

Photogenic images: producing everyday gestures of possibility

Imagens fotogênicas: produzindo gestos diários de possibilidade

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Resumo: As imagens podem ser fotografias, mas também podem ser o ambiente visual da vida cotidiana. À medida que as imagens moldam nossas configurações diárias, eles coreografam as vias e os cenários que nos moldam. No processo, as imagens podem influenciar o que pensamos, como nos sentimos e quando e onde atuamos. Para explorar como, volto à fotogenia (Talbot, 1839), um conceito passado que envolve a produção de imagens (e como as imagens posteriores podem continuar a produzir efeitos, emoções, idéias e maravilhas). Revisitar o conceito de fotogenia oferece uma oportunidade para reconsiderar o que são imagens, como elas criam e como elas têm a capacidade de ativar outras pessoas em ambientes cotidianos. Para começar, forneço uma breve visão geral de como o termo “fotogenia” surgiu e evoluiu. Em seguida, considero o conceito de fotogenia como método (por St. Pierre, 2014) através de uma série de imagens de uma área de bairro urbano conhecida por suas irrupções de arte popular. Em seguida, exploro as tentativas produtivas ou fotogênicas que as imagens criam para gerar futuros éticos e mudanças coletivas (Guattari, 1995). Depois disso, eu discuto como, através de um retorno à maravilha (MacLure, 2013), na pesquisa e na vida cotidiana, as imagens comuns têm a capacidade de intervir para um mundo mais pacífico, amável, pensativo e generativo, um gesto menor por vez (Manning, 2016). **Palavras-chave:** fotogenia, imagens visuais, impressões fotográficas

Abstract: Images can be photographs, but they also can be the visual surroundings of everyday life. As images shape our daily settings, they choreograph the thoroughfares and backdrops that shape us. In the process, images can influence what we think, how we feel, and when and where we act. To explore how, I return to *photogeny* (Talbot, 1839), a past concept that involves the production of images (and how after-images can continue to produce affects, emotions, ideas, and wonder). Revisiting the concept of photogeny provides an opportunity to reconsider what images are, how they create, and how they have the capacity to activate others in everyday environments. To begin, I provide a brief overview of how the term ‘photogeny’ emerged and evolved. I then take up the concept of photogeny as method (per St. Pierre, 2014) through a series of images from an urban neighborhood area known for its irruptions of folk art. Next, I explore the productive—or photogenic—attempts that the images make to generate ethical futures and collective change (Guattari, 1995). After that, I discuss how, through a return to wonder (MacLure, 2013) in research and everyday life, ordinary images have the capacity to intervene toward a more peaceful, kind, thoughtful, and generative world, one minor gesture at a time (Manning, 2016). **Key-words:** photogeny, visual images, photo-impressions

What do images produce?

Images can be photographs, but they also can be the visual surroundings of everyday life. Images are what we see. They are always already around us, everywhere, all the time. As they shape our daily settings, they constantly compose the thoroughfares and backdrops that shape us. Images occasionally become photographs after they have left visual impressions that propel us — and our cameras — into motion.¹ This is the case for the images named below, as well as for many of the figures that follow. They are byproducts of the past, something to think with in the present, and catalysts for the future. When visual images such as these take on a life of their own, they help us see a world that is at the same time they help us see what else that world might become.

¹ In this way, as Scribano and Aguirre observe, “The appearance of image is a compelling circumstance on which to speculate because it shows what the eye-camera can see” (2015, p. 203).

This is why some photographs are able to burn their way into our collective memories. These images create aftereffects that can linger on our social consciousness long after we have looked away, influencing how we know, think, feel, and act. Many internationally-recognized images have produced and provoked in this way. For example, the image of the unknown protester who stood in front of military tanks in Tiananmen Square (Widener, 1989). The vulture sitting in wait for an emaciated Sudanese child (Carter, 1993). The woman who walked through a neo-Nazi demonstration in Sweden with her fist raised against racism and oppression (Lagerlöf, 2016). And, in another recent example, the image of three-year-old Alan Kurdi, whose body washed ashore in Turkey (Demir, 2015). Alongside a controversial reenactment by protest artist Ai Weiwei (2015), the initial photograph circulated worldwide and, for many, became emblematic of forced migration in Syria. Taken together, each of the images named here have carried over into ongoing social, ethical, political, and artistic debates; in doing so, they have realized far-ranging influence. They matter not only in what they mean, but in what they create.

