Daniel Szollosi Trimester Essay for
Reading, writing and research methodologies with Steve Rushton
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The camera generated performances
How the camera makes us?

'To live is to be photographed, to have a record of one's life, and therefore to go on with one's life oblivious, or claiming to be oblivious, to the camera's nonstop attentions. But to live is also to pose. To act is to share in the community of actions recorded as images.'
Susan Sontag

INTRODUCTION – self directed project
This trimester I am working on a thematic project what deals with a certain behaviour of the 'models', human subjects at the moment when a camera is present, and when it's exposure button is pressed. These acts, performances for the camera itself, often start repeating, replicating themselves: the result is photographic clichés. The topic of my essay is photo clichés, poses, human behaviour when a camera's lens is pointed towards them.
I have done a series of studio photographs reacted the most self-repeated, 'memeish' poses I have found through my research. I distracted the background to reveal the abstraction of the poses by themselves.
My interest focuses on finding what is the goal of taking tourist photos. To show the viewer the fact that the tourist has visited that sight, that city?

Actually which intention is the dominant? Being photographed, or producing photographs by clicking the camera or posing in front of it? I think exposing is also addictive similar to posing. Try getting a camera in your hand, I bet you would shoot your first picture within a minute.

Cliché, posing
        The most popular tourist photo cliché is well known by all of us. The scenario for a typical tourist photo is simple. Place your partner in front of a sight, he stares into your lens and click. The aim is to give the ultimate proof of the fact that the person was present once in the past in that space with the company of the tourist sight in the background. The result is a sight in the background and a person staring into the camera, smiling and posing. People do travel a lot to take a look personally on a city and its sights, but when it comes to the moment of taking a picture they turn their backs to the sight what they have travelled for and spent money to see. It is not strange? How it is possible to have any visible emotional influence on the subjects face if the moment what the photograph catches the subject does not stare to the sight which should it be influenced by? A photograph – especially the documentary – should bring a moment of truth, a true fragment of time. But let me ask: is there anything true, anything natural in *posing?* Turning your back to a sight and freeze, and artificially smile? The smile on the photo is artificial and fake. If the camera would not be present nobody would turn his back to the sight instead he would stare at the sight.
This common scene has built over the century since the invention of the photography – a directed, artificial scene. Artificial in the sense that the subject turns his back to the tourist sight, because there is one thing even more important than staring the sight – staring into the lens. The reason is obvious: our face is the most important in recognition and identification is the prior aim of these images. It seems like we can not state that 'I was there at the Eiffel tower' if we can not prove it with a photo document that we were there – the photo document that shows that subject with his recognizable face.

Switching to an even wider lens what can we observe on the process of taking a tourist photo?
The gaze of the camera holder – the pose and the gaze back to the lens of the subject.
Gaze and pose: the duel of the two sides of the camera. Posing is an action gained by a spectator's gaze – evermore gaze gave birth to posing.
When the red light is blinking in the front of the apparatus – and the subjects is aware of that –

something extraordinary happens: instead of continuing behave naturally, the subject starts artificially posing. What means 'normally'? Is it recordable, how people behave naturally? Of course it is. It is something similar to wild life photograph, but in these case we call it *voyeurism* – when the subject is not aware of that he is being watched and recorded.

It can only record another layer of reality. There is a deep cultural impact on our society that forces us behave in front of a lens. The record shows acts that the subjects wound not do 'normally'.[1]

The impact of a camera is so strong that these poses started to live their own lives. They created themselves and now repeating themselves.

There are certain phenomenons, viral activities which would not exist without a camera: it is about to pose to the gaze of the camera – such as forming bunny ears with two fingers behind the head of a relative of yours, 'planking', 'bunnying', 'owling' or just simply posing in front of a city sight staring and smiling into the lens.

Planking is special cliché meme[2]. Meanwhile posing in front of any kind of tourist sight, staring into the camera seems for me more an aim to documentate the fact that 'me' as the tourist was here, here you can see the proof, the photo rather than a direct aim the repeat this type of photo cliché, on the contrary planking is directly the aim of repeating this obviously stupid, silly and most importantly nonsense pose. In a way its about the boundaries, the limitations of its own: how far the 'player' can push the boundaries without offend the rule? The rule is to keep pose repeated, but in the same time keep the image bring something new to the table, keep it interesting, and motivating to the other members of this global community. So the camera motivates its users. It can be easily observed in another trivial example. Young children go skiing as a bunch, they calmly sliding down on the slopes, but when the magic and planned day comes and one of them takes the responsibility to carry up to the mountain the camera in his backpack, the little crew goes insane: they go on the biggest jumps they have never ever dare to try. Same goes with planking: planking is just simply would not exist without a camera.

