Double Gaze. Time, Trace, and Excess in Photography as Document

Agnese Ghezzi[*]

ABSTRACT
Starting from the analysis of some photographic objects and practices from the late nineteenth century selected from the archives of Italian anthropological museums, the contribution aims on the one hand to analyse how these are the product of a culturally and historically determined gaze, born in the intertwining of positivism, ethnocentrism, nationalism and colonialism. On the other hand, it aims to highlight the shifts in meaning, the presence of subjectivities that escape the hierarchical structure of the photographic device, and the impossibility of operating a control over the image. To do so, the contribution proposes a theoretical passage between the model of stereoscopic view, which can be associated with the dominant vision, and that of diplopic vision, understood as the possibility of bringing to the surface a meaning that escapes the cultural, theoretical and aesthetic framework within which the image was conceived.

KEYWORDS
photography, archives, colonialism, gaze, framing

1. *Introduction*

This paper aims to analyse some photographs and visual practices from the period between the 19th and 20th centuries, selected from the archives of Italian anthropological museums, in order to unpack their status and functions as visual, cultural, and historical documents.[1] I ground my investigation on the entanglements between anthropology, photography, colonialism, and nationalism, which have been deeply analysed by the literature over the past thirty years while referring to a geographical context and a historical period that has been less considered – since Italian historiography has been concerned mainly with colonialism during the fascist era, while international scholarship has mainly developed the studies of more prominent imperial countries such as the United King-

dom or France. My purpose here is not to provide a comprehensive literature review of such scholarly contributions, but to emphasise that, in this as in other research fields, there has been growing attention towards the material and visual culture on which these disciplines and concepts have been constructed. This shift of focus makes it possible to consider the practices, objects, media, tools, techniques and types of bodily relations through which scientific discourses have been embodied. In this regard, Karin Knorr-Cetina (1999) has proposed the concept of "viscourse", with specific reference to vision, to indicate the social context in which images are immersed and involved.

Photography is one of the possible practices to be analysed, whose development – as has been noted by Christopher Pinney (2011) and Elizabeth Edwards (2001) among others – is parallel and entangled with anthropology. Photographs' uses, circulation, accumulation and stratification in collections, albums, atlases, files, and publications can tell us something about how the anthropological discipline and the colonial discourse were structured and shaped. In this sense, not only has the discipline of anthropology used photography and photographic images, but photography as a technological product and photographs as objects with their own material specificity and agency have conversely influenced the construction of the discipline.

In line with a now well-established line of research, the paper addresses the anthropological archive as a non-neutral and non-fixed accumulation of materials that reflects power structures and theoretical perspective, while it attempts to not reduce it to a single, stable *dispositif*. The role of archival practices in the production of knowledge became a fundamental subject from the 1970s, starting from Foucault's (1970) focus on taxonomies as agents in the ordering – and hierarchization – of the external reality, to the analysis of Derrida (1995) on the connection between archive and power. A seminal work such as Sekula's *The body and the archive* (1986) conceptualises the connection between portraits, indexical photographic power and social control, and John Tagg (1988) further considered the connection between the camera and the modern State, insisting on theories of governmentality. I keep these pivotal analyses in mind to avoid approaching the anthropological photo archive as a natural product of the scientific discipline. However, I also take a step aside from these readings, being careful not to reflect on the archive the system it stems from (see Pinney 2003; Sartori 2021). The aim is to describe nuances, trace negotiations, and delineate a path that opens up the hermeneutic possibility of visual archives.

The present paper refers to a couple of selected case studies that stem from the photographic collections that constitute the visual archive of museums of anthropology and ethnography in Italy to identify some examples of photography's multiple manifestations and status within the anthropological discipline.[2] Through the analytical investigation of selected cases, it calls for an analysis of "photo-objects" (see Bärnighausen *et al.*, 2019) not as single, fixed and separated entities but as interconnected material traces with their own biography (see Kopytoff 1986, Edwards & Hart 2004) and trajectories, that exist always and only in connection to other documents, media, and traces. To do so, I am guided by reflections about the agency of archival materials and accumulation as layers which we should learn to recognise and unfurl (see Schwartz & Cook 2002; Edwards & Morton 2015; Sohier, Lugon & Lacoste 2017). This analytical development represents a shift from viewing photographs as objects of power to considering the subjectivity of photographic objects (Mitchell 2005, pp. 28-56), an approach that stresses the productive role of pictures.

Precise modes of observation and codified photographic styles were developed between the 19th and 20th centuries, to construct a visual, objective and comparable taxonomy of human variety. Images were integral instruments in the making of scientific knowledge and photographs and illustrations were created, organised, and circulated as pieces of evidence within the disciplinary discourses (see Daston & Galison 2007, Bredekamp, Dünkel & Schneider 2015). In this regard, anthropometric photography has been extensively analysed in the literature (see Edwards 1990, Ellenbogen 2012, Joschke 2014, Morris-Reich 2016), showing how the positivist discourse about race was based on the arrangement and correlation of visual series. Although the issue about how images make knowledge and the related scholarly production have a strong connection with the present analysis and have influenced the way visual objects are considered within scientific practices, in the present contribution, the focus is shifted to those elements that escape from the scientific context as well as from the disciplinary framing, that do not answer to the supposedly objective scientific need, that restore a point of view that diverges from the one who calls the photograph into existence.

