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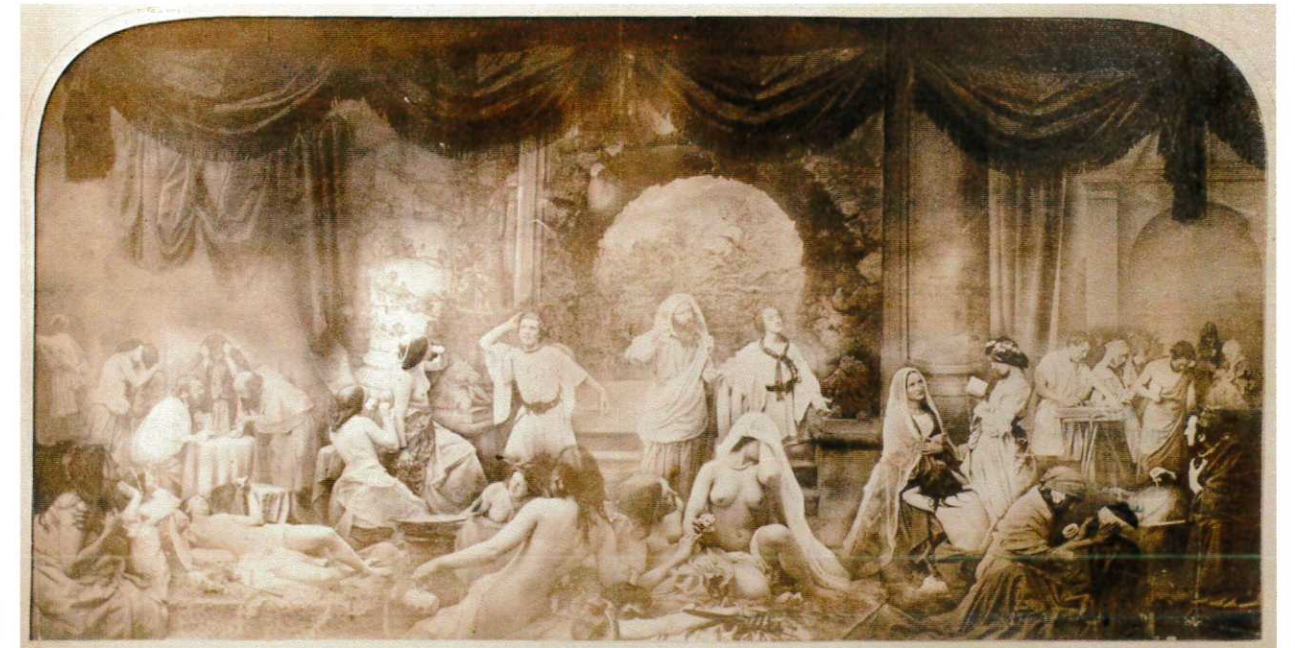
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The camera is a tool that allows people to express themselves artistically, politically, socially, critically and comedically. In this respect, photography can be used to tell a story in as many ways as literature or film can tell a story. However, because a photographic camera can take only one picture at a time – as opposed to the flowing narrative possible in the mediums of writing, film and video – photography has to work harder to get meanings across and utilises a series of different strategies in order to do this. Perhaps the word 'snapshot' best explains this characteristic of photography: we never get the whole story, just a slice of it, and it is up to the viewer to 'fill in the blanks' and make the story understandable.

