

Stephanie Power | MRP | June 15, 2016

Presented to Ryerson University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Fine Arts degree in the Documentary Media Program. Toronto, Ontario Canada  
© Stephanie Power

## author's declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this MRP. This is a true copy of the MRP, including any required final revisions. I authorize Ryerson University to lend this MRP to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research. I further authorize Ryerson University to reproduce this MRP by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research. I understand that my MRP may be made electronically available to the public.

## table of contents

1. <i>prologue</i> .....	4
2. <i>introduction: a new york scrapbook</i> .....	6
3. <i>the street photographer in the vertical city</i> .....	11
4. <i>geeking out: from hipstamatic to hasselblad</i> .....	21
5. <i>i'll be your mirror: reflecting on reflections</i> .....	32
6. <i>hustle and flow: on flânerie in the city</i> .....	38
7. <i>goodbye to all that: conclusion</i> .....	43
8. <i>bibliography</i> .....	45



*Mary Hayden, Brooklyn. (date unknown)*

## prologue

My roots are showing: as a girl from out around the bay who “idolized New York all out of proportion” – to quote Woody Allen’s Isaac in *Manhattan* – a sense of aspiration informs this project. Growing up in Newfoundland, I had two tenuous connections to New York: my mother voraciously read the American society bible “Town and Country” and my father travelled to New York twice in the 1960’s to visit his sisters, Mary and Bride, who as young women moved to Brooklyn from Chapel Arm, Newfoundland in the 1940’s. As a child ever envious that my aunts had unlimited access to such a cosmopolitan place, I was drawn to the idealistic notion of New York as a “magic city.” I idolized Mary, a fierce woman who was my template for what I imagined was the archetypal New Yorker: brash, quick-witted, uncompromising. As a child, I witnessed her throw the “chin flick” and it thrilled me. It was such a brazenly profane gesture from

an old school God-fearing Catholic. And it was so New York! She remained close to my father until he died from complications due to Alzheimers in 2000. Now 95, and also with Alzheimers, she lives in an old age home in the same Newfoundland town where I drifted through the pre-fab hallways of my high school and plotted my escape to the magic city.

But I would never have the cojones to move to New York like Mary and Bride, even though opportunities presented themselves to me. To this day, I remain an outsider: roaming the city with a camera, often strolling by Robert Frank's house on the slim chance I might find him sitting outside – I hear it's a habit of his. Frank, Garry Winogrand, Diane Arbus, Helen Levitt and Saul Leiter: I worship them in the same way I worshipped Aunt Mary. Their traces remain on the streets I walk: ghosts that whisper sweetly while I look forward and backward through my lens, caught in a temporal loop, searching for a city that I'm not sure exists, except in my head. New York looms large in the collective imagination and we all have our versions of it. This is mine.



*5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, photographed by my father, 1969*

## introduction

### *MY/NY Deluxe Picture Book* project

"Chapter One. He adored New York City. He idolized it all out of proportion. Uh, no, make that, he... he... romanticized it all out of proportion. Now... to him... no matter what the season was, this was still a town that existed in black and white and pulsed to the great tunes of George Gershwin. Ahhh, no, let me start this over...."<sup>1</sup>

—Woody Allen, *Manhattan*. 1979

Berenice Abbott, Walker Evans, Weegee, Helen Levitt, William Klein, Lisette Model, Lee Friedlander, Bruce Davidson, Garry Winogrand, Joel Meyerowitz, Saul Leiter, Diane Arbus, Ken Schles, Nan Goldin, Jamel Shabazz, Bill Cunningham. Epochal photographers all. I grab hold of this constellation of voices and wonder if I may add a contribution to the conversation that's run longer than a Hell's Kitchen roof party when it comes to the subject of documenting New York City.

---

<sup>1</sup> Woody Allen, "Manhattan" 1979.

*MY/NY Deluxe Picture Book* is a scrapbook diary reflection of New York City: it attempts to mimic the experience of walking through a city where fragments of visual stories emerge in unexpected, ambiguous juxtapositions. New York may be organized on a very simple numerical grid, but its narrative is anything but linear. The whole book speaks as a personal, subconscious reflection on a city full of reflections.

It is sometimes said that even if you've never been to New York, you've been to New York. The city looms large in the collective imagination and we all have our versions of it. It may appear that New York is writ too large to be contained by any singular vision, but exactly the opposite is true: it has acted as a palimpsest on the imagination of photographers too numerous to mention, and their work has come to define the city in sometimes epic and sometimes evocative terms that continue to resonate with us. Weegee's hard-boiled noir New York is not the same city that was the urban pastoral of Saul Leiter. Diane Arbus' subterranean world of freaks bears no resemblance to Nan Goldin's<sup>2</sup> transgressive forays into the hearts of her junkie friends, even if Google search likes to conflate their iconic photographs of members of the trans community.

New York is a landscape that contemporary street photographers cannot help but explore; we are irresistibly drawn to the allure of getting lost in the vertical city, as we carry on the work of our antecedents. My photography revolves around my personal impressions gleaned from a city awash in reflections: "The act of walking is the act of reflecting. The reflections of the street become fragments of an inner mirror – what seems like a logical linear collection of stones, asphalt and street signs is deconstructed through the mind."<sup>3</sup>

When exploring the visual contrasts that result from the juxtaposition of window reflections, layered traces from frayed, abstracted posters and graffiti ("environmental collage"), and the abiding chaos of the

---

<sup>2</sup> While I am addressing the idea of street photography, Nan Goldin is not a street photographer. She created some of the most important visual documents of New York in the downtown scene of the early 80's but her work addresses the interior downtown spaces where her subjects lived their lives. We could even argue that while Diane Arbus used the streets to find her subjects, once she gained their confidence, she then shot many of them in their homes.

<sup>3</sup> Ricarda Messner, "Confessions." *Flâneur magazine*, Issue 3, 31.

street, I'm seeking out traces that are easily missed without closer scrutiny: what is unseen within the seen. My photographs are a product of my inner mirror: reflecting itself back out on the movable feast of the city in an infinite loop. While my book is ostensibly about New York, it is more pointedly about my relationship to the city, specifically as that of an outsider. With an awakened eye I immerse myself in the visual chaos, which could render itself invisible if I lived there. My nostalgia manifests when I think I might find the New York that I see in Helen Levitt's photographs. This is absurd, of course, but it may also add tension to my work, as I reckon my idealistic notions with what I actually see.

To pull my narrative deeper, embedding it in another layer of nostalgia, I combined my work with photographs taken by my father on two trips he made to New York in the 1960s. The fragments of my family's relationship to New York act as a counterpoint to the fragments of the city I capture with my camera. One of my earliest memories is how frustrated I felt watching my father take my older sister there in 1969, while I was forced to stay at home in a small town I'd precociously pegged as dull. His photographs bring a sense of history and memory, but my own recollections of his trip are likely the result of a false narrative I've imposed upon them. I'd deliberately held on to them for a long time, seizing them from the modest family archive – a cigar box. In juxtaposition with my own work, they become ambiguous even if they fall into classic expressions of vernacular photography. Some photos show his sisters posing with him or their husbands; others convey a tourist's well-observed impressions of the city.

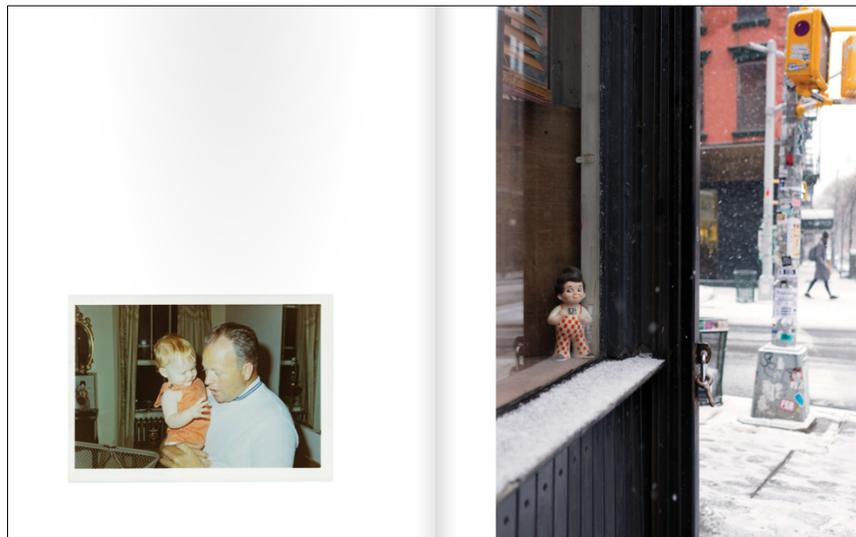
In all the discussions I've read on the notion of memory, it is appropriately David Carr, late reporter from the New York Times, who most effectively encapsulates its meaning, especially with regards to my project:

“Memories may be based on what happened to begin with but they are reconstituted each time they are recalled – with the most remembered events frequently the least accurate. What one is remembering is the memory, not the event... We accessorize the memory with the present tense. Sitting in the space between dendrites, memories wait to be brushed by a smell or a taste, and then they roar back to life, but it is always in service of the current narrative.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> David Carr, *The Night of the Gun: A reporter investigates the darkest story of his life. His own*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 334.

