HISTORICAL GLITCH: UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL MEDIA THROUGH THE
PHOTOGRAPHIC LENS

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ii

ABSTRACT

Jade E. Davis: Historical glitch: Understanding digital media Through the Photographic Lens
(Under the Direction of Ken Hillis)

Historical glitch: Understanding digital media Through the Photographic Lens, explores the intersecting media ecologies of social media, digital heritage content, as well as culture. The case study for this project, Vintage Black Beauty was digitally born on the social networking site Tumblr. By "digitally born" I refer to how these images were curated and published as a collection. The Tumblr was designed to put digital tools into practice by disseminating historical photographs of black women in their everyday lives from across the black diaspora. This project has two aims: one, to theorize how these photos changed (and if they did change) once extracted from their original curated frames, i.e. magazines, exhibits, and other historical photographic project; and, two, to understand how audiences (here, Tumblr users) engaged photographic narratives when the material document is deployed beyond its initial structure and transformed into a digital product. These aims are theoretically understood through the works of Fanon, Hurston, and McLuhan. Additionally, a digital performance piece that analyzes the effects of this practice, informed by DaDa art practices, puts the theoretical implications into motion by placing the digitized photographs gathered on Vintage Black Beauty in conversation with media from the same time periods. Through exploring this ecology, I argue that we can gain a better understanding of some of the differences between

digital and analog media, their different potentials for change, as well as the inherent limits they pose. While digital media do allow for greater access and dissemination, they are still tied to a screened experience and held to ethical standards determined by various stakeholders who are often ephemeral or evolving and in contradiction with how we have been trained to conceive of knowledge production. As more of our social lives move to the digital it is important we understand the implications for both formal and informal learning systems as these are space where culture is codified.

To my grandmother, Lucille Howard Brantley Russell, daughter of George Dennis Brantley and Lucille Priscilla Howard Brantley. Your accomplishments, and those of your mother, made me who I am. Thank you for believing in me, always and without restraint. Thank you for sharing your hopes and dreams (and your mother's advice).

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vi

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

DIGITAL PROJECTS

http://vintageblackbeauty.tumblr.com

http://historicalglitch.com

INTRODUCTION: DIGITAL PERFORMANCE ANDTHE WRITTEN WORD

Scholarship is the process and practice by which information and knowledge that have become culture are codified and used as a prism for understanding contemporary social relations. To do this, scholarship must be taken up by others engaged in erudition. It must be recognized as valid by peers. Further, other people must be able to deploy, reproduce, critique, and analyze the work across time. Digital Media changes this. Rather than information and knowledge seeping into culture after years of vetting and review, people are able to create, deploy, modify, interpret, and misinterpret information at a speed and scale that were not imaginable in the near past. This change modifies the message of existing scholarly practices.

Scholarly practices are sacred to those who are involved in formal knowledge production. The research leg of higher education is devoted to this. The marching orders, known to those even outside of the academy, are, "Publish or Perish". The isolated scholar, making great discoveries over the course of years or lifetime, in a cramped office stuffed with books, hand written notes, and loose leaf manuscripts sitting behind an oversized desktop computer atop a wooden desk, is a cultural trope that is easily recognized. This is the part of the labor that goes into being an academic or scholar that is recognized partially because it can be carefully vetted by peers and disseminated through a ranked journal or presses. From the presses those who can or are part of an institution that can afford to access it are able to access a seemingly

endless corpus of vetted scholarship that not everyone has the privilege to read. The narrow version of what "publish" means for scholars in our contemporary academic environment is not translatable to the digital world though, and as such, "scholarship", too, is losing some of its meaning and power as it gets left behind. It is a remainder of an old system that rewarded those who were already fluent in the codes and societies of its success.

Scholarship and Its Digital Failure

Other areas of life and work have been upended by digital practices, especially in terms of distribution of product and information. A good portion of scholarship has remained an area reluctant to change and as such has not produced a significant amount of research that attempts to give language to the limits of "scholarship" in digital culture. Scholarly practices seem to lose a lot of vetting that it is built into our current model when taken up in digital production relations (Benjamin 87). If the goal of scholarship is to continually shrink the enclosure through which academic knowledge is disseminated, then the project has been a success. Lack of sharing, coupled with the expectations and practices of peer review mean that conversations are for internal audiences first and foremost. The ability, then for this knowledge to be taken up in popular spaces can be seen as tainting or "not real scholarship", as it is too accessible. Accessibility, though slowly being taken away, is part of what defines the digital experience.

While most industries that deal with the distribution of a product (and in the case of scholarship, that product is knowledge) have greatly transformed due to the

capabilities provided by digital media, scholarship has largely remained the same. The changes in practices have not come from below in any meaningful way, despite the image of the lone scholar in their office. Instead, changes have come from the presses. In the 21st century developed society beyond the dawn of the digital age. We are in it. The inability to critically engage in digital spaces as a primary form of knowledge production has created a loss of language. The digital has moved forward to a point that scholarship has lost the words to describe the phenomena that are unique to a digitally augmented world. Additionally, the fragmentation caused by disciplinary and sub-field differences has created an inability to holistically critique the technologies and techniques the design and define digital engagement.

"If the theater is to cast about familiar events, 'historical incidents would be the most suitable.' Their epic extension through the style of acting, the placards and captions, is intended to purge them of the sensational" (Benjamin 148).

The general inability to cognitively and universally connect the business of digital media with the social experience has created a break in how digital media is conceptualized. The digital is a realm of social interactions defined by difference and differential amounts of power and control over the platforms where people engage with each other. People are able to make sense of the digital because they engage in conversation about, within, and around its contours. This conversation often fails to move from the platforms owners and operators to those engaged in the platforms social experience in a meaningful way. Research that starts in the digital realm then, needs to take the complicated power relations it creates by into consideration, especially since, by simply accessing a website or social media site the researcher is interpolated into

the data that helps the platform understand its user base and, due to the algorithmic component of design, evolve.

With these changes in mind, I explore the following questions:

1. What can we learn by starting a digital project with deep engagement in the digital space?

    a. What happens if we shift the beginning of the analysis to the platform and its institutional framework as defined by corporate documents that are digitally available?

2. What shared cultural knowledge frames social understandings of digital media objects?

    a. Does digital media shape, reframe, or extend our understandings of these objects?

3. Where are the limits and potentials for change in both media and analysis or media brought on by the digital shift of certain forms of analog media?

4. How do we analyze through the digital auto-affective experience that allows fir free analysis guided by digital encounters?

5. How does differential use of digital media and our reliance on platforms shape scholarship?

    a. Where are the spaces to play and/or reimagine what scholarship might look like in a digital age?

    b. What are the potentials and limits of digital scholarship?

My goal as a researcher is to understand how digital media allows for information to become knowledge and culture. A secondary goal is to see if, despite the many

constraints and roadblocks of the digital environment, there is a way to allow the past to be reframed and become a center of genuine conversation that allows for the rearticulating of difference towards inclusion, proximity, and commitment instead of distance and detachment.

Performance is the primary mode of social interaction in digital spaces because the digital is a space that has to perform as if it is the real world in order to be meaningful. Likewise, the moment when digital spaces stop being performative and become judicially binding is a space that has been under-examined and theorized, despite it being the nodal point that allows platforms to make sense as more than an augmented environment of the existing world. At the same time, people who are engaged are performing a version of themselves that is determined by the contours and limits of the platforms. Turning digital media from information to knowledge happens because social interactions are digitally mediated. Colloquially, people often refer to digital media as social media or social networks sites. There has been much work done exploring how this changes audiences. One line of research understands the audience as moving from consumer to prosumer (Ritzer and Jurgenson) in a digital capitalist configuration. Another line of research explores the agency of the audience in the meaning making process (Livingstone and Das 2013). What many of these explorations neglect is who the audiences are assumed and structured to be in these new configurations that mix humans, platforms, algorithms, and contents in a primordial stew of big data. In the past audiences were placed on the other side of the screen or page (in print media, film, and television) with limited ability to add to the diversity of the

media they were consuming. The audience also lacked the ability to actively and passively be in conversation with and on media. In digitally mediated social spaces, standard operating practice involves a constant feedback loop between all consumers and the technology, interfaces, platforms, and producers of media. This constant feedback is the cause of one of the biggest shifts in contemporary media: the digital data stream. The digital data stream is the unfiltered aggregate of the information and feedback that is filtered through digital streams. The information starts as part of a universal stream that has to be algorithmically separated to be meaningful due its enormity. The unfiltered data stream that requires an algorithm to make sense of it is something that is built in to social media platforms. "Platforms", as defined by Tarleton Gillespie, is the discursive term used by both businesses and popular culture to describe the "intermediaries like YouTube and Google – those companies that provide storage, navigation, and delivery of digital content of others" (2010). To this definition, I would like to add that platforms are also in the business of collecting and algorithmically analyzing data derived from the recording the interactions of individuals with digital content. More often than not, this analysis is where these platform companies are able to monetize their services. Because streams are not filtered, and because the richness of data is the ability to map, enable, create, and limit connections, social media platforms are generally designed in such a way that all users of the services are potentially accessible to each other. When there is social separation in these spaces, the separations only occur because of affordances built into settings or the design of platforms and are more often than not limited to the front end[1]. The shifting access,

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[1] The "front end" refers to the part of a website or platform and end user is able to see and access through their web browser.

streams of information, people, and mediated social interactions where end users have limited power highlights the need to bring performance studies and media studies together in the contemporary moment to define ethical engagement in and with digital media across audiences and contexts.

The Written Word

The document you are currently reading, be it on a screen or the printed page, is the written part of my project. While the words are what I have written, the way the document is viewed is out of my control. I know that parts of this document will be printed on paper as I edit it there. A reader might have a printed version as well. As I create this document, I am working through technological screens. The document itself was created across multiple word processors, computers and devices, yet is still understood as a single, coherent document. Likewise, the bits and pieces of this document will be stored in searchable digital databases in various screen readable formats. Despite the diversity of components, platforms, and forms within the document itself, the document is still the part of the project that resembles what many people mean when they say "scholarship." The primary method of meaning making that is accepted and understood as scholarship is the writing process that produces objects like this written text. However, our changing media and technology landscape have made makers out of new media users at a scale that is unprecedented and in way that is more obvious than in the past. While parts of this project push boundaries, these parts are able to do so more easily because they lean against this written form.

The written part of this project is the historical and theoretical glue that is a signature component of the text-bound dissertation genre. This document's primary purpose is to help make sense of the motivations and outcomes of the larger dissertation project. This document defines the project and the theoretical apparatus. It discusses the background of the project and provides contextual information to support the theoretical assumptions. This document also maps the media ecologies in which the various components exist. Finally, this document provides an introduction to the digital chapter of the dissertation and provides a brief description and explanation of digital chapter's components. Understanding this document and its purpose is important because the project leans against multiple forms of digital media, each piece making up a part of the whole experience. The project was initiated because of the accessibility of the digital photograph.

The Digital Photograph

Photography is uniquely linked to digital and new media. Unlike other forms of print media, it, like the experience of digital media that must be viewed through the screen, is impossible to see without controlling light to create some type of social meaning. Additionally, unlike long form print media such as books, newspapers, and pamphlets, the single frame of photographs allowed it to seamlessly transition from print to its digital form, without a need to recreate or reimagine the medium. By looking at selected archives of this new digital material composed of old print photographs, some of digital media's attributes that are often overlooked can be compared to their analogue

counterparts. These digital objects (and their digital lives) can be examined, explored, and taken apart. While there is not a strong case to imply that the social experience of a digital photograph is different than an analogue one, there are noteworthy differences around access, scale, and spreadability. These changes affect the performative aspects of photographs in digitally augmented social environments. These changes in the performative aspects of digital photographs allow digital photographs to speak to culture in a way that was not previously possible due to limits in how and where photographs could be viewed.

The Project
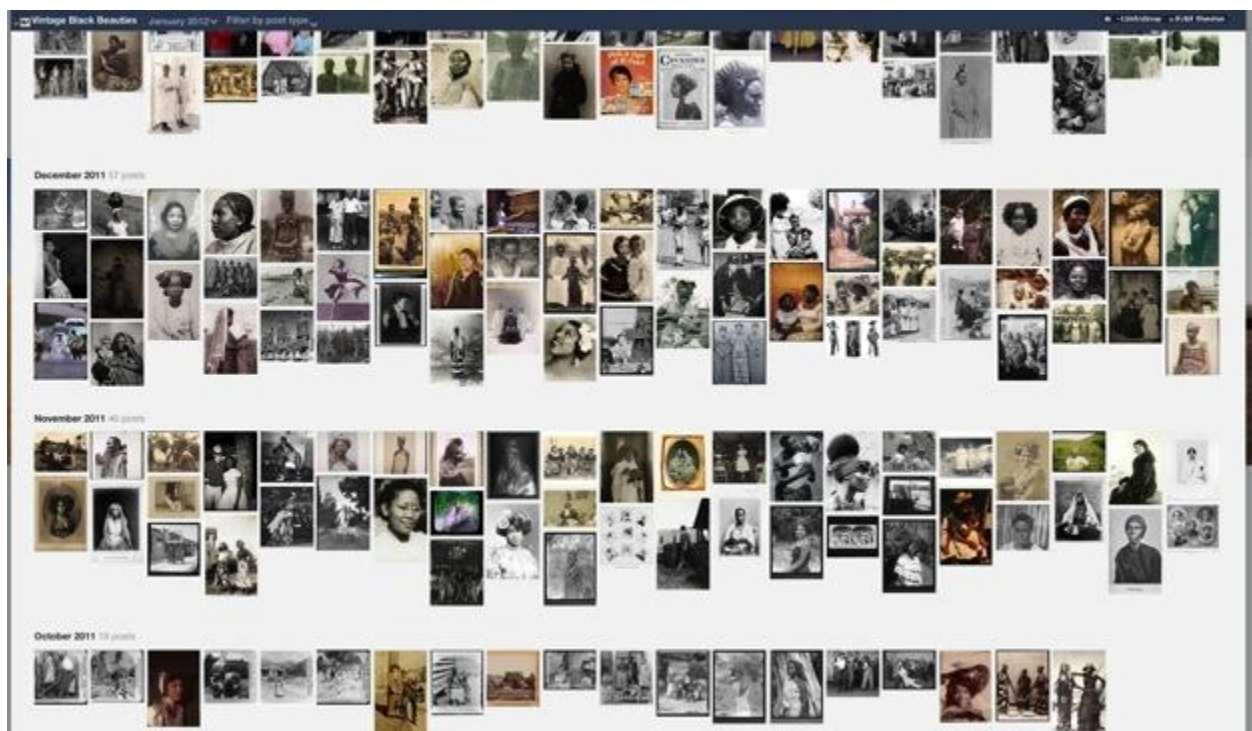
Figure 1: Screenshot, Archive Page of Vintage Black Beauty

Figure 2 is an image from the Tumblr archive page of the place where this project started. My project, Vintage Black Beauty, is what is known as a "born digital" project. What this means that, rather than starting like a normal research project with questions,

9

books, and writing, it actually started online, and the research grew from that space. The project is a collection of historical photographs of women from the global black diaspora, found primarily in official digital collections. Rather than compiling these photos into a book, they were hosted on the social networking site Tumblr and turned into a digital collage of photographs as seen in the figure above. Because Tumblr is a social space, and it operates as such, as soon as the project went online users were able to see and interact with the site, and even submit their own family photographs to be included in the new, remixed archive I was creating.

      This next description is a bit more technical. Vintage Black Beauty, a born digital project that shared photographs found in other digital archives and photos submitted by users on the social platform Tumblr, is a project that attempted to play with how we conceptualize digital heritage objects. Digital heritage objects are digitized historical content, not limited to photographs. They also include historical texts, digitized archeological sites (captured by laser scanners), digitized art, and 3D modeled artifacts. Despite the richness of these resources, Vintage Black Beauty only shared digitized photographs. I chose to focus on photographs because they are easily accessed, shared, and understood. What this project attempted to do was put these photographs in a social exchange through the affordances of a social networking site to present them to a larger, more public audience. The photographs were shared with a larger audience to see how they would be understood and interacted with. The Tumblr blog that disseminated the photographs has over 2,200 followers to date. Followers are people who have signed up to see content from the site as it is published. Additionally, over 30,000 people visited the site from every continent except for Antarctica. I know this

number (and the geographical regions) because I was able to include a small bit of code that links the site to Google analytics, a service that tracks user activity on the site including, their geographic location, how many pages they view, and their time on the site.

A final description of the project: Vintage Black Beauty is a born digital project on the social networking site Tumblr that disseminates historical photographs of women from the black diaspora. Through this project, and the over 2200 engaged followers of the site, plus other visitors and commenters (people on Tumblr are able to do an action called reblogging where they post the photographs to their own Tumblr blog and leave comments), I look at how digital heritage artifacts can have new socially defined lives in the decontextualized, speed-based world of digital media. In doing so, I look specifically at how historical objects are granted a new form of agency that sees them redefined in our modern historical locus. In this way, the photographs can be said to perform a sort of socio-cultural existence that is different from the dominant historical narrative Rather than focusing on stories of intense suffering and political action, the counter-narrative produced is one that highlights the banality, joy, and beauty of everyday life. At the same time, the photographs expose a larger public to some version of history that they might not have seen or interacted with otherwise.

The photographs in this project depict women from the black diaspora. The time period that the photos come from, the early-mid 1800s through the 1960s, comes with historical baggage that has certain specificity. Namely, many of the photographs were made at times when the people photographed were experiencing, for example, the realities of slavery, colonization, emancipation, decolonization, segregation, and the civil

11

rights movement. The project shows photographs that existed alongside the popular image of the life of black women that framed them as one-dimensional objects. As I stated above, these photographs were from digital collections held by established archives. What I omitted is that these archives were often government archives created to assess the poor or exotic peoples that were subjects or citizens. The archives include such institutions as the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in the United States and the Office of Colonies and Outer-sea territories in France. Many of the photographs came from missionary archives that have since been donated to universities and museums. These photographs were designed to capture the need for and success of the humanizing mission that was used to partially justify slavery and colonial expansion. Other photographs were parts of postcard series or "look" books from the "human zoos" of global expositions that were popular at the end of the 1800s through the mid1900s around the globe. That is to say these photographs were not created as part of a middle-class portrait culture that often defines early photography. However, for many of the women in the photographs, in their places and times, these are the only photos that depict them that exist.

Through my early exploration of Tumblr, I discovered that it was not like many other social networking sites. Rather than focusing on highlighting connections and networks between users, Tumblr forefronts content. Connections and networks being visible is not the default, as is often the case with other social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, where the number of followers and links to a list of them is included on a user's profile page. A user who signs up for the site has to choose a front-end theme that has space for visible connections. The user then has to opt-in to

that option being visible. Because the site forefronts content, but enables user

interaction exclusively through a dashboard[2], the personality of the site is different than

other Social Networking Sites. Tumblr sites exist as something between a social

networking site and a personal blog. They afford the ability to "favorite" and save

content similar to other sites. However, commenting on Tumblr does not function like a

normal blog. Traditional commenting is often through a third party system like Disqus, a

third party commenting service that can be deployed on websites to all visitors to

engage in conversation. More commonly, to leave comments, Tumblr users reblog

content, placing material from other Tumblr blogs on their own. This action does not

require adding any new content to the original post. The new, reblogged post will,

however, link to other versions of the same content appearing on various Tumblr blogs.

This difference in interaction, based primarily on communal forms of content

instead of community formation allows some content that might not have worked as well

in other social networking sites easily find a home on Tumblr. Even more than that,

users of Tumblr are able to privately engage in their interests in a social space that

builds an imagined community through content rather than conversation. My own

interests meant that early in my exploration of the site I started following blogs that were

labeled as vintage. Often these were given the qualifier of beauty or glamour. These

blogs tended to feature old photographs, often of women. After batch following a dozen

or so of these blogs to see the type of content they were posting I saw a pattern. Most

of the images were images I had seen before. It seemed as though the words "vintage"

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[2] The "Dashboard" is the initial page that loads on Tumblr for a logged in user. From this page they see an activity feed of blogs they follow and have access to administrative options, like making a post to their own blog, creating a new blog, updating their profile, and modifying their privacy and contact preferences.

and "beauty" or "glamor" came with a pre-set corpus of images that fit the category. There was a striking lack of diversity in the images of people that were shared. On top of that, even the Tumblr blogs that focused on racialized vintage images tended to focus on a very specific notion of "glamorous" that is defined by dressing up and being part of the images that we already see circulating of the past. While I did appreciate seeing these images, I was more interested seeing something more diverse than dominant visual tropes.

Many of these photographs in Vintage Black Beauty came from a historical narrative that is defined by the racism and oppression of black bodies and women. Our current socio-cultural historical position is different than the time when the photographs were taken though. There is an understanding that past regimes were oppressive, and that past oppression continues to marginalize certain groups. However, while the photographs can be seen through this lens, there is enough knowledge to start breaking down the narrative and see more than just racism and oppression. To understand what this project highlights about our contemporary relationship with digital and social media, however, it is important to start by looking at the roles of stakeholders and the platform, and how they help define, limit, and enable meaning making through a political-economy that is defined by digital norms. One of the most important digital norms is the layering of meaning. The chapters of this dissertation are ordered to highlight the peeling away of the various layers.

Chatper 1, "Of digital Controls and Stakeholders," explores the places where stakeholders enter the projection. I also with examine the political-economy of Tumblr by exploring the platform in its own words through the Terms of Service and the Privacy

Policy. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the contours of the base layer of most digital interactions and knowledge production projects. It also shows how the social use and interpretations of digital media are codified into agreements that have consequences outside of digital space.

Chapter 2, "Digital Learning Explorations for Specific Audiences, Platforms, and Media," defines some of the potentials and possibility that happened in the social part of Tumblr where Vintage Black Beauty lived digitally. In this chapter I explore some of the potential and limits of trying to find and create meaning in social media spaces. I also explore some of the potential digital media have to shift narratives. In attempting to do this work, I also highlight how the disconnectedness of the digital, in terms of inter-user interaction, and the polysemy of meaning, make it impossible to do scholarly work that is more than interpretive when working with digital media.

Chapter 3, "What We See: The Ecology of Oppression, Trauma, And Crisis," pulls back the layer of social experience and starts with two images that were shared on Vintage Black Beauty. This chapter attempts to place the photographs that are collected on Tumblr into a larger digital ecology by exploring both the narratives that surround these types of photographs in digital scholarly spaces, as well as by looking at some of the trends for large-scale image analysis. This chapter highlights how these different paths the photographs might take reinscribe many of the dominant narratives that existed in the past.

Chapter 4, "In the Shade of the Eiffel Tower," looks beyond the layer of meaning that Tumblr initiates. Rather than focusing outward toward the larger digital ecology, instead it looks more closely at the information contained in a photograph, and the

larger collection that is now digitally available. The purpose of this chapter is to show that while there are many connections that can be generated from the Vintage Black Beauty Tumblr collection, many of the connections require extra work that, while facilitated by the digital, are not necessary defined by it.

Chapter 5, "Towards an Experimental Digital Scholarship: Historicalglitch.com," is a hybrid chapter with both a written and digital component. This chapter, while linked to the Tumblr project is not connected to it in a meaningful way. Vintage Black Beauty serves as a backdrop that enabled thinking through a new layer of meaning that takes advantage of some of the things digital is able to do that paper and certain platforms, cannot.

CHAPTER 1: OF DIGITAL CONTROLS AND STAKEHOLDERS

There are meaningful differences between certain types of digital artifacts and their analog counterparts. Those differences include spreadability, access, and reproducibility, though there are limits on spreadability and access. One of the important things to remember when considering the role of stakeholders in digital media is that, despite the relationship between digital and social media, not all digital encounters are social encounters. In fact, a growing number of interactions with digital media are social in a way that mirrors traditional media, where there is an object that can be shared and reacted to, but not interacted with to the same extent as the interactions that defined the social web of the early to mid-2000s. As more content has moved to being digital and digitally born like Amazon Prime or Netflix original series or the ever increasing repositories of digital scholarship available through JSTOR, ProQuest, or Wiley Online, there has been in increase in paywalls and tracking to make sure digital media are viewed only by an approved and paying audience. The source material for the Vintage Black Beauty collection was available freely and accessible without needing special credentials. I chose digital archives based on this level of accessibility. Doing so provided some constraints in the sea of seemingly unlimited possibility of the internet. While there is a plethora of digital photographs available on the internet, a good portion of them are shared without any identifying information. Some of the photographs come from family albums and while information is available it is not verifiable once it begins circulating freely in digital space. As such, a viewer is left to guess what they are seeing.

The ability to control the resolution is where the stakeholders of digital photographs from the project are able to exert some small amount of control. When it comes time to engage in traditional acts of knowledge production, permission must be granted and fees must be paid before rights to the high-resolution images are secured for use. As I worked through Vintage Black Beauty, and thought of the ways I might bring the project to a more standard format, the ability to use photographs became the biggest difference between analog and the digital.

