

SURREAL STREET PHOTOGRAPHS

1000

VOLUME 1 - B&W

2015-2020

5 YEARS SCP

TEXT AND COVER BY **MICHAEL MOSCHOLIOS**

THE 5 LAST YEARS IN SURREALIST STREET PHOTOGRAPHY

BY THE “UNKNOWN SOLDIER”

There are so many talented photographers in the world nowadays. And the greatest thing of all is that we can discover their work through the globalisation of media channels and of social networks.

This book does not have the ambition to cover all of them. However, it contains 100 contemporary images by artists who might never had the means or the social support to become acclaimed. The democratic character of the Internet may not be that democratic after all.

That is why the book is focusing on the photographs which have been courageously shared by the authors in our community of Street Core Photography (SCP) in the last 5 years.

***“Photography is a peculiar state of mind. After many years of quest, people get ‘healed’, they stop photographing only to come back after a while.*”**

Others simply cannot take the burden and they stop. Most of them stay anonymous, as do their subjects, as do their dreams.

Some just create a picture and they are gone. Others seek obsessively the body of work that will set them free.

These are photographers that come and go in SCP, they come and go in photography, they come and go in life . . .

Michail Jan21

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IVAN MARANOV (BG)

The first striking detail is the absence of humanity and at the same time the mark of time upon it. In this contradiction is added up the ambiguity of the message of the human made ad.

The contradiction remains unresolved because our attention is immediately absorbed by the metaphor of nature (tree branch) completing and fixing what people may have irremediably damaged (aged hand). Did the author have the time to reflect and compose thoroughly his symbolism?. Neither this question needs to be answered.

The connection through a familiar sadness is immediate. It also captures our interest for a long time, at least long enough to admire the textures and the clear lines (stairs, building, ad frame), peaceful but unease at the same time. This way an unstable equilibrium is reached and conveys the full strength of the image.

In memory of Ivan, a talented Bulgarian street thinker and wanderer.



© IVAN MARANOV

RAFAEL IANOS (RO)

Francesca Woodman in "On being an angel" explores, in a surrealist manner, the strong feelings that a woman body creates to the viewer. At the same time the ambiguity, necessary to burn onto the viewers memory, is omnipresent. What does it take to become an angel?

Rafael knows that nothing needs to be said. It takes no words, it takes no projects or conceptual series of pictures. It takes just one picture! And it takes to feel and recognise the moment when this picture appears. That is all. And that is huge.

I am sure that when Rafael visualised his photograph he had the same revelation: Our (photographic) existence is not fragmentary but cumulative. Everything rushes in a tiny frame.. The visual trail when we finally release the shutter is: sensibility, emotion, impulse, awareness.

Then it becomes absence. Until we meet again with the framed "reality". Which, as someone said, is never the one we have imagined. It is either worse or better.

Let's embrace here a moment of a better reality, of a hopeful humanity.



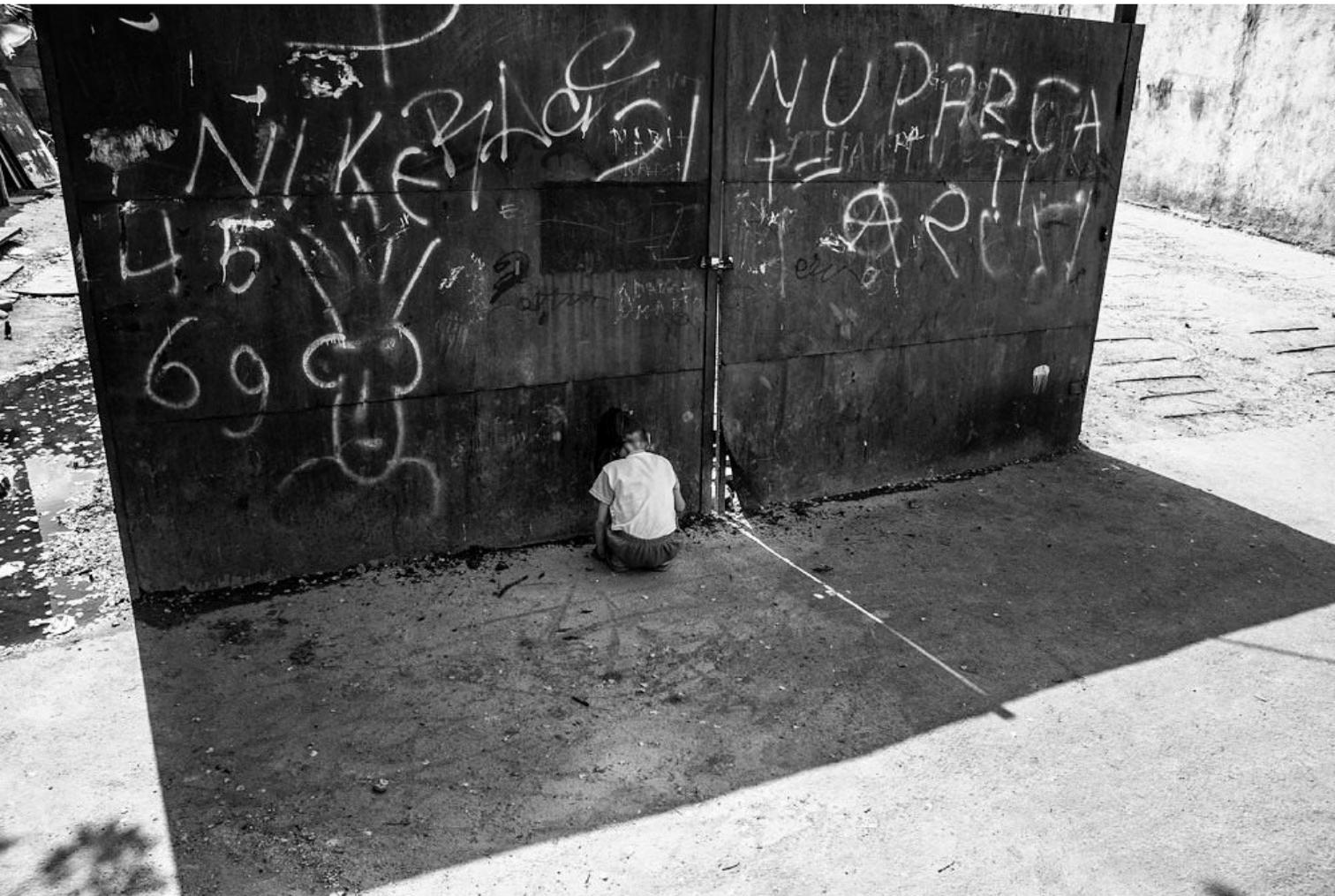
© RAFAEL IANOS

Surely many of the viewers are wondering why we have not included composition and geometry in the qualities of a street core photography. It may seem that the minimalistic approach is privileged. Well, it is not. We would not ever exclude an image because of its harmonious geometries. But the image will be excluded by itself if the only elements it bears, are the fine lines and shapes.

Having said that, we are presenting here an image where the impact of geometry is powerful and it is naturally our main point of entry into the frame. Gracefully, the author know that his fine framing, the perfect use of leading lines, the combination of shapes, are simply not enough. The geometry is serving just as a theatrical stage for the event to take place.

