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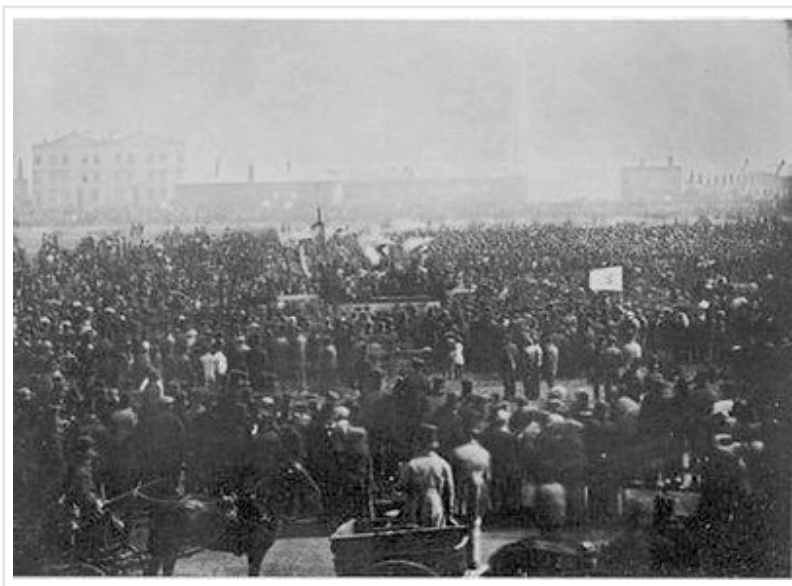
NEXT BLOG>>

(NOTES ON) POLITICS, THEORY & PHOTOGRAPHY

"WHAT WE NEED IS A CRITIQUE OF VISUAL CULTURE THAT IS ALERT TO THE POWER OF IMAGES FOR GOOD AND EVIL AND THAT IS CAPABLE OF DISCRIMINATING THE VARIETY AND HISTORICAL SPECIFICITY OF THEIR USES." - W.J.T. MITCHELL. PICTURE THEORY (1994).

23 DECEMBER 2006

Photography and Popular Empowerment



"The Great Chartist Meeting, 10 April 1848," W.E. Kilburn. Daguerreotype. The Royal Collection © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

As part of my thesis back in the day I wrote about Chartism as a workers movement seeking *political* redress (in terms of suffrage and parliamentary representation) for *economic* hardship and dislocation. There is a terrific but apparently out of print book on the subject by Dorothy Thompson - *The Chartists: Popular Politics in Industrial Revolution* (Pantheon, 1984). It turns out that not only was this the first mass movement of workers, but also that it was accompanied by photographs. So, when Susan Sontag rightly says that, as a matter of its historical genesis, photography has been

REAL LIFE

"The camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera." - Dorothea Lange

"Photography is nothing - it's life that interests me." - Henri Cartier-Bresson

"Light, then, is indeed a wonderful instrument ..." - Mark Rothko

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intimately implicated with war, it seems that her observation is partial. Photography also seems to be intimately implicated in the struggle for popular empowerment - at least it would be interesting to explore that thesis. As a first step I recommend an essay by Christian Nold "Legible Mob." In *Making Things Public*. Ed. Bruno Latour & Peter Weibel. (MIT Press, 2005). This volume is huge (1000 pages) and a bit difficult to grasp (physically and intellectually) but it is intriguing. In his essay Nold talks not just about the image shown here, but about the (usually contested) contemporary practice of estimating the size "crowds" at political protests and the ways various parties to such debates use photography for that purpose. (For recent examples see [this post](#) and [this one too](#).)

POSTED BY JIM JOHNSON AT 10:11 AM

1 COMMENTS :

R.A. said...

for some reason, this post made me think of the way that photography was used in the whole westward expansion/manifest movement. like the images of william h. jackson, and other USGS survey folks.