Seeing something in a digital archive, for example, is not an inherently social encounter. There are not comment threads or ways to engage around the material. The social must be brought in through external platforms. This bringing in adds new constraints and layers of meaning because to add the social aspect the item must be removed from its archival home. This removing takes away the narrative that is constructed through the information available at the original archival home. Archives have historically been ported to digital media with minimal modifications to practices, places, people, and organizations. Items that are digitally available in digital archives are generally held by institutions that still enact some control over how and where digital items can be used and dispersed even if those items are not behind a paywall or on a local server accessible from only the physical archive. This means that, even though all the photographs featured in Vintage Black Beauty are available as digital images, and they can be easily shared through embedded code on a website or saved and uploaded somewhere new, there are limits to how these images can be used when it comes to a commercial project, or academic projects that destined for print. In fact, many of the images featured on Vintage Black Beauty would not be available for use in print without

special permission. Getting permission for the use of hundreds of images would take an enormous amount of time and money. Digital photographs, with their speed of access and reproducibility give digitized photographs a new life. Vintage Black Beauty took advantage of the low barrier distribution model digital media provides. Instead of being something that can be seen by a few people who stand before a physical object, digital photographs can be viewed and shared simultaneously by people all over the world who have access to a screen and software that can render the digital image.

Once these collections were digitized, however, through scanning of film or a print that was then color-corrected, and stored with meta-tags in searchable databases, the photographs acquired a new life that was unique precisely because of the digital experience. Rather than being stuck in the relative obscurity of archival collections, as a digital object the photograph can be emailed, posted on a website, shared through social media, or saved on a hard drive. The digital photograph also can be easily manipulated with software or remixed into other media such as film. Even if a digital photograph is created to be viewed on the screen it can become a low-resolution print. This low-resolution print will make the photograph, that can be projected onto a screen in larger than life dimensions, shrink. Unlike print, which needs images to be 300dpi (dots per inch), the screen is optimized to be viewed at 72dpi. The digital photograph is a form of low-resolution social engagement with brief moments of ownership. This low resolution transformation of analog photographs into digital data that we experience socially as photographs, even as the materiality of the film and print is lost and exchanged for haptic digital interactions, creates a new cultural relationship with an imagined past.

There were two names I saw over and over again as I searched for photographs, The French Geographic Society, funded by Prince Napoleon Bonaparte and the University of Southern California (USC) library. Photographs from the Société de Géographie were digitized and held in Gallica, the French National Library's digital portal, which provides instructions to contact the Geographic society for use of an image. Likewise, the USC's digital collection only stores a digital version while the physical copies of photographs and negatives reside in archives around the world. If a higher resolution version is needed then a message is sent via a contact box or to a general email. I contacted both organizations (Appendix A) and learned that securing the rights to use images in print scholarship would require special permission and lots of money.

The exchanges with the French Geographic Society and the USC library highlight that the analog versions of many digital media objects still have a life outside of digital media. The life outside of the digital archives is defined by the various stakeholders and entities that serve as semi-functional gatekeepers who determine where physical analogs of the object can be produced or accessed. These gatekeepers are tasked with knowing where higher quality and physical copies of digital media objects are located. That being said, if the implications of having such a diverse group of stakeholders for the various parts of the project are to be understood, rather than starting with the photographs, it is important to start with the platform on which they appeared. More than anything, the platform shapes and formats the project and creates the potential for interactivity. The flattening and mixing nature of digital streams assumes that all information and objects are, if not neutral, the same. This idea is built into digital

20

platforms and generally reproduced in the actions of the users who are, in moments of access, locked into a co-experience of vulnerability.

The Failures of Language in Digital Media Scholarship and This Project

The common word inherited to talk about the social relationships between institutions, bureaucracies, and the people subjugated under the domination of the ruling classes is "power". Power though, contains the possibility of resistance. In digital environments, the possibility of resistance does not exist when examining the relationship between the platform and those individuals who perform part of their social lives in these spaces. Domination, too, does not work. It imagines a class that is subjugated in a particular way that also allows for the possibility of resistance. The landscape, as it currently exists in digital media, is one where the possibility of resistance is absent by design.

Another theoretical form of power that might shine light on the digital landscape is the panopticon (Foucault 1975). This too, represents a failure. In the panoptic model, the tower is always visible. The power of the guard tower is defined precisely by its constant visible presence. It does not matter if the tower is or is not occupied, it is the possibility that creates subjugation and this subjugation shapes social interactions. Legal terms of digital platforms, on the other hand, are completely separated from the social interactions, to the point that they are invisible from the front end of digital platforms. Rather than subjugation by a constant presence, legal terms and privacy policy subjugate by operating completely in the background. Rather than being unoccupied, the terms are living documents that are constantly in a state of evolution, changing what the social formation of the platform means and what its implications are.

21

Social, data, legal, platforms as rhetorical devices, and history all exist in separate

spaces, never crossing to take a holistic view at what digital platforms are actually doing,

and what this doing means. There is no unifying language.

In theoretical terms, the legal terms operate as a technique, not a technology

(Ellul 1964). Even as technique though, there is a failure of language. Rather than the

Terms, being a technology of the digital that was then normalized into social practices,

all of the analog versions that preceded terms of service existed in the analog world.

This, then, is another difference between digital and analog media. In the digital world,

the terms are pre-packaged and invisible. There is no sticker breaking to accept. It just

is. And without the sticker, the seal that marks a space of acceptance and collusion, the

digital is a space where a user who wants to participate in the digital aspects of social

life, a life that takes place on platforms, does not resist or acknowledge that they have

entered into more than a performance, but an enforceable legal relationship. I will show

what this looks like in practice. By examining the terms of service of Tumblr, I highlight

how, even though they are not discussed in studies of social aspects of digital platforms,

the legal terms frame the social interactions. The inability to bridge the social is one of

the first failures that define the new realms of possibility this project hopes to open up.

On Tumblr

In the fourth week of May 2013, the purchase of Tumblr by Yahoo Inc. for

$1.1Billion was announced. The ramifications of the sale for a site that existed as a

space of various types of deviant activity and subaltern collectivity formation (Fink and

Miller 2014) worried me. The independent and fluid nature of Tumblr is what

22

immediately drew me to the site as a space of experimentation with digital artifacts. It was the only site where people would publicly post photos of their family next to images of hardcore pornography, hate rants, and confessions to form unique digital portraits that showed the fluidity of digital identity. The shift to Yahoo servers meant that Tumblr was no longer a semi-private archive owned by some guy in New York. It was now part of a publicly traded New Media giant. Rather than being a place that felt as though it was for the collective user base, Tumblr would now need to answer to shareholders.

From any location with a screen-based internet-connected device a person is able to pick and choose from a buffet of perspectives and content types through Tumblr. Physical travel and active participation are unnecessary. If a person wants to build up her or his followers then she or he has to learn to work with what those followers might want. The ability to schedule future posts is built into the platform, moving the blog to a semi-automated existence. In these ways, Tumblr is a nearly perfect example of Marshall McLuhan's idea of "learning for a living" in the electric age, where electricity stores, expedites, and changes the perception of information (1964). This change in perception is exactly what Vintage Black Beauty takes advantage of in distributing informative photographs with the speed and transportation enabled by electricity. When Tumblr is understood as a Yahoo property that needs to generate profit, however, another type of intentional distribution and learning for a living occurs: promotion and corporate censorship.

Terms

11. Special Provisions for Promotions

Some features of the Services may allow you to promote yourself to other Subscribers, and some of these features may be Paid Services ("**Promotions**")[3].

At a basic level, social media platforms are designed for the sharing of information and knowledge. An important constraint and risk in trusting information from these platforms when they join conglomerates or become publicly traded is that corporate structure and goals are not always transparent to end users. That does not mean that before Tumblr became part of a publicly traded company there were no risks for users. There is always risk when a user base that provides information is mostly anonymous with no way to verify expertise or information. There is also a risk of deliberately harmful information being spread, something that can be seen with revenge porn or trolling. It is in the best interest of the platform's owners, however, to allow this to happen as it generates traffic. At the same time, they have to distance themselves from these actions to avoid liability. To ensure owners are legally protected, even though they are hands off, they have to know who is who to protect themselves just as much as they have to say they have no part in the content that is produced and disseminated on and through their platforms. Stories created on a site like Tumblr might also be falsified for reasons unique to the creator or curator of the blog. The design, and typically narrowly focused nature of Tumblr blogs, something that is exemplified in Vintage Black Beauty, means that by following a blog a follower is asking to be brought into the loop of information for learning and for pleasure. The format of Tumblr though, is more that of an entertainment platform than one for what might be recognized as traditional learning platform.

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[3] Tumblr Terms of Service (TOS) https://www.tumblr.com/policy/en/terms-of-service

In addition to the question of the reliability of information distributed through social media, whenever information is found either organically or from a section of a platform that is designated for promotions, the reason for its existence is always in flux.

Figure 2 Screenshot, tumblr.com homepage

The terms become extremely useful when compared to information found in common locations such as "about" pages. The figure above is part of the opening content slider of Tumblr. It appears after the option to log in. The text, "Tumblr is so easy to use that it's hard to explain" is accompanied with some of the actions the site allows. The Tumblr "T" sits in the middle surrounded by recognizable icons, very reminiscent of Tumblr's Web 2.0 roots. This image, designed to entice a person to sign up for the service, says nothing of what the site does. Instead, the image is composed

of a series of empty signifiers designed to mean everything and nothing. The lead

sentence itself says as much. It can be paraphrased as, "this site cannot be put into

words because it does so much as to be pointless." Tumblr is a site that tries to fit

everyone to capture the largest possible audience. It has hundreds of millions of blogs

dedicated to everything from the well-articulated "deep stuff…filled with literally

whatever." Despite my long term and, at times, heavy usage of the site, I too have a

hard time explaining what the site is, though I fall back on it being primarily a digital

archiving platform for sharing content from diverse sources designed around an idea of

content being communal rather than a people being in a community. What Tumblr really

is, then, despite its assertion that it is "whatever", can be verified by the terms.

Reading the terms of a platform might not seem like an obvious place to look in

an attempt to understand what the platform is. However, when we consider the purpose

of a platform's terms—a legally binding contract designed to serve and protect the

interests and activities of the company—their relevance becomes clear. The terms are

the only place where the platform has to say, without hiding behind metaphors or

speaking about relationships or social interactions, the purpose of their existence. The

platform has to disclose who its audiences are, how they are imagined, and with whom

the audiences interact (and what these interactions might look like). Finally, the future of

the platform, has to be included as well, because, though terms are living documents,

they have to protect the platform both now and in the future.

Janet Murray, in her book *Inventing the Medium,* says there are four affordances

that define the Digital,

Everything made of electronic bits is potentially:

- procedural (composed of executable rules)
- participatory (inviting human action and manipulation of the represented world)
- encyclopedic (containing very high capacity of information in multiple media formats)
- spatial (navigable as an information repository and/or a virtual place

Most of my discussion of affordances will keep this in mind, but add a fifth affordance when looking at large, corporate digital platforms: "concession". Concession is the act of entering into a legal agreement with platforms without the ability to resist, deny, or modify the terms of that agreement. It is also defined by using the site as defined by these terms and agreements with or without being cognizant of operating within these limits.

1. Accepting the Terms of Service

> Please read these Terms of Service and our <u>Community Guidelines</u> (collectively, the "**Agreement**") carefully before using Tumblr.com (the "**Site**") and/or the other domains, websites, products, applications, mobile applications, services, and/or Content provided by Tumblr, Inc. (all of those collectively with the Site, the "**Services**") (Tumblr, Inc., a Delaware corporation and wholly-owned subsidiary of Yahoo! Inc., a Delaware corporation, collectively with its agents, representatives, consultants, employees, officers, and directors, "**Tumblr**," "**we**," or "**us**"). By using or accessing the Services, you ("**Subscriber**" or "**you**") agree to be bound by all the terms and conditions of this Agreement. If you don't agree to all the terms and conditions of this Agreement, you shouldn't, and aren't permitted to, use the Services. (TOS)(ibid)

It is telling that, per the terms, users of Tumblr are not called users as is the case on most social networking platforms but are instead referred to "subscribers." This helps solidify the idea that Tumblr is a site for the distribution of curated communal content closer to a digital magazine than a social network. The magazine is one of the

few media forms where being as narrowly focused and aesthetically pleasing as possible are benefits instead of deterrents for a large part of the potential audience. Tumblr is not designed for social interaction first and foremost. The built in workaround of reblogging is clunky and, due to the way it is attached to the notes of the initial post, operates more like a letter to the editor. Notes are the interactions more commonly referred to as "comments" left by users on Tumblr posts. Unlike comments on other sites though, these notes include everything from reblogging with commentary to clicking on the heart that accompanies posts to "favorite" them.

The ability to click and favorite, reblog, and add notes illustrate that Tumblr, even as it imagines itself, is not a Social Network. On social networks a person can subscribe to an individual feed. The value of content posted to the site is the reach of the network. These connections are prominently placed. On Tumblr they are hidden. This places users first and foremost in a passive, consumptive role that is agreed upon simply by signing up for the site.

When it is expected that users, or in this case subscribers, will be in a passive, consumptive role, it becomes easier to censor or limit what can be seen without the user questioning the censoring. There is nothing to indicate that information has been removed. There is no disclaimer announcing that parts of your feed may have been removed. In terms of the censorship, Tumblr, like many sites that distribute content has the following notice:

> *Tumblr may also impose limits on certain Services or aspects of those Services or restrict your access to parts or all of the Services without notice or liability (TOS) (ibid).*

28

The idea that subscribers of Tumblr are imagined as passive individuals is reconfirmed later in the terms in a comment wherein 13 and older is listed as the legal age required to use the site:

> You have to be at least 13 years old to use Tumblr. We're serious: it's a hard rule, based on U.S. federal and state legislation. "But I'm, like, 12.9 years old!" you plead. Nope, sorry. If you're younger than 13, don't use Tumblr. Ask your parents for a Playstation 4, or try books (ibid).

Rather than telling 13 year olds to go out and do social activities, they are instructed to play videogames or read a book. Both of these activities are activities one can do in a group, but ultimately happen at an individual experiential level. Video games are generally designed for single player play at times with multiplayer or online play capabilities. Books are something that can be read aloud or in a book club, but at the end of the day an individual imagines the world of the book in his or her own head. Within Vintage Black Beauty the passivity of the content is made obvious by analyzing how many comments are generally left on posts. Though there are just over 2270[4] followers many of the photographs posted have no notes. Even amongst the posts that do have notes it is very rare that a post passes more than 100.

In addition to the role of users of the platform, what also enables the site to function is content, but not just any content, the content provided by the subscribers. Explanations for "Content" and "Subscriber Content" make up the largest part of the Terms. Everything on the site falls under the umbrella of content, including any interactive features. This terminology allows for all information to be captured within a stream, and any code or algorithm that Tumblr has access to, to collect and/or analyze said stream. Owners of the site know that this is what it does.

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[4] This is the count as of June 2015.

6. Content and Subscriber Content

Definitions:

For purposes of this Agreement: (1) the term "**Content**" means a creative expression and includes, without limitation, video, audio, photographs, images, illustrations, animations, logos, tools, written posts, replies, comments, information, data, text, software, scripts, executable files, graphics, Themes (as defined below), and interactive features, any of which may be generated, provided, or otherwise made accessible on or through the Services; (2) the term "**Subscriber Content**" means Content that a Subscriber submits, transfers, or otherwise provides to the Services. Content includes, without limitation, all Subscriber Content.

Your Rights in Subscriber Content:

Subscribers retain ownership and/or other applicable rights in Subscriber Content, and Tumblr and/or third parties retain ownership and/or other applicable rights in all Content other than Subscriber Content.

You retain ownership you have of any intellectual property you post to Tumblr.

Subscriber Content License to Tumblr:

When you provide Subscriber Content to Tumblr through the Services, you grant Tumblr a non-exclusive, worldwide, royalty-free, sublicensable, transferable right and license to use, host, store, cache, reproduce, publish, display (publicly or otherwise), perform (publicly or otherwise), distribute, transmit, modify, adapt (including, without limitation, in order to conform it to the requirements of any networks, devices, services, or media through which the Services are available), and create derivative works of, such Subscriber Content. The rights you grant in this license are for the limited purposes of allowing Tumblr to operate the Services in accordance with their functionality, improve the Services, and develop new Services. The reference in this license to "creat[ing] derivative works" is not intended to give Tumblr a right to make substantive editorial changes or derivations, but does, for example, enable **reblogging**, which allows Tumblr Subscribers to redistribute Subscriber Content from one Tumblr blog to another in a manner that allows them to add their own text or other Content before or after your Subscriber Content.

When you upload your creations to Tumblr, you're giving us permission to make them available in all the ways you would expect us to (for example, via your blog, RSS, the Tumblr Dashboard, etc.). We never want to do anything with your work that surprises you.

Something else worth noting: Countless Tumblr blogs have gone on to spawn books, films, albums, brands, and more. Any royalties or reimbursement you get for your creations are, needless to say, entirely yours. It's your work, and we're proud to be a part (however small) of what you accomplish.

You also agree that this license includes the right for Tumblr to make all publicly-posted Content available to third parties selected by Tumblr, so that those third parties can

syndicate and/or analyze such Content on other media and services.

An example of what it means to "make all publicly-posted Content available" to a Tumblr partner for distribution or analysis would be licensing the Tumblr "firehose," a live feed of all public activity on Tumblr, to partners like search engines.

Note also that this license to your Subscriber Content continues even if you stop using the Services, primarily because of the social nature of Content shared through Tumblr's Services - when you post something publicly, others may choose to comment on it, making your Content part of a social conversation that can't later be erased without retroactively censoring the speech of others.

One thing you should consider before posting: When you make something publicly available on the Internet, it becomes practically impossible to take down all copies of it.

You also agree that you will respect the intellectual property rights of others, and represent and warrant that you have all of the necessary rights to grant us this license for all Subscriber Content you transfer to us.

Content License to You:

As a Subscriber of the Services, Tumblr grants you a worldwide, revocable, non-exclusive, non-sublicensable, and non-transferable license to download, store, view, display, perform, redistribute, and create derivative works of Content solely in connection with your use of, and in strict accordance with the functionality and restrictions of, the Services (including, without limitation, Paid Services, as defined below). This means, for example, that we license Content to you for purposes of reblogging. (ibid)

The overall use-value of Subscriber Content for Tumblr, and user content on most

social networking sites, is limited. Though a subscriber does grant the platform a royalty

free sublicense that allows for the content to be distributed, the platform expects no

monetary gains directly from the subscriber, or any ventures that might come from the

subscriber using the platform for distribution. The ability for future monetization of

content by subscribers, not through Tumblr, but through third parties, is included as part

of the enticement for using the service in the terms. Shortly after the site's terms of

agreement celebrate Tumblr's successes, the hidden truth of the sublicense becomes

31

clear. In addition to making content viewable on the platform, it might also be sent to third parties for purpose of analysis. Tumblr names the stream, per industry standards, as, "the Firehose." Briefly after that, Tumblr explains that once the license is granted it cannot be revoked, even if the subscriber leaves the site, even if the content is licensed somewhere else. While Tumblr can never "own" the content, much like the stakeholders of the photographs, Tumblr becomes a gatekeeper than can allow digital content to be accessed for as long as its servers are running, regardless of the intention or desires of the original subscriber who submitted the content to the platform.

Another important thing to note about content posted to Tumblr, and this is again something that is standard for social networking sites, is that it is the responsibility of the subscriber to receive licenses to post content and media to the site. This limits the liability of the platform and its parent company. I have not come across surveys asking users of sites like Tumblr how often they investigate or even read licenses and right of use for media they share. I imagine though, given the speed of the streams, that it is not often. As a subscriber, an individual receives a revocable license to public content on the site for purposes of reblogging only.

Privacy

Tumblr's Privacy Policy (PP) is where the site shows its playful side. Like the terms, in addition to having the legalese, there is gray text that says what the privacy policy means in every day Silicon Valley inflected English. It makes sense that Tumblr would spend additional time crafting this into an approachable narrative when we

32

consider that privacy policies are the part of platforms that are most publicly in the

spotlight.

> You can keep yourself fairly anonymous on Tumblr, but remember that your posts, blogs, pages, and username are all visible to the public by default. People that know your email address can also find your blogs. If you'd rather be unlisted, head over to your Account Settings [5].

The privacy policy lays out business interests in terms of how information is used and

monetized. Tumblr's privacy policy in particular, due to its unique style of stating terms

in legal language and then providing a gray box in everyday English, says much about

its understanding of its community.

Information Shared with and Received from our Corporate Parent: We are a wholly-owned subsidiary of Yahoo, and, as such, Yahoo may receive any information we do, and may share information it has with us. Yahoo may use the information it receives from us to help us provide, understand, and improve the Services (including by providing us analytics) and in connection with Yahoo's products and services (including by providing you with a more personalized experience). For details about how Yahoo treats the information it collects, please review Yahoo's Privacy Policy.
Yahoo owns us and we share (ibid).

Tumblr creates a digital world where anyone is able to perform his or her own

expertise or interest through his or her own curated vertical, the personal blog. Without

intending to, I too followed the formula built into the platform by creating and curating

Vintage Black Beauty. Going back to the magazine metaphor, the followers are, per

Tumblr's terms, subscribers. If this is the case, are those visitors that simply view a

page and then "bounce", [6] per the analytics data the same as a person that might see a

cover of a magazine at the checkout aisle of a grocery store, or on the magazine rack at

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[5] https://www.tumblr.com/policy/en/privacy

[6] "Bouncing" occurs when a person comes to the website and views one page and then leaves. I was able to record activity on the site with the aid of Google Analytics, a freely available web traffic monitoring service.

a bookstore/coffee shop and flip through the pages? A good portion of the traffic to

Vintage Black Beauty comes from these types of encounters. An internet user searches

for a term, usually a country, and sees a summary of a site that looks interesting and

clicks through to look for a moment. This is similar to magazine practice where

someone might look for a resource by topic or pick something up because of an

attention grabbing headline.

Native Actions: The Services allow you to perform native actions that are integral to our products, such as liking a post, reblogging a post, replying to a post, and following a blog. Liking, reblogging, and replying are public actions – anyone can expand the "notes" view on a post, for example, to see who liked, reblogged, or replied to a post. We use information about native actions to improve the Services, develop new Services, and, particularly, to personalize your Tumblr experience. Personalization using this information may include presenting you with new posts relevant to what you've liked, providing you with better search results, and showing you advertising more relevant to your interests.

Reblogs, Likes, and Replies are a matter of public record, so if you're truly ashamed of your desires it's best to keep them to yourself. But why? Be proud of who you are. You're beautiful. We're looking you in the eyes and telling you how beautiful you are (ibid).

The implication of the gray disclaimer about Native Actions is that Tumblr understands

that, at its root, it is a site that was designed for offbeat interests that may come across

as deviant or taboo if shared at large. This confirms that the private nature of

subscriptions, the limited information included in public profiles, and the hiddenness of

the list of favorites (though, as stated they are viewable on the original post), are

intentional design decisions. The reiteration that the person who chooses to engage in

these activities is still "beautiful" is the platform's acknowledgement of Tumblr's

acceptance of these activities and assurance that it won't share them. Because

subscriber activities are both public and hidden, the platform is a freer place to engage

in the consumption and sharing of deviant content.

One of the things that make the privacy policy of Tumblr so accessible is not just that it has the terms of the privacy policy and then the little gray boxes that humanize what the expectations are. The use of the words "you" and "yours" throughout conveys a sense of ownership and agency over the information collected. There is nothing in the Tumblr privacy policy about selling data to advertisers. The site is personified for "you" and you alone. Though there is an acknowledgment that information will be collected, the purported purpose is not to generate targeted advertisements, but instead to ensure that Tumblr is able to get content that is relevant to "you" to make the experience of the site that more personalized and pleasurable. In fact, the heart of the privacy policy, a point repeated over and over again, is we (Tumblr) want to make sure you (the subscriber) protect your privacy in a way that is comfortable for you. That is something we (Tumblr) can ensure. However that ends as soon as you (the subscriber) begin engaging with third party services, by opting into these features, which might do other things with your information and data.

In the article, "Cultural Production, Transnational Networking, and Critical Reflection in Feminist Zines", Elke Zobl states that "Zines function as a heterogeneous, "culturally productive, politicized counter public" (Nguyen 2000) for feminist networking and critical reflection by young women in different parts of the world" (2009). When Tumblr is reimagined as a zine platform, the static page of subscriber content and the perpetually transferring content sublicenses becomes the photocopier. The media shared through Tumblr is often appropriated content found around the web, and though not the case on Vintage Black Beauty, accompanied by essays and poems of varying lengths and styles, quotes, text transcripts, video, and audio. Additionally, the ability of

the subscriber to control who they are on the site through their username and hidden

activity makes it a safer space for politically inclined, niche, or controversial topics than

other sites that require real names and public activity. These affordances allowed me to

create a political site without fear of ramifications that might have existed were I more

public with it being central to my project. Additionally the small private distribution can

be mapped easily to zine distribution.

While it seems that Tumblr has the best interest of its subscribers at heart, what

it sells is a false sense of difference. Tumblr does not have to say it does A/B testing.

Tumblr does not have to focus on advertiser relationships. Tumblr does not have to do

anything with the user data at all other than the login information. In this way its privacy

statement makes it seem more moral than it might be. It is important to remember that

Tumblr is still part of the privately owned public sphere of the internet. It is not a

standalone product that creates its own rules and best practices. In addition to laws, it

has to answer to Yahoo, their owner since 2013.

