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The World in a Jar: War & Trauma –Pictures and the Nature of Evil
by
Robert Hirsch
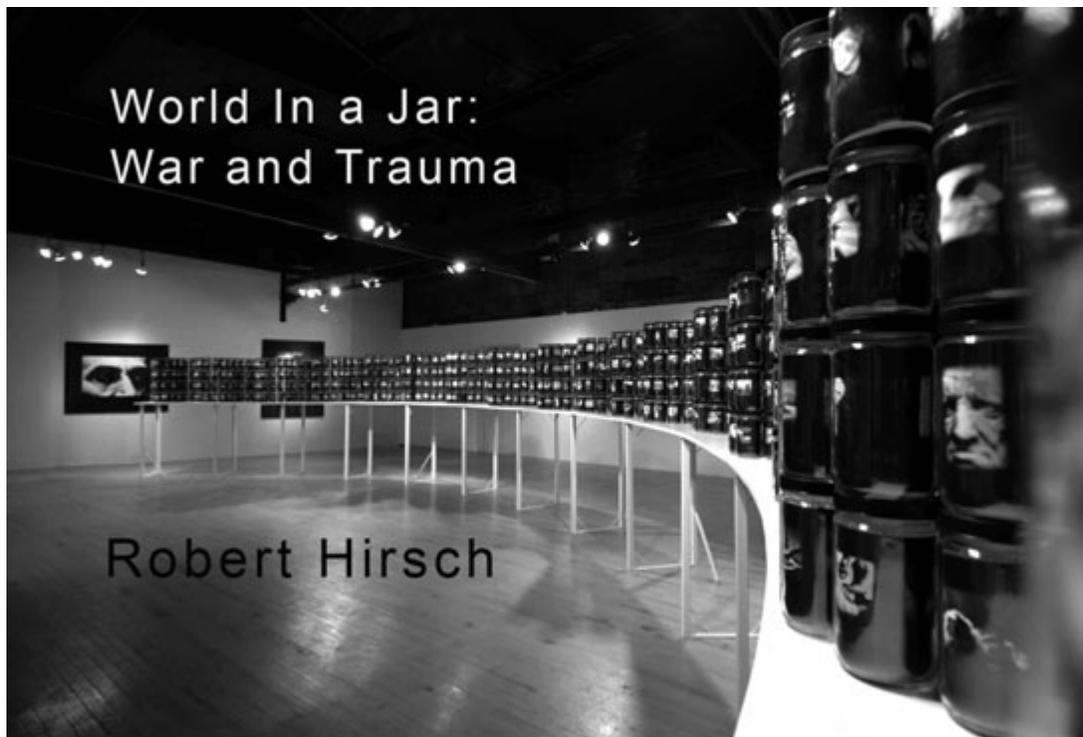
World in Jar: War & Trauma utilizes the camera as a social tool to curate and re-imagine key components from historical and original pictures to graphically explore the workings of our collective societal memory involving loss, popular culture, religion, tragedy, and the nature of evil. Utilizing the Shoah, commonly known as the Holocaust, as an historical anchor this venture evolved out of my response to the events of 9/11 and expanded to include such BIG issues as ethnic violence, genocide, religious intolerance, and war. This is accomplished through an amalgam of materials, processes, and tools to produce an open, wordless storytelling format that encourages viewers to ponder: "Who we are."

World in a Jar is a free-form sculptural montage that rethinks the customary linear narrative by offering a supermarket of moveable images. The installation consists of over 1000 individual image jars, stacked four high on a 50 x 4 x 2-foot serpentine display pedestal and is surrounded by ten individually framed 40 x 60-nch prints. The project regards image archives as a laboratory for experimental inquiries into the nature of vision and its relation to time. Each glass jar contains the same picture, a twin printed twice on a black field (akin to a 19th century stereo card), which lets the image be seen from multiple points of view. The utilization of a desktop laser printer and 32 ounce peanut butter jars challenges the credo of the big, beautiful print with its crisp detail and vast tonal range that has been framed to perfection.

