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Photography is hardly over.
However, what vernacular photography was might just be.
I think it's fair to say: what was vernacular photography — is no longer.
The history of photography as an accepted art-form, perhaps reached its first peak when Walker Evans (the Vitruvius of the vernacular) snuck her into the museum. He famously redeployed the camera as a clinical recording device – with the so-called integrity of the medium being paramount. (Of course, as an artist, for Walker Evans to remain apparently detached in the face of a Depression ravaged America took conviction in spades). This agreed preference for apparently non-artful recording variously saw the documentary records of Atget, and the schoolboy snaps of Lartigue, come to be read as exemplary artworks.

The absence of artifice, and the appearance of clinical detachment, has widely been regarded by art historians, and artists with cameras, as the most appropriate stance for the medium of photography as a fine art. It was the seemingly unaffected, yet lyrical, documentary qualities of the medium that first led photography to become accepted by the art museum as a fine art form. Photo-historians came to see the overt presence of the artful photographer as a misstep — with Pictorialism being the limit-case. The matter-of-fact photograph became the benchmark, from the police record to the postcard. From Walker Evans and August Sander to Bernd and Hilla Becher, the uninflected stare came to be seen as a return to the integrity of the medium. Recently, exceptions have again been allowed. However, these tend to be critically engaged in a meta-photographic play: such as the set ups of Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall or Thomas Demand. These knowing exceptions are allowed to prove the rule.

Outside of the world of photography, which aspired to being recognised as a fine art, the general public has always just got on with taking pictures and recording things. The snapshot had an aesthetic all to itself. The vernacular snap relaxed outside of art. It had no need to feign its utility. It was the perfect and practical medium of record. Many artists with cameras would follow suit.
However, the analogue vernacular snap is now something of an artefact. This isn’t simply a piece of rhetoric: it’s a fact. These snaps await their Linnaeus. Of course, there are millions of new vernacular photos being taken, but with the mass uptake of the digital and the phone camera, and with new platforms of photo-sharing and storage, the old snap has recently become redundant.

For several years I’ve been collecting other people’s snaps. Since I began seriously collecting found photographs, this turn has become ever more distinct. In a few short years these photos have been set adrift. For my generation they remain very much a part of living memory. For the next generation they’ve already become technological fossils. If for my generation they are like heritage media, for the next, they are as removed as the tin plate, the carte de visite and the dinosaur.

Every day I trawl the internet looking at all of the things people once photographed, and how. The vast array of photos printed out and floating unhinged in the world can now be read as being exemplary of what Walter Benjamin famously called “the dialectic at a standstill”. As a category, the snapshot is definitely in the order of the remnant. Benjamin’s poetic idea was a method of reading history through her recently redundant things. Through old toys, arcades and citations he read and wrote history, and mused philosophically. In Benjamin’s system, redundant things were employed for their indexical qualities. From the Arcade to the Archive, he read them as rubbings of the world. Benjamin thought we might glean insight from the cast off skins of modernity.
Recently I realised this was what my work had been doing for 30 years. From old books to postcards, from street discards to my so-called museums of recently redundant things bought on Ebay, which might be found to hold a single idea such as ‘falling’, or ‘air’ or ‘space’; or my collection of title pages torn from deaccessioned library books (Cubism CANCELLED, Twentieth Century Poetry CANCELLED, Great Expectations CANCELLED), or my LOST BIRD posters, or my thousands of found photos: my work adds up to an inventory of the recently redundant.
To collect is to gather your thoughts through things. Meaning might be found in the accumulation of details. Each photo taken, or collected, offers the possibility of completing a set; as if to photograph is to work at a solution, of a type. It’s as if we could only get all the pieces together we could solve the puzzle. This is a condition of both taking and collecting photos.

The camera reduces the world to a list of things to photograph. That’s its default position. Like a frottage of light the photograph lifts everything in its sights. Photography is the medium of record. Every photograph we take is in addition to the vast album of images that float about the world. Photography has the innate structural order of the archive. To photograph is to collect images. With each find, the collector’s satiation is short lived. It’s the next thing, and the hunt that keeps the collector elevated. Collecting relieves things of their use value.
The camera flattens the world ready to be placed like ferns in albums. One of my collections is made up of images that hold or perform the very idea of the index, the way a peach seems to hold the sun. These images are a set of pictures that capture and declare the indexical quality of the medium. A case in point is an instant Polaroid which shows a man in a crowded street. He’s covered in what appears to be his own blood. The image is a piece of documentary evidence. The document itself provides us with extra information. While at first we might suspect that the man has been in an accident, or suffered a beating, the writing beneath, tells us that he was hit by a ball and bat. This is itself a little confusing. Then the image reveals another indexical trace. The Polaroid has a piece of actual blood on its top edge. It might be the man’s. It might not be. It seems likely.