25 DECEMBER, 2006 11:55

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[Voter Registration \(US\)](#)

[Reporters Without Borders/Reporters Sans Frontières](#)

[Southern Poverty Law Center](#)

THE PROBLEM, OR PART OF IT, AT LEAST

"The first question must always be: Who is using this photograph, and to what end?" - David Levi Strauss

"By contrast, almost all writing about photography in our times tends to begin with the alleged nature of the product rather than with its production and use." - Patrick Maynard

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[Enrique Metinides](#)

["Great Works of Art are Thugs"](#)

CORBIS CREATIVITY FOR SOCIAL
JUSTICE AWARD

Enthusiasms (5) - David Hidalgo
The Political Uses of the Sublime
What Liberal Media?
Reprieves in Florida & California
Bill Henson - Untitled
Red

MY PAPERS

"Picturing the Public in Black &
White: Working Notes Inspired by
Robert Westbrook's 'Democratic
Hope: Pragmatism & the Politics
of Truth'" (pdf)
"The Arithmetic of Compassion:
Rethinking the Politics of
Photography" (pdf)

ASSORTED ARTISTS, AUTHORS,
THINKERS, PROVOCATEURS

"The opinion that art should have
nothing to do with politics is itself a
political attitude." - George Orwell.

~~~~~

The Algebra Project  
Critical Art Ensemble  
Alfredo Jaar  
Lize Mogel  
Walter Mosley  
Pragmatism Cybrary  
Project Row Houses (Houston)  
Martha Rosler  
Sebastião Salgado  
Edward Tufte  
Roberto Mangabeira Unger  
Krzysztof Wodiczko

CRITICAL ART ENSEMBLE DEFENSE

FUND



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NEWS, COMMENT, LETTERS & ARTS -  
AND I SURELY DO NOT MEAN "FAIR  
AND BALANCED"!

"Most of all photography is probably  
an instrument for showing things, a  
device for displaying them." - Urs  
Stahel

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"The most political decision you  
make is where you direct people's  
eyes. In other words, what you show  
people, day in and day out, is  
political. . . . And the most politically  
indoctrinating thing you can do to a  
human being is to show her, every  
day, that there can be no change." -  
Wim Wenders

[A Public Space](#)

[Adbusters](#)

[all about jazz](#)

[Alternet](#)

[Alt Weeklies \(Portal\)](#)

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[BOMB Magazine](#)

[Brick](#)

[Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists](#)

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Boston Review  
The Brooklyn Rail  
Cabinet  
City (Rochester)  
Code Z  
Cognitive Dissidents  
ColorLines  
Common Dreams News Center  
Counterpunch  
Democracy Now!  
Dissent  
The Economist  
Eurozine  
The Exquisite Corpse  
Granta  
Guardian Weekly  
The Harper's Index  
Imprints  
Index on Censorship  
In These Times  
Independent Media Center (Portal)  
Journal of Aesthetics & Protest  
Labor Notes  
Left Business Observer  
Legal Affairs  
LiP Magazine  
London Review of Books  
Middle East Report  
n + 1  
NACLA Report on the Americas  
Naked Punch Review  
nat creole  
The Nation  
NewPages.com (Portal)  
NYRB  
The New Yorker  
No Depression  
Notes from the Western  
Edge/FreshEars Media

[One Final Note](#)

[The Onion](#)

[Open City](#)

[Open Demcoracy](#)

[Orion](#)

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[TPM - The Philosopher's Magazine](#)

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[Transition](#)

[UbuWeb](#)

[Words Without Borders](#)

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INCLUSION, EXCLUSION & THE  
POLITICS OF PHOTOGRAPHY

“I have said that a photograph bears witness to a human choice being exercised. The choice is not between photographing x and y, but between photographing at x moment or y moment. . . . What varies is the intensity with which we are made aware of the poles of absence and presence. Between these two poles photography finds its proper meaning. ... A photograph, while recording what has been seen, always and by its nature refers to what is not seen. It isolates, preserves and presents a moment taken from a continuum. ... Hence the necessity of our understanding a weapon we can use and which can be used against us.” - John Berger

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS



ATOM via Feedburner

**30,383 Visitors**  
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PHOTOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS: REAL  
& VIRTUAL

"Art patronage has always been a kind of money-laundering, a pretty public face for fortunes made in uglier ways." - Rebecca Solnit