Pushing against the boundaries of what constitutes a picture border, the images have no prescribed arrangement. Rather, each jarred image serves as an interchangeable viewing block, allowing it to be a perpetual work in progress that recreates itself each time it is installed. This introduction of chance permits each photograph to not only present its own split-second historical reference, but also informs the context and interpretation of the surrounding images. There are no captions or text references to anchor the images to particular events, which allow them to transcend their specific time-based circumstances. Rather, images float freely in an ambiguous, enigmatic, and uncertain space with each jar directing attention to another. This process increases the observation time, encouraging viewers to forge interconnections and expand realizations based on their own experiences. This follows the concept that a fine way to explain a picture is with another picture, encouraging viewers to build their own meanings based on their cultural awareness and visual literacy. Such an engagement is also a reminder of how photographs continue to seduce us into believing that they are objective records, when in fact all images are *not* what they initially appear to be and require thoughtful interpretation. Pictures are active and can make things happen. They are created for specific reasons and we respond to them through our own particular set of conscious and unconscious lenses. *World in a Jar's* open-ended production, emulating how the paradoxes and puzzles of our own memories are constructed can convey an endless tale about the human condition that exists outside of chronological time.

Where Does Art Come From?

Art, like evolution is adaptive, but during the past three decades certain theorists have distorted and straight-jacketed actual practice by insisting artistic sources be returned to their originating classes, cultures, genders, places, and races. Such a limiting, non- experiential model disregards what notable artists know – that our cultural heritage is founded on a practice of transformative art. The exchange of ideas is a powerful tool for promoting excellence in the visual arts and accomplished work can mentor and promote new vision. This entails borrowing, sharing, re-borrowing, and amending – the full range of ways new art learns from, builds on, and emerges out of the existing models. Consequently artists are looking for "Good Stuff" (existing models) to inform their endeavors. English Common Law is based on precedents. Doctors rely on previous research to fight disease. In music one can hear how Scott Joplin borrows from W.C. Handy, George Gershwin borrows from Joplin, Igor Stravinsky and Miles Davis from Gershwin, Aaron Copland from Stravinsky and Davis, and now movie composer John Williams, who has scored all of Steven Spielberg's blockbuster movies, from Copland. Consider one of America's popular cultural icons: *Steamboat Willie*, the 1928 Walt Disney cartoon that introduced Mickey Mouse. *Steamboat Willie* is based on Buster Keaton's 1928 silent film *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, which itself borrowed from a 1910 song, *Steamboat Bill*. Disney snatched creativity from the life around him, mixed that with his own talent, and then imprinted that mixture into the character of our society. In photography a similar process can be witnessed in how John Thompson begot August Sander who influenced Lisette Model who begot Diane Arbus. Select an art practice and you will find this 1-2-3 combination of snatch, mix, and imprint. As Pablo Picasso quipped, "Bad artists copy; Great artists steal."

A recent example of how the walls separating art and life keep getting thinner can be seen the case of prominent appropriation artist Richard Prince who is being sued by French photographer Patrick Cariou for unauthorized use of his photographic survey of Rastafarian culture. Prince purposely twists authorship into a knot by claiming he "practicing [art] without a license," which actually gets to the heart of how new work is created. Ask yourself: Is there anything inherently wrong with re-presenting that which exists? Should William Shakespeare's estate have sued Leonard Bernstein for converting *Romeo and Juliet* into *West Side Story*? Is there any difference between photographing a building or a page in a book? Both physically exist as finished objects and as potential raw material for new directions. A camera makes no distinction between the two subjects; it is a machine that doesn't care about what is in front of it and can capture anything that is touched by light.

In an age of digital sampling and point and click downloading, any data we can Google™ can be a starting matrix for new creations. This is at the nucleus of the Shepard Fairey case involving his Warholization of a Barack Obama photograph made by Mannie Garcia that was posted online and used by Fairey to make his "Hope" campaign poster. Regardless of the legal ramifications or what you think about Fairey's actions, it is indicative of how individuals constantly draw in experiences of others through the arts and the media and infuse that existing data to meet their needs. The more we know about how art is made, the more derivative and evolutionary we recognize art is. For creative individuals everything is grist to be transformed into something else. The physical world is both our rightful cultural inheritance and a visual testing ground. The difference between an innovative artist and a plunderer is the capacity to think, imagine, and act independently and in turn to express ideas differently from previously recognized views of a similar subject. We can identify inventiveness when a maker transforms a subject and gives it new meaning, providing a clear demarcation that separates imitation from fresh resourceful endeavors. Thus all artists endeavor to recompose the world by making it "special," creating extra-ordinary, heightened experiences that deliver satisfaction and pleasure which reality fails to provide. Hence, picturemaking is an act of assertion, control, and organization over a situation with each generation of imagemakers confronting the same challenge: how to retell and make memorable and significant pictures that fit their times.