In this B&W picture, there is an ingenious use of the shadow to create a second gigantic surface for what could be a wall or a box. The metallic texture of this shadow accentuates the feeling that in fact the surfaces of protection can easily be these of a prison (here the colour would destroy the effect because colour is never without information. A blue sky will always be a sky while a white space on the upper part of the frame can be anything.

The partial information around the main theme (rain water, wooden boards, concrete walls, leaves) are only adding to the ambiguity and not resolving it.



Whether the graffiti on the metallic wall makes any sense or not, we couldn't care less. The humanity of this "well composed abstraction" (a contradiction in the term itself as you can see) is served perfectly by the child's solitary (in)activity.

There are so many conflicts in this image and we are far from being exhaustive.

The perfect disequilibrium, a majestic moment of doubt!

© RAFAEL IANOS

Some painters would have never been able to freeze a dog's gesture in order to paint it. Some others would have taken away the "odd" objects in order to have a "clean" scene.

The author of this surrealist portrait was thrilled and grateful for this very presence of unrelated objects. Try to decompose this picture by subtracting one by one the "intrusive" elements. You will see that each subtraction is reducing the power and the symbolism of the image.

And there are so many contradictions treated here through the magical transposition of photography. The grass which may not be green and not even a grass. Is this the garbage backyard of a cinematographic studio or the atrium of an eccentric human being? Do we read the despair of an old lady or the decency of a lost existence?

A photograph! So easy and simple to create it by just a click of the shutter, but so difficult to perceive it through the inner vision of each artist.



The moment we are leaving the frame (this fragment of the world as cut by the artist) we have not the slightest clue of what kind of reasons led him to recognise the value of a couch, a trolley and some flip-chart stands. We are only glad that the intrigue continues ad infinitum.

The absolute mystery, the "secret of a secret" applied with virtuosity.

The more I approach to see the details the less I learn about the picture. No When, no What, no Where is revealed or guessed. Not to mention the Why (the reason behind capturing this particular time and space slice).

I can decode some parts but some others remain at the sphere of a nightmarish abstraction.

The geometry has a haunting rhythm as does the ghostly figure below, transparent, fused within the texture, already a shadow itself and still capable to be reflected on the wall.

The light is in pieces. Broken, bounced, weakened for a moment and then strong again.

The greys are escaping any formal balance and the shapes are denying to stay regular. The right half of the frame is so empty and so full at the same time, making it the only refuge for this extreme visual uneasiness.



All and all I am spending a long time in front of Rafael's picture and that's the first sign of a successful image. The second sign is that, as I leave the picture behind me, I become aware that the image won't leave me for a long time.

© RAFAEL IANOS

VASILEIOS GIANNOUSIS (GR)

One of the big challenges of a mechanical process, like the photographic replication of reality, is to transcend its own blessing and curse and present our material world in an immaterial manner. Where all is suspended and where all beliefs become doubts; where harmony is broken into pieces and where disturbing and intriguing are the ultimate components of the artistic endeavour.

Vasileios' Kouros is not standing, it is not made out of marble. It is formed by unstable elements in perpetual movement.

In the quest for the next moment and not the decisive one (the next frame), will this body be completed or will it fully disintegrate into water drops and thin air?



© VASILEIOS GIANNOUSIS

UDAI SINGH (IN)

Rudolf Arnheim in one of his papers on the “Nature of Photography” mentions “The Balcony”, a play by Jean Genet.

I have browsed it quickly and it is amazing how in a couple of lines of a play mostly centred on the appropriation of revolutions, we may find the answer to some recurrent questions in photography.

After a staged photographic session of bishops, generals and judges (what a mix!) the Queen is informed:

THE ENVOY: *It's a true image, born of a false spectacle.*

FIRST PHOTOGRAPHER *(cynically): That's common practice, your Majesty. When some rebels were captured, we paid a militiaman to bump off a chap I'd just sent to buy me a packet of cigarettes. The photo shows a rebel shot down while trying to escape.*

THE QUEEN: *Monstrous!*

THE ENVOY: *But have things ever happened otherwise? History was lived so that a glorious page might be written, and then read. It's reading that counts.*



In Udai's images it is the reading that counts. Moreover, he is always capable to suspend reality (my dear obsession). Somehow for us photographers, the whole life is lived in such a way as that a glorious photograph might be taken, and then viewed, read. What is wrong with us people?

© UDAI SINGH



© UDAI SINGH



© UDAI SINGH

ASHOK VERMA (AE)

The photographer is fascinated by the interaction and the myriads of juxtapositions between urban objects and inhabitants.

He creates numerous frames within busy city locations, in commercial buildings and with people fleeing incessantly "crime" scenes.

And then for a moment, he looks down and all the tension of the obstinate photographic endeavour, disappears on the sandy backdrop of a minimal yet disturbing composition.

These are the moments when the photographer *"takes a subject beyond just being a picture of something and let it float as an invention"* as S. Wagstaff would have said.



For a moment I was sure that the concrete blocks were beach cabins and the mutilated mannequin just a desperate nudist! Weren't you?

The subtle forgery of photography!

© ASHOK VERMA

DAVID MAR QUINTO (PH)

If surrealism is putting an umbrella on a sewing machine, then putting a car on high heels is as ingenious as it gets.

The fact is that David is creating fireworks. They last only for seconds but they have a great impact and, sometimes, we can get them with us.

This last part makes them memorable enough to survive the critique of the purists.

Some will say: they are "hotel lobby" artwork. But I would add "with a twist". Splitting the time in two (a motionless part and a moving part) is his favoured game. The moving part is so important for the author that we wonder if he wouldn't prefer cinema over photography.

We cannot deny the high technical qualities of his images and the fact that these long-exposure "snapshots" are the fruit of much patience and a keen eye.

Are you looking for more? I am not! I'd put oversized prints on my wall to remind me that still simple is beautiful and that simple is complex to conceive and even more complex to implement with precision.



Beautiful images with a neat content and an ideal form!

And another thing: Only the moment is private and David is going further than recording the facts of the moment. He is not an intruder, he is giving time to time. He must be one of the few photographers "accepted" by the crowds and not considered a disturbance invading their privacy.

© DAVID MAR QUINTO



© DAVID MAR QUINTO



© DAVID MAR QUINTO

PIOTR KUTOLOWSKI (PL)

Maybe it's the xmas wine but I see angels all around. And I keep venerating them even if probably this is just another mirage, another futility, another illusion.

Angels are messengers. Both of good and evil, and the author knows how to create the ambiguity of a fallen angel.

Good or evil, hope or despair, a promising beginning or an imminent divide . . . the choice is ours. There will be viewers who will choose to see the warm face against a cold window, the worried eyes waiting for words which arrive always a little too late. Some others will detect the dilemma of the woman/angel/messenger before sending her (phone) terminal message of yet another ungratified infatuation.

The confrontation of moods and worlds (running versus idling, rational versus dreaming, confidence versus uncertainty) is clear and omnipresent.



The present picture full of symbolism and deprived of context is so discreet and yet so appealing to our most primal emotions.

Who wants to be saviour or the ultimate protector? What should we do when an angel asks for a chance, a second chance, for patience and humility. All those virtues that only angels can provide.

