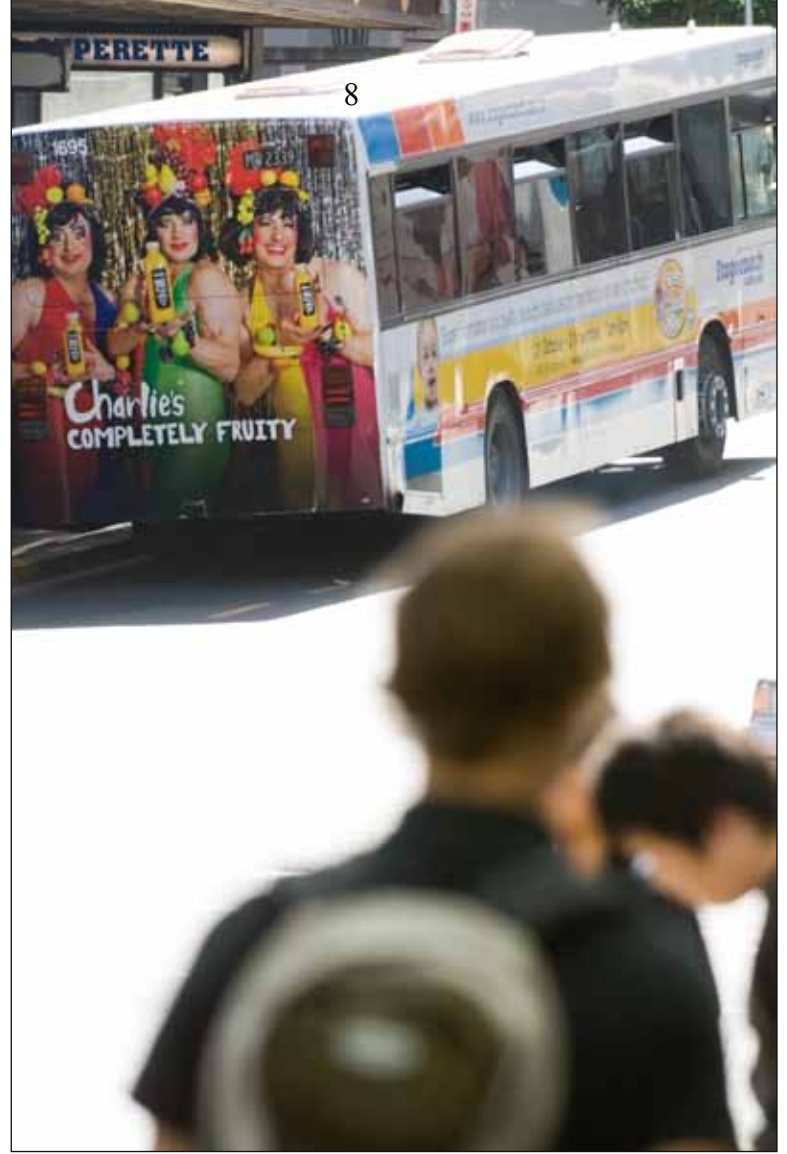
Part 2 is a collection of photographs that I took without applying the method of sudden enlightenment (refer to Chapter 2.3 of the exegesis). They are one-off snapshots that represent my own view of meaning transformation of moment beyond moments.



