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From the Selected Works of Sharon Sliwinski

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New York Transfixed: Notes on the Expression of Fear

Sharon Sliwinski

NEW YORK TRANSFIXED

Notes on the Expression of Fear

Sharon Sliminski

The question is: What is the genesis of spoken or pictorial expressions, by what feelings point of view, conscious or unconscious, are they preserved in the archive of memory, and are there laws by which they are set down and force their way out again?

Aby M. Warburg¹

This chapter is about nine photographs and what may be seen in them (6.1–6.9). The images are part of a much larger collection conceived of and organized by a group of four friends—Alice Rose George, Gilles Peress, Michael Shulan, and Charles Traub—shortly after 11 September 2001. Their idea was to document what had happened and what was still occurring on the streets of New York City that infamous autumn. The group also decided that this makeshift project should be open to ‘anybody and everybody’ and they sent out word as widely as possible that any photograph submitted on this topic would be displayed in an exhibition at Michael Shulan’s SoHo gallery.² Images began pouring in. Over 5,000 photographs were submitted in all, taken by some 3,000 (mostly amateur) photographers. A small army of volunteers carefully scanned each submission, reprinting the photographs uniformly so they could be hung floor to ceiling in the gallery without



6.1 Unknown photographer (no. 3029 from *here is new york*).



6.2 Unknown photographer (no. 5032 from *here is new york*).

names or frames, 'like laundry drying in the alleyways of Naples'.³ *here is new york: a democracy of photographs* eventually opened on 25 September 2001. By the second week there was a long line at the door and the crowds would continue for months afterwards. All of the images have been subsequently uploaded to a website, various exhibitions have toured worldwide, and a massive book containing nearly one thousand images was published by Scalo in 2002.

In terms of sheer quantity of artefacts, *here is new york* may be the largest archive in world history devoted to a single event. The construction of the collection as well as the nature of its specific contents raise a number of questions for the field of historiography, or what is sometimes called historical memory. Here the form in which we remember events is thought to have a direct effect on public life. Indeed, the very prospect of justice may rely on such constructions and their associated practices of remembrance and forgetting. As Jacques Derrida bluntly declared: 'There is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.'⁴ In this respect, *here is new york: a democracy of photographs* lives up to its name, for each of Derrida's criteria—participation in and access to the archive, its constitution and interpretation—have indeed been organized under the principle of egalitarianism. The friends collected photographs from 'anybody and everybody' and the entire archive is accessible to anyone with a computer and Internet access.

But the archivists nevertheless bear the authority of what Derrida calls 'consignation', which is assuming the right to gather together the signs. That is, they bear the responsibility but also *the authority* for putting the archive together and for putting it into an order. This authority involves the reproduction of the original documents (as physical prints and digital files), as well as providing access and controlling publication rights, the arrangement of the images in the various



6.3 Doug Hamilton (no. 3240 from *here is new york*).



6.4 Jeff Jacobson (no. 2566 from *here is new york*).



6.5 From Gulnara Samilova (no. 5119 from *here is new york*).

exhibition spaces, the editing and ordering of the pictures for the book, the classification of images into 50 odd categories on the website, and perhaps most importantly, the initial choice of what to collect, namely photographs. There can be no doubt that each of these decisions has an effect on our interpretation of the event known as 9/11. Or as Derrida might say, each decision leaves its own distinct *impression* upon historical memory.

But political implications aside, Derrida proposes that we create and preserve archives because there is something in them that defies understanding but that we desperately, indeed feverishly, wish to hold onto. These apparatuses are usually constructed as an attempt to house memory that would otherwise be lost. Archives appear, in other words, precisely at the point of breakdown in memory; they are the remainders and reminders of the destruction of memory. At the heart of the archive, one could say, lies the problem of trauma. As Sigmund Freud first noticed, trauma profoundly affects the very way in which we experience events.⁵ Its character is generally regarded as twofold: trauma consists of the violent shattering of perceptual experience as well as the compulsive drive to contain or master the incident afterwards. Traumatic stimulus breaks into the psyche, so to speak, flooding the mind in such a way that the shocking event cannot be immediately contained as an experience which occurred in a specific time and place. Some of the common effects of trauma can include hallucinations or traumatic dreams in which the subject is returned to the scene of the trauma. The individual finds him- or herself back within a terrifyingly literal reproduction of those moments in which they were helpless. Using Derrida's thesis, Herman Rapaport suggests that archives such as the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC can be read precisely within this enigmatic logic: as structural forms that attempt to replicate