© PIOTR KUTOLOWSKI

ELISA TOMASELLI (IT)

Colours of Rome

There is "Rosso Veneziano" and "Giallo Napolitano" and all the shades of a country blessed by a superb light. And then there is Rome.

"The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightening rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls." - Italo Calvino, Cities and Memory 3, Invisible Cities

Elisa was venerating Rome and captured the colour and the smell of a city bathing in clay's ochre. But most of all she captured the many moods of its inhabitants in a masterful way, worthy of Calvino's invisible city (it is no secret that all Italo's cities were in fact one).

Why then the B&W picture? Because, among other, in art photography we are looking for the ambiguous, the unstable, the doubt. Once a street loses its authoritative colours, there remains nothing but the glance, the gaze, the divine touch of the inhabitants.

Similarly to Rome's oscillating correlation between inhabitants, physical site and cultural context, Elisa here explored the instability of the connexion between viewer, visual narration and physical context.



And she was doing it in the most honest way, by dignifying her subjects with her attention. They were touched by pathos.

In memory of Elisa, a great loss of a giving artist, sharing much more than her inspirational images, suffering in silence, and offering us a freeing vision of a world that still holds together, that still has a chance. A chance that maybe nobody gave to her!

© ELISA TOMASELLI

KOUSHIK SINHA ROY (IN)

The contact sheet of a contact sheet

Robert Frank's "Trolley, New Orleans 1955" was indeed like a contact sheet. A notion that in the digital era has only an archival and historical use (if any). Frank's image was presenting many different frames, stories, emotions put together in a single shot. A political essay and statement on the American society of segregation.

Koushik's picture is the most successful among any conscious or subconscious replications of Frank's iconic picture I have ever seen.

In addition, it is more honest with no declarations, no opinions or judgments. Just observing without judging, dear to a particular eastern philosophy!

Only one more thing I have to add. Robert Frank's picture was a single shot! If we check out the 81 contact sheets from "The Americans" the Trolley was a single shot, exposure 16, on an ISO125 KODAK PLUS-X film!

And that shot was/is the favourite of hundreds of photographers, it made the cover of the book. It made Kerouac write about it.

And my haunting question is: Why on earth we cannot do such pictures anymore? Is it because triggering the shutter means nothing in terms of cost and it won't consume another exposure of the once precious film roll? Is it because no one waits anymore for the meaningful moment to shoot?

Whatever the reason, I think it is time to have every picture accompanied by its subsequent and preceding shots. I need to see what was there before and after. I need a contact sheet. And I need to see why, with all this unbelievable digital gear, we are unable to make a difference, an icon, a meaningful image.

I am taking also the liberty to declare us victims of a technology that has taken over our visual sensibility and it just records randomly and accidentally.





© KOUSHIK SINHA ROY

TRACING BACK THE ART TRAIL

The photographers' confrontation with their surrounding world is a pretty precarious state of mind. They instantly sketch fortuitous movements and all-changing expressions and faces.

But even more delicate is the reaction to the result of their work appearing before their eyes. They are captivated by the surprising impact of the placement of the elements but should they correct the overexposed hand, the blotted blacks, the technical imperfections? They should not finally touch it, not a thing. Because when mojo appears better step back and accept it as it is.

In Koushik's street portrait we find a dream-world (rather nightmarish) and a surreal approach. The two girls, in a majestic capture of empty glazes and uncanny gestures, seem ghosts of Alice in the wonderland.

But mainly we find the art trail and how old mastery is populating every new emerging talent: From Koushik portraits back to Brandt's nudes, the latter inspired by the derivative photography of Man Ray, back to Brandt's luminous and ominous frames, influenced, in their turn, by the Citizen Kane's low-angles.



© KOUSHIK SINHA ROY

LEONTINA CHIRICIOIU (RO)

Overexposed figures have been used more and more in the recent years in street photography. It is true that they confer an unearthly mood in the ordinary candid pictures. But as sole element, the overexposed subject fades out rapidly if not complemented by other meaningful elements and mostly by a story.

In the present picture the faceless overexposed man/boy serves perfectly its role, that is to attract attention together with the 2 bright squares and the vertical luminous lines on the wall. The whole background scene becomes this way unbearably stable and motionless, almost petrified, elevated to sculpture.

But exactly this elevation makes it the most suitable stage to host the dreams of the girl in the foreground. Detached spatially, looking down, she nevertheless feels the existence of what appears to be the creature of her imagination.

Too young to make her wishes come true, old enough to know what makes her resonate, she is consequently bound to a mere inception, raising concrete pillars and wooden walls, trying to give a face to her dream, and failing once more.



There is a third presence which alleviates the theatrical rigidity and gives a touch of spontaneity in an otherwise technically perfect frame. The understatement of the author is cried out loud: "This is not an accidental image, but you are witnessing another accidental life. Now it is brought to you, so bear with it."

When does the photographer "see" her/his picture? I am sure long before s(he) ever had a camera!

© LEONTINA CHIRICIOIU

TZEN XING (USA)

We are spending so much time to talk about depth of field and how to give to a 2-dimensional photograph a sense of 3-dimensions.

We are using shadows and reflections in the quest for abstraction. We experiment with volumes and colours, with staged subjects, with peculiar juxtapositions looking for the surrealist mood.

And all of the sudden here comes the author of the present picture with a flat wall, with no manipulations or mannerisms, with a piece of his reality, cut as little as it takes, no more no less, to surprise us, to *punch* our visual stimuli (R, Barthes' punctum). She is transmitting her message, full of questions, on the enigma of humanity and the absence of it.

Only after we have been out of the obscure self questioning on how is it possible this earth to treat its children so differently, how the unfairness is so visible yet so invisible when we choose to close our eyes . . . only after that, we might check the composition of the present picture. And, not to our surprise, everything is there. The haunting, uneven, crossing lines, the obsessively repeated patterns of the grids, the open wounds in the concrete, the desperate grip of the child on the window.

Once again the sequence is the following (talent, analysis, rules) and not the other way round.



“The rules of composition do not have the slightest value for the artist/photographer. Her/his work is the fruit of talent, intelligence and hard work. Through these, the artist is led to a number of solutions. The critics and the teachers are then “studying” these solutions and compare them (in a Procrustic manner) against artificial parameters.

© TZEN XING

MANOLIS NEGRIS (GR)

Cannot take out of my mind the uneasiness that many friends of mine live at this very moment.

That is why I can use any amount of hope this world can spare.

But how a dividing wall (any wall) and some steel bars (a pure Orwellian scene) can be a source of hope?

I can suppose that the location is at the remains of the Berlin wall, but I do not really need to know, because the contextual information does not diminish the strength of the multiple and punchy messages this frame irradiates.

The probably highly touristic venue, through the authors vision, acquires a historical, moral and existential hypostasis.

I can see in this picture the people having lived behind the wall, the ones having tried to break through, the ones who hammered it down, I can feel the lost and new hopes, the lost and new lives.

The details are, a hole in the wall, a man walking by, sober buildings, a cracked texture on the wall's surface.



But it is the whole of the image which makes the difference. The subdivision operated by the natural lines (bars, cylindrical stones, windows and roof) guides us through contradictory perceptions. Freedom/captivity, despair/hope, anger/peace.

