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AFTERIMAGE PROVIDES A FORUM FOR THE DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS OF PHOTOGRAPHY, INDEPENDENT FILM AND VIDEO, ALTERNATIVE PUBLISHING, MULTI-MEDIA, AND RELATED FIELDS.

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We frequently come to know archives through the weight of their sheer number in mass, which quantifies and qualifies their origins, ability, and optimizes future interpretation. These cumulative possibilities normally make up an archive's "story." Many archival reclamation projects are born upon telling this story such as the 2006 DVD collection and book, Elec O~c Edwardians: The Story of the Mitchell & Kenyon Collection), but the archivist that is the focus of this essay teaches a number of pictures that defy regular narratives. The Joseph Selle Collection at the Visual Studies Workshop, with over one million negatives of street vendor photographs, defies regular narration through its sheer magnitude of numbers and invites speculation about a different category of archive: the dual act of storytelling and counting.

This hybrid status may lie beyond the types of picture archives and their corresponding patrons evocatively proposed by the late historian and archivist Paul Vanderbilt. Responsible for modernizing major picture repositories such as the Picture Division of the Library of Congress, Vanderbilt opened the eyes of a new generation of historians and picture researchers to the interpretative possibilities of these resources. Vanderbilt listed four principal types of collections: 1) trade agencies; 2) working files of particular serial publications or promotional agents; 3) critical collections of outstanding specimens for historians and picture researchers to the interpretive possibilities of major picture repositories such as the Picture Division of the Library of Congress; and 4) repositories devoted to preservation as such. This last category offered the most far-reaching possibilities for Vanderbilt as they were based on the contingencies of future development.

These future contingencies invited the use of archives as an exploration rather than the routine selection of illustrations to accompany prescribed arguments. To encourage an open-ended, imaginative use of pictures, Vanderbilt worked out a long-term practice of forming combinations of images, usually in pairs, that were unrelated to each other by the usual archival categories of photographer, time period, geographic location, genre, and subject matter. Escaping the regulation of narrow control vocabularies, the pairings would reveal an unexpected line of interpretation and lead to larger associations among patterns of imagery and ideas. Vanderbilt put this theory into practice over many of his career by posting combinations of unrelated pictures. These informal, reading-room "exhibitions" stimulated the imagination and encouraged conversations with like-minded visual researchers.

The key to these stimulating possibilities was the large number of pictures associated with this final type of image repository, posing unexpected and revealing juxtapositions and linkages. Another insightful historian and picture researcher, David Nye, drew on this potential with the photographic archive of General Electric. Here, Nye found a system of relationships between constituent elements of the corporation and its ideology that were only visible in the archive taken as a whole. Pictures directed toward consumers and management interacted with those made for workers and the engineers. Various facets of the corporation only reveal themselves when the archive is apprehended systematically and within the current of many images rather than the single outstanding one.

Similarly, the key to unlocking the value of the Selle Collection lies in the way rather than the size, but this collection carries a multitude of stories apart from Vanderbilt's institutional "preservation archive" or Nye's corporate "image world." The one million plus images in the Selle collection are the product of a specialized small business in San Francisco, Fox Movie Flash, engaged in the bygone pictorial practice of street vendor photography. As such, the plethora of pictures belong to one extending art, as diverse as they may be, under that type. Since the pictures were all taken with a specially modified motion picture camera and stored on 100-foot rolls, the standard half-frame negatives are readily digitized using standard motion picture, post-production scanning equipment. This capacity for digitization animates much of the potential of this new type of archive and made possible the exploratory projects that created with the Selle Collection at the Visual Studies Workshop (VSW, publisher of Afterimage) in Rochester, New York.

My purpose with this article is to recount these projects—both in the sense of telling the story of and mapping the impact of such works and the digitization of images—and to speculate on further project possibilities with special archives of this kind. The projects are Andy Eskind's groundbreaking initial work with the collection that culminated the basis for David Mount's video (2007), and Elizabeth Tomasson's artist's book, Ten of Us Examine (2007). Each artist worked with the same set of images (about 18,000 digital images scanned as a pilot project). While each work bears its separate identity and provocative meanings, they share an overarching ambition "to verge on something else" that stems from the intractability of very large numbers. There is an insubstantial and questioning that causes each artist/researcher to direct their project and seek meanings outside of regular boundaries. These experimental projects point out that archives of very large numbers operate as a kind of new medium—an entirely different kind—causing archival work to "verge" on boundary-crossing genre hybrid "artistic acts."

