

12 Prophetic pictures

Or, What time is the visual?

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Siegfried Kracauer opens his study of frivolity and catastrophe in nineteenth-century France with an arresting vignette of the Paris Salon of 1831. He describes how crowds gathered each day around Delacroix's *Liberty Leads the People*, a celebration of the July Revolution of 1830. The subject matter was dramatic (a 'half-naked young woman' holding a musket and waving a tricolour, a 'new Joan of Arc') and raised the question of whether she was 'a terrestrial being or a supernatural apparition' (Kracauer 1938: 3). Kracauer surmises that the attraction of the picture may have reflected the suspicion in

the minds of some of those who came to gaze at it that this picture was not just a graphic representation of the three glorious days of July, but that it also lifted a corner of the veil that hid the future.

(1938: 3–4)

Kracauer, whose work consistently demonstrates a concern with 'uncontemporaneous sedimentation' (Koch 2000: 120) – that is, material resistances to a singular temporality – here dramatises a startling way of viewing images, suggesting a popular understanding and desire for pictures to point to what is yet to be, rather than merely objectify what has already happened. This is perhaps startling only to post-Durkheimians, weighed-down by the idea that representations are after-effects. It may have been much more palatable in an age of Romanticism when Percy Bysshe Shelley could resonantly proclaim that 'Poets are [...] the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present' (Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry* 1821, pub. 1840).

This chapter attempts to anchor this dialectic between the representation of antecedent signifiers and futurity in the specific context of a corpus of illustrated nineteenth-century astrological almanacs before then striking out to attempt to explore the unlikely prophetic echoes apparent in photography. The hypothesis proposed in the first section of the chapter is that compared to language, the visual often displays a relative indeterminacy, a multitude of potential interpretations, and that this makes it the perfect vehicle for predictions. The relevant opposition here is what Lyotard describes as that

between 'figure' and 'discourse,' latent potentialities found across all forms of representation, but which in this specific context are differentially situated in 'image' and 'text.' For Lyotard, 'figure' resists the 'linguistic-philosophical closure' of 'discourse.' The 'figural,' a space where 'intensities are felt' is 'relatively free of the demands of meaning' (cited by Carroll 1987: 26–29). Lyotard argued that certain forms of poetry were more 'figural' than certain forms of image (such as a diagram, which might be highly 'discursive'). In general terms this is undoubtedly true and the great merit of Lyotard's contribution is that it liberates us from stale image/text dichotomies. And yet, I hope to persuade the reader that, in these astrological almanacs, 'figural' images do not make themselves hostage in the same way that 'discursive' language does. Rather, figural images offer a flexible ground that can be finessed and sculpted by the linguistic claims of the next year's almanac. The argument here is indebted to Bernadette Bucher's observation that the visual cannot 'negate' in the same way that language can (she notes that Montaigne could say, when looking at images of the Tupinamba 'cannibals' 'What! They're not wearing breeches'; however, 'it is impossible to portray a thing [visually] by what it is not, it is present or absent, and if it appears it is always positively, in a certain shape' (1981: 35). The visual and language have different kinds of power.

In the concluding section of the chapter a parallel yet distinct argument about the 'positivity' of the visual is explored in relation to photography and the suggestion made that the camera opens up a future-oriented performative and 'proleptic' space. These different modes of image-futurity both offer a challenge to social theories that stress representations as mere receptacles of past actions and as end points of social processes.

Raphael's Prophetic Messenger

The most important of these almanacs is *Raphael's Prophetic Almanac*, although others, such as *Zadkiel's*, also offered images as signs of the future. Raphael's almanacs were striking for the prominence given to a 'prophetic hieroglyphic' published as a frontispiece to each annual issue. This nineteenth-century usage echoes Walter Benjamin's sense of a 'picture-writing' descended from the great Renaissance text *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. Large, fold-out, hand-coloured copperplate engravings and lithographs, offered visual predictions of what would happen in the year ahead. They also served as marketing tools, for the reader would only be able to decode the 'truth' of these prognostications if they bought the subsequent year's publication (where 'all was explained'). These images, of which there is a significant corpus, have never been discussed in any detail (they feature fleetingly in histories of European astrology).