This is not to suggest, however, that this is a paper about photographs or photography. Rather, it is about *photogeny*, a past concept that involves the production of images and how after-images continue to produce (Talbot, 1839). Revisiting the concept of photogeny provides an opportunity to reconsider what images are, how they produce, and how they activate others. Some might argue that photogeny was ahead of its time, particularly given contemporary ‘new’ materialist perspectives that encounter images as vibrant matter in a more-than-human world (e.g., Bennett, 2010; Hultman, & Lenz Taguchi, 2010).² Alongside the new materialisms, images are not passive objects, but are animations that can express wants and desires (Mitchell, 2005). Images enliven, haunt, and register ghostly matter (Derrida, 1994; Gordon, 2008). They prick (Barthes, 1981). They instigate and imagine. They echo. They produce creative responsibility (Guattari, 1995), affects (Massumi, 2002), and everyday possibilities. In the potential shift from photography back to photogeny, images are not things. They are doings (Barad, 2007).

In pausing to explore how photogenic images act within everyday environments, therefore, I focus on how visual interventions attempt to work toward a more affirmative society, one minor gesture at a time (Manning, 2016). First, I provide a brief overview of how photogeny emerged and evolved. I then take up the concept of photogeny as method (per St. Pierre, 2014) through a series of images from an urban neighborhood area known for its irruptions of folk art. Next, I explore the productive — or photogenic — attempts the images make to generate collective change (Guattari, 1995). After that, I discuss how, through a return to wonder (MacLure, 2013) in research and everyday life, ordinary images have the capacity to intervene toward a more peaceful, kind, thoughtful, and generative world.

What if photography had been named photogeny?

Images imparted a great sense of wonder in the early days of **photography**. For example, it was nearly two hundred years ago that William Henry Fox Talbot and his counterparts began to experiment with what we have come to know as photography. The early part of the nineteenth century saw an international group of inventors competing to find a means of creating photographic images. These were moments in history that were imbued with curi-

² It is important to note that questions of what images are and what they produce depend upon their theoretical frame. A ‘new’ materialist perspective departs from conventional approaches to images in research. For example, objectivist perspectives approach images (photographs) as secondary evidence of social realities. In subjectivist approaches, photographs (and other pictorial representations) are thought to offer interpretations of, and insights into, social phenomena. Both, however, treat photographs as passive objects that are waiting to be analyzed or interpreted by researchers. Though important, these lenses may overlook the more active prospects of the images that comprise life in everyday environments.

ous anticipation as multiple inventors sought not only to be the first to successfully reproduce images, but to also be the one to name the process. There were several early contenders, as Batchen (1993) aptly documents. In recounting this history, Batchen observes that

photography's pioneers showed almost as much interest in the medium's nomenclature as in its invention, and almost all of them proposed one or more possible names.... In many cases the word came before the invention, or at least before the invention was fully operational. The choice of name therefore reflected not so much what photography was as what as what photography might be. (1993, p. 22)

There were many suggestions for what this mysterious and long-elusive process might be called. Nicéphore Niépce adopted the term 'héliographie,' the etymology of which suggests that images are formed from sunlight-writing. Louis Daguerre preferred 'Daguerreotype,' which he named after himself. Others emphasized the materials used to generate images, as evidenced in the 'cyanotype photograms' produced by Anna Atkins and John Herschel. The field eventually settled on Herschel's suggestion of 'photography,' or light-writing.

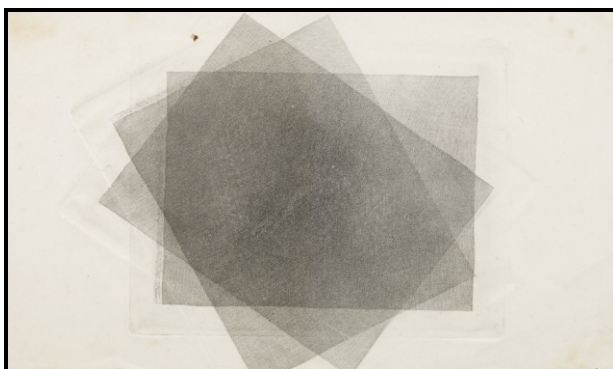
The adoption of 'photography' allowed for many linguistic possibilities: not only could something be 'photographed,' there could also be 'photographs' and 'photographers.' The term encompassed process, event, product, and descriptive identity all at once. The flexibility of 'photography' likely contributed to its ease and continuity of acceptance, both then and now. Yet, as with any naming, the term 'photography' did some things and not others. Born toward the end of an industrial revolution marked by mechanical production, the term emphasizes the ways in which machines (cameras) manufacture visual images. 'Photography' hence became associated with the production of 'photographs' as tangible, material, representational objects. The resulting photograph became the end in and of itself.

In contrast, Talbot (1839) imagined that *photogeny* could account for the creative and productive potential of images. Even though he also was among those racing to establish the processes and naming of the field, he waited five years to share his findings because he expected that his images eventually would disappear; he was astonished when they did not. In finally reporting the results of his experiments in 'Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing,' he expressed his surprise with how long it sometimes took for the 'full effects' of images to emerge. He wrote: "I thought that perhaps *all* these images would *ultimately* be found to fade away. I found, however, to my satisfaction, that this was not the case" (p. 198, emphasis in original). Talbot went on to publish the first book with photographic images, *The Pencil of Nature* (1844). His images thus have lived long past their expected life span, and Talbot likely would be surprised to find that his photogenic images of leaves, moth wings, lace, and sheets of gauze exist today (see, for example, Figures 1–4). Although Talbot realized his quest to create photogenic images, he was less successful in immediately advancing his preferred terminology.