Folded into my own observations, my father's photos feel like a call and response to my work. As an additional counterpoint, I also brought into play pages from his *City of New York Deluxe Picture Book*, which he annotated with check marks and observations like "Good show. True Grit. Carol and Dad, 1969." And through a process of collage, this guide gave my book its title.



*spread from MY/NY Deluxe Picture Book using my father's archive*

While both the book and exhibit give the viewer a sense of the fragmentary nature of walking down a New York street, the former invites a more meditative experience, thoughtfully edited and dependent upon the reader's pace; the latter became – in its construction – an exuberant layering of images, reproducing the visual language of the environmental collages of the street. The city is all rhythm and repetition, only chaotically so. It teems with visual life. In his book *One Way Street*, Walter Benjamin observed that “ ‘Flânerie is a method for reading texts, for reading the traces of the city.’ ”<sup>5</sup> This notion inspired my methodology for my return to New York in 2015. I was curious whether I would finally grasp my attraction to these traces, which I've been shooting since 2011, at which point I had no context beyond my intuition to document them.

---

<sup>5</sup> Mike Featherstone, “The Flâneur, the City and Virtual Public Life.” *Urban Studies*, Volume 35, Nos. 5-6: 910.



*uptown/downtown diptych from "MY/NY Deluxe Picture Book"*

Enveloped in the canyons of New York, I at last abandoned my desire to go shopping in favour of throwing a couple of cameras around my neck and walking the streets in anticipation of the poetic and kaleidoscopic. “To head out into a city with a camera is still fundamentally about collaborating with chance. A successful street photograph brings into the world not only something that wasn’t there before but something that could not have been anticipated.”<sup>6</sup> I did not know what I would end up capturing, but I trusted myself enough to know I’d find good stuff if I relied upon my intuition.

---

<sup>6</sup> Teju Cole, “Hustle and Flow,” *New York Times Magazine*, 26 April 2015, 22.



the street photographer:  
moving horizontally through the vertical city

“Men can see nothing around them that is not their own image;  
everything speaks to them of themselves. Their very landscape is alive.”

—Karl Marx<sup>7</sup>

i. on the street

Is street photography dead? Or has it reinvented itself, adeptly transformed in the hands of the Instagram-addicted, forever keeping visual pace of every momentary shift in the landscape? Even Stephen Shore has made his Instagram account his primary work now.<sup>8</sup> Shore believes that his former subject Andy Warhol would have loved Instagram, given his prescient notion of 15 minutes of fame and his obsession with pop culture. No doubt he is right. The users of Instagram are exacting some influence on today’s street photography, even if many of their depictions of New York verge on the usual clichés. All of this adds to my conflict about calling myself a “street photographer.” Who am I to photograph New York and what do I have to say that matters in that grand collective conversation about the city?

---

<sup>7</sup> David Kishik, *The Manhattan Project: A Theory of a City* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2015), 30.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Blaustein, “Turning Instagram Images into Analogue,” *New York Times*, 15 March 2016.

I cannot separate the idea of “street photography” from the streets themselves. In her book *Wanderlust*, Rebecca Solnit calls New York “emblematic – the capital of the twentieth century, as Paris had been of the nineteenth century.”<sup>9</sup> This seems to parallel the history of street photography, with Atget shooting pragmatically and exquisitely in early 20th century Paris long before Cartier-Bresson opened his eyes (and ours!) to the decisive moment. The latter would visit and document New York alongside Berenice Abbott, Helen Levitt and Walker Evans, all supplying ample evidence of New York’s visual supremacy at a time when people were still unused to seeing the city defined through photography. All laid the groundwork for the kind of street photography we feel nostalgic for: its very soul reflected in the vertical city’s ability to throw its population into the streets, the wealthy rubbing elbows with the working class, all dwarfed by its looming skyscrapers which still make one feel tiny and insignificant, thrust into concrete canyons that overwhelm the senses. Despite all evidence that New York has grown anodyne as a city, it retains a performative quality that manifests both in its people and its street culture. Nowhere else on earth has a population been so visible, so eclectic, and so easy to document. “New York, with...its famous toughness is a masculine city... One imagines (photographers) wandering purposefully like hunter-gatherers with the camera a sort of basket laden with the day’s spectacles ... leaving us not their walks, as poets do, but the fruits of these walks.”<sup>10</sup>

## ii. the street is a stream of consciousness

In a pithy but pointed statement, Helen Levitt “once remarked about her pictures, ‘People say, ‘What does this or that mean?’ And I don’t have a good answer for them. You see what you see.”<sup>11</sup> I am continually fascinated by the fact that throughout history, the distinctive voice of every street photographer covering New York has manifested itself in such powerful and divergent work. For example, Helen Levitt’s response to the streets of New York “resembles the unconscious, a dense system of half-buried wishes

---

<sup>9</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 189-90.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 189-90.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, “Seeing What you See: Photographs by Helen Levitt” in *Raritan* 31, no. 4 (Spring, 2012), 1.

mingled with half-forgotten memories.”<sup>12</sup> In contrast, Garry Winogrand’s work set a stylistic conceit for the look and feel of what is thought of as definitive New York street photography: wide angle, sharp focus, the quick capture of an eccentric subject unawares, a pure distillation of his big, brash Bronx cojones. I identify with Levitt, not only because she was shy, but because her photographs are tender, witty and also a bit cryptic. You have to write your own stories around them. My intention with the book is that the viewer writes their own imagined story, spinning their own narrative around what they see in what *I saw*. It is only in the final pages that I am willing to explain my intentions.

Even if both Levitt and Winogrand are most famous for work they shot in the 1940s and 1960s respectively, both may have crossed paths as they documented New York in starkly different ways during the 1970s, when the city was in shambles, making it a delicious subject. In the current zeitgeist, there is much romance about the endurable cliché of “gritty” 1970s New York. Bruce Davidson’s *Subway* photos are shared on my Facebook feed on what seems like a weekly basis and Levitt’s work from that era keeps surfacing and enthralling. In her recent *New York Times* essay, writer Meghan Daum reflected upon a longing for the “sense of wildness” that permeated New York and argues that it “has always been a city whose dominant emotional chord is nostalgia... No matter how good the present is working out, the past was always better.”<sup>13</sup> Yes. Especially if one decided to bathe it in the nostalgia of Hipstamatic’s John S. lens, which made everything I saw look oddly consonant with an era long past, a perfect example of my own wish fulfillment for the black and white city of my dreams. But the weirdly intense blue-green cast of this “lens” in no way resembles the look of any vintage photographs I’ve ever seen. It is a perfect example of the reconfiguring of memory, in this case through a nostalgic photo filter that is a simulacrum, which “accessorizes the memory with the present tense”<sup>14</sup> to go back to what David Carr observed. I think the roots of our nostalgia for the look of old film lies in our current immersion in digital media. We are creating a fictional universe rooted in the aesthetics of nostalgia in order to cope with the alienation

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Meghan Daum, “Returning to a Gentler Gotham” *New York Times*, 6 February 2016.

<sup>14</sup> David Carr, *The Night of the Gun: A reporter investigates the darkest story of his life. His own*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 56.

inherent in our overuse of technology<sup>15</sup>. Even if it is this very technology that allows us to use an app like Hipstamatic, we are thrilled that we can create faded, colour-washed photographs, because (speaking for myself as an early user) it simply looks much more interesting than the clinical perfection we normally associate with digital photographs. At this writing, Hipstamatic has retreated as the go-to photo app, replaced by VSCO, an app that creates desaturated light-washed effects that are consistent with the lumberjack-hipster aesthetic of magazines like *Kinfolk*. I rarely use Hipstamatic anymore, but a few of my early shots made it into my book, if for no other reason than I thought they were good, regardless of how they were made.



*my Winogrand moment, Penn Station; shot with Hipstamatic*

With or without the synthetic affectation of Hipstamatic, one might look at some of my photographs and see echoes of Levitt or Winogrand or Saul Leiter. I follow in their footsteps on the streets of New York, with great regard for their vision and search for the city that they saw, even if it no longer exists in that form. If nothing else, this was a good experiment as part of my more formal introduction to photography in the Doc Media Program. I tell my illustration students that one has to work through their artist crushes before they can find their own voice and I think I'm dealing with the same issues in the making of *MY/NY*

---

<sup>15</sup> To be specific, our dependence on social media platforms to assuage our loneliness; alas it was my social media contacts that helped enable this project, through their "likes" and positive comments on my early Hipstamatic photographs.

*Deluxe Picture Book*. However, I don't think my voice is overshadowed by my hero-worship, but rather informed by it.

After all, do we not all tell our own stories through what we shoot, reflecting our inside world back out, every time we press the shutter? My inner landscape of thoughts and feelings shifts all the time, and I see it reflected in my photographs. I see what I see. But it's also about knowing where to look, and more importantly *how* to look.