6.6 U n k n o w n photographer (no. 1540 from *here is new york*).



6.7 Alya Scully (no. 1880 from *here is new york*).



6.8 Rachel Shaw (no. 2944 from *here is new york*).

or re-present the traumatic events in such a way that the experience can be mastered retrospectively.⁶ With its special emphasis on photographic representation, *here is new york* no doubt aspires to a similar goal. The archive houses visual reproductions, ‘imprints’ which presumably open the possibility for an engagement with the historical event in such a way that the experience can be registered, and indeed, worked through. After all, the archivists of the collection have constructed a complex technological apparatus (using computers, scanners and printers) that is specifically designed to visually reproduce the horrific event through the continuous production and distribution of photographic facsimiles. In short, the *here is new york* collection is profoundly circumscribed by the dynamics of trauma.

While there is much to be said about this relationship between the structure of the archive and the structure of trauma, I have not yet come any closer to the nine photographs themselves, those fragile paper inscriptions that appear to depict witnesses’ immediate reactions to 9/11, indeed, which seem to show the traces of the event right on the surface of their bodies.

These nine photographs can all be found in the category on the *here is new york* website called ‘onlookers’. As I browsed through the tiny thumbnails one morning, I began to notice a repeated gesture, one I came to think of as a state of being transfixed. In picture after picture, this strange posture in which one or both hands are placed over an opened mouth or grasp some part of the head started appearing with an unnerving regularity. What made the discovery particularly uncanny was not simply seeing this expression repeated on the streets of New York on that clear September morning, but also the fact of its recurring documentation. What would possess so many people to turn their cameras away from the spectacle and to point them at spectators? The first part of this problem involves the mystery of the expression itself: what is the significance of this extraordinary shared gesture? How can we interpret its genesis and how is it preserved in that other archive called the unconscious? And what can this particular expression tell us about the nature of the event known as 9/11, what Jean Baudrillard called ‘the ‘mother’ of all events, the pure event uniting within itself all the events that have never taken place’?⁷ The second aspect of the problem involves the mystery of the recurring image, the curious, or indeed, compulsive rendering of this particular expression into another visual impression, namely, a photograph. Given the repeated appearance of such records in the archive, perhaps the images should be read as a kind of symptomatic sign or as an artistic motif. But what does it mean to fold the psychology of human expression into a history of visual images? Or put another way, what is the nature of the relationship between individual and collective memory, between expression and impression?



6.9 U n k n o w n
Photographer (no.
2365 from *here is
new york*).

My proposition is that these traces—both the bodily gestures and their photographic documentation—represent ‘visual testimony’ of the event known as 9/11. History is not only a narrative form that is recorded some time after the events it seeks to represent. History is first written with the stylus of the body. This thesis immediately runs aground, however, because such emotive gestures are almost always performed unconsciously. The history written with the medium of the body is expressed in a language that no one speaks, or, rather, in a language that few are aware they speak. We do, however, possess a fairly good translation machine, a device that can record this unconscious language and help render it intelligible. I am speaking, of course, of the camera and its photographic products. The camera is itself caught up in the enigma of trauma for this device helps reveal the astonishing and paradoxical fact that our bodies receive traumatic stimulus in a time and form *other* to that in which it may be perceived. These images register that which could not be seen at the time.⁸ This thesis follows directly from Shoshana Felman’s argument that trauma does not only involve the enigma of a human agent’s unknowing acts *but also the enigma of historical transmission*.⁹ Trauma has a strange way of calling others to witness events which the agents involved cannot fully know. According to Felman, this bewildering aspect of trauma is transmitted principally through verbal testimony, a special kind of speech act composed of bits and pieces of experience that have not yet settled into understanding. ‘To testify’ is to vow to tell what one has experienced—even though the experience has not been fully assimilated into understanding. Felman suggests that far beyond its usual legal context, testimony has come to the fore in the contemporary cultural narrative. In this chapter I try to decipher this discourse as it functions in the visual realm. In collections like *here is new york*, the human experience of the event is not communicated verbally. Here the impact of the incident is expressed through bodily action and relayed through the medium of photography. In this case testimony is a ‘visual language’ made up of empathetic signs. But like all testimony, the aim of this strange address is to express the impact of an event that was *felt*—indeed, which produced real terror—and simultaneously exploded conceptual reification.¹⁰