Thing in Itself

Photography's transparent, even scientific, neutral quotidian ability to accurately reproduce realism has been the measure of truth that has asserted dominance over other forms of visual veracity. This opinion regards any deviation from this system as a capricious whim of emotion, fantasy, and sentimentality, thus condemning them as untrustworthy. Celebrated photographers are the ones who stick closely to the facts of a situation. These photographers pour themselves into this mold of alleged impartiality, supposedly devoid of any impulse to energetically partake in a narrative. Indeed! Scrutinizing a daguerreotype Edgar Allen Poe proclaimed it "discloses only a more absolute truth" of the subject being represented. This came from the prevailing notion that an "operator" merely pointed the camera and the machine produced the outcome. Such naïve observations about the daguerreotype's highly descriptive surface can fail to discover what is actually happening underneath the exterior. This still pervasive view that bona fide photography is limited to topographically depicting a subject continues to undercut the medium's potential to communicate complex ideas. We have a ghetto of practice that mistakenly equates truth with the erasure of beauty and the hand of the maker. Consequently splendor and technical expertise are admonished as showmanship, which detracts from a photograph's supposed objective value. Conversely, what intrigues me is imagemaking predicated on horizons that change as you move towards it. *World in a Jar* explores this space between art and documentary practice where reality combines with imagination to create an authenticity based on how a fluid meaning can be discovered at various stages of the creation process.

My intention is to make images that **evoke** an interior state of consciousness and grapple with a subject beyond its external physical structure. This approach can be likened to the Japanese concept of **shashin**, which says something is only true when it integrates the outer appearance with the inner makeup of a subject. American writer Herman Melville referred to the purely surface view of reality as "a pasteboard mask." Such an intricate facade conceals the intuitive world of the "**thing in itself**" – a deep structure of cultural, political, and psychological models that inform the realities "behind" or beyond what we can detect with our five physical senses – an idea dating back to Plato's concept of delving into the complex, many-sided, interior panorama of the world. From this standpoint, the story-telling experience of *World in a Jar* is similar to taking a walk at sundown and observing the day does not have an abrupt border with the night. Rather it is a complex and often-indistinct progression filled with twists and turns, a penumbra of counterpoints, subtlety, and false appearances – an infinite matrix of compound tales.

People mistakenly assume one has to go to the street or into nature to find authentic subjects to photograph, that all images are wild things waiting to be captured. *World in a Jar's* reconstructive style confronts this fallacy and dissents from the significance that mainline venues and publishers place on the genuineness of the banal and superficial while sightlessly paying no heed to artists who are connecting the visible with the invisible as a multifaceted means of looking inside an experience. This is symptomatic of confusing art with craft (skilled technique). Giant, high-resolution photographs are representational craft and can elicit emotions, but they only become art when promote encounters with the different, the hidden, the strange, the unknown, and most importantly with the not-yet-thought-of. Unfortunately, not much is likely to change as long as our cultural institutions continue to follow the lead of commercial venues with their emphasis on hip branding instead of searching for authentic artists who transmit meaning and understanding about the human experience.

World in a Jar's story requires no particular knowledge, training or expert mediation to comprehend, it speaks directly to its audience: You look and you know. It does this by inviting viewers to find and push on their edge of meaning by getting up-close and personal with the images. This intimate psychological dialogue between observers and objects can provide an initial pathway for cognitive and emotional understanding of a subject. This stratagem can open a secret window that asserts ideas and perceptions that we recognize as our own, but could not have given concrete form to without first having seen those images. These visualizations that combine the historical with the personal not only bear witness, but also can help us make sense out of an unruly world. Such stories also can raise our consciousness about our own apathy, thus inspiring constructive action.

Images & Meaning

This project involved researching visual material that was then selectively photographed to investigate the nature of the photo-based image. This was done in-camera through compositional and optical means, such as focus, depth-of-field, and lighting, rather than by post-camera Photoshop production, which is minimized. It is a Socratic process that allows me to engage in a philosophical and visual dialogue with other times, places, and makers, springing from the idea there is no correct first version of how an image should look. Nor is there a single, correct way to look a work, except with an open mind and patience. I am not redefining an image as much as I am inquiring into the metaphysical contradictions and opposing social forces that swirl around how each image is understood. I use camera optics to record pictorial discoveries that blend form and content together by asking each picture a question while examining the origin of the image and how its significance has changed over time. During this process, which is part tribute, part protest, and wholly corrective; I challenge images to come up with answers to my own questions about them. Conceptually, I am a photographic etymologist, examining the evolution of meaning.