The hieroglyphic usually features in history as emblematic of the difficulties but, most importantly, the possibilities of the translation of the visual into language. The history sketched here emerges from a moment when the deciphering of the Rosetta Stone seems to open up the utopian

possibility of translatability in general. Indeed, it has been argued that the Rosetta Stone's mystical attraction reflects a desire for the translatability of everything, including material forms. In this reading the Stone is to be understood as an object that provides its own caption (Beard 1992; Ray 2007: 5).

In occult and apocalyptic literature, such as William Cunninghame's *Apocalypse* of 1817 (2nd ed., date of first edition not known) hieroglyphics are 'seals' of a future to come. The seven seals of Revelation are to be understood as akin to locks, guarantors of the closure of the text (it was secret knowledge known only to God – hence its un-polluted authority). The history sketched here, however, points in the opposite direction towards a practice in which the image is produced precisely because of its ability to escape the syntagmatic¹ certainty of language.

Astrology, whose appeal in the Middle Ages had been confined to court circles found new audiences in the seventeenth century through works such as William Lily's *Merlin Anglicus Junior, The English Merlin Revived*. Sales of almanacs were greater than those of the Bible (O'Connell 1999: 21) and, by the end of the eighteenth century (at a time when the population of England was less than ten million) half a million almanacs were sold each year (O'Connell 1999: 22). A proliferation of titles gave way at the beginning of the nineteenth century to the supremacy of Francis Moore's *Vox Stellarum*, aka *Old Moore's Almanac*, which had since the French Revolution 'introduced illustrations symbolizing millennial ideas and promoting political radicalism' (O'Connell 1999: 22).

Robert Cross Smith, a self-educated plebeian from near Bristol, who chose to cloak himself in Cabbalistic mystery, would issue the first of *Raphael's Prophetic Messenger* in 1826 (Curry 1992: 47 and 52). The issue rapidly sold out, necessitating a reprint and, by 1831 he was able to claim sales of 8,500 at a time when Moore's was selling 270,000 per year (Curry 1992: 52). Curry suggests that the audience for Raphael's 'overblown occult romanticism' would have been what he calls 'semi-erudite,' and quite distinct from the rural labourers and urban working classes who enjoyed Moore's publication. Curry identifies Raphael's likely consumers as an audience in retreat from the 'successes of secularism, whether as political radicalism, philosophical utilitarianism or science' (1992: 53).

Raphael (Robert Cross Smith) died at the age of 36 in 1832 and control of the *Prophetic Messenger* passed briefly to the astrologer 'Dixon' before passing to a further five 'Raphaels' (Curry 1992: 58). Sales would steadily rise to about 100,000 by mid-century and (depending on your sources) either 150,000 or almost 200,000 by 1900 (Curry 1992: 60).²

The choice of 'Raphael' as an authorial device suggests a genuflection towards the Kabala, and the 'East' in general performed a crucial role in the projection of the *Prophetic Messenger's* authority: Raphael was also advertised, from the 1830s through to the end of the century, as the author of *Pythonesse of the East*, which claimed to be based on a found text

‘formerly in the possession of Her Imperial Majesty the Empress Josephine’ (Raphael 1894).

The Pythoness of the East, and Raphael’s nominalist appropriation of a Jewish identity, points to the Prophetic Messenger’s role as an agent of cultural critique. This echoes the earlier role of Confucius and China in eighteenth-century cultural critique as argued by Wittkower:

Sinomania in 18th-century Europe allows some insight into the nature of this kind of quest. Thinkers of the Enlightenment embraced Confucius’ moral philosophy which, based upon reason and tolerance, seemed to offer a better foundation for a harmonious communal life than a revealed religion with its fanaticism, obscurantism and intolerance.

(Wittkower 1977: 14)

The Orientalist linkage between the East, prophecy, and the future, was most clearly stated in the 1854 tract *A Plea for Urania*, written in opposition to Justice Leatherhead’s proposal that astrology be outlawed. In defence of his science, the anonymous author extols ‘the East’ as the location in which astronomy and astrology have only recently begun to separate, and as the ‘source of all laws, religions, sciences, and modes of government.’ Most significantly for our present purposes the East offered a door into futurity: ‘the East has attractions for all. Its fascination is made up of the past, the present, and what is probably *to come*.’