*Patricia Field window, Bowery*

For example, in the constantly shifting landscape of the street, I take note of the closing of long loved shops, like *Patricia Field* on the Bowery which shut its doors in February 2016. It was an ultimate outré stronghold, much beloved by downtown drag queens and divas. It preceded Field's fame as costumer for *Sex and the City*. When I look at the photograph I shot last summer of her window, reflections of the Bowery bouncing off it, I can see an elegiac quality that I must have observed through the lens, if only in a subconscious way. Field closed her store, not because her rent had become unmanageable, but because she was ready to move on. Underneath this declaration, she must have felt the store's cultural cachet had expired. This was yet another goodbye to 1980s New York, an era often cited as the city's last great

artistic one – its countercultural Belle Époque, devastated first by AIDS and later by gentrification. If I feel guilty about one thing, it is that I gave no thought to this when I first visited New York in November 1989 on a school trip. Little did I know that one day I would find much to admire about Cookie Mueller, Nan Goldin’s muse, who died from AIDS related causes precisely when I was bouncing around the city for the first time in a state of wide-eyed exaltation. Back then, I *was* a tourist, my gaze overlooking traces of the city, my attention pinned only upon the obvious attractions: Bloomingdales and Saks Fifth Avenue. It took me far too long to grow curious about New York in a more thoughtful way, and I wouldn’t do so until I picked up a camera, or in my case, my iPhone. In so doing, I hope I’ve been able to strip away some of my own layers of naiveté, or at least cross-pollinate my guilelessness with some wisdom. I am making up for lost time.

I’d like to cover all of New York City in photographs, but it is an impossibility. Psychogeographic wandering<sup>16</sup> beckons, but my legs will carry me only so far before arguing against the whole enterprise. Fortunately, certain neighborhoods beget specific themes: the East Village and Lower East Side are the best places to find layered, graffiti strewn poster ruins. These environmental collages are ever changing works of art. New York resident and photographer Norman Bush, who has documented these ruins for almost 50 years, calls them “‘atmospheraically developed’... I love the fragmented notices and playbills; to me, they look like paintings.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed. They are hyper-collages, transmogrifying as time acts upon their ever-changing layers. If I see one and do not shoot it immediately, it will have almost certainly evolved or dissolved upon my return. I see a strange beauty in them that makes me think of abstract expressionism. They are subject to chance, to spontaneous creation, whether by the elements or human intervention. They are scraps, not unlike Helen Levitt’s photographic “scraps of talk or shreds of things

---

<sup>16</sup> While I call myself a practitioner of “psychogeographic wandering”, it is a term I’ve used casually to refer to my own style of exploring the city by following my intuition and engaging in playful drifting. The notion of using psychogeography is often namechecked in today’s discussions of walking, as people in cities around the world grow more curious about their landscape and take unmapped walks through unfamiliar streets. This may be done for political reasons (e.g. the derive, where one insinuates oneself in the landscape as an active interrogation of place, as Guy Debord did in his Situationist drifts) or for more passive reasons of contemplation, observation and pleasure in the sensual offerings of the street, as is the classic behavior of the flâneur. My own behavior is representational of the latter.

<sup>17</sup> Norman Bush, “Abstract New York,” *New York Times*, 19 September 2015.

picked up as pieces and assembled as cryptic pictures whose stories remain to be told.”<sup>18</sup> They are enigmatic fragments of a city, hiding in plain sight. They have the luxury to unfold in a city that embraces abstractions, unlike my hometown of Toronto which is a model of efficiency in the removal of chaotic interventions on our streets. I am sensitive to their composition and harmony. Not only do I want permanent documentation of the environmental collage I’m observing *at that moment*, but I am also adding my own imprint upon it – not by inserting a few more rips and tears but by photographing it. In cropping my photograph in a way that aesthetically feels most pleasing to my eye, I recontextualize what is there. Maybe I am the abstract expressionist behind the lens, giving an afterlife to a vanishing world.



*environmental collage, Bleeker Street near Lafayette*

## ii. get outside. be an outsider.

The street photographer *is* an outsider (both literally and figuratively), “an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city

---

<sup>18</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, “Seeing What You See: Photographs by Helen Levitt” in *Raritan* 31, no. 4 (Spring, 2012), 1.

as a landscape of voluptuous extremes,”<sup>19</sup> and we must observe almost *as if* with insider status. For me this manifests in the aperture through what I see and what I long for. Being an outsider gives me objectivity, but I am also aware of my own desire to be swept along into consumption of the spectacle, going native as it were. So badly do I want to be a part of some of the things I observe, that I decide they are entirely worth consuming, whether that means whipping out my credit card or simply losing focus, falling into the flâneur’s famous solipsism. On the other hand, I have also noticed that if I take a picture of a desired thing, I no longer need to *own* it. My camera has consumed it for me, thus taking my personal commodity fetish to another level, transforming my appetites into art (I hope). I walk the city always on the edge of seduction, and the tension of that is manifested in my photographs. I am not a New Yorker documenting New York. I have no accumulated insider knowledge of its secrets. Every time I visit, I am haunted by the thought of *what I’m missing*. I am an outsider, twice-removed: on the physical level for my distance from New York and on the mental level because of my nostalgia for New York’s distant past, the “magic city” of both my young adult dreams and the street photography I admire.

Like the instruction on every subway door, the street photographer is wise to “mind the gap.” The space between outsider and insider is where tension and nuance lies, and it manifests the moment the photograph is taken. Focusing on the binary feels simplistic. The notion of insider-outsider exists on a continuum, even if it can be argued that true outsider status gives the photographer maximum street cred. We lack the emotional investment of the insider, and we *are* intuitively drawn to a moment playing out in front of us and it is slipping by quickly soooooooooo CLICK! I agree with Abigail Solomon-Godeau in her unfolding of the states: “If we are...to consider the possibility that a photographic practice ostensibly premised on insiderness ultimately reveals the very impossibility of such a position in the realm of the visual, might it conversely be the case that a photographic practice that affirms its own implacable exteriority yields a certain truth of its own?”<sup>20</sup> The truth of the outsider as photographer is the truth of

---

<sup>19</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1977), 55.

<sup>20</sup> Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Inside/out//1994,” in *The Everyday*, ed. Stephen Johnstone (Cambridge: Documents in Contemporary Art, The MIT Press, 2008), 198.

every teenager who walked the halls of their high school painfully aware that they don't fit in with the status quo of the quarterback and the prom queen, but also aware that their outsidership gives them powerful insights into the world around them. I figured out pretty early on that the popular kids in my high school were doomed to lives of quiet desperation<sup>21</sup> because they never had to develop a finely tuned lens that was not only self-protective, but fiercely observant, both of which are enabling in my explorations as a photographer.



*Bruce Davidson, woman on subway platform, mood undisturbed*

As a woman who is on the wrong side of middle-aged, I've at last gotten my wish to be invisible. I use this to my advantage, even if I still wish for a *winkelsucher*, Helen Levitt's right-angle viewfinder. Alas, the middle-aged lady is invisible but her camera is not. My fear is always that "once life is aware that it may become art, once we know that someone is taking our picture, we act like the subatomic particles that change their course after they have been detected by the scientist's measuring device"<sup>22</sup> I long for the authentic moment I initially spotted. Once I've drawn attention to myself, I risk losing that. However, upon spending time with Bruce Davidson's *Subway*, I was astonished to discover he'd asked for permission to shoot all those photographs. I'm embarrassed to admit I hadn't tweaked to the obvious: he was shooting with a flash. His photographs were very confrontational. It was the 1970s and riding the MTA was an invitation to confrontation. Theft of his cameras would have been the least of Davidson's

---

<sup>21</sup> Pink Floyd, "Dark Side of the Moon" or Henry David Thoreau "Civil Disobedience and Other Essays." In the lingua franca of my youth, I give precedence to citing the former, all due respect to Thoreau.

<sup>22</sup> David Kishik, *The Manhattan Project: A Theory of a City* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2015), 210.

problems. Reading his essay caused the ground to shift under my feet. Could I ask for permission and yet get something naturalistic? During my visit this February, I asked for permission to shoot on several occasions and was rewarded with something lovely, even if in one situation, I nervously lost the ability to focus the camera. The photograph ended up working precisely because it was soft. When Davidson asked for permission to shoot a young woman on the M line’s elevated platform – he was mesmerized by the breeze ruffling her light dress – he “asked if she could slip back into her mood undisturbed. The wind picked as the light fell at sunset, and I took a few more photographs.”<sup>23</sup> Such a little thing but so instructive. And because of this, I’m learning to ask people to ignore me and *slip back into their mood undisturbed*.



*Young women outside Balthazar, Spring Street, mood undisturbed*

---

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Davidson. *Subway* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2011), 11.