The analysis in this essay is not only intended to reiterate how

[2] The pictures and cases are selected from extended research on different archives and institutions, in particular; the *Museo di Antropologia ed Etnologia* founded in Florence by Paolo Mantegazza in 1869, the *Museo Preistorico-Etnografico* founded in Rome by Luigi Pigorini in 1875, now part of the – *Museo delle Civiltà*, the Photographic Archive of the *Società Geografica Italiana* (1867), and *Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo* in Genoa.

these photographs are the product of a culturally and historically determined gaze,[3] and how the archive and the photographic lens functioned as devices of control in the service of the colonial gaze. Through a visual analysis that looks to the margins of the image, outside the frame, at the back of the photograph, I would like to guide the gaze to the shifts in meaning, the presence of subjectivities that escape the hierarchical structure of the photographic device, the photographs' "imaginable possibility" (Didi-Huberman, 2008, p. 23) and the impossibility of operating a complete control over the image. Therefore, I refer to those arguments that have emphasised the dispersive and excessive quality of the archive, from Edwards' idea of the archive as a sum of many "micro-relationships" (2001) to Poole's concept of "visual economy" (1997).

2. Stereoscopia and Diplopia

To substantiate such a movement in the theoretical and historical approach toward photographic objects, throughout the paper I would employ two optical models, that are here to be seen as two different visual paradigms in the analysis of images: stereoscopia and diplopia.[4] Stereoscopic vision is the perception of the relief of an object as a result of binocular vision, due to the physiological mechanism that leads to the processing and fusion of the two distinct images formed on the retina of the two eyes. Drawing on the analysis proposed by Jonathan Crary (1992) there is a development in the nineteenth century of a different type of vision. Crary analyses the observer as a historical subject and observation as a process that can be historicised within the relationship between bodies, media apparatuses, and the external world. The transition occurred from the camera obscura device, which was linked to the visual perspective model conceived in the Renaissance, to that of stereoscopic photography, capable of giving the effect of three-dimensionality that developed in the second half of the

[3] On the notion of gaze see Foucault 1973; Elkins 1996; Sturken & Cartwright 2001; Pinotti & Somaini 2009.
[4] It is evident that both of them come directly from the optical and visual field, meaning they are internal to the domain I am analysing. This choice offers in itself an example about the way images are used as heuristic models to substantiate scientific positions and concepts. In his study on Darwin's first theorization about genealogy, the art historian Horst Bredekamp (2006) shows how the naturalist found in the image of the coral a possible explicative model, then abandoned in favour of the most widespread figure of the tree, and other examples of this kind could be made (see Black 1983, Barsanti 1992). Without entering into the specificities of each example, it is interesting to notice the need to explain a theoretical position by mobilising a visual concept that is in a relation of inclusion to such realm, in a circular association that allow to work on a subject through the use of visual models taken within the myriad of objects provided by the domain.

nineteenth century. Such a shift in the media also entailed a shift in the conception of vision, which was therefore inscribed in a physiological frame leading to an embodied understanding of the mechanism of vision, which is conceived, and thus regulated, normalised and standardised by new optical devices.

As Crary puts it:

> The standardization of visual imagery in the nineteenth century must be seen not simply as part of new forms of mechanized reproduction but in relation to a broader process of normalization and subjection of the observer (Crary 1992, p. 17).

If the device of camera obscura and the connected idea of vision was based upon a "scenic relationship", (*Ivi*, p. 127) – meaning a very clear distinction between the viewer's standpoint and the external world – the stereoscope:

> signals an eradication of the point of view around which, for several centuries, meanings had been assigned reciprocally to an observer and the object of his or her vision. There is no longer the possibility of perspective under such a technique of beholding. The relation of observer to image is no longer to an object quantified in relation to a position to space, but rather to two dissimilar images whose position simulates the anatomical structure of the observer's body (*Ivi*, p. 128).

In the analysis of this new mode of image consumption, Crary refers to Benjamin according to whom "Every day the need to possess the object in close-up in the form of a picture, or rather a copy, becomes more imperative" (Benjamin 1979, p. 250). This closeness between subject and object, and the related indistinguishable effect on the beholder, the perception of "the absence of any mediation between eye and image" (Crary 1992, p. 127) is the aspect that I would like to emphasize in the use of the stereoscope model throughout the present essay. By that, I mean a vision that produces such an effect of reality that the context, including the technological context, of image production and the image itself merge and become equivalent. The stereoscopic vision is, therefore, a subjective vision that imposes itself as natural, one in which image and context find themselves on the same plane (and must necessarily be, to produce its effect). I will refer to this paradigm of vision to indicate a typology of visual analysis that considers the image as a product arising directly from a certain power structure, aligning and normalising the relationship between eye and image and flattening the interpretation on the horizon of production.