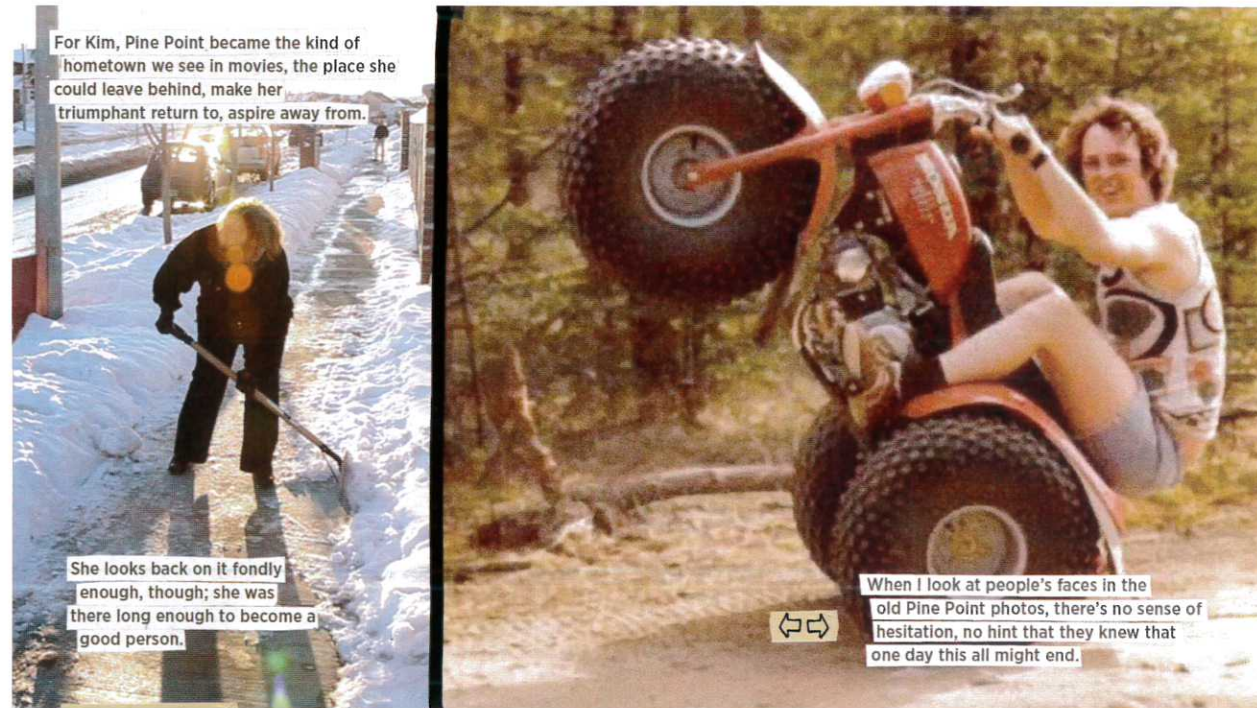
This elliptical nature is one of photography's strengths, but it can also be a source of ambiguity, mystery and even frustration. Because so much of photography works on a documentary level, story can be crucial. But how can a sense of sequence be expressed in just one image? The easiest and most common way around this lack of context is to accompany a photograph with a caption. The seesaw effect of reading and looking is essential for providing context.

In the 19th century, some pioneers of photography were adroit at layering images with metaphor and symbolism in order to tell a story, in the same manner as painting had traditionally done. By doing this, they expanded the ability of the medium to tell more of the story; to do more than present a straight documentary 'slice' or a trace from life. To achieve this wider narrative, photographs were commonly staged. By having the subjects act out a scene for the camera (as one would in a play or film), the subsequent viewer knows that the scene has not been taken from life and that a story is at the heart of the meaning. In staged or constructed (art) photography, the fictional qualities are pushed to the fore. A clear example of this can be seen in *The Two Ways of Life* (right) by the Swedish-born Victorian art photographer Oscar Gustave Rejlander (1813–75). For this photograph, Rejlander layered as many as 30 negatives to create a dense tableau depicting vice and virtue that to contemporary eyes seems melodramatic and over the top, but which to the eyes of the Victorians would have been fully aligned to fashionable academic painting. This method of layering negatives (or files, as is done today) has continued to be a popular device, and one used by several artists in this book, including Jeff Wall, who creates similarly fantastical scenes, albeit with very different meanings.

