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IMMERSIVE HISTORIES: PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE ABSORPTION OF THE PAST

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Abstract

Photographs create a saturating awareness of the past in public spaces, notably the street and the open-air as sensorially immersive spaces. I considered how photographs operate as an unintentional encounter with, and immersion in, the past, generating a low-level sense of the value of that past. Departing from technologies of immersion in the usual sense, and from self-conscious and intentional engagements with the visual, I draw on ideas of non-cognitive awareness and the fugitive practices that exist in the dynamics of susceptibility at the interstices of everyday life. I consider how, since the nineteenth century, and into the digital age, photographs have created historically-scripted spaces and an immersive sense of historical connection and continuity, creating an intensification of historical imagination and coherence of sentiment. In this, the immediacy of photographs is used to create banal, folded presences of the past, a historical "habitus" which intensifies the space-time of the street.

Keywords: photography; history; space; non-representational theory; heritage; memory.

Topographies and geographies of the imagination have always shaped the way people have attached meaning to the world around them in a discursive relationship. Such immersions are nothing new; they have patterned narratives across global responses to the past in story-telling, song and visualisations almost since time immemorial. But in extending the definition of immersion as a condition of such human experience, my argument not only departs from "immersive", understood as technologically-defined and technologically-determined, such as stereo or cinema, it also contributes to ways in which immersive thinking can have wider applications beyond those technical and material definitions of immersive 'technology'. History, as human memory of one sort or another, submerges and immerses.

I am going to explore the ways in which the presence of photographs in the public space constitutes, and contributes to, an immersive experience, not only in material ways but in terms of enriching the psycho-geographies of the past. History, as collective understanding, engages all the senses as it mobilises the imagination of the past. Yet, historical presences have diverse effects on general historical awareness and operate at emotional levels which are hard to ascertain (Jordanova, 2000, p. 180). Photographs, I argue, are part of a saturated and saturating experience of historical topographies which is messy, decentred, sensory, affective and, above all, immersive in that, incorporating viewers, they surround and soak into consciousness. While the role of photographs in cohering relationships with the past is well established, in the public space, photographs are increasingly circulating across media - screens, spaces, surfaces and bodies (Henning, 2018, p. 17). That is, they have become immersive as they saturate and fill the historical habitus of the everyday, forming an unarticulated environment of sensibilities and dispositions through which a sense of the past is absorbed (Bourdieu, 1977). The presence of photography has consequently changed the pattern and pulse of the past in the public space as an immersive experience, but one that is often unperceived and unarticulated.

Two facets of such immersions wind around one another, and consequently how intensities of attention and thus historical immersion are managed in public space. First, are the ways in which photographs create an *unremarked* historical presence in the public space which exists unnoticed as people move through the city or town as a space of historical imagination and identity. Second, is the conscious employment of photographs in the public space to create, mediate and manage forms of "historical attention", but one that works in both conscious and unconscious, intentional and unintentional ways.[1]

The terms that underpin contemporary ideas of public history imply a level of self-consciousness, intention and even consensus, aspects which Jürgen Habermas famously associated with the public sphere as a realm of reason with the potential for consensus, and the condition of being 'public' (Habermas, 1989). Yet the "publics" that constitute public spheres and public spaces are variously multiple, fluid, self-ordinating and imagined. Public space, as I use it here, is a space where public culture, in this case in relation to the past

1) This paper is part of a larger research project on photography and the emergence of what we would now call "public history" – historical narratives working in everyday space, and created both for and by the public themselves.

