

First published in the UK in 2015 by  
Intellect, The Mill, Parnall Road, Fishponds, Bristol, BS16 3JG, UK

First published in the USA in 2015 by  
Intellect, The University of Chicago Press, 1427 E. 60th Street, Chicago,  
IL 60637, USA

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the  
British Library.

Cover image: © Michael Wolf, 'Street View/ Interface' #9

Series editor: Alfredo Cramerotti

Design and typesetting: Stephanie Sarlos

Production manager: Bethan Ball

Copyediting: MPS Technologies

ISBN 978-1-78320-459-5

ePDF ISBN 978-1-78320-460-1

Printed & bound by Gwasg Gomer Cyf / Gomer Press Ltd, UK

# THE CULTURE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN PUBLIC SPACE

edited by Anne Marsh, Melissa Miles and Daniel Palmer

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**intellect** Bristol, UK / Chicago, USA

# Contents

- 6     **Foreword** Alfredo Cramerotti
- 8     **Acknowledgements**
- 9     **Introduction** Melissa Miles
- 22    *Chapter 1*  
**Standing on Shifting Ground: Privacy and Photography in Public**  
Melissa Miles
- 44    *Chapter 2*  
**Tilt** Simon Terrill
- 56    *Chapter 3*  
**"No Credible Photographic Interest": Photography Restrictions  
and Surveillance in a Time of Terror** Daniel Palmer and Jessica Whyte
- 74    *Chapter 4*  
**Street View/Interface** Michael Wolf
- 82    *Chapter 5*  
**Bill Henson and the Polemics of the Nude Child in Photography**  
Alexandra Heller-Nicholas and Anne Marsh

100	Chapter 6 <b>The Sleepers and Trafalgar Square</b> Cherine Fahd
110	Chapter 7 <b>Criminalizing "Camera Fiends": Photography Restrictions in the Age of Digital Reproduction</b> Jessica Whyte
134	Chapter 8 <b>In the Event of Amnesia the City will Recall</b> Denis Beaubois
144	Chapter 9 <b>The Face in Digital Space</b> Martyn Jolly
158	Chapter 10 <b>From Sixteen Google Street Views</b> Jon Rafman
168	Chapter 11 <b>Google Street View and Photography in Public Space</b> Daniel Palmer
185	<b>Further Reading</b>
188	<b>Contributors</b>

# Foreword Alfredo Cramerotti

From the Series Editor to the Reader

## IN AND OUT OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

What we commonly understand as the public sphere—which is bigger than just public space; incorporating as it does relations, speech and time where things can become and be public—is more a concept than a thing. Let's take as an example public personae. In the past, according to cultural theorist Boris Groys, figures like politicians needed the visual narrative provided by artists in order to become “fully” public, but nowadays this division of labour (the politics by politicians; the representation of politics by artists) is no longer the case (Groys 2008). Politicians, alongside film celebrities, sports stars, terrorists and multinational CEOs, generate vast quantities of images and shared visual narratives, with the extra layer of also being in charge of “curating” their own public image. They inscribe themselves into the public consciousness through this act of curating their own visual self.

An individual's public presence is immediately represented, mediated, circulated and interpreted through the media and by the media, including also protean media such as the blogosphere or online content aggregation tools. The public sphere is more a concept than a thing because it is extremely difficult to pin down what it does and how it affects an individual. In this sense, does art function as a design tool by which we make things work, rather than something to intellectually stimulate? It is not really about how I design and inscribe myself into the world, but rather how I negotiate the way the world designs and inscribes me (Groys 2008). This is the crucial matter when we deal with the notion of the public sphere.

The media machine distributes images of all kinds at levels of production with which the individual artist or collective cannot compete. The only way for an artist to contribute in shaping the public sphere is to go beyond the art system and become an artwork; to cease producing images (or other forms of narrative) in order to become an image.

From adding to the public sphere through one's work to becoming the work itself, subjected to the gaze of the media—a sort of meta-artist—is quite a radical step, but it is not one that was unannounced: for nineteenth-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche it was better to be an artwork than to be an artist. And so it goes. We are now in a situation in which everyone is expected to curate his or her own narrative in the public sphere in order to respond to the “aesthetic responsibility” that society demands from us. As Groys asserts, self-design has become compulsory; the “mass cultural practice par excellence” (Groys 2008). Hence, “aesthetic evaluation” is at the core of the public sphere, where artists and audiences alike act together in shaping the dimension. Unlike past claims about everyone being an artist, in this age it seems that everyone is an artwork, and—more problematically—his or her author too.

## REFERENCE

Groys, Boris (2008), “Self-Design and Aesthetic Responsibility,” Lecture at Frieze Art Fair, London, 16 October. Text published in *e-flux Journal* no. 7, June 2009. Available at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/self-design-and-aesthetic-responsibility/>.

# Acknowledgements

A project of this scope could not be undertaken without the assistance of a significant network of support. The research for this book was funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant in partnership with the Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne. Our relationship with the CCP was invaluable. Aside from hosting the project's symposium and the associated exhibition "In Camera and In Public" in 2011, the CCP also facilitated the distribution of our surveys and provided space for our focus groups. Naomi Cass and Rebecca Chew at CCP also offered ideas about photographers to consider in the project. We also wish to thank the many photographers who agreed to be surveyed, interviewed and to participate in the focus groups. They generously shared their time and experiences of working as a photographer in this fraught environment.

Mark Davison from the Faculty of Law at Monash University also warrants our gratitude, as he helped shape the larger project as a team member and contributed important legal knowledge and advice. A number of research assistants helped us during this project, including Holly Arden, Jessica Whyte and Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, on a variety of tasks including assisting with literature reviews, image permissions and liaising with photographers. Along with Heller-Nicholas and Whyte, who also contributed to this collection, we would additionally like to thank Martyn Jolly for his chapter.

Finally, of course, we thank the photographers who have kindly contributed their work to this publication: Cherine Fahd, Denis Beaubois, Simon Terrill, Michael Wolf and Jon Rafman. Thanks also to Sarah Van Ingelgom (Blue Lotus Art Consultancy), and Jennifer Chaput.

—Anne Marsh, Melissa Miles and Daniel Palmer

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