

Editorial

Street Photography Reframed

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Afraid of contagion? Stand six feet from the next protester, and it will only make a more powerful image on TV. But we need to reclaim the street.

Davis (2020a)

When I began writing this Introduction in April 2020, the streets were empty. Or, to be more precise, this was what I was seeing in the many photographs that were making up the daily news. Day after day, photographs of empty piazzas in Rome and Venice were filling up my news feed. I was seeing or being shown the impact of the spread of the coronavirus on public spaces. There was no traffic on the Brooklyn Bridge and no footfall through London’s Trafalgar Square. New York’s Times Square also appeared to be at a complete and total standstill (Figure 1). As of March 2020, public life in the streets of most financial capitals had been put on hold for the foreseeable future. It was eerie—or so I was told. This was the word being used over and over again in the headlines.¹ It seems that those sitting at home needed to be haunted—though not necessarily by what once was. They needed to be haunted by what might no longer be: living in public, being in the streets, loitering, meandering, and shopping.²



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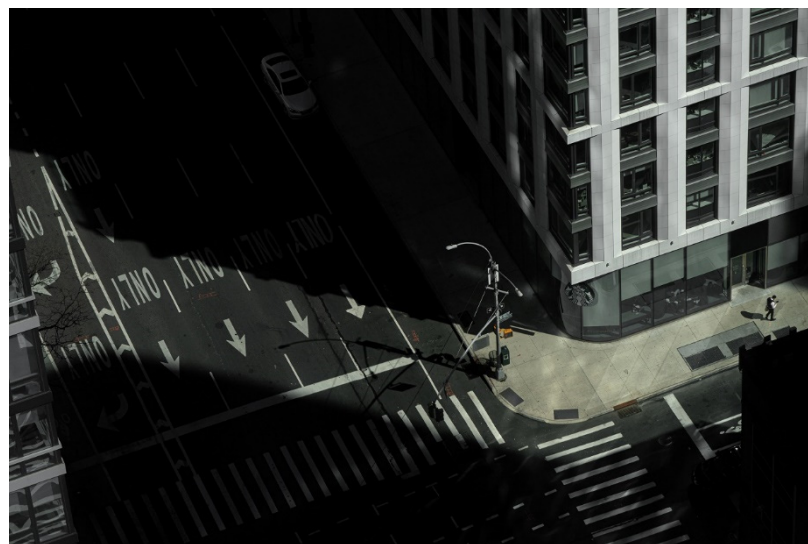


Figure 1. Empty street in New York City following the outbreak of coronavirus. 15 March 2020. Photo: REUTERS/Jeenah Moon.

¹ The headlines are numerous. See, for example, (Wilson 2020; Gale and Conroy 2020; Daniels 2020).

² On the condition of being haunted by the future, see (Fisher 2012). See as well the short statement penned by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (Agamben 2020a). Published in March 2020, in advance of the escalation of the virus in Italy and around the world, the essay encapsulates its argument about the end of public life as follows: “We might say that once terrorism was exhausted as a justification for exceptional measures, the invention of an epidemic offer the ideal pretext for broadening such measures beyond any limitation.” Swift criticism of the philosopher’s statement as well as new evidence that the virus was spreading, prompted a clarification. Agamben did not temper his initial response to calls for a quarantine. The “gravity of the disease” aside, he notes, “fear is a poor advisor” (Agamben 2020b).

I scrapped this beginning many times. Before I could finish my thought—attend to what I thought I was supposed to be seeing when I looked at countless photographs of empty streets and public squares—the streets (or at least the records of them) were full again.³ As of May 2020, my daily news feed was made up of photographs of people, millions of them, moving through streets all over the world (Figure 2). They were marching and chanting—protesting—against the murder of George Floyd and systemic anti-Black violence.⁴ The opposition between the records of street life in the spring of 2020 is striking, and not simply because it neatly or purposely exacerbates the violence of civil unrest—because it makes a raised hand or a clenched fist appear that much more palpable, that much more strident. The opposition is striking because it exacerbates the violence of civic life. Records of protesters filling the streets of numerous cities, large and small, suggest that for much of the world’s population, there is no future to be haunted by. For many marching and chanting—protesting—the streets are not public. They are carceral and alienating.⁵ The streets, as urban theorist and historian Mike Davis notes in his response to the failure of the Trump administration to prepare for the future—for *what they knew was coming*—need to be reclaimed.⁶ They need to be *made* public.