All the above coupled with a sublime and a captivating sharpness (which is not always a bourgeois concept).

© MANOLIS NEGRIS

MIHAI TANASE (RO)

What defines an old picture? The scenery, the props, the time stamp?

If we go beyond the sophism that all pictures are old since they are moments of time past, then we may consider that it is the level of empathy conveyed by the photographer, in relation with his/her subject and setting, which defines the nostalgic impact of a picture.

Here we cannot fail to connect both with the portrayed man and with the photographer as they approach, each one from their own side of the lens, the photographic process, honestly, directly and with compassion.

Is the man in his workshop tired, fed up, impatient to get through all this, but he still cares for the photographer?

Is the photographer in a hurry to freeze the gesture of the hands, the body position, the indecipherable expression, so that he doesn't care for the reflexion on the glasses, but he still cares for the craftsman?

Either ways, this is highly thoughtful photography.



© MIHAI TANASE

STELA PATRULESCU (RO)

Helen Levitt's first subjects were the chalk paintings on the sidewalks and the walls of New York and the kids who made them.

Sometimes the kids were gone . . .

*"Perhaps the world that these pictures document never existed at all, except in the private vision of Helen Levitt, whose sense of the truth discovered those thin slices of fact that, laid together, create fantasy."
(Looking at Photographs - by John Szarkowski)*

Nevertheless, a human presence is always searched in a photograph no matter which are the obstacles.

In Stela's picture this search is haunting but liberating at the same time. The children have fled, but the pattern of their spell remains.

And at this exact moment these captures go beyond the docu-art of Levitt's children.

We examine closely the distorted (destroyed) reality of yet another post-communist (post-industrial) suburban fabrication.



And the temporal hallucination offered by photography takes its full meaning: In the Balkans where we are forced to witness the longest transition ever, where the nostalgic innocence meets with, and resists to the embellishment of the quotidian.

An undeclared resistance to off-the-rack lives and to shopping-Mall contained consciousness.

© STELA PATRULESCU

THE PULITZER PRIZE

I have many times repeated that it is a thin line between "cheap cheat" and genuine expression.

In order to see a picture thoughtfully we have to be able to communicate with the same language. Usually we connect if we understand the message or if the picture is appealing to our memories.

Pictures of human suffering have an immediate impact because we all have experienced pain. Photographers that are aware of this are often trying in an aggressive or more subtle way to boost such feelings.

This year's (2016) Pulitzer prizes and other prestigious awards were given to pictures "conveying" the Syrian refugees suffering.

It is up to you to judge whether those pictures are more powerful than Stela's continuous revisiting of a hard reality "au quotidien".

Let's give our award to a struggling father day in-day out, wherever he finds himself, way longer than a couple of months.



© STELA PATRULESCU

AESTHETICS AND ANAESTHETICS

Why two pictures? One is not enough to stand alone? Mind you, this is not a diptych, these 2 pictures are not here to provide support one to another.

They're two, simply because I want to double your pleasure and attention for this photographic expression residing at the very profound of Stela Patrulescu.

Why do I get so absolute and intimate (some would think) about this? Because otherwise I cannot explain the continuous, almost nightmarish, envy I feel in front of the clear and direct photographic compositions (or decompositions) of Stela's reality, which is also ours, mine, but I am too blind to see.

And if I wanted to turn around the question back to my overfed ego, I would have asked: why am I so blind? But, for just this time, I will stop talking about me, and return to Stela's work.



© STELA PATRULESCU

If narration is one of the important ingredients of meaningful photography, then the short stories created instantly by Stela are photography's response to the neorealist cinema of nowadays, as well as to the socialist realism of the seventies, which both needed very long scenes to convey a message of doubtful impact. Aesthetic overdose leading to anaesthesia. Two or even three hours of mute film rolling to arrive from the gun to the rose, from the subhuman chaos to the ruler's order. Movie directors are very close to dictating (reading on our behalf) after all.

Just switch on the antonyms, the opposite notions, of the above and you will have the honest, unforced and poetic revelation of the eternal moments created by Stela: her version of a surrounding world which evolves too fast to be understood and to create empathy. Her still images do exactly that: they dilate time for us to be able to overcome our handicap of visual anaesthesia (even blindness in my case) and to empathise with a depleted action, a low-adrenaline universe which will not make it to the news but it will make our days.



© STELA PATRULESCU

RAVI SHARMA (IN)

Dried plants and alive ones at the same time. Dried human beings and alive at the same time.

Uncertainty in our feelings: anguish, pity, joy? Uncertainty in our perception of reality: Man, woman, mess, order?

And the thorny plants? We usually avoid them! (S)he can't be eating, can (s)he?

The image captured us far long with these questions. Questions that would remain unanswered if we were not in the process of a dialectic approach, where the artist can state if he achieved the result randomly, intuitively or deliberately.

Ravi Sharma: " Everyday when I pass from this house I see her, she is nearly 90 years old. What makes me surprise is that in this age she is able to sit in the above posture to clean her teeth (she is not having a single) with a neem stick. I intentionally put the thorny bush in the fore ground depicting her bitter memories in life."



This human portrait has the power of the contradiction, the elegance of a contrasted and well balanced B&W, and the symbolism of an unspoken universal truth: We follow our obsessions to ease our fears, we fight death with immortalisation. We are detaching from a cruel reality by getting behind a viewfinder.

We, the photographers are fugitives and persecutors at the same time. But then again, who isn't?

© RAVI SHARMA

RODERICK TAN (PH)

A Dingo? An Askal? It doesn't really matter.

What really matters is the fact that the desperate figure of street dogs is haunting us, as if taking pictures of them would pay back some of the moral debt and the affective deficit we owe them.

No such a thing! We continue to be in an ever growing obligation since they are always around to break the inhumane continuum of soulless cities and of devastated country sides. Some of the best pictures in the history of photography are "using" their melancholic presence.

Josef Koudelka, Daido Moriyama, Garry Winogrand . . . The list of surprising, captivating and suggestive pictures is endless.

The result of our love and hate (or rather ignorance) relation with the stray dogs is obsessively making the photographers to react instinctively in their presence. And when the scenery is as symbolic as the present one, the impact on the viewer is primary and immediate. Our worst fears and guilts revealed.

We will never be able to give them enough! So start today, see them, make contact and give them a chance, at least as big as the one they are giving to us!



It may sound like a cheap "animal lover" fake discourse, but whatever this is, the photographer was there to make it happen and convey the message to his viewers. And since I am sure that there will be many to doubt the qualities of the photograph, please observe the excellent figure-to-ground, the pseudo-peaceful curves of the electric wires, the cubic patterns breaking up to the absolute cross, the diverging leading lines of the gazes of "Christ and the Dog". Sometimes a title is inevitable!

© RODERICK TAN

ARTURO MARQUES TOCA (ES)

Arturo calls this photograph 'Metro of Madrid'. I call it the inevitable.

Inevitably we will carry Moriyama and d'Agata with us for many years.

Inevitably the more we grow in photography the less the instruments will help us. And inevitably time will betray us.

Inevitably street core photography is a child's dream. It starts with some broken toys, and when asleep, everything comes to life to become the worst of nightmares. And inevitably the broken toys will quickly give place to broken existences.