Another, contrasting method of storytelling in photography is through the use of a large number of sequenced images. This was a device used in early



Oscar Gustave Rejlander, *The Two Ways of Life* (1857)



Michael Simons and Paul Shoebridge, *Welcome to Pine Point* (2011)

photography – such as Eadweard Muybridge's *The Horse in Motion*, which tells the basic story of how a horse gallops – and one that has developed in line with technology ever since. The technique has, for example, advanced with the 'slide show' as a popular way of viewing stories on the web, and over the past decade, as technology has developed, the rise of multimedia storytelling has gained in popularity, initially in documentary circles. This method employs photographic stills, sound and video clips, voice-over, music, interviews, graphic design and illustrations, in any combination, to give as much context to a story as possible. An early and significant example of this is *Welcome to Pine Point* (left), an interactive web documentary by the Canadians Michael Simons and Paul Shoebridge. The pair set out to make a book about the death of the photo album as a way to keep memories, but they eventually developed a multimedia piece that turned out to be a rich alternative to both the photo album and the traditional notion of documentary. Equally important is its exploration of how we remember the past and how memory proves to be an unreliable source for distinguishing between truth and fiction.

Using cameras as well as narratives as their tools, photographers tell stories about themselves and others. Narrative, however, is something broader than photography. Narrative and oral history are characteristics of humanity, storytelling being an important way in which we transmit knowledge, data and opinions. In photography, narratives are built by both photographers and viewers, because a narrative is inextricably linked with context on the one hand and interpretation on the other. If the maker/photographer provides no context – for example through captions – the interpretation of a

photograph will inevitably be steered by the viewer's own experiences, background and education. As a result, without at least some context already in place, concepts such as fact and truth (as conceived by the maker) immediately lose their value. On the other hand, where context is abundantly provided, as in a multimedia piece, the opinion of the maker may be foregrounded, leaving the viewer with less room for personal interpretation. So a good use of narrative might seek to provide room for and balance both authorial intention and the viewer's interpretation.

In multimedia storytelling, the photograph offers an array of alternatives to the classical structure of linear narrative – a story with a beginning, middle and end, and with one or more characters. Multimedia non-linear storytelling can be more easily enriched by the use of flashbacks, memories and digressions, for instance. Whether linear or non-linear, and whether the stories provide a dénouement or are open-ended, a photographer developing a visual story will usually ask themselves the following questions: What is the audience am I trying to reach? What is the theme of the story I want to tell? What is the context? What will be the events? Do I need a character to personify the issue I am raising?

Character-driven storytelling is a way of making the narrative personal, in fact employing a cinematographic storytelling technique. On a vernacular level, this can also be seen in the rise in popularity of 'stories' across image-sharing sites that allow users to create mini-films using photographs and video that can also be written on, or to which music and sound can be added. Regardless of how the result relates to truth or fiction, everyone's life can now be turned into a Hollywood-style production, to be viewed once rather than treasured forever.

Henk Wildschut (born 1967)

Monday, 14 December 2015 10:14 (2015)

'Business flourished in the shopping street.'
This sentence evokes images of shining shop fronts, luxury products in beautifully illuminated shop windows and excited people doing their Christmas shopping. The line is from the book *Ville de Calais* (2017) by the Dutch photographer Henk Wildschut, and the shop we see (pictured here) is in fact made of waste wood, plastic and cardboard. The street has a mud floor, no pavements. The word 'flourished' refers to an extension that had been constructed by using some more waste wood and plastic, two months after Wildschut first photographed the shop.

From 2006 to 2016, the photographer documented the rise and fall of the Calais Jungle, a 'village' consisting of makeshift dwellings created by refugees and illegal immigrants who were hoping to make their way from France to the United Kingdom. They were not welcome in either place. To survive the period during which they waited for a chance to make the dangerous crossing by smuggling themselves onto boats or through the Channel Tunnel, they built temporary shelters. The way in which the basic need for shelter takes shape became a theme for Wildschut, resulting in the publication *Shelter* (2010) as well as *Ville de Calais*. In these books, he shows us the ways in which people who are looking for a better life can build a community even in the harshest conditions. Without ever depicting the 'village' from close to, and only rarely showing its inhabitants as recognisable individuals, Wildschut is nonetheless able to depict a humanitarian crisis down to the smallest details, and without visual clichés. The shelters symbolise the larger, underlying story of poverty, fear, sorrow, exclusion, violence, courage and hope.





