

Student Number: 2001173

BA Course Title: Photography in the Arts (BA Hons)

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Module Name: Research into Context

Module Number: ADAD5003

Module Lecturer: Paul Duerinckx

Word count: 2675

Question 1: Using at least 3 examples, consider how image makers have utilised digital technology to explore at least one of the following: Conflict, the Environment, Identity, the Surveillance State, the Technological World?

The relationship between image makers' creative expression and the development of technology has been interwoven for hundreds of years, since the first photograph taken by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in the early 19th century (Abrol, 2015). For example, the invention of photography in the first half of the 19th century has been described leading to the 'democratisation' of art, both in terms of creative expression through the acquisition of a 'mechanical eye' for the masses and accessibility and popular engagement (Benjamin, 2008). It is a relationship which for many years has raised key questions about how art, the 'ways of seeing' art, and economic, social and technological change interact (Berger, 1972). The recent revolution in information communications technology has followed the age of 'mechanical reproduction' 100 years ago (Benjamin, 2008). The relationship between art, artist and audience has been further redefined - indeed potentially revolutionised. The recent pace and intensification of this process is emphasised by the commentator Martin Lister: who in his introduction to the second edition of his book "The Photographic Image in Digital Culture", first published in 1995 states:

In the 17 years between the first and second editions of this book, there has been an explosion of new kinds of photographic practices, technologies and institutions.... The first edition opened with an image of personal computers humming and blinking on desks in formal institutions. They are, of course, still to be found, but computers have also moved off desks and out of their beige boxes to be integrated into a range of smart devices and closer to the fabric of everyday life, to be mobile, pervasive and ubiquitous. Rather than dramatic novelties, so called "new" or "digital" media technologies are now the stuff of habit, routine, everyday life and work (Lister, 2013).

In this context, a group of New York artists including John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Whitman, and Yvonne Rainer, were amongst the first image makers to attempt to blend visual art and technology in the 1960s when they worked with engineers and scientists from the world-famous Bell Laboratories (ARTDEX, 2021). By the 1980s, Andy Warhol was perhaps the most globally influential artist to utilise then state-of-the-art technology such as video and film to make his work more visible and accessible – as well as pioneering early forms of digital art in the digital drawings he produced on an Amiga Computer to advertise computer systems and software for the Computer Company Commodore International as a brand ambassador (ARTDEX, 2021). Now, almost two hundred years

after the invention of the camera, and in terms of how image makers utilise the new medium of *digital* technology, three key themes can be identified - both in relation to artists' creative processes and their interaction with their audiences. These can be broadly identified as firstly, the development of new genres of creative work based on experimentation with new techniques and creative tools which make digital an integral part of the creative process and embed digital within the work. Secondly, the capture and distribution of creative work in new formats. And thirdly, the enhancement of audience reach and engagement and creation of new experiences and content for them through innovations, such as digital installations, internet art and virtual reality.

These themes will now be explored through a consideration of the work of Eyal Gever in relation to the environment, Tomas Van Houtryve and James Bridle in relation to the surveillance state and Ai Weiwei in relation to conflict and identity. Wider questions about the rapidly changing role of photography within digital society, such as those considered by commentators such as Martin Lister (2013) and Fred Ritchin (2009), which arise from these reflections will also be briefly considered.

Firstly, Eyal Gever is an artist who explores the relationship of his digital work to the environment. Gever describes his work as "a fusion of art and technology" which explores the "human spirit, ecology and global issues" (Gever, 2021). This is most apparent when looking at his "Uncanny State" series, in which he along with contemporary dancer, Sharon Eyal, and contemporary pianist, Rosey Chan, try to express how the "ever-changing relationships between man, nature and technology" is now heading "so fast into the era of biotechnical innovations" that we need the six basic elements (Water, Fire, Air, Earth, Aether and Vibration), each represented by Eyal Dancing to Chan's piano, to remind us where we came from (Getler, 2019).

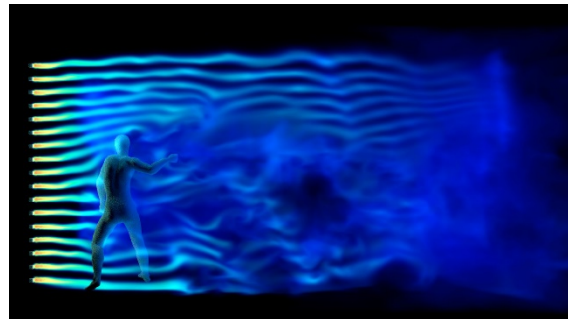


Fig 1. Aether Dancer, Uncanny State, Gever, 2019 Fig 2. Air Dancer, Uncanny State, Gever, 2019

Gever integrates technology into these pieces through the use of a 3D software which transforms the dancers into one of the six most important factors from the six elements that are the "foundation" of which "we are all created" (Nitrogen, Carbon, Sulphur, Oxygen, Hydrogen, Phosphorus). This use of computer-generated imagery shows how technology is becoming integral in driving an artist's subject matter as in Gever's work it is what binds each important factor together. His focus therefore combines the underlying themes, identified in the introduction of making digital part of the creative process alongside capturing and distributing outcomes in new formats. Natasha Getler's statement in her curatorial text on Gever's "Uncanny State" series, supports this as she feels that Gever's work "blurs the lines between organic and non-organic, considering our current and future identity as biological humans in the growing age of artificial intelligence and digital consciousness" (Getler, 2019). Her comments highlight how the line separating the digital medium and image making is disappearing with the two becoming one in Gever's work.

