THE ANXIOUS PHOTOGRAPHER
ethics and emotion in photographic encounters

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From colonial ethnography to contemporary documentary practices, photography's relationship with disenfranchised and marginalised subjects have always elicited difficult questions regarding the politics of lens-based representation. A large corpus of critical writings focuses on the power dynamics between the photographer and the photographed to map ethical margins. Under such circumstances, anxieties develop among reporters and documentary photographers to reframe their perspectives and develop inventive modes of articulating the narratives of marginalised sections. Though it signals a necessary process that requires continuous re-evaluation, ethical questions in photography should also move beyond its focalisation on the figure of the photographer. In the entire circuit of photographing/being photographed, editing, distributing, and consuming images, the photographer occupies a single locus amid the expansive arrangement of power relations. Hence, focussing merely on the photographer's role undermines the agency involved in posing, staring back at the camera, reading, sharing, and re-contextualising photographs.

In Soham Gupta's controversial work *Angst,* which engages with street and homeless people, these concerns become pressing. His photographic project is often subject to criticism because the characters are said to appear dehumanised and stripped of autonomy. As an ethical precaution, Gupta has persistently maintained — quite defensively — that the act of photographing vulnerable subjects establishes a connection with his vulnerability and childhood trauma. Without disregarding his childhood problems, it is important to note how such an ethical rationale reductively approaches the issue of engaging with others' trauma and victimhood.

In this paper, I seek to locate the ethical questions of photographing marginalised subjects in the manifold modes of contact through which images acquire meaning, rather than through prefixed identities of the photographer/photographed. By interacting with Ariella Azoulay's concept of the citizenry of photography and civil imagination vis-à-vis Soham Gupta's *Angst*, this paper will try to rethink the discursive relationship between ethics, anxiety and photographic practice.

Keywords. Documentary photography, ethics, citizenship, anxiety, identity,

Desde a etnografia colonial às práticas documentais contemporâneas, a relação entre a Fotografia e os sujeitos marginalizados sempre suscitou questões difíceis no respeitante às políticas de representação. São vários os ensaios críticos que focam a dinâmica de poder entre o fotógrafo e o fotografado que mapeiam as margens éticas. Nessas circunstâncias, instalam-se *ansiedades* entre repórteres e fotógrafos documentais para reformular perspetivas e desenvolver modos criativos de articulação de narrativas de grupos marginalizados da sociedade. Embora sinalizem um processo necessário que requer uma reavaliação contínua, as questões éticas na fotografia devem, igualmente, ir além da focalização na figura do fotógrafo. Em todo o circuito de fotografar / ser fotografado, editar, distribuir e consumir imagens, o fotógrafo ocupa um único *locus* no vasto arranjo das relações de poder. Porquanto, focar apenas o papel do fotógrafo prejudica a agência envolvida em posar, fitar a câmara, ler, partilhar e recontextualizar as fotografias.

No trabalho controverso de Soham Gupta, *Angst* [Angústia], que aborda a rua e os sem-abrigo, estas preocupações tornam-se prementes. O seu projeto fotográfico é frequentemente alvo de crítica, que considera as personagens desumanizadas e desprovidas de autonomia. Enquanto precaução ética, Gupta manteve de forma persistente — e, até, defensiva — que o ato de fotografar sujeitos vulneráveis estabelece uma conexão com a sua própria vulnerabilidade e traumas de infância. Sem menosprezar os seus problemas de infância, é importante notar como tal raciocínio ético trata redutivamente a questão de se envolver com os traumas e a vitimização dos outros.

Neste artigo, procuro localizar as questões éticas de fotografar sujeitos marginalizados nos múltiplos modos de contato através dos quais as imagens obtêm significado, e não por meio das identidades predeterminadas do fotógrafo/fotografado. Ao interagir com os conceitos de cidadania da fotografia e de imaginação civil de Ariella Azoulay, vis-à-vis com *Angst* de Soham Gupta, este artigo procura repensar a relação discursiva entre ética, ansiedade e práticas fotográficas.

Palavras-chave. Fotografia documental, ética, cidadania, ansiedade, identidade.

> «Whatever happened between us was important to us, but it is not important to the pictures. What is in them is self-contained and, in some strange way, free of us both» (Avedon, 1974: 2).

