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# THE CULTURE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN PUBLIC SPACE

edited by Anne Marsh, Melissa Miles and Daniel Palmer

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# Contents

- 6     **Foreword** Alfredo Cramerotti
- 8     **Acknowledgements**
- 9     **Introduction** Melissa Miles
- 22    Chapter 1  
      **Standing on Shifting Ground: Privacy and Photography in Public**  
      Melissa Miles
- 44    Chapter 2  
      **Tilt** Simon Terrill
- 56    Chapter 3  
      **"No Credible Photographic Interest": Photography Restrictions  
      and Surveillance in a Time of Terror** Daniel Palmer and Jessica Whyte
- 74    Chapter 4  
      **Street View/Interface** Michael Wolf
- 82    Chapter 5  
      **Bill Henson and the Polemics of the Nude Child in Photography**  
      Alexandra Heller-Nicholas and Anne Marsh

100	<i>Chapter 6</i> <b>The Sleepers and Trafalgar Square</b> Cherine Fahd
110	<i>Chapter 7</i> <b>Criminalizing "Camera Fiends": Photography Restrictions in the Age of Digital Reproduction</b> Jessica Whyte
134	<i>Chapter 8</i> <b>In the Event of Amnesia the City will Recall</b> Denis Beaubois
144	<i>Chapter 9</i> <b>The Face in Digital Space</b> Martyn Jolly
158	<i>Chapter 10</i> <b>From Sixteen Google Street Views</b> Jon Rafman
168	<i>Chapter 11</i> <b>Google Street View and Photography in Public Space</b> Daniel Palmer
185	<b>Further Reading</b>
188	<b>Contributors</b>

# Foreword Alfredo Cramerotti

From the Series Editor to the Reader

## IN AND OUT OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

What we commonly understand as the public sphere—which is bigger than just public space; incorporating as it does relations, speech and time where things can become and be public—is more a concept than a thing. Let's take as an example public personae. In the past, according to cultural theorist Boris Groys, figures like politicians needed the visual narrative provided by artists in order to become “fully” public, but nowadays this division of labour (the politics by politicians; the representation of politics by artists) is no longer the case (Groys 2008). Politicians, alongside film celebrities, sports stars, terrorists and multinational CEOs, generate vast quantities of images and shared visual narratives, with the extra layer of also being in charge of “curating” their own public image. They inscribe themselves into the public consciousness through this act of curating their own visual self.

An individual's public presence is immediately represented, mediated, circulated and interpreted through the media and by the media, including also protean media such as the blogosphere or online content aggregation tools. The public sphere is more a concept than a thing because it is extremely difficult to pin down what it does and how it affects an individual. In this sense, does art function as a design tool by which we make things work, rather than something to intellectually stimulate? It is not really about how I design and inscribe myself into the world, but rather how I negotiate the way the world designs and inscribes me (Groys 2008). This is the crucial matter when we deal with the notion of the public sphere.

The media machine distributes images of all kinds at levels of production with which the individual artist or collective cannot compete. The only way for an artist to contribute in shaping the public sphere is to go beyond the art system and become an artwork; to cease producing images (or other forms of narrative) in order to become an image.

From adding to the public sphere through one's work to becoming the work itself, subjected to the gaze of the media—a sort of meta-artist—is quite a radical step, but it is not one that was unannounced: for nineteenth-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche it was better to be an artwork than to be an artist. And so it goes. We are now in a situation in which everyone is expected to curate his or her own narrative in the public sphere in order to respond to the “aesthetic responsibility” that society demands from us. As Groys asserts, self-design has become compulsory; the “mass cultural practice par excellence” (Groys 2008). Hence, “aesthetic evaluation” is at the core of the public sphere, where artists and audiences alike act together in shaping the dimension. Unlike past claims about everyone being an artist, in this age it seems that everyone is an artwork, and—more problematically—his or her author too.

## REFERENCE

Groys, Boris (2008), “Self-Design and Aesthetic Responsibility,” Lecture at Frieze Art Fair, London, 16 October. Text published in *e-flux Journal* no. 7, June 2009. Available at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/self-design-and-aesthetic-responsibility/>.

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—Anne Marsh, Melissa Miles and Daniel Palmer

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