It took another century for the idea of photogeny to take hold. In the early 1900s, French scholars intermittently followed Talbot's lead through *photogénie*, a variation of photogeny that was taken up in French cinematic and literary theory. The term 'photogeny' was repurposed as 'photogénie' by a set of impressionistic scholars, including Delluc (1920/2004) and Epstein (1924/2012). The term later came into use again with Morin (1956/2005) and Barthes (1981).

Photogénie offered impressionists such as Delluc and Epstein an opportunity to explore "a latent power within the moving image" (Aitken, 2001, p. 82). In perhaps a foreshadowing of contemporary affect theory (e.g., Massumi, 2002), these scholars were concerned with the potential of images to create impressions that move how people think about and experience film. Yet, even though these scholars were concerned with cinema, they approached photogénie "at the level of the image or the individual shot" (Petrie, 1999, p. 54). The images

in films could not only disrupt the perceived boundaries of space and time, they also could possess a vital force. Several decades thereafter, Morin (1956/2005) similarly argued that images might be perceived as motionless, but they are not dead; rather, images can be enlivened through *photogénie*. It was Morin's line of thinking to which Barthes then turned.



Figures 1–4 - *The Photogeny of William Henry Fox Talbot* (c. 1860; n.d.; c. 1841–1864; c. 1852–1857)

In developing *photogenia*, Barthes (1981) theorized how images could wound. He did this in *Camera Lucida*, a literary text that considers the affects/effects of images upon viewers. After a century and a half of starts and stops for 'photogeny' and its ilk, therefore, Barthes elevated the terms in his passage about one particularly potent photograph. He wrote:

For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the 'ordinary'; it cannot establish an objectivity, in the positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your *studium*: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound. (p. 73, emphasis in original)

As Barthes explained, images wound because they contain latent powers that can come to life. As such, they are able to provoke and produce affects/effects that vary across observers and their respective encounters with images. Regardless of when photographic images are taken, then, it is through photogeny that they continue to trouble notions of life and death, space and time, and even vibrant and inert matter (Barthes, 1987; see also Abel, 1988;

Sonesson, 2015).³ In focusing less on what images mean and more on what they are producing, Barthes facilitated the conceptual return from photographs as objects to photogeny as vital impressions.

The choice of ‘photography’ over ‘photogeny’ nearly two centuries ago conceivably has created a methodological vocabulary that tends to approach images as things rather than doings. Given that we inherited a language that mechanically (re)produces images as objects, it could be argued that we began to approach photographs in much the same way. Passive photographs became something to be systematically analyzed and collected within specific frames; meaning then was to be imparted from both everyday viewers and research analysts. Many conventional approaches to research now position photographs as manageable, containable, and, at times, perhaps even controllable. This raises questions such as, *what if photography had been named photogeny instead? What kinds of generative ontologies might have then been able to emerge?* Perhaps photogenic approaches to images might have been affective, unpredictable, and a bit unruly. They might have fostered speculative inquiries into what images have the capacity to create, generate, and produce. They might have engaged images as active, vibrant, vital doings that can leave visual impressions anywhere, at any time. And, instead of capturing images, photogenic inquiries might have explored the ways in which images capture us. To consider how in the next section, I adopt the concept of photogeny as method.

Photogeny as method

In the turn toward concept as method (St. Pierre, 2014), inquiries are guided by the use of concepts rather than prescriptive, step-by-step procedures that determine how, when, and where investigations should proceed. Instead, concept as method is a form of research without method. It is a freedom from the confining strictures of methodology (St. Pierre, 2017) in which concepts form ‘contours for inquiry’ (Mazzei, 2017). In this way, inquiries can emanate from concepts through creative and contingent forces (Nordstrom, 2017).

In taking up photogeny as a conceptual frame for inquiry, I draw from the set of terms that follow. Each are from earlier times.

photogeny, *n.*

The production of photographic images; photography. Now rare (chiefly hist.). (The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) online, 2015)

photogene, *n.*

A visual impression remaining on the retina after the stimulus producing it has been withdrawn; an after-image. Obs. (OED online, 2015)

photoimpression, *n.*

The formation of a latent or of a visible photographic image. (Webster’s New International Dictionary, 1934, p. 1847)

I adopt these terms in ways that extend across a broader spectrum of images that includes, but is not limited to, photographs. They combine to create the framework for photogenic images through which this inquiry subsequently unfolds.