The power elite understand how images, especially in combination with words, can rule dreams and in turn how dreams influence actions. Such endeavors are not necessarily benevolent and can, in fact, be malicious. Evil, like pornography resists definition, can manifest itself as an obligatory myth in which one-group concocts a self-glorifying narrative that de-humanizes another group. Such fable formation converts *Those* people into powerful enemies, whose existence is the cause of society's ills, thus justifying their elimination from the society to save it.

Although Photoshop™ has become a verb people still want to trust their own eyes, even when they are aware they are only seeing pixels, thus validating Groucho Marx's perceptive wisecrack, "Who you going believe – me – or your lyin' eyes?" Yet people continue to expect photography to automatically render reality transparent and understandable rather than acknowledging its inherently devious nature and ability to make falsehoods visible. Fashion photography is a good case in point. Here constructed allegorical images encourage us to both desire and to look like the models in the advertisements. The problem is that the bodies on display only exist as Photoshop™ fantasies. This is why schools should teach us how pictures are made and how they can be deciphered, which requires developing a watchful sense of observation, a trustworthy thought process, and a reliable knowledge base.

Illness & Religious Training

When I was five I became deathly ill with Rheumatic Fever for months. I recall lying in bed at night fearfully crying because I thought I was going to die. I comprehended my parents could not help me and I was alone in the world. The disease erased my former self and in its place left me physically weakened and acutely aware of my mortality, moving me into another psychological world far from my cohorts. I lost my child-like sense of indestructibility and realized the fragility of life, which further disconnected me mentality and physically from my peers; making me feel like a tiny vulnerable island in a large impervious sea. Eventually, I found my realization comforting for it explains how life is without fairy-tales.

While recovering from this illness I wintered with my mother's parents in Miami Beach, Florida. My grandfather was a religious man and I went to Hebrew school three times a week including Saturdays, which was "Shabbat" or the "Sabbath." Yet I did not feel like one of God's Chosen children. My youthful challenging of the stories in the Torah or Hebrew Bible, the doctrine and teaching that is revered as the inspired words of God, led me to be placed in a class for disruptive boys who were ruled over by the lumbering and pockmarked Mr. Stein, who we referred to, rather uncharitably, as Frankenstein. Eventually, I did make my Bar Mitzvah, singing off-key, a Hebrew passage from the Torah, and thus in the eyes of Judaism, officially becoming a man at the age of thirteen. Ironically, this empowered me to drop out of the Conservative Synagogue, which I did, leaving behind the religious trappings of Judaism. Nevertheless, I remain a member of the Tribe whether I want to or not, for it is imposed upon me from both within and by the outside world. Given the state of cultural identity politics, I am potentially pinned down to what my worst enemy says I am, simultaneously both an heir to the Auschwitz nightmare and to the kid on the street who wants to feel my horns. In the end, when push comes to shove, I am ensnared by history and will always be identified as a Jew. That said, I do not believe in an

afterlife nor do I think that moral principles or the meaning of life are contingent on the policies and regulations of any organized religion. What matters are actions we take in this *ONE* life we have to live in the here and now.

The Black-and-White Post Holocaust World

The foundational themes of *World in a Jar* are based on my perceptions of the post-Holocaust world I was born into. In 1961, Nazi official Adolf Eichmann, who oversaw the logistics of mass deportation of people to ghettos and extermination camps, was put on trial in Jerusalem for crimes against humanity, propelling the Shoah into the world's collective consciousness. I watched the proceeding on a black-and-white TV with my mother's father whose family had vanished up the death camp's chimneys. I was stunned.

Seeing the black-and-white photographs made after the Allies liberated the concentration camps, naked corpses of women and men with numbers tattooed on their arms, degradingly piled like so much kindling, made me feel as if my head had been split open and filled with monstrous fiends who pursued total annihilation. The Nazi regime personified US Army General Omar Bradley's description of being "a combination insane asylum and slaughterhouse." No images, before or since, have so profoundly affected me. They left an indelible streak of anxiety upon my psyche. Clearly, everything I had previously been taught to believe about the world was wrong. Suddenly, I found myself bound up with ancient hateful beliefs, a rapidly spreading mental plague that resulted in the horrific deaths of millions of people whose crime was being different from the group in power. Their anguish, sorrow, and terror, like undeveloped film, were latently tattooed inside me.