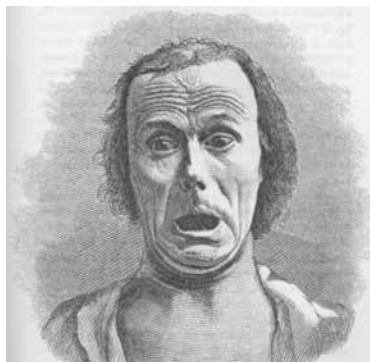
The face of terror

My thesis calls for a relatively short theoretical tour since the analysis of gestural expression has a very long history. In ancient Rome, Quintillian advised young men on the art of *chironomia*: how to use recognizable hand gestures to good effect in traditional oratory (a practice that continues in politics and the theatre). In 1832 Andrea de Jorio published what is considered to be the first treatise on gesture entitled *La Mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire napoletano* [*Gestural Expression of the Ancients in the Light of Neapolitan Gesturing*]. The book sought to show how the expressive practices of antiquity have been preserved among the ordinary people of Naples. De Jorio was among the first to show that gesture is not a universal language but also the product of social and cultural differences. More recently, the analysis of gesture has begun to draw much scholarly attention, serving as the basis for studies on the origin of language and language development, symbol formation and the history

of the culture of everyday life.¹¹ Anchoring one corner of this interdisciplinary field is Charles Darwin's massive 1872 volume, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. The book aims to provide a systematic account of the expression of emotion and moreover attempts to show that many of these physical expressions are a product of evolution. The tome was a bestseller in Victorian England; some 9,000 copies flew off the shelves in the first four months. As the title suggests, Darwin proposes that neither our expressions nor our emotions are uniquely human; many animals have the same emotions and some of their expressions resemble our own.

In a late chapter, Darwin focuses on the expressions pertaining to surprise, astonishment, fear, and horror. He notes that normal attention may quickly graduate into what he calls 'stupefied amazement' which is a frame of mind 'akin to terror'.¹² This particular emotion finds outward expression in the raising of the eyebrows as well as opening the eyes and mouth. The degree to which the eyes and mouth are opened, Darwin argues, corresponds directly to the degree of surprise felt. To establish the universality of the expression, he quotes examples from literature (Shakespeare gets particular mention), draws from psychological research and relies on an enormous number of correspondents to provide anecdotal evidence from around the world. One other source that cannot go without mention is photography. As a Victorian enthusiast of the camera, Darwin acquired hundreds of photographs of facial expression from portrait studios as well as from the photographer Oscar Rejlander, who furnished him with more than 70 images specifically designed for the book. Darwin also looked to the work of French neurologist G.B. Duchenne de Bologne, who was conducting experiments with electricity, galvanizing the muscles of the face in order to study expression. Darwin had several of Duchenne's photographs rendered into engravings so they could be included as illustrations in the book (6.10 and 6.11). This inclusion, however, was not without a subtle editing. Darwin both promotes Duchenne's *artificially* produced expressions as evidence and illustration of natural history and moreover mutes their constructedness by giving specific instructions to his engraver to 'omit galvanic instruments and hands of operator'.¹³

Midway through his chapter on fear, Darwin pauses to mention another little gesture, 'expressive of astonishment, of which I can offer no explanation; namely, the hand being placed over the mouth; or on some part of the head'.¹⁴ He provides no visual illustration for the gesture, but this short description could serve as a caption for any one of the nine transfixed photographs taken in New York. Darwin further notes that the gesture has been 'observed with so