Specifically, these terms lend themselves to visual inquiry processes that are emergent. Being that photogeny emphasizes the visual impressions that images form, photogenic images are examined within ordinary contexts. Just as Barthes came across an image that left

³ Notably, English translations of Barthes’ work use ‘photogenia’ interchangeably with ‘photogeny,’ the latter of which seems to be the most oft-used term today.

a sharp impression upon him, I take a similar approach here in terms of images that leave impressions. This is not something that can be anticipated or strategically sampled in advance, per se, but is something that happens.

For those anticipating more procedural methods, following the desires of images may appear to be methodology in reverse of itself. Although photogenes usually are considered to be “negative impressions” (OED, 1986, p. 795), negative is not meant as something that is bad, but something that has been reversed into the negative of itself (such as Talbot’s photogenic images in Figures 1–4). The same could be said for the ways in which photogenic inquiries evolve. Thus, reverse impressions of methodology also could be thought alongside Manning’s (2009) description of the differences between normative positivism and a radical empiricism that aims to meet phenomenon when and where they occur. She writes: “Positivist science seeks to overlay potential with order, imposing measure from the outside. Radical empiricism works from the quasi chaos of the not-yet, beginning in the rhythmic middle of a becoming event” (p. 90). In other words, photogenic inquiries are not meant to impose order, but to embrace the beauty of the rhythms that surround us as they emerge. This is akin to the conditions for radical inquiry that St. Pierre, Jackson, and Mazzei (2016) suggest, such as “attend[ing] to the encounters in our experiences that demand our attention” (St. Pierre, Jackson, & Mazzei, 2016, p. 106). Because photogenes are negative impressions, they offer a similar approach to inquiry. Here, the aim is not to set out to record specific impressions of the world in advance, but to listen to gestures and conversations as they unexpectedly emerge, even when they take shape as images.

In the case of image-based encounters, then, photogenic inquiries allow images to find and leave impressions upon us. This is a twist, perhaps, on Expressive Creative Encounters (Scribano, 2013) in which creative images in everyday environments form encounters that elicit expressions from passersby in daily life. That is what I have done here in a neighborhood in Detroit as I respond to, and move with, the images that wound, astonish, and impress upon me. Such everyday images abound — photogeny is everywhere. As Abel (1988) observes, photogeny appears in “aspects of the world, but “only mobile aspects of the world, of things and souls” (p. 315). In the process, it “make[s] us *see ordinary things* as they had never been seen before” (p. 110, emphasis in original).

To do so, I examine ordinary images in by approaching them as minor gestures, or what Manning (2016) describes as “temporary forms of life [that] travel across the everyday, making untimely existing political structures, activating new modes of perception, inventing languages” (p. 2). Like the minor gestures that form the undercurrents of everyday life, photogenic images animate the “insurgent life” (p. 5) and “living variation[s]” (p. 72) that manifest throughout the city. Even though we are always-already surrounded by minor gestures, all the time, they are easy to miss, for “the minor gesture often goes by unperceived” (p. 2). Identifying minor gestures entails care, and it involves attuning to how they “do their work” (p. 130) within “choreographic explorations of the city’s movement” (Manning & Massumi, 2014, p. 148). To attune to images as minor gestures, I ask questions such as

- How do visual images produce?
- How do visual photo-impressions remain?
- How do after-images stimulate after they have been withdrawn?
- How do images work toward the ethical futures they desire?

It is through ordinary encounters with photogenic images, thereupon, that I examine visual interventions in everyday life. I share everyday images in Detroit taken as part of an ongoing photographic cartography of neighborhoods in the city (Ulmer, 2016). The images

that follow move beyond notions of images as still photographs, animate ‘ordinary’ visual assemblages in which we live, and explore what images aim to create.

Urban folk art as everyday images: ‘you become what you see’

Detroit has no shortage of everyday artistic images that aim to provoke. Some of this art is sanctioned, such as the vibrant collections of murals that appear throughout the city. Other art is placed without permission using a variety of graffiti and post-graffiti techniques. What receives less attention, however, is the everyday art that simply appears throughout the city, including — and especially — within residential neighborhoods. Different areas embrace different genres, mediums, and topics of art. This is easy to miss, for artistic pieces tend to be tucked away within neighborhood spaces, and there are more than 100 potential neighborhoods in Detroit. In other words, there is more to art here than large, invited murals that increasingly contribute to a cool, ‘creative’ urban aesthetic in the downtown commercial areas. There are residential neighborhoods on the east side of the city, for example, that turn to folk art, instead.

In part, the rise of folk art reflects the influence of the Heidelberg Project, an outdoor installation by Tyree Guyton that sprawls across more than two neighborhood blocks. Some might suggest that the Heidelberg Project is the pulse of East Detroit — an artistic heartbeat that courses throughout the broader McDougall-Hunt neighborhood. It has been a labor of love for Guyton, who has experimented with multiple, dynamic motifs over the last three decades. Among them are clock faces painted on pieces of plywood in which the numbers often appear out of sequence (e.g., Ulmer, 2017). In an interview with a local newspaper, Guyton explained that, “It was time to put the clocks out here in such a way that I could see them every day, and you become what you see, what you talk about, what you do” (in Stryker, 2016, para. 31). The clocks were a newer refrain⁴ for Guyton. Since then, as I shall explain, he also has begun experimenting with the word ‘you.’ These artistic experimentations are important to him because they might engage and influence others. The visual works he produces follow the simple but powerful belief that, again, “you become what you see.”