These appalling, often contrasty, grainy, and poorly reproduced, black-and-white photographic recordings of the Shoah subconsciously influenced my future direction to work in a similar photographic manner, which seemed to me to be more authentic, permanent, and timeless than the glossy patina of color photographs. In Hebrew school I learned that in the Bible (The Tanach) black appears as a negative lifeless void until God counterbalances it with a positive – light. Yet during this time, I saw celestial projections at New York's Hayden Planetarium and was absolutely astounded with the blackness of the eternal and infinite. It was challenging to try and resolve this contradiction while growing up in a world where most images were converted into black-and-white – books, magazines, movies, photographs, prints, and television. Through attentive observation I realized there were numerous degrees of blackness that affected its meaning. Regrettably the English language defines black as the absence of or complete absorption of light, rarely acknowledging the distinction between the different degrees of blackness, such as a dull, flat black and the intense, luminous black that lights the darkness. Gradually, I learned to value and emulate the essential beauty of black and the accompanying monochromatic grayscale for its graphic positive/negative interplay and capacity to transform the entertaining diversion of color into the critical nucleus of the matter. Eventually I came to see black's *nothingness* as a lush and boundless source for *everything*, particularly good and evil.

While in my mid-twenties, this monotone outlook guided me to peel color away and make subjective black-and-white photographs based on historic images surrounding the Holocaust starting in my mid-twenties. Being haunted by Theodor Adorno's phrase that "writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," it took me 30 years of aesthetic and intellectual wrestling with the enormity of these ghastly crimes before I could at least momentarily think I was not trivializing the subject and could use it as a platform to scrutinize the intricate, destructive characteristics of human nature. Having taught and extensively written about color photography, it has only been since completing this project that I started making provocative photographs that utilizes color.

As a member of "the hinge-generation", Jews living between the experience of the Holocaust and its memory, I believe that as the last of the Holocaust survivors' die it is essential for artists to serve as the next generation of witnesses and find innovative ways of remembering what happened. As memory is active and mutable and because we often forget what we want to remember, there is a constant struggle over how anything is remembered. Recollection is subjective and only as real as the last time it is recalled and the failure to recharge these memories is akin to a belated Nazi victory because what they did will quickly and deliberately be concealed and forgotten. Evil is not static. It is dynamic and once you enter its realm you will be enticed go deeper. Therefore, to remain silent is a failure of the living to learn from the crimes of the past.

The monumental symbolic significance of Adolf Eichmann, a desktop murderer, being called to answer for his role in this crime against humanity opened a floodgate of study, testimony, and memorialization. Also, it was of the utmost importance that the facts about what Nazi Germany perpetrated enter the historic record because people live within the history they construct and, to whatever degree, within the pasts that are constructed for them. Like photographs, the relationship between memory as lived and history as documented is an intricate dialogue. The mind is not a passive mechanism. Once you accept something as being true, you expect it to be so, and this alters how you perceive events and the way your memory recalls them. Hence, the accuracy and transparency of information becomes significant in how it is understood within the context of any situation.

Therefore I think about the village (shetl) where my grandmother's family (the Auerbachs) lived in Lumja, Poland, which was physically obliterated for the purpose of erasing any societal memory of the Jewish life that once informed that culture. We can witness this struggle over remembrance and by the growing number of Holocaust deniers, such as the President of Iran (Mohammad Ahmadinejad) and the leaders of

Hamas, all whom cynically attempt to rewrite history to demonize Israel, turn Jews into Nazis, and refute the Shoah as part of jihadism, the most murderous ideology since Nazism. Such Islamofascists embrace genocide, the moral dilemma of the past 100 years (Armenia, Bosnia, Cambodia, China, Darfur, Rwanda, and the Ukraine), by calling for the eradication of Jewish society, the core of all Abrahamic monotheistic beliefs, and demolish the humanist values of the rule of law, tolerance, and respect for core rights, such as free expression and protection of women and minorities, which are the hallmark of dynamic and enlightened civilizations. Fortunately an abundance of objectively documented photographs exist as referential truth to counter such harmful distortions of actual events. This is why history matters because when people fail to take responsibility for their own actions disastrous consequences are more likely to occur.

That said I reject the notion of myself as a victim of victims, damaged by calamities committed on someone else in another time. Solutions based on an identity are destined to fail because they value what we are given at birth rather than what we do with life. Besides, I don't believe that actual trauma can be transmitted across generations, but I do think a wounded spirit can be passed on. That said, not much can be accomplished at this point by assigning blame. The paramount problem is whether it is still possible to believe in other human beings. I cannot ignore the cruelty in humankind, but it is my wish for each of us to take responsibility for our actions, find our own place in this life, and carry out small affirmative acts, including making photographs, which promote mutual tolerance.