6.10 'Terror, from a photograph by Dr. Duchenne'. Heliotype from *The Expression of the Emotions of Man and Animals*, 1872. Reproduced with permission from Darwin on line.

many races of man that it must have some natural origin'. In the scientist's terms, this means that the expression of this particular emotion is not learned but rather a direct action of the nervous system.¹⁵ When the mind is powerfully affected, nerve force is generated in excess and is subsequently transmitted into a variety of directions. Following Duchenne's work, Darwin speculates that the character of the particular expression is dependent upon the connections of the nerve cells as well as the development of the muscular system. He spends several pages trying to distinguish the differences between fear and terror by entering into a debate with doctors about the importance of the *platysma myoides* muscle (which stretches over the frontal surface of the neck). In Darwin's view, therefore, our emotions—those most intimate affective states of mind—are made evident through the subtlest gestures of the body.

The English scientist walks a fine line with this thesis. On one hand, he is deeply indebted to the pioneering anatomical research of doctors such as G.B. Duchenne and Charles Bell who laid the foundations for the study of physiology as a scientific discipline. This debt is evident visually (aside from reprinting reproductions of Duchenne's photographs, Darwin also uses one of Bell's diagrams as his opening figure, indeed, one could say that the modern psychology of expression is completely underwritten by the new technologies of mechanical reproduction). But on the other hand, Darwin's book poses a direct challenge to these doctors' mutual belief that man's expressions held a transcendental purpose. Like many in their day, Duchenne and Bell believed that expressions were given by God to serve as a kind of natural language for communication between the souls of men. Of course, Darwin made it his life's work to reject such origins. To the Englishman, expressions were not the designs of a grand Creator but rather products of evolutionary processes. Outward appearance was an amalgam of physiology, habit and inherited responses—including those derived from animals.¹⁶ The expressions that fleetingly pass over our faces are daily living proof of our archaic inheritance. The beauty of a simple smile is not a gift from above, but a profound human work that has been thousands of years in the making.

Although one cannot help but be in awe of the reach and character of Darwin's project, he offers remarkably few words about the inner world of feelings. The psychological nature of emotion is so scarcely discussed that one gets the sense his book should simply have been called *The Expressions of Man and Animals*. However, less than a generation later a young Viennese doctor would try to bridge this gap. Sigmund Freud famously began his scientific training as a zoologist studying the gonads of eels. To Freud, the English scientist was always 'the great Darwin' and



6.11 G.B. Duchenne de Boulogne. 'Fright' from *Mechanics of Human Physionomy* 1862.

one finds traces of his admiration even in the last of his writings.¹⁷ Moreover, Freud initially built his theory of emotion as Darwin did, using a neurological model. In the beginning of his psychoanalytic research, Freud was preoccupied with describing the psychical apparatus as a conductor for the expression of the emotion. And even as he elaborated his Structural Theory in the 1920s (which posits psychical life as dominated by the conflict with three masters: the outside world, the super-ego and the instincts), Freud continued to view emotion primarily in terms of its 'quota', that is, in terms of quantity rather than character. However, psychoanalysis offers a crucial component to our thinking about expression, for here the body's surface is not merely a mechanical apparatus, an amalgam of ancient hardwiring, but rather a sculpted convergence between the impress of the external world and the express of subjective feeling.¹⁸ To Freud, the expressions that fleetingly pass over human faces were not only a daily living proof of our archaic heritage, but also an externalization of the drama unfolding in our internal theatre.

Similar to Darwin, Freud's notion of affect includes feelings and emotions as well as somatic responses that we commonly regard of as the expression of emotion (shortness of breath, a racing heart). What distinguishes psychoanalytic thinking about emotion is Freud's innovative notion that affect may come undone from its corresponding idea or representation. In other words, one's (conscious) feelings may be cut off from their object of association: one may experience sadness without knowing exactly what one has lost. While we think of emotion as a recognizable state, as 'ownable' so to speak, Freud argued that affect may also remain unconscious, become displaced, or even transform into its opposite (love into hate and vice versa). Indeed, he suggests one of the most common ways in which unconscious affect is expressed is through bodily sensation.¹⁹ In one of his last essays, 'An Outline of Psychoanalysis', Freud compactly describes one of the 'fundamental assumptions of psychoanalysis', which simply put, is to disregard the traditional philosophical and scientific division between mind and body. Rather than regard consciousness as belonging to one distinct 'place' and bodily processes as belonging to another, Freud argues that: *'the allegedly somatic "accompanying processes" are the really psychical things.'*²⁰ In other words, the body and its mechanisms are not simply subject to the external laws of biology; rather, the body is the pre-eminent conductor of psychical reality, serving as a kind of canvas to express our emotions. Or as Joyce McDougall has proposed, the body can be thought of as a kind of theatre, a stage upon which some of our most dramatic psychical conflicts are played out.²¹