Afriphoto

Fratelli Alinari (Florence)

Aperture Foundation (NYC)

Arles Rencontres de la Photographie  
(France)

Australian Center for Photography  
(Paddington, NSW)

Belfast Exposed Photography  
(Northern Ireland)

California Museum of Photography  
(Riverside, CA)

Canadian Museum of Contemporary  
Photography/ Musée canadien de  
la photographie contemporaine  
(Ottawa, ONT)

Center For Creative Photography  
(Tucson, AR)

Center for Documentary Studies  
(Durham, NC)

Center for Photographic Art (Carmel, CA)  
Center for Photography (Woodstock, NY)  
Centre for Contemporary Photography (Fitzroy, Australia)  
CPIF - Centre Photographique d'Ile de France (Pontault-Combault, France)  
Centro Nazionale di Fotografia (Padova, Italy)  
Centro Português de Fotografia (C.P.F.) (Porto, Portugal)  
Danmarks Fotomuseum/Danish Museum of Photography (Herning, Denmark)  
The Darkroom (New Orleans, LA)  
Detroit Focus (Michigan)  
Durham Centre for Advanced Photographic Studies (Durham, UK)  
George Eastman House (Rochester, NY)  
EXPOSURE: A Center for Photojournalism, Documentary Studies, and Human Rights (Medford, MA)  
Ffotogallery Cardiff (Wales)  
Finnish Museum of Photography (Helsinki)  
Fifty Crows Foundation (San Francisco)  
Florida Museum of Photographic Arts (Tampa)  
En Foco (NYC)  
Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson (Paris)  
Fotografie Forum International (Frankfurt am Main, Germany)  
FOAM - Fotografimuseum Amsterdam (NL)  
Fotogalerie Wien (Vienna)



Foto Vision (San Francisco)  
Fotomuseum Provincie Antwerpen  
(Antwerp, Belgium)  
Fotomuseum Winterthur  
(Switzerland)  
Galerie Fotohof (Salzburg, Austria)  
Fox Talbot Museum (Wiltshire, UK)  
Gallery of Photography (Dublin,  
IRE)  
The Griffin Museum of Photography  
(Winchester, Mass)  
HASSELBLAD CENTER (Göteborg,  
Sweden)  
Houston Center for Photography  
(Texas)  
Huis Marseille (Amsterdam)  
Hungarian House of Photography  
(Budapest, Hungary)  
Hungarian Museum of Photography  
(Kecskemét, Hungary)  
IDEA Photographic: after  
modernism (Santa Fe, NM)  
Ikon Gallery (Birmingham, UK)  
iN-PUBLIC  
International Center of Photography  
(NYC)  
Jeu de Paume (2 Locations in Paris)  
K\*MoPA - Kiyosato Museum of  
Photographic Arts  
Latvian Museum of Photography  
(Riga)  
The Light Factory (Charlotte, NC)  
LightWork (Syracuse, NY)  
Maison Europeenne de la  
Photographie (Paris)  
Minnesota Center for Photography  
(Minneapolis)  
Moscow House of Photography  
Musée de l'Elysée (Lausanne,  
Switzerland)  
Musée de la photographie  
(Charleroi, Belgium)

Musée Français de la Photographie  
(Bièvres, FR)

Musée Nicéphore Niépce (Chalon  
sur Saône, France)

Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea  
(Milan)

Museum für Photographie  
(Braunschweig, Germany)

Museum of Contemporary  
Photography (Chicago)

Museum of Photographic Arts (San  
Diego, CA)

Museum of Photography, The Hague  
(NL)

National Museum of Photography,  
Film & Television (Bradford, UK)

Nederlands Fotomuseum  
(Rotterdam, NL)

New York Public Library,  
Photography Collection (NYC)

Noorderlicht Photography  
(Groningen, NL)

Photo Espagna (Madrid)

Photo Voice (UK)

Photo Voice

PhotoAlliance (San Francisco)

Photographer's Gallery (London)

PCNW -Photographic Center of the  
Northwest (Seattle, WA)

Photographic Resource Center  
(Boston)

Die Photographische Sammlung/SK  
Stiftung Kultur (Köln, Germany)

Prague House of Photography (Czech  
Republic)

redeye (Manchester/Liverpool, UK)

Rekjavik Museum of  
Photography/Ljósmyndasafn  
Reykjavíkur (Iceland)

Salt Institute (Portland, Maine)

SCALO Gallery (Zurich, SW)

SF Camerawork (San Francisco)

Silver Eye Center for Photography  
(Pittsburgh)

Smithsonian Photography Initiative  
(Washington, DC)

Société Française de Photographie  
(Paris)

Society for Contemporary  
Photography (Kansas City, Mo)

Soros Foundation - Documentary  
Photography Project (NYC)

Southeast Museum of Photography  
(Daytona Beach, FLA)

Thessaloniki Museum of  
Photography (Thessaloniki  
Greece)

Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of  
Photography

Visual Studies Workshop  
(Rochester, NY)

World Press Photo (Amsterdam, NL)

ZoneZero

PHOTOGRAPHY MAGAZINES,  
ETCETERA - PRINT AND ONLINE

Afterimage

AK47

Aperture

Blind Spot Magazine

Blueeyes Magazine

Daylight Magazine

Democratic Books

Foto8

Fotografia

Gomma Magazine

lensculture

MediaStorm

OjodePez

photo-eye

photography-now.com

Picture Projects

[PixelPress](#)