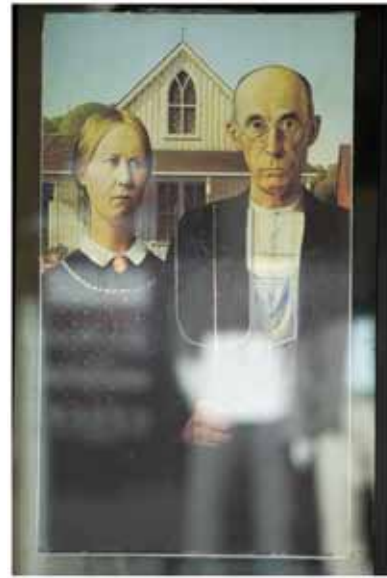














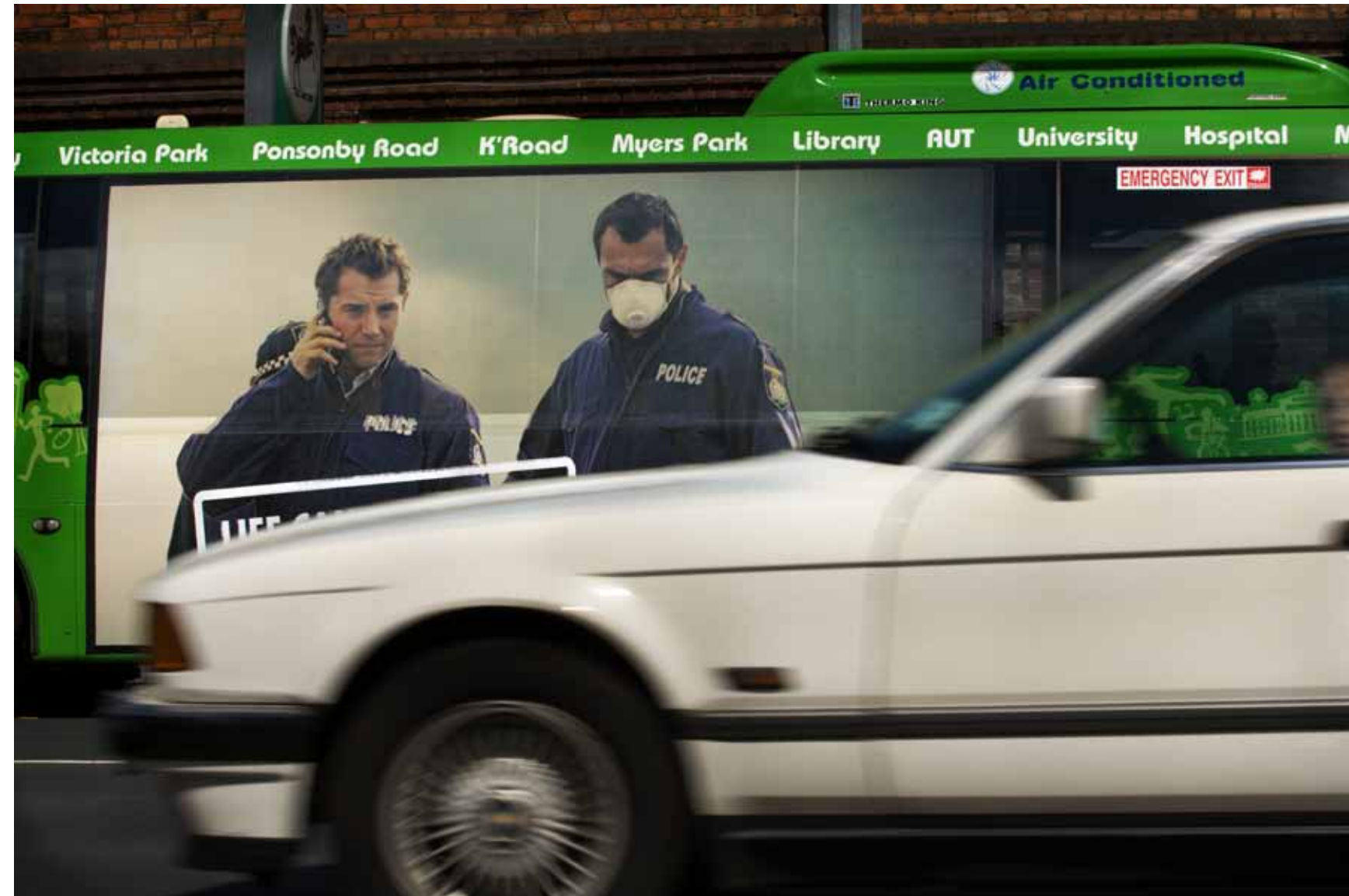