For years I’ve collected other people’s photos and sorted them into categories. Like most artists I started collecting to
inform my work. What seems to have happened is that gradually the collections became the work.

I have collections of bridges and of human bridges. I have categories of cars, and of pets, and of people with pets and cars. There are photographs of people holding a single thing — a fish caught, a gift received or, something else — something worthy of being photographed. I have hundreds of readers.

I have hundreds of photographer’s shadows, and a huge collection of photos of photographer’s thumbs. There’s a whole set of photographs of amateur models. There’s no shortage of those. But I only collect ones where you can see the impressions of their socks, or their waistbands embedded in their skin. Photography is an art made in the wake of things.
I have a set of interruptions, where someone has got in the way of the photographer’s view. There are images which previous owners have marked to show where they are in the picture. I’ve also assembled hundreds of snaps of people in the wind. I call this group a “Portrait of the wind”. You might notice a tie over someone’s shoulder or a billowing dress. I like the idea of an archive of something you can’t see. I also have albums of people listening to music.

I have a collection of photos of people from behind. I have photos of people relieving themselves. I have 365 photos that have been defaced. I’ve a huge set of photos of people who look dead but aren’t. Probably.
I have a collection of interruptions. There are, of course, also photographs of people holding cameras. And of people holding photographs. And photographs of photographs.

You might notice that with all of my work I’m collecting towards a logic of documents and things as it were. You also notice that when you put things in categories you find categories within those categories — someone reading — listening to music — and in the wind — or a photographer’s shadow and their thumb.
All of my found photos are found to capture and hold some sort of idea. If I ever find a photo that holds all of my categories maybe I might stop. To collect is to impose an order, and to delay — all at once. It’s a clinical and sentimental game. To select a single image from a set is to interrupt this implied order, to end the delay, and to stop living — for a moment. That’s what photographs do. They stop the living in their tracks.

And now, it seems as if vernacular snaps, these little paper documents, these pieces of the world, have themselves been stopped in their tracks.

Patrick Pound is a Melbourne-based artist working across mediums. His work has the look of having been made by someone who has set out to try and explain the world and who, having failed, has been reduced to collecting it. His work is about compiling and constructing evidence. His work poses the world as a puzzle.

He is currently working on a vast installation project called The Gallery of Air for the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne. The Gallery of Air includes 100 works from across the NGV’s collections and several hundred of the artist’s collected things all of which have been found to hold some idea of air from a draft excluder to an asthma inhaler — from a Jacobean air stem glass to a Dali ash tray made for Air India — from Constable’s cloud study to Goya’s farting figure.
A blown glass orb with a single air bubble — the breath of its maker — caught forever inside, might find itself next to an Atget photograph of a street worker blowing cigarette smoke.

Pound has held recent solo exhibitions at Hamish Mackay Gallery, Wellington, NZ (2012); West Space, Melbourne, (2011), Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne (2011); Grant Pirrie Gallery, Sydney (2010); Fehily Temporary (2010); Artspace Mackay Regional Gallery, QLD (2009); and the Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne (2008). He has been included in numerous group exhibitions including: The Big Picture, curated: Bronwyn Rennex and Jo Skinner, (Stills Gallery, Sydney, 2013); Living in the Ruins of the Twentieth Century, curated: Adam Jasper and Holly Williams, (UTS Gallery, Sydney, 2013)

Inside Running (Fremantle Arts Centre, 2013); Liquid Archive (Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, 2012); The Basil Sellers Art Prize (The Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, 2012); Paper Jams (The Gus Fisher Gallery, University of Auckland, 2012); Present Tense: An imagined grammar of portraiture in the digital age (National Portrait Gallery, Canberra 2010); Someone looking at something (West Space, Melbourne 2009); and Photographer Unknown (Monash University Museum of Art, 2009). Patrick Pound’s work is held in numerous public and private collections including the National Gallery of Australia, the NGV, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Museum of New Zealand, Auckland Art Gallery, and the Dunedin Art Gallery.