The Anxious Canon

Canonical discourses on the ethical concerns of photojournalism can be situated alongside the emotional dynamics of photographic reception. The oft-claimed de-sensitising aspect of photography in an image-saturated world usually marks the point of departure to think about ethical viewership. Considering the overt proliferation of images depicting suffering, torture, and death, Sontag claimed that photographs have lost the power to affect us emotionally. *On Photography* dealt with the problematic of photographically representing war and violence; for her, wielding a camera in a scene of suffering is implicitly violent. It anaesthetises the viewers and arrests the scene merely as an impersonal spectacle. Years later, in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, she polishes her earlier thesis by claiming that photographs do stun or shock the viewer in their transitive relay of affectivity, but the effect of the shock itself is anesthetised due to repeated exposure. Photographs, therefore, cannot reorganize our gaze into ethically responsible modes of viewing, for it dismisses politics. For her, it is imperative to move beyond the sensationalism of war photography and articulate new "frames" of depiction that will facilitate a critical understanding of war politics. She undoubtedly privileges narrative continuity and coherence in written form rather than momentary impressions of reality in photographs. Photography's structural inefficiency in conveying articulable narratives seemingly contributes to Sontag's suspicion of the medium. There is an obvious degree of anxiety working in Sontag to make people ethically accountable viewers of photographs, and the only way it seems possible is to complement them with pronounced commentary on the context and history of suffering (Sontag, 2004: 10-20).

One gets reminded of Roland Barthes' essay, *The Photographic Message*, where he suggests two levels of signification in photographs, "denotative message" and "connotative message" (Barthes, 1982:197). The denotative message conveys the visible analogy to actual events recorded, or what one can vaguely claim as the camera's objective content, and the connotative message is built into the structure of the photograph itself, implying the contextual relations, processual techniques, syntax, and ideological frameworks that underline the existence of a particular photograph (ibidem: 199). The connotative message is never implicated directly but remains elusively hidden within and beyond the frame. Judith Butler's idea of the photographic "frame", in *Frames of War*, can be precisely comprehended in Barthesian terms, where it is not the object of representation but the mechanics of representability that should be foregrounded by reading through the hermeneutic framework in photographs. Butler states that the "frame" organizes visual experience and creates «specific ontologies of the subject» (Butler, 2009: 3). Returning to the ethical question of representing suffering subjects, it is not enough to restrict our judgement based on the "sensational" nature of the photographed content. Rather, one should scrutinize the social procedures that orchestrate certain ways of seeing that content. Butler's idea of "frame", therefore, extends the notion of "gaze" by foregrounding the role of technical apparatus in ideologically manipulated visual perspectives. Particularly focussing on the phenomenon of "embedded reporting" by American agencies in the Iraq War (2003-2011), Butler pointed out how photographers had limited access to conflict zone because they were "protected" and allowed entry only through the American military. Photographers became the military appendages who visually framed the war and its implications. The socially conditioned gaze of American photographers was further coordinated by military techniques:

> «Embedded reporting implies that reporters working under such conditions agree not to make the mandating of perspective *itself* into a topic to be reported and discussed; hence these reporters were offered access to the war only on the

> condition that their gaze remains restricted to the established parameters of designated action» (Butler 2009: 64).

If gaze is formulated through the ideological constitution of the visual, Butler's formulation of "frames" also entails the active material processes that embody visual constitution and their reception in the first place. Frames encompass the structural systems in the production-circulation-reception axis that enables the development of a gaze. But most importantly, the "frames" implicated in the non-figurative figure of photographs also hold the possibility to develop an alternate gaze and unearth the process of framing itself. To understand this phenomenon vis-à-vis the ethical question of photographing suffering, I wish to study the controversial photography project *Angst (2013-2018)* by Soham Gupta. His work needs to be situated in conversation with the anxieties that continually restructure and shape aesthetic practices in photographic representation. Here, anxiety as an emotion works as a constitutive factor in the development of contemporary photography practice.

Photographer's Anxiety

Angst is a collection of portraits documenting marginalised figures living in the streets of Kolkata. Destitute, homeless, drug addicts, prostitutes, and mentally and physically afflicted people are isolated in the frames and photographed with a high-contrast flash. The resulting untitled photographs possess blackish backgrounds with the subjects highlighted in the centre of the frames, almost resembling a theatrical arrangement with the spotlight on the main characters. His interviews and comments on the work insistently emphasize the performative aspects of the people he chose to photograph. As he claims, «most of my work is collaborative in nature: I like for the person I photograph to take an active part in the shooting process» (Gupta, n.d.-c). Gupta's ethical anxiety is telling in such repeated assertions, but one should be wary of such discourses and their dire implications in the social field of photography. It reduces the complicated contours

of ethicality in photographic encounters by imposing a redemptive value in the gaze of the Other, implying that a photographer is exempted from power inequalities if the photographed person performs a reverse gaze or if the scene gets collaboratively staged. Instead, one should also note how staging gets constituted and what it does on encountering the camera. Moreover, these assumptions ground agency in an ocularcentric tradition of visual culture, where the gaze is privileged over the immanent presence of the body in the frames.