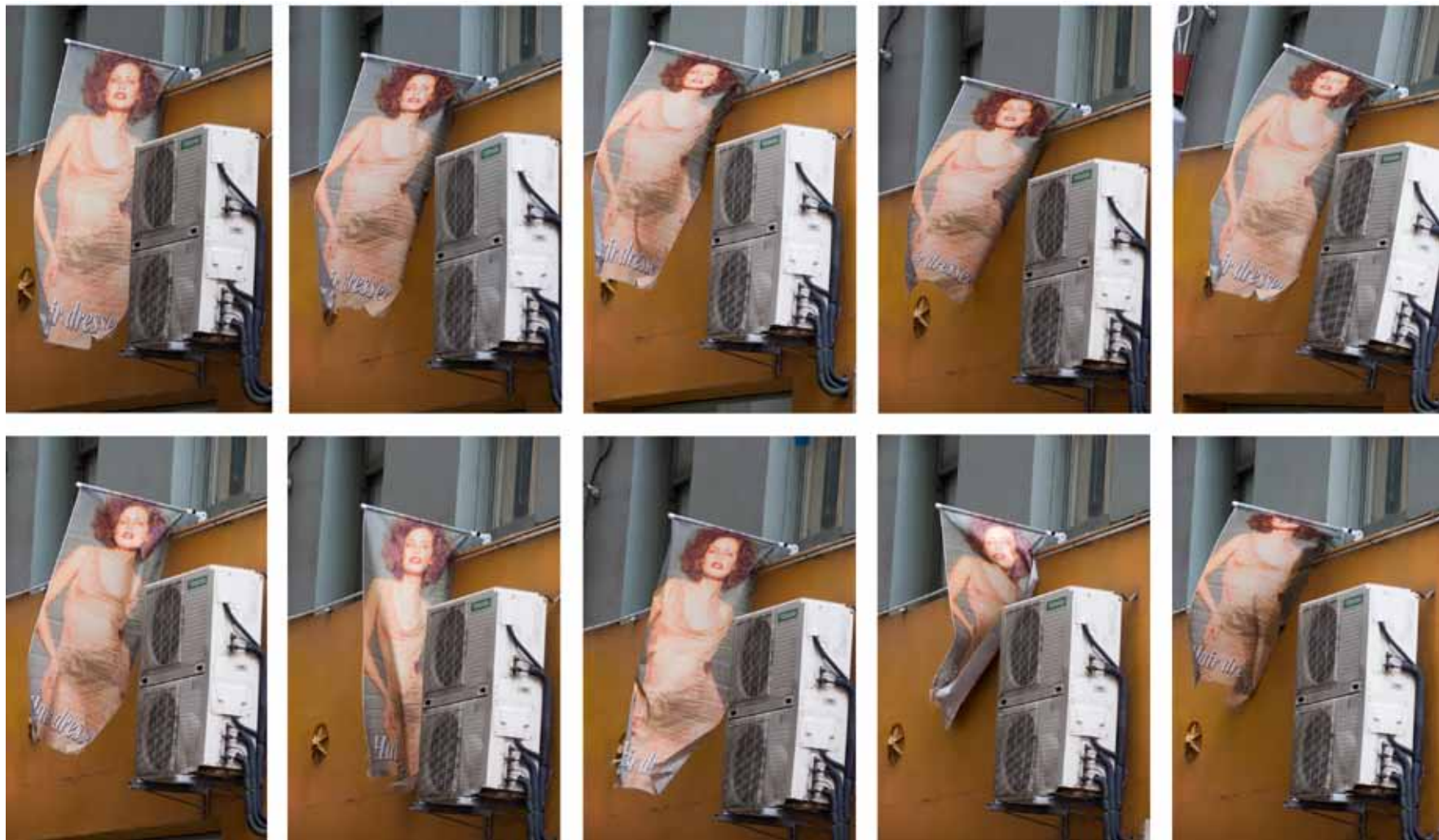








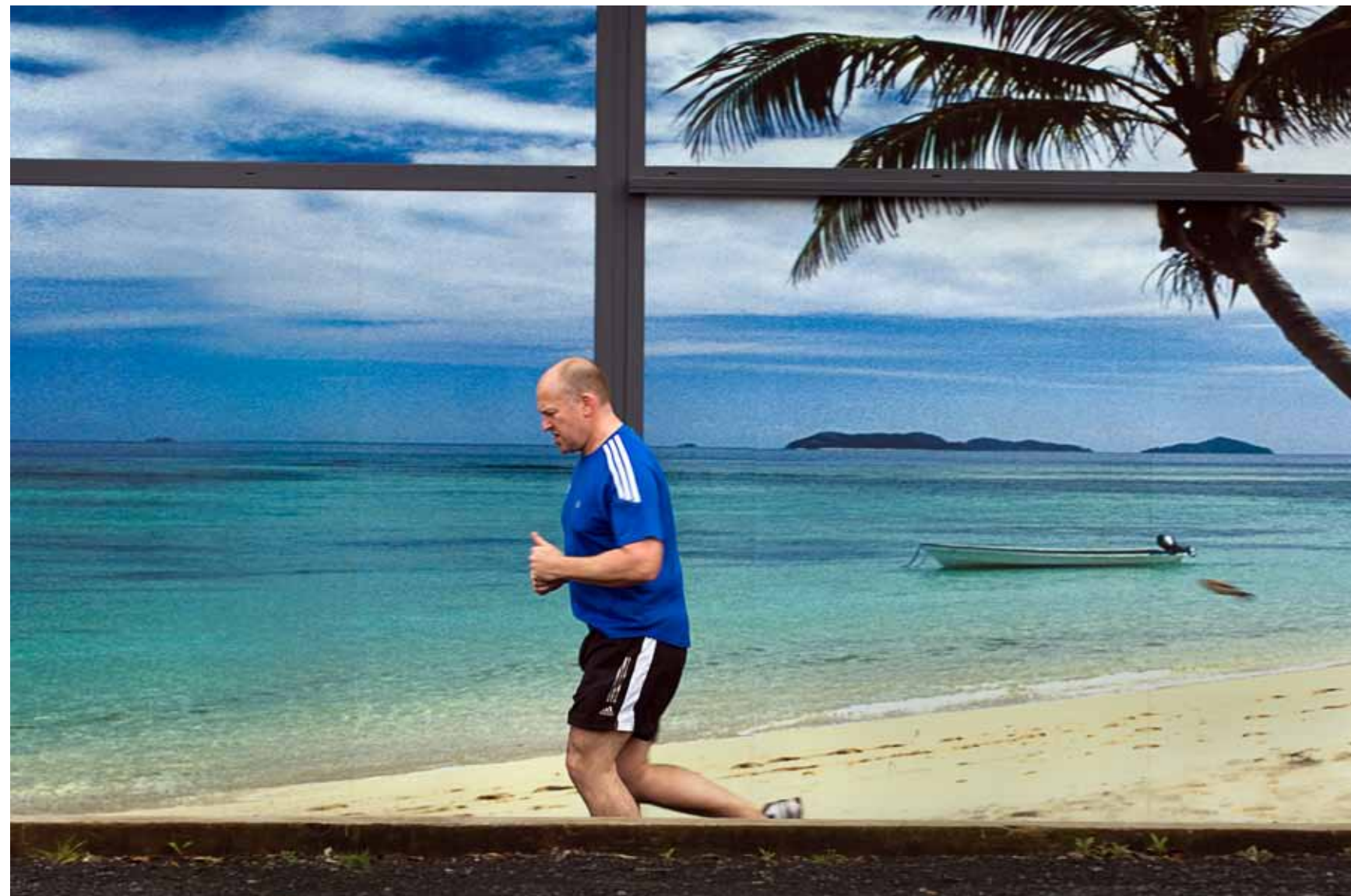




