

## gesture is a gender / a shining bracelet which amplifies a slim wrist

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To-be-looked-at in 1933 was different than to-be-looked-at in 2016. The subjects presently holding the most financial, governmental, social, and sexual power benefit from the relatively new game of peek-a-boo that was photography circa 1933. To enable us to tolerate the hyperrationalization of the worlds of work, family, and social-spatial arrangement that make up the present, digital network technologies connect us in scopic-affective chains which depend heavily on the image of the human face.

So I sent an email to Will, Paul, Jamie, Ivy, Laura, Sami, Brandon, Crystal, Emily, Olive, Konrad, Sietske, Steve, Matt, Kevin K., Kevin L., Carrie, Margaret, Charlie Jane, and C.A., and later forwarded the message to Maggie, Brad, and Tooth, then FB-messaged Sophia and David, texted Joel, and asked Angela at coffee if they might like to recreate an Henri Cartier-Bresson photograph.

To-be-looked-at-ness in 1933 was still perhaps more in dialogue with performance, while to-be-looked-at-ness in 2016 is to be in dialogue with the internet. The latter is to imagine a community that is at once an agora, an audience, a sounding-board, an antagonist, a lover, a set of parents, and a group of friends at an after-after-party that never ends. Winding back through the genealogy of to-be-looked-at-ness locates the performative gesture somewhere near the very root that grew into the web we call communication in 2016.

Gesture makes a circle (discovered Konrad, Paul, and Valerie) through circuits of replication, going round through a garland of hands and elbows called classical (thought Lisa) or Grecian (I said), like a braid. Various weights (Ivy pointed out) press upon one another in pulls of affection or pushes of aggression. To shorthand one's relationship to the world through the particular poise of a hand....

It's from a book called *The Decisive Moment*, in French *Images à la sauvette* (Sitka pronounced it aloud but did not translate it; after all she's 6), which actually means Images on the Run, or Stolen Images. Says Eunsong Kim:

*he does this because he believes the modernist tradition of found means "TAKE" because for him FOUND means DEAD and without LIFE*

*Found means CONQUER*

*Found means MINE*

*Found means I ANOINT YOU AS RAW*

*unaffected*

*scientist*

*removed hunter*

*Found means you are my objects*

*"I" have no connection to you—*

*Of this version of a linear process, an archive driven by state power, Caswell declares:*

*"Instead of redeeming the archival conception of creatorship through its expansion, we should complicate creatorship's direct ties to provenance."*

*Complicate, challenge, destroy their notion of ownership, their ownership to this material—the owner is not the man who paid once, a long time ago, the photographer, the scientist, the white male artist WITH NO MEMORIES WITH NO TIES NO PHANTOMS TO TEND FOR. The museum. That library. Complicate all such ties to provenance and ask: Where are your memories? Are you a witness? Who do you care for? What are you continuing? Who do you remember?*<sup>1</sup>

Several black and grey flowers on a white dress, one flat nail-file, one person looking bemused and sociable, one person looked-at and wry, one retracted ballet hand, two fingers touching, one shining bracelet, six elbows, six eyebrows, three skin tones, three kinds of hair, two earrings, one worn wall. Olympian in their gazes: a hand that is a bird, a turn that is a flower, gesture that is gender. To-be-looked-at-ness says, “Do not ascribe aesthetics to us, we ascribe it to ourselves.” There is so little available about this picture except that one writer has called it a grotesque, to which I respond, “The gestures of power are never denaturalized.”

To-be-looked-at in 1933 versus to-be-looked-at in 2016 is an equation with a divisor that is an amalgamation of media. It is also a biopolitical question, which then draws a relationship between the biopolitical self and reproductive media. To imagine the self in a box (as an icon, setting preferences, adding friends, sharing links, being redirected, seeking out jobs and friends and lovers and apartments), to refer communicatively (which is to say gesturally) to the stage and the audience, to extend the project of modernism during which this “Humanist photographer” snapped what Ivy, Jamie, Maggie, Valerie, Lisa, Konrad, Paul, Raheleh and I discovered is a highly arranged and physically awkward shot—is to continually frame and reframe binaries of ugliness and beauty, blackness and whiteness, the human and the less-than-human.

Here I have begun to take up Eunsong’s directive to “debilitate whiteness” and will repeat her reminder: “What is made legible through the discourse of modernism is made through the discourse dependent on colonialism and chattel slavery. What is made powerful by modernism, what is made great, is made so because: whiteness as property, whiteness as abstract.”<sup>2</sup> I would redirect this sentiment back upon the selfie, the Instagram, the Facebook profile, where gestures made for stage legibility encode and encase the social formulations of whiteness, patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism, keeping them visible for perpetuity. Self-ascription here can only loop back around to a poststructural performance politics of disconnected gesture which has *already been* reappropriated inside our current technologies. I’d refer back to the enactment or staging of a proletarian, racially ambiguous or mixed, agender utopia of mutual care,<sup>3</sup> that which Cartier-Bresson “found” and I thought I saw at first, one dependent on a complicated and weighty braid of hands, arms, and elbows.

1 Eunsong Kim, “FOUND, FOUND, FOUND: LIVED, LIVED, LIVED,” *Scapegoat Journal* (Feb. 26, 2016): 53-60, 57-58.

2 *Ibid.*, 54.

3 Used here in reference to José Esteban Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York UP, 2009).

Manuel Alvarez Bravo  
*Caja de visiones*, 1938  
gelatin silver print, 19.3 x 24.2 cm