In the early psychoanalytic archive, Freud encountered this mind-body dynamic in his hysterical patients' medically unexplainable symptoms: Dora's nausea and difficulty breathing, Elizabeth von R's leg pains, the conductor Bruno Walter's brief but devastating arm paralysis.²² In each of these cases Freud surmised that the individual had mobilized a physical symptom as a way to express psychical feelings that were deemed consciously unacceptable. The physical symptoms served as surrogates, a way to express the dangerous feelings in disguise, so to speak. In this way Freud read his patients' physical symptoms as *retroactive signs*, unconscious outcomes of the patient's history of affect and experience. This interpretation echoes Darwin's

theory of the expression of emotion in which specific physical gestures represent the outcomes of an evolutionary history, diminished traces of events that occurred in the past. Both Freud and Darwin read our states of affect—and the state of fear in particular—as directly shaped by *history*.

With these theories on the expression of emotion in mind, let us return to the *here is new york* photographs in attempt to provide an interpretation of the witnesses' strange, transfixed expression. From Darwin we can surmise that the people on the streets of New York were, in some sense, *predisposed* to react in this particular way. As his archive of expression shows, the bodily expression of affect is the older, the more 'primitive' way of conveying emotion. Using the body as a medium is an archaic form of functioning that is reminiscent of both of animality and infancy—states in which emotion is primarily expressed with the body (in Latin *infans* means those who cannot speak). The fact that Darwin describes the transfixed expression in 1872 suggests that 9/11 was immediately recognized as a familiar danger, or at very least, perceived as *reminiscent* of something familiar. The re-enactment of this gesture on the streets of New York on 11 September means that the event was immediately (if unconsciously) 'classified'. Indeed, despite the ideological attempts to frame the incident within a history of terrorist assaults (the Pearl Harbour analogy was briefly floated by the media, for instance), the shared gesture among the witnesses seems to suggest that the event resonated with something more like a genealogy of disaster: the Hindenburg explosion, the sinking of the *Titanic*, the great Lisbon earthquake and perhaps even the destruction of Pompeii.²³

As Jean Baudrillard proposes, the event also evokes a history of 'all the events that have never taken place', a history of all the 'wished for' events, all the disasters we have ever *dreamt*.²⁴ This step into the world of the imaginary returns us to Freud, from whom we learn that physical responses are, in fact, 'really psychological'. That is, the transfixed gesture can be seen to represent one of the first *significations* of the traumatic event. Indeed, trauma can be defined as that which resists the symbolization of language and is therefore confined to bodily expression. Freud himself might have described the nature of the gesture as an instance of 'identification' which is the original form of emotional tie with others, a primitive way of taking in or introjecting the object. Identification is a derivative of the first, oral phase of life, which perhaps sheds some light on the movement of the hands to the mouth (6.5–6.9): a sign of where the violent spectacle penetrated into the internal theatre of the psyche. Indeed, although the attacks were principally designed to be a visual assault—a spectacle for the eyes, so to speak—for those individuals who were on the streets of New York that morning, the disaster was actually 'taken in' through the mouth.