Alessandra Sanguinetti (born 1968)
***The Adventures of Guille and Belinda and the Enigmatic Meaning of Their Dreams* (2009)**

Alessandra Sanguinetti works in a documentary tradition; however, the photographs in this series do not form a linear narrative, but are instead a dreamy interlacing of interconnected stories that weave in and out of focus. The two young girls, aged nine and ten when the project started, create a world for themselves and invite the photographer in. The pace is slow, the mood is quiet and the viewer is reminded of the long-forgotten games of childhood. In *Argentina, Buenos Aires. Ophelias* (2001) shown here, the doomed Ophelia from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and perhaps more specifically the John Everett Millais painting (1851–2), is referenced as the two girls float in the stream. What do you think their game involves? What's the story?

The series is best understood as a book where the pace and rhythm of the story unfolds in a flowing narrative. We learn that the girls are often on a farm – their relationship with the animals is a natural and easy one. But the most important thread of the story relates to their friendship. They share an intimacy that is by turns serious and light-hearted. They dress up in various costumes, and their physical difference makes for both comedy and pathos. This push and pull of difference and fantasy is what makes the project so compelling. It is as if Sanguinetti has captured something wholly universal about childhood, something which seems strange to adults, but utterly right to children. The line between real and make-believe need not be so distinct. In the innocence and charm of the girls' relationship, there is also a hint of melancholy, as we know that this chapter of their lives will close and the story will take another route – sadly one more rooted in reality, as stories of growing up often are.



Sebastião Salgado (born 1944)
Gold Mine, Brazil (1986)

Trained as an economist, Sebastião Salgado became a photographer around the age of 30, dedicating his life to showing inconvenient truths about human intervention and its impact on the environment. His most famous pictures are of the Serra Pelada gold mine in Brazil, some 270 miles (430 kilometres) south of the mouth of the Amazon River. The dark power of this image lies in Salgado's distant point of view: the mine has an unnerving resemblance to Dante's *Inferno*, with the portrait format further emphasising the depth of the open mine and the epic scale of the miners' descent into its abyss. From this distance, the miners appear not as individual human beings, but as a herd of muddy human animals brought together by their restless search for a better, more prosperous future.

The gold rush began at Serra Pelada soon after a child found a nugget of gold on the banks of a local river in around 1980. The news about the discovery spread fast: tens of thousands of men sped to the site, which would soon become the world's biggest open-air gold mine. The gold fever brought out the worst in people, spreading violence and abjection. The nearby town became a place where murders took place daily and where teenage girls prostituted themselves for a flake of gold. At its peak, some 100,000 gold diggers worked in Serra Pelada under appalling conditions. Miners were paid 20 cents on average for digging and carrying up one sack of ore. When Salgado saw the mine for the first time, it reminded him of the time before Christ when the Egyptian pyramids were built: 'the history of mankind unfolded'.



Lee Howick (1928–2009) and Neil Montanus (born 1927),
Colorama #193 (Teenage Dance) (1961)

What a party! In a time when the term 'teenager' was new, this scene is trying to recreate what adults thought young adults did when they got together. Or, more accurately, hoped they did. Frozen in a suburban recreation room, the image shows a melange of activities from dancing to guitar playing to gazing at a man taking a photograph. This picture is one of the many vast 60-foot-tall back-lit transparencies called Coloramas installed by Kodak in Grand Central Station in New York City from 1950 to 1990 that together told a story of American values and aspirations, focusing on travel, leisure

and family. Looking at these, it seems that all uplifting events are real only if captured by a camera. Sound familiar? Although the fashions and pastimes may be different, and the context is one of advertising and promotion, the attitude summed up in the phrase 'It's only real if it's on Facebook' seems to have its roots in these strange, all-too-perfect American tableaux, which even at the time thrived on and exploited people's propensity for nostalgia.