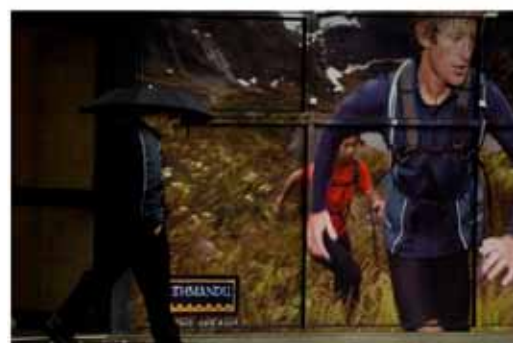




















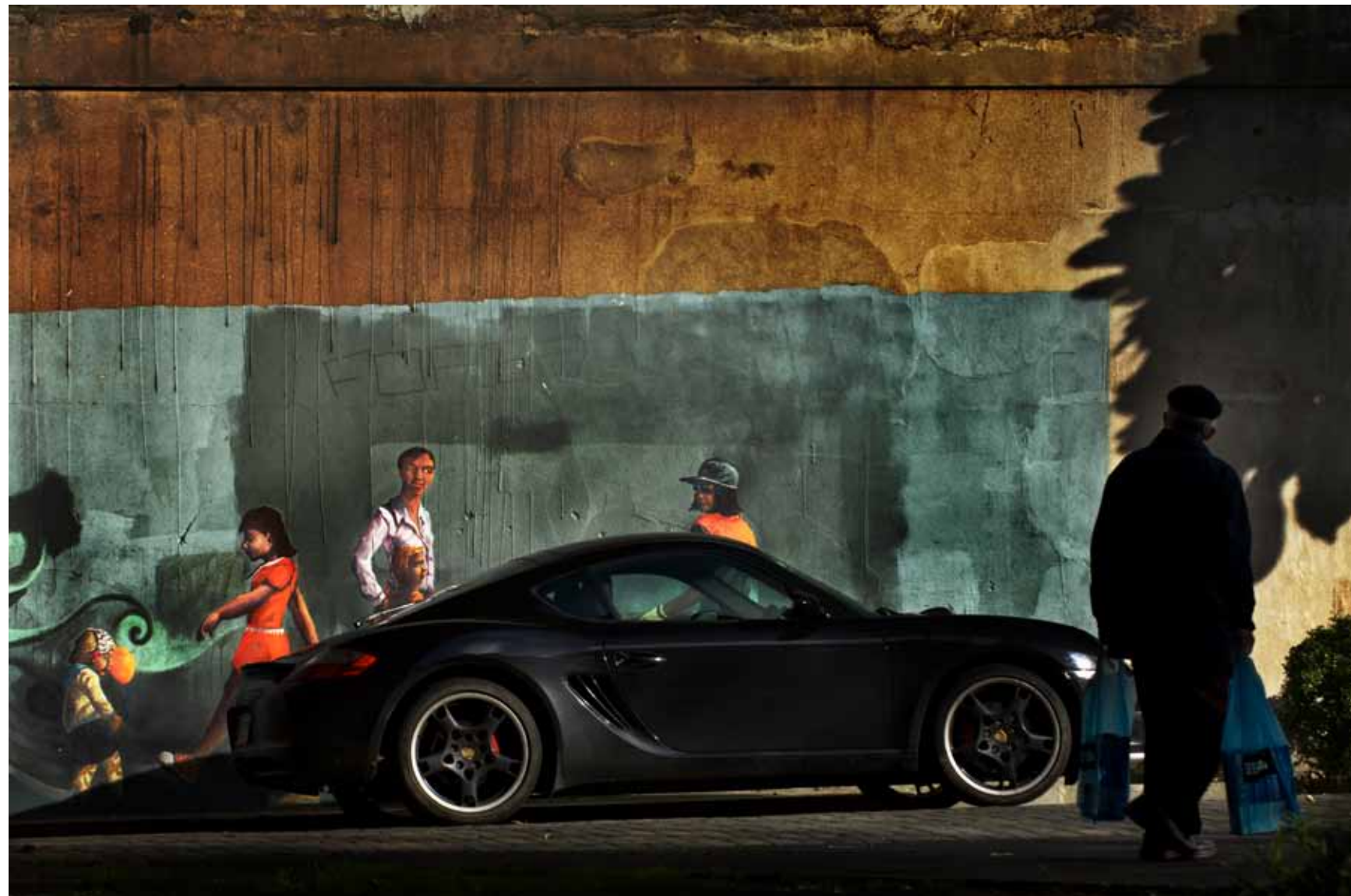