The exhibition of violated bodies and the repositories of injustice and violence contained therein can speak for themselves and question existing epistemological frames of visual reading. The performativity of photographed bodies is not dependent on their activity or passivity, but it is situated in the very fact of them being present in photographic encounters. Referring to James Agee and Walker Evans' photographs of peasants during the Great Depression, Rancière underlines the insignificance of studying photographers' intentionality (Rancière, 2009: 15). The photographer might have wanted to portray the destitution of farmers, or might have shot them without any concerned intention as such, but it is the «beauty of the random» (idem: 13) in photographic encounters that make photographs a site of contested agency. Portraits of peasants, refugees and beggars might say nothing about the hardships they went through or the intention of letting themselves photographed, but «what they speak of us is only this capacity to expose one's body» (idem: 11). This encounter initiates the "random" moment where the characters undergo a "despecification" of their social identity, thus generating «the ability acquired by the characters themselves to play with the image of their being and their condition, to post it to walls or to set it up before the lens» (idem: 15).

In a scathing critique of Gupta's work, titled *Field Notes on Othering*, Adira Thekkuveettil and Amarnath Praful similarly harp on an ocularcentric approach to understanding photographic ethics. The article revisits early colonial anthropological photography in India to situate Soham Gupta's work «as a symptom

of a larger ongoing system of questionable practices of representation which have long been prevalent in the subcontinent» (Thekkuveentil & Praful, n.d.: para. 3). Gupta's perspective is assumed to be dictated by the gaze of the "colonial ghost" (idem: para. 5-9). Ethnographic practises of photographing different tribes in a tabulated form were targeted for anthropological schematisation. Tribal people were often stripped and made to pose in front of the camera, exhibiting their bodies as a site of Orientalist fantasy and colonial possession. According to the article, though the power equations in Gupta's photographic encounters are different from that of the early ethnographers, his gaze is supposedly haunted by the colonialist past. Apart from the argument's overt determinism, this comparison overlooks the "frames" in which the concerned gaze has manifested. The discourse, institutional support, and conduits of production and reception in early anthropological photography are entirely different from the context in which Gupta photographs. The authors seem to claim that the colonial gaze in anthropological discourse has continued its existence in frames governing contemporary art photography. While such claims rightly foreground the continuity of structural inequalities in representative practices, ethical parameters cannot remain the same in both cases. The relation between Gupta and his destitute subjects is not merely a repetition of colonial power, nor does it necessarily adopt a colonial posture. Ethical norms variably shift in different frames of visual composition. What might be ethically legitimate and scientific in the early anthropological discourses of photography inevitably acquire different significations in contemporary photographic contexts.

Critics' Anxiety

To probe the ethical nuances of Soham Gupta's photographs, one should consider the frame of art photography and its specific history of representing marginalised bodies. Evoking Diane Arbus' controversial work *Freaks* would be an apt point of departure to put Gupta's work in perspective. *Freaks* is a documentary

work containing portraits of nudists, dwarfs, transgenders, brazenly dressed circus performers, people with physical deformities etc. The expected criticism directed against Arbus referred to the exploitation and aestheticization of marginalised bodies by a white woman. In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag blames Arbus for depicting her subjects in a "pitiable" and "repulsive" manner. Apart from being disturbed by the fetishization of "crippled identities", Sontag felt deeply uncomfortable with the repetitive structure and the dull format in which they were portrayed (Sontag, 1973: 33). However, Arbus' photographs follow a distinct aesthetic pattern, developing from a different history of photographic representation. As Sarah Parsons succinctly notes:

> «Sontag transferred arguments she seems to have developed around social documentary and journalistic uses of photography to an art context, paving the way for a more politicised reading of artistic practice, while, in so doing, excoriating both Diane Arbus and her subjects (Parsons, 2009: 294)».

Such high-art appropriations of pain and poverty, according to Sontag, would change the morals of people for the worse. She assumed these photographs would normalise a perverted way of viewing oppressed bodies instead of critically understanding the circumstances of their oppression. With no historical or contextual positioning of the subjects, *Freaks* would definitively frustrate Sontag's ethical limits, thereby circling back to her favour of narrative articulation for an empathetic response. It is surprising how such arguments confidently assume the inability of these figures to speak for themselves and generate contra-readings. Violated bodies on display should be seen as autonomous agents that can mirror the social mechanics responsible for their assigned place in different frames of photography. By reading through the traces of violence etched on those bodies, in their posture or (un)willingness to pose, one can discern the structural inequality governing concerned frames of photography. Therefore, the role of the spectator and the discourses of image transmission should necessarily be taken into account when one considers ethical questions in photographic encounters.