[Polar Inertia](#)

[PRIVATE](#)

[ReVue](#)

[seesaw magazine](#)

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[BBC News - The Week in Pictures](#)

[Guardian Unlimited: In Pictures](#)

[Slate: Today's Pictures](#)

[Washington Post: Camera Works](#)

IF WE USE PHOTOGRAPHY TO HELP
US THINK, HOW SHOULD WE
UNDERSTAND THE PROCESSES OF
THINKING?

"605. One of the most dangerous ideas for a philosopher is, oddly enough, that we think with or in our heads.

606. The idea of thinking as a process in the head, in a completely enclosed space, gives him something occult.

607. Is thinking a specific organic process of the mind, so to speak - as it were chewing and digesting in the mind? Can we replace it by an inorganic process that fulfills the same end, as it were a prosthetic apparatus for thinking? How should we have to imagine a prosthetic organ of thought?" - Ludwig Wittgenstein

"If one takes the view ... that human mental activity depends for its full expression upon being linked to a cultural tool kit - a set of prosthetic devices, so to speak - then we are

well advised when studying mental activity to take into account the tools employed in that activity." - Jerome Bruner

"...[H]uman thought is basically both social and public - ... its natural habitat is the house yard, the marketplace, and the town square. Thinking consists not of "happenings in the head" (though happenings there and elsewhere are necessary for it to occur) but of a traffic in what have been called by G.H. Mead and others, significant symbols - words for the most part but also gestures, drawings, musical sounds, mechanical devices like clocks, or natural objects like jewels - anything, in fact, that is disengaged from its mere actuality and used to impose meaning on experience. From the point of view of any particular individual, such symbols are largely given. ... While she lives she uses them, or some of them, sometimes deliberately and with care, most often spontaneously and with ease, but always with the same end in view: to put a construction upon the events through which she lives, to orient herself within "the ongoing course of experienced things," to adopt a vivid phrase of Johns Dewey's." - Clifford Geertz

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[Gamma](#)

[Magnum](#)

[Panos](#)

[Parker](#)

VII

l'agence vu

Webistan

SOME INTERESTING BLOGS

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[American Philosophy](#)

[Cocktail Party Physics](#)

[Josep Colomer](#)

[Conscientious](#)

[Crooked Timber](#)

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[Knowledge & Experience](#)

[Left2Right \(defunct?\)](#)

[Brian Leiter](#)

[Lawrence Lessig](#)

[Majikthise](#)

[Meet Me In Ataxia, Baby](#)

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[Philosophy of Art](#)

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[1mag3](#)

[Alec Soth](#)

[State of the Art](#)

[3 Quarks Daily](#)



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[Research on Income & Wealth](#)

[Institute for Defense & Disarmament
Studies](#)

[Legal Information Institute \(Cornell
Law School\)](#)

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[Organization For Competitive
Markets](#)

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System\)](#)

[Union of Concerned Scientists](#)

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Rights Library](#)

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"Many persons seem to suppose that facts carry their meaning along with themselves on their face.

Accumulate enough of them and their interpretation stares out at you.

... But ... no one is ever forced by just

the collection of facts to accept a

particular theory of their meaning,

so long as one retains intact some

other doctrine by which he can

marshall them. Only when the facts

are allowed free play for the

suggestion of new points of view is

any significant conversion of

conviction as to meaning possible. ...

In any event, social philosophy

exhibits an immense gap between

facts and doctrines." - John Dewey

MUSIC LINKS ("WITHOUT
CATEGORY") - MORE TO FOLLOW