The Depiction of Suffering

Since the 1980s, the sharp reproach about photographic representation by critics, such as Martha Rosler, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, and Allan Sekula, left little opportunity in the academy for documentary style work. One of their principal criticisms swirled around the depiction of suffering, a critique rarely applied to the other arts. These academics contend photographs, such as those by Sebastião Salgado and James Nachtwey, should not make their subjects artistically pleasing for this contaminates the so-called "real" with visual pleasure, thus beautifying pain for viewers. These academic critics label such images as being detrimental to constructive social engagement rather than recognizing they might awaken one's compassion, and that such an acknowledgment could be a first step toward social justice. Pictures can be exploited, but de facto censorship is worst. Yes, the act of picture making involves applying aesthetic principles to a subject and images can arouse a pleasurable experience, but more importantly it transforms a subject. A good photographer can capture and transmit a subject's sensibility to viewers. Although there are limits on what photography can represent, and any emotional attachment to an image is personal, unstable and subject to manipulation, it is necessary to feel and acknowledge the suffering of others before we can act to alleviate it. As pain isolates and depresses the one who feels it, we seem hopelessly overwhelmed and powerless when confronted with the suffering of individuals other than ourselves. One way we can overcome this is by recognizing the anguish of others by seeing it depicted in pictures. Such as aesthetic experience based on cultural patterning, shapes our meaning and response. The multiplicity of images in *World in a Jar* offers numerous conduits to awaken one's consciousness to the complex process of representation in an active and inquiring way, allowing us to envision being in the skin of another. Consequently, suppressing images that recognize the connection between beauty (light and form) and disaster curtails intellectual, emotional, and social engagement of the circumstances.

Since 9/11 some critics have revisited their previous positions. In her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Susan Sontag changed her stance about the power of photographs to represent deprivation, humiliation, and suffering in a positive manner. Why? Perhaps Sontag realized that pictures are more accessible, energetic, and visceral than words. People do not seem intimidated by images they privately view at their own pace. This experience encourages an immediate, personal response in which people can examine and reflect what these photographs show them. Pictures can make us feel and even think, but only if we develop the creative power to imagine ourselves in situations besides our own. Using the mind's eye we can identify with the suffering of the person being pictured and substitute our image for theirs. In spite of this, neither art nor artist is protection against cruelty and bestiality. Nonetheless I do think there is a prospect, if not for redemptive liberation from error or evil, at least for some kind of solace from distress in the process of making and viewing pictures.

In the United States the defining public image of the Iraq invasion has shifted from the official, orchestrated media moment of the toppling of a statue of Saddam Hussein to the sadistic amateur snapshots made in Abu Ghraib Prison to videos of roadside bombings posted by insurgents on the Internet. Now in 2009 there is a curious absence of significant new images. Could it be the war has been visually defined by the Abu Ghraib images or to the general malaise and collapse of public support for the war? The circulation of such horrid pictures, or the lack there-of, plays a crucial role in whether or not people bring into being a simultaneous protective indifference and an inculcation of compassion. How come? An image's authority is determined as much by imagination and memory as by its indexical relationship to the subject. Engaging images acknowledge the complexity of life through their capacity to sensitize and stimulate our latent exploratory senses that in turn can generate *compassionate empathy*.

Human Evil

In the past people believed in Natural Evil, such as earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, and tornadoes, which were brought on by a vengeful God to punish the wicked. Although some fundamentalists may still believe events such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina are the result of America's wicked ways, most people acknowledge evil in terms of human cruelty with Auschwitz as an extreme manifestation. Whether

expressed in secular or theological terms, history makes it clear that decency and depravity are human constructions and there is no intrinsic code of ethics.

In her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963) Hannah Arendt postulated that evil, regardless of where it takes place, could simply be a function of banality – the tendency of ordinary clerks and teachers to conform and perform despicable acts without critically thinking about the results of their action or inaction. History tells us that the privation, enslavement, mass murder and colonization of the innocent is *not* the result of individual power hungry, paranoid, sociopathic, megalomaniacal mass-murderers like King Leopold II, Hitler, Stalin, Mao, or Pol Pot. Rather, the immense catalog of evil is made-up by the convergence of petty thugs and ordinary, street-level bureaucrats who have consciously chosen to execute the horrendous policies and the general populace – all of whom benefit financially and/or socially from these racist, death-worshipping ideologies. This apathetic self-deception, where people compartmentalize and rationalize their behavior, allows average people to indulge their prejudices and execute acts of extraordinary evil, even though they know the true nature of their deeds. In Eichmann's case, he purposely ignored the "Golden Rule" and its principle of humane reciprocity. Rather, he claimed no responsibility because he was just "doing his job" – "He did his *duty*...; he not only obeyed *orders*, he also obeyed the *law*."