and history, is created through open availability and circulation in a "vast intertext of mixed media" Images are therefore active in the production and shaping of understandings in the public sphere and its constituent publics, outside the formal structures of the state and within the structures of the local and the affective.[2] These can, of course, overlap as they consolidate a public defined through the dynamic connections of its sensibilities and dispositions (Warner, 2002, pp. 51–2; Hariman and Lucaites, 2007, p. 296; Allbeson, 2021, pp. 13–14). Visual structures are both formative and definitive, and with a democratic spread. The images that concern me here are visible, effectively, to all, yet there is no given or specific outcome, but one that is nonetheless effective and affective. Immersive experience has been described as "one which places us within an image space, surrounding us with mediated content" (Jones, 2019, pp. 38–39). The role of photographs, as public images, is to immerse users of everyday spaces – the street, the railway carriage, the advertising hoarding, the park, the waiting room – in a sense of the past. The perceptual framing, and the extensive surrounding space of the immersive, is the everyday, a habitus of cultural disposition which places interaction within the world as the generative principle of social practice as publics are made through textual, here photographic circulations visibilities and immersions (Warner, 2002, p. 50).

In the digital age, photographs have never been more active and significant as public images. While having both a conceptual coherence and history, as technologically-altered interventions in time and space, they seep into and saturate the everyday almost unnoticed (Henning, 2018, p. 8). Consequently, in order to think about historical immersion, I am going to make three incisions into a huge and sprawling field. First, I am going to consider briefly the pre-history of historical immersion and then, second, look at the role of photographs as they constitute layered and multiple historicities that create what philosopher of history, Francois Hartog, has called the museumification of urban spaces, realised here by the presence of photographs (Hartog, 2015, pp. 102–3). Finally, by way of example, I am going to look at a series of photographic interventions in the public space of Lewes, a town in Sussex, England, which culminated in a collective performance piece of total historical immersion. But first some framing and underpinning.

Pre-cognitive Apprehensions

'Immersive', as I consider and develop it here, moves beyond the intentional 'placing' of the immersive event , but rather engages a broader, saturating presence of photographs. As such, I am more interested in the unintentional immersion that emerges from different intensions and pratices of placing. I term this "just thereness" – the quality of being "just there"that nobody notices, images which are not 'read' in the way that methods teach us. It has resonances with Michael Billig's concept of banal nationalism and its manifestation as the limp flag on the town hall absorbed into the unconscious habits of the everyday, rather than the flags consciously waved at coronations or football matches (Billig, 1995). Immersion emerges, is laid down and shaped as an "ongoing product of a multiplicity of dynamic connections" (McCormack, 2013, p. 24). It constitutes a sense of variable proximity vacillating between distance and closeness, noticed and unnoticed, a quality of "just being there" in extensive and expanding space (Jones, 2019, p. 37). Daniel Miller has argued that things (in which we can include photographs) are at their most powerful when they are not evident. He says:

> the less we are aware of them, the more powerfully they can determine our expectations by setting the scene and ensuring normative behaviours … they determine what takes places to the extent that we are unconscious of their capacity to do so – [they] fade out of focus into peripheral vision, yet determinant of our behaviour and identity. (Miller, 2005, pp. 5–6).

In other words, immersion is premised in a "sensible materiality" (McCormack, 2013, p. 23), while consumption is defined by the power of the unintentional, or at least not consciously apprehended, immersion can occur through photographs as they saturate the visual field.

This presence of photographs in immersive landscapes can be understood as a form of what geographer Nigel Thrift has called a pre-cognitive dynamic of susceptibility through the quality of just being there. Thrift calls this 'non-cognitive awareness' and 'involuntary processes of encounter', things that are seen but not processed or consciously experienced:

> Non-cognitive awareness … and involuntary process of encounter …
>
> moments of relation of which no residue remains upon which
>
> therefore we may not easily be able to reflect but which can still have grip.
>
> (Thrift, 2008, pp. 8–9).

Likewise, drawing on the radical empiricism of Dewey and James, Derek McCormack argues that cognitive knowing "emerges from a sort of non-representational sense making" (2013, 24). What I am suggesting is an unarticulated historical unconscious, created by the very immersive presence of photographs which are not consciously seen. These are pre-linguistic, non-representational practices of absorption that create both being and affect (Springgay & Thurnam, 2018, p. 35). The presence of photographs works as a habitual visual taxonomy – sites of visibility where common yet unarticulated understandings could arise. They work within the ephemeral spectacle and visual and haptic cornucopia of the public space. Crucially, in ways that resonate with debates about the insidious and subliminal representation of gender or race for instance, photographs of the historical were seen and absorbed by those who did not consciously engage with them.