Secondly, and in relation to the theme of the surveillance state, the photographer Tomas Van Houtryve's body of work is particularly significant. His "Blue Sky Days A Drone's View of America" 2014 series is a response to an American drone strike in Pakistan which killed Zabair Rehman's grandmother, who was simply "picking okra" (Van Houtryve, 2015). The title of the project is inspired by Zabair's response to his grandmother's death: "I no longer love blue skies" (Van Houtryve, 2015). The project explores how little the public are actually aware of the use of drones in American society (Van Houtryve, 2015). Van Hountryve expresses this by attaching his camera to a small drone and flying it across America to find the gatherings that would be considered a "target" according to drone strike reports "from Pakistan and Yemen" such as "weddings, funerals, groups of people praying or exercising" (Van Houtryve, 2015). Van Houtryve stated the reason why he wanted to do this was to show "the changing nature of personal privacy, surveillance, and contemporary warfare".



Fig 3. Signature behavior, Blue Sky Days, Van Houtryve, 2013 Fig 4. Wedding, Blue Sky Days, Van Houtryve, 2013

His approach demonstrates how technology and art have both evolved over time together, as many of the present-day issues covered by artists such as the one represented in Van Houtryve's project are technologically related. Additionally, the fact Van Houtryve used a piece of technology in the form of the drone to help him express his vision in response to a technological incident reflects this (Van Houtryve, 2015). In relation to the broad themes identified in the introduction Van Houtryve is an image maker whose uses digital technology as a part of his creative process at the same time as addressing an issue which is in part created by technology.

Thirdly, and as an extension to my exploration of Van Houtryve's work, I subsequently researched that of artist, writer and journalist James Bridle in relation to the surveillance state theme (James Bridle / About, 2021). His "Drone Shadows" project features full size drawings of drones, used for surveillance and air strikes, at various locations (Griffiths, 2014). These drawings aim to highlight and raise awareness of their existence and use. The drawing of the drone itself was done the carpark in Bridle's studio and was exhibited across the world, in particular in London and Washington DC (Griffiths, 2014). This shows how technology and art are intertwined as Bridle drawing is based on a very advanced piece of technology with the purpose of raising the awareness of the existence of said technology to the general public (Griffiths, 2014).



Fig 5. Drone Shadow 001, London, February 2012 with Einar Sneve Martinussen of Voy Oslo., Bridle, 2012 Fig 6. Drone Shadow 002, Kemeralti Caddesi, Istanbul, 09/10/2012, Bridle 2012

However, it is important to note in contrast that his work is *influenced* by new digital technology but is not *shaped* by it; nor is it incorporated in the creative process in the same way it is with Gever or Van Houtryve. This is further supported by *The New Yorker's* Alex Carp stating that Bridle's work "deals with the ways in which the digital, networked world reaches into the physical, offline one. At thirty-three, he's part of what might be the last generation that makes those distinctions" – a comment which reflects how the "Drone Shadows" project demonstrates how an artist can convey how the "digital" word makes an impact on the "physical" world without having to use technology itself to convey their vision (Carp, 2013). In an article written by Bridle where he discusses John Berger's "Ways of Seeing", he argues we need a "new way of seeing" to better understand the digital word in particular technology which is "Beneath the surface of the street, and behind the screens of our computers, hide powerful forces that shape all of our lives." And that understanding the "connections between infrastructure and code, state surveillance and corporate power, social prejudice and algorithmic bias, and the environment and computation" is "vital" during "the times we live in" and that it's an image makers job to "forge" that understanding (Bridle, 2019). This shows that image makers need to utilise technology alongside art forms as it will help them and everyone else who views their work to understand what our world really is.

Finally, I considered the work Ai Weiwei in relation to conflict and identity. Ai Weiwei is a native Chinese artist and activist now domiciled in Europe, who has been critical of the Chinese Government's views on both human rights and democracy (Ai Weiwei - Wikipedia, 2021). Due to activism expressed through his art he has been labelled "China's most dangerous man" (Stevens, 2012) Ai Weiwei's collaboration with Irish artist Kevin Abosch called "Priceless" back in 2018 explores how the world views the "value" of human life, in particular that of refugees through the use of the Ethereum Blockchain (Pearson, 2018). The way in which it all works is that two ERC20 digital tokens on the blockchain, one which is unavailable to anyone the other is available for distribution (Pearson, 2018). A "nominal" portion of the digital token was then put into digital wallets with the keys then thrown away (Pearson, 2018). This meant that the 12 pieces of physical work would be sent to the buyers of the Wallet addressees. The Wallet addresses themselves are a random words, numbers and letters that represent a shared moment between Weiwei and Abosch (Pearson, 2018).