Immanuel Kant advocated that people are their own moral legislators; in Eichmann's situation, a reflection of societal hubris that some people were not fellow humans, he knowingly forfeited being the "master of his own deeds" and like many people he made Adolf Hitler his personal legislator. By default, creatures like Eichman become the visible face of horror due to weak-minded, self-justification and a failure of imagination – the inability to see beyond their own circumstances, conduct, and their unwillingness to openly question their so-called patriotic duties so that they may profit from the redistribution of power and wealth. Hitler got his followers to commit genocide not only as the result of anti-Semitism, but rather because otherwise so-called decent people put their own short-term interests before considering the long-term consequences of their actions. As Irish political philosopher Edmund Burke deduced, "all that is required for evil to succeed is for good men [and women] to remain silent."

Arendt insisted that moral choice remains even under totalitarian conditions, and that this choice has political consequences even when the chooser is politically powerless, stating: "[U]nder conditions of terror most people will comply but *some people will not*, just as the lesson of the countries to which the Final Solution was proposed is that "it could happen" in most places, but *it did not happen everywhere*. Humanly speaking, no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation." Although evil repels analysis, Arendt's statement confronts moral relativism that has plagued academia by asserting that there are differences in core values that are worth fighting for and certain societal principals and structures that have evolved over time are better than others and not all so-called truths are equal.

Conclusions

Just as most black-and-white photographs are shades of gray, people are rarely one thing or another. Rather we are a continuum of numerous biological and cultural elements, which allows us to pigeonhole contradictory viewpoints. This is gives us the capacity to continually ignore, change and/or diminish the real-world affects of our behavior.

Evil is more multifarious than being a murderer or rapist. Evil also occurs in whose of us who are Sierra Club members and recycle our garage, but who on occasion realize that the idealism we have chosen to pursue is also selfish and such self-centeredness seems to be hardwired. In his book, *The Selfish Gene* (1976), evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins asserts a gene will operate in its own interest even if that means destroying the organism it inhabits, thereby making Selfishness the core of human existence. Dawkins' position confirms Thomas Hobbes's philosophical case for a social contract that gives the state the authority to curb human self-interest and maintain societal order. As American President James Madison wrote in the Federalist Papers, "But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary."

The combination of biological pre-determinism and the randomness of quantum physics makes Swiss cheese out of classical religious notions of predestination, heaven and hell, as well as such utopian political ideologies of communism and fascism. These belief systems have their roots in the authoritarian impulse of Faith, which criminalizes thoughts as well as conduct. Their common denominator of submission makes no distinction between public and private life and insists on arbitrating everything from diet to sex, always asking the same question: Are you one of *US* or are you one of *THEM*? Such imposed ethnocentrism, believing oneself and one's group to be the center of the universe and the measure of all within it, makes pluralism – the tolerance of difference – impossible to achieve. For democratic pluralism to work one must abide a secular social contract that binds all citizens and separates public duties from private customs and values. Tolerance is necessary for different ideas to flourish, which promotes a more complicated and richer life. Challenging picture making generates tension with accepted practices, raising questions and maybe expanding aesthetic boundary lines.

This dovetails into what I call the "***Possibility Scale,***" which states there are no artistic impossibilities, only different levels of possibility. It grants you the freedom to act and determine an idea's usefulness by saying: "If I can visualize it, there could be a way to make it happen." This is the essence of inventive thinking that expands human capacity by encouraging one to visit regions deemed out of bounds or inhabited by demons in order to test our limits of understanding. Consider Leonardo da Vinci, Mary Shelly, Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, Arthur C. Clarke, Buckminster Fuller, and now William Gibson, the father of cyberpunk science fiction, all whose fantastic works, created outside the margins of their times, anticipated future inventions and societal transformations. With photographers, it is the pictures that matter. Being a decisive photographer is not about a moment, but a state of mind I dub *The Attention Zone*. This is a mindset where one relies on single-mindedness to make those "special" images that depict, express, and engage viewers about the ambiguity and often-contradictory nature of human behavior.