Photographs thus constitute an immersive form in the street: noticed and unnoticed, visible and invisible, everywhere and nowhere. They are imbibed largely unconsciously, literally "at street level" through the processes of everyday visuality, of walking through the streets as an affective materiality. It is a "knowledge that is unaware of itself" (Pollen, 2016, p. 66; Bourdieu, 1977), invisible yet active, affective and saturating. One sees the traces of these processes of absorption in

2) Warner (2002) gives a useful account of the distinctions between public, a public and the public.

Fig. 1 Photographs displayed in stationer's window (right).
Stratford upon Avon. c. 1885. Photo: George Washington Wilson. (© University of Aberdeen)

photographs themselves **(Figure 1)**, the unconscious proximity, the idle-flaneur type-consumption or that just being there (Andersson, 2018). However, a rhythm of ordinariness is not itself outside history. Art historian Lynda Nead writing on visuality and moral ordering of the Victorian city describing "photographs spilling out of the containing frame … into the space of the street" (2000, p. 153), while Nigel Thrift talks about "a vast spillage of *things*" as "sense-catching forms" (2008, p. 9). In this instance, Lynda Nead is writing in particular about pornography and the contamination of the street; however, the immersive work of photographs is framed by similar ideas of visibility and moral order, the reproduction of values around positive and negative spillages onto the street, and the implications of excess. As Melissa Miles states, replete with metaphors of inundation, there is a liquid language of the public sphere which is "drowning in a flood of photographs and caught in an 'image-saturated' environment…both vast and overwhelming" (2020, p. 1).

Photographs in Public Space

With this broad historical perspective in mind, I now want to turn to my second strand, namely, the presence of historical photographs as immersive landscapes in the present. The contemporary urban space is saturated with the past; to walk the streets is to be immersed in the space of the past. There is a vast literature, over many years, on this, from cultural theorists, geographers, urban planners, architectural theorists, anthropologists and historians, which I cannot begin to address here, but many of those debates resonate through my discussion (see for instance de Certeau (1984), Casey (1993), Ingold (2000), Ingold and Vergunst (2008), Montserrat and Rose (2022)).

Historical photographs in the public space are ever more present, given the ease with which photographs can now be reproduced, resized and remediated through high-resolution scans to create immersive environments. While digitally enabled however, the photographs that concern me here are not defined by their fluid digitality, but through their reality affects in creating a tangible legacy of "the real" as an intensifying modality. Once alerted to their presence, one finds a plethora

Fig. 2 Local history display. Stamford Lincolnshire. 2019 (author's photograph).

of Victorian and early twentieth-century photographs around, not, in this case, in archives, nor in books or digital environments, but in the streets – on hoardings around building sites, in shop windows, on buildings or transport networks. While photographs have long been used in outdoor exhibitions and 'historical panels' in heritage trails **(Figure 2)** and the like with their specific attentive demands, the technical possibilities of the digital age have changed the scale and intensity of historical photographs in the public space as both experience and metaphor.

Visual markers, from statues to plaques, have been used to historicise the urban space at least since the sixteenth century. However, the increasing ubiquity of historical photographs inserts another visual narrative. For photographs introduce a very specific form of marker of the past into the public space, not the icons of the famous, but rather the very look

Fig. 3 Leicester Railway Station. 2015. (author's photograph).

and immediacy of the past, as visual traces of the past are floated into the present. Their immersive potential takes many forms, from artists' interventions to modest interactions with and uses of photographs to historicise the everyday spaces of contemporary experience such as shops, stations and building sites **(Figure 3)**.[3] This history is not simply marked in place, but is intimately populated with a sense of real people. These photographic "floatings" into the present take various forms but all link to a sense of "personal experiences" and "making the past come alive", merging the realistic, nostalgic and sometimes elegiac.