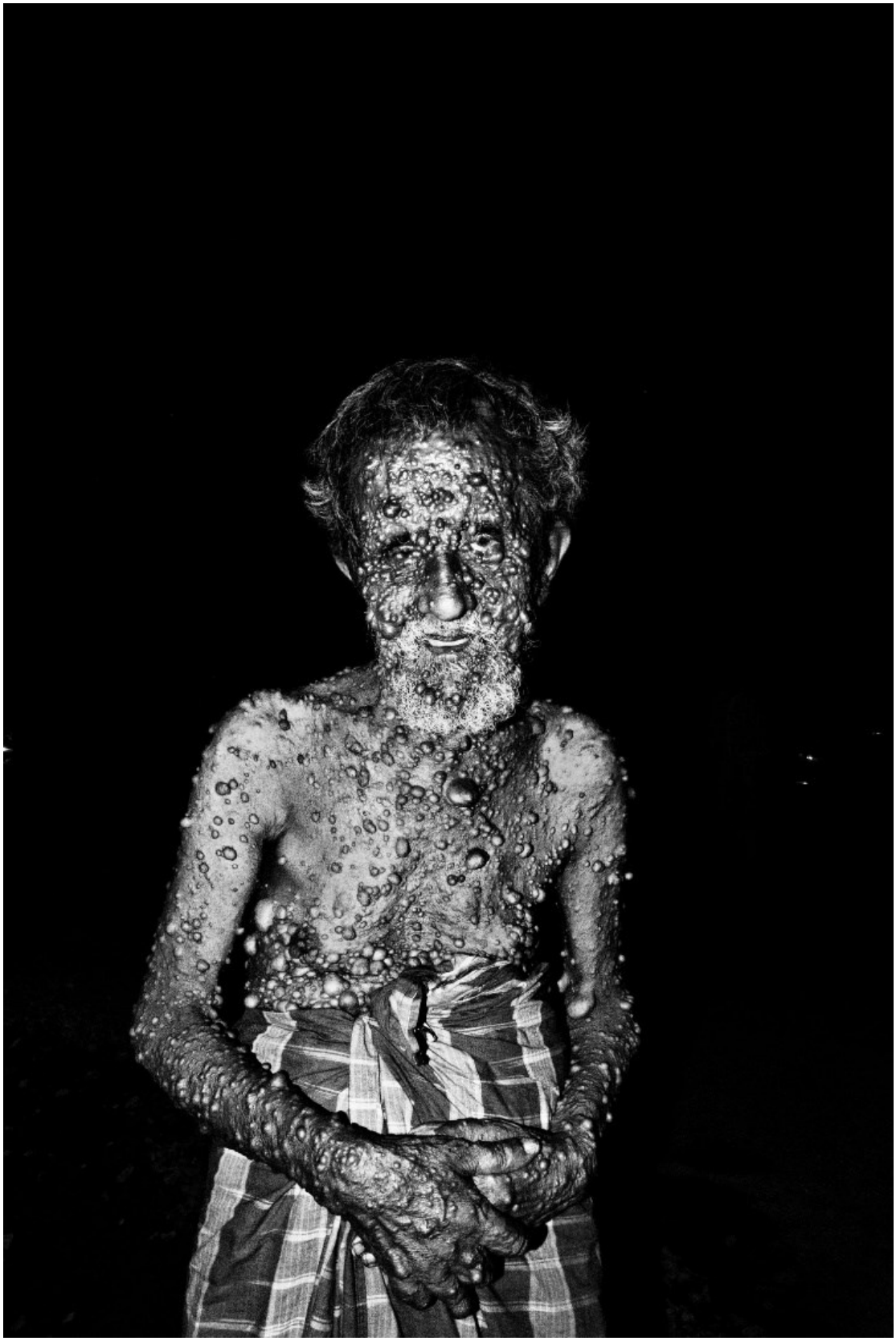

Figure 1. Soham Gupta, from the series *Angst.* 2015. Source: Google Arts and Culture.

Figure 2. Soham Gupta, from the series *Angst.* 2015. Source: Google Arts and Culture.