But, screaming masks instead of faces, photograms and movie stills instead of decisive shutter releases, phantomatic grain instead of silky realities, phantasmal crops instead of fully framed captures, are they enough in order for them to be more than a curator's refuge, a judge's safe room?



Inevitably a psychologic portrait as the present one will talk the same language with most of the viewers who are unable of separating an objective reality from the one formed by own desires and fears, who are unable to repeal narcissism.

"The fact that the majority of people share certain ideas and feelings does not prove the validity of these ideas and feelings. Consensual validation as such has no bearing on reason or mental health." Fromm

© ARTURO MARQUES TOCA

ATENEO STA INES (PH)

The recipe for "fast food" street photography is allegedly the juxtaposition of human body parts in the foreground and some unrelated objects in the background.

As all stereotypes this one also has its bright examples . . . of exception.

It all depends on how these above elements are placed within the frame, on the angle, on the abstraction operated. The result, the final frame, is the best and only proof of the idea that stereotypes, rules and recipes are invented only to justify the existence of critics and teachers.

The present image is using the absence of face expressions to direct the viewer's attention to the fluidity of the curves (whether they are made in concrete or in human flesh). You will notice that there is not a single straight line in the whole frame.

Exceptionally we will mention the geometric shapes and patterns that are obsessively created by the author using the tubes, the ball stripes imitating the fingers, the triangles of the open feet.



Grace is the message, the intent and the impact of the picture and a grace made from poor ingredients as it should be. Humble and poor elements are combined in a glorious way to create a powerful image overflowing with optimism.

Take the shot boy. It's a 3-pointer!

© ATENEO STA INES

BERNARD GRABNER (AT)

Still life! Is this street photography? Once again I have the same answer to this repetitive question. Who cares? The objective is to have a powerful photograph.

Nevertheless, in order to reply to the purists, yes, the absence, the ghost of humanity, is also street core photography. The relics, the marks, the devastation that the human beings leave behind are part of them.

And the present image does exactly this. It testifies the absence of humanity with a scream of despair. Initially I wanted to see more of the context around the picture, but then I guessed that it would have weakened the impact of the clear message. We cannot fail to underline the masterful use of bright and dark areas.

It's true, this image is not ambiguous. The questions it raises are not inherent to it but only indirect. It's a statement against the unsolicited violence and the urban aggression.

It can definitely be used for social campaigns but it has at the same time a hidden melancholy albeit the marks of violence. It has the mystery, the secret of transforming a moulded plastic into a marble statue. These mannequin manufacturers are really competing for (sur)realism nowadays.



The abstraction of the shattered glass is immediate and used creatively here (inspired by many masterpieces in the same line). The author, an urban wonderer, must have seen many broken glasses around. He stopped at this one. Let's thank him for the insight and for this meditative moment of a devastated "still" life.

© BERNARD GRABNER

KAI HIRAI (JP)

Much in the contemporary street photography is about that, and this, and the other one. In a maximalisation effort, the ambitious artists are trying to fit as much as possible in a single frame.

Humans in all of their hypostases, but many of them. Faces, expressions, body parts all around. Frontal, partial, in the background, everywhere. And the even more ambitious critics have a wealth of interpretations, reading paths, leading lines, intersecting glances, shapes, clusters, parallel stories and surrealistic juxtapositions.

Usually these frames come from very busy cities (NY, New Delhi, Havana ...) and the photographers, once there, quickly give up any effort to cut-out meaningless information, and they skip the very essence of composition (reductionism, and inclusion by exclusion). And they are satisfied with the raw result of a "chaotic order" (the same contradictory concept as the "tilted equilibrium"). And they are right on the money. And there is a huge body of exceptional work from many photographers within the above approach.



Nevertheless, and happily, there are also, and still, compositions where the monosemantic reading needs no crutches in order for the picture to prevail and perpetuate in our memory. Like the running (away) girl and the menacing corridor of the present picture.

PHOTOGRAPHY WITHOUT APOLOGY

Back in the 70's during a logorrheic speech, G. Winogrand nailed a good one: "The photograph has to be more dramatic than what has been photographed. It's all about drama or nothing!"

Not poetic? Poetry has to be dramatic!

Not narrative? Narration has to be dramatic!

Now, how that works? Can it be constructed? Yes, but the joggling with the documentary authority of the picture should be extremely subtle. As soon as the viewers are confronted with a subjective (staged) picture they lose their interest in resolving any ambiguities present.

The transformation(s) of the content(s) are still there but the need to untangle the puzzling elements disappears.

Nevertheless, the 4 pictures presented here are powerful enough to stand both ways.

The question is: which one is closer to the thin line between objectivity and subjectivity? Which one maintains the documentary authority of an otherwise mechanical process condemned to change into something meaningful or die?

Because mechanical it is (chemical stands no more).

"I'm an eye. A mechanical eye. I, the machine, show you a world the way only I can see it. I free myself for today and forever from human immobility. I'm in constant movement. I approach and pull away from objects, I creep under them. I move alongside a running horse's mouth, I fall and rise with the falling and rising bodies. This is I, the machine, manoeuvring in the chaotic movements, recording one movement after another in the most complex combinations, Freed from the boundaries of time and space, I co-ordinate any and all points of the universe, wherever I want them to be. My way leads towards the creation of a fresh perception of the world. Thus I explain in a new way the world unknown to you." - Dziga Vertov, Soviet film director, 1923





© CORNELIU SARION



© CATALIN STRUGARU



© MARIA MALLIOU

NICOLA TANZINI (IT)

I am disappointed that people are not giving a couple of reasons for their selections. Of course it is personal and subjective. We are flooded by "Picture of the day/month/year" and worldwide contests "Best portrait/landscape/action", but only very few give a justification for the selections. Curating is not an adolescent collection of favorites.

Having said that, here is an image that the author labels it "the Selfie". I do not know Nicola's full body of work, and I prefer to keep it like this in order to focus on this one picture.

I am repeating myself by saying that a powerful image is presenting its impact at thumbnail (contact-sheet) level. It is already transmitting its architecture and its mojo even if it is blurred or small.

Most of the times, when we open up (print) large a great picture, it does not give us any more answers. Can be sharper, have some recognisable tiny objects, but (here for example), the huge abstract face created by the elements would not be clearer or less mysterious in large.

Against any compositional rule or aesthetics, this image is playing with our certainties. And it makes us doubt in a subtle way.



"This is symmetric". No, it is not, the shadows are asymmetric.

"This is a Fellinian background". No, it is not. It is a town.

"This is too noisy". No, it is not. It could not be otherwise.

"This is a photograph." No, it is not.

It is the photographer's dream put in an image. And we all know how difficult is to grasp and share a dream.

© NICOLA TANZINI

CORNELIU SARION (RO)

I am only human, so I react to a recent hate attack on what is "fake", staged and on whether I should continue to use the term street photography.

People seek freedom and the very same people erect walls. The most moron of the creatures, man, the most oxymoron producer among art adepts, the photographer.

Why on earth, categorise art, why put boundaries. My secret dream is to see street photographers capturing devastated brides, and wedding photographers (ab)using church, priests and spouses in creating the creepiest of realities, revealing the most disturbing of the truths.