Photographs disturb the relationship between excess of memory and what might be assumed as the natural processes of time slipping by (Edwards, 2021, pp. 29–41). Importantly these processes are entangled in different forms of attention or non-attention. An excellent example is the degree to which public commemoration and memorialisation of the First World War between 2014 and 2018 was, to a substantial extent, photographically driven as war memory saturated the public space. Photographs filled shrines in parish churches, decorated war memorials, were knitted or crocheted into poppies, adorned railway carriages **(Figure 4)**, filled television documentaries and turned into art works, in the vast intertextual networks of media in which photographs were at the centre. They became immersive and shaped the environment of encounter. Yet, while they have a "just there" quality, saturating and overflowing the street space, they also demanded attention and engagement: a perceptual shift from historical unconsciousness to historical consciousness.

One should also recognise that the dual immersive qualities of 'just there' and 'demanding attention', that 'placing' that I noted at the beginning, have been quickly marketised. For instance, 'just there' as corporate performances are used to legitimate

3) A notable example is Shimon Attie's "Writing on the Wall" project in the old Jewish quarters of East Berlin, 1991–2, which has had many imitators. http://shimonattie.net/portfolio/the-writing-on-the-wall/ [accessed 28.10.2021].

Fig. 4 The 'fallen' of the Great Western Railway. Paddington Station, London. 2019. (author's photograph)

changes in the urban landscape by asserting a continuity with the past and thus their own legitimacy. As Ludmilla Jordanova has noted "commercialisation" is one of the markers of public history (Jordanova, 2000, p. 167). In London's Crossrail project, for instance, billed as the largest civil engineering project in Europe, major innovations at Paddington station are both articulated photographically, and self-consciously anchored, in the engineering of the nineteenth century. In the walkway between the main station and the Hammersmith and City/ Circle line station, and thus part of the daily pre-cognitive

Fig. 5 Paddington Station, London. 2016 (author's photograph).

Fig. 6 Historical photograph, Sainsbury's supermarket, Leeds Railway Station. 2016 (author's photograph)

landscape of tens of thousands of people, is a display **(Figure 5)** on the building of the underground and the Paddington cuts, the ghostly figure of the engineer Isambard Brunel presiding over the photographic timeline. These are rich photographs, full of workers, their presence held in the photographic trace. The whole space of the engineering project is linked as historically contiguous, as the photographs populate the space with its original workforce, while round on the other side of the station, modern engineering is self-consciously positioned in alignment with Brunel and the achievements of the nineteenth century: as the hoarding declares: "Brunel's station revitalised for the 21st century."[4] The project is legitimated through the immersive presence of the past. Another more modest example of corporate claims to be part of those social processes of community and memory is that of Sainsbury's, the major supermarket chain, on Leeds railway station **(Figure 6)**. This photographic topography both reinforces the continuity of place and re-peoples the past. Dead spaces or transformed spaces reclaim their past through the immediacy and temporal dynamics of the photograph, and using immersive presence of the pre-cognitive, atmospheric, and extra-representational, to legitimate their operations.

With a different flavour, the local government is doing something similar in Swindon, an unremarkable ex-railway town, where photographs are used to reanimate and repopulate the town's formative railway heritage. The "ideal" village of railway workers' housing founded in the 1840s, with school, mechanics institute, and health provision.[5] Across the road were the huge engineering yards. Photographs are used to move this history into the space of the street and to the surface of everyday experience. Here photographs of nineteenth- and twentieth-century workers are pasted on to builders' hoardings around one of the railway village buildings, now being restored after being semi-derelict for years **(Figure 7)**. But the photographs are working beyond the representational. They become markers of reanimation, rebuilding consciousness of the past around buildings and spaces, as well as creating an everyday landscape which embraces the presence of the past. It is also one encountered unconsciously, pre-cognitatively, everyday, placed as these images are on one of the main roads leading to the town centre, passed by several thousand cars a day. Tina Campt has argued, in a very different context, that photographs constitute a "low hum" of presence in the quotidian, and describes the 'lower frequencies of transfiguration' enacted within the unmarked everyday. Her sonic and acoustic metaphors capture something of the

Fig. 7 Swindon, builder's hoardings. 2017 (author's photograph)

4) Hoarding around building site for Crossrail, Eastbourne Terrace, Paddington, London. April 2016.