Guyton might be the most visible artist in the McDougall-Hunt area, but he is not alone in taking everyday neighborhood spaces — houses, walls, lawns, trees, sidewalks, fences — and transforming them into urban folk art.⁵ In part, this is because the neighborhood is quite large. The McDougall-Hunt neighborhood has several potential demarcations, and is additionally bordered by several blocks that are considered to be too low-density in population to belong to a nearby neighborhood or constitute its own distinct area. I include these blocks within this inquiry because Heidelberg symbols appear throughout: new clock faces periodically appear on abandoned buildings to mark when time has captured yet another structure. I posit that the images of clocks serve to offer more accurate boundaries than those from more official sources.

The broader neighborhood contains many images of folk art, only some of which are included in the figures that follow. There are many unexpected visual interventions in this neighborhood — too many to explore in one paper, especially when they change on a daily basis. For example, not pictured in this paper are several grassy plots joined by the outdoor exhibit, *Street 2 Folk*, a facsimile sidewalk that has been made from hundreds, if not thou-

⁴ From a post-qualitative perspective, refrains similarly have been taken up in the works of Grosz (2008), Jackson (2016), and MacLure (2016). For Grosz, the refrain “enables and induces art” (p. 3) in a more-than-human world.

⁵ Urban folk art is a term that, with rare exception, has not been addressed within the scholarly literature. Two notable exceptions include 1) Eff’s (2013) studies of screen paintings in Baltimore and 2) Maryland and Freeland’s (2010) examinations of theatrical performance in New York City.

sands, of shoes. The sidewalk of shoes cuts through fields that once were part of a full urban neighborhood; unknowing viewers might instead believe this to be a rural setting rather than a neighborhood that is less than two miles from a major urban center. What is pictured in this paper, however, are image-based gestures of politics and faith. In the midst of ongoing neighborhood challenges involving population loss, housing foreclosures, demolition, arson, and crumbling infrastructure are images of hope, possibility, and unexpected beauty. Whether they take the form of hand-written lettering on a white picket fence, painted brick walls, or pieces of plywood, the following images of urban folk art challenge visual discourses that have come to be associated with Detroit.

This is important because Detroit is too often viewed through an ‘aesthetics of decay’ (Apel, 2015). When photographers come from all over the world to manufacture ruin imagery, they contribute to a storyline of an “empty, unpeopled city returning to nature” (p. 75). This visual narrative is problematic on multiple fronts. Not only does it become more difficult to create just policies for residents in a city that is portrayed as vacant or dead, for the people who live here, these photographs are “not romantic artifacts but reminders of jobs and homes lost, neighborhoods destroyed, and lives derailed” (p. 75). Hence, Detroiters are not unfamiliar with the ways in which images matter in their everyday lives. This is why, in neighborhoods such as McDougall-Hunt, some residents are creating their own visual counter-narratives—ones that are not indifferent to the histories of Detroit, but work to generate new possibilities and futures through invocations, matterings, echoes, and calls for ethical futures.

Invocations (Figures 5–6). Two blocks from Guyton’s Heidelberg Project, tucked away on a side street off the main thoroughfare, is a tree-lined boulevard. Few houses on the block now remain, and the setting—only two miles from the urban center of downtown—could easily be mistaken for a country road. On each of the trees hang one or more dresses. Their presence invokes the absence of the people who once lived here—the dresses function as proxies for what had been and what might be yet again. They affectively generate what Derrida (1994) might refer to as hauntings in which the “element itself is neither living nor dead, present nor absent: it spectralizes. It does not belong to ontology, to the discourse on the Being of beings, or to the essence of life or death” (p. 63). Hauntology, he continues, is what makes “ontology, theology, [and] positive or negative onto-theology” possible (p. 63). In this way, the spectral dresses offer what ruin imagery does not: they return to the people of Detroit. And, in so doing, they do not place blame upon Detroiters for the changes that have occurred in the city, but ways in which ordinary lives have been displaced by the forces of global capitalism (Apel, 2015). As Derrida posits, hauntings are political. Yet, these dresses are not only specters or economic mournings—they are more-than-human invocations for what was, what is now, and what still might be. They are also more than political.