## geeking out: from hipstamatic to hasselblad

MY/NY Deluxe Picture Book" project methodology

### i. to thine own hipstamatic be true

*MY/NY Deluxe Picture Book* emerges as an unexpected outcome of losing my way as an artist. In 2010, after six years of creative burnout as an illustrator and paralysis over my future creative prospects, I flew to New York with a personal assignment: take pictures with my new iPhone for the sheer fun of it. The thrill of owning a smartphone was fresh and the idea that a brand new app (Hipstamatic) could transform everything I shot through filters supposedly meant to mimic the color saturations of old instamatic camera prints was very appealing to me. I know the etymology of nostalgia: acute homesickness. I think that what I am homesick for is the authenticity of the epochal New York street photographers I admire. In Katherina Niemeyer's introductory essay to the book *Media and Nostalgia*, she states: "Nostalgic expressions or the creation of nostalgic worlds could indicate a twofold phenomenon: a reaction to fast technologies, despite

using them, in desiring to slow down, and/or an escape from this crisis into a state of wanderlust... and nostalgia.”<sup>24</sup> Hipstamatic is a perfect example of this. In using my iPhone, I was playing with a fast portable technology for the first time, but the app I was so hung up on appeared to be a reaction against it. In its earliest form, it was incredibly slow. It had the skin of an old brownie camera; you composed a shot through a tiny viewfinder and before shooting, selected a filter. Once shot, the app would “process” the photo. This took an eternally long 10 seconds before you were able to shoot again. Over the course of three weeks, I saturated New York in the John S lens, the filter that in hindsight was pure visual overkill. But it turned me on to photography, a practice I’d only dabbled in. I have a few regrets now, because I took some great shots, but I can never rescue them from John S. They are permanently rooted in the filtered universe that Hipstamatic imposed and I have to live with that rookie shooting decision. But shooting with my iPhone got me excited about seeing things. I had been unable to see for so very long.



*nostalgia much? New York soaked in Hipstamatic's John S. lens*

After walking the city during the day, shooting whatever caught my fancy and practicing my notion of psychogeographic wandering without knowing the concept, I’d return to the East Village apartment I

<sup>24</sup> Katharina Niemeyer, “Introduction: Media and Nostalgia.” In *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*, ed. Katharina Niemeyer, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.

rented to upload an edited selection of the photos to Facebook. My friends were quick to respond: they loved them. I had to wonder: should I take this playful experiment seriously? Nothing speaks louder than feeling good about your work and I was, for the first time in years.

By 2012, I'd shot hundreds of photos on my iPhone. I was feeling emboldened that I had something to say as a photographer. I couldn't stop myself from taking pictures. Framing what I saw through the lens felt like I had some kind of intimacy with the world and my observations with a camera aligned with my meditation practice, which stirred in me a need to be more contemplative about what I see.

## ii. to preserve or to document

It wasn't until 2013 that I got serious about considering grad school. Still, some practical side of me insisted that I apply to a program that would allow me to become gainfully employed (whatever that means). I applied to Photographic Preservation in 2014, after which I attended a Doc Media info session and discovered that the program had a photographic component. Looking at the photobooks on display, I felt exhilarated. But I was told that without an undergrad degree, I wouldn't be admitted into any grad programs at Ryerson, so I dropped the ball on the whole enterprise.



*mea culpa!*

Three months later, I was shocked to find out that the Dean had approved my application for Photographic Preservation. In September 2014, I walked into the orientation in the 1<sup>st</sup> Year Lab, determined to make it work. I walked out of that lab a month later, strolled up the ramp and down the hall to knock on the door of IMAB22. I was auditing Katy McCormick's photobook class that day, and I never returned to the Preservation Lab again.

### iii. secrets of the photobook revealed

At last, in a program of study where every class felt completely in alignment with my interests, I indulged myself in expanding my modest photobook collection. Considering that before this program, the only knowledge I had about Robert Frank was that he was the director of *Cocksucker Blues*, I was immediately drawn to the ambiguous narrative he created in *The Americans*. I was just beginning to grasp the language of the photobook and it was a revelation. It also challenged the notion of the only photobook in the house I grew up in: the one that Dad must have brought back from New York and the one I'd thumbed through obsessively as a child, creating – yes – my own narratives around the photographs. I'm talking about *The Family of Man*, a book much derided by the first wave of educated photographers.<sup>25</sup> But the visual language of *The Americans* was a repudiation of such a sentimental narrative and now I, as an adult, understood why. With my book, I am abandoning the tired tropes I created over and over in illustrations of pretty girls in stilettos wielding shopping bags. I've thrown off those simplistic narratives in favour of creating non-linear ones, as I discovered I have the capacity to do in the photographic realm. And while my background as an art director and designer gives me sensitivity to typography and image juxtaposition, the photobook presented a new challenge: it has a language all its own, one dependent upon visual storytelling that acts as something of a slow burn, like a really great piece of music.

My first photobook *wanderlings* set the tone and conceit of *MY/ NY Deluxe Picture Book* in a rudimentary way. While my interest in the form of my project preceded its concept, street photography finds a very

---

<sup>25</sup> Allan Sekula, in his essay "The Traffic in Photographs" calls *The Family of Man* "the epitome of American Cold War liberalism [universalizing] the bourgeois nuclear family, suggesting a globalized utopian family album, a family romance imposed on every corner of the earth." (from *Documentary, Documents of Contemporary Art*. Editor: Julian Stallabrass. (MIT Press, 2013) 94.

good home in the photobook. Through the turning of the pages, the pacing of the photographs allows you to proceed through a landscape at any speed. You have flâneurie at your fingertips.



*a selection of photobooks from Katy McCormick's Doc Media Photobook Production class, 2014; photo: Elyse Bouvier*

While I joked that I wanted to sail through the Doc Media program shooting only with my iPhone, I knew well enough that if I did, I wouldn't learn anything: not about the formal aspects of creating work, nor about myself. And while many of my classmates had a solid project idea in year 1, my concept was frustratingly vague. All I knew was that I wanted to return to New York and bring the project I'd started with Hipstamatic into fruition.

#### iv. flâneurie and the city

During our winter production class with Elle Flanders, my project began to take shape as meditation on observation and consumption, vis-à-vis the rapacious eye of the lens, as well as that of the shopper. Notions of flâneurie and psychogeography were now a focal point for me. I considered using Jane's Walks<sup>26</sup> as a framework for my project to give it structure. During one of our classes, Elle noted that the idea of "slowing down" in my street shooting was something worth exploring, as opposed to grabbing things off the cuff with the iPhone. It was then that she offered me her Hasselblad, and her generosity

---

<sup>26</sup> Jane's Walks are a movement of citizen led walking tours in cities all over North America, inspired by the writings and activism of Jane Jacobs, who is the godmother of holistic urban studies.

inspired a huge creative leap in my process. I've been accused in the past of doing things the hard way and the Hasselblad is definitely *not* a street photography camera. Which made me all the more curious to use it in this way.<sup>27</sup> I also invested in a Fuji XT-1 and two prime lenses. All bases covered.



*spring shooting fail: exposed 120 film aka the learning curveball*

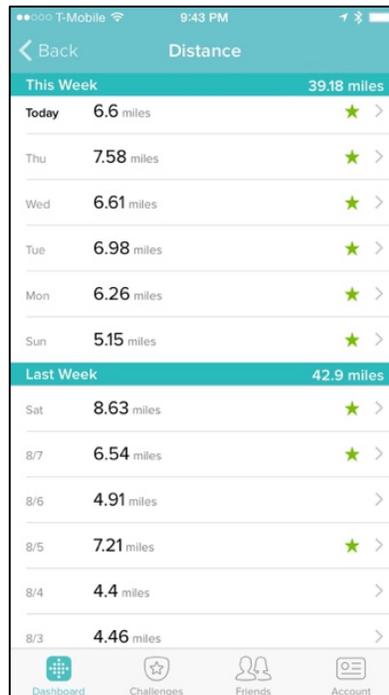
Conceptually, I *still* had no idea what I was doing. Katy advised me to just go and shoot. Something would manifest in the edit, as is the way of the documentary practice. I trusted that would be the case but I was also terrified that I would never find any container for the work. How does one conceptualize street photography? During Sara Angelucci's spring production class, my project had evolved in to a study of perception. I wrote: "As I draw closer with my lens to my preferred subject of shop windows, I further engage with the reflections and layers they present. I find myself photographing the unseen within the seen. The world is altered and the atmosphere becomes sensual, a counterpoint to the energy of the city that I wander through. The inner landscape of perception mingles with the physical urban landscape."

It is a known fact that there is no place more miserable than New York in August, so I decided what better time to go there and shoot. My playful experiment with the synthetic nostalgia of Hipstamatic was replaced by the genuine nostalgia of cranking 120 film through a bulky 1970s Hasselblad. How's *that* for slow? What was not slow was the amount of time I had to shoot: I gave myself only two weeks. While I

---

<sup>27</sup> The Hasselblad's square format adds a contrast to the Hipstamatic square format photos. One may not be able to tell which is which, if one is concerned about more formal aspects of this project. The same goes for my father's photographs and those generated by Hipstamatic. The fakery of the Hipstamatic borders and filters make one wonder whether they are really "old" photographs when placed in the non-linear narrative of the book. I answer these questions in the last pages, in an illustrated listing of the real archive photographs.

shot contemplatively, I was hustling to find good subject matter. I walked through the city embracing a strategic amount of psychogeography but I had the sense of covering too much city in too little time. I shot daily for about 5 or 6 hours until fatigue affected my ability to see, but I was rewarded by contact sheets that were good from the get go, an enormous relief. Having to wait to view them added its own kind of magic to the endeavor, slowing me down once again.