Figure 2. People gather during an anti-racism protest in Trafalgar Square on 20 June 2020. Photo: Hollie Adams/Getty Images.

³ There has been extended discussion of the ideological charge of emptiness in recent studies of landscape photography, especially in light of new debates about ecological catastrophes and the periodization of the Anthropocene. For just one essay that attends to the politics of photographic depopulation with regard to the destruction wrought by late capitalism, see (Toscano 2016).

⁴ The waves of protests that erupted across cities around the world in response to the murder of George Floyd dominated the news cycle in June and July 2020. However, numerous other protest movements developed or returned to the streets in the wake of national quarantine orders. In April 2020, hunger protests erupted in Lebanon. These preceded the riots that began in August 2020, following the explosion in the port of Beirut that killed close to 200 people, injured more than 7500, and left 300,000 homeless. Anti-extradition protests in Hong Kong, which had begun in June 2019, continued through the spring of 2020. Photographs of these protests returned to the news cycle that May.

⁵ In *Carceral Capitalism*, Jackie Wang describes the streets of Ferguson, Missouri, the site of protests and violent clashes with the police following the murder of Michael Brown in August 2014, as a “carceral space,” noting that due to fine farming and other forms of racist policing, residents are “unable to control how resources are distributed in the city they inhabit—or even to go to work because of outstanding warrants and/or fear that they will be slammed with more tickets and fines.” “When municipalities develop a parasitic relationship to residents,” she continues, “they make it impossible for residents to actually feel at home in the place where they live, walk, work, love, and chill. In this sense, policing is not about crime control or public safety, but about the regulation of people’s lives—their movements and modes of being in the world.” See ((Wang 2018, pp. 189–91); emphasis in the original.) In drawing attention to Wang’s thesis, I am not conflating the Ferguson protests with those that took place in May and June 2020. Rather, I am pointing to the fact that international outcry against police violence and the expansion of an abolition movement under the banner of Black Lives Matters make evident the need to extend the history of carceral capitalism.

⁶ To quote Davis: “So Corona walks through the front door as a familiar monster” (Davis 2020b, p. 7). For an extended discussion of the ways in which “the future” was purposely ignored, including efforts to disincentivize for-profit drug companies from producing vaccines and the Trump administration’s decision to defund USAID’s Emerging Pandemic Threats PREDICT program just three months before the outbreak of the coronavirus in Wuhan, see Davis’ recently revised and updated 2005 study of the Avian flu pandemic (Davis 2020c).

Doing so, Davis suggests, is a matter of representation. It is a matter, as the epigraph to this Introduction notes, of making a “powerful image” on TV—or on whatever screen those “at home” might be working and watching. Now, more than ever, the relationship between inside and outside cannot be mapped onto the difference between private and public; or, as Davis hints, this truism is the myth. We have been living in this loop between the living room and the screen since at least the 1960s. Davis’ call to step into the street and “make an image” recalls the slogan that was heard in the streets and on television in August 1968: “the whole world is watching.” The refrain was chanted by anti-Vietnam war protesters as they were being beaten by police outside the Democratic National Convention in Chicago and live on TV.⁷ It is still heard and read in the streets today (Figure 3).⁸



Figure 3. Juneteenth Black Lives Matter George Floyd Protest, Teaneck, New Jersey. 19 June 2020. Photo: Julian Guadalupe/Alamy Stock Photo.

The call for this Special Issue preceded the emergence of the latest pandemic and its related protests, and most of the essays that follow were published in advance of March 2020.⁹ I begin here, nonetheless, because I want to attend to the repetitions that precede and exceed the photographic frame. I begin here, that is, because I want to defuse the singularity of this moment and its photographic record. This is also what I think Davis is doing, and where we can locate the politics of his charge that reclaiming the streets is a matter of making a “good” image. “Coronavirus is the old movie that we’ve been watching over and over again since Richard Preston’s *The Hot Zone* (1994) introduced us to the exterminating demon, born in a mysterious bat cave in Central Africa, known as Ebola” is how he opens his account of this pandemic (Davis 2020b, p. 7). His point is not that the culture industry anticipates reality, an argument of and about postmodernism.¹⁰ It is that we have seen this “monster” before. Claims for the singularity and immediacy of the record, Davis instructs, purposely disabuse us of the need to think, act, and work historically. They are designed to conceal the fact that the “new” crisis was anticipated—that it *was* the future.¹¹

⁷ On this protest slogan and coverage of the Democratic National Convention in August 1968, see (Gitlin [1980] 2003).