Figures 5–6 - Untitled (Source: J. Ulmer, 2016, The Heidelberg Project, Arndt St., Detroit)

Matterings (Figures 7–8). There are critical challenges in Detroit. As the writing on the white picket fence in these figures suggest, these trials may lie beyond the abilities of any one politician. Hence, ‘Obama for America / God for Detroit.’ What this suggests is that however well-suited President Obama may have been to address the challenges of the nation, the city itself might be in need of divine intervention. The message is onto-theological as it calls for faith in daily life. The writing in the second image then calls for more. Taken about six months later, it appears as new text was added, and then painted over. Perhaps to revise what was written, or perhaps to prevent further (unauthorized) additions by filling the remaining space on the fence, new text was added. It reads: ‘Life Matters.’ This phrasing echoes the Black Lives Matter movement while also keeping with a ‘new’ materialist philosophy that emphasizes the ways in which various forms of life matter, and are mattering. The fence, located on a main one-way road near the northern border of the neighborhood, is on one of the more often trafficked roadways in the city. It is one block north of McDougall-Hunt. Given that the road flows outward from downtown, the messages on this fence likely are read by those on the return trip home. The place of home, then, functions as a site where political change is not only outwardly expressed, but where positive social change might begin.



Figures 7–8 - Untitled (Source: J. Ulmer, Winter 2016, Summer 2016, E. Forest Ave., Detroit)

Echoes (Figure 9). In the bottom, left-hand corner of this image is a low brick wall sitting in front of a recently-vacated home. The word ‘echoes’ has been painted onto the wall, and it is surrounded by musical notes, as well as what appears to be playful circle- and diamond-like shapes (which perhaps form planets and stars). Not pictured, but on adjacent faces of the wall, are paintings of a car and bicycle. Missing from the image entirely is a small, hand-painted wooden sign that read: ‘Pray 4 Our Community.’ This sign appears to have been removed near the time when the residents of the home left. Even in its absence, it echoes nevertheless. Echoes, then, can be thought here in two ways. Not only are echoes affective reverberations that attempt to provoke change, they occur when the spectral past collides with the present in a move toward more ethical futures.⁶ Echoes are important to consider within the context of changing visual environments, which can come together in what Manning describes as a ‘choreography of collective movement’ in which movements are cued and aligned to one another. As she writes, “Although it may feel like it is individuals cuing to one another, what is actually happening is that movement is cueing to a relational ecology in the making” (p. 120–121). Furthermore, for Manning, “a choreographing of the political sees minor gestures everywhere at work” (p. 130).

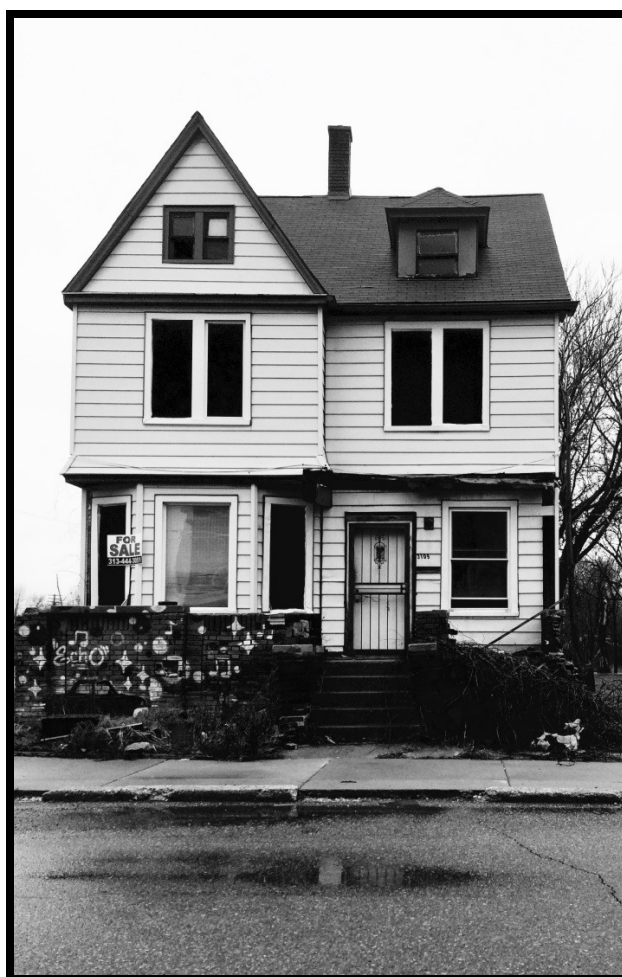


Figure 9 - Echo (Source: J. Ulmer, 2016, E. Canfield St., Detroit)

Minor gestures abound in the visual ecologies of Detroit, and the immediate area north of McDougall-Hunt in which this image appears is no exception. Changes occur on a daily basis and ripple throughout the neighborhood: graffiti that has been added or removed;

⁶ For a discussion of how ‘spectral data’ has troubled time through images, see Nordstrom (2013).

a stand-alone pawnshop being repainted in a softer shade of orange; snow that falls and melts away; daffodil and dandelion flowers that emerge in its place; a shiny mid-sized billboard advertisement for the television show *Detroiters* added alongside houses on a partially-occupied block; repeated taggings of the word ‘safe’ on small, crumbling, former storefronts in which transient populations now shelter; rapid demolitions; an occasional stray cat or pair of dogs casually wandering across the roadway; distressed corner lots with commercial aspirations listed for sale; a complex landscape of materializing potholes; and, as the quickly as the magnolia trees can come into full bloom, sometimes the most vibrant of homes fade, even as its echoes continue.