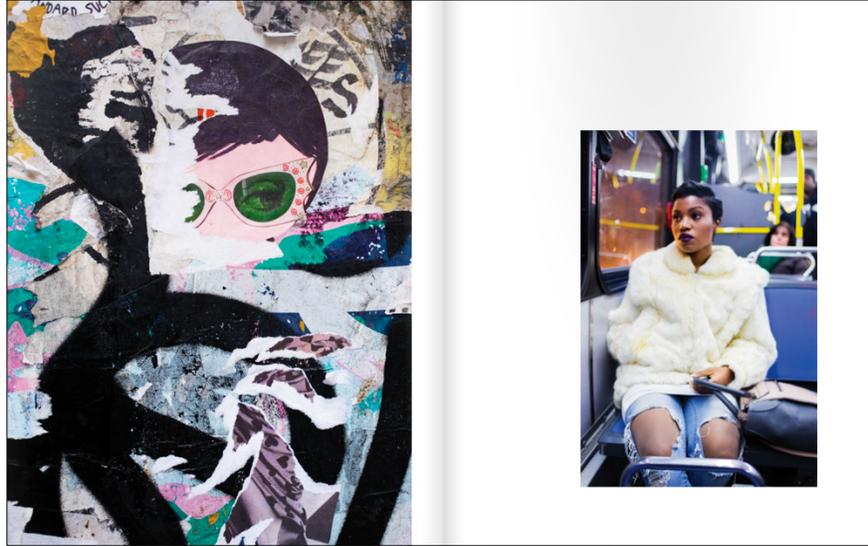
*the digital flâneur*

I was pleased to notice that physically I grew stronger, and schlepping around two cameras quickly grew tolerable, even in the heat. I also noticed in myself a kind of devotional aspect to being a photographer: your feet flag long before your curiosity does. Shooting inevitably becomes its own reward. The intuition of a street photographer is their best friend and it is what my methodology is grounded upon.

## v. fragments of the street

I began the process of editing in September, and focused on presenting images of reflections in shop windows during our first critique in Blake Fitzpatrick's class. I imagined doing a book and exhibit of these images alone. Near the end of my presentation – pretty much on a whim – I presented the shots I'd taken of the environmental collages. He suggested that this work might act as a rich counterpoint to the shop windows and that I shouldn't be too quick to disregard it. At which point my editing process exploded: what started out as too tight an edit expanded to all the aspects of street life that I had embraced from my first iPhone experiment in 2011. It was then that the notion of my family's relationship to New York became a part of my project: during our Archives & Databases class, I recalled how I had in my possession my father's photographs of New York taken on two trips during the 1960s. When I threw these into the mix, it was the first time I saw an interesting conceptual underpinning in my project. There was a family story going on here that had been right under my nose all along. I had to "kill my darlings" in order to see all the other good stuff I had. So while the shop window reflections are still richly represented in my book, they are part of a bigger story, and work all the more because of that.

I created two photobook dummies for our mid-thesis critique in December. One was based upon the notion of a *New York Scrapbook*, incorporating my idolization of the history of New York street photography. I considered bringing in an illustrative element, commissioning graphic novelists to capture moments in the life of street photographers: for example a single page strip chronicling Diane Arbus' mediated encounter with the grenade boy. But on presenting both books, I wasn't happy: I'd organized them thematically, separating uptown window displays, graffiti, downtown grit, subway shots and my father's photographs into separate chapters. I knew immediately this didn't feel right. As I stated in my introduction to this paper, the book had to mimic the experience of walking through a city where fragments of visual stories emerge in unexpected juxtapositions.



spread from "MY/NY Deluxe Picture Book" both taken on my return trip to New York this February

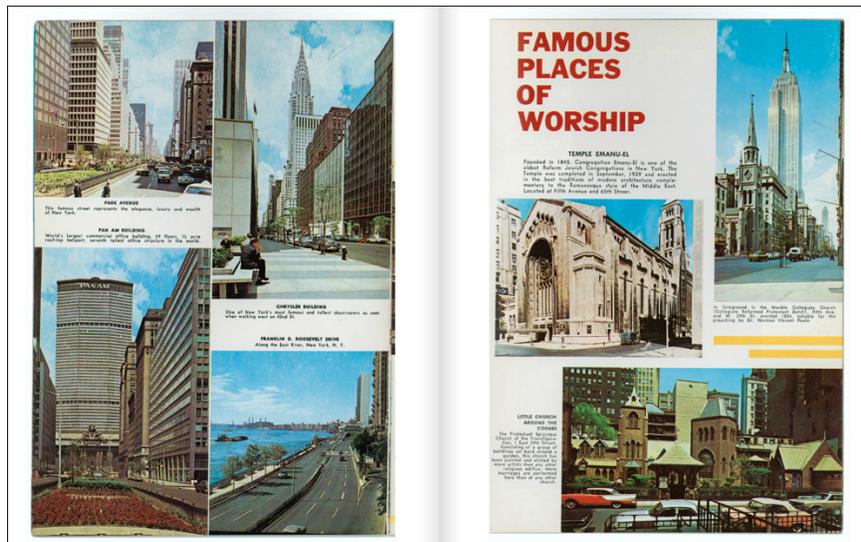
After some procrastination, it emerged in a new form in January. The process of pacing my photographs and my fathers in one stream-of-consciousness narrative was exhilarating.<sup>28</sup> I felt the book needed to contain a contextual explanation, which I placed at the back to avoid a didacticism inherent in introductory text. Conceptually, a sense of aspiration revealed itself as an underpinning theme. I always wanted to live in New York but never had the gumption to move there. And yet I had two aunts who lived there all their lives. My father's photographs of the city were taken at a time when Garry Winogrand and Diane Arbus roamed the streets. But my father was just a tourist.<sup>29</sup> He carried his idealistic guidebook *City of New York Deluxe Picture Book* which I've treasured for a long time and in *MY/NY Deluxe Picture Book*, I use it as a textual and visual counterpoint to my father's photographs and my own, breaking apart its spreads to create my own observations. For example, a religious theme becomes evident in the spread entitled *Famous Places of Worship* where I've combined churches and highrises, a meditation on both religion and capitalism. Following this spread are photos of Chanel and Forever 21 windows, the former

---

<sup>28</sup> I was in a state of flow, that feeling of energized focus, which mostly manifests itself when one is engrossed in a project that is deeply meaningful. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is responsible for coining the term in his book *Flow* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Which begs the question. Am I a tourist? Even worse, am I an elitist tourist because I go native from the moment my Porter flight touches down at Newark? I am aware of my own snobbism... my rarified choices that do not include a hotel room on Times Square or cupcakes at Magnolia Bakery. But I would argue that the normative tourist experience is one that treats a city as a theme park, as befits the anodyne experience of escorted bus tours through the city – prepackaged loops through the most unimaginative locales – perhaps as much the fault of NYC's tourism board as it is of the uninspired traveler.

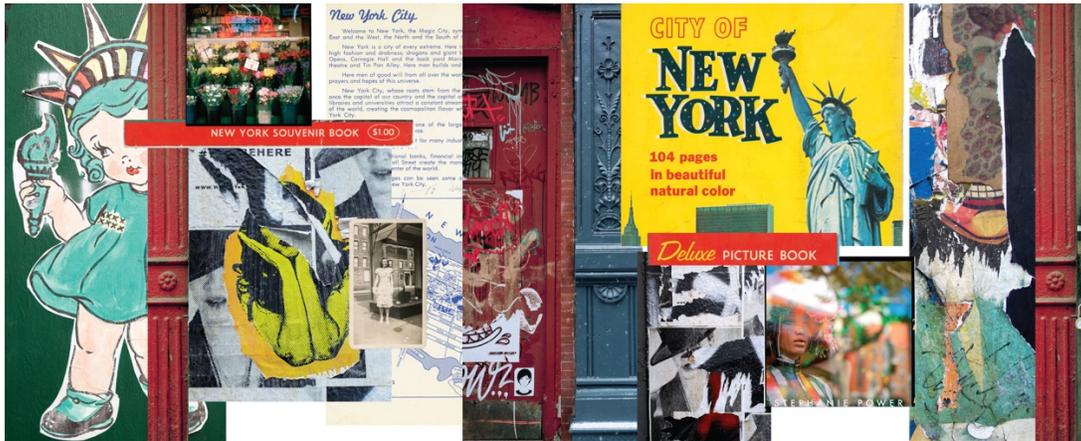
reflecting clocks and the latter reflecting St. Patrick’s Cathedral. My father was raised a devout Catholic and I was expected to toe the line. But chanting the rosary once a week proved too much for me and to his credit, he let that egregious exercise go because he could feel my pain. But I still had to quietly rebel against him and eventually became agnostic. Unfortunately, I may have shifted into another brand of religious fervor for the many years I spent throwing my money down the drain at Bloomingdales. The thrill of the shop didn’t expire until I picked up a camera, and even then it would continue to remain a delirious, sometimes reckless distraction.