Raphael fused an Eastern mystical futurity with a form of visual conjecture (prefiguring Carlo Ginzburg’s [1988] usage) with the hieroglyph as a device: ‘We have instanced the Egyptian hieroglyphic as the root or source of all pictorial devices of which the signification is obscure, or conjectural.’ (Raphael, 1845: 46).³

‘Ominous’ hieroglyphics

Raphael’s *Prophetic Messenger* stands apart from its competitors for the lavish illustration that accompanied each issue. The ‘Hieroglyphic for the Eventful Year [insert relevant year]’ was a large fold out hand-coloured plate (usually with six or nine scenes) predicting, pictorially, the events in the coming year. The title page for the 1830 almanac – the earliest copy I have managed to obtain – proclaimed (in capital letters) the presence of ‘a singularly ominous hieroglyphic for 1830 on a large copper-plate, carefully coloured.’

Given that Raphael’s hieroglyphics appeared a few years after Champollion’s 1822 translation of the Rosetta Stone (building on Thomas Young’s earlier work on the demotic passages – Wood 1954: 206ff.) we might be forgiven for assuming that Raphael’s usage reflected popular enthusiasm for the mysteries of Egyptian picture-writing. In fact, Raphael’s usage owed more to the Renaissance fantasy of picture-writing descended from Francesco Colonna’s *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* first published by Aldus Manutius in 1499 in Venice.

Walter Benjamin invokes the hieroglyphic several times in his writings. In 'The Antinomies of Allegorical Exegesis,' written in 1925, he uses the term to describe the baroque emergence of the visual as a mode of revelation. 'If script is to be granted a sacred character [...] then it will press toward complexes, towards hieroglyphics' (2008: 176). In 'A Glimpse Into the World of Children's Books,' an essay written in the following year, Benjamin describes the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* as providing the 'patent of nobility' for Renaissance hieroglyphics whose nineteenth-century offspring were the rebuses, the picture-writing (*Bilderschrift*) or 'puzzle pictures' for children, which so interested him (2008: 230).

Raphael's 1830 illustration (Figure 12.1) divides its pictorial space into three loosely structured visual registers. A non-exhaustive description would include a cherub unfurling a cartouche adorned with mystical signs, an exploding volcano, ecclesiastical buildings on fire, a notice concerning the eclipse of the moon in September 1830, a funeral cortege, a great naval battle, a



Figure 12.1 Hieroglyphic for the Eventful Year 1830, Handcoloured copperplate engraving.

Source: Private Collection.

a storm that appears to be wreaking havoc with agriculture, a naval calamity, a crowd demonstrating their support for 'Reform,' and a learned astrologer/scientist with a telescope and globe who points to a vast book recording that 'Furious Mars, Warns of Danger From afar!'

The astrologer/scientist wears a cummerbund adorned with the name of 'Raphael' and bears considerable similarity to the figure captioned 'Raphael in Italy,' who appears in the elaborate frontispiece to *Raphael's Witch or Oracle of the Future* (1831). In this image, titled 'The Tablet and Questions & The Cabalistical Tablet of the Stars,' Raphael is seated in front of a vast telescope surrounded by the tools of his astrological and alchemical trade.

Witch has an intriguing etymology, being 'derived,' John Brand notes in his 1810 annotations on Henry Bourne's earlier text,

from the Dutch *Witchelen*, which signifies *whinnying* and neighing like a Horse: In a secondary sense, also to *foretell* and *prophecy*; because the Germans as Tacitus informs us, used to divine and foretell Things to come by the *whinnying* and *neighing* of their Horses.

(Brand 1810: 353)

Raphael's *raison d'être* was 'witchery.' As he wrote in the 1830 almanac:

'I behold (in a dark vista of the future, which science illumines) the sea foaming and raging with fury; the earth quaking; rivers overwhelming their bounds; torrents roaring; the winds of heaven let loose to work his work of vengeance' (1829: 17).

'Imagality': the interpretability of the visual

The beautiful annual Hieroglyphics gave Raphael's publications their unique character and were central to a clever piece of marketing. They were offered as hostages to the future, pregnant spaces of interpretability whose precise meanings would be revealed after the event in the following year's almanac. Of course, the readers were obliged to purchase the following year's publication if they wanted to benefit from such revelation.