Echoes can be thought of as reverberations. They include thoughts, prayers, invocations, and calls for change that begin with where we live, and with us. As Obama suggested in a 2008 speech, “Change will not come if we wait for some other person or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek” (para. 46). This is the philosophy of change that—through minor gestures of art—echo through the neighborhood. This is a philosophy of change that, as Guyton might suggest, begins with ‘you.’

Calls (Figures 10–13). Through many modes of expression, the residents of the greater McDougall-Hunt neighborhood continue to call for action. Some of these calls invoke faith; others raise the question of responsibility. Even though there are plans for the Heidelberg Project to be dismantled, reassembled elsewhere as exhibits or collections, and replaced by something new and different, the site continues to evolve. At the time of this writing, recent additions center on a building on a main roadway. In place of windows are pieces of plywood; atop each brightly painted background is large white lettering that reads ‘you.’ Other pieces of plywood have been set on the porch, affixed from the roof, and propped against the building. The signs appear on all four sides, and are punctuated by the heads and bodies of plastic dolls that have been perched in the windowsills. They culminate to form an assemblage that repeatedly calls to each passerby: ‘you,’ ‘you,’ ‘you,’ ‘you,’ ‘you,’ ‘you,’ ‘you.’



Figures 10–13 - Untitled (Source: J. Ulmer, 2017, The Heidelberg Project, Mt. Elliott, Detroit)

Ethico-aesthetics, creative responsibility, and photogenic gestures of possibility

Taken together, these photogenic images of urban folk art visually intervene in everyday life. For people travelling throughout this particular neighborhood and its outlying areas, images produce gestures of faith, hope, recognition, and possibility as they call for futures yet-to-come. Some suggestions are more targeted than others. Prayer directives for the broader community, for instance, are more specific than general suggestions that we work toward a better world.

Photogenic images align with Guattari's (1995) suggestion of a new aesthetic paradigm: an ethico-aesthetic paradigm that produces a sense of creative responsibility. It wonders

how do we reinvent social practices that would give back to humanity — if it ever had it — a sense of responsibility, not only for its own survival but equally for the future of all life on the planet, for animal and vegetable species, likewise for incorporeal species such as music, the arts, cinema, the relation with time, love and compassion for others, the feeling of fusion at the heart of cosmos? (p. 119-120)

In this sense, folk art images within the McDougall-Hunt neighborhood follow, “before any instance of representation — a creative processuality, an ontological responsibility” (p. 126). As he continues: “New collective assemblages of enunciation are beginning to form an identity out of fragmentary ventures, at times risky initiatives, trial and error experiments; different ways of seeing and of making the world” (p. 120). Images, in these regards, produce creative sparks that attempt to sustain in/non/human life as they work toward inspiring others to do the same.

Manning (2016) makes similar connections between ethics and art. When it comes to art, “An ethical act worthy of its name is always inventive — inventive, not in the sense of recreating a metaphysics of freedom and emancipation, but in the sense of espousing a response and response-ability to the other” (p. 153). This involves paying great attention to the more-than-human world in which we live; even though our everyday environments may appear still, they are always moving. It is important to attend the movements therein, as Manning (2009) writes, for “the more we ignore the movement within stillness, the more we lose our balance” (p. 44). Photogenic images are situated within the movements of stillness. Dresses are affixed to trees, yet dance in the wind. They may appear still on a windless day, but there are movements therein nonetheless, just as there are movements in the additions of plywood panels and plastic dolls in windowsills; butterfly wings that have been pinned down; or echoes of a recently vacated house. The last of these images feels particularly still, yet vital memories remain.

Even as a newcomer to the city, changes in ordinary visual images wound and haunt. The conversations I followed in the Eastern Market neighborhood have been all but silenced with layers of brick-colored paint. Colorful murals in the ‘midtown’ neighborhood that expressed messages about life and love have been whitewashed. A historic hotel (with memorable graffiti) was razed to create a wider delivery berth for the new downtown professional sports arena. Their physical presence may be gone, but they remain as photogenic images. Visual photo-impressions linger, even after the stimuli have been removed. Thus, it is not only the Heidelberg Project that again faces dismantling, but, more broadly, the ways in which everyday people communicate through everyday art. I hold my breath as I pass by what have become favorite everyday images, hoping they will remain: a plywood mural inviting people to participate in ‘Hug Detroit,’ an annual block party in which people converge at night on bicycles adorned with glow sticks, glow necklaces, and wheel lights; the fading 9,000-square foot mural of a chimera by Kobe Solomon; and the less conspicuous ‘ghost signs,’ or remnants of vintage advertisements that were painted by hand on brick walls and adorn buildings in neighborhoods across the city. Visual traces of these images — both taken and not taken — continue to disturb (see, for example, Koury, 2004).

