

Loisirs

By Anna Fox



Project Details

Name of Researcher:	Professor Anna Fox
Name of Output:	Loisirs
UCARO link/s:	https://research.uca.ac.uk/3205/
Output Type:	T – Other – multi-component output comprising photography book and exhibition
Year and mode of dissemination:	<p>BOOK Fox, A. (2014) <i>Loisirs</i>. Hauts-de-France: Diaphane Editions. ISBN 978-2-919077-26-7</p> <p>EXHIBITION <i>Photoaumnales</i>, Galerie Nationale de la Tapisserie, Beauvais, France, 27 September 2014 - 11 January 2015</p>
Key Words:	Photography, documentary photography, storytelling, leisure, time, memory, post-production
Funding:	Diaphane Publishing - £8,000 Photoaumnales Festival of Photography, Beauvais - £10,000

Synopsis

Loisirs is a research output by Professor Anna Fox consisting of a series of 25 digitally joined colour images of the leisure industry in Beauvais, France.

In 2013 Fox was invited by Photoaumnales to undertake a residency in the city and develop new work based on their interest in her projects *Resort 1* and *Resort 2*, depicting Butlin's holiday camp in Bognor Regis. Fox was interested in the planning of Beauvais (largely post-war) and the way that the leisure industry, a relatively recent phenomenon, was embedded in the layout at the edges of the urban environment within easy access for residents.

The series explores the way that leisure has become embedded in contemporary society with equal status to work. It also considers the themes of time and memory in

documentary photography. In particular, it investigates time and memory in relation to digital manipulation, challenging narratives surrounding documentary, accuracy and authenticity.

The output was disseminated in two forms. Firstly, the 25 photographs were published within the *Loisirs* book, which included the foreword 'Leisure and Pleasure: Anna Fox in Beauvais 2013-2014' by Professor Val Williams. Secondly, *Loisirs* was disseminated at the Photoaumnales exhibition, which also provided funding for the project.

This portfolio of supporting information includes evidence of the research aims, context and processes which led to new insights. It also includes images from the making of *Loisirs* and a PDF of the book.



Fox photographing the Decathlon sports store, 2013 © Andrew Bruce and Michael Floor



Research Questions and Aims

Research questions:

To what extent can the memory/experience of being somewhere be defined in photographs of place?

How far have we come in our understanding of documentary photography and its representation of truth?

What is the condition of the contemporary leisure industry in Beauvais?

What role does leisure play in our lives today?

Research aims:

To photograph the contemporary leisure industry in Beauvais using new methods

To investigate time and memory in photographs of the leisure industry

Context

Leisure has always been a fascinating subject for photographers; in the post-war period it has become particularly interesting as it has infected all strata of society and, as an activity, has become as significant as going to work. For Fox, the project *Loisirs* extended her interest and concern to document the leisure industry in Europe as a significant feature of the contemporary social environment, as established in her landmark works *Resort 1* (2011) and *Resort 2* (2014).

In the modern environment leisure and work comfortably co-exist, they depend on each other, though not everybody agrees to take part. Leisure parks, now mushrooming in modern cities, have become an integral part of the fabric of urban and suburban life; they are part of the machine. Work and leisure are often positioned as binary opposites, yet they operate together - leisure purporting to provide the freedom that work appears unable to provide. Leisure activities allow us to 'get away from it all' (ie, work), to relax, to get fit and/or to discover new things about ourselves. Many leisure pursuits are designed for the whole family, whereas workspaces are generally out of bounds for family units. Leisure may even be considered a way to get healthier and/or recuperate in opposition to the ills of work. This has made leisure a fascinating aspect of everyday life and a wide range of photographic responses have developed around this subject.

The leisure spaces that Fox photographed in Beauvais are all to some degree spectacular. They confirm a need for us to feel immersed in pleasure through leisure as opposed to the often mundane environments that dull us at work. The project *Loisirs* intentionally observed leisure spaces as organized environments that direct us (the users) how to negotiate them. Many of these sites of leisure employ dynamic designs and interiors inspiring immersion and engagement. Fox was considering leisure within a European context, with an emphasis on a post-war society as well as within a society that had become wealthy enough to make leisure a part of life.