The 1830 almanac announced the 'remarkable fulfilment of the predictions prefigured in the hieroglyphic for 1829,' an image that sadly it has not been possible to source.⁴ Raphael's exegesis provides ample testimony of both the extent to which certain simmering political events could be safely predicted and also of the way in which the visual offered a productive indeterminacy, a field of interpretative possibility available for sculpting once the actual events that they supposedly prefigured was known. Hence Raphael claimed a presentiment of 'The Catholic Bill and its contingencies' in

the symbol of *a monk wearing a mask, with a flag in one hand, having thereon the words RELIGIOUS LIBERTY*; in the other hand, a sword: while at

a distance off *a lamb is seen, advanced in growth and pawing in triumph*; at his feet a serpent, monk's cowl, and the various insignia of Popery – plainly prefiguring *the fashionable apostacy* of the times, and the *mask* under which the Catholics obtained Government to sanction their menacing petitions.

(Raphael 1930: 7)

Raphael's description of the success of his 'Omens relative to Spain' illustrates a spectrum of interpretability from the denotative to the connotative. A 'celestial figure [...] seen holding a banner, with the word "*Hispaniola*," the appellation of Spain, first *pointing to a tomb*, which denotes the death of the Spanish Queen that took place,' seems impressively precise (although of course an ailing monarch is quite likely to die) whereas the claim that the banner on which is written '*Resurgam* [...] denote[s] the efforts now made by Spain to assume her former dominion in the New World – witness the famous *Mexican expedition* now approaching the shores of the South American regions' seems more contentious. Nevertheless, Raphael proclaims his belief that 'the *literality*⁵ of these portentous omens are too obvious to be explained away on any other principle' before then drawing attention to his wonderful escape clause: 'There are also others which I leave the reader to decipher by *the events that have yet to follow*.' In the 1843 issue this escape clause is presented more poetically: 'the remaining events [...] are still hidden in the womb of time' (1842: 71). Because each new almanac went to press between September and November in each year a significant number of unfulfilled prophecies could be assumed to prefigure events which were yet to pass.

The Hieroglyphic for 1831 (Figure 12.2) featured in its lower register a striking skeleton waving a 'reform' and astrological nativity flag astride a coffin inscribed 'Lo The Time is Come.' The top register features an urban conflagration and enormous ships alongside a cartouche predicting that 'MONARCHS TREMBLE NATIONS MOURN, Ocean[s] rage and Cities burn, Gazing with a prophet's eye, THUS HATH RAPHAEL READ THE SKY.'

The following year's almanac, published in November 1831 (sic), presented the previous edition's Hieroglyphic as a prediction 'relative to the March of the fearful Cholera Morbus.' Reading the image retrospectively with the benefit of a largely unfolded year, Raphael urges the reader to

take into thy notice [...] the fearful Signs in my Hieroglyphical Omens for the year 1831. The Trio of Coffins, Enthroning of Death, &c., and thou wilt be enabled to establish Astrological foresight beyond the shadow of a doubt. Alas! Gentle Reader! TOO TRULY has thy friend Raphael's Predictions, in this instance, been fulfilled!

What makes these hieroglyphic frontispieces much more than a matter of antiquarian interest is their foregrounding of questions of interpretability. Clearly, the challenge to the creator of the hieroglyphic involved the production of images that were both seemingly predictively specific – mobilising the

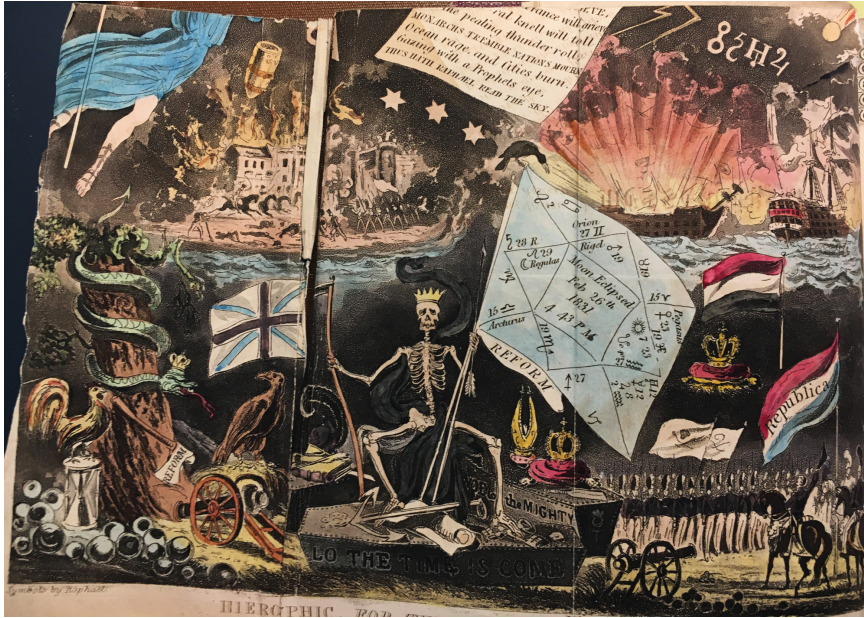


Figure 12.2 Hieroglyphic for the Eventful Year 1831, Handcoloured copperplate engraving.