5) The health care system was so successful that, almost 100 years later, it became the prototype for the UK's National Health Service.

sense of immersion, the low background hum of images and photographs in the public space, that I am suggesting here.

The immersive qualities of such histories are particularly evident in a series of local history and photography exhibitions that have taken place in the small town of Lewes in Sussex since 2014, and which furnish my final example. These exhibitions worked in all the ways I have noted thus far. Curated by Brigitte Lardinois, a local resident and academic from the University of the Arts London, they were an experiment in what Victorian and Edwardian photographs could do in the public space. The exhibitions were experiments not only with the reach of an archive, but also in the impact of historical photographic presence on historical imagination and sense of place and community. The multiple exhibitions created the topography of the town as an expanded immersive space and operated over multiple forms and demanded very specific forms of attention from the pre-cognitive to almost forensic attention – perhaps seeking faces from the past. All demanded a form of immersion as users could engage in multiple ways and with multiple intentions and intensities, either walking or through interactive maps which annotated the urban space.

This historical intensity emerged from very specific local conditions. Lewes is home to *Edward Reeves Photography*, one of the longest-lived and best documented local photographic businesses in the UK.[6] Their first studio opened in 1855 in the wet plate and albumen print revolution. In particular, their archive is unusually and pleasingly complete. Little, if anything, has been thrown out. Historians can reconstruct, for instance, the demographics of clientele, changing styles of the desired social icon, patterns of commissioning, and, of course, the changing face of Lewes itself.

The *Stories Seen through a Glass Plate* series of exhibitions draws on this rich local resource.[7] It also constitutes a museumisation of the townscape in Hartog's terms, not through managerial heritage but through the photographic mapping of the past, literally and metaphorically on to the town. Historical photographs of Lewes, made for that community by Reeves, were reproduced as high-resolution digital copies and mounted on light boxes so they projected, shimmering, into the public space. Light boxes /photographs were placed in the shop and house windows actually shown in those photographs, [http://www.reevesarchive.co.uk/SSTAGPIV/index.html] so the street became a reflexive and folded museum. The light boxes simultaneously enlarged the photographs, but not massively (about four times the original whole plate), and miniaturised Lewes' history in a succession of jewel-like encounters shimmering in their spaces **(Figure 8)**.[8] Recalling Michel Serres' notion of time as variously folded, kneaded and crumpled in ceaseless contractions and attenuations, the sense of place and its history became layered and folded, as light box back-lit projections gathered layers of cognitive and optical reflections, including those of the viewer standing in the street (Serres & Latour, 1995; see also Connor, 2004). **(Figure 9)**. The light boxes simultaneously stimulated absence and presence, a sense of the past but also a profound sense of connection. As public

Fig. 8 Lightbox, *Stories Seen through a Glass Plate.* Lewes, 2014. (©Reeves Archive Project).

Fig. 9 Temporal layers. Lightboxes and windows and streets, 2014. (author's photograph).

history, the project stimulated a sense of ownership of the past on the terms of the street space. The exhibitions created an immersive and intense space which could be reauthored and subjective time projected into the space of the street (McQuire, 2012, p. 137). It represents a relational, situated and richly textured temporal environment, bound up with micro and macro social experience, as the street turned into an immersive lived landscape of the past (Keightley, 2012, pp. 2, 4).