I feel undeclared pleasure seeing action photographers mutilating doped athletes for a symbolic image of hypocrisy. I admire wildlife observers putting down their top-notch cameras and, with a polaroid, portraying the brainless crowds leaving a hemorrhagic corrida.

Why? Because we should not seek adulation, we should only mirror our beliefs through a camera's mirror (or a simulacrum thereof); produce a photograph deprived of pretentious expectations, liberated from opportunism.



The fact that the individual sees and interprets a picture differently does not change the picture itself.

The photograph's fate and combat is only one. To stay timeless, to exist independently from the brains and the eyes of the beholder and even of the author itself.

Therefore, no comment for the image presented! Many have tried to photograph kids playing in plastic spheres, very few have made it to give plasticity to an otherwise habitual seeing.

© CORNELIU SARION

CORNELIU'S WORK

In a modern industrial world ... (strike back, take it from the top) ...
In the modern post-industrial world of digital photography ... (strike out) ... In a crisp sharp world of utterly focused imaging, does the attenuated elegance of the abstract still exist? And the oneiric, precarious balance of a fading contrast, can still hold its place among hyperrealist creations?

The answer is to be found (and lost again) in the pictures of Corneliu. The shapes are the sole protagonists of his expressive work, but what these pictures really are about?

The approximation of the dream, the "almost" (le presque), can be dreadful according to R. Barthes. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that this very incompleteness can be photography's only hope to survive the lethal disorder created by the deluge of photographers and their digital captures of the obvious.

The "almost" of Corneliu's work cannot be explained in a couple of lines. However, if we only let the picture's child to guide us through his surroundings before and after his "placement", his posing for the sake of breaking the time continuum, then we may recognise that in fact these are our own childhood pictures.



Our own stolen, granted or missed childhood, now only visible through old prints, found in a box, pasted in an album, and then ignored over and over again in a Sisyphean struggle for resolving life and death.

© CORNELIU SARION



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THE BOYS

When Corneliu made this picture I was sure it is probably its best captured in the remote location which he visits obsessively (Dobrogea, Turkish minorities). I also thought that others did as good or better (Koudelka, Gipsies).

I was extremely wrong. With his image Corneliu is getting beyond himself and the others by presenting the same theme but with a totally new sensibility. The light, the innocence (or is it alienation?) are just enough, are just right. Or could it be that we all are aliens until we become adults?

Cannot take my eyes from the light strip and the straw strip and whatever it is that creates the dancing flames, the lava flow, the luminous lance avoiding the boys, the bending silhouettes avoiding the flames. Cannot take my eyes from the penetrating frontal look of the brothers. Are they looking without seeing? They are looking at nothing; they retain within themselves their love and their fear. That is the Look (Le Regard).

Corneliu succeeds to set everything on a precarious equilibrium. There is symmetry and the next second there is no more. There is spontaneity but when we try to describe how, it turns to seem like the most laborious theatrical performance. There is air (as defined by Barthes), attitude, aura this "luminous shadow which accompanies the body", but the young age of the kids cannot confer them yet the animula.



The author claims wanting to grasp "kairos" (time) in the Heidegger way. He wants that his photographs illustrate resoluteness, that the human will always run towards its end.

But the boys come to revendicate that they are confined in the present, that they have no projection to the future; that photography will always brightly declare: "That has been".

TWINS

Two things happened when I recently met a great photographer. Let's call him El Fotografo.

The first one was between him and me and we'll keep it this way. The second one was the answer to the question of the public: "Did you stage your iconic picture?"

He said: "How can someone think that I was able of ever imagining such a composition, setting or subjects?"

And yet, it is possible! You can have a dream and transpose it, to share it. You can have a nightmare and picture it, to transcend it. You can simply know what reality will look like after "visiting" it through a bi-dimensional rectangle. It's called vision, talent. And only a few possess it.

Most of us are only here to appreciate, analyse and understand these visual representations of screams, whispers, monologues and autistic gestures of triggering the diaphragm blades; of cutting the world, cutting the self. A blade cut will always bleed and the scar will persist long after the shutter release. Do you still call photography a mechanical process?

And do you still look for a subjective description of the present picture? No words will ever explain the author's skill to suspend reality and to abolish the invasive wealth of technology by simply ignoring it.



If any of the shapes, subjects or objects would have offered their sharp details, we would have been probably missed the timid endeavour of the girls to step ahead, to free themselves and the observer at the same time.

Diane Arbus's twins, just left the scene still holding hands and Corneliu can project them to the present time with admirable dexterity.

Many photographers continue to search for the quiet revelations found in chance moments on the street, the "trouvaille", the lucky find. Some cities are not anymore attractive for street photography. Take Paris for ex. the narrow streets with their warmth have gradually disappeared. The suburbs with pavillons and barbarous residences have sucked the life out of the centre. It was (is) a massive expulsion of the neighbourhood spirit and of the "flâneur" (the street photographer by definition).

This will be happening with many other cities presently attractive (Bucharest, Athens, Constantinople). That is why the "flâneur" takes some times (more and more actually) the pastoral ways.

Corneliu does this in a regular and persistent way. And the result is impressive. The present photograph has been taken some short time ago, it bears however an irretrievable past and a melancholy conferred only by images taken at the very beginning of the photography. The story of the survival of a photograph is an unpredictable one. The authors are always wondering about their images: "By whom and how will it be looked at? How long will it survive in consciousness? Will it be one day in a publication, an exhibition, a private house, a museum?" We cannot know!

But we can assure the author that the picture has entered irrevocably our memory. As Kafka said: "We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds." ... and we would add .. and it's a miracle whenever they enter the viewers' mind. Try to close your eyes when looking at this picture. The details will take their full meaning.



Is this image abstract (blindness), symbolic (the lost innocence), surrealist (the mythic unicorn)? Absolutely!

But above of all it is the proof that the ethos of photography (in teaching us how to see intensively) is so close to poetry. Purifying our senses in order to perceive again the living world around us.

ORNA NAOR (IL)

The first surrealists (poets, painters, sculptors) were often going through flea markets and other vanguard markets to pick objects. Sometimes strange but usually ordinary objects. But then, when at home, they were combining them in aesthetic works. In other words, "the ragpicker footsteps".

Photographers are doing exactly the same but they "assemble" their work on the spot.

But they are also lucky because they also have in their disposal faces, glances, shadows, animals ...

Orna is collecting these glances, without losing the taste for composition and peculiarity, strolling through the crowds.

After all, we are nothing without the others, even the indifferent or hostile ones.



© ORNA NAOR

HENRI-PIERRE CHAVAZ (FR)

Someone was saying that there was just a tiny probability a teenager Lartigue and a senior Atget to have known and seen each other shooting at the Bois de Boulogne.

No way that they would have missed each other today with the infinite availability of everybody's work through modern communication tools.

And still, my ignorance on so many talented photographers has not been getting any better albeit all the accessibility and ease of information.

I am hence not to be forgiven when I prefer to present a picture over so many others apparently better.

Curating is as much a private moment (or even more) as photographing. And I may be alone in describing and decoding Henri-Pierre's image, but I cannot stay indifferent in front of a theatrical scene spontaneously created by life, nevertheless, only acknowledged and captured by the author's keen eye.



Admire the bent legs and pipes, and the lifeless subjects with the strange glances as opposed to the almost alive doll and the perpetual movement of the drawings on the wall.