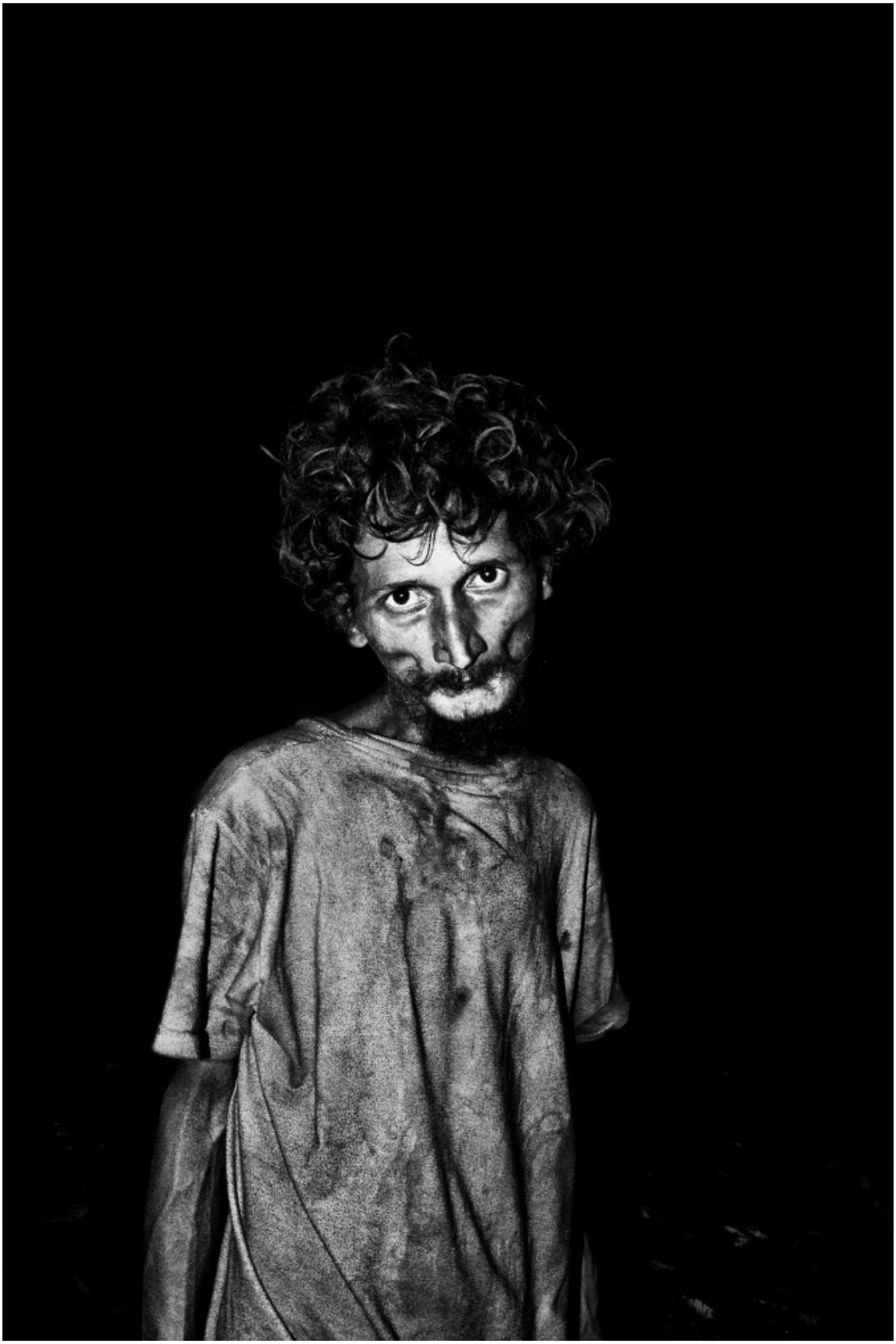

Figure 3. Soham Gupta, from the series *Angst*. 2015. Source: Google Arts and Culture

