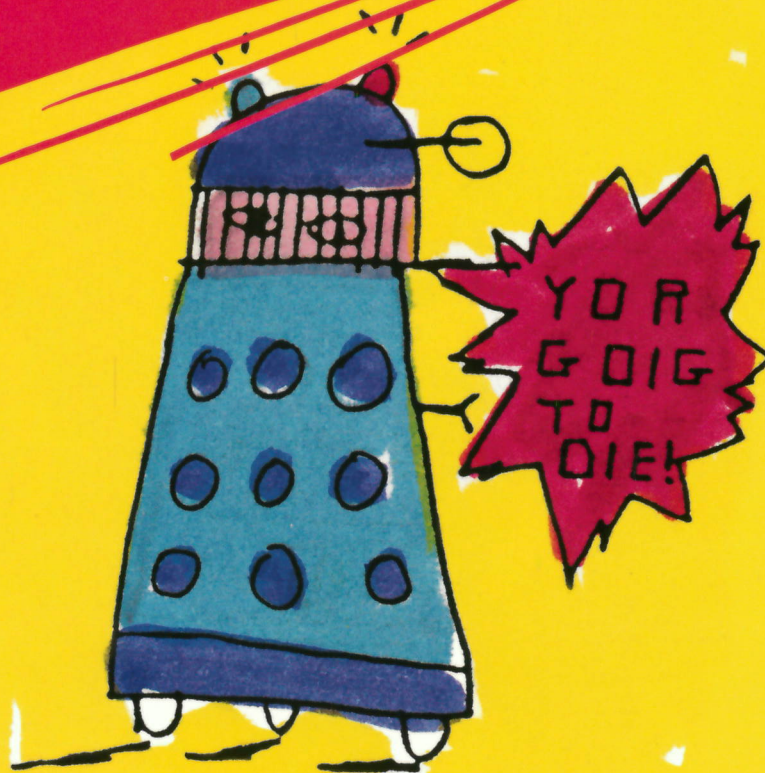


SPEAK



pop against **art** by greil marcus
the true **crimes** of andrew cunanan
the photo **archives** of dr. burns
robert **altman**
james **thackara**
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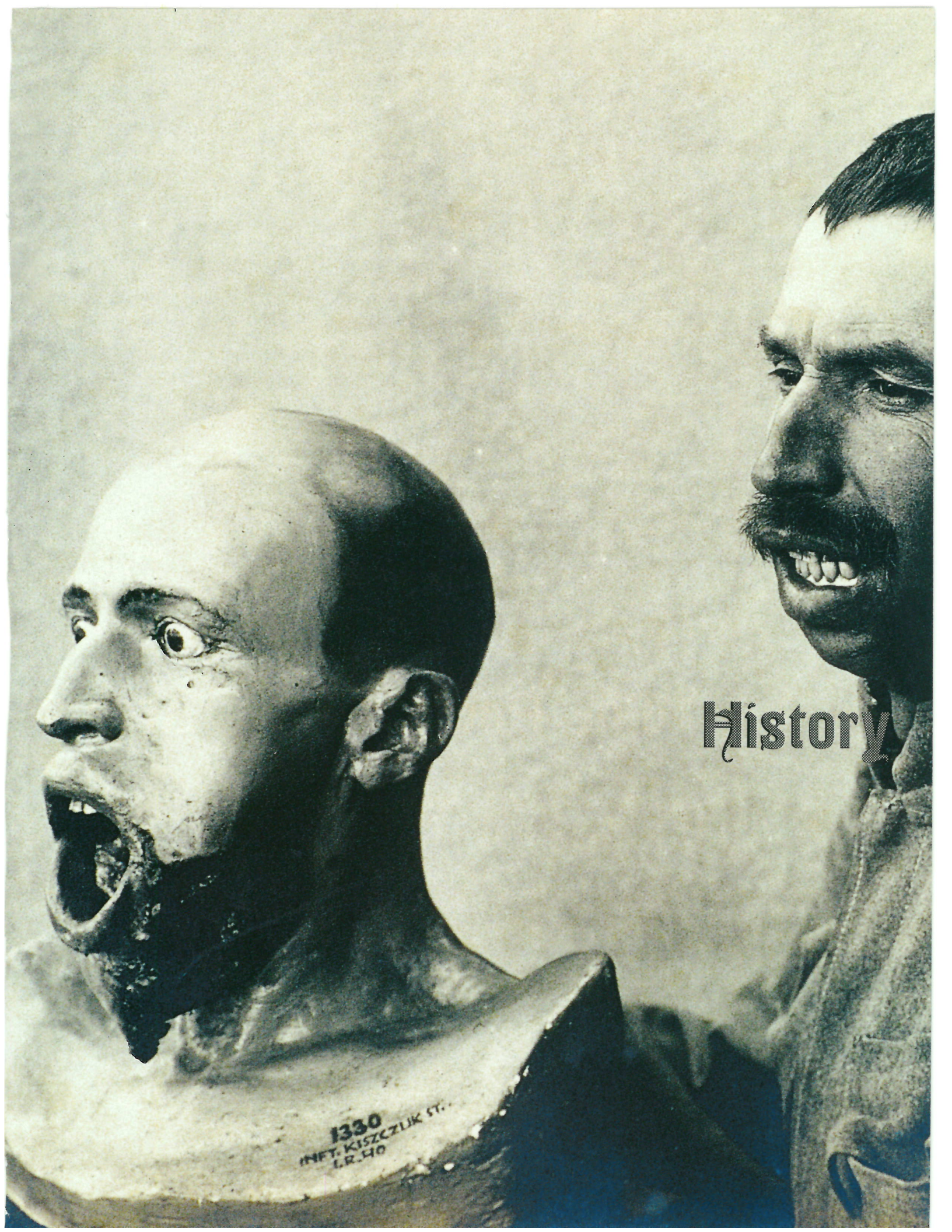
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Silent