Even the gestures and the expressions are so forced that we may easily consider that we all are crash-test dummies in an urban test tunnel. Life in a lab-tube, in-vitro!

© HENRI-PIERRE CHAVAZ

ALPHAN YILMAZMADEN (TR)

Ara Guler's Istanbul is Bosphorus' mouth, it is tramway 26 at Sirkeci, the city in the 50's and 60's, its struggling people, the fishermen, its huzun (melancholy).

But the same Istanbul is also Alphan's, his childhood's and now his photographic mastery's.

Places change, people too, but their complicity does not. The city and its inhabitants keep their eternal dance. The city changes them and them the city, but they keep the same passion for each other. They keep creating memories which will not fade away.

I have never visited Istanbul to photograph it. I am persuaded, and humbly accepting, that it is one of the cities that only their inhabitants are able to capture their soul. Brassai's and Bresson's Paris, Raghubir Singh's India, Winogrand's New York, Guler's and Alphan's Istanbul ... will never reveal their mysteries to us the common visitors.

Because these local photographers are the only capable to create poetic testaments and testimonies by distilling, day in - day out, the many layers of an overwhelming Eastern Balkan existence.



© ALPHAN YILMAZMADEN

FLORINA LUPUT (RO)

Said it before, I cannot fail to repeat it. Street photography is like a child's dream: we start with some broken toys and then we fall asleep to arrive at the most complex of stories ever. Likewise, street photography starts with some accidental circumstances to then take form in a magic equilibrium and to tell a story in a fraction of a second.

Florina, a very capable sketcher, draws graceful curved lines (the horse's back, the clay stack), puts a vertical stabilising pole, and quickly assembles a wooden cube and roof to complete the puzzle.

Is anybody out there who would take some time to correct the lens flare and avoid the overexposure? If yes, you are waisting your time and talent. Don't think twice! Just shoot!



© FLORINA LUPUT

AHMET GUROL (TR)

The other day in a photography/psychology initiation we were trying to see what a photograph is conveying to us in order to better understand ourselves.

The fact is that photography is a double edged knife with no grip. It cuts out both the photographer and the viewer. Trying to explain exclusively our own photographs, has the advantage of making less victims.

Having said that, all obsessive photographers (already a pleonasm) know instinctively that nothing is definitely idyllic or nightmarish until it has been photographed.

A picture can free the author and devastate the viewer, as easily as it can harm the photographer and save the spectator.

This inherent duality of a photograph is sometimes coupled with the explosive tension of a waiting, a longing.

We cannot fail to underline here, how Ahmet is capturing the irreconcilable destinies of the boys, not to mention the temporal and spatial remoteness of the old man.



The author grasps the smell of the ionised scene and at the same time knows how to "stage" the subjects in it (figure-to-ground for the main points of interest, uncertain low-key for the subject closer to the menacing obscurity of the open end of the frame).

Unavoidably Ahmet went through all the struggle of the process before the liberating shutter release. I am sure he was exhausted when putting aside the camera. Who wouldn't be?

© AHMET GUROL

DENIS DUKHOVNIK (RU)

Denis was saying in an interview that he gave to me in 2016: "I hope my photographs will find an audience. After all, in my opinion, this is the goal of any photographer."

I am sure this (was) will be the case. Because when we make connection with our subject, we can only sing to them: "Tu si' 'na cosa grande pe' mme".

But only for just a moment, since the urge to take the next frame is too powerful ...

"Something to regret is to stand still. And to miss the need to move forward.

Photography is part of me. When you feel something and you want to show it, photography is a great way to do it. The unusual moments inspire me. Life is an adventure. And photography is a dependency.

Street Core Photography is when you don't know what will happen in a given situation. You need to be on the lookout for any place not to miss the moment."



© DENIS DUKHOVNIK

DRAGOS-RADU DUMITRESCU (RO)

Dragos is special (he does film, expired slides, pinholes of all kinds ... mind you, digital too) so I wanted to ask him before going any further in commenting this picture.

Of course the dialectic part of an evaluation is accessory but it happens to know some details about his work. Hellas, not all of them!

So instead of partial knowledge and partial guessing I decided to ask him. But not before writing down my thoughts.

Is it film? The grain doesn't appear to be digital. Nor does the subtle grey palette, so complete that any colour would have contaminated this bursting visual experience. (ed: it was digital after all)

Do you think that people are important? They are not. They are props to fill the scenes imagined by Dragos.

Are they staged? Of course they are. Only that it is also done differently. The subjects are set, then left there until they start regaining control of the self. And it is then when the frame is captured. Forget that you may obtain these looks or body postures by directing human beings. (ed: they were only partially staged after all)

The author knows the difficulty (not to say the impossibility) of getting meaningful portraits out of consciously posing individuals.

HCB was saying that: "The most difficult thing for me is a portrait. You have to try and put your camera between the skin of a person and his shirt." Dragos is putting his camera at eye level and looks through the viewfinder until he becomes part of the scene.

Observe the expression and the look of the girl. It is almost as feeling admiration then compassion for someone spending his time over there and over them. Like asking: "Why are you doing it?"

And the boy's gesture giving up his position and moving towards something else, changing into something we'll never know.

Last but not least, geometry. But I do not need to talk about this. It is obvious that the author masters it and juggles with it at ease. Circular patterns, tilted bodies/poles, fragmented shapes.

"The world I live in is a fractured, distraught and bewildered chaos from which I'm trying to rekindle a sense of order through the expression of form, colour and emotion." DRD



© DRAGOS-RADU DUMITRESCU



© DRAGOS-RADU DUMITRESCU

Where, who, when but most of all why?

We may have some clear answers for the first 3 questions but for the last one we can only speculate. And this makes it the most important question in decoding a picture.

Why Dragos is in that corn field, why is he wasting film roll to capture mostly green leaves. He could probably figure the image in B&W, however why is he getting all this high grain and motion blur? It was probably done under quite low light conditions, but then the situation is even more intriguing.

Interesting looks, postures, background ... someone would have said. But no!

There is "nothing" in this image! It is not a rural documentary picture, no men at work under a "superb" colourful sunrise at the fields, no poverty hit people, no suffering. It is not either a portrait, nor a candid moment, no humorous situation, no peculiar juxtapositions. Only some grey scratches and grain(s) everywhere.

Nevertheless, this picture carries majestically the quintessence of the photographic event. The core, the primal surrealism of the temporal paradox in photography. The absolute memento mori.



Why the author was there? Simply to tell them: "Remember (that you have) to die". Funny thing, they both look like they'd know that already.

Don't abuse of this power that photography possess. But thank you Dragos for reminding it to us in the best of ways! With a mute rage and a latent anxiety.