LEAVING THE GROUNDWORK

As mentioned, if there is a story here to recount at all, it is thanks to Eskind's rediscovery of the collection in the spring and summer of 2003. Until then, there was little documentation of the collection: it scarcely had a name (the "Selle Collection") is still somewhat provisioned. With over thirty years experience piecing together image datasets at the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York, Eskind quickly saw the possibilities. He immediately set to work to recount the collection (in both senses) and to find out what it consisted of and where it came from. The numerical counting part was easy; just a matter of multiplying the 1,500 frames on each 100-foot roll by the number of rolls in each drawer, multiplied again by the number of drawers (1,500 images x 100 rolls x 7 drawers = 1,050,000 images total). If this calculation is not exact, even a casual survey of the collection would indicate that we are dealing with a haul of a lot of images here.

Learning the history of the collection was trickier and started from anecdotes about its origins provided to Eskind by the former coordinator of the VSW Research Center, William S. Johnson, and the founder and former director of VSW, Nadean Lyons...
Easily interesting was the information that was discovered within the routine of a single image. The work contains certain commercial markings, though an exact chronological sequence of the images and titles is still elusive. Beyond the interpretation of frame numbers and markings, there were attempts to "crack the code" of the material frame sizes and print-quality irregularities around the negative edge and the potentially matching frame of the film gate. Eskind invited a retired engineer from Kodak, who had worked on the famous Zapruder films of the Kennedy assassination case, to consult on the investigation. Eskind also engaged other experts through "Have your ears tuned to listen for useful information within the pictures themselves. For example, film buffs found they could date pictures to the month by discerning in the background the title of shows on the theater marquees. But as revealing as such embedded details might have been, the "collective view" enabled by the digitization of the images has generated even more avenues of interest.

As mentioned, Eskind's eye was immediately struck by the digitization-ready disposition of the 35mm film that could be run through a standard high-resolution scanner. He received funding from the late Irv Shankman of St. Louis that enabled him to send twelve rolls to a standard high-resolution scanner. He received funding from the late Irv Shankman of St. Louis that enabled him to send twelve rolls to

His work culminates in the first public exhibition at the Richard L. Nelson Gallery at the University of California, Davis, organized by Eskind and curator Perry Pritikin. Titled "Joseph Selle: Hot Movie Flash: Mid Century Street Vendor Photography," the exhibition assembled and expanded the connections between varying uses and interpretations of this infrequent material. On one hand, the show opened a window on the collection with a unique view of vernacular visual history. Like a time machine it summoned fleeting moments of San Francisco street life in a single instant. The visual access to discrete events was captivating. Collectively, the show offered a compressed view of the changing times of urban life through changing fashions and guises of the decades following World War II, suggesting questions about the social functions of the street itself and its operators. Were Selle and his associate photographers like the "public characters" defined by anthropologist Jaques Jacobs as regulators of the street who in various ways both stabilize street life and also direct it? Such questions of social position, and their implications for the Selle Collection's story. On the other hand, the show grappled with the aesthetic similarities between the Hot Movie Flash images and the modern street photography of Walker Evans, Leed Friedlander, Garry Winogrand, and others. Both Eskind and Pritikin eloquently pinpointed their attention to the material through three separate conversations on their own aesthetic responses and curatorial decisions in view of other options for apprehending the archive as visual culture.

Both astronomers, the underlying reality of large numbers disturbed the matter and prevented the collection from settling into an established pattern of use and interpretations as social history or aesthetic experience. From the outset, Eskind's questions and sense of attention resolved around the numbers involved. "How long does it take to look at a million photographs? Is it even possible?" As if trying to fathom such numbers, he goes on to speculate on the number of images we are exposed to each day in a multimedia society (He mentions 1,500 image today, which is extremely credible given the fact that 2,700 photographs are taken every second worldwide), though an exact chronological sequence of the images and titles is still elusive. Beyond the interpretation of frame numbers and markings, there were attempts to "crack the code" of the material frame sizes and print-quality irregularities around the negative edge and the potentially matching frame of the film gate. Eskind invited a retired engineer from Kodak, who had worked on the famous Zapruder films of the Kennedy assassination case, to consult on the investigation. Eskind also engaged other experts through "Have your ears tuned to listen for useful information within the pictures themselves. For example, film buffs found they could date pictures to the month by discerning in the background the title of shows on the theater marquees. But as revealing as such embedded details might have been, the "collective view" enabled by the digitization of the images has generated even more avenues of interest.

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Eskind pushes this meditation on numbers with the power of large numbers seems to be the very element of fascinating how did the connected interest and drive the inquiry to other levels of cultural and aesthetic meaning.

Setting the large numbers as some kind of unbound possibility space, Eskind wondered what other "imagined points of interest" might be discerned in this "variable documentary record" and how other connections could be generated by the data. Eskind, interested in the "collective view" enabled by the digitization of the images has generated even more avenues of interest.