Information Shared with and Received from our Corporate Parent: We are a wholly-owned subsidiary of Yahoo, and, as such, Yahoo may receive any information we do, and may share information it has with us. Yahoo may use the information it receives from us to help us provide, understand, and improve the Services (including by providing us analytics) and in connection with Yahoo's products and services (including by providing you with a more personalized experience). For details about how Yahoo treats the information it collects, please review Yahoo's Privacy Policy.
Yahoo owns us and we share (ibid).

Ending with "Yahoo owns us and we share" leads to one of the biggest issues of the

social media world: when the product is "free" the user, or in this case, the subscriber is

the project. In social media, the platform owns you, or, at the very least, digital footprints

and trail left behind as cookies work their way across the internet, always feeding back

to the site that issued them. Yes, you can keep your deviant or off the beaten path interests mostly private to the world outside of Yahoo, but inside all of that information is still a tool that is used to sell you as much as it used to be used to sell the free-to-use platform to subscribers as a place where they can find and create their own voices. As much as Tumblr resembles a zine, it can never function in the same way because at the end of the day, it too must answer to Yahoo and Yahoo's shareholders. Additionally, if someone were to buy Tumblr, they could choose to make all that privately held information public, and subscribers would have no recourse.

Tumblr being a privately held company means that though it might look like a zine on the surface, at the end of the day, even with a license for the content I produce, Tumblr has the ability to block my access to Vintage Black Beauty and even to make it disappear. If Tumblr is sold again, the terms and privacy policy might drastically change, and I would be left without recourse to say I do not agree to the changes. Additionally, there is no way of knowing if and when Yahoo, or whoever the next owner of Tumblr is, might pull the plug and take the servers offline. Once this happens, all of the photographs shared will be lost to the oblivion that is non-digital memory (though some of it might be archived by an internet archiving project). While the low quality and limited production of Zines mean they are at risk of falling apart or being lost, the creators, readers, and subscribers and expand this in a way that is not often discussed in relation to commercial digital platforms. Or, at the very least, the point of the Zine is its limited distribution and lifespan. Tumblr, aided by the digital and corporate capital invested in the technology, is designed for massive reproducibility in almost real time with an illusion of perpetual existence.

Despite these limits, going through the terms of Tumblr allows us to place the site in a different space than other social media sites that are attempting to augment or supplant existing social publics. That is not the goal of Tumblr. As with Zines, the goal seems to be to amplify to a collective and allow for the curation of specialized and specific communal content. The social aspects are one of the affordances of the digital realm. Because the site was built on the social web, the social's presence is noted, but not the point. This difference in goal explains some of the affordances built into the platform that allow for semi-anonymous interactions. It also helps explain why at a board of directors meetings in late 2014 the current head of Yahoo (and thus Tumblr), Marissa Mayer, said that Yahoo's goal is to compete with Google owned YouTube. YouTube is another site where users are subscribers, thus, in terms of how users are imagined to be interacting with user content, YouTube is already a Tumblr competitor.

For the subscriber the terms and privacy statement are static documents in as much as the subscriber has no power to engage them or stakeholders of the platform in meaningful dialogue. While a person can read the terms and policies, there is no way for anyone outside of Tumblr or Yahoo to change them. There is no recourse to revolt other than leaving, and even then, a subscriber can never completely remove himself or herself from the platform. Instead the subscriber becomes inactive, their content left behind. Tumblr is Yahoo. Yahoo owns it. Because of the parts of digital social lives that are mediated through Tumblr are owned by Yahoo as well. This became clear in moments where the Tumblr dashboard interface changed, something that occurred multiple times throughout the life of Vintage Black Beauty. I would go to quickly make a post and, without warning, would be greeted by an interface I only partially understood.

Each change is a learning curve that cannot be protested or reverted unless Yahoo deems it necessary. By creating Vintage Black Beauty in this space I gave some control of the project to Yahoo.

Subscribers who follow Vintage Black Beauty are bound not by the frame of a photograph, but instead by this historical moment that sees them as product with limited agency to control their interactions and no agency in the interpretation of what those interactions mean or how they are valued. In the everyday space of living with social media, subscribers use the tools to create meaning despite their inability to control the larger framework that defines how they can use and access the site. While these limits do come up, they are, for the most part, meaningless when it comes to seeing the site as a resource or a tool for change. And though there have been some cultural crises born from the detached nature of platforms, such as Gamergate, for the most part, the inability of subscribers to control Tumblr has not led to a dangerous crisis. Vintage Black Beauty tries to break that while acknowledging the limits of possibility inherit in working with digital media, stakeholders, and platforms.

CHAPTER 2: DIGITAL LEARNING EXPLORATIONS FOR SPECIFIC AUDIENCES, PLATFORMS, AND MEDIA

A Larger Conversation on Platforms, Scholarship, and Learning

What culture normalizes, education codifies. When methods, citation styles and archiving practices as a whole are taken into account, culture can be understood as a system of codes that signals the thing being interacted with is verified and verifiable knowledge. Academics are trained to be fluent in these systems. This creates a tension that still needs to be worked through when thinking about learning exploration in social media. Just as education codifies cultural norms, social media platforms attempt to codify culture. Because this codification of culture is what builds in platform affordances, it is impossible to port standard learning and educational practices to social media without reimagining the experience, audience, and desired outcomes.

For digital platforms and online resources to be effective, the privacy of the users and ownership of the content need to seem unimportant or invisible. Academics and educators have long dominated ownership of the knowledge making practices. With the move to digital spaces more and more people are able to create knowledge. Questions around legal rights, ownership, and best practices that are built into the process of working with online platforms, repositories, as well as information, theoretical implications, formats, and distribution shape what can be done (Benkler 2006, Lessig 2004, 2014, Stadler 2005). While the act of typing something into a search bar and seeing an answer seems straightforward, there are many processes, both human and

technological, that have been created and are being enacted and modified to make search work. When planning a learning module, experiment, or exploration in digital media, all of these things should be taken into consideration, along with the unique affordances each platform and interface offers.

The unique affordances of Tumblr were taken into consideration when the platform was chosen for Vintage Black Beauty. Though I had gone out of my way to ensure there were historical links between the photographs reproduced and the original archives where I found them, the way the links were built into the platform did not conform to normative notions of what scholarship is. The dynamic nature of the dashboard meant that the photographs were shared with limited text to enable quick viewing that did not detract from the photographs or turn subscribers away due to information overload. Because digital media operate as a series of interlocking pieces, projects that take place in digital space have multiple parts that cannot be visible all at once. Additionally, because digital media and website pages are not inherently organized like sheets of paper that can easily be flipped through in a logical format, it is almost impossible to see all the parts together on a single screen in a meaningful way. Even mapping the pieces loses valuable information that allows other pieces to make sense together or on their own. One of the biggest differences, moreover, when interacting with digital platforms that have a social component is the audience. While all media have the potential for multiple audiences, time, place, space, or other cultural barriers usually constrain who makes up the potential audiences. In digital media audiences are part of the same stream of information and are only differentiated after their information has entered the aggregate by an algorithm or individual interpreters

who can read the digital activity. To understand Vintage Black Beauty and the implications of the project for a wider academic audience requires a different type of literacy. I want to emphasize the need for this literacy to be different and not new, because this is an important distinction when engaging digital media.

Many media are tools that remediate (Bolter & Grusin 2000) towards some image of perfect communication where information, knowledge, feelings, intentions can transfer freely across sentient beings, machines, technology, and back again to sentient beings without going through a change. Change is inevitable though because the instant the information comes into being, its author dies in a Barthesian sense. This means that the intentions of the creator are no longer inherently part of how the object will be understood or interpreted. When we move this to digital media, each instance of accessing a digital document is a moment of engaging multiple stoppages of meaning, both across all the components that bring the page or media to an individual. Information in a digital space is in a constant state of remediation, for the screen, the processor, internal memory devices, and the viewer. For Vintage Black Beauty to work, first and foremost I needed to understand how photographs might transfer meaning in digital social spaces.

Vintage Black Beauty is partially grounded in the idea that "a little formalism turns one away from History, but that a lot brings one back to it" (Barthes 1972, 111). The site was created on Tumblr because the platform allows for specific interactions such as private viewing and semi-private activity streams. The ability to customize the front end design of a Tumblr blog to make it look more like a blog designed for a traditional word centric blog or a gallery, to include user images and framing language is also an

important aspect of framing Tumblr blogs. For Vintage Black Beauty I chose an infinite

scroll grid-based design that would allow for multiple images to be on the screen at

once in various sizes. The background of the design was dark to allow the mostly black

and white photographs to pop. This layout allows for a user to quickly visualize various

photographs across time and space. This is something that is important for breaking

down the myth of the limited roles of black women in the past. It shows that in addition

to diversity of experience, there is also a diversity in terms of looks, customs, and

clothing. The infinite scroll creates something similar to a cinematic experience because

the screen is capable of movement. Scrolling down or up changes the collage of

photographs. The framing language for the site provides an additional form that signals

the signification of the photographs. "An archive remixing research project celebrating

the beauty of women of the black diaspora in vintage style because I love discovering

old pictures that are new to me (and I wanted a place to save them). People don't have

to be glamorous or famous to be beautiful." Despite the history of injustice many of

these photographs come from, the form of social media that Tumblr encourages allows

for the photographs to exist outside of their dominant narratives. Tumblr encourages

sharing without context. The minimal context provided with the photos (they were

shared with a date when available, the caption provided by the holding archive, and the

photograph itself linked back to the site where it was originally posted) provides some

sense of authenticity and origin without making the story of the photograph central.

Finally, the minimal framing of the photographs coupled with the simple site design and

singular site activity (sharing photographs) begins the myth-making project. Calling that

which was photographed to provide typing or caricature, as simply "beauty" is a

deliberate act of moving the formal system sideways. It is not saying that the injustice did not exist. Rather, it is asking that the image be viewed from a different lens or gaze. When this is done it is possible to bring other readings determined by the contemporary historical moment to the forefront. "What must always be remembered is that myth is a double system; there occurs in it a sort of ubiquity: its point of departure is constituted by the arrival of a meaning. To keep a spatial metaphor, the approximate character of which I have already stressed, I shall say that the signification of the myth is constituted by a sort of constantly moving turnstile which presents alternately the meaning of the signifier and its form, a language-object and a metalanguage, a purely signifying and a purely imagining consciousness. The alternative is, so to speak, gathered up in the concept, which uses it like an ambiguous signifier, at once intellective and imaginary, arbitrary and natural" (Barthes 1972,121-122). Once taken out of a dominant narrative and placed into information streams that seem to provide infinite content designed to be interacted with for seconds at a time, the object moves with an illusion of detachment. It moves in the realm of the imaginary. When this happens, the photograph "empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains. There is here a paradoxical permutation in the reading operations, an abnormal regression from meaning to form, from the linguistic sign to the mythical signifier" (Barthes 1972, 116).

Theories and Considerations

As much as I do not consider Vintage Black Beauty to be a project engaged in historical revisionism, it is doing something particular with history. For the purpose of this project, History is a shared socio-cultural idea of the past that allows us to exist in the same context. The socio-cultural id the space this project occupies. Society changes

44

and people can exist in multiple cultures and conditions simultaneously. This means that because History is a socio-cultural artifact it is inherently always in flux. Much of the work individuals do in knowledge production, be it academic or personal, is an attempt to stop this natural flux that makes the past always unstable. The difference with this project is the narrative it is writing into is not the dominant one. The photographs that make up the remixed collection of Vintage Black Beauty are images that for me were not just beautiful, but also changed how I understood, vintage, black, and beauty. Through Tumblr I was allowed to create a publicly viewable record of those encounters through sharing the images, not a word-based list. Digital media made the need for textual explanation less important. Through Tumblr other people were able to follow along and perhaps have their vision of history extended as well. Because of the communal nature of Tumblr, it is difficult to discern user sentiment or impact as the site is not designed for dialogue. The ability to engage with the ideas of others, but not really know or experience others as a social group, is itself similar to our relationship with history. There are so many artifacts left behind and the people involved in the creation of meaning are often no longer able to have their voice or experience heard. Even the snippets of history we are left with, often left in writing by the people of the past, a practice similar to notes on Tumblr, can never be an accurate representation of wholeness. That does not mean that society and culture do not try to imagine snippets as a representation of the whole. Reliance on snippets reflects the difficulty of bringing the past to life in the present.

The past is limited to a narrow narrative that removes agency from the many who were not able to record their own history. When we look at "technologies of

representation", they are limited by what they are able to capture and the imagination informed and decoded by culture and society of both the creators and the viewers of the final representative object. Through the affordances of digital media people are able to connect more quickly and to more people and things than they did in the past. There is a technological limit to this though. Because people are used to information moving more quickly and seeing so much more, for projects like this that try to move public history, there is not a lot of space or time to analyze what is being seen or experienced. It is speaking into the air. Different people will "hear" different photographs. That does not mean photographs or other media should not be shared in digitally augmented social environments. As a qualitative researcher, and a person committed to figuring out what these digital platforms add to pedagogy, I am grateful to have those moments when people put the photographs into different historical narratives and stories by reblogging and leaving comments. To continue playing with sound metaphor, some photographs are "louder" than others. But this messiness is part of most things people experience. It is up to researchers engaged in making sense of digital and social media to find ways to elevate those things that are a bit quieter when they contain important to the messages or information. Vintage Black Beauty is a project that tries to make a quiet history resonate.

Rather than being able to read interpersonal social cues, in the digital encounter, the accessible information is solely in the realm of the person experiencing. For this reason, it is hard to measure resonance. Technology, for now, is unable to contain and transmit human emotion. Emotional states can be intuited from social and cultural cues, but they are not inherent in the pieces of digital media that move from server to screen.

46

Digital media is still a realm of measuring resonance and reach through numbers. I do

not know how people felt about Vintage Black Beauty, but 2,271 people followed the

activity on the site through their Tumblr dashboards (Appendix B). In addition, to the

people who followed the blog, 37,511 individuals visit the site as of May 2015, and

stayed for an average of 3 minutes and 12 seconds (Appendix C).

Seeing

Missions des P. P. du Saint-Esprit - Cameroun
La façon de porter le bébé

Figure 3 Woman carrying a child, Cameroon, ca.1920-1940 (http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15799coll123/id/49414)

This particular photograph (Figure 20) is of a woman in a light colored dress tied at the waist on a sloped street in Cameroon. She is standing, posed, on hard ground in parallel to a brick wall. The woman wears no shoes. Her slightly curled toes seem to grip the hard ground below her feet. Though the surroundings are hard, the image is soft. The caption underneath the photograph says "La façon de porter un bébé", or in English, "the way to carry a baby." The thing a viewer of this photograph is supposed to look at is a leather harness around her torso and the exposed bottom of a baby that straps said baby to her hip. This specific photograph was part of a postcard series that, given the language and history of the time period, as well as the archival collection where it was found, was distributed by a missionary group. For the mission, the post cards gave the home congregation a glimpse of the people they saved. That is the historical environment that saw this photograph circulated. Now, imagine this photograph appearing on Tumblr for a subscriber.

A user logs on to Tumblr and sees a space called a dashboard. This is where she or he sees posts from all of the other Tumblr users she or he follows. Lots of blogs post fashion images, lifestyle tips, thought pieces. There are many blogs that are in the habit of posting vintage glamour shots, or news and images from specific regions of the world. There are blogs that just post gifs, animated images often from television shows, and, because it is the Internet, pornography. All of this content gets mixed together to form the curated stream of content designed for a single Tumblr subscriber. Information tends to move quickly because people tend to subscribe to lots of blogs. Though the caption and the date were part of the post, not everyone speaks French. And even if people do, they might look and keep scrolling. The people who see this image are

seeing the image decontextualized from the dominant historical narrative that enabled its existence. They are still seeing "the way to carry a baby", but, what they might be seeing, as one visitor of the site told me as I sat with her while she looked at the photographs changes "the way to carry a baby is with love" or maybe the way to carry a baby is not noted at all and the photograph is just a picture of some lady on a street. And, despite the historical conditions of the photograph, when you look at the photograph, you can see that too. The way the woman protectively has her hands on the baby stands out to me. The way she is looking down at the baby and the way she is holding her body all scream love and care. Despite what I am seeing, the photograph *is* just some woman and a baby on a street. This is the accident of the photograph. An image that was created to show a "primitive" contraption people of Cameroon use to carry a baby becomes a photograph of motherhood. It becomes a photo of everyday life. The woman carries the child with care and proximity. As the infant's body melts into the woman, the two of them are inseparable in this photograph. This image stands opposed to the inhumane, cold, distanced, far from the body, no contact method of pushing a baby around in a buggy or stroller that is so normalized in the contemporary western world. I write that last bit in jest as a reminder that popular framing is important to understand how photographic imagery might be interpreted. Digital distribution reframes these photographs in a contemporary understanding that sees represent more than just oppression for as large of an audience as possible. Platforms like Tumblr, despite the drawbacks and limitations on ownership and agency, make this possible.

Barthes' concept of mythology provides for photography a language that most people who are able to see are fluent in. We know that it is a representation of the real. We know that the real that photographs present is a real of the past. If most people are fluent in reading photographs then people should be able to easily understand how the encounter with an unfamiliar photographic image can be easily placed in the larger understanding of photography and thus in an expanded historical context, which is the domain of myth. The forced surfacing of the image through social media creates a coevalness as the item is collectively consumed, as asynchronous conversations happen that are publicly visible and replicated across thousands of monitors. This is in part borrowing from what Johannes Fabian calls "visualism," the cultural belief vision is the 'noblest sense' and the most 'exact' way of communicating knowledge (106, 1983). What makes historical photos a unique case to understand the effects of digitization and digital media, especially when conceived of as "new" anthropological artifacts, is that there is no need to create a false sense of distance because distance is built into the experience of the photographic object. Through the framing and form of the project, however, we are able to make the photograph more than text. We are able to revive it. This reviving changes relationships to history, time and the "Other".

An image of a teenaged girl in Sierra Leone from 1925 is posted to Vintage Black
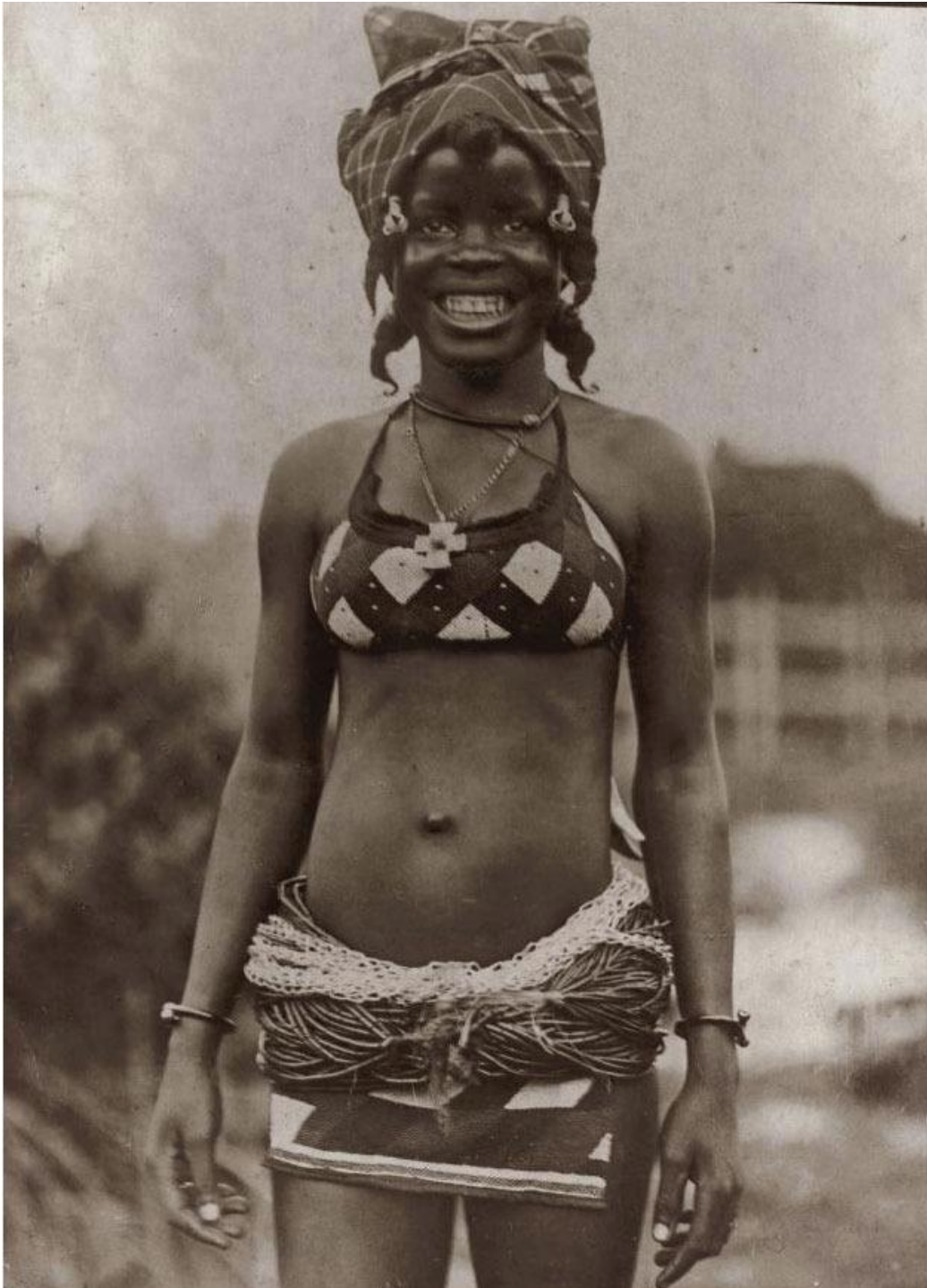
Beauty from the Dutch national archives with the original Dutch caption. [7] Google

translate says that the original caption "Vrouwen. Een Bundu meisje uit Sierra Leone

Centraal Afrika na een rituele wassing in inheemse feestkledij. Tot aan het moment dat

zij 'vrouw' wordt, mag zij geen katoenen doeken over haar lichaam dragen. Foto 1925."

translates to roughly "Women. A Bundu girl from Sierra Leone Central Africa after an

ablution in indigenous party attire. They may, up to the moment she is a "woman," not

wear cotton cloths over her body. Photo 1925." This being indigenous fashion is

noteworthy and important for understanding how this photograph will be understood by

Tumblr subscribers who follow Vintage Black Beauty. It is also noteworthy because this

being the caption signals that this was also important to the original caption author and,

potentially, the photographer. The girl is outside and smiling. She wears a woven top

similar in shape to a sports bra. It covers her breasts but her stomach is exposed. The

top has a geometric two-toned pattern. She wears a short skirt or loincloth with a pattern

that matches the top. She is wearing a woven piece of cloth over her hair. Her hair,

either braided or twisted, is sticking out in the back. It is adorned with some kind of

decorative bead on the ends closest to the front of her face. She wears wood and bead

necklaces, a bracelet on each wrist and two multi-strand belts lower on her waist.

Of the over 2,000 followers of Vintage Black Beauty, 34 had active engagement

indicated by favoriting or reblogging the image of the woman/Bunda girl from Sierra

Leone. Within the limited active engagement a micro conversation happened amongst

two Tumblr subscribers. In figure 22 a subscriber notes that the traditional clothing looks

a lot like the infamous western cultural icon, the bikini. The subscriber implies that

perhaps the idea that changes how we imagine western swimming owes some credit to

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[7] http://vintageblackbeauty.tumblr.com/post/14990863813/vrouwen-een-bundu-meisje-uit-sierra-leone

Sierra Leone. The bringing up of royalties puts the idea of ownership and image into question in a meaningful way. A second Tumblr subscriber, seeing the original comment, reblogs the image from the first subscriber's blog (meaning the image is reblogged with the original caption and the subscriber comment) and adds a comment in agreement. The second comment begins a process of cultural analysis by noting that the cultural shift in African culture brought on by western presence means that clothes this revealing are often positioned as a western imposition on a traditional African way of life. In that moment, the user realizes that "The world is funny, a lot of things are upside down." The origin of the photograph, part of a Dutch national project, was part of what was posted through the language of the original caption and the linked back to the Dutch national archives website where it lives digitally. Even with this information available, the history of the photographs creation was unimportant. Instead, a different mythical narrative, one of modesty as a traditional African value, and the implied sexuality of European sartorial customs came to the forefront. The image stopped being part

> **nanettehb:**
>
> > **vintageblackbeauty:**
> >
> > > Vrouwen. Een Bundu meisje uit Sierra Leone Centraal Afrika na een rituele wassing in inheemse feestkledij. Tot aan het moment dat zij 'vrouw' wordt, mag zij geen katoenen doeken over haar lichaam dragen. Foto 1925.
> > >
> > > Women. A Bundu girl from Sierra Leone.
> >
> > **1925. Dang. I think whoever "invented" the bikini might owe some folks some royalties...**
>
> Abi! I was thinking the same thing!
>
> The funny thing is a lot of modern day African parents would freak out if their daughters wore stuff like this. They'd say that wearing 'revealing' clothes is unAfrican and an is something that came from the West.
>
> This world is funny, a lot of things are upside down.
>
> ↻ Reblogged from: nanettehb

Figure 5 Tumblr Notes Thread

of a Dutch cataloging project and instead became the image of a young African woman smiling in her traditional clothes. The resemblance of traditional clothes to modern European fashion reinscribes a people often portrayed as backwards in popular media as forward thinking trendsetters. Additionally, the comment on modesty seems to be an attempt to exert some ownership over choices that might be seen as a cultural imposition of the West for some people of African descent. This shifts where the historical imaginary positions women of the past by showing a girl in party attire; it provides another cultural lens for understanding modern clothing and places certain bodies in an expanded historical narrative in terms of modern fashion trends.