⁸ The slogan was revived at the anti-WTO protests in Seattle, Washington in 1999 and popularized in the 2007 film *Battle in Seattle*. For an example of its recent reemergence, see (Goldhammer 2014).

⁹ Though the protests in response to the murder of George Floyd must be seen in the context of the expansion of the Black Lives Matter movement, their escalation has been linked to the racial disparity in the impact of the coronavirus, with the highest rates of death in racial and ethnic minority groups.

¹⁰ For the postmodern argument, see (Jameson 1991).

¹¹ Significantly, in Davis’ account, the crisis is not the pandemic. It is the lack of response to the pandemic, which is also, he argues, its cause. The crisis, Davis notes, dates back to Reagan (Davis 2020b, p. 10). Likewise, the monster named in the title of the essay, is not the virus. It is neoliberalism.

To be clear, my concern is not to remind readers of what they already know: that photographs are multiple and mediated. Rather, it is to consider how and why—as much as when—the need for immediacy became urgent, vital. Or, at least, it is to suggest that this questioning is necessary. It is necessary to historicize the emergence of a photographic genre defined by the claim to be “there” to be present—to having been made “on the sly”, as Henri Cartier-Bresson explored in his account of how he could use photography “to preserve life in the act of living” (Cartier-Bresson 1952, n.p.). Significantly, none of the essays in this issue take street photography as a given, as a practice that is “born in the street.” Rather, their authors insist, often emphatically, on the need to call into question this very assumption or claim. In turn, what emerges in the pages that follow is a concern with the writing of history, with attending to the ways in which the history of street photography has been written such that the street is given—is there—and the public is either present or absent, as opposed to *made*.

Most histories of street photography begin at the beginning, not of photography but of the emergence of the street as a site of representation. Victor Hugo’s novels have been flagged as one such beginning; Édouard Manet’s paintings of picnics and parties as another.¹² Street photography, it is commonly argued, began before, if not beyond, the arrival of photography. It began with the emergence of a desire to be on display, to be one with the crowd, to go around “botanizing on the asphalt,” as the German literary critic Walter Benjamin put it with reference to Charles Baudelaire’s writing about the activities of the *flâneur* (Benjamin 1997, p. 36).¹³ Indeed, in the opening pages of their detailed history of street photography, Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz put it thus: “the street photographer is a kind of Constantin Guys with a camera.” Like that “passionate lover of crowds and incognitos,” the authors continue by quoting Baudelaire’s description of the maneuvers and meanderings of that “painter of modern life,” the street photographer is “to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world.” (Westerbeck and Meyerowitz 1994, p. 41). The birth of street photography, in short, belongs to, is inseparable from, the birth of Western modernism. The two social forms were born together—or this is the way the story is told.

There is nothing wrong with this story. I do not recount it in order to dispute it. My goal in these introductory pages is not to provide another or different history of street photography. Rather, I am interested in how this story is written, with how, more specifically, its beginning is anticipated by its end. Despite claims otherwise, despite claiming that street photography began with the storming of the barricades or with its representation in the prose of Hugo and his contemporaries, histories aligning street photography with the birth of modernism begin in the 1950s. They begin, that is, with the so-called apotheosis of the genre that has yet to be born, that is born in the writing and work of Henri Cartier-Bresson (Figure 4). *The Decisive Moment*, the 1952 publication of Cartier-Bresson’s work and words, gives the genre a vocabulary and a history. It configures it as a social form. In fact, Westerbeck and Meyerowitz open their study by asking readers: Which came first? The street or Cartier-Bresson? In their words:

[Cartier-Bresson] sees so many things we cannot that we wonder whether the street itself isn’t just the product of his imagination, as if he invented it the way that other Surrealist photographers invent their visions in their studios and their darkrooms. Yet in a sense it is the street that invented him. Life in the street, especially in Paris, has created a modern sensibility that photographers like Cartier-Bresson embody. (Westerbeck and Meyerowitz 1994, p. 39)

¹² See, for example, the two most widely referenced English-language histories of the genre: (Westerbeck and Meyerowitz 1994; Scott 2007).