*famous places of worship: spread from MY/NY Deluxe Picture Book*

I struggled to find a title for this project and nothing worked until I collaged the cover using the tourist guide juxtaposed with fragments of my photographs. It was then that the title revealed itself with little embellishment of my own, but for the acronym *MY/NY*. It is unsurprising that I have turned again to collage as a method of making art, but cities are all collages, and my methodology is instinctive and correct, given the subject matter. I returned to New York in February to do more shooting but unfortunately, the Hasselblad seized up in the sub-zero weather, so I spent the trip strapped to the world’s heaviest prop, a great conversation starter if not at all functional. I came back with work I was pleased with, and a selection of these photographs merged easily within the edits I’d already made. To avoid the extremely restrictive sizing available at Blurb, I designed the book at 7 ¼ x 9 ¼ , then had 35 copies

printed using Blurb's 8 x 10 format, at which point Lunar Caustic Press trimmed them. The smaller size might be fractional, but what a world of difference it makes to the overall feel of the book. *MY/NY Deluxe Picture Book* has emerged in a form that best befits its subject matter.



*MY NY / Deluxe Picture Book flat collage based on cover design went on to inspire wall treatment for exhibit*



*MY NY / Deluxe Picture Book exhibit: Rally Gallery, June, 2016; photo: Martin Franchi*



*Erte window, Soho*

i'll be your mirror:  
reflecting on reflections

"New York is more full of reflections than of itself."<sup>30</sup>

—Zelda Fitzgerald, *Save Me the Waltz*

i. the illusory shop window

Atget set the bar awfully high for the documentation of shop windows. Ever since he meditated upon them in early 20th-century Paris, the shop window has presented itself as an alluring subject. A common trope in photography from undergrad work through thesis projects and onward through conceptual photography, one wonders whether this piece of street theatre has worn out its welcome.

---

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Goldsmith, *Capital*, 538. *Capital* is a book of quotations/literary montage about New York City that was enormously helpful in my research. It is organized thematically, in a manner inspired by Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. The origin of this quote is Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz* (New York: Harper Perennial Classics, 2012) although Goldsmith attributes it to yet another book about New York: Ann Douglas' *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995).

And yet I am irresistibly drawn to shooting them. I feel as if I should apologize for it. If I am honest, I would admit that the mannequin in a window is often a surrogate for shooting people. But then for me there is the attraction of the reflected world in the shop window, and the “making strange” of the urban landscape first introduced in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Paris on boulevards created by Baron Haussmann.<sup>31</sup> The notion of the department store as a so-called dream palace<sup>32</sup> lies in the fact that it was not introduced as a utilitarian destination for essential items. “The vast phantasmagoria of commodities on display, constantly renewed as part of the capitalist and modernist drive for novelty, was the source of dream images...”<sup>33</sup> Its goal was and still is to entice and indulge the consumer’s dreams and aspirational desires. The window display is a proscenium of seduction. In Paris, its appearance evolved between 1830 and 1860, a result of the manufacturing of unprecedentedly large scale panes of glass, with dimensions of 14’ high by 8’ wide. This allowed for “the commercial exploitation of its visual display, framing the gaze of passing flâneurs and flâneuses at commodities seductively displayed.”<sup>34</sup> It should come as no surprise that Frank Baum, author of *The Wizard of Oz*, also wrote a treatise on window display.<sup>35</sup> Such intoxicating wonders manifest themselves perfectly in New York’s impeccably groomed landmark, Bergdorf Goodman. Like many who pause to admire their 5th Avenue displays, I do not drift beyond them into the store, as I am simply unable to afford indulging myself in such a stratospheric realm of dream fulfillment. If I were to enter, I would find a world of department store flâneuses<sup>36</sup> who thrive upon consumerism as a central pleasure of modernity, just as they did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I am equally drawn to banal and ignored windows such as the ones I’ve found on midtown strips off 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, just a couple of short blocks away

---

<sup>31</sup> Haussmann was the architect of Paris’s modernization and sweeping boulevards, which allowed for the grand scale of the department store (Le Bon Marché opened in 1852). See: <http://www.museumofthecity.org/project/haussmann-and-revival-of-paris/>. This ushered in an era of capitalism that echoes in New York’s 20<sup>th</sup> century consumer capitalism with 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue emerging as the ultimate shopping destination. Only in the landscape of New York’s gentrification and Rudy Guiliani’s Disneyfication of Times Square in the mid 1990s has 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue devolved into a tourist mecca of chain stores usually found in suburban shopping malls (e.g. Zara, American Eagle, Topshop). They exist alongside stalwarts like Bergdorfs, Henri Bendel, Saks Fifth Avenue and Lord and Taylor.

<sup>32</sup> Mike Featherstone, “The Flâneur, the City and Virtual Public Life.” *Urban Studies, Volume 35, Nos. 5-6*: 913.

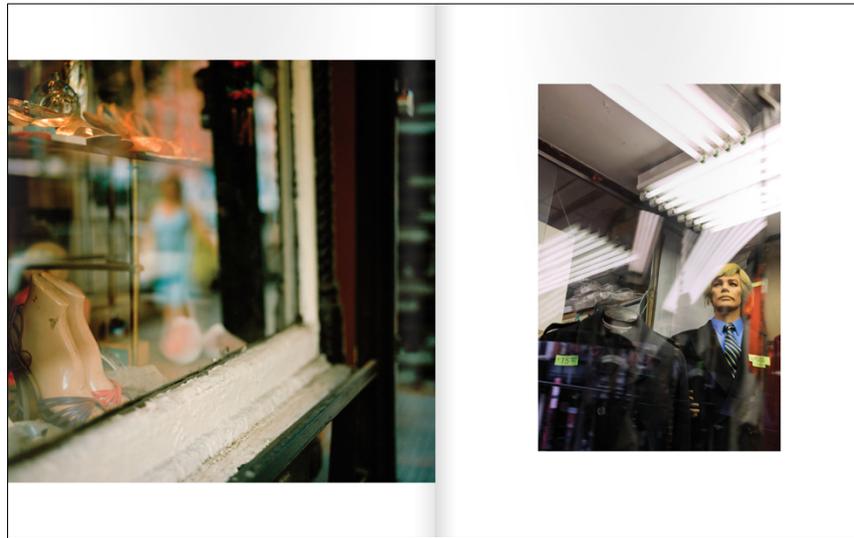
<sup>33</sup> Karen Van Godtsenhoven, *Women’s Passages: A Bildungsroman of Female Flânerie*, Dissertation: (Universiteit Gent, 2005), 28.

<sup>34</sup> Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window*. (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2006), 113.

<sup>35</sup> L. Frank Baum, *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors*. (Chicago: Show Window, 1890).

<sup>36</sup> The female shopper found a safe place to indulge in flânerie with the invention of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century department store and its acknowledgement of a woman’s desire to escape her confinement. According to Anne Friedberg in her essay *Les Flâneurs du Mal*, the flâneuse was a new social character: the female consumer who maintains mobility through this aesthetic activity. I would argue not much has changed. For women, shopping is a social activity. Women also dress for other women. In the spirit of the hunt, there is a pecking order established in the wearing of clothing that invigorates a level of personal style to be admired by others. Style itself, however, cannot be bought.

from the tourist mecca Macys. It is on these streets that cheap “schmattas”<sup>37</sup> are hawked, and mannequins gaze out at us, shopworn and disheveled. These window representations are a bit more revealing to me than any of the high end shops on 5<sup>th</sup> and 57<sup>th</sup>: they undermine the perception of the inherent glamour in New York’s fashion system, as it is rarified, and that commodity culture extends far beyond Bergdorf’s doors.



*East Village vintage shop window; Orchard Street men's suit shop*

That said, neglected and marginalized shop windows have diminished considerably as gentrification has burrowed into every corner of Manhattan. I don't possess Zoe Leonard's intimacy with the Lower East Side where she photographed with her Rolleiflex the remains of “mom and pop” storefronts (*Analogue*, 2007). I contemplate shop windows as an ultimate outsider, unable to penetrate the glass. The reflected world becomes my sanctuary. As I walk its streets, New York remains a mystery to me, never to reveal itself.

*MY/NY* exists primarily in my imagination. I'm distorting the reality of the city through my lens. In my photobook, I've created a landscape that feels illusory. The temporal layers of shop windows and environmental collages – looking forward and backward through glass and through the scraps that are

---

<sup>37</sup> Schmatta is Yiddish meaning “rag.” Often used in conjunction with the phrase “rag trade” which is slang for the fashion business.

transformed by time – may work as a metaphor for my father’s last days living with Alzheimers. I’ve often wondered about the inner landscape of forgetting he endured, and why his memory of the distant past was sharpened more clearly while his present grew increasingly hazy. He had the ability to peel back layers of time to recall his days on the Argentia Naval Base during WWII, but he was unable to recognize those who were in his company. I had the good fortune to always be familiar him, probably because I was the baby of the family, his “tootie” as he nicknamed me.