This photograph is also significant because it hints at the wealth of reflection subscribers have when they decide to follow a blog like Vintage Black Beauty on Tumblr. The swimsuit we know as the bikini debuted in July of 1946 and was made by French designer Louis Reard. The existence of the photo of the traditional dress in 1925 predates the historic event in which the bikini was unveiled in the world of fashion by over 20 years. The photograph is part of a European national archive meaning images of this style of dress potentially existed in the western consciousness tied to specific traditionally African cultures. The micro conversation around the image exemplifies how, when these photographs are digitally distributed, the potential exists for the photographs to reframe or expand historical narratives. The digital, through its chain of never ending signification as pixels, becomes information that is meaningful as autoaffective distancing occurs for the viewer.

She Looks so Familiar: Creating New "Lived" Historical Narratives

Sometimes I look at these vintage photos and I think, "She looks so familiar!" I think being part of

the diaspora, for some of us, means always being on the look out for our kin folks.

-auntada[8]

"But I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking

behind my eyes."

-- Zora Neale Hurston, How it Feels to Be Colored me

The rise of The Digital as a social space, and the digitization of governmental

and University archives, archives that collect early colonial imagery, the early imagery of

blackfolk from the United States and all of the African diaspora, allow photographs to be

seen publicly in a way that was not possible before. This availability fundamentally

allows for a change to occur with how we imagine and interact with our own histories. It

also allows us to turn these histories into memories in a way that was not possible

before. I am attempting to make a specific history, memory and archival history matter

to the lives of those who live on the other side of the screen.

I am playing with history through transculturation. David Attwell described

transculturation in *Rewriting Modernity: studies in Black South African literary history* as

"multiple processes, a dialogue in both directions and, most importantly, processes of

cultural destruction followed by reconstruction on entirely new terms" (18, 2005). While

it is impossible to go back to what happened before and carry out an ethnographic

project where I can speak with the women in the photographs, their photos are able to

speak to me, to us. It is possible to look at their ghosts as they play a role in the

everyday lives of those who see them and to explore the influence of the performances

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[8] http://vintageblackbeauty.tumblr.com/post/9638636075/sometimes-i-look-at-these-vintage-photos-and-i#postNotes

56

their presence calls forth. I think this is especially important when engaging the specificity of the black female historic experience, as this is a history that is often not explored. Returning to Attwell, if, "the relationships between gender, race, and modernity require a different and distinctive kind of treatment" (23), then I offer critical reflexivity, especially in the spaces of lost connections in digital media, as a missing component. Though photography was a European invention, and almost all of the early photographers, especially the ones featured in this project, were most likely white and male, photography has become an integral technology that aids remembering, memorialization and historicizing the world and lives across cultures and contexts. David Attwell states that the "post- Enlightenment ideoscape has been imposed on the world over the last 300 years or so has ensured that most societies have now come to define themselves in relation to it" (4). Technology and the World Wide Web have made photographic imagery a more integral part of our every day life as we are able to snap photographs and share them within seconds. I believe this has fundamentally changed the way we interact with photographic imagery.

Though Barthes says, "the principle of adventure allows me to make photography exist" (1981, 19), the principle of imagination and memory make these women exist. The discovery of their existence animates the past. This experience is not an adventure (1981, 20). It is a formation. It creates a new future, a future that more fully integrates the gifts of the past. These photographs ask that we focus on the remnant rather than the origin.

Looking at these photos is not about nostalgia. It is not about looking back to a better time or place. Looking at these photos is not about all the "what could have

57

beens." Rather, these photos exist to help imagine and discover what could be. These photographs force the question, as Barthes did: "Is History not simply that time when we were not born?" (64) Against Barthes though, there is a demand. Rather than being stupefied at "seeing a familiar dressed *differently*" (64) there is a demand to acknowledge. Even dressed differently, these photographs contain familiar faces.

We, society and culture, were always already there. There is a demand that we see our existence. If we "project the present photograph's immobility upon the past shot, and it is this arrest which constitutes the pose" (78), what happens when we deny the immobility and place the photograph in motion? The women in these photographs move through time and space and reach out to us. Motion need not only refer to a physical movement. Motion is the explosion of the movement of history as history is transculturated. The women in these photographs also motion. They motion for their re-vision. "If the historical knowledge of an object or a thing requires its isolation in a place apart from the network of the interests of the historian, this setting apart is surely doomed to lead to a putting down" (Lyotard 6, 1987). We break away from historical knowledge because we cannot put these women down. Through the screen photographs cannot be physically picked up. And the photographs, and the memory they create, capture the women in life.

"To beauty that doesnt [sic] need the label Gucci or Jason Wu to make it beautiful."

-response to a photograph by whileimyoungnbeautiful[9]

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[9] This subscribers blog is no longer functioning properly and older notes are no longer showing up on the original posts. The note can be found on the following page: http://whileimyoungnbeautiful.tumblr.com/page/119. The original Vintage Black Beauty post can be found at http://vintageblackbeauty.tumblr.com/post/1089014934/djibouti

There is a life around the photographed subject. With a click of the camera, a visible excerpt of that life is created. This excerpt constructs new meaning for the contemporary viewer. Rather than looking at the photographs as evidence of an inhumane practice, today they are evidence that these women had lives too. The existence of these photographs begs those who gaze upon them to look. "Look! We exist. Look! We live. Look! We have lives". And when this call is answered, the photograph transforms. The woman stops existing solely as an aesthetic artifact, an excerpt of a time and place cannot be directly interacted with. She becomes the medium that transmits history to and through the viewer.

There is genuine communication happening from the photographic referent and the eye who has stopped looking, the eye that is now seeing. The duality of the photograph is its inability to separate the object from that which it represents, and the need for something to be represented in order for the photograph to have affective meaning (Barthes 1981, 5-6). We exist because she existed before us. She existed before us, because we see her now.

I cannot *talk with* these photographs, even when they *speak to* me. It is through them that I travel, to worlds and times unknown. Though my soul stays on the other side of the screen, I exist through time and space. It is through these women that I find myself. How shocked I was, therefore, when I came upon my own presence, not in an American negro, but rather in 1881, a woman from Martinique[10]. She captured my essence, not only as I imagine myself, but also as those close to me see me. I found

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[10] http://vintageblackbeauty.tumblr.com/post/12881866382/excursions-et-explorations-colombie-venezuela

my body in 1889 in Paris, via South Africa. I found the place I want to live my life in a moment from 1941 Mississippi[11], where a woman threw her head back, laughing, as she danced the jitterbug.

Through Vintage Black Beauty I am given glimpses of the experience of others. In a meta way, the data I am able to see are very much like a photographic snapshot. Each photograph has a count of how many people have reblogged it or favorited it. If a user reblogs the photograph with comments, a snippet of the comment becomes visible on the photograph's page (each post to Tumblr has its own page where it can be viewed by itself). The comments that mean the most to me are the ones where people see a place or a face that is familiar, or they let me know that they were reminded of home or their own life. People also send private messages about the project with the option of letting me share them publicly. I have only shared one message from Tumblr subscriber auntada. Her message succinctly stated purpose of the project, "Sometimes I look at these vintage photos and I think, "She looks so familiar!" I think being part of the diaspora, for some of us, means always being on the look out for our kin folks."

The literacy that is central to this project is about knowledge production. However, it is not a quest for new knowledge. Instead, despite the limitations and constraints that exist within digital media and social media platforms, the primary goal of the project is to spread knowledge that was unable to be widely distributed through previous distribution channels. By taking advantage of the way photographs are read as individual objects detached from a larger film roll or project, the knowledge that is generated is more reflexive than extrinsic. For me to assume that seeing a photograph

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[11] http://vintageblackbeauty.tumblr.com/post/10045833057/negroes-jitterbugging-in-a-juke-joint-on-saturday

would make someone click on the image and explore its archive, and then do the next step of searching for historical information about the time, place, and group represented, is me placing my own proclivities on an audience that by and large is looking at the site as though it is an entertainment magazine.

CHAPTER 3: WHAT WE SEE: THE ECOLOGY OF OPPRESSION, TRAUMA, AND CRISIS[12]

The Catholic Schoolgirl

Figure 6 Danseuse de la région de Mobaye (Oubangui), Archive nationales, d'outre-mer (http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/sdx/ulysse/notice?id=FR%20CAOM%2030Fi72/31&qid=sdx_q1&p=1)

"She can't be Catholic! She's naked!" said a woman in the audience during the question and answer session of a conference presentation. I was taken aback. I had shared some of the stories and reactions of finding digitized old archival photography and sharing it online. I ended the presentation by asking permission to share a photograph I discovered online in the French National archives a week before. There was a question that was nagging me that I hoped the audience could help me work through: "is/was sharing this photograph the right thing

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[12] This chapter previous appeared as Davis, Jade E. "The Catholic schoolgirl & the wet nurse: On the ecology of oppression, trauma and crisis." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 1 (2014).

to do? And why?" I introduced the girl in the photograph as Héliani, a catholic

schoolgirl who modeled for the photograph, information I knew from the brief bit of

biographical information[13] included with the photograph in the digital archive where I

found her. The book she modeled for is titled *Eve Noire/*Black Eve, a book I ordered

after seeing the photograph. Knowing this history is something that has become so

second nature to me that I was taken aback by the comment from the woman in

audience. Of course Héliani was a Catholic schoolgirl. This photo is different

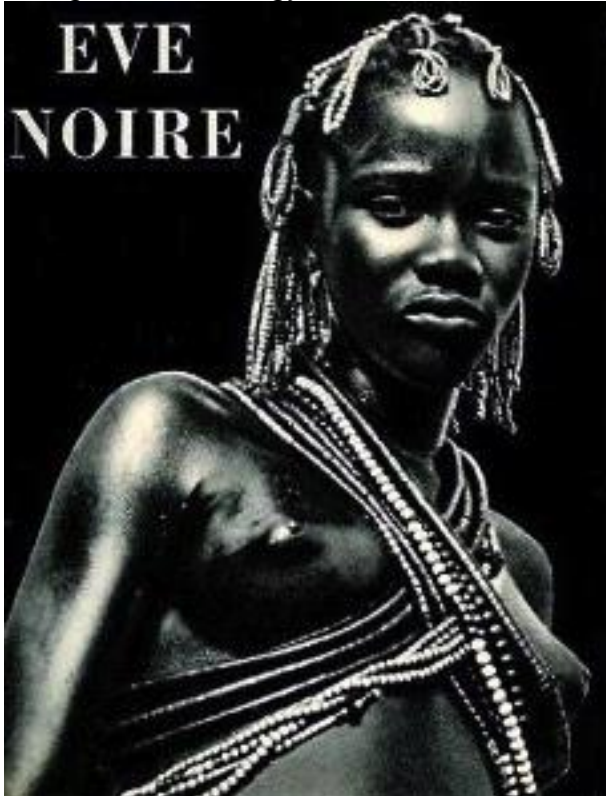though. The ecology she is visualized in is very different than how she would

appear while actively being a student of the Catholic mission. This is a Catholic schoolgirl "spotted" at a party who became (*devint*) a model for the "Eve Noire" series. I am stuck on the becoming part. It makes me wonder if the photographers asked her if she would like to be on the cover.

The reaction of the woman in the audience to Héliani was not the first experience where I found myself taken aback by a reaction or question to my exploration of the photographic cache of

women of the black diaspora. I was walking on campus with a professor when I first

Figure 7 Cover, Eve Noire

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[13] "Jeune fille du village de Poto-Poto avec une coiffure de perles. Elève de la mission catholique, répondant au nom "d'Héliani", elle fut repéré par Ellebé lors d'un tam-tam (fête) à Poto-Poto et devint un de ses modèles pour une série de photographies intitulée "Eve noire".

started this work. I used the terms "black women" and "colonial photography" in one sentence as I explained what I was doing. I saw her body recoil, and took it as a sign that I needed to do this project. *Seeing* these women as part of a broader and more universal ecology is needed to help shift the monolithic narrative that exists around them. I felt, and continue to feel, sadness and shame because women who look like me, women who were photographed for various reasons, reasons that were often highly problematic, were reduced and confined, left to be defined, by those projects. When they are reduced to that narrative, their ability to move through larger ecologies of knowledge or meaning is greatly reduced.

Finding the photo of Héliani changed how I think through my work and its imagined audience. This fraction of a second in Héliani's life is the collective image society often imagines, that we almost never actually see captured by the camera, when we are thinking of the dynamic of the historical black woman/white man. If the conversation with the professor caused her to recoil, Héliani's photograph, her body in focus front and center, a melancholic look on her face, a group of white men out of focus in traditional explorer gear looking at her in the background, represents what I feared the professor was seeing as she imagined what I was describing. Once *Eve Noire*, the book, arrived in my mailbox, I eagerly opened it not sure what I would find. I instantly recognized the cover model. It was Héliani. She stands in what looks like an identical pose as the digitized photo found in the French archives, but from a different angle. Rather than the person holding the camera being to her side he is now in front of her, probably kneeling, as she looks down directly into the lens. Her face has the same affective resonance. But there is something more. The

64

background of the photograph has been blacked out. She stands there alone as Black Eve, without the distraction of the men around her. The look on her face is almost powerful. The melancholy becomes an unapologetic presence that simply says, "I am here. And I see you." It is the only image that appears without a background in the book. The other photos in the book focus on the women, the backgrounds still blurry mostly lack human spectators, and even when spectators sneak into the frame, none of them are white men. In a majority of the photographs, the girls and women are nude, but smiling.[14]

The original photograph of Héliani is painful to see. That is the feedback I received at the conference, as well as when I've shared this photograph with others both on and offline. It makes visible that which is almost always invisible in colonial photography. While we might imagine white men in safari gear looking with scrutinizing gazes, unfriendly, older, surrounding their photographic subject, to see it actually happening, frozen in time and space though a photograph is painful. When we view this image we see the myth of what colonization looked like come to life. The gaze of the white men is predatory. Their intentions, as narrated by the look on their faces and hers is animalistic. The gaze of the viewer is inevitably drawn to their blurry faces in an attempt to put them into focus, to face the boogeyman that will not allow the effacement of the colonial, the historical context that consumes Héliani. We follow the gaze of the men and see that they are staring, gazing, and consuming her.

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[14] The book in and of itself is an interesting place to look, created by Bertrand Lembezat, an administrator for la France d'outre-mer, the book lists him as "administrator of the colonies", as well as the author and photographer for the book. Many photographs taken by him that are available in the French National Archives do not appear in the book, though there is some overlap between the photos online and in the book. The book was printed not by the French government, but instead by a private press in Switzerland.

Their gaze frames ours. Even contextualized, Héliani, Catholic schoolgirl dancing at a party, the photo still disturbs the viewer. Héliani is framed by the white male colonial and sexual gaze, breast exposed, alone, and surrounded. The blurry faces of white men erase the blurry black faces behind them also watching as Héliani dances. It is this erasure that caused the first person who reblogged this image when I posted it to Tumblr to say, "There's just something about "Héliani's" expression, and the intense gaze of the white men in the background on her nude body, that embodies this fetish." [15] The shadow archive, a space of hidden photographs that many own but hide away, as described by Alan Sekula in "The Body and the Archive", encompasses the entire social terrain she can be imagined in (10).

Héliani remains. Young girl from the village of Poto-Poto with a hairstyle of pearls. Student of the Catholic mission who respond to the name of Héliani, Héliani who becomes the personification of Black Eve. Héliani who with a slight glance down captured in a fraction of second, is the perfect expression of the imagined horrors for women of colonization. Surrounded by white men, she embodied, for an instant, all the sexual horrors we place on black women in the imaginary of colonization and enslavement. More than what we see in the photograph, our fear is what could happen to her immediately after.

The Wetnurse While the photo of Héliani is difficult because of the history that is present and visible, a history that is normally invisible, the photo of Type de « négresse » d'ADANA, (Turkey, c1910) is disturbing because of the hyper-visibility of

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[15] http://dynamicafrica.Tumblr.com/post/22731164593/vintageblackbeauty-danseuse-de-la-region-de

similar photographs and caricatures. This is not a photo I found and posted.

Instead, I watched the photo make its way through Tumblr as it was reblogged over

3,000[16] times. The background of the image is a painted curtained terrace signaling

that it is studio print, the type of photo often used for postcards. However, the photo

Figure 8 Source Unknown

is cropped. All that is left on the screen is the

image of a black woman, mouth in a slight smirk,

fatigued hooded eyes looking directly at the

camera, her breasts large and exposed, below

the left nipple a dot of what was probably milk.

Her left hand rests on her left knee and her right

knee appears to be slightly propped, sitting on

an ornate bench. A skirt is draped between her

legs, creating a seat. On the right breast, a fair

skinned child nurses, awake looking up at the

women, clutching the nourishing breast (the

nourishing woman) in his or her hands, nestled

in the seat of her skirt, lying against her left

forearm and hand. The clothing, headdress, and

furniture all scream "not from the USA" to me,

but that is where most of the commentary on the

photo came from. Instead of seeing a woman

who might or might not be the child's mother, a possibility as the caption placed the

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[16] http://vintageblackbeauty.Tumblr.com/post/26255822411/type-de-negresse-dadana-turkey-c1910

image geographically and gave race to the woman, a "black woman" (négresse) from Adana Turkey, something I found when I located the uncropped postcard. Nothing was said of the child neither was she marked as a nurse or nursemaid (nourrice), something that was commonly marked on French postcards[17].

Instead of the woman being who she was, the image in the photograph contained the History of slavery in the United States as it moved through Tumblr. The ecology of knowledge of black nurses people had to work with blinded them to the broad history she was a part of. This image was seen as another instance of Mammy come to life, except it was real, an actual photograph of Mammy in action. Rather than being silenced by the visibility of bodies as with the photograph of Héliani, this invisibility of bodies of all the other mammy images we are inundated with, from the grocery store to films, is what gave life to this photograph. It is this overwhelming citationality that renders us unable to see the complexities of the relationship the photo presents us with. The potential to analyze the image based on visual signifiers existed. Rather than seeing a cropped image without a caption, subscribers of Tumblr took a cropped image for the whole, and colored it in with the dominant understanding of the past that was familiar to them

The nurse is erased as she is subsumed (and consumed) by the mother (Coles 63-64). The shadow archive encompasses the entire social terrain she can be imagined in (Sekula 10). In our imagined psyche, her role and the role of the mother blend and fade until "nurse as mother" fades away, leaving her mother role

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[17] The back of the postcard is said to have the following additional information, but I've been unable to locate this image in a traditional library or information about the publisher, "Type de « négresse » d'Adana Nourrice noire allaitante éditions G. Mizrahi, Adana, carte postale, 9 x 14, vers 1910"

invisible, and the "nurse as object" or "nurse as thing" for us to contemplate. Similar

to Héliani, it is the life outside of the photo that creates the space of fear and

discomfort. We put the complex relationship of nourishment under erasure and fill

the gap we have created with all of our fears of her powerless, forgotten position.

This position is defined not just the relationship she has, that we see, with the child

she is nursing, but also by the relationship of the parents of the child, parents who

might have also once suckled at the breast of a nurse like her. In this relationship the

parents, too, formed the mother/child/nourishment bond, and then placed another

woman in the relationship of capitalist or, in this case, enslavement, and made her

the nurse for her own child. The négresse d'Adana becomes nothing more than a

resource, detached from her humanity. Instead of the fear we have of the colonial

male gaze, we are left, in the back of our minds, with the image of the evil white

mistress/mother. The unspoken statement that can be seen in many reactions to

this photo as it moved digitally is "where is this celebrated white mother figure?"

Mammy takes her place, casting the birth mother as detached from her own child. If

the mother had been present, she would have been saving two generations of

suffering, the suffering of the enslaved wet nurse as well as the child.

The pain we see continues to be amplified when we enter the lived narrative

of blackness in relation to whiteness in the United States, specifically the relationship

between white men and black women. While we cannot be sure of the sex/gender

of the child, there are no western markers of femininity visible on the child's body.

This is placed in contrast with the oversized breasts of the « négresse » d'Adana.

Seeing the child as male we "imagine his heartache and conflict [...]that his society

forbade him to recognize his erotic feelings for black women that were linked to his deep love and gratitude to his 'black Mammy', who not only saved his life, but might have...given him a reason for living" (Coles 67). This is reading the image colored by US slavery and segregation. Slavery in Turkey at a time when it was still the Ottoman Empire looks the same when seen through a photograph for many Tumblr subscribers. In actuality, Ottoman slavery and the social relationships it enabled were very different (Erdam 1996, Toledano 1982, Zilfi 2010).

The Ottoman Empire is historically underrepresented in the larger conversation on slavery and its legacy. The US and the Ottoman empire both enslaved black Africans, but slavery was a much more complex social system in the Ottoman empire, not limited to the chattel and plantation model that dominates the US narrative and the narrative that the image of the wet-nurse was bounded in (though there were Ottoman sugar plantations in Egypt that more closely resembled the US model). Further, slavery in the Ottoman Empire was not limited to the slavery of Black Africans. White Europeans, Caucasians (from the Caucasus region), and people of other ethnicities were enslaved as well. More often than not, slaves were incorporated into families as domestic workers with means of legal protection and multiple ways to end their slave contracts. Additionally, much like we have the mammy figure from US slavery, that which this image represents, there is an image of mixed race Ottoman slave girl that is just as potent and culturally visible: the harem girl.

Despite this, the « négresse » d'Adana becomes the embodiment of "what it looked like" in the United States for Tumblr subscribers as she moves through space and time as a digital artifact, cropped and detached from history.

Returning to Coles in her chapter on Nurses,

"The nurse or nanny's metaphorical portrait needs to be brought out and dusted down, so that she can be hung in the gallery along-side the parents, grandparents, siblings, and other ancestors... It is time she was remembered for the impossible role she has been placed in, rather than considered as no more than a "servant" who can be fired and hired at the whim of the mistress. It needs to be recognized that a blind eye has been turned to the fact that the nurse often has been given the vital task of caring for a child at its most vulnerable and impressionable age (69).

We must remember that the ecologies of social relationships are complex and problematic and often live in excess of the narratives we place them in. By allowing ourselves to be blinded by the History we've been given, we are not able to challenge History in a way that allows the women this woman represents to be more. Additionally we are blinding ourselves to the ability to imagine what the diaspora actually looked and looks like, and limiting our ability to *feel*.

THE BODY SCRIPTS: FACING/FIXING OPPRESSION

"We must not ignore...the impact of our ancestral history, especially if our ancestors

have suffered, for their anguish can return and haunt us. It is the anguished return

of traumatic experience that repeats itself across generations and affects the way

the next generation is perceived"

(Coles xiv).

"In attempting to understand the origins of racism, it is important to avoid removing it

to a historical past or displacing its sources onto the oppressed. Any investigation or

representations of [otherness], then, must take a critical look at Euro-American

whiteness to understand the construction of race as a category. As critic Coco

Fusco has insisted, 'To ignore white ethnicity is to reduce its hegemony by

naturalizing it.'"

(Brian Wallis, "Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz's Slave Daguerrotypes",

p. 179).

On October 15, 2012, the Society Pages, a sociologically focused collection

of blogs, made a post to one of their sub-blogs "Sociological Images." The post

highlighted Human Zoos at the turn of the 20th century[18] and incorporated three

images that showed people who had been taken to Europe and not only put on

display, but also photographed and their image placed on postcards while in

"captivity." The leading text was the following:

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[18] http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2012/10/15/human-zoos-at-the-turn-of-the-20th-century/

(emphasis in original). The positioning of the photographs of these people with this detached trigger warning forces the reader to place the people seen in the ecology of oppression. They can only exist and move in the realm of victims of "racism and enslavement." This placement limits the ability for a different reality to be imagined even though we know they existed in a different temporal-spatial reality from our lives and from the fraction of a second of their lives captured photographically. It limits the ability for those of us who might have been touched by this history to be okay with seeing people like us as familiar. The thing that I found most disturbing about this post, in addition to the positioning of the "victims," is that the original article the images had been taken from, an article that was linked to, had the photograph of the man who was responsible for bringing the people to Germany and putting them on display. The Sociological Images post ended with the quote that was paired with the photograph of this man "In his memoirs, Carl Hagenbeck praised himself, writing, 'it was my privilege to be the first in the civilized world to present these shows of different races.'" Despite this, his face, the face that should be associated with the ecology of oppression, racism and enslavement as much as, if not more, than his

Figure 9 Carl Hagenbeck, Spiegel Online (http://www.spiegel.de/fotostrecke/photo-gallery-europe-s-human-zoos-fotostrecke-50706-6.html)

73

"victims" remains invisible, outside of the system we use to understand the complex power arrangement of colonial History.