Thus, the light-boxes became shrine-like objects as viewers stood quietly in the street in a state of contemplation. I am told that people came from far and wide – mini-bus loads of ancient Lewes-born relatives were brought to see the photographs. It became a collective family album played out in the space of the street. But it also operated on a pre-cognitive level, creating a low hum in Tina Campt's sense, as it was absorbed into the background of daily life by neighbourhood residents and passers-by. Local histories assumed a new immediacy and vibrancy as part of the everyday, through registers of attention and inattention. Importantly the light-boxes served as triggers for historical conversations as groups of people, often complete strangers, created what McQuire, writing of big-screen projection in the public space, has called the "ambient intimacy amongst strangers" (2012, p. 139). Indeed, I experienced this myself.

Much has been written on the relationship between photographs and orality and the way in which photographs become interlocutors, in that they shape the conversation in ways that would not have happened had they not existed. It is precisely this reanimation of historical photographs which stimulated a sense of vital local history – vital in both senses in that it was important and significant and second, that it had a vitality, a dynamic. The project demonstrated the power of place – the

6) Reeves describe themselves as "four generations and half a million photographs later …" https://www.edwardreeves.com
7) The most recent 2020 exhibition focused on the retail histories of Lewes. http://www.reevesarchive.co.uk/the-face-of-the-high-street/map.html
8) Unfortunately, I never saw it at night but it must have been particularly effective in the encompassing darkness.

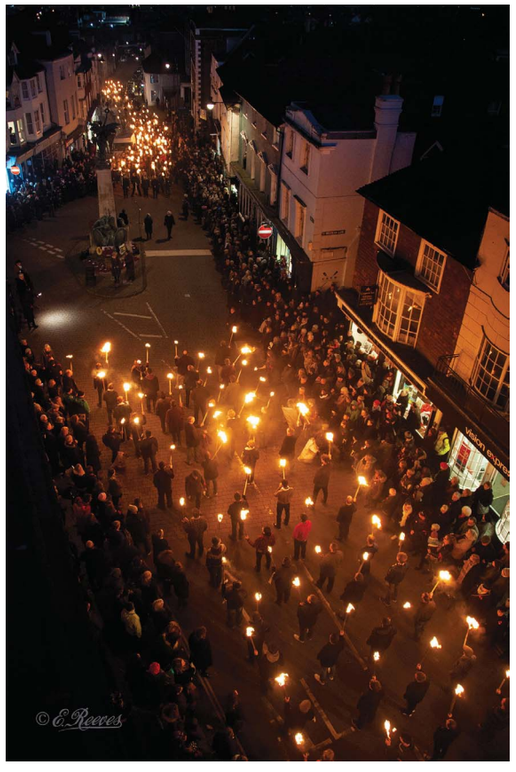

Fig. 10 Lewes remembers. View of performance at the war memorial, 2017 (© Edward Reeves Photography).

power of ordinary urban landscapes to nurture citizens' public memory, to encompass shared time in the form of shared space. The everyday experience of the street became an historically-scripted space through the immersive power of photographs, working over registers of attention and of "just thereness" as I have described.

Such immersive experience creates publics as collective immersive political and civic bodies – not simply audiences and spectators. As Melissa Miles puts it "photography's publics come into being when strangers engage in collective, reflexive, communicative, publicly visible interaction to photographs" (Miles, 2021, p. 8). This comes to the fore in the final element I want to discuss. **(Figure 10)** The apotheosis of this series of immersive historical interventions was *LEWIS REMEMBERS*, to mark the memory of the First World War in 2017. It was a performance triggered and framed by the presence of the photographs. The topography of local experiences of the war – soldiers, nursing, or foddering requisitioned horses for instance – was spread out over the town photographically through carefully positioned light boxes. This topography could, as was the case with the other exhibitions, be experienced by walking, looking and, interactively, in an immersive spectacularisation and museumisation of the street space.

