

cycle of observation

The 'Cycle of Observation' is the culmination of an inquiry that began and incorporates an epistemological study through dialectic methodologies for exploring veracity of visual information.

Documentary photography has been prey to subjective interpretation and manipulation particularly for propaganda since its inception. With photographers being encouraged to interpret, instead of record actuality, even before the advent of Photoshop, all is but lost.

In an age of manipulated content, what prerequisites should be applied to evidential imagery that the viewer may define the veracity of actuality? If there is mistrust of visual information due to an increased practice of manipulation, seemingly without any regard of its effects concerning public trust in the authority of the photograph, has it now become necessary to place further importance on the integrity of the author or should methodology be employed?

The initial idea developed to address this topic twice underwent a metamorphosis leading to a total of three distinct methods with which to address the above. These may be best described as:

1. The Synchronized Polyptych
2. The Layered Synchronized Polyptych
3. The Synchronized Motion Polyptych

The use of the term 'Synchronized' refers to synchronized video footage and or synchronized image capture via wireless shutter releases.

The Synchronized Polyptych

The core driver in the 'Cycle of Observation', is: the confirmation of actuality through content. This content is presented in differing views as a polyptych.

The rationale behind a multi-camera method stems from the fact that; though one photograph may convey a story, it's never the whole story. So how many cameras or related photographs does it take to convey truth, or more precisely, 'Actuality'? In producing this study multiple synchronized cameras, are fired remotely, to capture photographs at a given moment with interlinked content to create a 'Cycle of Observation', which is: confirmation of actuality through content. This content is then presented as a polyptych.

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This particular study is an exploration into the voyeuristic gaze of the passerby, the exhibitionistic performance of the location photographer, and confirmation of content. This 'Uncommon Practice' authorizes the commercial photographer to challenge the photographic taboo of being observed within the final work, by placing them at the center of interest. Thus this triptych may be defined in terms of three views:

1. The '**Primary View**' - depicts the photographer's direct pictorial gaze, the commissioned photograph. This view acts as the primary objective of the photographer.
2. The '**Documentary View**' - documents the location photographer in situate, who is fully aware of being observed. The equipment, assistants and performance of the

photographer during the normal course of practice add value to the overall visual effect of production. In many instances this 'production performance' is an integral part of the photo shoot, which can determine the success of the photographer's practice.

3. The '**Third View**' - is the voyeuristic passerby. This inquisitiveness, sometimes described as 'rubbernecking', is the naturalistic interest of humans into human endeavour, and may lead to a further unintentional performance by the passerby. This view verifies the recording of the 'Documentary View' recording the performance of the 'Primary View', whilst authenticating the content of both proceeding views. It is this third view that completes the 'cycle of observation'.



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This triptych may be one, if not the most, successful interpretation of the original idea. Not only is the photographer clearly present within the photograph, but unlike the first attempt at the Gherkin, the 'Third View', which is beginning to metamorphosis into a 'Third Space', is successfully achieved by the use of a wireless remote system to trigger the firing of the third camera. The 'Third View' camera has been placed completely out of the photographer's line of sight. As such one must trust in fate and happenstance as to the content of this image, while still retaining some measure of control over the 'Primary' and 'Documentary View'.

This external / internal study at the RIBA has again furthered, not only the methodology, but greatly improved the concept of altering ones perception of actuality versus documentary of simultaneous converging events. How location and viewpoint may deny an authoritative view of an event, the truth of actuality.

This widens the discourse into the voracity of visual information produced by the author of the narrative, because they are not only regulated by their experiences, viewpoint, and state of mind, etc. but also by what they don't know or cannot see and therefore cannot hope to interpret.

Does this notion further such ideas as '*the camera cannot lie, but don't trust the photographer*'?





This triptych study produced at Greenwich Peninsular questions how ones view of a scene may override the scene itself. This of course is not the objective but it demonstrates how juxtaposing ideologies can override content in production. Of course great care should be exercised to ensure that methodology should not diminish content. *"It was not so much the content of the work that was important, but the way in which it was approached"*.