The choice was made by the blogger to reinforce and represent racism and enslavement with photographs of people of color.

This reinforcement limits the ability of someone who recognizes kin in these photographs to see the person seen/scened and the person seeing (me) as a whole person. Instead of being able to self-actualize, the person reflexively scripts themselves and everyone like them as though the racism, enslavement, marginalization, and oppression is the only ecology where their presence is allowed or expected. Even as they are confronted in their day to day lives with alternate expressions of humanness, the dominant narrative re-produced in this post still marks their body as central to this narrative, a point reinforced with historical photographs.

This post brings to light one of the problematic aspects of encountering historical photographs of black women across the diaspora. The pseudo-scientific discourses of slavery and colonization rendered the creators of the archives invisible. The aesthetics of many of the photographs place the women as specimen or Types. This leaves the modern viewer of these photographs with two options, to focus on the structures that brought these photographs into existence, rendering the women in the photographs invisible inasmuch as they become a hyper-visualization of racism and oppression and stop being an individual. The other option when viewing the photos today is to allow the photographs to become neutral, simply images of women that existed, a photographic subject like any other. This can be

encouraged by sharing the photographs with limited contexts, and allowing them to move outside of the confines of the collections, posts, essays, and other forms a person might choose to share them in. Our collective inclination seems to be to do the former. I would like be mindful that, as noted by Bourdieu, it is imperative that we are aware of this tendency so that we may find space for another way of seeing and analyzing. "Finally, and more subtly, surrendering to habits of thought, even those that can exert a powerful effect of rupture under other circumstances, can also lead to unexpected forms of naïveté… We must also break with the instruments of rupture which negate the very experience against which they have been constructed" (Bourdieu 251).

In addition to being mindful of our tendency to face oppression with the oppressed, we should be mindful that not everyone involved in the colonial project, and bringing the "Other" to Europe, had the same political project in mind. Prince Roland Bonaparte commissioned thousands of photographs of people from around the globe (Marien, 2006). Many of the collections are available digitally on the French National Library website. The first book Bonaparte wrote, a book cataloging Surinam for the World's Fair in the Netherlands in 1883 is also available digitally. Imagine my surprise, given the narrative we have of the explorers, when he explained that no white people were willing to come and be in the village of Surinam though he tried to get them to participate (25), and later as he is discussing the practices of the non-maroon black population, he says the following:

"Le nègre se considère comme plus sincère et plus honnête que le blanc

Il y a quelque semblant de vérité dans cette affirmation, car entre eux, dans le meme

tribu, ils sont généralement très probes et ont beaucoup de confiance dans la parole

de leurs compagnons" (134).

"The nègre considers him or herself more sincere and honest than the black man.

There seems to be some truth in this affirmation, because, between them, in the

same tribe, they are generally very honest and trust in the words of their

companions" (134).

It is clear in reading Bonaparte's book that he did not look down on or see the

people he photographed and brought to Europe as less than human in the way

Hagenback did. Rather, he was very respectful, complimentary, and mindful of their

social and cultural position, and, as in the quote above, critical of the role of the

white population of Surinam. The term primitive is used only to describe the

indigenous Indian population's lack of written history, and even that is positioned

next to the plight they have been given with regards to decimation of population due

to disease and a situation that led many of them, both men and women, to

drunkenness (47). With this in mind, and knowing that outside of this book he did

not write on other expeditions he financed or was a part of, I cannot help but wonder

how his writing was received at the time, and if he did not see the beauty in the

photographs that I see today.

Even as we have examples like Bonaparte of other ways people were

thinking of these encounters, we focus on the bodies present, the bodies seen as

representations of horror. We script the bodies into the historical understanding that

Héliani and the « négresse » d'Adana bring to life/light for us. Just as their bodies

are capable of representing all those (his) stories (rather than the actual perpetrators

being the visual representation that is seen/scened), the body of *a black woman*

becomes *the body of black women*, taking in all the historical narratives society has

imagined for her across time and space. Instead of being touched by History, she is

grabbed, shoved, pushed, and contained.

> "As a result, the body schema attacked in several places, collapsed, giving
>
> way to an epidermal racial schema. In the train, it was a question of being
>
> aware of my body, no longer in the third person, but in triple. In the train,
>
> instead of one seat, they left me two or three" (Fanon, *Black Skin White*
>
> *Masks* 92).

The idea of the body moving from the third person to the body in triple is a

moment where the body becomes both in the social realm and the realm of

experience. Language is structured such that we think of ourselves in first person.

We have a set of words, first-person pro-nouns such as, "I", "me", and "my", so that

we can speak to and of our personal embodied experiences. The movement

through space causes a third person existence to be placed upon the body. While

we experience the "I, my, me", the bodies around us experience "you" and "her/him."

In the social realm the body of a person is matter that takes up space and has a

narrative around it constructed by the I/eyes that perceive its existence. It is through

that narrative that the body becomes human. The perception of the body as "you" or

"her/him" is determined by the histories the body invokes and the feelings it conjures

in other people. To face the body as a person, to see it, is to face (put a face on) all

of those things that lie on the surface of history and our current social structure. For

a black woman, her body scripts a story we do not want to confront or script

ourselves into, in the first person. She is seen by many as not a "you", but a "her" or

a "she." The third person of her body becomes space in triple. Distance. Empty

space. Void of bodies. It is that moment on the train when, though there is a seat to

the immediate left or right of her body, a person chooses to stand to avoid the

suffocating closeness to all she represents. Her body is heavy (mentally). Her body

is big (historically). Her body engulfs (now). Her body seems to suck up the air

around it, though it is really just fear making others forget to breathe, unsure how to

approach her as a "you." The actual presence of the body makes people more

aware of what they say and how they say it. It is a body that makes others self-

censor and self-asphyxiate. Her body halts conversations and heightens others

depending on its proximity. It is a body that, when present in only a representational

sense, is safe to be consumed, to speak of, and about.

All bodies that could be associated with her body, even when they are

different, are consumed by the sign-images of her body. The epidermal schema, as

defined by Fanon, means even as a black woman from the French Antilles or the

United States has long since lost any ties to a site of African colonization, her body

is consumed, marked, and seen as though she is part of the narrative of

colonization. And so she is. If we think further back than the colonization of the

1800s we find repetition. The bodies of black women were objectified and

consumed in the New World, under slavery. The bodies of black women in the new

world were saved and sexualized. The bodies of black women were creators and annihilation all at once. We end up back at the Fanonian idea of the body in triple. Roles haunt the body of the black woman. She is the woman who nourishes a taboo hunger and sexual desire, the hunger we see being literally fed in the image of Héliani and the « négresse » d'Adana. The way the confrontation with what was perceived as actual horror even when, in the case of Héliani, it was completely scripted (though this does not take away the trauma) and with the « négresse » d'Adana the photo is not what it seems, the script needed to read the image was already in the collective consciousness of those who viewed them, as illustrated by user comments. As is the case with the Society Pages' post on Human Zoos, more often than not the way we write the script of these bodies is to bind them into a narrative of trauma, forcing those that recognize themselves in the images into a state of crisis.

Aesthetic Literacy and Decolonial Cultural Analytics

The current movement of cultural analytics asks that we turn large amounts of images into data sets that can be analyzed outside of their cultural context to find underlying patterns (Manovich 2009). The aesthetic focus happening in New Media studies when brought into conversations with decolonizing projects invites us to look at data in the other direction. There is a risk in current moves in scholarship to turn even images such as the ones analyzed in this paper into data points, because we have not yet allowed them to culturally rupture the limited histories and experiences dictated by what we are seeing. While there may be patterns evident when images

are analyzed at scale, we see these patterns in our day-to-day interactions and conversations that call colonial aesthetics into being in our everyday lives. When we think of the colonial or enslaved body, the data have already been culturally synthesized into a series of archetypes and social roles. To look at the images does not inherently challenge the cultural understandings of these bodies. The ability of the viewers of photographs to automatically be able to place Héliani and the « négresse » d'Adana into a cultural context, even if the understanding of the context is only partially correct or completely false and imagined,, as well as the need for a "trigger warning" on a more or less neutral photograph, illustrates that for these bodies the work of cultural analytics has already been done. The images are seen to represent the whole collective of images and they are immediately placed in very specific global cultural relations. To look at the photo as a decolonial project where we take cultural analytics and go the other way allows us to reframe and renegotiate the boundaries of the narrative. We have the ability to negotiate the aesthetic resonances of these photos based on expanded social conditions and connections coupled with digital movement.

The digital encounter is inherently intercultural. Cultural perspectives and filters help the viewer understand what they are experiencing. Additionally photographs are created within cultural frameworks. The risk of turning images, such as those analyzed in this dissertation, into data that set the focus outward instead of inward, is that there is a risk of losing the postcolonial nuances that have been illuminated by their digitization. By this I mean, if these specific photographs continue to be seen as part of one unified project, then rather than decolonizing,

cultural analytics has the potential to be a neo-colonizing project. By not trying to

better understand what is happening within the frame, existing narratives are

reinscribed and rebound within and around these images in the social imaginary of

colonization. The assumption of neutrality of an image or photograph as is required

in the current popular method of cultural analytics is idealistic, as an image,

especially a photographic one, is understood within larger cultural narratives

inflected by time, place, and history. We cannot continue to ignore these narratives

because we are able to create new ones determined by software and algorithms.

Bodies marked and bound by a postcolonial narrative do not have the liberty to lose

themselves in the algorithm. Instead of the digital being a space where the

aesthetics of anonymity and hive mind[19] can take over, the digital becomes a space

where names and stories that were invisible, can be made visible, creating new lines

of flight that complicate dominant narratives. By stepping outside of my own Tumblr

collection and into the broader digital movement of specific photographs and

photographs from similar projects I am able to better understand some of the work

they are doing as well as some of the work they are being used for out in the
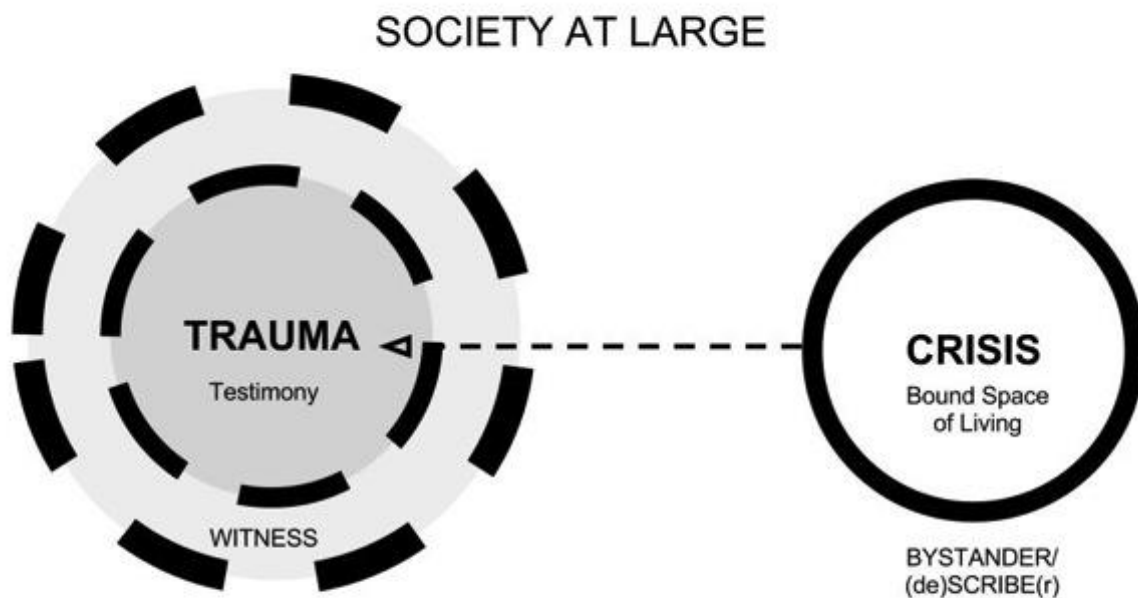
broader world.

To turn these images into a decolonial aesthetic project is acknowledging that

the people who were subjects of and subjected to colonial power were human too. A

decolonial aesthetic project requires, for me, a latching on to the moments of

humanness photographically captured, but not narratively bound, in colonial records.

The colonial project was one attempt to stabilize global positions. This was done

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[19] The hive mind is the collective conclusion of many people in digital spaces as explored by Kevin Kelly (1994, 1996). It is also commonly used in marketing literature to discuss building the buzz or a collective identity for a product (Thomas 2004).

was by keeping detailed historical photographic records. Foundations shift though,

and as much as much work is done to make the past and history seem stable, as

society changes our understanding of the gifts of the past do as well. What was once

a positive gift becomes a negative, and what was once a negative gift can shift to

being positive.

Re/bound/ed: Mapping Trauma and Crisis

SOCIETY AT LARGE

TRAUMA

Testimony

WITNESS

CRISIS

Bound Space
of Living

BYSTANDER/
(de)SCRIBE(r)

Soul murder, multi-generational soul murder, as described by Coles (6-7), is

the opposite of self-actualization. If soul murder is defined by "killing the joy of life"

and "interfering with the sense of identity of another human being," then I think it is

safe to say that the practice of facing and fixing the oppressed with re-presentations

of the oppressed body *as* the oppressed body across time and space, especially

through photographic representations of the real, is in fact soul murder. The scale in both time and space of the soul murder caused by the conflation of the oppressed body as oppression is so large it can be seen as soul genocide. The "soul murder" is the beginning of how we socially rescript certain bodily representations (people) of trauma as crisis.

If we think of lives, or history, as existing on a narrative line, trauma is the moment where the narrative breaks and then comes back together. We know it has broken because it can never be known in the moment it exists. It is always the space of a post memory. As such, trauma can exist only in the post-tense. It is always assumed to be located in narrative and accessible through testimony and witnessing. Because it is contained in this way, as a clear narrative break in the person or collective past that returns as a recurrence at some future point, there is a belief that by witnessing the testimony, the forced recurrence that is at times forced by the trauma itself or, at other times by an outside person (i.e. friend, family member, researcher, interviewer), we are somehow able to bear witness to the trauma. In FIGURE 9, we see a visual diagramation of what this looks like. If trauma were to exist in a circle, we see the circle as one with open borders that has spaces where people can go in and come out of the trauma at different places during the process of recurrence, often through testimony. By consuming this testimony, we take on the role of witness. The space of witness becomes a circle that is able to consume the original trauma, expanding the circle of the event. What is important to note is, though the circle of witness is able to expand, it is still

confined within a dashed circle that allows entry and exit from the event or recurrence. The ability to enter and exit means that trauma is allowed to exist and is acknowledged as part of society at large. These events of trauma often become History. While we want to see trauma as existing outside of the realm of binaries and negation, crisis represents the ordinary binariness of trauma. It is, at times, and for some, its core, and ordinary space and time of living.

When Histories of trauma become institutionalized without a careful examination of the complexities and specificity of the situation, they become crises. Crises are those histories that exist in closed circles. The irony of the closed circle is that rather than closing off the history in a way that allows for a natural evolution away from "the event in post" (trauma), people become entrapped in the history, unable to exist external to it. The people who live in crisis do not experience one narrative breaking event, but rather exist in a narrative of breakage due to the constant backlash of a history, that due to its institutionalization is no longer their own history. Because of the way their histories and experiences have been institutionalized, those who come from a place of crisis often do not see how to get out of that circle. Often, when an attempt is made to escape the circle of crisis, the pain of the backlash (not accepting of your history, denial of the past, loss of family, friends and home-spaces) brings them back. The circle of crisis is a space of living. There are no testimonies and there are no witnesses. Society at large is a bystander to the crisis, often oblivious to the barrier that exists. As bystanders, society also fails to see that by living, crisis is normalized. When it is normalized, and there is such a great pain attached to leaving, those living in that circle stop

84

seeing it as anything other than life. While there is not anything inherently wrong with this, the social structures that create this situation in the first place often lead to bystanders being in a role of judgment. A judgment that is often very negative and hyper-critical. This judgment serves as another method of keeping the crisis contained and institutionalized. It does not allow for growth. If attempting to leave the circle of crisis causes a rebound back in to the center, the space of living, the role of the bystander bounds the circle in an attempt to ensure there are no dashes where the crisis can ooze out. Every crisis is a direct result of our socio-historical heritage. Every crisis becomes something we use to organize society around, but not in. This separation means that those who exist in crisis experience a constant onslaught of mini-traumas, traumas so small they are invisible to society at large. Those in crisis are defined by their locked-in-ness to their specific socio-historical heritage. Often, this heritage puts them in an awkward relationship with society at large when it comes to issues of commodification of their "story" or their movement. More importantly, as society at large is incapable of seeing those in crisis and their socio-historical heritage as a universal heritage, those who exist in communities of crisis are faceless, anonymous and interchangeable. In *History and Trauma*, Davoine and Gaudilliere speak of crisis, they say that as a society we tend to think of crisis as something internal to and ongoing for the individual, "whereas what is ongoing is this temporality out of time that abruptly opened out for their ancestors and endures, for them, in the very suspension of time" (167). They go on to say, "Such a temporality without future or past eliminates all pertinence from a causal chain. This is because causality implies the orientation of the arrow of time from the

85

past toward the future" (167). If crisis is defined by a persistent timelessness, then crisis is the negation of the ability to create history from those ancestors that endured the original event that took their narrative of the shared chain of History. People in crisis become bounded, out of place and out of time, faces of concepts (racism, oppression, enslavement, suffering) both now and in the past, marked by the past, yet without it and therefore without a future.

The photographs of Héliani and the « négresse » from Adana allow us to face what this bounding looks like. To say that these two photographs are not problematic is to deny the supremacy of the visual and the legacy of History. While I did not have as strong of a reaction to the « négresse » from Adana, due to my own personal history, as I did to the photograph of Héliani, the overwhelming feeling of helplessness in the photo of Héliani breaks my ability to unbound the history. She becomes stuck in the moment, without a past or a future. The reality of the erasure of the black nurse across time and space, especially in the United States, as a central member of the families she nourished, as though she was a disposable resource can create, a similar pain that makes us go back to that moment of suffering as though that moment is all there is and all that matters, again, no past, no future. Despite this, the two women were simply living, even in that moment. One was at a party, and the other was making a living with one of the options available to her. Similarly, the photographs presented in the Human Zoos article on *Sociological Images* shows the bounding effect placed on people stuck in crisis instead. When given the choice to properly frame the oppression with the face of the actual oppressor, the more salient and affective choice was instead to face Human Zoos

with the oppressed, the individual in crisis as though that is their ongoing state of being, no past, no future. We look at a history we cannot change and instead socially reproduce it, looking on and thinking "isn't this so sad?." The Black body, the Black Female body even more so as she is often absent from the histories of blackness we do speak of, is bound by the historical past, a heavy and painful past that has no opening to be another way. While the thought of the black body in captivity as introduced by Harvey Young makes me very uncomfortable, the actual space of bounding (place of captivity) is productive. It is the space of history that we are too scared to move away from for fear of erasing past pain and suffering, as though that is a possibility.

"There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can emerge. In most cases, the black man cannot take advantage of this descent into a veritable hell" (Fanon, BS, xxi).

The line of crisis is solid. Unlike trauma, the holes of escape are invisible. Likewise, being constituted in these spaces means that attempts at existing outside of them are futile. There is possibility of coevalness. Even as the boundaries stretch, they never completely give way. The effect is a violent rebound. Society forces those bound by crisis to see themselves as both accomplice and victim, re-inscribing the limitations that are out of their control in their daily interactions with the world outside. The internal reflections on their own community, and their place in the world, lead those members of socio-historical crisis to question their daily

87

interactions with those outside of their community and place their specific narrative over extraordinarily ordinary events. The spaces within which members of socio-historical crisis populations are allowed to exist are transformed into non-places. These spaces are so non-existent, they are mostly invisible to those outside of the crises they represent [think of prisons, working as domestic labor forces, support staff, non-elite transportation professionals, across time]. No matter how far away one gets from the center of the circle of crisis, or how close one gets to the border, events will occur on a daily basis that lock the individual into the bound space. The ordinariness of these events makes them invisible, such as the decision to face oppression with the oppressed. As we look back at those who we imagine as historically touched by this lived experience, especially this lived experience of blackness, we imagine them stuck, fixed, by these moments. It is this imagined fixity of the crisis of black women that seems to be the root cause of the affect of the photograph of Héliani and the « négresse » d'Adana. Just as photographs themselves fix the split second of a referent, they also have the power to fix our imaginations.

While in the past the experience of these images might have limited them to being seen only in relation to that which can be viewed, that is, they were limited in the social framework they were presented in, the ability to link materials across time and space offered by the digital allows for a path of flight that was not available before. While there is always a risk that presenting these types of images simply re-articulates the dominant narratives of the colonial experience, accessible resources exist to do a deeper practice of cultural analytics where, instead of reaching out into

88

the current social practice, we step into what is framed by the image by looking at the larger social and cultural conditions at the time of its creation, and of its original collection. Héliani was at a festival, surrounded by a community. The nursemaid lived in a place where articulations of race, gender, motherhood and slavery were complex and in flux. These simple acknowledgments of more complex cultural dynamics are enough to start shifting a narrative that attempts to re-bound a singular story that forces all of those who see themselves reflected in these historical images to start imaging a possible alternate existence outside of the bounds of colonization. These images are what they are. We do not risk forgetting the real suffering, pain, and trauma that together constitute the dominant collective cultural memory we use to bound colonization.

CHAPTER 4: IN THE SHADOW OF THE EIFFEL TOWER

Digital media does not inherently change how a media object might be analyzed. Digital media represents a change in scale, not a change in kind. In fact, one of the ways the success of the digital might be measured is precisely by its ability to fall away or become invisible and let content shine. What digital media does change is the kind, quantity, type, and subject of media objects people are able to access. The change in scale has occurred in terms of how many people are able to see media objects. Finally, there is a change in scale in terms of the number of connections that can be made between media objects through meta-data and search. These new methods of classification and visualization, placed together on a single results page of a search or a meta-tag, allow connections that in the past might have been invisible, to become obvious. This obviousness raises new questions for analysis that in the past might have fallen away.

My position in relation to the photographs featured in Vintage Black Beauty and their digital representations is that the women are my other. While I, and the women in the photographs are all part of the imagined space of the black diaspora, our temporal and cultural distance means that apart from aesthetic similarities that allow for a type of recognition we have nothing in common, just as the women in the photographs have limited connections outside of the group of women who's photographs share a, geographic location or tribal affiliation. There is no way for me to ask these women how they feel about their images being reproduced digitally, accessible to anyone who

stumbles upon the images in the many websites or books that have reproduced them over and over again. Nor can I ask if they are okay with the connections I have imposed on them by including them in my own Tumblr collection. In this way, the other of history, though able to move in digital space, becomes a prisoner to our modern interpretations. One of the biggest constraints is that digital space and social media interactions do not allow for the same time and care with the encounter as I have on the page. Here on the page I am able to take time with a series of photos that I would not have come across had I not started with, and revisited a photograph posted on Vintage Black Beauty. Vintage Black Beauty is the portal through which I access and understand these images.
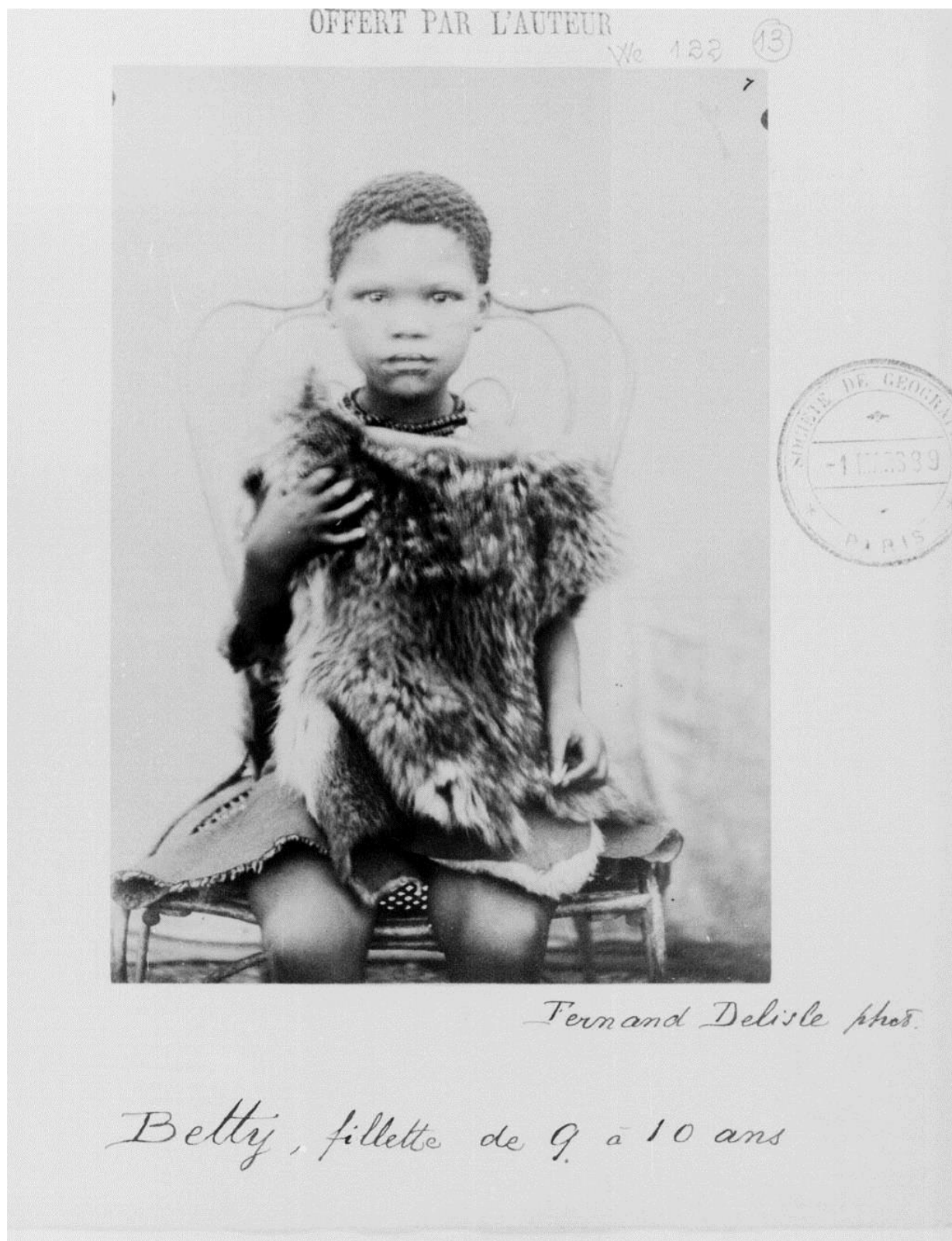
Figure 11, Betty 1, Gallica BNF

WC 122 14

OFFERT PAR L'AUTEUR

Fernand Delisle phot.