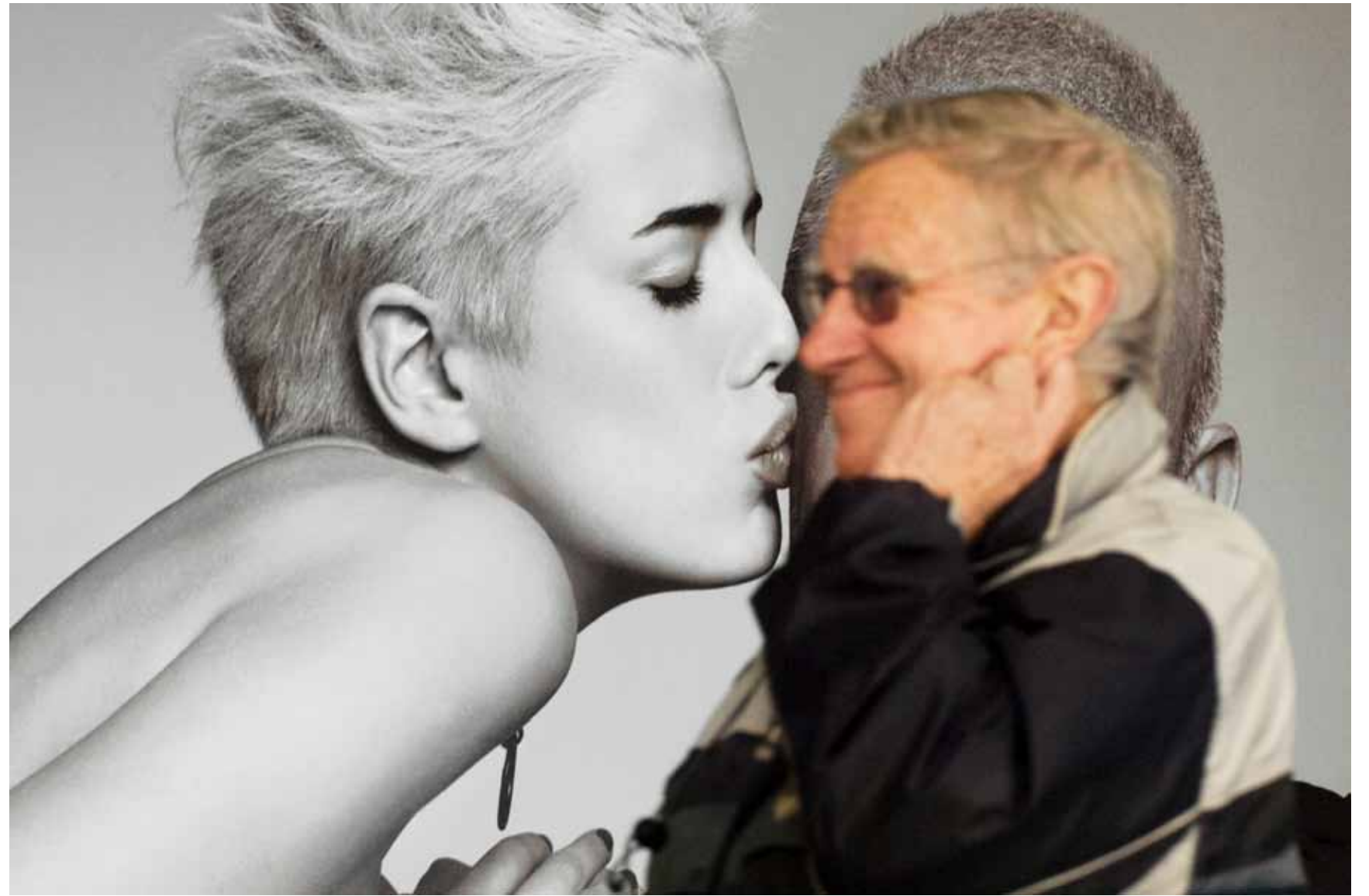






















