Perhaps it helps to think of this emotive gesture as a form of mimesis. This is to say these transfixed expressions may be read as part of a powerful human compulsion to become similar and to behave mimetically. Certainly this is evident in the mirroring between spectators (and especially where spectators mime each other within the frame of a single photograph (6.1 and 6.2)). However, as Walter Benjamin points out, the realm of mimesis is 'by no means limited to what one person can

imitate in another. The child plays at being not only a shopkeeper or teacher, but also a windmill and train'.²⁵ Following Benjamin, this transfixed expression can perhaps be read as an expression of attachment to the World Trade Center itself, a kind of painful miming of the spectacle, a way of *becoming* the towers. 'From time immemorial', Benjamin says, 'the mimetic faculty has been conceded some influence on language'.²⁶ Indeed, the word transfixed has two principle meanings which share a mimetic relation: 1) to root (a person) to the spot with horror or astonishment, to paralyze the faculties; and 2) to pierce with a sharp implement or weapon.²⁷ We should keep in mind the second definition—the action—is the older of the two definitions. So transfixed may refer to the actual action of impaling an object or person, or to the imaginary sensation of feeling *as if* one were impaled, paralyzed with horror. In this light too, the transfixed gesture can be seen to mimetically reflect the event itself—namely, the impaling of the two World Trade Center towers by United Airlines Flight 175 and American Airlines Flight 11 (6.12). In this way the emotive gesture can be read as indicator of similarity, a powerful assimilation of the subject to the object in its most intense form.

All this to say, the transfixed gesture that was fleetingly recorded on the streets of New York offers a remarkable example of our capacity to symbolize, to *visually testify* to traumatic experience using the medium of our own bodies.

Visual culture and testimony

It bears pointing out that there is a difference between the gestures themselves and the two-dimensional photographs of them. Gestures have duration and movement; they are embodied expressions that occur in a specific time and space. Perhaps we should be wary of conflating the images with the actions they purport to represent. After all, theorists from Walter Benjamin to Roland Barthes have consistently argued that the most common judgement about photography is not one of aesthetic quality but identity. In exhibitions such as *here is new york* the images are valued less for their aesthetic treatment than for their ability to provide material traces of the event. That is, the photographs are thought to bear an imprint of the trauma, as if some invisible line connected these representations to phenomenological reality. All we can say of them is: *This*



6.12 Unknown photographer (no. 2087 from *here is new york*).



6.13 Unknown photographer (no. 5112 from *here is new york*).

happened. I saw it. These are symbolic representations, in other words, that have lost their symbolic quality.

And yet a similar dynamic appears to be at work in verbal testimony. Shoshana Felman describes testimony as ‘a point of conflation between text and life ... which can *penetrate us like an actual life*’.²⁸ For Felman, literature is an ‘alignment between witnesses’ and reading certain literary texts is inherently related to ‘facing the horror’ itself. There is a certain paradox in this notion, for literary testimony rarely seeks to represent the traumatic event. More precisely, testimony testifies to the witness’s *inability* to represent the traumatic event, to the subject’s struggle to give the experience significance in the time of afterwards. In Michihiko Hachiya’s remarkable journal about the bombing of Hiroshima, for example, the bomb never appears. The journal begins on 6 August 1945:

Clad in drawers and undershirt, I was sprawled on the living room floor exhausted because I had just spent a sleepless night on duty as an air warden at my hospital.

Suddenly a strong flash of light startled me—and then another. So well does one recall little things that I remember vividly how a stone lantern in the garden became brilliantly lit and I debated whether this light was caused by magnesium flare or sparks from a passing trolley.

Garden shadows disappeared. The view where a moment before all had been so bright and sunny was now dark and hazy. Through swirling dust I could barely discern a wooden column that had supported one corner of my house. It was leaning crazily and the roof sagged dangerously.

Moving instinctively, I tried to escape, but rubble and fallen timbers barred the way ... To my surprise I discovered I was completely naked. How odd! Where were my drawers and undershirt?

What had happened?²⁹

The next 200 pages detail the injured physician’s struggle to make his way through the devastated city to his hospital as well as the hospital staff’s collective struggle to understand the horrors that begin to assault the bodies of the survivors. There is no such thing as an atom bomb or radiation poisoning yet. Significance must be made out of these terrible phenomenon. *Pikadon* becomes the accepted new word in their vocabulary [pika: bright flash; don: loud sound], although those who were near the centre of the city simply call it *pika*. For those like Hachiya who were nearest to the epicentre of the bomb, there was no sound, only a flash. This paradoxical fact calls for pause. For those closest to the bomb, there was no bomb. The doctor’s remarkable journal is, then, a testimony of his grappling with this event that occurred but which eluded his capacity to register it. This bald struggle to understand that which has exploded human comprehension brings the reader face to face with the horror.