Betty, fillette de 9 à 10 ans

93

Figure 12 Betty 2, Gallica BNF

There are two photographs of a young girl on a chair. In the photos she is posed. They are standard portraits. In one she looks forward. In the other she is in profile. She is seated in a wooden chair with a wicker base. Her body is covered with a pelt that lies against her like an asymmetrical dress, hanging slightly off of her right shoulder. The top is covered in luscious fur. The bottom is skin side out, and looks like a leather skirt. She wears multiple strands of dark colored beads around her neck. Her tightly coiled hair forms waves across her scalp. In the forward facing photo she looks directly at the lens of the camera. Now, in her digital version, it is as she is looking directly at anyone who happens to glimpse at her on the screen. Her left hand rests on her left shoulder with the tips of her fingers buried in the fur. Her right hand is above her right thigh. This hand too, engages the fur. Her thumb and pointer finger tightly pinch a small wad of fur. In the moment the photograph was captured, she was looking directly at the lens. I stare back, wondering about the life of this child and the circumstances of her life and these two photographs. In both of them, her hands are close to her body, intertwined in fabric and each other, something I've seen in my own children at times when they are feeling insecure but need to sit still while people are watching. Her name is Betty, a young girl between 9 and 10 years of age, according to the biographical data handwritten at the bottom of the photograph. The handwriting lets us know something else. Fernand Delisle, a French medical doctor and anthropologist, famous for his photographs of human types and work at the Natural History Museum of Paris, photographed her.
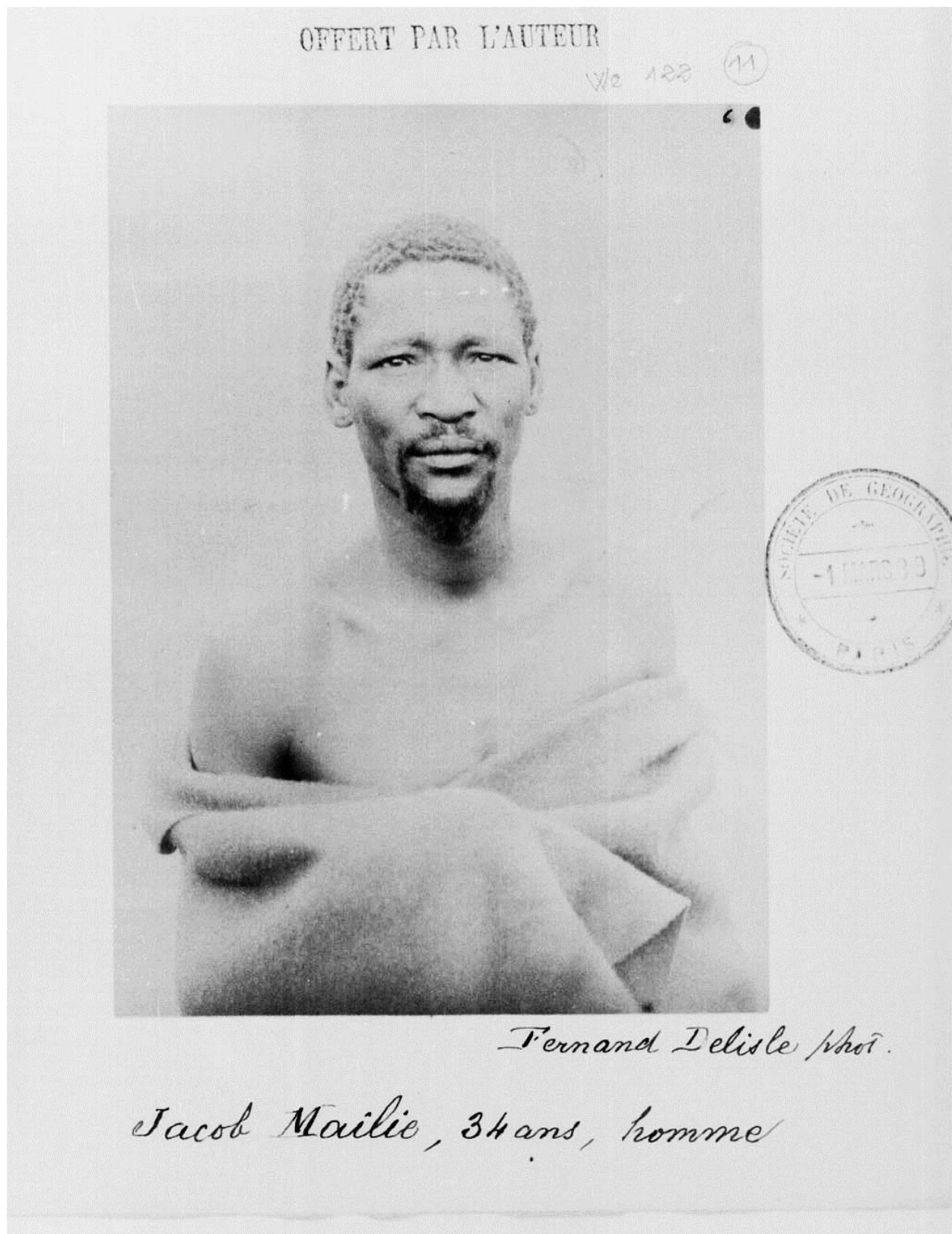
OFFERT PAR L'AUTEUR

Fernand Delisle phot.

Jacob Mailie, 34 ans, homme

Figure 13 Jacob 1, Gallica BNF

Figure 14 Jacob 2, Gallica BNF

There is another set of portraits in this collection of people captured in photographs by Delisle. These portraits are of a man, again forward facing and in profile. Faded in the background of the profile image, the chair, the same as the one Betty sat in for her portraits, is visible. Instead of furs, he is wrapped in what looks like a felt blanket. His shoulders are exposed. His hair looks just like Betty's, except his hairline is a little squarer. Like Betty, his gaze pierces the camera lens, and now, seems to look outside the screen directly at me. When I look at him I feel a power and comfort that stands in contrast to the childlike vulnerability of Betty. His furrowed brow, and the drooping skin over his eyes capture a certain type of experience that comes with age, and with our cultural expectations of masculinity. This sense of his masculine presence is heightened with the sharpness of his cheekbone, and his perfectly coiffed goatee. His biographical data, captured on the photograph, identifies him as Jacob Mailie, a man 34 years of age.

Figure 15 Family Photo, Gallica BNF

There is a third image in the set that helps bring these two images together. It contains Jacob, Betty, and an unnamed woman holding an infant on her right hip. None of them wear shoes. Jacob, now without the blanket, stands shirtless, revealing his thin muscular torso. The viewer's eyes are pulled into this section by a thin hemp-like string that is wrapped across his chest. He wears an elaborate headdress. The helmet looks as though it is from the skin of an animal head. The top appears to be made of feathers. His left wrist has another hemp-like string. An animal fur wrap that goes down to his knees covers his lower half. The rest of his legs are exposed, his ankles decorated with beaded anklets. Behind the bare foot at the bottom of the image, it seems the felt-like blanket from his portrait has fallen to the ground. Jacob's left hand rests on the shoulder of Betty, and Betty does not look amused.

Betty is dressed in the same outfit as when her portraits were created. The neckline has been straightened out so it no longer sits unsymmetrically against her collarbone. The vulnerability of her portraits has been replaced by a look of annoyance. She does not look at the camera. Instead, her head slightly tilted, her eyes look down and to the left. Her hands, grasping each other what looks to be a little too tightly, rest at her waist. She leans in to Jacob only slightly. To her right, with a bit of space in-between stands the unnamed woman and infant.

The woman is dressed similarly to Jacob, in a patterned animal skirt. She is topless with multiple strands of light colored beads. Her exposed breasts slightly sag, one rests against her arm that is across her body supporting the infant. Her head is covered in a patterned scarf that is tied at the back. The child in her arms isn't quite in focus, most likely incapable of staying still for the moment of the photo. The infant is

covered from head to knee, in a head scarf and fabric, pressed securely to the body of

the unnamed woman. The four of them stand as a family. The resemblance between

Jacob and Betty, and Betty and the unnamed woman is remarkable. The photographs

are digitally together, but neither confirm or deny that they are indeed a family.

The Hottentot is the Message

Figure 16 Le Jugement de Paris, Gallica BNF

The name "Hottentot" is intimately linked to Saartje Baartman. As the Venus Hottentot, she was displayed in London and Paris. When she was no longer a big draw as an oddity, she turned to prostitution before her untimely death. The story of her body did not end with her death, though. Georges Cuvier, a French Naturalist and Zoologist who helped establish the fields of anatomy and paleontology, took her dead body and made a cast. He removed her brain and enlarged labia, pickled them, and put them on display along with her skeleton. Her cast was placed first in the Garden of Plants, and later, the Acclimation Garden in Paris. The story of the Baartman is a story that is central to how the black female body is understood in media and scholarship, particularly when it comes to contemporary issues of commodification, power, and resistance, as her body is one that is famous for its commodification and consumption. The European perception of oddity and grotesqueness of her physique, the one she put on display in her life and that was displayed in her death, defines how the black female body is understood as an object with limited agency and humanity. Her body amplifies the primitive hidden desires related to sexuality and nourishment that often find the black female body at the center of their signification. Her body is the medium through which the black female body is able to enter the large cultural landscape of knowledge production. Limited agency, tragic endings, and the white gaze define the medium.

The portraits of Betty and Jake, and the family photograph were all taken in the Acclimation Garden, most likely in 1888. Like Baartman, Betty, Jacob, the unnamed woman and infant are Hottentots. Like Baartman, their bodies were on display. The difference is, instead of being on display individually, they were on display as a family at the Universal Exposition in Paris as well as part of a medical and anthropological conference leading up to the fair. The existence of these photographs, and the larger collection of photographs where they were found, destabilizes the historical record that has been passed down. Hottentot does not only signify Baartman. Men, children, and teenagers were part of the "primitive" displays of Hottentots. At times, they were

Figure 17 1889 Global Exposition Tent Village, Getty Open Content

displayed with people from European ethnic groups as well as types from around the globe. And, though the term "Hottentot" conjures the image and story of Baartman, by 1888, there were four half-Hottentot dancers at the Folies Berger (Topinard 1888, 195) in addition to the 14 Hottentots who were at the Garden of Acclimation in 1888 to be viewed and later on display from time to time, in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, at the 1889 Universal Exposition.

The Exposition, like the dozens of others that happened in the late 1800s through the mid-1900s, was a global celebration of the progress of man, mostly from a European perspective on progress and man. The presence of Hottentots served as a performative illustration of primitiveness. They were displayed next to other ethnicities, including Europeans, in their tent camp, placed not just in the Shadow of the Eiffel tower, but also constructed mini-villages from North Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, to highlight how far the Europeans had progressed. They existed against the backdrop of the Eiffel Tower and the advances of technology, such as photography. These technologies were used to capture a primitive image of the Hottentots in and around the huts where they would occasionally camp at the Exhibition. The Hottentots only wore non-European clothing for purposes of photography and being on display. The continued presence of living Hottentots in Paris held up the illusion that the European was superior in every way. Baartman was never the only Hottentot. She is the one we remember though.

The Hottentot Body

The Hottentot bodies occupy what Franz Fanon describes in *Black Skin, White Masks* as a "second space". This is a space of reckoning where bodies lose their

individuality. Rather than being a named person, the person is reduced to an object, consumed and produced by larger cultural narratives. All marks of uniqueness are stripped away. The Hottentots were on display as human objects. As such, they were performatively human in as much as they were actually human with a monstrously alien difference when compared to Europeans. Once objectified, an individual is interpolated into a narrative he or she cannot control or experience as self. As discussed, crises are histories that exist in closed circles that are impenetrable from both the outside and inside, constantly being bound and rebound by culture and society. Though culturally this second space is often one of stagnation, it is not a stoppage for everyone. Those who are able to keep moving exist in a third space, as defined by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*. The third space is not the synthesis of the individual and the object into a subject. Rather, it is the failure of synthesis into coevalness. An explosion of new meaning and understanding as bodies move into this new realm causing individuals to metaphorically be reborn. The third space is an attempt to reclaim humanity from hyper visible yet invisible space. To fill in this third space for certain bodies requires letting go of accepted histories and narratives that have obfuscated their presence.
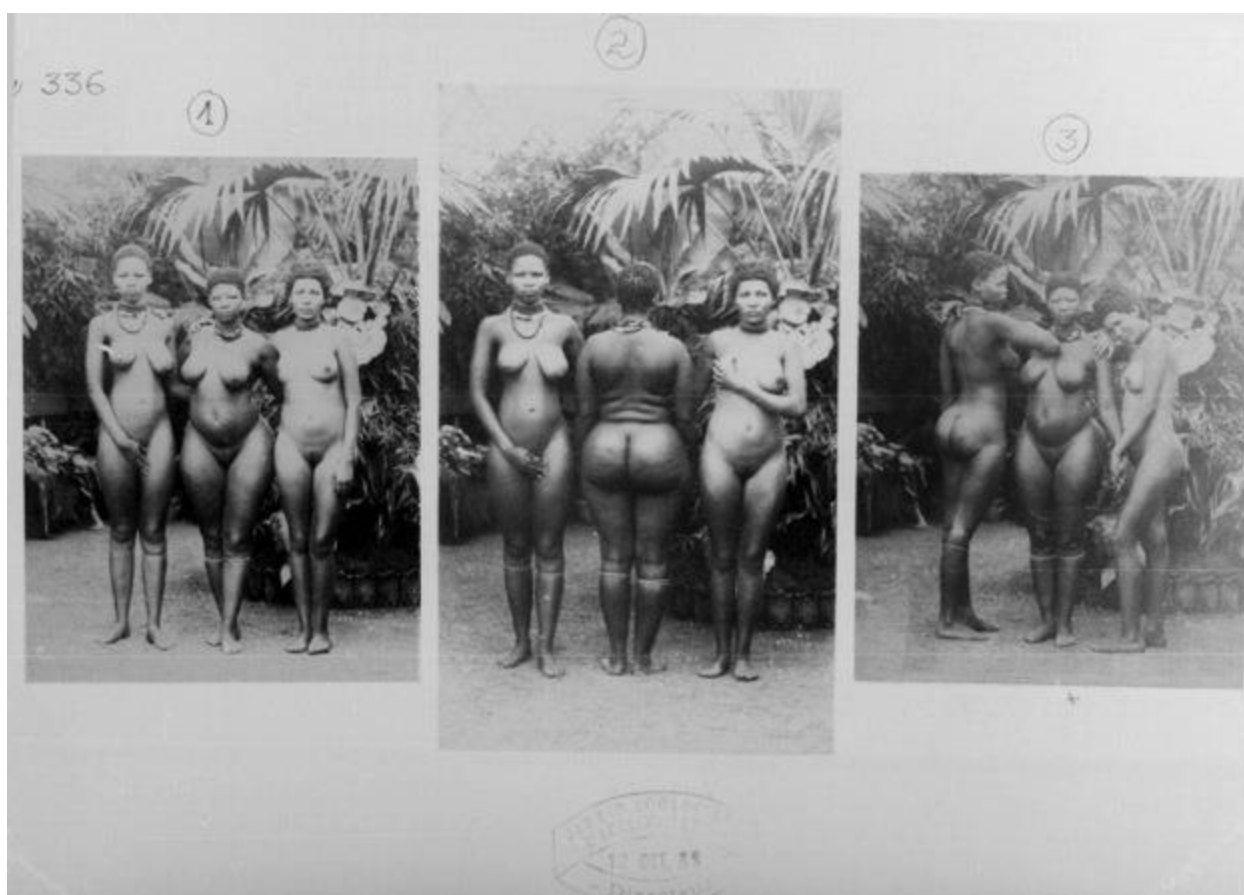
A triptych of anthropometric photographs shows three women in various poses. Though these women were part of the Global Exhibition, the background looks very similar to the Hottentots photographed in 1888. In fact, the woman on the left is one of the Bastards[20] examined in 1888. Her name is Bebye Rooi. This image stands out from the rest of the images in the album where it appeared. Instead of a triptych focusing on one woman, this set features three. [21] The woman on the left turned slightly back to ensure her full backside is visible, rests her arm on the shoulder of woman in the middle as she looks towards the third woman. Between her and the woman in the middle there

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[20] A Bastard was the term given to half Hottentot half Boer people.
[21] http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b7702319b

105

is a noticeable spatial distance that is absent between the other two women. The woman in the middle has her hand lightly draped over the shoulder of the woman on the far right. The middle woman is facing almost completely forward, exposing the front of her nude body. She looks through the screen, her eyes focused on the world in front of her. On the other shoulder of the woman in the middle, the woman on the right leans against her, resting her head and hand on the middle woman. Their hands, pulled toward the woman on the far right, are intertwined. The woman on the right's slightly protruding belly rests against the arm of the woman in the middle. Instead of looking straight ahead the woman on the right gazes slightly angled downward. The viewer is left with the impression she is tired and leaning on her companion in this photo. In all three photos, these women's bodies are intertwined to some degree, but in photo 3, there is a feeling of closeness and safety that is not quite present in photo 1 and 2 of this set. The intimacy forces viewers to not see these women as an exhibit despite their exhibition being the only reason these specific photographs exist. Instead, the situation is descripted. Rescripting allows these Hottentot women to exist as whole people, capable of having agency, relations, and lives outside of the colonial history and exploitation scripting that brought them to us. Because of the nature of how they were positioned, as contemporary primitive peoples, The Hottentots and their activities were not a well-documented part of the exposition. Instead, we are left with photographs, staged for the purpose of distribution, beyond the exposition both in terms of time and place. There are no biographical details provided for the women in the three photographs in BNF. All that is known is that they were some of the Hottentots present at the Universal Exposition of 1889. Even then, we have no way of knowing if they were

106

on the ground or simply part of the photographic record. Despite this lack of information, these women are the faces that the visitors of the exposition, people who walked in the shadow of the Eiffel tower in 1889, saw as well. The words used to describe their structural properties of Hottentots and the Tower are the same across cultural spaces. Monstrous. Grotesque. The words were said in plays like 1814s "La Vénus hottentote, ou Haine aux françaises" (Théaulon et al), and "Protestation contre la Tour de Mr Eiffel" that appeared in the 14th of February 1887 edition of *Le Temps.* Both Baartman and the Eiffel tower symbolize a future not yet seen in 1889, where their shapes are an iconic part of popular culture. Yet society remembers the Eiffel Tower.

Expositions, and histories like that of Baartman and others who willingly went to or lived in Europe and supported themselves by being shown being put on display illustrate the complicated status of their bodies as "types." They came to the places where they entered the historic record as curiosities and medical oddities to be examined and understood as a break in evolution never quite in time with modernity. Yet, for many, it was a life they chose. Knowing if they were successful or happy is something that was left out of the historical record. It is also not known how they came to be on display. What is known is that the performative aspects of the Hottentot body, repeated constantly and always with difference, allow the images to be repositioned as they move through time and space, from the physical world of the past, to film, paper, and screen.

The moment of thirdness is the moment of knowing that there is a person and there is history around the time and place of this person's existence. For the person whose epidermal racial schema signals their blackness, there is a third space that is

107

"stripped bare of every essential."[22] It is a space where a different way of being can be imagined, living in the realm of unbounded possibility. Photographs like those of the Hottentots from the 1889 exposition make this complicated. As a photographic still, they do not move forward. They are not able to easily move outside of the narrative of human zoos and colonization that colors our modern understanding of what we are
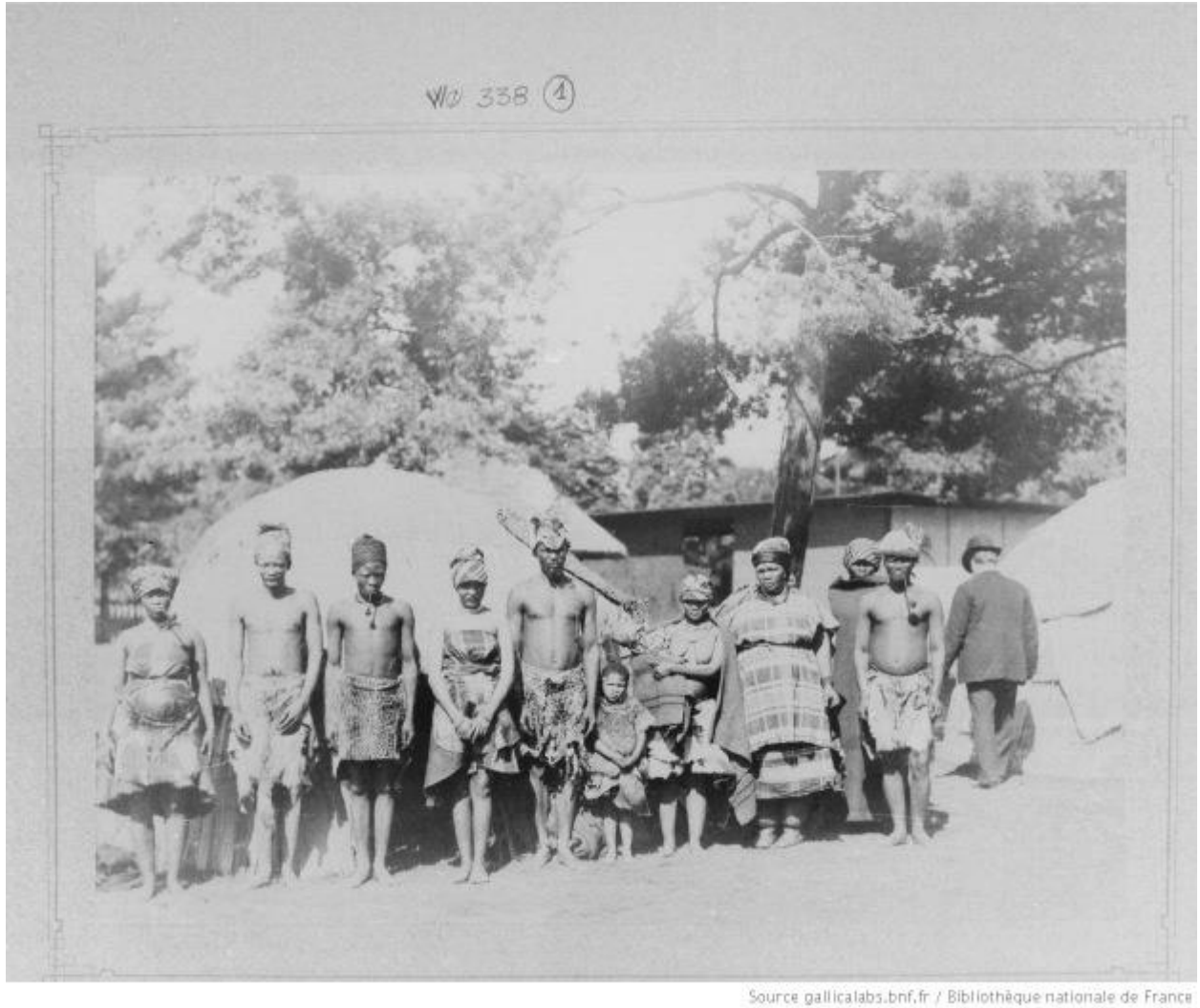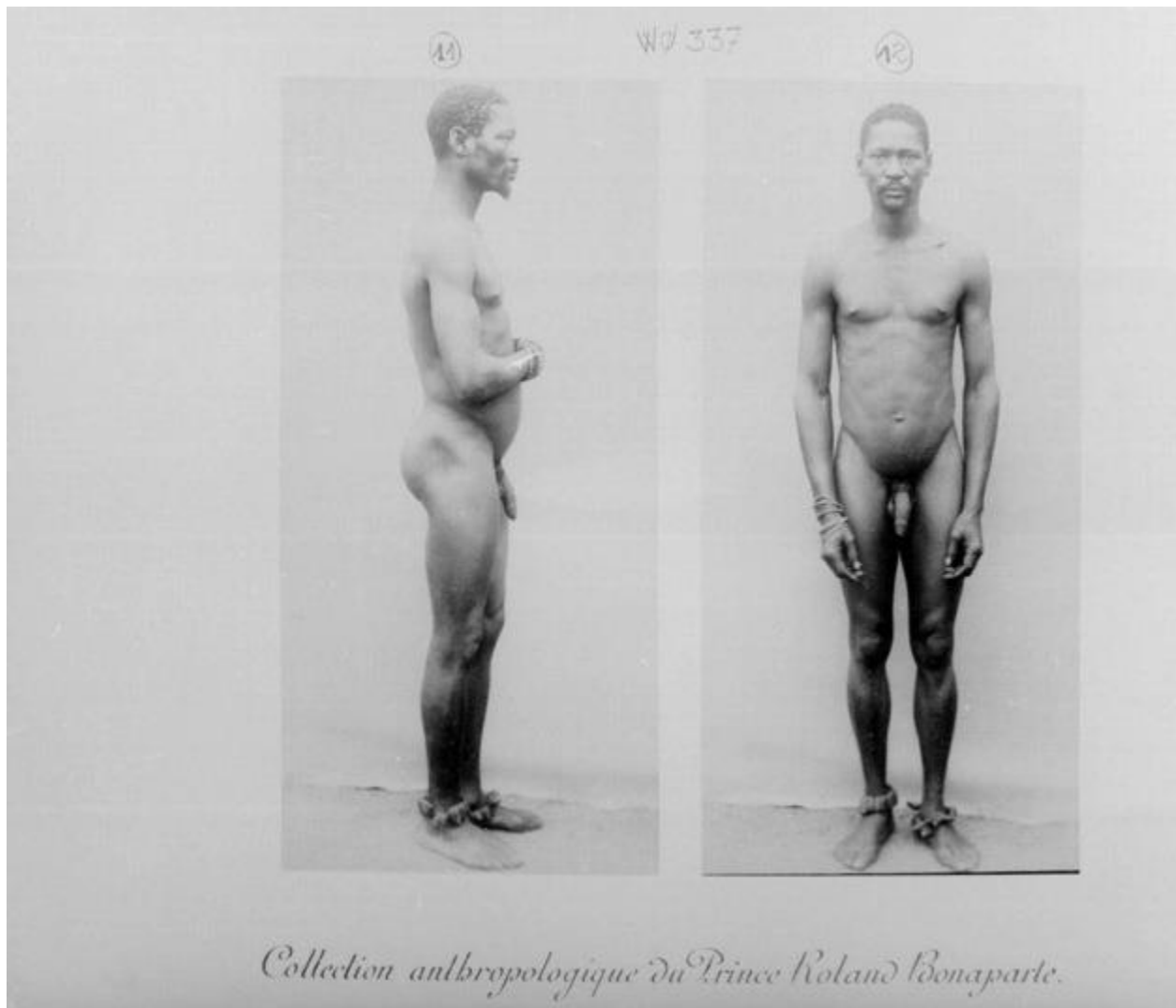

Source gallicalabs.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 19 1889 Hottentots 2, Gallica BNF

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[22] Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin White Masks*. New York: Grove P, 2008. xxi.

seeing.