Jayce Salloum’s 1999 project (name varies: e.g. *Home Made Chocolate, Thunderbolt*) feels somewhat in alignment with mine as his observations of shop windows also concentrated on neglected storefronts in the East Village, just a few blocks north of where Leonard shot. Both he and Leonard are making pointed commentaries on capitalism, which initially I set out to do but later abandoned. In the curatorial essay *Archive of the Street*, Jim Drobnick and Jennifer Fisher note that “the images here evoke the sensibility of a stranger... there is a peculiar overlay of liminality, otherness and alienation, a dislocation that prevents us from knowing exactly which side of the outsider/insider divide we inhabit.”<sup>38</sup>



*Bergdorf Goodman window and East Village vintage clothing store*

---

<sup>38</sup> Jim Drobnick and Jennifer Fisher: “Jayce Salloum: Archive of the Street,” in *Image and Inscription*, ed. Robert Bean (Toronto: Gallery 44 and YYZ Books, 2005), 178.

I also feel an undertow of alienation as an outsider. New York was always a lonely place for me, especially during the years I travelled there alone to shop and indulge in my own dream fulfillment. Only in picking up a camera was I able to experience the city in a mindful way. And if I'm still smitten by a place that keeps me at a distance, my lens pinned upon the impenetrable glass of shop windows is a metaphor for that. I may also be feeling a sense of loss. What if I *had* moved to New York? What kind of person would I be now? Would I have a better, more creative life? Of course, it is only I who keeps myself at a distance from this city. When one is grounded in aspiration, it feels almost a guarantee that wishes will not be fulfilled. All the better to reinterpret this feeling through the lens of a camera.

## ii. i'll be your mirror mirror mirror

Andy Warhol once observed that the Velvet Underground's debut LP should have been pressed with a built-in skip so that the line "I'll be your mirror" would repeat ad infinitum. Such is the sensation of the continuous encounter of reflections on New York streets. One imagines a parallel universe, where the reflections and the isolation of the frozen world behind glass are united, creating a narrative that unfolds upon continued observation or even the slightest paradigm shift. As I shot, I found myself constantly shifting my viewpoint, in order to better marry the inside of the display and the outside, what turns out to be an intuitive reflection on the insider/outsider paradigm. It was through the ground glass of the Hasselblad that I found the shop windows presented the most dreamlike landscape, one glass universe reflecting upon another. This was also a probable outcome from my romance with an old film camera, the physical act of taking pictures through looking down into the viewfinder – which feels gesturally like looking inward at my own self. An element of longing presented itself through my looking inward *and* through the lens simultaneously.

There was also a practical reason for the manifestation of the dreamlike landscape: I was using fairly slow film and my aperture was always wide open, so these shots have a consistently narrow depth of field. Capturing reflections in shop windows worked best when shot on shady sides of the street. The low light conditions of a vertical city in combination with the use of slow film resulted in a happy accident for me,

a newbie working with a medium format camera. But because I believe chance is integral to street photography, I was pleased that my lack of technical expertise yielded the kind of photographs that conceptually play into my representation of shop windows as mesmerizing dioramas, especially when married to reflections of the exterior street. Unlike Zoe Leonard, my use of an old medium format camera was not conceptual but a tactic to create large format prints. I was also eager to go analog, as using film might awaken instincts I didn't know I had.

I believe that when one works within a universe of reflections, one falls into a quiet place that feels unanchored, where reality and illusion are not clearly divided by glass, but where one sinks into it through the imagination.



*Elizabeth Street, Nolita*

## hustle & flow: on flânerie in the city

“Walking is a subversive detour, the scenic route through a half-abandoned landscape of ideas and experiences... When you give yourself to places, they give you yourself back; the more one comes to know them, the more one seeds them with the invisible crop of memories and associations that will be waiting for you when you come back, while new places offer up new thoughts, new possibilities. Exploring the world is one of the best ways of exploring the mind, and walking travels both terrains.”<sup>39</sup>

–Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*

There is a luxury in roaming New York freely with no other objective but to examine its quirky details and how it offers up numerous hypnotic reflections. In any discussion that involves walking and shooting in public space, it becomes fairly easy to conflate street photographers with ethnographers and flâneurs. The city is a romantic refuge, and the flâneur’s position in it is “‘to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange.’ The task was to see the city anew, as if for the first time.”<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 12-13.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 913.

To see a city “anew” and to achieve a state of “transcendence” is in contemporary parlance, to be a mindful observer, and mindfulness demands rigorous attention to one’s “self” as well as to one’s environment and interactions. It is interesting that the flâneur appears lost in reverie, and yet observant. It begs the question, could the flâneur be considered mindful, or is this figure self-absorbed, adrift in intoxication? There are an unsurprisingly broad variety of descriptions of this paradoxical character, one of my favorites of which is by Franz Hessel.<sup>41</sup> A close friend of Walter Benjamin’s, he makes a comment that resonates with my own experience of walking New York and turning this experience into a book: “Flânerie is a way of reading the street, in which people’s faces, displays, shop windows, café terraces, cars, tracks, trees turn into an entire series of equivalent letters, which together form words, sentences, and pages of a book that is always new. In order to really stroll, one should not have anything too specific on one’s mind.”<sup>42</sup> There is no advantage to having an agenda if it is your ambition to really *see*.

Notably, the flâneur is yet another version of the outsider. A subversive figure, he or she abandons a capitalist work ethic in favour of the pleasures of a subconscious wander through the city. Today, there exists a feminist flâneuse: she can be found taking part in contemporary events like “Slut Walk,” an annual protest march calling for an end of rape culture, where women gather together to vocalize their right to dress how they please and walk where they please when they please, without the approval or the harassment of men. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women were only able to indulge in flânerie with the introduction of the department store as a destination. Not much has changed. We are still treated as streetwalkers if we idle too long, are not walking with purpose, or are not armed to the teeth with shopping bags. Female flânerie is a tricky notion when women’s behavior on the streets continues to be under scrutiny by men. Even with a camera, I was never comfortable standing in one place too long.

---

<sup>41</sup> Franz Hessel (1880–1941) was a German writer and translator. He worked with Benjamin on a German translation of Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*.

<sup>42</sup> Anke Gleber, “The Art of Walking: Reflections of Berlin.” In *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flânerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 66.



*fresh bagels and haircuts, East Village*

Fortunately, while shooting, I tended not to focus on being harassed but rather focused on my collaboration with chance. One dull day on my return trip in February I threw my camera in my bag, bored with the day's offerings. And then snow began to fall. During my long meandering walk from Chinatown back to The Jane Hotel in the West Village, I was unable to put the camera down. I was exhausted and there were no free cabs, but that day of shooting fed me better than the coq au vin I wolfed down at Buvette when my feet finally gave out. Back in my tiny cabin at the Jane, I thought of how Winogrand, Arbus and Leiter roamed these very streets and how they must have had similar feelings of exhaustion and contentment.

But Winogrand, Arbus and Leiter didn't loom as large over my New York shoot as Robert Frank did. He was my psychogeographic touchstone in the sultry days of August... a benign<sup>43</sup> daily presence that was deeply felt. On the first day of my stay in the East Village, my feet led me directly to Frank's doorstep on Bleeker, just east of the Bowery. It wasn't intentional. My grad school brain pegged the event as kind of auspicious. I was too shy to knock on his door, convincing myself that it was August and surely Frank and his wife June were enjoying cooler breezes in Mabou, N.S.

---

<sup>43</sup> Frank is hardly "benign" as a radical countercultural ground shifter in the photographic realm. But in the landscape of my daily walks, he was a trace of the city that I felt was soon to vanish, given his advanced age.



*Robert Frank's chair? Bleeker Street*

I returned again and again to his block, as it intersected with my daily downtown strolls. I shot many of my favorite environmental collages on his street. Spying me with my camera pinned on his house, a passerby remarked that Frank has a habit of sitting outside on the sidewalk. I would imagine he enjoys the contact with the members of the boxing club next door. One day I discovered a chair in front of his door. I photographed it, loving the immediate sense of both his presence and absence. On return strolls, I hoped I would find him sitting there, but I never did. An old man from the boxing club occasionally took residence, napping or reading the Daily News. That Frank's address and accessibility is hardly a secret speaks to the constellation of intersecting lives of those who live in New York, a city that treasures walking like no other place. And yet it is questionable whether many New Yorkers would consider their perambulations *flânerie*. More often than not, New Yorkers walk to get places. They are also tethered lovingly to their smartphones, paying more attention to their digital *flânerie* than to the formidable city around them. Yet they still manage to swan through the streets displaying a meticulous sense of style that is meant to be appraised and admired. Most have wished to be caught in Bill Cunningham's lens, as his New York Times column *On the Street* paid decisive tribute to style since 1978. His recent passing marks the end of an era devoted to documenting street style. In the future, I believe his enormous archive will be evaluated beyond the tropes of fashion to reveal a sublime representation of New York's population, not unlike August Sander's exhaustive series, *People of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*.