¹³ Julian Stallabrass discusses street photography in these terms, though instead of starting in the 1860s, with the writings of Charles Baudelaire and the movements of the *flâneur*, he begins in the 1930s, with Benjamin’s historicization of this figure and his forms. In doing so, he subtly dislocates the origin of the genre from the 1850s, locating it in the 1930s; or, to be more exact, as a response to processes of modernization shaping the upheavals of the interwar period, including the rise of the illustrated press. See (Stallabrass 2002).

Written from Cartier-Bresson to Hugo or Manet and back again, the history of the genre becomes a story about the invention of the decisive moment. It is written in order to welcome Cartier-Bresson as much as make inevitable his arrival.



Figure 4. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Spain, Andalusia, Seville*, 1933. © Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos.

If I call attention to this determinism, it is not because I want to insist that photography made in the street has been drawn into a story about the medium's plasticity, about the desire for the coincidence of subject and form. "To me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression" is the line that often gets quoted as a way to define the decisive moment, the goal of working in the street and in accord with its motion (Cartier-Bresson 1952, n.p.). The photograph of the children playing among the ruins of Seville three years in advance of the civil war that the photograph has come to represent is now taken as evidence of the realization of just that synchrony between subject and object. No doubt, this desire for formal equilibrium—for the framed frame—does script street photography's history. However, my taking stock of the history's determinism serves to disclose another end: the need to write the history of street photography into a story about the formalization of the century-old desire to be in the street and at home simultaneously. The *flâneur* does not just "botanize on the asphalt," slowly and methodically take stock of life on the streets, even make it foreign; in doing so, he, to quote Baudelaire again, "sets up house in the heart of the multitude." Though rarely defined in these terms, this is the activity that Cartier-Bresson writes into the history of photography in the 1950s. In the essay prefacing the 126 photographs making up *The Decisive Moment*, Cartier-Bresson narrates a practice in which he seeks to make himself present so that he can become absent. "Tiptoe" is one of the postures he uses to describe his bodily movements; approach "à pas de loup" or "stealthily" is another (Cartier-Bresson [1951] 2017, p. 11.) The desire for this ghostly "presence" is summed up in the following lines of the eponymous essay that was first conceived of as a how-to or a primer:

I prowled the streets all day, feeling very strung-up and ready to pounce, determined to "trap" life—to preserve life in the act of living. Above all, I craved to seize, in the confines of a single photograph, the whole essence of some situation that was in the process of unrolling itself before my eyes. (Cartier-Bresson 1952, n.p.)¹⁴

¹⁴ On the origins of *The Decisive Moment* and its intended use, see (Chéroux 2014a).

Cartier-Bresson is not “there.” He never was. He was always making a picture, framing a scene that was unrolling before his eyes. The street, as Benjamin dialectically defined it in the 1930s, when, notably, Cartier-Bresson was playing and pouncing and shooting, is conceived of as both a landscape and a living room.¹⁵ It is a space that can be and is already possessed.

This is street photography. It is a social form invented in the 1950s to formalize the play between presence and absence; or, at least, to ensure that that play—the pleasure of the hunt, as Cartier-Bresson describes it—was still (would still be) possible. This story, though, is also written backwards, written from the end of the 1960s, when the broadcasting of the coverage of the war in Vietnam, including its many protests, made it seem as if the street and the home could no longer—or not much longer—remain separate, divided. There are many versions of this story that could be recounted here, though the one that comes to mind and is recounted by several authors in their contributions to this issue is the one told about the presentation of photography on the walls of New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in the late 1960s. This is not a story about photography becoming or being art—or it is not only that. Nor is it a story about photographers becoming authors, even though this is also what happened in the 1960s.¹⁶ It is a story about photography becoming private. One line from the publicity for one of the most celebrated exhibitions of the period, *New Documents*, will do as a way to narrate this story of photography’s turn inward. Opening in February 1967 and showcasing the work of three young photographers—Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand—the exhibition was presented by its curator, John Szarkowski, as follows: “In the past decade this new generation of photographers has redirected the technique and aesthetic of documentary photography to more personal ends. Their aim has been not to reform life but to know it, not to persuade but to understand” ([Museum of Modern Art 1967](#), p. 1).