History

1330
INFY. KISZCZUK ST.
L.R. 40



The Photographic Archive

previous spread

GERMAN WORLD WAR I SOLDIER POSING WITH WAX MODEL OF HIS ORIGINAL WOUND Lublin,

Poland—German Fourth Army Dental-Maxillo Facial Unit, 1917.

(On the base of the model is written the case number and unit:

#1330 infg Kiszczuko St. 1 R. 40)

Head and neck wounds in trench warfare were common because those were the only exposed parts of the body. Tens of thousands were mutilated; some suffered such disfigurement that the only recourse was to wear a mask. Maxillo-facial surgery by dentists coupled with facial reconstruction by plastic surgeons were the greatest surgical achievements of the war and allowed for rehabilitation of the wounded. It was documented unusually with Moulange, or wax modeling, which was a European tradition. Those with destructive wounds had fully painted wax model casts taken of their preoperative state. Dr. Stanley Burns

above

"WE WANTED THE WAR," "THE JEWS ARE OUR MISFORTUNE," JEWS IN WARSAW FORCED TO PARADE THROUGH STREETS October 1939, [previously unpublished]

Hitler allowed his soldiers to go into battle with their cameras. My next book explores the crimes the Nazi Wehrmacht perpetrated on Jews, prisoners and the civilian populace. The crimes of the Nazi SS, SD and Gestapo are well documented in written and pictorial works, but the photographs of the deeds of the common German soldier have not been the subject of any prior study. SB

PETER ROSS



of Dr. Stanley Burns

by Brett Simon
When Dr. Stanley Burns

invites you to peek into his cabinet of curiosities, you had better know what you're getting into. For the past twenty-five years, he has collected photographs of the common—and not so common—man. Pulling from his archive of over a half million photographs, the largest collection of historical images outside a museum, Burns takes the viewer on visual tours into some of the darker corners of human experience.

Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America presents the haunting and often tender images of the once-popular practice of postmortem photography. A Morning's Work and Masterpieces of Medical Photography offer gut-wrenching medical documentation of disease and treatment. Burns' current projects include a book on vigilantism and lynching, and another on Nazi photographs of World War II. All told, he has authored or co-authored eleven books—two in collaboration with macabre photographer Joel Peter Witkin—curated museum shows, created the documentary A History of Death in America, and served as a consultant to historians and filmmakers. Sleeping three or four hours a night, Burns spends fifty hours a week looking at pictures, countless more tracking them down, and still has time to dedicate several days a week to his ophthalmology practice.

Dr. Burns' publications wear as many hats as their maker, shifting between precious art book, no-nonsense history, didactic textbook and highbrow horror show. The photographs themselves, meanwhile, offer a kind of scrapbook rendering of our romance with the off-limit areas of vision: portraits of absent or deceased loved ones, stereotopic postcards of a faraway land, a nudie picture, an invisible instant captured with a strobe flash, a dissected cadaver.



