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Proposal for an edited volume of Journal of Photography & Culture

The Theatre of Photography: staging, re-enactment and modalities of the frame

This project looks at the intersection of photography and theatre, and takes their multiple encounters as an opportunity to consider and rethink the often overused or misconceived concepts of 'performance'.

Notions of 'performativity' for instance, as developed by speech act theory (producing that which it names), are in photography often used to describe a set up that exists only in order to be photographed, and work that demands particular engagement with its viewer. In theatre, on the other hand, the term refers both to stage representation and to forms that point out masks of identity inscribed by societal contexts.

Equally the term 'theatricality' has been used in various ways in discussions of theatre and of photography, with positive and negative connotations emerging from different critical perspectives. What is clear is that theatricality enjoys different definitions, and this project aims to separate definitions, both in terms of how they shed light on photography, and in terms of how photography might provide a focus.

Specifically, we aim to consider the photography/theatre/performance triangle by asking questions such as: Can we develop a new way of thinking performance out of the relationship of theatre and photography? How can photography help us to clarify the grey areas between theatre and performance? What can we learn about photography from their close association?

Performative acts happen on stage, in front of the camera, but also as part of the choreography of an image. They imply the apparatus of the white cube as much as the black box. Both need to-be-seen in order to-be-understood as 'work', and they need to 'work' in order to function – as a play, as an exhibition, as something that is performed to-be-looked-at. But, in a supposedly post-medium-specificity age, what questions remain about what and how a medium mediates?

While our **introduction** to the journal will be a *mapping* of the potentially differing usage of terms in theatre and photography, it will also be an attempt at *translating* these from one context into another, from theatre into photography and vice versa, thus positing how nomenclature may be shared, but also how discourses may be hybrid. This will engage with arguably the key notions of our disciplines today: beyond the key concepts of the performative, the theatrical and the photographic, others – i.e. the framed and the staged, the pro-photographic and the non-diegetic – will necessarily come into play, alongside ideas around event, gesture, stage, apparatus, situation, re/enactment and re/presentation.

Since we conceive both theatre and photography as inherently inter-disciplinary and trans-medial, we suggest that a cross-referencing of these terms will allow us to think theatre *photographically* and photography *theatrically*. We will argue that photography therefore contains theatre and theatre contains photography, potentially claiming a *liveness* for the photographic image and a *stillness* for the theatrical action.

Accordingly the **essays** in this volume will also follow a dialogical structure, bringing together authors from both fields to work collectively, experimenting with the collision or collusion of approaches and methodologies. Rather than reinforcing disciplinary positions, we intend to facilitate a questioning of differences of conception, and indeed to test existing understandings about photography, theatre, and performance. Topics might include:

- Inter-medial translations from Theatre into Photography and vice versa
- The apparatuses of stage and camera & the mechanisms of production and representation (proscenium arch, view finder, border, off-frame)
- Relationships: author-actor-director; artist-model-curator
- Documentation of work / documentation as work / document as performance
- The pro-filmic, pro-photographic, pro-theatric and its aftermath
- The gesture of photographing (photographers at work)
- The implicated viewer and audience participation in galleries and theatres
- The body as apparatus/camera/mechanism, the photograph/play as a body
- The event as both a becoming and a having-been-there
- 'Liveness' and voice of the still image
- Acting out, reacting to cues, re-enacting
- The operatic as a form of excess or access
- The theatre of task-based instructions in conceptual art
- Plays staging photographers
- Fictitious photographs & scenarios that only exist for the camera
- After 'staged photography' and the 'cinematic' photoplay
- Photographs as material part of a performance (backdrop, prop, storyboard)

The issue will explore how performative staging practices engage both the camera and modes of theatre production, thus giving and enhancing the condition of the resulting works. The *co-authored* essays will be commissioned from the context of our **The Theatre of Photography research network**, which contains a range of practitioners, theorists and historians approaching the subject from different angles.

The other sections of the journal will also be commissioned by us:

- Archive section: Collaborative archive of 'photographers at work', images of the gesture of photographing (6 pages of photos, one per page, plus around 500 words text)
- One Photo section: 1 photograph with text (1000-1500 words)
- Portfolio section: 6-10 full-page photographs and a short text about the work (500-1000 words)