These lines are quoted by several authors of the essays that follow. They have become shorthand for defining photography’s modernist turn: its turn away from the social. The new photographer, according to Szarkowski, did not step into the street in order to record it; she stepped into the street in order to record herself. Presented to the public at the height of the civil rights movement, at the moment when the streets were being reclaimed as a site for the display of police violence, the “new documents,” including Arbus’ elegiac photographs of the residents of a nudist camp and Friedlander’s “street scenes,” records of himself made into a record, reflected in windows, becoming shadow, forcefully withdrew the social from photography by withdrawing the category of reportage from photography’s repertoire. Photography, it could be argued, became art in order not to continue being news. To quote one of the most stunning evocations of the desire or need to turn photography inward as well as evidence of its persistence as a thesis for making sense of the work of American photography for at least the next decade, here is Szarkowski’s account of the failure of photography to report on the war in Vietnam:

More recently, photography’s failure to explain large public issues has become increasingly clear. No photographs from the Vietnam War—neither Donald McCullin’s stomach-wrenching documents of atrocity and horror nor the late Larry Burrows’s superb and disturbingly conventional battle scenes—begin to serve either as explication or symbol for that enormity. For most Americans the meaning of the Vietnam War was not political, or military, or even ethical, but psychological. It brought to us a sudden, unambiguous knowledge of moral frailty and failure. The photographs that best *memorialize* the shock of that new knowledge were perhaps made halfway around the world, by Diane Arbus. ([Szarkowski 1978](#), p. 13; emphasis added)

¹⁵ Stallabrass addresses Benjamin’s reading of Baudelaire’s prose in these terms, attending to the way in which the street is also, for the *flâneur*, at least, an interior. See ([Stallabrass 2002](#), n.p.; [Benjamin 1997](#), p. 37).

¹⁶ For this story, see, foremost, Abigail Solomon-Godeau’s writing on modernism and its limits in her seminal collection of essays, *Photography at the Docks* ([Solomon-Godeau 1991](#)). See as well her discussion of the invention of street photography in these terms in ([Solomon-Godeau 2017](#)).

Photography could hold the war in Vietnam, but not as a news event. With Arbus' penchant for the marginalized in hand, the shock of the war as much as the war itself, Szarkowski imagined, could be contained. Personalized, made subjective; it could also be made history.

This, for Szarkowski, was photography's task, even or especially when it was used by those roaming the streets with a camera attached to their eye, eager to produce journalism. Describing his 1965 exhibition *The Photo Essay*, in which spreads from the pages of several American and European magazines were blown up and appended to the walls, Szarkowski explains: "During the decade after World War II the photographer became an individual observor (sic), and emphasis shifted to the quality of his personal vision. The subject of these essays was often not the exterior event but the photographer's reaction to it" ([Museum of Modern Art 1965](#), pp. 1–2).¹⁷ By the 1950s, the subjective, according to Szarkowski, had officially trumped the objective. "Today," he continues, "some essay photographers are questioning the premise of the picture story and suggesting that perhaps the picture should be judged for its intrinsic meaning and not just as one element in a unified statement" ([Museum of Modern Art 1965](#), p. 2). There is certainly an echo of the decisive moment here. Cartier-Bresson's claim for the singularity of the image as much as for the single image's ability to hold the essence of it all shored up Szarkowski's formalism. Like others shaping the history of modernism in the 1960s, including Clement Greenberg, Szarkowski stressed the self-sufficiency of an image—of art; he also, like Greenberg, scripted the apotheosis of modernism into a story about art's eventual or necessary jettisoning of narrative.¹⁸ Art's autonomy is a revolt against its status as "vessels of communication" is how Greenberg once put it ([Greenberg \[1940\] 1986](#), p. 28). Or, as Rosalind Krauss stated in her account of this modernist myth: in the formalist camp, there was a "will to silence" ([Krauss \[1979\] 1985](#), p. 9).