It is important to acknowledge that the "Hottentots" in Paris were not alone. They had lives in Paris. Some of them had friends and family there as well. Some of them lived in Paris for extended periods of time. It was their home. In some ways, this practice might seem as though it is trying to erase the traumas of the past and the crises they continue to call forth as individual bodies are revisited. That is not the case. Instead, reading images through the auto-effective experience of the digital attempts to complicate the past and allow those who existed there before us to be recognized as human. Though the full biographies of the people in these photographs are not known, for the moment in time captured on film and now reproduced digitally the Hottentots in these images existed. Their past circumstances cannot change, but the knowledge of their existence can speak more easily through digital media than analog film and photographs. Their existence creates a more inclusive future. If the original purpose for so many of these images was to show how inhuman these people were, then seeing those pictures still as solely remnants of a negative past means we have not left the dialectic created by colonization's desire to occupy not just the present, but the past and the future. Similarly, colonization is not just an actual state of being, it is a state of mind and of consciousness. The idea of a colonized brain, one steeped in values that see the West as central, either as the beacon of progress or the enemy conqueror, is not a brain that can break out of the net of colonization. To look at the photographs and simply see men, women, and children, and accept their beauty, their being, their

humanity, is an encounter which, "At every meeting the brain multiplies the association of ideas and the eye discovers a wider human panorama" (136)[23].

Figure 20 Jacob 3, Gallica BNF

There are two photographs of Jacob printed side by side. He is again in profile and facing forward. Unlike the first portraits, in these he is standing up, captured from head to toe. In profile his right arm rests over his slightly dissented stomach. He wears a

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[23] Fanon, Frantz, and Richard Philcox. The Wretched of the Earth. New York: Grove P :, c2004. Print.

set of bangles or multiple hemp rope bracelets on his wrists. His ankles still wear the anklets he had on as he stood outside with his family. His long arms, at his sides, place his hands just above his thighs in the forward facing image. In the profile view, his arm is across his stomach. While this was probably done to ensure his arm did not block the view of his buttocks and hip, the vulnerability of the pose is similar to that seen in the photographs of Betty with her arms over her torso. His thumb and middle finger are touching on both hands. He is nude. From the side his well-defined leg muscles, especially in his hamstrings and gluteus muscles, are pronounced. In the front view, his sculpted abdominal muscles form a vest that leads down to his uncircumcised penis. His nude body serves as a tool that complicates the narrative of the Hottentot even more. The female body was not the only body consumed as nude object. The male body was as well.

There is a blank space in both BNF and the Getty Digital Collections, the digital archives where I've found images of the Hottentots presented at the Universal Exposition of 1889. Two photographs are missing. All of the people photographed have a nude portrait. Some have a standard portrait as well. Betty is the exception. While she appears in a portrait and multiple other images, there is no nude image of her to be found in the metatags or collections that lead to and contain the Hottentot photographs. There is a book, though, by authors who were able to visit the physical archive where the analog photographs are kept. Betty is on page 68 of *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History*, illustration 54. She stands nude, from the side, arms akimbo. From the front view she holds something in her hand, too bright to be discerned. Her nude body expands the Hottentot narrative. Not only women and men, but children too,

were consumed as nude objects for the purpose of showing progress. Our contemporary moment, however, makes child nudity taboo, especially in digital spaces.

The Body in Crisis

Through Baartman it is possible to understand what it means for a body to be trapped in a multi-generational crisis. Even if it is acknowledged that apart from her, Betty, Jacob, Lisbeth and many others lived in Paris, Baartman's body and its story continue to frame all bodies that are similar to hers. Baartman is bound, not in her moments of agency and potential, but instead in the horror of her end. When a body on display is compared to her body, it is not only the suffering of Baartman that is reinscribed. Her suffering becomes transient, moving to the body of the "Other," framing their story as hers. These bodies are unable to enter society because they signify a historic pain that society has been unable to soothe thus far. Because these bodies represent history, the past remains invisible as society at large fails to see the wider panorama of humanity that made a life despite the cultural burdens of difference and oppression. Difference, racism, and oppression are the cultural knowledge frames that allow black bodies to make sense in the contemporary world. However, we are in a new historical moment because even though the digital archives are not complete, they allow for a level of access that was not possible before. Yes, there was a Venus Hottentot, and she had a traumatic life. And yes there were others after her, and they made a life too. In this sense, Baartman's body remains central to understanding the black female body. The difference in this is that rather than focusing on her life, she can be used to show that not all stories are hers. The Hottentots show that narratives and imagery can control what culture assumes is being reproduced to the point of erasure. Digital media

112

show that in this current cultural moment the images that circulate might change

because the thread of a more complex narrative has been coded into the meta-tags of

the photographs.

The Digital Life of Historic Hottentots

I would like to return to the photographs of the three women. These photographs

were the lens that led me to Betty and Jacob, and the other men, women, children, and

teenagers who were part of the African village of the 1889 exposition. I saved and

distributed this image through Vintage Black Beauty. While I saved all sorts of

photographs of black women, I tried to steer clear of images that could easily be taken

up as erotic. I sent the triptych to my best friend during an instant message session.

There was radio silence for five minutes. When she came back, she said "sorry, I was

crying." I asked her why. Her body is nearly identical to the woman in the middle. She

said that seeing that photograph was the first time she had seen her body represented

unapologetically in neither a sexual or comedic way. It was the first time she saw a

reflection of herself. And while she wishes she had the body of the woman on the left,

she is the woman in the middle. I posted the photo on my own digital space immediately

after our conversation with the caption "Hottentots, 1889." Someone reposted it almost

immediately and added "Venus" to the caption. While I have no means of assessing the

affective resonance the photo created for the reposter, in that moment of seeing

"Venus", I thought of Venus the Goddess, not Venus, the story of Baartman.

The digital presence of these photographs in the digital archive both affirms and

rejects the hold the story of Baartman has on history. They do not deny her existence.

To the contrary, they call it forth before breaking it by existing as proof that they were

there too. The gaze of society has changed as well. In the past magazines like *National Geographic*, and various other anthropological endeavors that sought to capture humanity in photographic form, especially nude "primitive" women, were an easily accessible source of sexually explicit material. In our contemporary moment we are very literate in pornographic imagery, especially when viewed on the screen. Society as a whole is less literate in the anthropological gaze. This age of a new pornographic literacy, and a diminishing anthropological literacy means seeing the photos of the nude Hottentot women is not as explicitly sexual or as solely anthropological. The contemporary context of is one of both and, and the wider circulation of pornographic images enable by digital media has allowed this literacy to be more normalized. The digital gaze allows the women to be seen as a reflection of us, and of history, that is different than what that would have meant in the past. The digital gaze allows for the women to not be limited to being signifiers of oppression and racism. While they existed at a time and in a situation defined by structural racism and oppression, in this image they stand just as women, not often seen, that might look like us, black women, and all women of various body shapes and sizes. They stand together to show that the Hottentot was never just Baartman, and her shape was not something universal, something the women and men were chosen to highlight. And yet, despite this, Hottentot shall remain a term that conjures up the Hottentot Venus.

The existence of these women, of Betty, of Jacob, and the other Hottentots at the exhibition by conjuring the image of Baartman facilitate their own symbolic erasure. If the Hottentot is the medium, then Baartman is the message. The digital lives of these photographs may cause a momentary expansion, but the hold and meaning of that

114

message is more than we are able to let go of in this contemporary moment. We continue to understand the bodies on display with similar characteristics, namely large buttocks on the female body as always already in comparison to her. The briefness of the encounter means it acts as more of a historical glitch than something that will reframe our understanding of the past as a new history, especially when we still live in a world often defined or experienced through the same mechanisms of structural racism and oppression as the Hottentots of 1889 and Baartman at the turn of the 19th century.

The digital is a change in how history is culturally read, received, and understood. Understanding this change requires careful analysis of the medium and its platforms. The change in speed and scale changes our perception of the timelessness of things that are encountered digitally (Buckingham 2008, Hayles 2012, Virilio 2006). History arrives piecemeal, sometimes captioned, sometimes orphaned and sometimes misrepresented. The one thing that remains stable when looking at a photograph is that the object seen is from a time that is not our own. The photograph disables coevalness by design. In that sense, historical digital photographs of people become the ultimate interaction with the "other" because in the digital world the photograph is more real than the person as the idea of the image is the first or more common encounter in a digitally augmented world (Hillis 2009, Taylor 2002). Seeing Hottentots on the screen then, despite the photographs being more than a century old, communicates historicity only by the faded light of the image, and even that is commonly mimicked through digital filters. Carefully crafted and edited photographs though, the kind made with mobile applications like Instagram and Pudding, both apps designed for the taking and manipulating of photographs via smart phones, are seen as part of the new media

115

environment of digital media. In that sense, the distance of time when encountering a

person from the past at once disappears and is made more clear at the moment of

realizing that the person being viewed is no longer of this world, just as each individual

can never be the person captured in her or his own photographs due to the passage of

time. The Hottentots, and photographs of other historical women of the black diaspora,

serve as a nodal point that allow for new conversations that attempt to move beyond the

narrow boxes of the past

CHAPTER 5: TOWARDS AN EXPERIMENTAL DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP

HISTORICALGLITCH.COM

As a scholar of communication, the place where I see communication that is more strategically deployed, in order to create a specific type of understanding or seeing, is in creative practices. I have always been drawn to creative practices because they allow, if only for a brief moment, a glimpse into the world of another person. This feeds how I conduct both research and my pedagogical practices. One of the drawbacks to a project like Vintage Black Beauty when thinking through the future of digital media and scholarship is that, without my explanation many people will not realize it is scholarship. There is an inability to carefully craft the message for multiple audiences through a single screen. Even as the openness and accessibility that defines digital media allows for work to cast a wider net and new audiences. While culturally, technologically, and academically we are still figuring out the limits of digital media, platforms come with those built in. Part of making sense of what this means is attempting to do something digitally other than that which I could do on Tumblr. Historical Glitch is my attempt to move away from pre-structured platforms towards a more flexible experience that enables others to experience the project I as I did through work of curating the Vintage Black Beauty collection. Despite the attempt at more

117

flexibility, I found that once I was in the act of creating, it was still most helpful to call on pre-existing formats.

To guide visitors through the experience, the portal to the site is built on WordPress, an open source content management system and blogging platform. WordPress is flexible and is able to do many advanced things, especially when a user is able to go in and write plugins, something I did do for this project. However, the flexibility was not the type that ultimately would be able to bring together content in a pithy yet robust way that I had envisioned as I worked through the material of Vintage Black Beauty.

In terms of linking the experimental nature of this type of scholarship to a larger historical movement, the closest relationship is Dada. Dada, an interwar art movement that attempted to show how untethered meaning and value had become by making both absurdist and obvious connections, often from premade material with a few original additions. When I think of how content creation, algorithms, and feeds work across the social world of the internet, I realize that perhaps the hyper-focus on big data in the contemporary moment is one big DaDa project that attempts to find predictability in the chaos that big data brings together.

Making media and digital work is work that is mostly invisible. After spending many months working on various digital components, I realized that a good portion of the work is invisible. The XML[24] data from Vintage Black Beauty alone are over 200 pages in length. The custom HTML code for the digital projects is not included in this written document as they are viewable online. Those, too, are dozens of pages of

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[24] XML contains the raw information of the all the posts that were made to Vintage Black Beauty. It is a file that was provided by request from Tumblr so I had a backup of the project.

additional writing that, when displayed digitally seem to not take up much space. Additional items, like audio and video editing, both of which make up parts of all the digital component of this project take countless hours to create, but they are unable to be quantified in to pages in the same way code is. The shift to readers, subscribers, and users to makers of content means most people who use digital technologies are complicit in creating the media for consumption. Historical Glitch is a tiny big project that attempts to take advantage of digital tools, and give a glimpse of what scholarship that is designed for digital media might look like if it does not use the digital as an analog for printed matter. Instead it attempts to provide a space of reflexivity that is often invisible in traditional scholarship. As scholarship evolves to incorporate these new literacies, it will also need to create rubrics, ethical guidelines, and best practices to assess the labor and quality of digital work.

On Reframing Failure and Success

The internet and digital media are often described as tools that allow for networked model of communication rather than a transmission model (Shannon-Weaver 1963). Because of the metaphorically large size of the internet, and the multiple pathways available for connection, there tends to be an assumption that the network, and thus connections are an essential part of the digital experience. While connections are essential, they do not form as freely or as multi-directional as it appears. There are networks of transmission, especially in a platform like Tumblr, designed for subscribers first. A person posts content to the multitude. The inability to link content and social interactions to the living terms of service document limits the direction the networks and content a person in the network is able to attach himself or herself to. This inability to

attach is not limited to the social space and the official legal space. When a layer of

scholarly inquiry is added there is an additional lack of connection that occurs between

the object studied and the written work. Likewise, there is a schism between digital

creative practice and scholarship, as scholarship is very much still dependent on

disciplines practiced through a written model where knowledge is transmitted primarily

through approved presses.

In order for my project to be successful, it had to be set up as a triptych, a three

panel approach that included the Tumblr, this document, and historicalglitch.com. While

the components are able to stand on their own, together they create a richer more

cohesive experience where the role of each component, and their limits become

obvious. Tumblr, with its subscriber model is a portal. It is a storage space for me that I

can then use to look at certain photographs and do a deeper analysis. The deeper

analysis, contained in this dissertation in the preceding two chapters, highlights how

much information is lost or missing because of the inability to do this type of analysis for

each photograph. Likewise, Vintage Black Beauty and Tumblr are portals of experience

for subscribers or other viewers of the site who might pull the photographs into their own

narrative frames, frames that might be opposed to my own. Because Vintage Black

Beauty is accessible to anyone with the means to digitally connect and see, it is a place

where I concede control in acknowledging that once digital media is available, it might

flow freely through digital time and space.

Historicalglitch.com is the digital exploration. Because it was not tied to a

platform, it represents possibility. Still, due to the nature of digital media, the ability for

connections between Historical Glitch and Vintage Black Beauty are limited due to the way the experience of Tumblr is structured and the possibilities built into the various coding languages and JavaScript libraries that were used to create historical glitch. While many Digital Humanities projects are designed to create connections between archives, knowledge, and information, this project highlights the opposite, as it is a more common digital experience in the platform driven web. While in the postproduction time of Vintage Black Beauty there seems to be many opportunities to make connections between both the deeper analysis of photographs and the online digital project. While connections are not completely impossible, in order to create them in a way that is meaningful and coherent, it would require a complete rewriting of all the components. Historical Glitch represents an exploration of my experience with the project. It is also a testament to the disconnections inherent in our networked digital world.

historicalglitch.com: COMPONENTS

TITLE

The front page, the initial one that loads when one visits the site, is called "TITLE." Following Dada tradition, it is the first Manifesto, or "Manifesto #1." Rather than a traditional explanation, it is a chat transcript that took place via an instant message right after I purchased the domain. Rather than showing the full chat, I redacted the parts that were not me, providing only a partial view of a digital exchange. In this way, "TITLE" is able to show how often what we see when we go to sites is only part of a larger conversation, while at the same time explaining the meaning and purpose of the title.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

"THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK" is a custom built WordPress plugin. WordPress plugins add extra functionality to WordPress. This plugin creates a Dada poem from excerpts of Zora Neal Hurston's "How It Feels to Be Colored Me", an excerpt from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, and Marshall McLuhan's, "Playboy Interview."

A traditional Dada poem consists of taking a newspaper, cutting a story into chunks of text, putting them in a bag, and pulling them out. "Theoretical Framework" works in a similar way. Each time a visitor loads the page a selection of the pieces of texts are pulled from the database I created, at a set length, in a random order, to generate a unique theoretical poem that combines the voices of the three theorists together in new text. The poem allows the theorists to be in conversation with each other, and also provides a commentary on how we often rely on the theorist who came before us to make sense of the work we are doing now. The new text has many authors, including the three original authors, myself, the developer of the plugin, my co-developer who helped me with some of the bits of code that were not doing exactly what I wanted them to do, WordPress, the platform that allows the plugin to work, and the user, who's visit is the catalyst that generates the new text. In this way, Barthes, and his essay *"The Death of the Author,"* are the ghosts of this page. There is no narrative intrinsic to the page, yet the content is performative as a theoretical framework.

DECOLONIAL DADA

"DECOLONIAL DADA" is the Second Manifesto (Manifesto #2) of the site. This manifesto is a multimedia collage that pulls together various pieces of media from Tristan Tzara and Richard Huelsenbeck. It start with Tzara's "Syllogism Colonial", found on the International Dada Archive. The translation of the text is not provided on the site.

Nobody can escape Fate

Nobody can escape DADA

123

Only DaDa can make you escape Fate

You owe me 894 fr. 50

I took audio from an interview with Tzara and Huelsenbeck where they explain why
irrationality instead of politics was essential to DaDa and remixed part of it to create a
short audio essay "against the war and against imperialism regime." This piece-specific
part of the page highlights a problem of corporate ownership of creative spaces that are
commercialized. The video that the audio was extracted from was removed from
YouTube due to copyright infringement and is no longer available. From there, the
Manifesto is mainly my voice. I used different styles of text to convey emotion in an
attempt to explain why DaDa is something that should be brought into decolonial
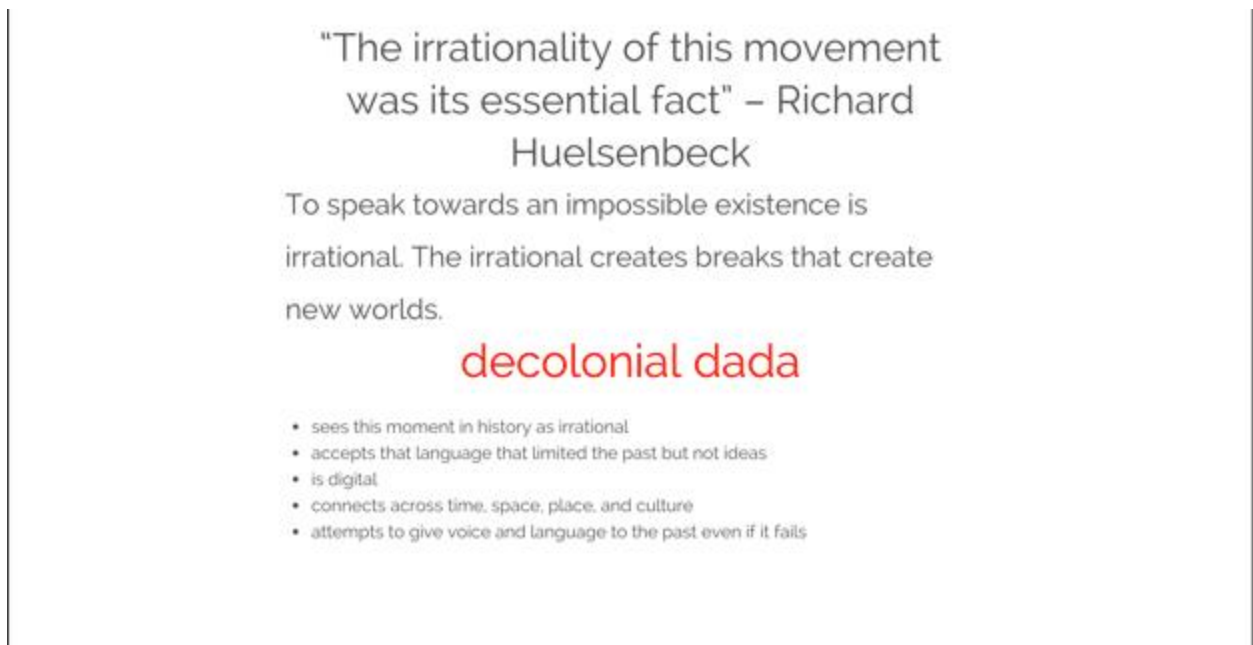creative projects. I end by defining decolonial DaDa in a bulleted list.

"The irrationality of this movement
was its essential fact" – Richard
Huelsenbeck

To speak towards an impossible existence is
irrational. The irrational creates breaks that create
new worlds.

decolonial dada

- sees this moment in history as irrational
- accepts that language that limited the past but not ideas
- is digital
- connects across time, space, place, and culture
- attempts to give voice and language to the past even if it fails

Figure 22 Screenshot "Decolonial Dada"

STRUCTURING EXPEERIENCE

The final portal page is "STRUCTURING EXPEERIENCE." This page contains a photograph of my grandmother with her mother in a car. It is the equivalent of a "Table of Contents", that provides access to the non-WordPress parts of the site. The title is a play on experience, as I am asking visitors to experience this thing I've created as both peer, as a noun, but also as a verb, peering. The page has a secondary page titled a "A One Minute Conclusion." The layout of these two pages is an attempt to highlight how design can direct experience. A visitor is more likely to click on the conclusion page than the experience above.

Micro Projects

Haunting: http://historicalglitch.com/nosybe/

NOSY-BE KVINDE
(NOSY-BE WOMAN)

From the Island of Nosy-Be, north west Madagascar

Figure 23 Nosy-Be Drawing

This project reflects the meditative process of not knowing about a photograph but trying to make sense of it anyway. The user image for Vintage Black Beauty is a woman from the island of Nosy-Be in Madagascar. The photograph was found in an archive with limited biographical information about the woman, pictured outside of her location. I found myself staring at the woman in the photograph, trying to see if somehow I could make more information become evident. I showed the different ways meaning can be derived by coloring the photograph and creating a printable coloring page (above).