Through photogeny, visual images of yesterday and today move through time, space, life, death, and perceptions of stillness. Image by image, neighborhood block by neighborhood block, the artistic photo-impressions within continue to produce minor gestures of possibility. Thus, the images in this paper are not only photographs of art in an urban neighborhood, they also are images produced in everyday environments when artists, activists, and residents move their local ecologies toward the ethical and political futures they desire. As

Deleuze and Guattari (1994) explain, it is through inventing, presenting, and generating art that artists not only create certain affects, but “give them to us and make us become with them” (p. 175). Here, artists invite us to join the vital forces of the city as it persists. They summon us to become what we see.

How might images also generate ethical futures in methodology and everyday life?

Among other affects, images can impart wonder. It is easy, however, to become so caught up the fast pace of daily life that we forget to wonder — or we choose to forego wonder entirely because it seems to take too much time. The loss of wonder has become so great that scholars now call for its return to research (ex., Pearce & MacLure, 2009), an enterprise that arguably has been (and should be) predicated upon curiosity and wonder. As MacLure (2013) writes,

Wonder is relational. It is not clear where it originates and to whom it belongs. It seems to be ‘out there,’ emanating from a particular object, image, or fragment of text; but it is also ‘in’ the person that is affected. A passion: the capacity to affect and to be affected. When I feel wonder, I have chosen something that has chosen me, and it is that mutual ‘affection’ that constitutes ‘us.’ (MacLure, 2013, p. 229)

When images provoke wonder and curiosity, they move our thinking as they quietly pull and push us in different directions at once. Or, that is, this is what they have the ability to do *if* we slow down enough to allow images to act on and through us (Ulmer, 2017).

Research, however, sometimes moves so quickly as to suppress and quash wonder. The rewards of research are based upon rapid, productive, measurable outputs. And while speed is crucial in some fields — as in sciences like virology that seek to address global pandemics as quickly as possible — the social and cultural sciences might benefit from a dose of wonder. As such, many scholars contend that research should involve questions, not the repetition of easily-graspable answers that already are known or understood (Koro-Ljungberg & Barko, 2012). They suggest that research should experiment with fluid methodological spaces (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016) and with what ‘might work’ (Torrance, 2017). Otherwise, a lack of wonder in research creates the risk for inquiries that are not only “set up, in advance, as relevant or irrelevant,” but are designed around “questions that already have answers, or whose answers are close at hand, contained within preexisting academic discourse” (Manning, 2016, p. 9). These are arguments that research should spring from wondrous, surprising, and unexpected moments. If we did not have a methods-based design ready from the onset, ready to canvas and contain photographs in tidy, linear, neat fashion, we might be surprised by what it is that we, and our visual ecologies, can produce. If wonder were to be cultivated more often as an intentional practice both in research and in life, then perhaps it is through photogeny that we might be more curious about how and why images produce.

Furthermore, we should be cautious that a lack of wonder in research does not also carry over into a lack of wonder about everyday life. When we position wonder as an abstract luxury rather than as a necessary ingredient, we potentially miss out on what it has to offer on a daily basis. In this sense, everyday images are as (if not more) important than the internationally-recognized photographs that grace the covers of news magazines and homepages of websites. The world is messy and unpredictable and research should be, too. Interactions with images are a prime example, for they exist outside our studies regardless of whether we want them to or not. Visual images are not sitting around waiting to be discovered, but are living and moving and breathing on their own in the world that exists beyond research. And we are already interacting with them. For those with sight, images are a natural way of moving through life — it is research procedures that instead offer something forced and unnatural. As scholars, then, we perhaps have been so focused on writing photographic methods into Cartesian, structured, scientific methods of thought that we have overlooked the photogenic poten-

tial of images. This may be somewhat ironic, as it is through photogeny that we already live social science research. Every day.

Photogeny, then, offers opportunities to wonder how we might intervene toward ethical futures in our own lives. That is what urban folk artists are attempting to do in Detroit: make positive contributions to their immediate environments and to those who otherwise enter or pass through that particular space. There are simply using the spaces that have been afforded to them to communicate through images. Because not everyone has access to the platforms of a digitally-networked society, including many residents of Detroit, urban folk artists here demand the attention of those drive, walk, and bike down the roads on which their art has been placed. And every day, their photogenic images create visual reminders. To do better. To be better. 'To pray for our community.' To call out these sentiments until we become what we see and create a sense of collective, creative responsibility. Echoing hope. Echoing possibility. And producing love.

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