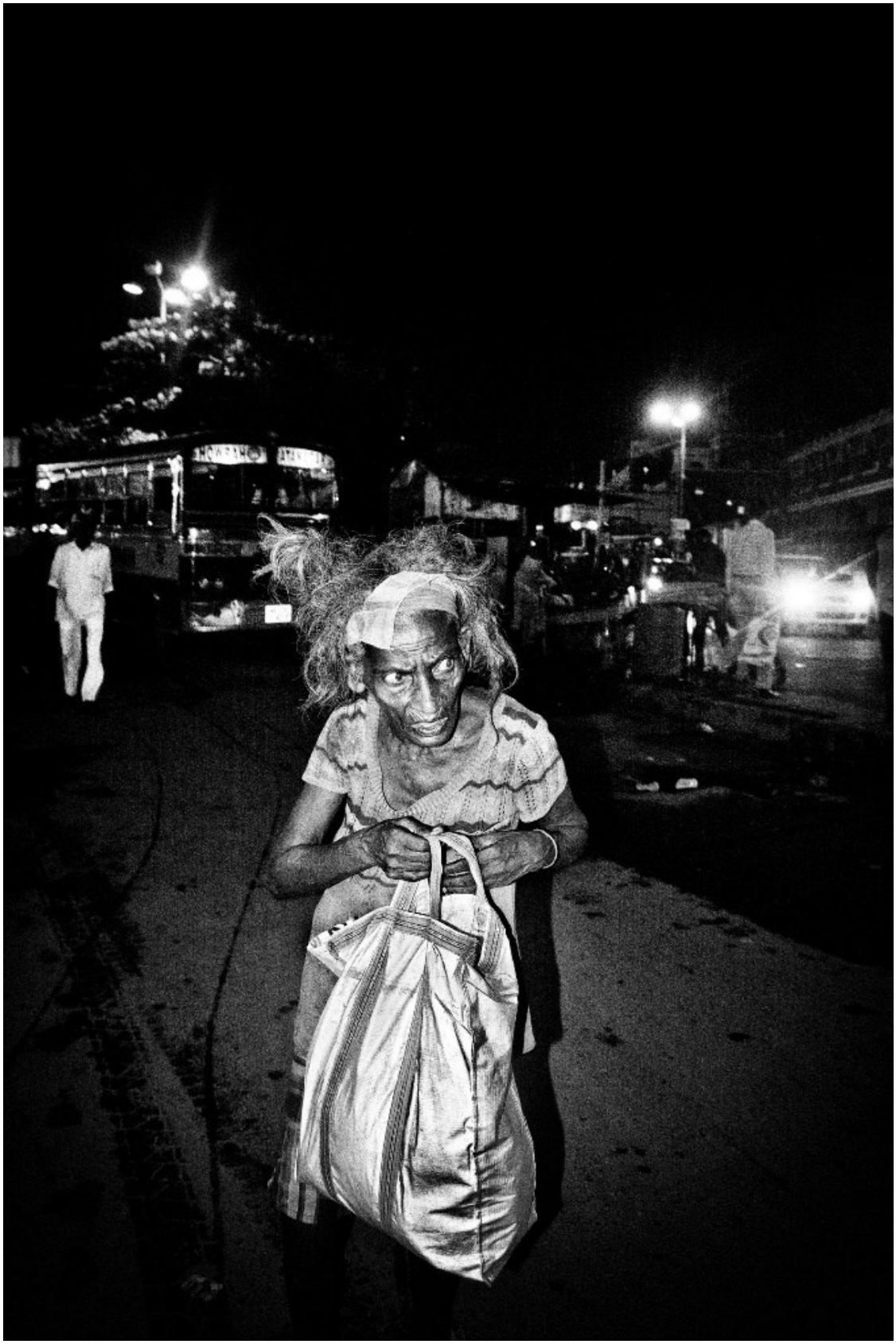

Figure 4. Soham Gupta, from the series *Angst*. 2015. Source: Google Arts and Culture

Interpretive Categories

Ariella Azoulay's critical intervention in underscoring the problematic categories of reading artworks is relevant here. In the book *Civil Imagination*, she notes how the categories of "the political" and "the aesthetic" are construed antagonistically in contemporary art discussions. According to art criticism parlance, artworks are considered political when they deal with «subjects that are identified as political». "The aesthetic", on the other hand, is referred to as the «negation of the political»; it is not framed positively (Azoulay, 2015: 41). These two categories govern the evaluation and classification of images in modern art discourse. She further observes how institutional readings of Walter Benjamin's distinction between the aestheticization of politics and the politicisation of art have contributed to this schism. They now exist in a persistent oppositional tension: either an artwork is too "political", hence lacking "aesthetics", or the work is too artsy, and not political enough. Azoulay, however, problematizes this distinction without binding the two categories in a dichotomous relation. Instead, she observes them as «two distinct axes along which images are transmitted, axes that exist in parallel» (idem: 53). It is photography, as a particular visual medium, which complicates this supposed distinction. Any person or space photographed is present amid a contingent arrangement of signs embedded on the surface of the image. But different fields of professional gaze will find variable sites of interest in what the photograph communicates. As she notes, the «professional gaze of art, law, history, or medicine will extract a different object from that which is visible and will focus its attention selectively upon it» (idem: 54). They belong to different epistemological fields and contain different methodological histories. However, they should not be seen as mutually exclusive, for they can also contradict or complement each other. In a sense, none of these fields and disciplines is «capable of exhausting the field of the visible in its own right» (idem: 56). This is probably why Luc Delahaye's later photographs — which have often drawn similar criticisms of beautifying horrific subjects — becomes difficult to approach institutionally. Most of the photographs

are taken in war-torn areas and conflict zones across Afghanistan, yet his characteristic detachment and deadpan style resist reportage. In these newsworthy places, his photographs radiate aesthetic landscapes and compositions where war consequences only appear marginally. This becomes a critical exercise, a challenge against classified fields of reading practices.

A "trained" spectator, according to Azoulay, isolates visual elements from photographs to deduce the themes and topics they possibly belong to. Likewise, Soham Gupta's *Angst* gets termed as "images of destitution", "poverty porn", or "exploitation images". In such cases, the photographs lose their specificity and become mere illustrations of a theme. They are also analysed and historically compared with other bodies of images familiar to the field of art, journalism, anthropology etc. But no amount of in-depth analysis can exhaust the multitudinous, accidental points in photographs that resist narrativization. This is precisely why David Shields' book, *War is Beautiful* appears dated and inchoate. In the book, Shields analyses the front-page photographs of the *New York Times* covering the gulf wars for the past fifteen years. He categorizes the photographs into several themes (death, beauty, god etc.), each of which visually reflects the discursive manipulation that effectively attempts to legitimise America's intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan. Shields creates archetypes out of individuals and visual tropes, grouping them under different headings. Quite unknowingly, as the book's underlying sense of incompleteness radiates, he also illustrates how such an exercise only frustrates the limits of the categories one creates.