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Tonnard was introduced to the collection by Mount. After noting in the dilemma of working with a collection of this size, she evolved her own unique research methods and project ideas. Where Eckerd and Adele searched mental selections in a self-selected sifting of the work, Tonnard, in a radical move, included every digitized frame and thrust the process of selection upon the viewer, forcing conversations between perceptual cinema and internal memory. In this recent context, Tonnard introduces a principle of selection, based on type, that informs every fact of an artist's book hunt on resurrecting the capacity of the collection to harbor one of the most fascinating figures of modernity, the double.

The form of the work also complements the previous crises, emerging from exhibition to media to book. Materially, the book is straightforwardly printed and designed as a paperback printed by LaLa of over 400 pages of reproduced frames from the digitized aspect of the Selle collection. The text portions, such as the book's introduction and acknowledgments, are also conventional except for the layout of the poems, "Les Sept Viellards," by Charles Baudelaire, where the words are broken apart, set, and rotated progressively at an angle below each photograph. Flipping the pages causes the words to pirouette as the poem reads sequentially from left to back on the recto and, on the verso, from back to front. Whichever way, the book is a deceptively simple tale of the double, necessitated in number and maintaining boundaries through inclusion and exclusion.

The double possesses both a stability connected to binary pairings and oppositions, yet in view of the fluid conditions of the street, they appear unstable and desired for disruption either by breaking apart or coalescing into the double. Curiously, Canetti never examines the double in his exhaustive study of the psychological forms and variations of the crowd. Perhaps there is no concept for him of the Crystal-Crystal, which, defined as small, rigid groups of men that never to perceive crowds, him at a refractive starting point and multiply. In this more open sense of crystallization, Two of Us cite the double, not the individual, as the core representing agent of the vagaries of modern street life.

The pain on the street becomes then just as much agents of division, as they do units of social togetherness. A number of the Selle images selected by Tonnard comprise a catalog of internal variations that signal apparent variation from that unison. A subtle listing of disturbing elements would include an odd character lurking in the background behind the couple; a compelling "gap" space in between, highlighting the separation of figures; an accidental alignment of arms or legs, mismatched clothes; a misaligned figure. These disturbing details serve to haunt the more reassuring signs of companionship and are charged with a kind of ambiguity that resembles Freud's insight to explain in his essay on the "uncanny." Tonnard makes aware observations about this much-discussed idea as well as other important concepts about the impact of modernity on the psyche from each cultural context and are charged with a kind of ambiguity that resembles Freud's insight to explain in his essay on the "uncanny." Tonnard makes aware observations about this much-discussed idea as well as other important concepts about the impact of modernity on the psyche from each cultural context and are charged with a kind of ambiguity that resembles Freud's insight to explain in his essay on the "uncanny."

Mathematics is especially relevant in resonating with this task of an archive if we follow the mathematician and novelist Rudy Rucker's exploration of the much-discussed idea of "two" in the context of the double as a condensed kind of time loop. The pages when read from front to back on the recto and, on the verso, from back to front. Whichever way, the book is a deceptively simple tale of the double, necessitated in number and maintaining boundaries through inclusion and exclusion.

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assimilated nothing less than the “all” that bordered on the infinite around the elusive “one” within the proverbial haystack. Mount of an arctfive in new way. For Eskind and Pritikin, the story turned In so doing, each artist had to learn to count and recount the story of visual literature that caused time to stand still in a repetitive inverted the struggle with selection from the outside to the internal running with the numbers, arrived at a form of proto-cinema that on the aesthetics of modernist street photography. David Mount, in Pritikin’s exhibition drew from the Selle collection as a storehouse under the force of huge numbers of images. Andy Eskind and Renny hybird forms while positions, perceptions, and interpretations wobble that encounters with very large picture collections give rise to special CONCLUSION: FUTURE PROJECTS of this hybrid textuality in repetition, the effects of the archive itself wonders who could be their author.” She goes on to locate the agent between the book, images, and the modern world in declaring, on city streets. Tonnard explicitly encourages this textual interchange real world, the textuality carries over to its subject matter: doubles The look and feel of a novel encourages one to “read” the pictures as with standard paperback cover, perfect binding, bonded paper, and, at about four hundred pages—all common features for a literary work. The book and feel of a novel encourages one to “read” the pictures as a text. And given the individual power of photography to link to the world, the textuality carries over to its subject matter: doubles city streets. Tonnard explicitly encourages this textual interchange between the book, images, and the modern world in declaring, “Transformed by photography, the streets have become a text. One wonders who could be their author.” She goes on to locate the agent of this hybrid textuality in repetition, the effects of the archive itself operating at a large scale of numbers. The message is scattered across the huge archive but poses penetrating questions about how literature can express the multiplicity of visual culture. The implied answer is that literature must itself arrive at a functional hybridity in order to interface with the modern conditions of visual culture and media.