Can we bring these insights about testimony to the visual realm? Is testimony merely a literary form, a speech act set down in literature or can it be articulated

in bodily gesture and transmitted through pictorial images? What kinds of images testify to trauma?

Similar to the long history of gesture studies, such questions about the nature of pictorial images do not so much open a new programme of research as return us to an old one. At the turn of the last century, German cultural historian Aby Warburg embarked on a similar project in his visual culture studies. Today, Warburg's name is usually remembered in connection with his unique research library—the Library for the Science of Culture that later became the Warburg Institute—which he set up in Hamburg and was subsequently evacuated to London in 1933.³⁰ Occasionally one may find his name cited in connection with the art historical discipline called iconology.³¹ But like the writings of Walter Benjamin, which slowly filtered back into the intellectual consciousness of the post-war world, interest in Warburg's work is slowly being renewed for its detailed observations and interdisciplinary approach to the interpretation of cultural phenomena. Warburg drew indiscriminately from a range of disciplines to construct an interdisciplinary method whose aim, as he put it, was to study the 'historical psychology of human expression'.³² At the heart of this project was the attempt to grasp the significance of visual images as something more than mere artwork, indeed, as something closer to a psychological necessity. Anchoring this method of research was an overriding concern with gesture. Working with a remarkably wide range of visual material, Warburg organized visual images by emphatic expression. Particular gestures are arranged into *topoi*, groupings for which he coined the phrase *Pathosformel* [pathos formula]. One of the key inspirations for this unorthodox classification system was Charles Darwin's book on the expression of emotion.³³ Following Darwin's lead, Warburg gathered certain works of art together on the basis that they possessed a common expressive purpose (rather than a formal similarity). In an early paper, for instance, he draws attention to a sculptural detail from a Roman sarcophagus housed in the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua. The small relief sculpture depicts a partially robed woman whose right arm is raised in distress. Warburg brings this ancient work into conversation with a sixteenth-century Titian painting that depicts an altogether different historical figure who is also in the throes of grief.³⁴ Some 16 centuries separate these two works but the similarity of gesture is unmistakable: two women caught mid-stride, arms raised to the heavens, fingers outstretched to their limit, mouths open in shattering cry of anguish. Even to our modern eyes, this gesture of lamentation expresses an unambiguous state of emotion through the cracked pigment and marble in which it is rendered.

In Warburg's view, visual images are vehicles of 'emotional release' designed to provide expression for profound human suffering.³⁵ In this unique way of apprehending history, pictorial images offer a record of our cultural dilemmas and can be placed into relation to one another in ways that burst the traditional linear narrative of cultural progress—a prototype of the method Walter Benjamin would later call the 'dialectical image'. By gathering images together based upon their sheer intensity of expression, Warburg diffracts traditional notions of temporality, opening up multiple extraordinary relationships between objects and images all in

effort to find a path—or rather to make visible all the *existing* paths—between the present and the past.

The re-enactment of the transfixed gesture on 11 September is perhaps but one stop in ‘the international migration of images’,³⁶ but this singular expression—spectators standing transfixed, eyes staring at a spectacle in the distance, hands held protectively over gaping mouths—marks the way in which this trauma impressed itself upon the bodies of the spectators, returning them to their most primal, mimetic relationship to the world. The photographs serve as vehicles of transmission, carriers of the visual act that functions as a historiographical report. Even without verbal narrative—history’s traditional form—viewers of these photographs are able to receive the message which, simply put, is *something happened*.³⁷ Indeed, if such disastrous, traumatic events affect our capacity to narrate history, creating a gap in discursive understanding, then perhaps we may look to the pictorial record for memory of these human experiences that have become lost. As Michael Shulan presciently suggests in his introduction to the *here is new york* collection: ‘Seeing is not only believing. Seeing is seeing.’³⁸

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