Source: Private Collection.

concrete certainty of mimesis – but which were *also* sufficiently vague that they would not become hostages to fortune.

We can see further evidence of the ambivalence of the visual, and the reliability of various probable events in Raphael’s ‘Explanation of the scenes in the hieroglyphic of 1841’ published in the 1842 *Prophetic Messenger* (Figure 12.3). Rather unusually, Raphael is able to rationalise most of the elements of the hieroglyphic (excepting the central motif and the vignette to its left). The building site at the top left is explained as a presentiment of the number of new Catholic buildings erected; the top centre vignette depicting courtiers flanking a veiled throne is explained as ‘emblematic of the recent occasions which have rendered it necessary for our Court to go into mourning.’

The top right scene requires a more elaborate exegesis. Described as a ‘lion and cock, in a menacing attitude,’ these are, Raphael continues, emblems of France and England and ‘no one who has read the public journals, detailing the warlike preparations in both countries [...] can doubt the application of this part of the hieroglyphic.’ The eagle on the rock, he continues, represents Russia and ‘shows the wily policy of that country, ready to seize upon the slightest opportunity afforded by either country.’ The scene below this, which one might suppose to depict the poor desperately catching stray grains of wheat (the protectionist Corn Laws, which inflated the price of wheat, would



Figure 12.3 Hieroglyphic for the Eventful Year 1841, Handcoloured copperplate engraving.

Source: Private Collection.

not be repealed until 1846), is said, after the event, to represent ‘an English porter, carrying out bales of gold to foreigners; otherwise it is typical that immense sums of gold should be drained out of this country and expended on foreign shores.’

After a brief explanation of the right-hand corner scene, Raphael concludes his tour by noting that

At the bottom we observe Mars and Bellona in their war chariots followed by Disease and Death. In the perspective we observe ships of war engaged in action; while on the margin of the sea are seen factories and the implements of commerce. This has reference to our warlike proceedings with China, arising from the treacherous proceedings of the Chinese with our countrymen, respecting our commercial relations with the Celestial Empire.

(Raphael 1841: 67)

The First Opium War (1839–1842) was already unfolding when the original hieroglyphic was composed and the modern viewer beholding that quay-side scene at the bottom left of the image is likely to find nothing either denotatively, or even connotatively, ‘Chinese’ there.

Raphael’s 1832 almanac described the contents of the hieroglyphic as ‘Remarkable Events, Celestial and Terrestrial, Podigies, Revolutions, Insurrections, Outrages, Convulsions of Nature, Political Occurrences, Remarkable Deaths etc. etc.’ This list encompasses many of the topics that feature as staple ingredients of modern ‘news.’ However if we are nevertheless able to detect what would later be extracted and secularised as ‘horizontal’ narratives we should be clear that in Raphael’s worldview the ‘Terrestrial’ is always causatively linked to the ‘Celestial.’ This is an interrelation, an aspect of providentialist cosmology that is perfectly captured by Auerbach:

In this conception an occurrence on earth signifies not only itself but at the same time another, which it predicts or confirms, without prejudice to the power of its concrete reality here and now. The connection between occurrences is not regarded as primarily a chronological or causal development but as a oneness within the divine plan.

(Auerbach 1953: 490)

Raphael’s hieroglyphic frontispieces are the origin of the news, a space where the messianic and the contingent jostle together in a ‘oneness within the divine plan’ that is also alert to contingency and the onward flow of history.