Gaze and Power

Sturken and Cartwright establish in their chapter 'The Gaze' that is fundamental desire of everybody: it is part of our ego. The gaze which refers being looked at, or looking at someone – in other words exhibitionism and voyeurism. Both are pleasurable.

'The photographic gaze thus helps to establish relationships of power. The act of looking is a commonly thought of as awarding more power to the person who is looking than to the person who is the object of the look. The tradition of institutional photography, in which prisoners, mental patients, and people of various ethnicities were photographed and catalogued, can be related to the traditions of visual anthropology and travel photography as well as to the tradition of painting peoples of so-called exotic locales. All function to varying degrees to represent codes of dominance and subjugation, difference and otherness.' (Sturken, M, & Cartwright, L. (2001),

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1 Interestingly everybody is protected by the law to be a victim of voyeurism. It is illegal to record someone then publish it without his personal contribution. Is not it a paradox? It is illegal to record someone when obviously he acts normally, but when you make him aware that he is being recorded, so he get the chance to behave artificially is acceptable.

2 'A **meme** is "an idea, behaviour or style that spreads from person to person within a culture."A meme acts as a unit for carrying cultural ideas, symbols or practices, which can be transmitted from one mind to another through writing, speech, gestures, rituals or other imitable phenomena. Supporters of the concept regard memes as cultural analogues to genes in that they self-replicate, mutate and respond to selective pressures.' (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme)

The posers of Abu Ghraib

During my research I found a particular news event what rushed like a virus over the globe and what brings together into a fusion what I have written in my essay so far.
In 2004 there was outstanding news event: some american soldiers' photos have been published from Iraq. Analysing through the photos of this special event can reveal the grotesque nature of the poses we have in our minds, and how and how deeply they are already embedded in our image driven society.

In the OPEN magazine's Issue 8 an article by Jorinde Seijdel was dedicated what happened with the photos of documenting the torture of Abu Ghraib prisoners in Iraq.
These photos have been leaked – on the contrary of will the American Government – although they were never intended to be published.
They were first broadcasted in CBS's 60 minutes and in the New York Times – and as it happened in the 2004 when the internet was already in a far gone state of course it had spread in second all around the globe via the internet.
Even an exhibition was dedicated to this photos, or this event: ICP the International Centre of Photography in New York, and the Warhol Museum in Pittsburg showed this exhibition curated by Brian Wallis (the Director of the Exhibitions of ICP).
Jorinde quotes Slavoj Zizek thoughts: 'When I first saw the notorious photograph of a prisoner wearing a black hood, electric wire attached to his limbs as he stood on a box in a ridiculous theatrical pose, my reaction was that this must be a piece of performance art.'
Theatrical.
It seems like the soldiers were directing the tortures to be capture-able. What if the soldiers were not torturing generally, usually their victims? What if the torture was a scene only for the camera? Would be interesting to know, what was first: the torturing, and then a camera was taken out of one of the soldiers pocket, and the record button were pressed, or just the other way around? There was a moment when someone took out the mobile phone camera then the action started?

Jorinde's opinion is that these picture are not documents of a certain event – they are almost, almost the event itself. She tells in the introduction to her article: these pictures eradicate the time and distance from the events. Due to Kimmelmann the effect what eradicates the distance is probably the viewpoint of these images: usually a professional photo journalist chooses his viewpoint to win the viewer sympathy to the *victim.* Usually the public is used to consume in the news the images that were taken by professional journalist photographers, but not in the case of the photos from Abu Ghraib.
Their greatest power is everybody who had been previously photographed – and therefore had been posed for a camera - recognize himself in the character of the soldier. The soldier. Not the victim.
In these pictures the point of view is flipped the other way around.

'The events are in part designed to be photographed. The grin is a grin for the camera. There would be something missing if, after stacking the naked men, you couldn't take a picture of them.'
Susan Sontag

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Alison Hearn, 'HOAXING THE 'REAL'' On the metanarrative of Reality Television