Moment Beyond Moment



Moment Beyond Moment



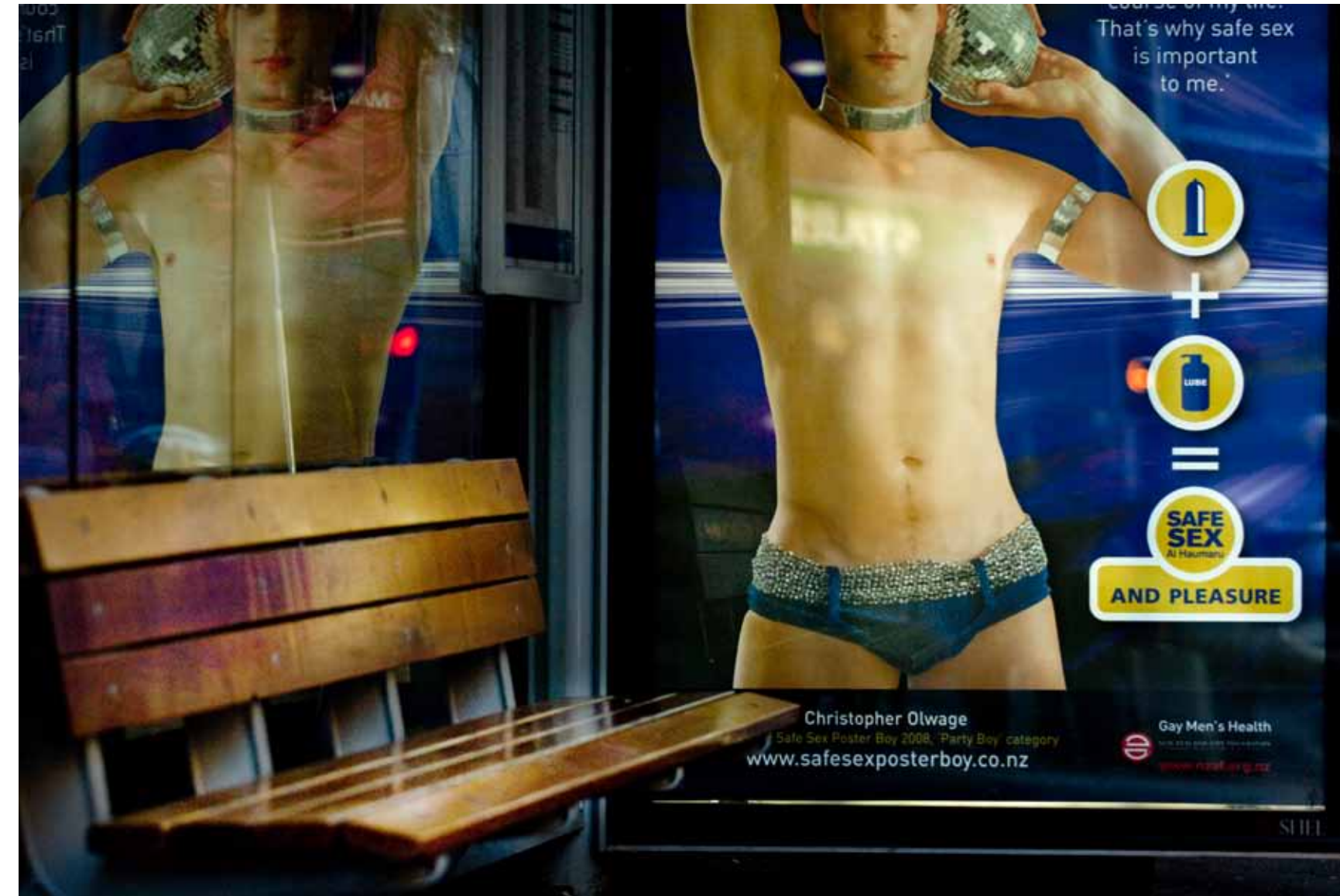






















Moment Beyond Moment



Moment Beyond Moment