In this respect the astrology of the early and mid-nineteenth century imagines a very different addressee from the one vividly sketched by Theodor Adorno in his 1930s study of astrological columns in Los Angeles newspapers. Raphael’s addressee is not yet individuated in the manner that Adorno describes (‘The standard image is that of a young person or one in his early thirties, vigorous in his professional pursuits, given to hearty pleasures’ Adorno 1994: 83). Raphael’s readers are imagined as a collective with highly messianic and nationalistic concerns and suggest a striking contrast with their twentieth-century North American successors (‘the striking feature [is] the almost complete absence of any reference to the major mostly solemn speculations about the fate of mankind at large’ – Adorno 1994: 66). By the early twentieth century, however, Raphael’s addressees appear increasingly individuated. The 1913 *Prophetic Messenger* is prefaced by an advertisement for Raphael’s *Horary Astrology* featuring a list of questions which this new publication would answer. Several reflected anxieties about impending conflict (‘Will two armies fight?’; ‘Shall I return from the War?’) but many more were focused on individual financial and marital success (‘Shall we be successful in business?’; ‘When shall I marry?’; ‘Shall I be happy in marriage?’ – Raphael 1912: 2).

Social theory and temporality

This chapter opened with Shelley's claim that 'Poets are [...] the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present.' This was a common Romantic ambition (one also thinks of William Blake's insistence, c. 1808, in his annotations to Joshua Reynolds *Discourses on Art* that 'Empire follows Art and Not Vice Versa as Englishmen suppose' – Blake 1927: 970). The rise of Durkheimian explanations did much to reverse this causal order. Since Durkheim, Latour has famously written: 'To become a social scientist is to realise that the inner properties of objects do not count, that they are mere receptacles for human categories' (1993[1991]: 52). Objects and images in this account are terminal deposits for earlier thoughts: their embrace of futurity, their prophetic potential, is extinguished. In this spirit Durkheim announced that 'the totem is not only a name; it is an *emblem*, a virtual coat of arms whose resemblance to the heraldic coat of arms has often been noted' (Durkheim 2001: 94, emphasis added), 'emblem' suggesting the antithesis of hieroglyphic, being backward looking rather than shadowed by futurity.

It would be misleading, however, to see Latour's critique as marking a new and previously unanticipated break from Durkheim: many other thinkers and writers – broadly post-structuralist in temperament – have proposed more radical ideas. Jacques Attali, for instance, makes a striking argument that sight's predictive abilities have 'dimmed': 'it no longer sees into our future, having constructed a present made of abstraction, nonsense, and silence.' 'By listening to noise,' by contrast 'we can better understand where the folly of men and their calculations is leading us' (Attali 1985: 3). Attali adumbrates a sonic echo of the hieroglyphic suggesting that 'noise [...] constitutes the audible waveband of the vibrations and signs that make up society' (1985: 4). Like Adorno and Lyotard, though noticeably less so than Kracauer, Attali envisages both a progressive aesthetics of futurity⁶ and the stale nostalgia of the 'popular.'⁷ (Kracauer's work was for the large part dedicated 'anthropologically' to the erosion of such stark political adjudications). Attali in certain respects inverts Durkheim's model, appropriating Nietzsche's claim that art was a Dionysian mirror of the world and explaining that it 'is a mirror, because as a mode of immaterial production it relates to the structuring of theoretical paradigms, far ahead of concrete production' (1985: 9). Attali suggests here that effervescence and objectification have different materialities and different 'weights.' It is precisely music's 'code,' its 'speed' and immateriality, that allows it to operate in advance of the material world. As he puts it

Music is prophecy. Its styles and economic organisation are ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than the material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code. It makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible.

(1985: 11)

Might we not make a similar, if less dramatic, claim for Raphael's Hieroglyphics? Might it be that their visual code, their ambivalent 'imagality' (both indeterminate and capable of conjuring ex-post-facto visual certainty) enabled them to seduce the shadow of futurity?

Conclusion: the photograph, a small window on the future

Inspired by our ruminations on Raphael, the same claim can surely also be made for the photograph, or at least certain iterations of it. Roland Barthes's contrast between 'the civilised code of perfect illusions' (the stale and used-up way in which photography is normally approached) and the photograph's 'wakening of intractable reality' (1981: 119), for which he argues so passionately, is nowhere more evident, and more illuminatingly present than in the work of the French sociologist and ethnographer Pierre Bourdieu. In Bourdieu's case the conflict lies in his claims for the perfect (we might say 'emblematic') illusions that French vernacular photography delivers (illusions he reproduces in his own analysis of these practices), and conversely the intractable reality that his own fieldwork photography in late 1950s Algeria was forced to confront (for a fuller discussion of which see Pinney 2016).