Time is an essential characteristic that informs the making of photographs. Time calls all of us and measures change. If there is no change, there can be no constructive activities. If there are no productive deeds, life stagnates. And we need to act to foster creation, for innovation propels life and provides hope. When people have nothing to look forward to, despair takes hold and evil gains a foothold. The perpetual struggle is between hope and evil, for it is at this juncture that our imaginative pathways can offer up potential for pioneering improved realities. Can photographers play a role in this process? I think it might be a possibility…
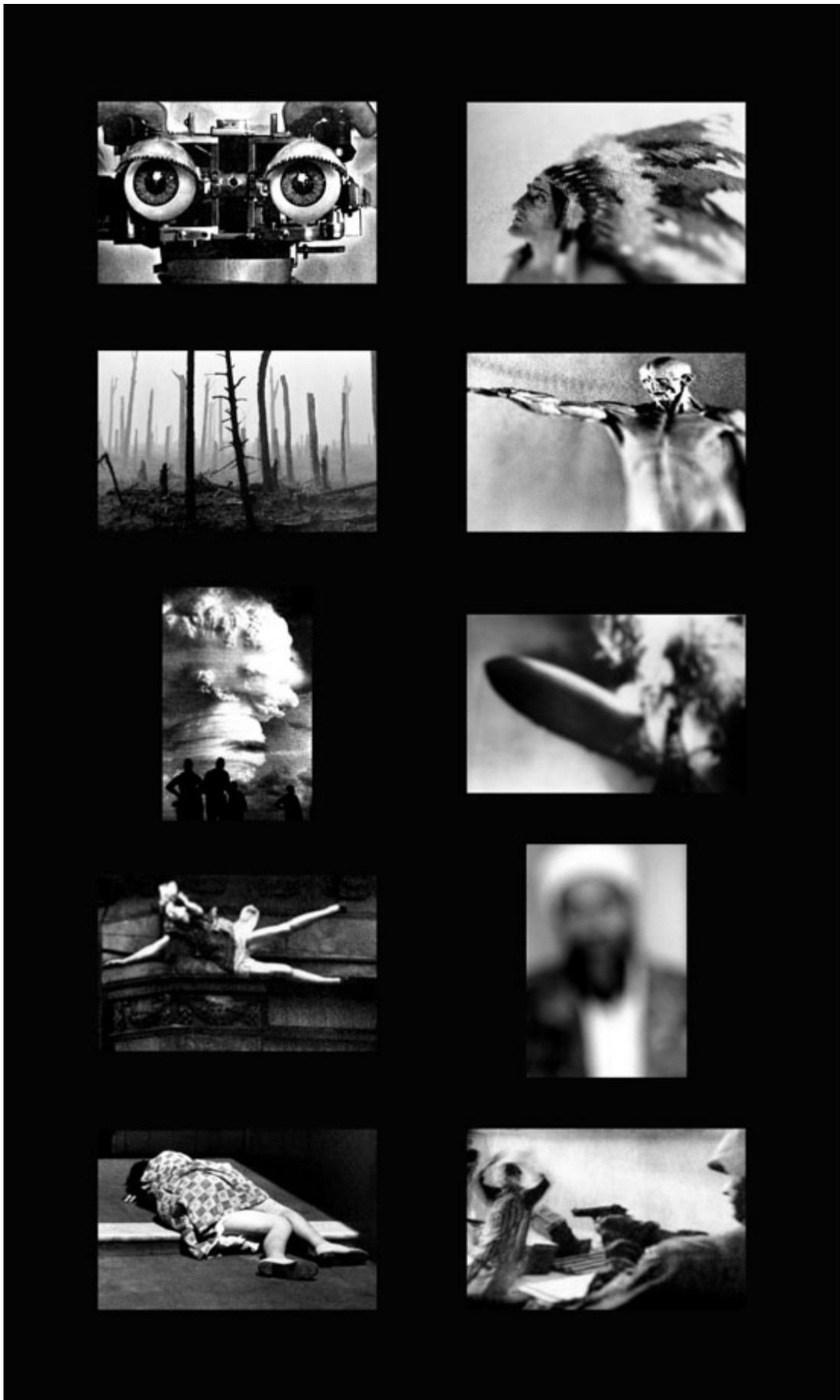
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Thanks to Mark Jacobs for his on-going critical input.

World in Jar: War & Trauma is available as a traveling exhibition from the Burchfield-Penney Art Center, Buffalo State College, Buffalo, NY where it is in their permanent collection.

For more information about Robert Hirsch's project's visit: www.lightresearch.net

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