Through *Loisirs*, Fox also started to develop her interest in a collapsing of time within the image, images that may have a closer relationship to memory than is typical of the 'decisive moment' in photography. During the *Resort* projects Fox started to digitally join images through necessity (due to the difficulty of capturing the image she wanted in one take). Through this experimental approach she discovered something that interested her more, concerning the veracity of the documentary photograph. In this, the project's thematic focus intersected with Fox's photographic techniques as she expanded upon her previous body of work to experiment with digital manipulation, raising questions about memory, construction and the notion of truth. She questioned the relationship between photography and memory and how the digitally joined images, made over 2 – 6 hour periods, felt more accurate than a 'decisive moment' type of image representing a fraction of a second.

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*Fox photographing Parc Saint Paul
2013 © Andrew Bruce and Michael
Floor*





Research Methods and Process

Fox worked with medium and large format cameras and a lighting team to create images that would be constructed afterwards in post-production. Through photographing one location from one specific point of view for between 2 and 6 hours, each image is built up of a number of single images creating a diorama type picture that is the complete opposite to the popular decisive moment type of documentary photograph.

The relationship between subject and photographer is also dynamically altered. The photographer remains in one place, with a large format camera and lights, for several hours, communicating with subjects as they enter the frame, which creates a very different atmosphere to the situation when the photographer roams around with a small or medium

format camera, hunting for frames. The performance of the photographer (Fox) and her crew was much more akin to a film crew and the public response to this was to become more engaged than they would be otherwise.

In this project, Fox engaged for the first time in considering the effects of digital manipulation in relation to time and memory in the documentary image. Building upon an initial engagement with digital manipulation in the project *Resort 1*, the *Loisirs* project explored the idea of infecting the notions of 'realism' and indexicality wrapped up in the photographic image with the fictitious instruction of extended time, and therefore related the image to something more akin to cinema or history painting than the practices that have been favoured for many years in documentary photography.

Research Contribution, Dissemination and Recognition

Research insights and contribution:

The insights generated by *Loisirs* lie both in the discipline of documentary photography and in the understanding of the subject matter (modern leisure) contributed by Fox's photographic project. The timed, joined images in *Loisirs* more accurately capture memory than is the case in conventional 'decisive moment' type images. Fox's images, despite being unreal, paradoxically do not deploy the illusory qualities of photography in the way that the picturing of a captured fraction of a moment does.

Loisirs also reveals how leisure activity in Beauvais is carefully planned; the townspeople take part in leisure on a regular basis, and leisure spaces have become as important as the workplace. This finding is not unique to this location, and refers to many Western and Northern European cities, particularly those that are predominantly post-war in plan.

Dissemination:

The dissemination of *Loisirs* was accompanied by talks and workshops, in Beauvais with the local art college, and in Lorient where a group of students and their teachers were invited to create their own leisure diorama.

The *Loisirs* series is now held by Photoaumnales within their collection.

Research Contribution, Dissemination and Recognition

Follow-on-activities:

Fox was interviewed by Tony Cearns for LOOK/17: Liverpool International Photography Festival, reflecting on *Loisirs* amongst her other projects: <https://lookphotofestivalblog.wordpress.com/2015/04/29/interview-with-anna-fox/>

The *Loisirs* project then led to a further commission at the Glynn Vivian Gallery in Swansea to respond to the Dillwyn archive and new work (*The Moon and a Smile*) was produced based on the approach developed in the *Loisirs* project.

Most recently, Fox has used *Loisirs* as a case study in the second edition of her co-authored book *Research in Photography: Behind the Image* (Fox, A. and Caruana, N. 2021 [2012]. *Research in Photography: Behind the Image*. London and New York: Routledge)



*Fox photographing Parc Saint Paul
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