Bourdieu's ethnographic study of French photography is exemplary of what we might think of as pre-Latourian anthropology – that is, a form of analysis which is Marxist in intent, but indebted to Emile Durkheim. Bourdieu's social science, while politically radical in its critique, is conventional in its basic modality: he treats photographs as crystallisations of sociality, terming them 'solemnisations,' something akin to Durkheimian 'collective representations,' like the totemic kangaroo glimpsed in the twilight of the desert, running away (Cladis 2001: xix). It is against this backdrop that we can place Barthes's sense of the 'oddness' that fellow scholars had not noticed photography's potential for 'disturbance' (1981: 12), for in the work of those such as Bourdieu the apparent work of the photograph was to merely serve (as Latour would later phrase it) as a screen onto which the cinema of society was projected.

In *Un art moyen* (Bourdieu 1996[1965]; translation *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*, 1990) Bourdieu is very interested in how as he puts it the 'Portrait Gallery has been democratised' and photographers have become their own 'historiographers' (1990: 30), suggesting that photography as a practice is not without transformative power. However, overwhelmingly his stress is on the manner in which photography acts as a mechanism of 'integration' (1990: 19), a 'solemnisation' (1996[1965]: 27) *after the fact* that can be read as a 'sociogram' (1990: 23). The family photographic album objectifies 'social memory' and has, as he says in a memorable metaphor, 'all the clarity of a faithfully visited gravestone' (1990: 30–31). Strikingly, in Bourdieu, the 'community' or 'group' always pre-exists the photographic act whose destiny is to further integrate that group. The photograph is always a 'reaffirm[ation]' (1990: 29). When he writes of acts which 'must be photographed because it realises the image that the group seeks to give of itself as a group' (1990: 24),

the camera serves only to make manifest a kind of visual echo of what the group has *already* achieved. As Bourdieu further states in a characteristically tautological manner, ‘The photograph itself is usually nothing but the group’s image of its own integration’ (1990: 26). There is no room here for contingency, or the unexpected. Indeed photographic activity appears predestined and ultimately meaningless: ‘one may only photograph what one must photograph’ and these images become a sort of ‘ideogram or allegory,’ signs ‘to which one does not have the key’ (1990: 36–7). *Un art moyen* is a work lacking in surprises and typifies the kind of analysis attacked by Lyotard in which the ‘aesthetic’ is granted visibility only in order to demonstrate its ideological function (Carroll 1987: 26).

Walter Benjamin’s writing on photography offers a stark alternative to Bourdieu. Recall his question: ‘Isn’t it the task of the photographer – descendant of the augurs and haruspices – to reveal guilt and point out the guilty in his pictures?’ For Benjamin, as for Bourdieu, photographs are allegories, but they are portents of a future for which there might be a key. Like Kracauer, Benjamin searches for the future in the archaic. Both Kracauer and Benjamin (and perhaps the Raphael of *The Prophetic Messenger*) would doubtless have agreed with Henri Focillon’s insight that ‘If the time of a work of art were the time of all history, and if all history progressed at the same rate, these questions would never need to be asked’ (Focillon 1992: 141). It is these unsettled temporalities that the study of images forces us to confront. What time is the visual?

Notes

- 1 What Umberto Eco termed ‘syntagmatic concatenation imbued with argumentative capacity’ (cited in Burgin 1982: 38).
- 2 Heywood, writing in 1900 gives the figures during the previous five years of 158,000 to 162,000 (Heywood 1900: n.p.).
- 3 Article in the 1845 *Prophetic Messenger* entitled ‘On Hieroglyphical Devices, with Illustrations from Rare Examples’ 46.
- 4 The British Library catalogue lists Raphael’s almanacs from 1827, but many issues seem to have been lost and many are very damaged.
- 5 Raphael claims a kind of ocular self-evidence for his predictions: in the 1841 issue, commenting on the previous year’s hieroglyphic’s predictions he writes that ‘An explanation of the plate is almost casting a doubt upon the powers of observation of our readers’ (1841: 67). The term ‘literality’ used by Raphael (and derived from Biblical hermeneutics) in fact points to a ‘seeing and believing’ which might more properly be termed ‘imagality.’
- 6 Recall Lyotard’s insistence that ‘Something is always happening in the arts [...] that incandesces the embers glowing in the depths of society’ (cited by Carroll 1987: 28).
- 7 ‘The monologue of standardised, stereotyped music accompanies and hems in a daily life in which in reality no one has the right to speak any more’ (1985: 8).