BLACK HISTORY—THE SLAVE

This image of an African Slave is a visual legacy of the cruel and inhumane history of African-Americans in the hands of white slavers. My archive serves as a witness to the history of slavery and is especially strong in documenting Southern injustice in the Reconstruction Era. SB

Confronted with the most shocking of Burns' images, the viewer is likely to cover his eyes and stare through the cracks in his fingers, wavering between a desire to see and a fear of seeing too much. This coupling of curiosity and anxiety is reminiscent of the voyeur genre of early cinema in which the Peeping Tom delights in keyhole discoveries until he himself is discovered and beaten. In the case of the photograph, however, after the visibly inaccessible is procured, the viewer is offered a safe distance from which to look.

But the jovial Burns is no Dr. Caligari intent on horrifying or titillating his audience. For Burns the secret of the image is not heard in the screams of the shock corridor, but in the calm and collected whisper of the archive. He considers his books therapeutic, a means to desensitize our response to certain images so that we may begin to see them clearly. Dirty lenses and dirty thoughts are replaced with a different fantasy: 20/20 historical objectivity.

Burns' various photographic histories share a common thread of nostalgia. In the postmortem photographs he celebrates a healthy intimacy with death—one now absent from American culture. The books of medical photographs pay tribute to the once-vibrant individualism now fading from the medical profession. And in his new book on lynching and vigilantism, Burns tenderly recalls a do-it-yourself brand of justice centered in moral and individual responsibility.



The photograph itself is a nostalgic look backwards, a summoning from the past what is absent in the present. Yet it is marked with what the critic Roland Barthes calls the “that has been” quality of the image: From the moment of exposure an image is forced out of context and relegated by time to attics of dusty neglect and oblivion. Burns, as archivist and historian, conceives of his project as placing the photograph in a context and breathing memory back into it. In the happy ending of the family romance, Burns takes the wayward picture in and restores its identity. But the ending is never so simple. Reframed by his books and museum shows the images assume new identities. The lost photograph, perhaps, can never be found—only retaken. In this way Dr. Stanley Burns fosters not simply an engagement with the past, but with the very process of recollection.

How did you become interested in photographs of the dead?

As a photographic collector and a physician, I started collecting medical photographs. I noticed that some of my photographs of disease conditions were of children being held up by their parents. These are Daguerreotypes and Ambrotypes, and it soon dawned on me that they were not taken for a medical purpose, but a memorial purpose. These pictures were taken at the dawn of photography, from the 1840s onward, and whereas prior to photography only the rich and the famous celebrities had visual images—the rich always had paintings, they did not take memorial portraits—here the common working person could have an image taken. They were able to get a photograph, and even though it was a photograph after death, they still had a memorial, a remembrance. Photography was a vernacular, a middle- and working-class phenomenon. These pictures were a normal part of culture at the time because people lived with death and dying in the nineteenth century. It was a part of everyday life. Childhood mortality was thirty to fifty percent. As an example, even half of Abraham Lincoln’s children died—one when he was in the White House and another after his death in 1872.

You mention in your book that not only was death present, it stayed in the home longer.

The parlor was the room in the middle-class home where the body was kept and the funeral was held. The trappings of death remained in the room. Then in about 1900, Edward Bok at *Ladies Home Journal* decided that since we appeared to have conquered disease, there would be no more parlors in the home. The living room was invented, a room for the living and not for the dead.

For many of the memorial photographs the body was taken out of the home and dragged into the studio.

Yes, this was actually a dangerous practice. During the height of epidemics people would carry their chil-

dren around. There would be advertisements: “Don’t bring your children to the photographer,” because it would actually spread diseases.

One of the reasons why I collect and use photography is to delve into our past, into the parts of culture that have disappeared which I find fascinating. I wanted to create a vernacular archive—a visual witness of the century. History has become so downplayed in American culture. What I do in my books is try to show how we got where we are.

The reason for *Sleeping Beauty* and *A Morning’s Work*, if you look at the dedication, was the lost prestige of medicine. It is only because of medicine that we have gotten so flamboyant about our lives. At the turn of the century we started to conquer infectious disease. We were able to do aseptic and antiseptic operations on the brain, the abdomen and the neck, places that could never be successfully operated on before. And with the invention of antitoxin, vaccines, and with the germ theory of disease, people were in an era of great inventions. We had electricity, the telegraph, the telephone, the car, the electric light, the airplane. There were great hopes of progress, and death was put off. We thought we had conquered death, and we did to a great degree. Life expectancy from 1840 to 1900 only rose from forty years to forty-seven years, but by the mid-twentieth century, it was seventy-six years.