The cumulative performance was on 17 November 2017, when young men representing the 251 war dead of Lewes, processed bearing torches, from the multiple points of this photographic topographic overlay. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEcsVhkhowk] In darkness they came from all over the town towards the war memorial, from the photographically-marked houses in which the war dead had lived or the businesses where they worked. The streets became historically immersive spaces as they filled with smoke from the flickering light of the torches, and as ghost soldiers filed through the old streets, their feet tramping. Walking became an immersive action of affective intensity. It also functioned across different historical scales of the collective and individual. As names of the dead were read out 'their' torch was extinguished as individuals slipped away into darkness until all was dark. The watching crowd, engaged in a form of civic spectatorship, was held back by a cordon of women, representing the women left behind, holding the space as they had done 100 years ago. But, crucially, the whole immersive performance and envelopment of both participant and spectator was premised on the presence of photographs in the public space.

Closing Thoughts

The presence of these photographs, and others I have discussed, is firmly rooted in the imaginative histories of place from local historians, designers, artists and indeed corporations, linked to the affective tonalities and sensory knowledge of the immersive experience. All have, in their different ways, recognised the cultural saliency of both photographs and the past, and the fluid relationship between past and present and its immersive potentials. As such, immersive historical dynamics mean that attention is paid to photographs in different, perhaps more fleeting ways, in distracted ways, or that they are not noticed at all – 'just there'– as different corporal and thus discursive relationships with photographs are brought into play. These are photographs on the move in every possible way as the urban landscape offers a reconnection of fragments. Historical space itself becomes an immersive cultural product – and one that is defined through photographs and in which photography becomes an idiom of historical relevance, immediacy and a sense of ownership.

Not only does such a consideration expand the remit of the 'immersive', but also ideas coming out of immersive media can help us think about the work of photographs in unconsidered historical presences. This position becomes increasingly pressing and persistent as the development of computational immersive heritage practices, using high definition and multiple data project and the mass-image archive increasingly fill a sense of the past. These demand full and immersive attention and expand the habitus of "the past" to the boundaries of human visual acuity (Kenderdine, 2016). But they are strategies that have their conceptual, cognitive and perceptual base in the practices and desires that shape the kinds of more modest immersive projects that I have described.

Thinking immersively also brings larger historiographical questions into play. What is at stake when photographs are used to imagine a space in particular ways? What patterns of historical authority are at work? How is the past carried into present, by what social actions? What gets remembered and what conditions? There is a politics to these issues and questions which is beyond the scope of this paper, but they are part of my larger project. All public spaces are defined by unequal and diffused distributions of power and agency, by the obtuse way in which photographs do their ideological work, and by the work of history itself as an apparatus (Welch, 2021, p. 64), tracing the uses that governments, professions and other interested parties make of 'the public sphere' and of the past, and charting the ways in which the results have become part of a 'society's imaginary' (Jordanova, 2000, p. 279). Which histories are made visual in the public sphere and to what end? Do its effects challenge or confirm dominant narratives? The public image enables a thinking through of a

collective identity, perhaps in more inclusive ways – the presence of those nineteenth-century railway workers at Paddington Station or the humble foot soldiers of Lewes, for instance.

The presence of the past is increasingly part of wider practices of visualisation of the public and urban space in visualised futures. If the nineteenth century urban space was profoundly visual and historicised, the digital practices of the urban space render immersive properties an on-going event which is, as I have argued, affective and embodied rather than simply representational (Montserrat and Rose, 2022). Absorbed and internalised in immersive space, the visibility of history under such conditions is part of a collective identity construction through a saturating visibility of the past. Photographs are engaged with, but there is also that unaware presence, photographs that are "just there", part of those atmospherics of place. They are not spoken about, but they saturate the cultural, civic and public sphere.

The focus on the representational power of photographs has meant that their immersive non-representational 'just thereness' and pre-cognitive action has tended to be underplayed. But immersion as a concept enables us to figure a past imprinted without consciousness of it or articulation, in order to create affective space, because it is not merely about the visibility and circulation of specific photographs but the massing and concatenation of photographs that creates a sense of, here, the past over time. Immersion is a key element and concept in this process. Photographs become part of the everyday ambience and environment – outside the discourses of media *per se* because they are absorbed as part of an ongoing and fluid re-ordering of life and experience. They are truly saturating and immersive.

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