© DRAGOS-RADU DUMITRESCU



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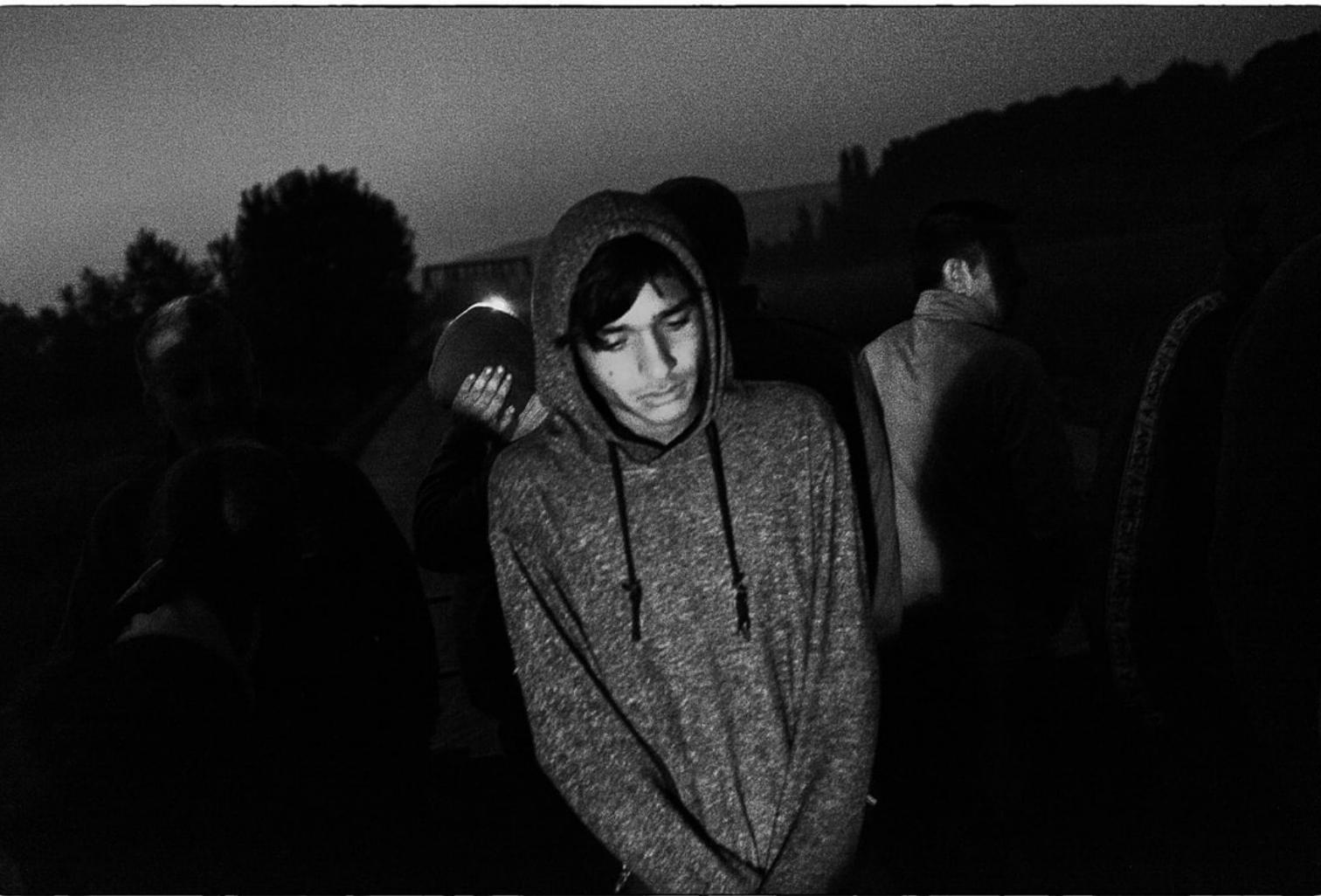
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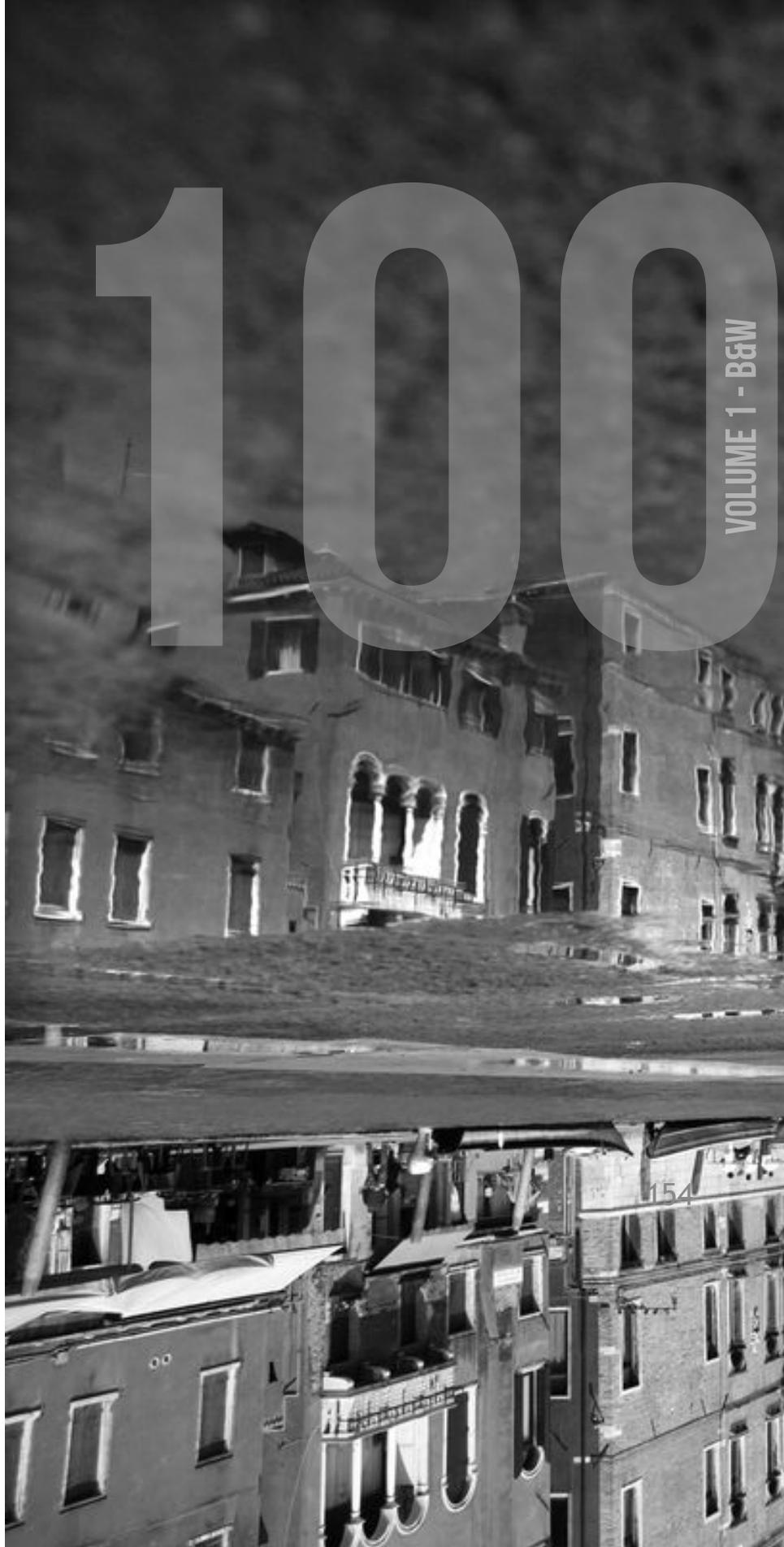
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