In your introduction to *Sleeping Beauty* you write, “Nineteenth-century Americans knew how to respond to these images. Today there is no culturally normative response to postmortem photographs.” How would you characterize our contemporary relationship with death? How should we respond to these images?

I wrote that ten years ago and we have gotten a lot better since. But we still do not deal well with personal death. We hide it, we don’t even say the words “a person died.” We have a whole bunch of euphemisms. For the first time since 1918, the AIDS crisis has caused children to die before parents. Now all of a sudden you have to deal with death. I did a documentary, *Death in America: A Chronological History of Illness and Death*, in which I explore how we got to this stage of non-responsibility. We are always blaming someone, but we are supposed to get sick and die. That is what life is about. Medicine has allowed us to have arm transplants, heart transplants, liver transplants, and to survive infections that devastated mankind for centuries.

Do you intend for these images to demystify death?

It is a demystifying of death and an acknowledgment of the great strides that physicians have made. Death has been removed from everyday life. You don’t wake up in the morning thinking you are going to die that day.

What about our relationship with non-personal death?

We love that. If you shot me and I shot you, we could have that picture on the front page. But if I came over and said, “Gee, my brother just died, had a heart attack. Look at him,” what would be your response?


And yet these private mementos of death have fallen into the public. They have ended up in your archive, in these books on our coffee table. They have lost their memorial function on the individual level, and have instead become a memorial to a cultural practice.

I would agree with that entirely. What happens in our culture as things fall out of favor is they wind up in the trash. When the children of the children of the children die, they don’t know who is in the pictures and who wants a



**POSTMORTEM-MEMORIAL DAGUERRETYPE OF
A MOTHER WITH HER DEAD CHILD, c. 1850**

In Sleeping Beauty I explored the history of memorial photography in American culture. This type of image of a mother holding her dead child was a common memorial and visual memento of the nineteenth century. These images not only helped in the grieving process but often represented the only visual remembrance of the child and were among a family's most precious possessions. SB



PIONEER NEW YORK CITY POLICE LINE-UP DEMONSTRATIONS, (previously unpublished)

The concept of safely picking a suspect out of a group was a major step in police and victim justice. Prior to the line-up, direct confrontation could be dangerous to the victim and prejudicial to the suspect. This photograph illustrates the pioneer line up concept: The audience wore masks to conceal their identity as police demonstrated the new innovation. The modern line-up is safely done with two-way mirrors and soundproof rooms.





picture of a dead person around? In the 1930s these pictures were discarded; no one wanted them. Death had joined sex as a taboo of the twentieth century.

Outside their familiar context, do these images become as distant and alluring as the blood on the nightly news?

Maybe on one level, but they really let people realize that these pictures are OK to take. Today memorial photographs are the second most common type of hidden picture; sex pictures are number one. Currently it is standard policy in most of the major hospitals in the United States that if a baby dies, a stillborn or prenatal death, they take pictures of the baby and they take pictures of the family holding the baby in the same style as in these nineteenth century photographs. Studies have shown that mothers and families who don't have the pictures have a much tougher time grieving, and talking about and overcoming the death. Some people don't even want the photos but they will call for them months or years later when they can deal with it. These pictures then become among the most important treasure items in their lives.

In our culture we are as important as the number of pictures we have of ourselves. If Michael Jackson or President Clinton showed up in your house today, there would be more photographers than personnel. A thousand years from now an anthropologist could figure out who the important people were in our society just by the number of pictures there were of them. To have no pictures at all is not to have existed. ●●▶

FAMILY WASHING BODY, JAPANESE HAND-COLORED PHOTOGRAPH c. 1880

Death was part of everyday life in the nineteenth century. One died at home, one was prepared for burial at home, and one was kept at home (on ice) until the funeral and burial. While no American photo exists of these practices, this Japanese image poignantly illustrates the event. Today, however, death has been removed from everyday life and we have filled our lives with professionals who perform all sorts of tasks that distance us from death. Avoidance of death is so serious a business that the Gannett newspapers would not publish any images in a recent review of a nineteenth-century postmortem photo exhibit at a museum noting that "the paper does not publish pictures of dead people." SB

prisoners built their own prisons? The prison at Leavenworth is the best example.