When Szarkowski turned photography inwards, he cut off photography's semantic potential or charge. He did so even though, as was the case with *The Photo Essay*, he left the photographs on the page (Figure 5). Szarkowski did not deny the photograph its support, its editorial affiliations and its multiple authors.¹⁹ He simply insisted on photography's "narrative poverty." This was the phrase that Szarkowski used to describe the work of Cartier-Bresson's contemporary and comrade, Robert Capa. Writing in 1966, in the catalogue for his first major exhibition at MoMA, *The Photographer's Eye*, Szarkowski explains: "The great war photographer Robert Capa expressed both the narrative poverty and the symbolic power of photography when he said, 'If your pictures aren't good, you're not close enough'" ([Szarkowski 1966](#), p. 9). This is a perverse take on the work of a photographer who, like Cartier-Bresson, made photographs for the page and for the news. The perversity of this assessment, though, is not located in the desire to strip Capa's work of its context, to make it into an icon. The news did—does—that. Szarkowski's privileging of immediacy—getting close up, being there—strips photography of the need as much as its potential to make time, to write history.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that this thesis emerged in the mid-1960s and framed Szarkowski's curatorial work for the next decade. In the catalogue for the 1978 exhibition *Mirrors and Windows*, quoted above, Szarkowski insists that "the general movement of American photography during the past quarter century has been from public to private concerns." Significantly, he takes the work of Robert Frank as evidence of this turn inward. See ([Szarkowski 1978](#), p. 11). See as well his framing of the work of André Kertész, a photographer who, like Frank, is now part of the street photography canon ([Szarkowski 1964](#)).

¹⁸ Christopher Phillips explores Szarkowski's debt to Clement Greenberg and American formalism in these terms in his important study of photography's emergence as an art at the Museum of Modern Art. See ([Phillips 1982](#), pp. 57–61).

¹⁹ The checklist for *The Photo Essay* lists the names of the photographer and the magazine editor. See "Checklist," *The Photo Essay* [MoMA Exh. #760, 16 March to 16 May 1965], Department of Photography Records, Museum of Modern Art, New York. See as well ([Bair 2021](#)) on the history of the photo essay and its presentation on the walls of the Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 5. Installation view of *The Photo Essay*. 16 March–16 May 1965. Photographer: Rolf Petersen (© The Museum of Modern Art, New York). Gelatin silver print, 16.5 × 24.1 cm. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Object Number: IN760.11. © 2021 Digital Image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

In the 1960s, on the walls of the Museum of Modern Art, photography was powerfully impoverished. It entered into what Allan Sekula once referred to as the “late modernist cul-de-sac” (Sekula [1978] 1984, p. xii). This is the perfect metaphor for the “dead end” of Szarkowski’s modernism, for a reconceptualization of the plasticity of art that ensures the rule of the single anecdote.²⁰ History, to be sure, is not dispensed with in Szarkowski’s account of photography’s development; it is rendered fixed and finite. Photography, Sekula explains, “was a visual art for which, unlike cinema, discontinuity and incompleteness seemed fundamental, despite attempts to construct reassuring notions of organic unity and coherence at the level of the single image” (Sekula [1978] 1984, p. xii). Sekula’s critique of modernism and Szarkowski exceeds the call for more than one image, for series and sequences and pages, as is often argued.²¹ Multiplicity is not enough. Narrativity—futurity—is what matters. Photographs are never finite, done. There is always the gap, where another story could or should be told, made. There is not authorship so much as agency.

Street photography was not born in the street; it emerged as another means of claiming modernism for photography. Said differently, street photography was invented in order to shore up a promise for a division between public and private that was already in need of shoring up by the middle of the nineteenth century—hence, the desire to go around “botanizing,” to go around making categories and demarcating difference. The radical acts of enclosure shaping the processes of modernization and their exclusions, which are still very much with us, ensured that.²² In this regard, it is worth noting that the French title of *The Decisive Moment—Images à la sauvette*—references the social need for the photographer’s disappearing act. *À la sauvette* can mean “ready for a quick getaway.” The phrase was used to describe the actions of illicit street vendors or pickpockets, those made not to belong on

²⁰ On the work of the violence of the anecdote, see (Sekula 2002, p. 32).

²¹ See, in particular, Sekula’s essay “Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation).” Significantly, Sekula does not name Szarkowski in his critique, even though the extended reference to the framing of Arbus as a humanist photographer suggests that he was thinking about the *New Documents* exhibition and its impact on writing the history of photography and documentary. This refusal to name Szarkowski is key. It reminds us that the “problem” is not Szarkowski—that he is not the “bad guy.” The aligning of photography with subjectivism is, Sekula suggests, symptomatic of the “promotion of introspection” in advanced capitalist societies. See (Sekula [1978] 1984, pp. 58–60).