There is a version of the image that was constructed with the text left by users. When clicked on, it opens a stream of comments that move so quickly they cannot be read, to represent how meaning is quickly derived and lost in digital environments. When a visitor hovers over the image the color changes, making individual comments easier to read. Finally, I took the original photograph and created a vertical triptych that shows the photograph fade to only text by the last frame.

Because the woman is unnamed, I created a poll where visitors can fill in the blank of "Hello, My name is_____" by responding to a Google Poll. To view the names others have left behind, the visitor is required to leave a response.

The final exploration is a song found in the French National archives. It is a popular song from the same region as this woman and that is sung the first time a child's hair is cut. While this is most likely not the voice of the woman, there is a chance she heard or even sung this song in her own life. The song was uploaded on Soundcloud as it enables users to listen and leave comments as they listen to the song.

In this way, through attempting to see the photograph and the woman in color, through digital texts that represent her now, and audio that is tangentially related, I am attempting to show how digital tools can be used to create new meaning because bits and pieces can be collected and placed together in a digital collage.
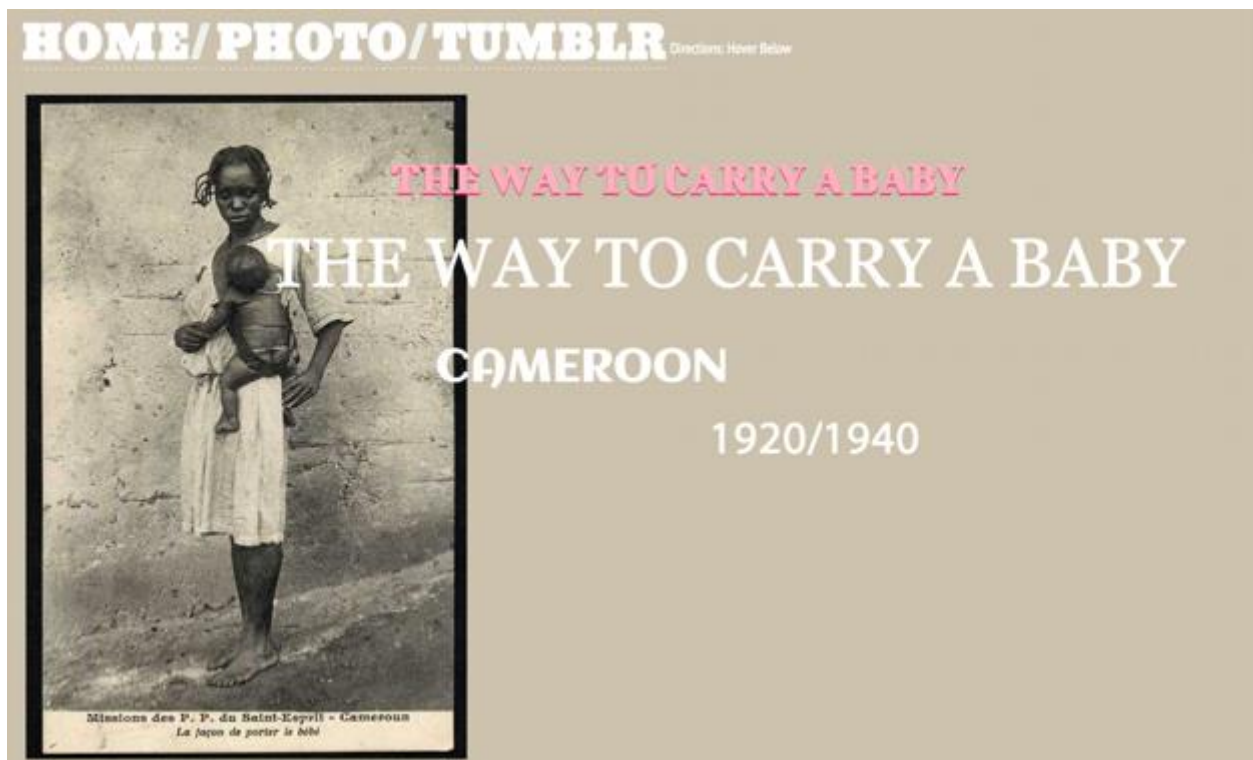
Polysemy http://historicalglitch.com/cameroon/

Figure 24 Screenshot "Polysemy"

This project digitally shows what polysemy looks like through the image of the woman holding the baby discussed above. The goal of the piece is to illustrate to visitors the experience I have had, and have shared with others, of reading these images in multiple ways. The text when the page loads is a translation of the original caption. When you hover over the first "The Way to Carry a Baby" the original French

caption appears. When the second "The Way to Carry a Baby" is hovered over, the text changes to "is with pride and love", completing the sentence. "Cameroon" changes to "beauty" and the date of the image becomes "is love." By having the words change to alternate ones, all related to how the photograph might be read, polysemy can be experienced in real time by the visitor. While there is no way for a visitor to add his or her own reading of the image, the hope is that the simple act of hovering to change meaning might inspire visitors to mentally hover over meaning a bit more as they explore some of the other photographs from the project.

The Americas for Google Cardboard http://historicalglitch.com/3damericas/

Figure 25 Image, The Americas for Google Cardboard

The last micro-project should be viewed with Google Cardboard or another stereoscopic viewer. It is a simple digital gallery of stereoscopic images from the Americas that were included on Vintage Black Beauty. I chose to keep this very simple

129

because it highlights that, even with older technology, there were advanced techniques that we need special equipment to view even today.

Main Project: Timeline

http://historicalglitch.com/timeline/

Figure 26 Screenshot 1 "Timeline"

The capstone digital project is a digital timeline, "A Journey through time and light writing with other digitized media: An Asynchronous Image Archive." In this project I allowed myself to revisit Vintage Black Beauty through the decade tags instead of through the archive page. I did not originally post images decade by decade. Instead, I posted them as I came across them in the archive. A visitor to the timeline that connects via a mobile device is able to scroll through a photo from each decade or view the photos as a timeline with multiple images on the screen at once. From there a user can scroll down and read my reflections on what I gathered decade by decade. I felt that it was important to provide some of my own reflections on the project in retrospect as digital curating practices, much like code, are invisible. The digital is the realm of big data though, and photographs are no exception. The ability to go through tens of thousands of photographs is what makes this moment the moment of cultural analytics

131

based on what we see. Though hundreds of photographs are posted, they are only a few that were selected from thousands of digital photographs I was able to access.

The other aspect of the Timeline that is important is the use of external media. I have an impression of a time that I was able to see through looking back at the photographs. I inherited cultural artifacts that shaped what I looked for in photographs. The drive to create the project was a reaction to an inherited popular and historical culture that tends to flatten and condense rather than complicate and expand. These media objects are the ghosts in the machine of culture (Ryle 2009). While I do not have items for every decade, there are some decades that have objects I consider exemplary.

CONCLUSION

The written document cannot be linked to Tumblr easily. Instead, it serves as a document that stops meaning. I can document my analysis, experience, and observations of the project here. Due to the nature of written documents, it represents a stoppage of thought. A sentence has a beginning and an end, as does a written document, especially one that serves a specific purpose, like a dissertation, a book, or an article. While there might be unexplored questions at the end, the document should have a point that is illustrated, explored, and concluded. It is about the transmission of information.

Digital media are media that create new forms of unspeakable disconnectedness just as much as they create the new possibilities for connection through layers of meaning. In this dissertation, I used Tumblr as a starting node to begin to explore what this looks like and where it might lead a user attempting to do more than browse and consume in digital media. Each layer of experience, from the technology, code, platform, social experience, digital content (media), to the algorithm, creates a new layer of meaning that is inherently disconnected from all the others with a different purpose and audience in mind. While these layers are all connected, the primary mode of their connection is a disconnectedness that does not yet exist in language. The only shared aspect of these layers is their ability to exist as part of narrative around specific digital media. While it is possible to pull the layers into different sets of pairs or binaries, such as the platform and social experience or the algorithm and the digital content, to show
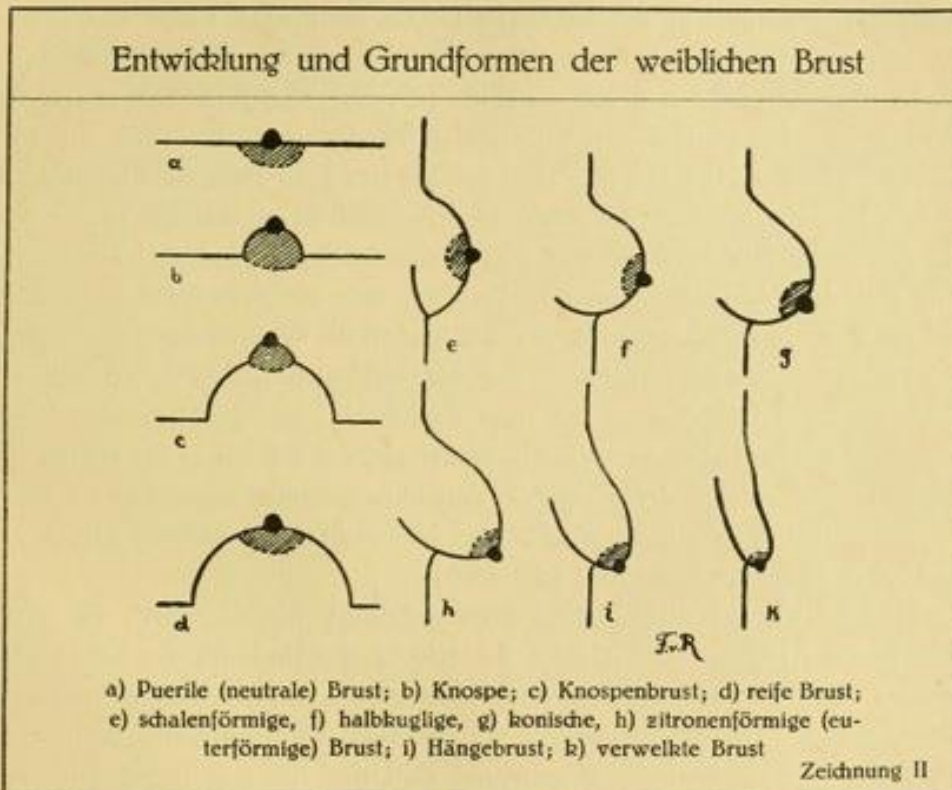
how they work together or how they define each other, ultimately to examine one, it becomes necessary to move the other to the realm of theory or interpretation and away from ontological evidence.

For my project, I started in the space between the platform and the social experience with Vintage Black Beauty. One side, I explored what the platform is through their own words, and the once space where digital experience is a full reality, through their publicly available legal documents concerning use of the platform. I used this to walk through what the platform is. I then explored an interpretation of the social experience of the platform and the types of literacies required to understand and move to a deeper learning engagement with content presented in this space. I moved from there to exploring a larger digital ecology of the type of images featured on Vintage Black Beauty by exploring shared snippets of interpretation of two photographs, one I posted to Tumblr and the Other I reblogged. To do this, I looked at how similar photographs are being shared in other digital spaces and placed the images in conversation with both a larger historical context and current digital analytic trends. I then went on to show how a photograph encounter in the digital social space might lead to a deeper exploration that might destabilize a broader or widely accepted cultural narrative of experience while not erasing it. Finally, by leaving the platform all together, I created an image of myself going through this experience as a digital chapter.

Returning to where I started, what then is the role of scholarship? Digital media is the evolution of electronic media. It has become ingrained in most processes of social life in the developed world in a way that is hard to imagine disappearing. Scholarship has the ability to theoretically play in the spaces of digital media's disappearance. To do

134

so, I believe it is important to start in those spaces that don't quite have words to describe them. The dark spaces of digital media, the absences, the in between and the gaps are the places where I imagine possibility existing. It is the place where the limits of our current digital performance can be highlighted. These spaces can help understand those who have been caught in digital or broadband divide in a more nuanced way as we understand that even within the media, we too, are stuck in a divide of power and commodification.

Merkmale gekennzeichnet wird. Die geschlechtliche Reife übt jetzt besonders auf das Mädchen einen vollständigen Umschwung in jeder Hinsicht aus. Am augenfälligsten ist die *Ausbildung der Brüste*. (Vgl. Zeichn. II.) Zuerst (vgl. Abb. 75 und 136) unterscheidet sich die Brust des Mädchens in nichts von der des Knaben. Der Warzenhof liegt mit Brustkorb scheibenförmig auf, und aus ihm heraus erhebt sich die Brustwarze *(Stadium der puerilen oder neutralen*

Entwicklung und Grundformen der weiblichen Brust

a) Puerile (neutrale) Brust; b) Knospe; c) Knospenbrust; d) reife Brust;
e) schalenförmige, f) halbkuglige, g) konische, h) zitronenförmige (euterförmige) Brust; i) Hängebrust; k) verwelkte Brust

Zeichnung II

Brust). Dann beginnt der Warzenhof beim Mädchen zu schwellen und sich halbkugelförmig zu erheben unter gleichzeitiger Entwicklung der Milchdrüse *(Stadium der Knospe)* (Abb. 76). Schließlich tritt ein noch stärkeres Wachstum des Unterhautfettgewebes ein, das die Knospe hebt, und zugleich wachsen die Drüsenausläufer in die Tiefe. So bilden sich die Brusthügel heraus *(Stadium der Knospenbrust)* (Abb. 13 und 72). Sehr viele Naturvölker bleiben auf diesem Standpunkt stehen, besonders viele ozeanische und afrikanische Stämme

3*

On The Performance Space of New Digital Narratives

I came across a book. I've since played with the book, looked through it, learned about it, and digitally cut bits and pieces of it up and put them back together again as collages. I realized in speaking to others about this book, that if this book were digitized in its entirety, if in the digital format it could still be recognized as a book, or, as individual photographs, it would lose too much. We would lose too much.

The book is *The Secret Museum of Anthropology (The Secret Museum)*. It was a privately printed book created by the American Anthropological Association in the 1930s. It is authorless and not officially recorded (the inside cover says "privately printed"). There are no marks on it indicating it was ever catalogued. It never received wide circulation, something that is built into its design as a privately published book. Despite being in an area with a plethora of Universities, there is no library around here that has it. But I do. I was able to purchase a used copy online. I know had I found this book in a library, my thoughts on it might be a little bit different. I did not though. Acquiring the book was unique experience in and of itself that helped me frame where my thoughts are headed. Thumbing through the book changed some of my thoughts on digitization.

The book is a collection of photographs that were pirated from a German book titled *Das weib bei den naturvolkern : eine kulturgeschichte der primitiven frau (Primitiven frau)*, published in 1928. The rough translation from Google Translate is "The female in aboriginal peoples: a cultural history of the primitive woman." *Primitiven frau* was digitized and is available through the Internet Archive project. The feeling of the two books, even as they contain the same photographs is completely different. *The*

Secret Museum is a carefully edited version of the *Primitiven frau*, with the photographs

chosen for their erotic nature. This editorial liberty limits the ability to look at the book

as though it is an anthropological work rather than a pornographic one. That doesn't

mean whoever was responsible for putting this private collection together didn't try to

play as though it were real scientific anthropology. The part of the book I

present/perform is the part that does just that. Part of the interactive installation piece I

created is a video that can be seen below. It features a series of simple line drawings

from the middle of *The Secret Museum* that attempt to catalog and number different

types of breasts found in the women whose photographs grace the pages of the book:

When I first received *The Secret Museum*, the image of the "different types of

female breasts and nipple formations" made me laugh, not because it was funny, but

because it made me say "of course." The display of these breasts was the sole purpose

of this book. Once I confirmed the source of the photographs, Ferdinand Freiherr von

Reitzenstein, and looked up his books only to find that Primitiven frau, the book that

contained these photographs originally was digitized, I was shocked. I saw flesh and

 bones and words instead of just flesh and crude drawings of flesh. In fact, there are

more pages of words in *Primitiven frau* than there are of photographs and x-rays. The

drawing included in *The Secret Museum*, appears on page 61 of *Primitiven frau* in a

section that is 17 pages of analysis where breasts are discussed.

Instead of seeing this drawing as a numbered series that reduces the women in

the book to only the drawings themselves, they exist in a larger socio-cultural

world. While their placement in the book is problematic, at best, we are able to see the

138

intent of Ferdinand Freiherr von Reitzenstein. Rather than simply creating a book of pornographic imagery, he did attempt to create an anthropological work on "primitive women." Furthermore, though they are few, in addition to the photographs of nude and partially nude women, *Primitiven frau* contains drawings of jewelry and women participating in various domestic activities (248), and other cultural items, such as songs with music and lyrics(321). There is a photograph with fully clothed women (351). Additionally the book contains an index (379) that provides location data for all the women and items featured in the book. *The Secret Museum* renders the women anonymous in a way that they can never be confronted as though they existed. The index in *Primitiven frau* prevents this from happening, because at the very least, we know where the women we are seeing existed. Despite the problematic nature of the book, it has a wealth of information to offer us, even as we look today in the post-post colonial age.

  If *The Secret Museum* were to be digitized, we would lose the covertness of its creation. For me, that is the most important thing the book has to offer. The seediness of its production and purpose would be lost if the book was publicly and freely accessible. The act of having to search for the book, and find a "deal" on it, or having the book presented with the caveat that it is rare and was never published for a wide audience, the ability to touch and feel the book, to smell and see the pages and random ink colors, creates a performative experience with the book that digitization does not have. Making the book digital would erase so much of what this book does. It would allow us to lose the idea that the original audience that this book was designed for will remain forever hidden. Further, the ability to see the physical product against the digital

139

version of what it was pirated from, on a screen where we can see page upon page of text, creates an interesting conversation around what happens when we lose text. I think seeing the physical book coupled with the digital text truly illustrates some of the issues digitization causes for certain artifacts.

It isn't that I don't want people to see *The Secret Museum*. To the contrary, the more people who can experience the book, the better we can understand, especially in the academy, whose bodies our disciplines were built upon and to what ends. It's just that I want people to do more than see the book. I want them to experience the book. When looking through the screen at a digital version of a book, or a photo, I find it is too easy to forget that we are seeing something real that existed and affected and affects different people differently. To lose the bodies, first through a photograph and then through the digitization of a book, we lose too much. The material experience of a book that can be taken out of a little bag, the method I choose to unveil the book in my installation performance, takes away the ability to show and remember how easily books like this were, and continue to be, hidden. I fear that in this digital culture of openness and access we forget that even today, there is so much that remains out of reach.

Another book that highlights some of the limits of digitization is *Eve Noire*, the book that featured Héliani as a cover model. The photographs in the book are stunning. Young girls and women that seem to be between 10-25 from around French West Africa were photographed in their everyday life, often smiling and dancing. I have an English uncle who was a colonist in what was then known Rhodesia. I have a hard copy of *Eve Noire* and I shared it with him to see what he thought of the book. He said it was a

lovely book that brought back memories, and explained that the presence of white people in some of the areas was as much of an oddity as we imagine black bodies being in other places. He found nothing wrong with the imagery in the book.

I digitized *Eve Noire* so that I could go through the book without damaging the original copy. I thought for maybe a minute about potentially sharing some of the images and decided against it. In the photographs the girls are mostly nude, covered in beads. While these are photographs of their everyday life, and they are clearly comfortable in their nudity, sharing it digitally in the present moment is problematic. Just as the nude photograph of Betty is excluded from the digital archive, the photograph of all the *Eve Noires* contained in the book feel as though they should be suppressed too. Their polysemic reverberance in this cultural moment feels too heavy to share. This troubles me. I worry that the almost natural desire to protect their bodies from modern eyes somehow marks their bodies as the site of dangerous deviance, instead of those who would look at them and only see them through that gaze. At the same time, there is not a way I can think of to share the photographs from the book that would allow them to stay in the narrative of their everyday life. Simply by being captured in a photo and placed in a collection such as *Eve Noire*, the girls and women were already placed in a pornographic gaze

I would like to stress that I do not think the limits of digitization are a bad thing. In fact, I think they are wonderful things that open up new possibilities. The Digital's tendency to reduce the experience of certain things is the space where I like to play. It is the space that is inherently made of breaks and new paths. Because this is the space of my work I think it is important to realize and remember that there are places where

digitization cannot translate, where the losses created by access and openness are too

great, and places where the Digital still does not exist.

Future Research

I cannot help but wonder what happens to improperly used intellectual property

that is the virally reblogged. I also wonder why there are no guidelines for best practices

and fair use on a site that is designed to distribute content. Providing case studies that

model what fair use looks like within Tumblr might limit how subscribers choose to

engage the platform. However, it would be a strong signal that the site is committed to

protecting its user base in a political economy that gives subscribers very little agency

outside of crafting a narrative through content posted to the site as I attempted to do

with Vintage Black Beauty, and act of free labor, as it were, that ultimately drives traffic

to Tumblr for various reasons that are explained more clearly in the Privacy Policy.

Future research also might explore some of the limits for connectedness brought

on by digital media, specifically around the dominance of platforms. Additionally, the

future of scholarship of the digital age is an area that should continue to be explored.

More specifically, for myself it is important to critically examine how existing methods

and methodologies might need to be modified or reframed to better encapsulate the

hidden, invisible, or often overlooked parts of the digital experience.

Appendix A: Emails with digital repositories

RE: Demande de contact
Société de Géographie
Sent: Friday, July 04, 2014 3:46 AM
To: Davis, Jade Elizabeth
Attachments:
BON DE COMMANDE.doc (42 KB)
Mademoiselle,

Si vous souhaitez reproduire dans votre thèse des documents appartenant à la Société de Géographie, il vous suffit de nous retourner dûment rempli le bon de commande ci-joint. Dès réception de ce document, nous vous adresserons un devis. Si vous acceptez ce devis, nous vous ferons parvenir une facture. Dès règlement de la facture, nous donnerons l'autorisation à la Bibliothèque nationale de France qui effectuera et facturera les travaux de reproduction.

En conclusion, vous aurez deux factures à régler, une à la Société de Géographie pour la redevance d'utilisation et une autre à la BnF pour les travaux de reproduction.

Le coût pour la Société de Géographie est en fonction du nombre et de la destination des documents qui vous intéressent.
Acceptez, Mademoiselle, nos cordiales salutations.

Translation
Mademoiselle,
If you want to reproduce documents belonging to the Society of Geography in your thesis, simply return the completed order form attached. Upon receipt of this document, we will send you a quote. If you accept the quote, we will send you an invoice. Upon payment of the invoice, we will give permission to the National Library of France who will perform and charge for the reproductions.
In conclusion, you have to pay two bills, one in the Geographical Society for the user fee and another in the BNF for reproduction work.
The cost to the Geographical Society is based on the number and destination of the documents you want.
Accept, Mademoiselle, our warmest greetings.
Dear Jade E. Davis,

Thank you very much for the email; your interest in the USC Digital Library is greatly appreciated.

You may download a JPG copy directly from our webpage – click on the 'Save' button, then choose 'Download' and select the size. A copy of the 'Large' size has the following dimensions:

Width: 577 pixels
Height: 962 pixels
Horizontal resolution: 600 dpi
Vertical resolution: 600 dpi

Should you need a high-resolution copy (in TIFF format) of the image, please contact the Day Mission Library at Divinity School of the Yale University, an institution which manages the collection the photograph is from:

Yale University Divinity School Library
409 Prospect Street
New Haven, CT 06511
Email: Divinity.Library@yale.edu
Web: http://www.library.yale.edu/div/reproductions.html

Cordially,

USC Digital Library
shcherbi@usc.edu
http://digitallibrary.usc.edu
twitter.com/uscdiglib

Appendix B: Screen Shot of Vintage Black Beauty Update Dashboard

Appendix C: Google Analytics Site Visit Activity

Audience Overview

Dec 14, 2011 - Jun 13, 2015

All Sessions
100.00%

Overview

● Sessions
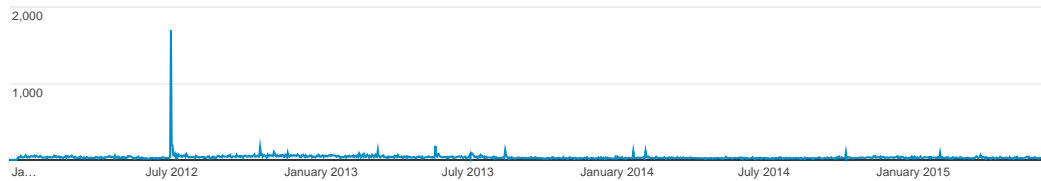
Sessions 43,047	**Users** 37,511	**Pageviews** 130,563		
Pages / Session 3.03	**Avg. Session Duration** 00:03:12	**Bounce Rate** 26.91%		
% New Sessions 87.14%				

■ New Visitor ■ Returning Visitor

12.8%

87.2%
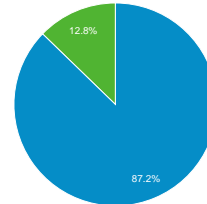
	Language	Sessions	% Sessions
1.	en-us	32,327	75.10%
2.	fr	2,041	4.74%
3.	en-gb	1,441	3.35%
4.	de	732	1.70%
5.	fr-fr	707	1.64%
6.	de-de	681	1.58%
7.	en	632	1.47%
8.	pt-br	465	1.08%
9.	es	464	1.08%
10.	nl	426	0.99%

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