You identify yourself as a historian in the search of the truth. Is there a point when you have acquired so many raw images that the story is not so clear?

No. They say I'm a visual savant. It really becomes clearer the more pictures I get. This is the way I collect; I cast a very wide net. Some people complain about that—people like to see one close-up of a face. They like to see trees and I like to see forests. I want to see what everyone looks like. I throw everything in and also let other people share evidence. For instance, I just got a picture this week that I have been looking for for fifteen years. It is of the New York State crime protectors association, which were vigilante groups. There are pictures of hundreds of these vigilante officers, and when you see them together you say, "OK, now I got it."

The idea of the vigilante system is wonderful in a developing country. It is like you or me—pioneers—and we have ten friends, live together in a community, can't afford to hire a police officer, and can't afford to build a jail. We catch a criminal and we are going to say, "Hey listen Brett, we caught this guy stealing from your house, why don't you take him up to Sacramento by horseback tomorrow and put him in county jail?" You say, "Hold it, I have to work, I have to feed my family. Why don't we just beat him up and tell him if he comes back to town it will get worse next time?" That is the way most of the vigilante system worked—internal policing done by common citizens—and it was a necessity in many parts of America until we had state police, which didn't come East until the 1920s.

It sounds like you are nostalgic.

Well, it's the loss of personal responsibility. A lot of my books, like the ones on medicine, are about this loss of personal responsibility.

You call *A Morning's Work* "a tribute to a dying system, a visual legacy of the heroic age of medical individualism." The book records not only the triumphs of medicine, but also gross abuses of this individual responsibility.

What do you mean?

Eugenics studies, the Tuskgee syphilis experiments. Are you casting a critical eye as well?

No, I include them all because times change, cultures change, understanding changes and if you don't have all the evidence, you're not looking at what everyone was doing. I don't agree with these things, but I like to have all the evidence in there. You have to see all

the pictures. Some of the ones I am showing are the only representations. What I have done is scour the world for the pictures that represent examples of everything that was going on within medicine and culture at the time. My archive has about five hundred and fifty-thousand nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century images. Basically whatever museums don't have, I have. I am not interested in the art photograph. If you want to look at the art photograph and be inspired, go to museums. I have the pictures of everyday life. I have the pictures of what war was about. I have the pictures of what the common man did with his camera in the last century. Vernacular photography is my specialty.

The art photograph can't be distinguished so easily. Many of these images are being shown in the museums. They are published in limited-edition fine-art books. What is the fate of these photographs in this new context?

First of all, the photographs were taken for utilitarian purposes; they were taken within the practice of a trade. The photographers wanted to be good tradesmen. They took these pictures artistically but they were not meant to be art photographs. They were trying to capture all of the aspects of their world. Their understanding of what a good picture is is implied in these photos. Some of them were very innovative and way ahead of their time. That is what is so intriguing about this—we have pictures that are reminiscent of what we've been doing in this century and someone was doing it in the 1870s.

Just to take one image in *A Morning's Work*, plate eighty-eight is a dissected head on a table.

Now Joel Peter Witkin copied it, or rather interpreted it. He and other artists took the image and they made up their own dissected head scene. But my dissected head on a soup plate is number one, there are no two ways about it. He is so lifelike, so perfect. And this is "Bring Me the Head of John the Baptist," an age old artist theme.

Did the photographer's aesthetic agenda interfere with the utilitarian function of the image?

Not really. I think it is an aesthetic challenge; those are the words I like to use. Here you have a picture of a dead body, or a maimed person or a head. How am I going to present this? So what these photographers did—amateurs and professional alike—is present them in as artistic a style as possible. They were presenting something that was not usually seen, certainly many of the medical conditions, and they would present it in a way for which they'd want to be best remembered. Take a look at picture twenty-four, you have a nude picture here but it is so well done. It is an art photograph. Take a look at one hundred and five and one hundred and six. These are wax models made of deformed faces, and it is really really extraordinarily well done. There are some absolutely amazing photographs that really transcend what you are seeing, it really transcends medical photography. And yet it says everything about plastic surgery, about the art of photography, about posing.

In one of your captions you write, "Disease often decorates the body in strange and wonderful patterns." Do you envision your project as helping develop an aesthetic of disease?