²² For a history of street photography that attends to the history of enclosure, see (Edwards 2009).

the streets and who are policed (Chéroux 2014a, p. 15). This history, I am suggesting, haunts street photography. The genre is haunted by a presence that never was. It is haunted by a street—and a public—that still or always needs to be made. Furthermore, as I have been arguing here, it is necessary to draw out the ghosts. Or, perhaps, it is worth recognizing that this is what Capa and Cartier-Bresson and a whole host of other photographers were already doing in the 1930s when they sought to “get close” to war and displacement, when, as is the case with the photograph of the children playing among the ruins in Seville, they offered a glimpse of the future. These street photographers always acknowledge the frame, which is not just the image. It is the social construction of exclusion: the need to “make a quick getaway.” This was the posture of photographers who, like Capa and Cartier-Bresson, were fighting against fascism at home and abroad.²³ Stepping inside the loop, they mediated their presence. They asked readers of the news to regard this as photography’s task.

The essays in this issue do not begin in the street; they begin with the frame—with modernism. It, too, is reframed in these pages. Several of the authors explicitly take up this frame and its legacy, acknowledging, for example, Szarkowski’s role in framing street photography as modernism. This is where Simon Constantine begins his essay on the work of one of the most celebrated American street photographers: Garry Winogrand. Attending to how Winogrand was produced by New York’s Museum of Modern Art in the 1960s, Constantine calls into question the validity of Szarkowski’s formalism as well as our continued allegiance to it. At the center of Constantine’s engagement with the “making of” Winogrand are the many photographs of protests that the photographer shot in the 1960s. The appearance of this subject does not in and of itself challenge Szarkowski’s thesis, but it should, Constantine argues, draw our attention to the ways in which the historical framing of modernism at the MoMA still circumscribes how we decide what counts as political. Constantine’s essay foregrounds the need to stay with the frame, to recognize that the tensions it produces are still with us. In his essay on the photographic archive of the Photo League (1936–1951), Barnaby Haran also considers the limits of our histories of street photography for our histories of political photography. Haran argues that the designation street photography has been used to humanize the League’s work and, thereby, render its records of poverty and protest distinct from the radical practices of the Workers’ Film and Photo League. Insisting on the continuity between the two archives, Haran models a history of left-wing photographic practices that does not end in their failure—or the development of art. Art, Haran suggests, need not be celebrated nor denied; it needs to be historicized. Doing so makes plain that representations of the poor, the wounded, the Other are neither given nor taken; they are produced through the semantic possibilities of photography. In his account of the work of the photojournalist Weegee, Jason Hill also interrogates the limits of our art historical accounts of street photography. His attention to the radiography of Weegee’s work radically shifts the ground of our study of photography and the street. Hardly a “bystander,” as Westerbeck and Meyerowitz describe the photographer in their history of street photography, Weegee, Hill argues, must be characterized as someone who was always “standing by” (Westerbeck and Meyerowitz 1994, pp. 335–41). With his ear to the radio, Weegee, Hill insists, did not witness but actively anticipated and produced the news. Attending to the apparatus of production that shapes the photograph’s circulation on the page—from the newsroom to Weegee’s bedroom, the place where he recorded himself listening—Hill challenges the assumption that street photography begins in the street or is a wholly visual practice.

²³ Though Cartier-Bresson downplayed his political affiliations after the Second World War, he began his career making photographs for Communist Party news outlets *Ce Soir* and *Regard*. Likewise, his film work in the 1930s attests to his affiliations with the Popular Front. It could be argued that *The Decisive Moment* was a means of trying to make a break with this past, in which, almost inevitably, it still lingers. For an account of Cartier-Bresson’s early work as well as the need to self-censor after the war and his time as a prisoner of war, see (Chéroux 2014b, pp. 131–47). Seeking to dislodge the decisive moment as the frame through which Cartier-Bresson’s work is read, Chéroux, significantly, does not downplay or debunk it. He historicizes it by acknowledging its centrality to the development of modernism.