*Bill Cunningham, doing what he did best: still from the documentary "Bill Cunningham New York" (2011)*

In my own perambulations, flânerie became an idealistic construct once I chose to walk New York in the insufferable August heat with two cameras strapped around my neck. So immersed was I as the so-called “hunter and gatherer”<sup>44</sup> of images, I no longer paid attention to the fact that my act of walking was instrumental to my practice.

While the lament is unoriginal that today’s New York is blandly commodified – a super-size shopping mall trading upon its nostalgic street cred – if you let the city wash over you and train your own microscopic lens upon it, it still retains a bracing energy that makes it a vibrant place for street photography. No, it is not the New York that I am nostalgic for. Nor is it in black and white. I will not run into Garry Winogrand racing down 5<sup>th</sup> avenue to capture Kardashian lookalikes clutching American Eagle bags and selfie wands in his lens. But I’m still beguiled as I search for the curious punctum that inserts itself in New York more than anywhere else. The act of observation holds the key to great street photography. The act of walking unlocks it.

---

<sup>44</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 189-90.



*Elizabeth Street, Nolita*

## goodbye to all that

"It is easy to see the beginnings of things, and harder to see the ends. I can remember now, with a clarity that makes the nerves in the back of my neck constrict, when New York began for me, but I cannot lay my finger upon the moment it ended, can never cut through the ambiguities and second starts and broken resolves to the exact place on the page where the heroine is no longer as optimistic as she once was."<sup>45</sup>

—Joan Didion, *Goodbye to All That*

On a sweltering August afternoon, I was standing outside Bergdorf Goodman capturing reflections in its Central Park facing windows. As I stood there, folded over the Hasselblad in a sweat-bursting fit of concentration, two hyacinth-scented gazelles floated out of the store and ascended into a waiting Cadillac Escalade behind me. For a moment, *just a moment*, I longed to be them instead of me: a heat-fatigued street photographer in cut-offs and a damp black t-shirt that was leaking dye all over my skin. I was having an outsider moment, and it was straight out of my worst high school nightmares. But it passed, long before I dropped off my exposed rolls of film that day. When I picked up the contact sheets, I knew

---

<sup>45</sup> Joan Didion, "Goodbye to All That." In *Slouching Toward Bethlehem: Essays*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 225.

it didn't matter how tired I felt or how disheveled I thought I looked, the urge to shoot would displace any notions I had of inferiority. Being behind the lens felt like a secret superpower.

In Joan Didion's definitive essay *Goodbye to All That* she recounts her love affair with New York as a young writer who moves to the city with idealistic notions and unsuitable garments. She lasts only so long racing from one literary party to another before New York has its way with her and her optimism flags. Even though my relationship to New York is fleeting, it's hard not to identify with Didion's precise account of how the city *felt* to her. It reminds me of my longing, which manifests in my photographs. Only in shooting them do I feel I've exorcized the need to *have* New York. I have the photographs. They are better. Unlike Didion, it is not disenchantment I feel: its relief.

Once I brought this project to fruition, I fully understood why I've been shooting New York for the last six years. My aspirational impulse has transformed into a sanguine state of reflection. It has been my pleasure to document the city *in my way*. My dreams of being an insider in the city never manifested. But something else happened: I made a book that is all the better for its distance from its subject. Whether it finds a publisher or not, its viewpoint is mine and mine alone: I see what I see. And whether I shoot the city again remains to be seen. To observe the rules of chance, who am I to make plans?

–Stephanie Power, June 2016

# bibliography

Allen, Woody. *Manhattan*. 1979. DVD.

Adams, James. "Hello from the Outside," *The Globe and Mail*. 11 March 2016.  
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/art-and-architecture/youll-leave-agos-outsiders-with-eyes-and-mind-full-and-satisfied/article29182721/>

Blaustein, Jonathan. "Turning Instagram Images into Analogue," *New York Times*, 15 March 2016.  
<http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/03/15/documentum-instagram-newspaper-stephen-shore-william-boling/>

Buck-Morss, Susan. "The Flaneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering." In *New German Critique No. 39, Second Special Issue on Walter Benjamin*, 99-140. Duke University Press, Autumn, 1986.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/488122>

Bush, Norman. "Abstract New York." *New York Times*, 19 September 2015.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/09/16/opinion/sunday/exposures-norman-bush.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/09/16/opinion/sunday/exposures-norman-bush.html?_r=0)

Calvino, Italo. "The Adventure of a Photographer" In *Difficult Loves*, New York: Harvest Books, 1985.

Carr, David. *The Night of the Gun: A reporter investigates the darkest story of his life. His own*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009.

Davidson, Bruce. *Subway*, Göttingen: Steidl, 2011.

Dash Moore, Deborah. "On City Streets." In *Contemporary Jewry, Volume 28, Issue 1*. 84-108. Netherlands: Springer. December 2008.

Daum, Meghan. "Returning to a Gentler Gotham" *New York Times*, 6 February 2016.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/07/style/new-york-city-leaving-returning.html>

De Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Stephan F. Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

Didion, Joan. "Goodbye to All That." In *Slouching Toward Bethlehem: Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

Drobnick, Jim and Jennifer Fisher. "Jayce Salloum: Archive of the Street," in *Image and Inscription*, ed. Robert Bean. Toronto: Gallery 44 and YYY Books, 2005.

Dyer, Geoff. *The Ongoing Moment*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2012.

Featherstone, Mike. "The Flâneur, the City and Virtual Public Life." In *Urban Studies, Volume 35, Nos. 5-6*, 909-925. <http://ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/38587747?accountid=13631>.

Friedberg, Anne. "Les Flâneurs du Mal: Cinema and the Postmodern Condition." In *PMLA, Vol. 106, No 3*, 419-431. Modern Language Association, 1991. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/462776>

Friedberg, Anne. *The Virtual Window*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.

Gleber, Anke. "The Art of Walking: Reflections of Berlin" In *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flanerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture*, 63-83. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Goldsmith, Kenneth. *Capital: New York of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. London: Verso, 2015.

Goldstein, Judith L. "The Flaneur, the Street Photographer and Ethnographic Practice." In *Contemporary Jewry, Volume 28, Issue 1*. 121-124. Netherlands: Springer. December 2008.

- Helmreich, William B. *The New York Nobody Knows: Walking 6000 Miles in the City*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.
- Kaufmann, Vincent. "The Poetics of the Dérive" In *The Everyday*, edited by Stephen Johnstone, 95-102. Cambridge: Documents in Contemporary Art, The MIT Press, 2008.
- Kishik, David. *The Manhattan Project: A Theory of a City*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2015.
- Laing, Olivia. *The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone*. New York: Picador, 2016.
- Lait, Jack & Lee Mortimer. *New York: Confidential!* New York: Dell, 1951.
- Leiter, Saul. *Early Color*. Göttingen: Steidl, 2008.
- Levitt, Helen, and James Agee. *A Way of Seeing*. New York: Viking Press, 1965.
- Levitt, Helen. *Crosstown*. Brooklyn: PowerHouse Books, 2001.
- Messner, Ricarda. "Confessions," *Flaneur Magazine, Issue 3*. Edited by Fabian Saul, Grashina Gabelmann. Berlin: 2014. 31.
- Niemeyer, Katherina. "Introduction: Media and Nostalgia" In *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*, edited by Katharina Niemeyer, 51-69. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.  
<http://ryerson.ebib.com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1864093>
- Parsons, Deborah L. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Perec, Georges. "The Street // 1974," In *The Everyday*, edited by Stephen Johnstone, 102-108. Cambridge: Documents in Contemporary Art, The MIT Press, 2008.
- Power, Stephanie. *Street Photography: Substance & Style*. 2015.
- Rich, Nathaniel. "Walking New York" in *New York Times Magazine*, 26 April 2015.
- Scalway, Helen. "The Contemporary Flâneuse." In *The Invisible Flâneuse? Gender, public space, and visual culture in nineteenth-century Paris*, edited by Aruna D'souza and Tom McDonough, 164-171. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006.
- Sekula, Alan. "The Traffic in Photographs//1981," In *Documentary*, ed. Julian Stallabrass, 195-204. Cambridge: Documents in Contemporary Art, The MIT Press, 2008.
- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York: Picador, 1977.
- Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. "Inside/out//1994," In *The Everyday*, ed. Stephen Johnstone, 195-204. Cambridge: Documents in Contemporary Art, The MIT Press, 2008.
- Talese, Gay. *New York: A Serendipiter's Journey*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961.
- Trachtenberg, Alan. "Seeing what You See: Photographs by Helen Levitt." *Raritan* 31, no. 4 (Spring, 2012): 1-18.  
<http://ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1023249753?accountid=13631>
- Van Godtsenhoven, Karen. *Women's Passages: A Bildungsroman of Female Flânerie*, Dissertation: Universiteit Gent, 2005. [http://lib.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/000/970/617/RUG01-000970617\\_2010\\_0001\\_AC.pdf](http://lib.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/000/970/617/RUG01-000970617_2010_0001_AC.pdf)
- Westerbeck, Colin & Joel Meyerowitz. *Bystander: A History of Street Photography*. New York: Bulfinch Press, 1994.