In one way it does. It lets you look beyond the disease to the person and the disease becomes not something horrible to shy away from but something with an aesthetic sense. Because, like with postmortem photographs,





Aside from their therapeutic and historical value, these images also play on our morbid fascinations. Does it bother you to think of people buying your books for their shock value?

It does. My purpose is a bit higher. But when something goes out there you never know what people use it for, and there is always someone who wants to make a dollar or two on the sensational aspect. The main audience are artists, historians, photographers and sociologists.

Do you not expect people to be shocked by these images?

There is inherent fascination with these images. You want to turn away but you want to look back. There are some people who cannot look at *Sleeping Beauty*. I was at a book signing last night with Joel Peter Witkin. People were looking at some of my books and they would sort of look at it, close it, come back and look at it again. When you look at death, you're trying to discover a secret about life. But you often can't look at it in one sitting.

Is there something that you are looking for, a secret that you are trying to uncover?

The original thing for me was disease and how we handle disease. Look at the mother in plate twenty-nine of *Sleeping Beauty*. She is looking at her child in such a poignant way. There is her life's child, it is an older child too. One of the great things about the movie *Life is Beautiful* is that you see this absolute level of kindness, gentleness and love for this man's child and family, and his total protection of them in the worst situation of the century, the Holocaust and the extermination camps. In plate twenty-nine you can almost catch it. It is very hard to capture it in a single picture, and in memorial photographs I am trying to do that in a way which no other photographs have.

When does this desire to see, to uncover the secret, become unhealthy?

When it becomes a compulsion, it becomes pathological. You can write a book, write a story, write a play or write a song until you get your ideas or feelings out. But if you never get the answer you are looking for, and only the constant question, I think that is when it becomes unhealthy.

So you feel as if you've gotten it?

I've gotten it. I have written eleven books and there are topics of previously undescribed areas of photographic or social history. What I do is I look and look and look—I am looking at thousands of new pictures all day long. Then I see a forest from the trees.

Two new books are on criminology and African-American history. Another book is entitled *World War II Through Nazi Eyes*. The book could only be done now because the Nazi soldiers are dying and their wives are dying. Because they are dying, and as is the case with most eras in photographic history, a one-time window of opportunity exists as their personal photograph albums become available on the marketplace.

Hitler allowed soldiers to carry cameras into battle, which was not something the Allied armies allowed. He was winning the war and this was all a great travelogue. I was just on the phone with the Holocaust Museum because I found an absolutely amazing picture of a Jewish man on a cart wearing a talus and the cart is being pushed by another man and there are other Jews walking alongside it. The Jew in the cart is carrying a sign and it says, "We wanted the war." This is in German going through the streets of

Warsaw. And in front of the cart is another German sign that says, "The Jews are misfortune." It's a totally unknown document of the Holocaust, and the picture is compositionally beautiful. These Jewish men were forced to do something which, in war-torn Warsaw, only further alienated them from the Polish populace.

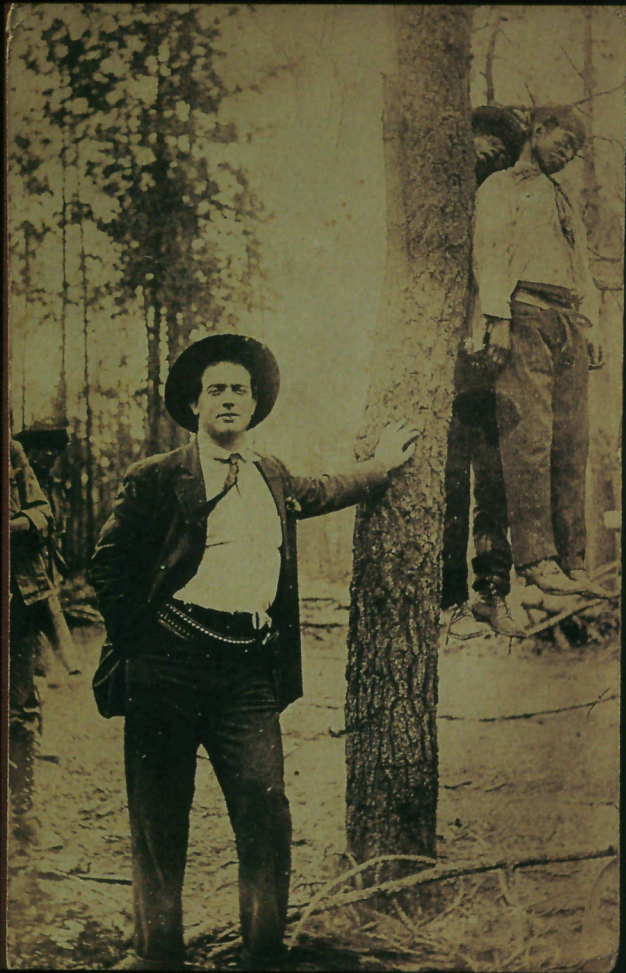
There is an old SS statement that I quote in my book: "We will get to the ocean and quickly," which is what they did. In these German albums there are many pictures of the soldiers who went to France or the Balkans frolicking in the ocean. Simply travelogue pictures. The other thing they did was present the pictures of what they did to the Jews. Theoretically, in the eyes of *Der Stürmer*, which was the Nazi propaganda newspaper, they weren't supposed to do this. When the German army went east into Poland there were these funny people who they had to wipe off the earth. They said, "Let's take pictures of what we are doing to these Jews to show that we are doing our part." These photographs haven't really been reproduced or generally acknowledged.