The Layered Synchronized Polyptych is the digital (physical) convergence of the 'synchronized polyptych'; to produce an *'Omniscient Gaze'*.

The point being that the author, through emphasizing salient points, creates a narrative.

The Layered Synchronized Polyptych

"If the visual image substrate is the real of the photograph's fantasy, and the photograph is the real of the photographer's fantasy, the spectator is reliant on the integrity of the photographer. Thus, although a photograph may communicate much; it often lacks the means to confirm physical veracity of visual content. The photographer's relationship to the visual world and the resulting photograph's claim to truth is easily distorted when viewed in isolation. Yet, it is worth remembering that the 'Camera' cannot lie, but the photograph can be made to. Thus, the methodology of this presentation is self-serving. All three images were created simultaneously through the use of three tripod mounted digital cameras."

By deriving a narrative that may have gone unnoticed within the 'Synchronized Polyptych', the author creates the 'Omniscient View', a fourth all encompassing space. Here the author, having produced a 'synchronized polyptych', deconstructs then reconstructs all views into a singular layered presentation.

There are however rules that must be adhered in combining the images; no object or any part of the photographs should be moved from the original position in order to accommodate the final image. Salient points of interest must emerge through emphasis and opacity. Furthermore, the photographer must be seen, 'Performing'.

Fortune has graced this capture and the theme is 'walking'. With the exception of the protester (on the opposite side of the road is the Chinese Embassy) sat next to the photographer, who is also sat, and the man rolling a cigarette on the far right; everyone else is walking; RIBA is a center of activity. Note the crossing sign is also in agreeance. Anyone who is familiarly with this building will note the distinctive light fittings, the columns and large glass entrance. A further clue to the space is in the sign on the orange door (bottom right). The montage tells a story of RIBA being a place of youth and vitality; progress and space, with historic traditional values.

This study is intended as *La Vanguardia of architecture* and identity of this iconic building in particular.





As exhibited at Ambika P3,
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35 Marylebone Road, London,
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The Synchronized Motion Polyptych

The dialectical discourse of converging views concerning a singular narrative of a moment in space and time; the complexity of the practice and its overriding aim to communicating 'actuality' of not only the original concept of the 'Synchronized Polyptych' but also the idea of fragmentation and convergence perplexes many, as 'time', 'methodology', and 'execution', can supersede the importance of the subject matter. Thus to assist comprehension of just one aspect of the overall practice, three examples were presented from the 'Synchronized Motion Polyptych' for installation / exhibition.

Two clear approaches have been used in achieving this with varying success. The first involves the use of three fixed tripod mounted cameras with a fourth under the direct control of the author, which interweaves and transcends the views of the other fixed cameras. Thereby, this fourth mobile camera under the author's direct control transfers freely within the frame of the other tripod mounted cameras as exhibitioner to their voyeuristic gaze. This approach successfully achieved the initial study intent.

The second is that of fixing the position of all four cameras thus removing any finite control over content. In this instance, all four cameras act as immovable voyeurs or sentinels and the photographer is reduced to a spectator. Although it is accepted that modifications should be expected in study and discovery, this method is considered less successful as it fails to adhere to the originating principal and aim of the study

that dictates, the photographer must be seen executing the creation of the primary image, thus by taking ownership and responsibility of and for the information.

The presentation of the 'Synchronized Motion Polyptych' is in the form of an exploded 2x2 matrix whereby the placement of the various viewpoints are disassembled to create a fragmented whole to subvert future memory (expectation) And is synonymous to how we receive and assimilate information on any given topic or news feed for that matter; attaining confidence in and shaping that information with each new fragment. The aim behind this experimental matrix is to encourage viewer engagement with the individual viewpoints, stimulating memory to combine the information in deciphering the narrative.

The (approximately) 3, three-minute segments with introductions, aim to demonstrate the technique and although they have content value, this method may focus more on information and or entertainment. Although serious issues can be relayed through the media of moving images, the hardware (TV type screens) associations as an entertainment source may hinder the gravitas of any content displayed due to association of hardware and further works are in progress.