" It's odd I suppose, ... but I have always had an aversion to the marriage of music and politics. Leaving the discussion of instrumental music aside, I have always admired songwriters, wished I could have been one myself. I love a song that tells a story, and when it tells of a man's suffering or a woman's hopelessness or dreams, one can certainly argue the case for political meaning, and in fact I would. But when people start telling me how to change the world over a G-major chord, that's when I generally leave the room. With all due respect, I always felt Joan Baez's 'I Dreamed I saw Joe Hill' was the moment in the movie 'Woodstock' to go out and get popcorn. It's a long movie after all. I was waiting for Sly and the Family Stone and I still am - "I want to take you higher - baby, baby, baby light my fire" - now there's a message!" - Wayne Horvitz

"Music speaks. It speaks in its own language differently to each of us. I believe in music as a contribution to the discussion about who we are and where we are headed. ... The unruly thing about music is that it demands its own meanings that are beyond any explanation. You might be able to decipher the nuts and bolts, but in the end, you can't unscramble the mystery of how music makes you feel. That's why I don't often write about my music. Words can so often obscure the feelings and the sense of music. Music is not an argument, it lives in its own universe and refuses to be pinned down." - Dave Douglas

[AACM \(Chicago\)](#)

[AACM \(NYC\)](#)

Other Minds



Geri Allen
Scott Amendola
Avantango
The Band
Balanescu Quartet
Billy Bang
Joe Beard
Arthur Blythe
The Blue Nile
Paul Brady
Brotsky Quartet
T Bone Burnett
Burnt Sugar
Don Byron
Regina Carter
Nels Cline
Leonard Cohen
Holly Cole
cosmo cosmolino
Elvis Costello
Robert Cray Band
Jack DeJohnette
Dave Douglas
Steve Earle
Kathleen Edwards
Marty Erlich
Kahil El'Zabar
Bill Frisell
Quartetto Gelato
Charlie Haden
Matt Haimovitz
John Hammond
Andrew Hill
Robin Holcomb
Dave Holland
Jolie Holland

J.C. Hopkins
Wayne Horvitz
Abdullah Ibrahim
Diana Krall
Kronos Quartet
Ray LaMontagne
Los Lobos
Lyle Lovett
Taj Mahal
Rebecca Martin
Buddy & Julie Miller
Butch Morris
Van Morrison
Paul Motian
David Murray
Ozomatli
Leon Parker
Dan Penn
Madeleine Peyroux
Liz Phair
Kelly Joe Phelps
Pink Martini
Odean Pope
Chris Potter
Bonnie Raitt
Carrie Rodriguez/Chip Taylor
Patti Smith
Luciana Souza
Tomasz Stanko
Los Super Seven
Greg Trooper
Uncle Tupelo
Son Volt
Tom Waits
Gillian Welch
Randy Weston
Chris Whitley
Wilco
Lucinda Williams

Cassandra Wilson

Reggie Workman

World Saxophone Quartet

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

"Because, you know, the
photographs . . . are more a question
than a reply." - Sebastiao Salgado

"A picture can be an answer as well
as a question but if you can't answer
your question try to question your
question. There are clever questions
and stupid answers as well as stupid
questions and clever answers. There
can be questions without answers
but no answers without questions." -
Ernst Haas

PATRONIZE INDEPENDENT
PURVEYORS OF BOOKS & MUSIC -
HELP MAINTAIN OUR INTELLECTUAL
& CULTURAL ECOLOGY - NEARLY
ALL THESE PLACES TAKE ORDERS
ONLINE

[The Bop Shop \(Rochester\)](#)

[City Lights \(San Francisco\)](#)

[Downtown Music Gallery \(NYC\)](#)

[Forced Exposure \(Boston\)](#)

[Harvard Book Store \(Cambridge\)](#)

[Jazz Record Mart \(Chicago\)](#)

[Labyrinth Books \(NYC\)](#)

[Seminary Coop Bookstore \(Chicago\)](#)

[Shaman Drum Bookshop \(Ann
Arbor\)](#)

COALITION OF INDEPENDENT
MUSIC STORES

From The Guardian - 20 of the Best

Independent Record Shops in
Britain (10/06)

Indie Jazz

SMALL PRESS DISTRIBUTION

Book Sense

"We may distinguish between two types of imaginative process: the one starts with the word and arrives at the visual image and the one starts with the visual image and arrives at its verbal expression." - Italo Calvino

"There is something embarrassing in ... the way in which, ... turning suffering into images, harsh and uncompromising though they are, ... wounds the shame we feel in the presence of the victims. For these victims are used to create something, works of art, that are thrown to the consumption of a world which destroyed them. The so-called artistic representation of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle-butts contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it. The moral of this art, not to forget for a single instant, slithers into the abyss of its opposite. The aesthetic principle of stylization ... makes an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror removed. This alone does an injustice to the victims; yet no art which tried to evade them could confront the claims of justice." - T.W. Adorno

COOL DESIGNS AND OTHER THINGS
(MORE TO FOLLOW)

Alchemy Architects Design Wee
Houses (Minnesota, etc.)

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