I'm interested in the title: *Through Nazi Eyes*. There is an identification that occurs when you are looking through someone's vision. We've all seen plenty of Nazi atrocities. Will the book offer a glimpse into their own loss and suffering?

Yes. One group of images I present are unpublished photographs of American execution squads shooting and hanging German soldiers and civilians who had committed war crimes. Another group, and this to me is outrageous, are photographs and engineering drawings of the destruction of Germany by the Allied bombings taken for the purpose of reparation—so that they could send us a bill for the damage we did to Germany. The last album I have is August 1944. This gives you an idea of how far their minds went. No one has seen these kinds of photographs and drawings and it absolutely amazes me.

You are working on this book right now.

Yes, it will probably be my next book. The other book I am working on is a lynching and vigilante photographic history book. It comes from the idea that the lynching and criminal system in our country has been subverted several times by southern states. People don't really know the history. I answer questions such as when did our country decide that if you go down the street and someone beats you, robs you and stabs you, you have to put him in jail, house him, pay for him, educate him, give him medical care, give him good food and everything else? We didn't start paying for criminals until the South took advantage of the system, jailing without cause and leasing prisoners to work until they died. How many people know that the



DOUBLE SOUTHERN LYNCHING

This is a classic lynching photograph with a proud perpetrator posing with the bodies. This image is a real photo postcard that was sent through the mail with some mundane writing about the weather in Mississippi on the back. During the early part of this century the southern states subverted the traditional American protective vigilante and criminal justice systems in order to kill, jail and subjugate African-Americans. 58

it allows you to deal with it. Medicine is a tough business and you have to treat individual people and not be shocked by what you are dealing with.

What about the people themselves? In what context were they asked to pose for these medical photographs?

Well, they were asked to show their condition to advance medicine.

And what was their understanding as to who would see these images?

In the nineteenth century, when images like these were taken, patients were paraded around so they knew that this was a public phenomenon. That is why they hid their faces.

Would non-medical people see these images?

Some, yes. But most of the medical images were made for medical books and medical purposes. Remember, this was a time when insane asylums and morgues had visiting days for public entertainment.

Do you ever feel responsible for these subjects? How do you respond to critics who say you are exploiting these people by parading them through museums and coffee table books?

I still think they are serving a medical purpose so my responsibility to them is not exploitative. I was not the first to use these medical photographs. Several of these pictures were shown at exhibitions at museums by noted curators.

But when they're shown in museums is it still with a medical purpose?

Not directly, but I'm really not so much interested in the artistic purpose. For example, Dr. Sayer with the girl in the suspension apparatus—the picture where she's hanging and everyone loves it so much because it has erotic overtones. To me, you have tuberculosis, you have a woman with bad Potts disease which cripples. Here the doctor invents this great device. Tuberculosis was the number one killer in the last century—anyone and everyone had it. But we forgot that. Here you're looking at this picture from an artistic point of view and I'm thinking, "Wait a minute, do you know what this guy has done here? This man has invented a device to straighten someone's back. He invented the plaster of Paris cast. He relieved tremendous pain, suffering and deformity."

Are there images that have seared themselves on your retinas, images that you can't forget?