0x063F6c5F6f285d6F23F54139F23C5409FfEF559

0xD6562e805362bE984Ed94748DB9337038449cae4

Fig 7. Priceless, Wewei and Abosch, 2018
Wewei and Abosch, 2018

Fig 8. 'You have a big nose – YOU have a big nose!'

This makes the essentially worthless piece of paper with a digital token priceless especially in terms of what it represents. Wewei's other 2010 work titled "Surveillance Camera" project, in which he creates a marble replica of a security camera, explores how the 'policing' of his life, touching upon themes of "paranoia and voyeurism", and how he feels his life is constantly "documented" (Lisson Gallery, 2011).

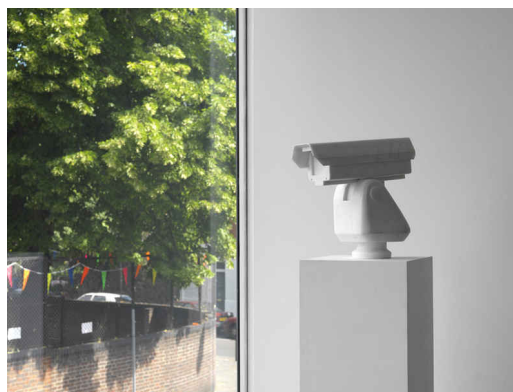


Fig 9. Surveillance Camera, Wewei, 2010

These works show the impact of technology on the world of art as Wewei's "Priceless" project questions the value of both technology and art has compared to human life while his "surveillance" project shows how technology has had effect on Weiwei's life through his art. In many respects his work therefore draws together the three underlying themes in relation to image making and technology identified in production. Mark Stevens from the Smithsonian Magazine sums this up as Ai knowing "how to combine his life and art into a daring and politically charged performance that helps define how we see modern China. He'll use any medium or genre—sculpture, ready-mades, photography, performance, architecture, tweets and blogs—to deliver his pungent message" this shows how it is possible for image makers of any medium (Photographers, Filmmakers, Fine Artists etc) can use whatever format to express their innovations, technology or the "digital world" being one of them, showing once again how technology can be utilised alongside art (Stevens, 2012).

The four artists I have discussed above show how image makers can use technology in their work through a variety of ways to explore different and sometimes related themes: Eyal Gever in relation to the environment, Bridle and Van Houtryve in relation to surveillance and finally Weiwei in relation to conflict and identity, also overlapping with surveillance. They do so to differing degrees through the use of digital in their creative processes, their choice of topic and focus and methods of interaction with their audiences.

My research into the ways in which these identified image makers have interacted with digital technology has also raised a wider series of ethical, social and political questions which I hadn't previously considered. This is perhaps best summarised in the following observation from one of the artists I focused on, Van Houtryve. Although he specifically refers to drones, his observation about the use and role of photography in the digital age has wider resonance:

For the past 15 years I worked as professional photojournalist inspired by the camera's ability to connect human beings, document news, and capture beauty. But there is a darker side to how photography is used in our world today.... I often wonder whether these uses have already eclipsed traditional ones, such as portraiture and fine art. Are we at a point in the evolution of photography where the medium has become weaponised? ... It seems clear that when the next chapter in the evolution of photography is written, drones will have a very prominent role. As more and more cameras take to the skies is that drones which use photography to celebrate and inspire the best of human values outnumber those designed for darker aims - Van Houtryve (Van Houtryve, 2014)

The rapidly changing context and significance for image making in the digital age, and the questions that this poses, has been further explored by commentators such as Lister and Ritchin. Lister, for example, in his consideration of the shifting terms used to describe "digital culture" would seem to echo some of the issues raised by Van Houtryve:

The politics of new communications technologies have shifted as the incorporation, institutionalization, regulation and surveillance of global information systems presents a less utopian picture than some saw, perhaps naively, 17 years ago (Lister, 2013).

From a different perspective, Ritchin offers a perhaps more optimistic view of the digital future of photography for image makers:

The inherent non-linearity of the digital allows for more input from others, including the subject and reader as collaborators. The top-down, bedtime-style story is of limited use. A non-linear narrative that allows for increased complexity and depth, and encourages both subject and reader to have greater involvement, will eventually emerge more fully from the digital environment. This, in a sense, is the more profound democratization of media. (Ritchin, 2021)

What is therefore clear from this constantly changing context is that image makers use of digital technology is now moving the art form to its arguably it's most pivotal moment since the invention of the camera almost two centuries ago and certainly since artists such as Warhol pioneered the integration of image and technology at the very early years of the computer age.

Note: I had also looked at artists and photographers such as Alberto Servlo Erik Johnson, Alex Mcloed.

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