The Citizenry of Photography

Azoulay's theoretical formulation of photographs' irreducible visuality stems from her early seminal research in *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008), which foregrounds the limitations of ethical discourses that remain focussed on the identitarian relationship between the photographer and the photographed. She

posits an ethical horizon born out of the specific, unforeseen moment of photographic encounter. Returning to the epigraph at the beginning of this paper: «what is in [photographs] is self-contained and, in some strange way, free of us both» (Azoulay, 2008: 2), Richard Avedon's comment in the context of the photographs he took of his dying father is quite revealing. But what exactly is the "strange way" that frees them both and makes the photograph "self-contained"? What happens in the particular moment of the photographic encounter? In *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Ariella Azoulay introduces a possibility to theorise this magical moment in a new way and think of ethical accountability differently. As an Israeli citizen, Azoulay is primarily concerned with the importance of photographing atrocities on Palestinian refugees and dissenters by the Israeli state. She constructs the idea of the "citizenry of photography", which is a democratic space that redeems refugees from their statelessness by including them in the world of photographic production and circulation (idem: 93). The existence of their bodies in photographic form, whether dead or violated, assures its entry into the civil contract of photography, where the photographer, photographed, as well as the spectator, is bound to each other in the economy of photographic circulation. Azoulay uses the metaphor of the "transit visa" to denote the entry of stateless bodies into a space of viewing and recognition (idem: 126). The presence of the spectator is important to note because this is the looming figure in deference of whom a photographic activity is carried out. The photographic moment, therefore, is not restricted to the dyadic encounter between the photographer and the photographed, nor between the spectator and the photograph; it is a multimodal meeting point initiated with the click of the shutter, which includes the "universal spectator" in purview. For Azoulay, the universal spectator's «viewing of the photograph that reconstructs the photographic situation and allows a reading of the injury inflicted upon others» is a «civic skill» (idem: 14). It works beyond the consideration of intentionality in the photographer-photographed relationship. As she puts it succinctly, «the civil contract of photography removes in advance any

possibility that one of the protagonists may be subjugated to someone else. This is a contract according to which all are in principle equal before photography» (Azoulay, 2008: 339).

Quite provocatively, she takes up the extreme example of inequality in photographic practices: ethnographers' forcefully stripping natives and making them pose for the camera. According to Azoulay, as the natives looked at the camera in shame and humiliation, it was ensured that some gaze would arrive from that very pinhole in some different space and time which will read against the lens and unravel the implicit inequality of that scene itself. Rather than viewing the sub-humanity of the natives, the photographs would be seen as a testimony of the photographers' inhumanity. Placing Gupta's work in this perspective would enable the subjects with a form of agency that was hitherto unacknowledged by deterministic criticisms. Soham Gupta should be robbed of his privileged status of determining the discursive formation of his subjects. The figure of the photographer should not be a point of ethical anxiety, it should be dis-empowered of its overt significance in such ethical conversations. Rather, one should locate ethical concerns in the transitory states between the photographer, photographed, and the spectator.

Ethical Privilege in Insider/Outside Gap

In the essay *Sontag's Lament*, Sarah Parsons strikingly points out Sontag's partiality in analysing the photographs of Diane Arbus and Richard Avedon. Documentary art photographer, Richard Avedon made a photographic work comprising portraits of his dying father. He depicts his father in various moods, but mostly in a state of melancholy and despair. Sontag finds no problem with such depiction because Avedon is truly an "insider" figure (Parsons, 2009: 298). On the other hand, the intimacy accessed by the insider further beautifies the images to her. We can similarly situate the works of many documentary photographers who photographed their community or close relationships and didn't face any criticism

because they were a part of it. Richard Billingham's documentation of his father's chronic alcoholism in *Ray's a Laugh*, Nan Goldin's prolonged work with queer bodies and HIV crisis in her friend circle, or Sohrab Hura's work with his schizophrenic mother in *Look It's Getting Sunny Outside!!!* can be pertinent examples of such projects. One almost feels Sontag's comfort with these works, primarily because they were taken by "insiders" who were in intimate association with the subjects they photographed. But, the significance of such identity positions should be put under scrutiny in photographic representations of suffering. As Parsons notes, «we may fully understand the relationship between son and father in a small exhibition, but as those images circulate in magazines, books, group exhibitions, and now the internet, they quickly lose their original narrative and their insider provenance, leaving us with just the images» (idem: 298). Sontag's ethical analysis of violence in photographs is grounded in the photographer-photographed relationship, it is not a theoretical postulation of photographic ethics based on the complexities of the medium itself. Such critiques have watered down the complications in photographic activities to a great extent, and Gupta's rhetoric of arguments defending his work, can be seen as its reactive symptom. Apart from claiming the performative aspect of his subjects, Gupta also claims the act of walking through the night and photographing his subjects as an «intimate exploration of vulnerability» (Gupta, n.d.-b).