Well, the head on the soup plate. My favorite image is the pile of feet entitled "A Morning's Work." It was



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CEREMONY ON MARTINIQUE FOR FREEING THE SLAVES OF THE FRENCH COLONIES—"ABOLITION DE L'ESCLAVAGE"—CENTRAL DETAIL FROM DAGUERROTYPE TAKEN MAY, 1848 (previously unpublished)

This is the only photograph related to a ceremony for freeing the slaves and is an important icon of mankind's highest achievement — "Man's humanity to his fellow man." The French government paid the slave owners for their slaves and gave the slaves land so that they could earn a living, resulting in less racism in the Caribbean French Islands. This image is one of the world's most valuable and important photographs and historic documents.

taken in 1865 by Civil War surgeon Reed Bontecou. Eight amputated limbs lie heaped on the floor. There has been no other photograph like it. It represents the horrors of war, the inadequacy of pre-antiseptic surgery and lets us appreciate how far we have come in preserving life and limb. The photo is an icon representing three thousand years of medicine. That to me is a major image.

Has there ever been an image that you felt you couldn't publish?

I have lots of them, some that I don't think should be published.

For what reasons?

The conditions were too horrible. Some of the war images no one would ever publish. Most women can't look at the images of female genital mutilation. I put those in there, again, to raise the level of social consciousness. There are people who will say when looking at these pictures, "Look what they did. How horrible." And other people will say, "Listen, this is their practice, this is their religion or culture, they should be allowed to do what they want to do and mind your own darn business." We have people wanting to preserve the Native American and ethnic cultures, and then we tell them, "You can't do this," and only let them preserve whatever we decide is good. That's why I publish these images, to get people thinking. That's part of my emphasis in getting this stuff out there in the world because no one has ever published pictures of genital mutilation, have they?

Not that I've seen.

Not like this. They don't talk about it. Do you remember all the stories you've read about genital mutilations or do you remember this picture here? You can't recite one sentence from one of those articles you read. And that's why I deal with pictures. The average person, the smart person, the brilliant person can't recite a sentence from anything that he's read other than recap the story. But with these pictures, a thousand words are in their minds.

Two years ago William Rubin, a very distinguished gentleman now retired from the position of curator of modern painting at the Museum of Modern Art, came to me stating that he had a new hypothesis on the genesis of modern art. In 1984 he wrote a book about primitivism stating that African masks were the stimulus of modern art. Wrong. He has now changed his mind. With the use of my photographs, he has written a new book called The Genesis of Les Demoiselles d' Avignon. What he shows is that Picasso's stimulus for this painting was not the primitive mask, but syphilitic subjects. The pictures of what syphilis does to the face, especially congenital syphilis, were so horrible that almost all of the world's archives have thrown them out. It was almost too horrible to look at, and no one would publish it.

William Rubin published everything in Demoiselles d' Avignon, and he showed that Picasso had permission from the governments in Barcelona and Paris to go to these special syphilitic hospitals where these people were. And if you look at the painting, which is the first painting of modern art, he shows the degeneration of womanhood and how these faces were destroyed. The African masks, which were claimed to be used by Picasso, were not available in Western culture until 1917 and the painting was done by about 1905. And, this is the absolutely shocking part, these African masks were also of people with syphilis.

The ones that were brought over to Europe, that were in their studios?

Yes. And so now Rubin has recanted his theory of primitivism as the genesis for Les Demoiselles d'Avignon and the start of modern art. Thus the fact that modern art is based on medical subjects is proven by my photographs. We've changed the history of modern art.

The interesting part is that Rubin, with his prestige, knowledge and contacts could not find the photographs for his theories because they were all destroyed because they were so horrible. These pictures were so bad that I wouldn't publish them.

It's not like the photograph in A Morning's Work, the man with the cauliflower face?

That I can eat lunch with, I've seen it often enough.

What is the pride of your collection?

I was able to purchase the quarter plate Daguerreotype of the ceremony for the freeing of the slaves in the French colonies that was done in May 1848. This is a French national treasure and it was so important that last year when the senát of France was celebrating its one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the abolition of slavery, they used copy prints of my picture in the exhibition.

It was the most expensive image I ever bought. Because I am a popularizer of history, people will give me things at reasonable prices because they know I'll use the images. If this had been sold in France, it would have disappeared for another one hundred and fifty years. There are two types of collectors, the sharers and the hoarders. I'm a sharer. If I've got a great image, it'll be out in the world in an article in a month or two to get other people's comments on it and let the world share it.

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Brett Simon lives in Oakland, CA. His writing has appeared in *Lingua Franca*. This is his first article for *Speak*.