The final three essays in this issue consider the organization of a public through its rendering in the photographic frame. Andrew Witt surveys the play of presence and absence structuring the work of the Los Angeles-based photographer Anthony Hernandez. Interrogating what it means to make street photography in a city where, as the story goes, no one walks, Witt hones in on the way in which Hernandez renders a public absent—or evicted—even or especially when those living and working and walking in Los Angeles are pictured. In Witt’s analysis of how Hernandez frames street photography as a means of framing class sits a concern that shapes the history of street photography if it is, as I argue here, tied to the consolidation of modernism: the designation of the street as owned, as private. Terri Weissman takes up the question of who belongs in the streets and who the streets belong to in her consideration of the role of the witness in our histories of street photography. Taking as her subject recent witness videos of anti-Black violence, including police brutality and murder, Weissman draws out how the history of street photography has shaped our engagement with this material, especially with its framing as inadequate or uncertain. Like the authors of many of the essays in this issue, she acknowledges the ways in which the critique of modernism actually reproduces its frame. Are we too quick, she asks, to fetishize the uncertainty of an image? Are we too eager to divest photography and other forms of indexing of social work? For Weissman, reversing this turn against the social means attending to the temporality of the image: to the way in which witnessing is a means of making sure that the violence of the past is mobilized in the fight for a different future. Finally, my contribution to this issue, which is meant to read as a coda, returns to Szarkowski and his desire to defuse the possibility of telling time with and through photography. Exceptionally, I begin in the street, though not with the making of photographs. I begin with the photomontages that Martha Rosler circulated as flyers at protests against the war in Vietnam in the late 1960s. My concern is with how protest is framed; or, to be more exact, with how it has become unframed—come to be conceived as happening now. To close this issue, in short, I return to politics of repetition in order to ask: when is the time of protest?

The essays in this issue are a retort to the legacy of the decisive moment, not, however, because they seek to undo it. It is because they acknowledge the need to lean against it as a frame. In doing so they also make certain that the almost all-too-saccharine desire to “preserve life in the act of living” does not ring hollow in our era of premature death. I am not suggesting that we recoup the claims for immediacy made in Cartier-Bresson’s name. I am suggesting that we make them work historically. Or, more to the point: I am suggesting that we recognize that we are writing and speaking about images. As Davis reminds us, it is not simply bodies that come back to the streets, daily. It is the memories of those who already fought as much as of those who continue to fight for a space that is public and a time that is not impoverished.²⁴ Protest does not happen now. This is the way in which it has been and is being framed. The photographs of empty streets are part of this framing. They are less eerie than melancholic.

Finally, it must be noted that all of the essays in this issue attend to American histories. For some, this might be seen as its weakness; for others, it might be one of its strengths. This is for the reader to decide. I hope that they do so by engaging the long history of American formalism that shaped and continues to shape street photography and its histories. This history needs to be foregrounded despite its obvious limits. Dispensing with it, getting past it—getting “post” it—could mean losing sight of how the history of street photography became and needs to be a history of ownership. It means settling for condemnation. In the title of her essay, Weissman reminds us not to settle by repeating the other refrain that continues to frame the work of protest and its image: “Whose Street? Our Streets!” This question and its answer, posed and repeated, rhythmically resounded on numerous occasions, makes a claim for ownership in order to acknowledge, repeatedly, that the streets

²⁴ On the role of memory in these terms, see (Kelley 2016).

are already owned.²⁵ It makes a claim for ownership in order to acknowledge that the streets have to be taken back. There is another directive with which I want to close that also captures this truth. It is the one offered by artist Hannah Black in her account of how to meet head on, physically and viscerally, the atrocities of everyday life under the conditions of rampant privatization, including the current pandemic: go outside. “When the young people say, *New York will breathe*, or, *Abolition now*, they mean it,” Black insists. “[T]hey go outside,” she continues, “and, for a few hours, *they make an image* of the present condition of freedom” (Black 2020, emphasis added). The contradiction is palpable as much as it is necessary and real. Go outside and make an image. It is one way to announce that time has not stopped; that the anecdotes rendering history silent are made.

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²⁵ The need was made explicit in 2017, when police in St. Louis, Missouri chanted the slogan as they arrested men and women protesting the acquittal of Jason Stockley in the fatal shooting of Anthony Lamar Smith. See (Hogan 2017).

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