The accompanying text of *Angst* presents a kaleidoscopic vision of Calcutta's nightlife traversing several underprivileged characters living on the streets. This narrative is strewn with grim shades of loneliness, despair and anger; all of which also bears strong political commentary regarding the country's socio-economic state and hyperventilating xenophobia (Gupta, n.d.-a). If we place this work in conversation with Sontag's subject-position based critique, one can ceaselessly blur the boundaries between the "self" and the "other", interiority and exteriority, or personal documentation and ethnographic tabulation. The depiction of poverty in the streets becomes an extended exploration of personal trauma for Gupta. In

several interviews, he has also claimed how his troubled childhood enables him to identify with the characters he photographs. One can sense Gupta's anxiety in relating his subjects to a more personal core to achieve the "insider privilege" in discursive circuits. The emotion of anxiety is, therefore, important to trace the flow of currents between the critic and the photographer. The anxiety of being ethically accountable to the photographed subjects has gradually shaped photographic aesthetics, but without moving beyond the interactive relationship between the photographer and the photographed. The question of representing suffering in photography, therefore, gets stuck in an impassive labyrinth between the ethico-aesthetic anxieties of the photographer and their moral critics. On the other hand, in Azoulay's formulation of the civil contract of photography, dispossessed bodies and other agents involved in photographic circulation acquire citizenship in a new visual regime. This regime cuts through social divisions and established identitarian positions by which the insider/outsider gap can be articulated. Therefore, in the citizenry of photography, such divisions cease to exist, and the only aspect through which one can read photographic encounters is the photographs themselves.

The Non-Omniscient Photographer

Mahesweta Devi's Bengali short story, *Behind the Bodice* aptly studies the problematic role of anxiety in mapping contemporary discourses on photography ethics. It depicts the story of the Kolkata-born journalist, Upin who photographs a breast-feeding tribal woman during an assignment, followed by a series of consequences leading to her vilification and rape by several policemen. During the photographic encounter, the woman, Gangor, does not show any hesitation and further demands money from Upin. Being a self-righteous journalist who feels ethically accountable to her, he trades money and his watch to photograph her. He assures his assistant, «listen friend, I will sell these pictures… why shouldn't she take money? They are not dumb beasts Ujan, they understand» (Devi, 2016: 125).

While Upin channelizes his guilt through monetary transactions, Gangor later treats herself as a privileged subject who was *chosen* to express herself photographically (idem: 132). She uses this opportunity to claim her citizenship in the world of photography, wilfully surrendering herself to the incessant multiplicity of perspectives the pinhole allows to emerge. Ethical possibilities precisely develop in the transactional space between the photographer's gaze, routes of spectatorship, and the photographed person's exhibited self. Contrarily, Upin's sense of authority-authorship, as Azoulay reminds us in a similar context, «treats the people who actually appear in the frame as "present absentees" in a manner that assumes that they are solely at the disposition of the professional gaze» (idem: 58). Later, when in the course of different circumstances Gangor gets violated by the policemen, Upin takes the entire burden upon himself. Eventually, he dies in an accident after going mad and running frantically out of misplaced anxiety. His anxiety reflects the self-assigned importance of photographers in constructing images of oppressed figures as if they possess the exclusive agency and critical omniscience to frame others ethically. In the story's context, this translates to the photograph being responsible for Gangor's rape and torture while ignoring the relational frames and situations in which the image got transmitted and read. The presence of the camera in Upin's hands makes him feel morally superior. What if we disempower photographers' authorship claims by highlighting their limited positionality in the citizenry of photography, and hence curtail the anxieties that surround them?

Anticipatory Photographer

Soham Gupta, like his Calcutta-based fictional counterpart, Upin, is no longer a privileged agent who is solely accountable for ethically legitimate representation, nor does he determine the frameworks of visual ethics. The anxiety and paranoia around the role of the photographer restrict explorations in photographic practices by binding ethical issues predominantly on the encounter between the

photographer's gaze and the photographed subject, particularly in an active-passive dyad. The possibility of an alternate gaze to emerge and unearth the ethical grievances in photographic activities is always present beyond the photographer--photographed relationship. In Soham Gupta's photographs, even though some subjects do not seem to have consented to be photographed, they simultaneously invite the gaze of a "universal spectator". The bodies in Gupta's photographs bear the testimony of injustice, torture, death, disease, and decay, including the hierarchy in their photographic encounter with Gupta. It is important to move beyond the reified interest in the photographer's gaze and look at the complexities of ethical issues by foregrounding other agents that collectively determine a photograph's existence. Anxiety is, therefore, not an appropriate emotion to probe into ethical issues of photography, rather, it should be anticipation. Anticipation for the linkages to crack and open up contra-readings from between different agents of photographic production and circulation. Though anxiety might not lead to censorship in all instances, it is important to be wary of paranoid readings of ethical issues in photography, which is largely dependent on subject positions. There are obvious relations of inequality in the civic space where the photographic encounter takes place, but that cannot be posited as factors to determine the ethical and moral "correctness" of a particular photograph. *Angst* is a spirited project which abstains from an active social commentary about the spaces Gupta photographs, it sits amid a hallucinatory journal that borders fact and fiction, fear and fantasy, the world outside and the mind inside. The characters in *Angst*, blended with curiosity and provocation, speak back to us in a language that requires a radical revaluation of disciplinary gazes. What is there in photographs has a fluid currency that can exceed its initial context and present them in spaces conducive to a critical re-evaluation of ethics and "frames" assisting such discourses.

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