Power in Whose Palm: The Digital Democratization of Photography
Session 502
February 23-27, 2013

Session Summary

In February 2013, the Salzburg Global Seminar convened the session "Power in Whose Palm: The Digital Democratization of Photography." As an organization committed to addressing issues of global concern and to promoting dialogue among cultures for more than sixty-five years, the Salzburg Global Seminar took the view that this was an important moment to explore photography's transformative power against the backdrop of the profound technological changes brought about by digitalization.

To this end, and with the generous support of The Edward T. Cone Foundation, SGS brought forty-eight world-renowned and emerging photographers, educators, scholars of photography, representatives of photo agencies, photography museums, festivals and centers, print and web media representatives, web entrepreneurs, and photo editors from twenty-five countries around the globe to Salzburg.

This multi-disciplinary, international group of participants included representatives of FACEBOOK, FLICKR, DEMOTIX, and the renowned photo-agencies VII and Magnum. Together, they examined the blurring of the lines between photographic art, journalism, and advocacy, and discussed the broader implications thereof for our societies, with the goal of inspiring a greater awareness of photography's capacity to affect social change. In addition, participants exchanged views on visual literacy and photography's role in education, the implications of increasingly democratized and decentralized distribution channels for visual images , and the ethics of usage in the age of the internet.

Given the diversity of the participants, the seminar was highly interactive, encouraging cross-cultural comparisons and experiences and providing an opportunity to contrast and compare perspectives from around the world.   In the words of one participant:

The Salzburg Global Seminar was an eye and mind opening experience that has further shifted how I view my work, the community at large, my relationship as a photographer within it and the role of visual literacy. Interacting with people from different backgrounds with their own unique stories, viewpoints and expertise provided me with a collective of rich contextual situations that illuminated previously unthought of ideas. I was very much inspired the group work as I learnt ways in which I can creatively and critically think about the foundations of visual grammar and work hand in hand with feedback from

my fellow seminar participants to create an active working contextual content that I can incorporate in the future. - Barbara Minishi, Kenya

The convening relied on collaborative debate and discussion in a series of presentations and plenary sessions, coupled with deeper analysis in four working groups. A keynote presentation *From Memory to Experience* opened the session, in which VII Photo Agency director Stephen Mayes reflected on the transformation of photography from an object to an experience.

The ensuing plenary sessions and small groups focused on the following themes and questions:

- **The Photographer as Advocate, Awareness-Raiser, Activist**
  How does photography spark social change? How has photography raised awareness around critical social issues, such as disease, poverty, environmental degradation, human rights, and cultural heritage preservation? How has this or can this contribute to dialogue, debate, advocacy, and, ultimately, policymaking?

- **Education: The Doers and the Viewers**
  What role does education play vis a vis the dramatic changes brought about by digitalization? Are we equipping the future generation of professional photographers with the mind-set and know-how they need to work in a rapidly changing context? And what about the consumers? What *is* visual literacy and could a curriculum be developed to teach our children and young people how to deal with the visual inundation to which they are subjected every day? Is there a research gap in this area?

- **The Brave New World: Democratization, Decentralization, Citizen Journalism**
  What does the shift from an elite, centralized distribution model to a democratic/decentralized model of distribution mean for the photography profession, journalism, and for society at large? Is everyone a photographer now? What are the upsides, downsides and cultural implications of these developments?

- **Making Choices: Ethics of Usage, Representation of Subjects, and Intellectual Property**
  What ethical, editorial and intellectual property challenges are arising as a result of new technologies? How are photo editors, photographers, web platforms manager, and society as a whole dealing with these complex issues?

In addition an **Open Studio** evening allowed participants to share their creative work with each other, with more than fifteen photographers giving five-minute "snapshots" of their work. Participants were also invited to an evening at the *Galerie Fotohof*, linking the session to the local arts scene in Salzburg.

The full session report including recommendations developed by the working groups can be found here:

http://www.salzburgglobal.org/mediafiles/MEDIA70675.pdf