Continuing a desire for a nostalgic past, Instagram, for example, originally provided for only square-format images,

in imitation of the popular Polaroid photograph. It offered filters with names such as '1977', which might bleach the photograph so that it resembled a faded snapshot, or add a vignette. Even the name is a melding of the words 'Instamatic' (Kodak's snapshot camera of the 1960s and 1970s) and 'telegram', romanticising analogue times of the past.

In the 1960s the marketing department of Kodak, through these sanitised scenes of American life, provided an ideology-driven story of a nation. Are the images that we post online also marketing an idealised life – albeit an autobiographical

one rather than a corporate, collective one? Could they be read as hundreds of little advertisements for their poster? Next time you take a picture at a party and post it to your social networks, think of this one and compare the story you are trying to tell with Kodak's.

Ralph Eugene Meatyard (1925–1972)
The Family Album of Lucybelle Crater (1970–1972)

An optician by profession, the American Ralph Eugene Meatyard is best known for the last body of work he created, *The Family Album of Lucybelle Crater* – a series of portraits of friends and family wearing masks and enacting low-key, enigmatic scenarios in the Kentucky countryside where he lived. Meatyard never finished his original project, but a revised edition was published posthumously featuring the artist's intended sequencing of images, and adding in missing captions, reproduced in Meatyard's handwriting.

The sequence of photographs is made to resemble a family album. Images bear captions describing the people in them (this image, right, for example, is captioned 'Lucybelle Crater and her P.O. brother Lucybelle Crater' – everyone seems to be named 'Lucybelle Crater') and some of the scenarios follow the formulaic tropes of family snapshots. Startlingly, however, the artist's wife, Madelyn, wears a full-head hag's mask in each picture, while a friend or relative wears a transparent mask that half reveals and half transforms his features. The addition of the masks promises larger stories than a traditional, vernacular album might, making each mundane scenario ghoulish and gothic.

An ordinary photographic album needs a narrator to tell the story for it to be fully understood – that is part of its charm. One can look at the photographs but only ever gain a partial understanding of what is shown: to fill in the blanks, a relative is needed to elaborate and describe, to provide and tell the stories that bind the images together. Meatyard offers us no such context; it is up to the viewer to join the dots. We must do this with our knowledge of traditional family albums and how they tell a story and what they do not tell. For example, we know most albums do not reveal negatively life-changing scenarios such as death, divorce or mental illness, but instead concentrate on celebration and togetherness. The masks hinder our ability to read the images and the emotions of the participants, and replace our feelings of empathy with a sense of the uncanny.





Gillian Wearing (born 1963)
Confess All On Video. Don't Worry You Will Be in Disguise.
Intrigued? Call Gillian Version II (1994) and Signs that Say What
You Want Them to Say and Not Signs that Say What Someone
Else Wants You to Say (1992–1993)

The British artist Gillian Wearing is a natural storyteller, using different narrative strategies with each piece of work. For these two works, she respectively used a video and photographs of people holding signs with their thoughts clearly written down – making their stories transparent to the outside world.

For the video (see opposite), Wearing put an advertisement in the weekly London listings magazine *Time Out* with the wording the same as the title of the piece. In a studio, she recreated a modern-day confession box and allowed the participants to confess their sins – typically revolving around sex, theft or revenge – without any interruption or judgement. What is fascinating is how the participants chose to conceal their identity – completely or partially hiding their faces.

In the photographs, Wearing used the reverse strategy so that we see the subject clearly. The contrast between the

person's physical persona and their inner thoughts which they wrote on the card is what gives the photographs their charge, as they often seem fictional or hard to believe. So the subject of *I'M DESPERATE* (above) is an affluent-looking man. Another shows a man with a face tattoo proclaiming, 'I have been certified mildly insane!' Are these 'real' confessions and thoughts? Or are the people wanting a moment of fame for the camera? The idea of confession is brought into question. Are they hoping for absolution, as in the Catholic confessional, or for release, as in the 'talking cure' of Freudian psychoanalysis? The result is unclear. In both works, the line between public and private is muddy and the motivations of the artist (and indeed the viewer) slide between the salacious, voyeuristic and bold.