The second model is that of diplopia, namely the loss of visual focus and the perception of two images for one object, which generates the so-called 'double vision'. This concept was used by Clément Chéroux (2010) to convey the repetition inherent in the way mass

media disseminate images of (catastrophic) events, and their tendency to use, repeat and propose the same image.[5] Cheroux, therefore, associated diplopia with a vision that gets duplicated because it repeats itself, and such a multiplication of identical images is explained through the uniformity of the media offer and the commodification of information, that leads to an effect of loss of meaning on the beholders-consumers. Although the evocation of diplopia takes its cue from Chéroux's essay, in this contribution I want instead to use it in another, rather distant way, in which diplopia is not understood as a syndrome – as the paroxysmal state of a social mechanism of media communication that finds its fracture point in a system of repetition that has become an ordinary process (Chéroux 2010, p.7) – but as a possibility.

Diplopia produces a disturbing effect of lack of focus and confusion between the boundaries of the object. In understanding it as potentiality, seeking double vision requires an exercise that trains the observer to identify the interference, to see in the same picture something that would otherwise escape, a possibility of meaning that does not emerge from a straight and normative vision. Through diplopia, I propose the possibility of bringing to the surface a meaning that escapes the cultural, theoretical and aesthetic framework within which the image was conceived, precisely through the role played by the discarded and the excessive elements. Taking into account these two models (which hint at two different approaches to visuality), the paper proceeds with the analysis of two cases, chosen as samples representative of a system of image production and use that is not however exclusive of the selected examples.

3. *Framing and de-framing*

On page 345 of the travel book *L'Omo. Viaggio d'esplorazione nell'Africa Orientale* published by Vannutelli and Citerni in 1899, it is possible to find a picture depicting the figure of an African man standing in profile that is identified, as mentioned in the caption, with "Un Ghelebà" (fig. 1). The expedition took place in 1895-1897 and (together with the publication) was supported by the *Società Geografica Italiana* to gain a better understanding of the Ethiopian area, in a moment of expansionist attempts.[6]

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[5] Chéroux analyses the case study of the dissemination of the images of the 11 September 2001 attacks, which shows emblematically the uniformity of the images that circulated through the press.

[6] Due to the conflictual situation between Italy and Ethiopia, the head of the expedition Vittorio Bottego and the second lieutenant Maurizio Sacchi, were killed during the expedition.
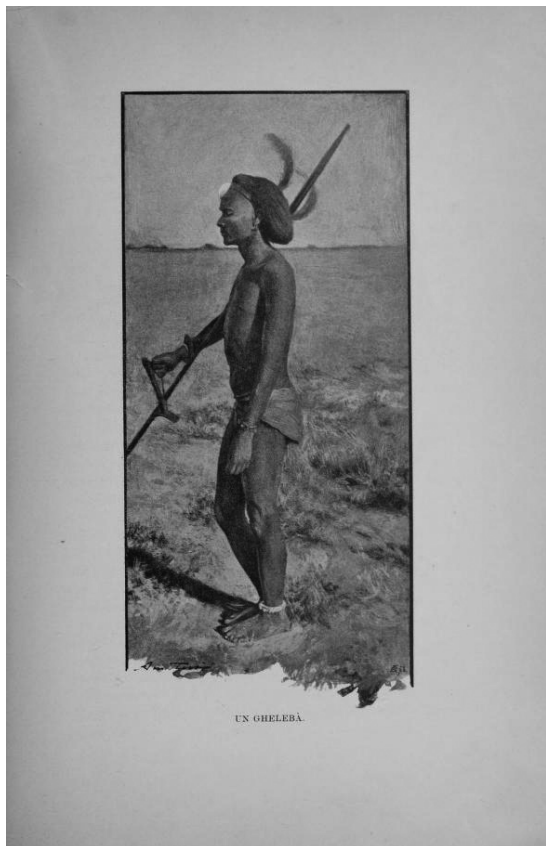
Figure 1 – "Un Ghelebà", engravings, in Lamberto Vannutelli & Carlo Citerni, *L'Omo. Viaggio d'esplorazione nell'Africa Orientale*, Hoepli, Milano 1899, p. 345.

The authors carefully indicate in the initial warnings to the reader how "the book is illustrated in great part by photographs taken during the trip" (Vannutelli & Citerni 1899, p. XVI).[7] However, the illustrations in the book are not photographs but engravings, since before the spread of photomechanical processes, the reproduction of photographic images within texts was an expensive process, and one in which it was not possible to alternate freely images and text. The production of engraving involved a multimedia process, with the passage from a pho-

[7] "il libro è illustrato in massima parte con fotografie eseguite durante il viaggio" (translation by the author).

tographic image into an etched matrix, which could then be used to reproduce the image in series on the illustrated print, a process that had its own rules and consequences. This process always implied a translation of the image, that could lead to a modification of its meaning through processes of elimination or addition. The picture, therefore, was defined by "both the textual and discursive systems which surround the image and the process of reproduction which the image underwent in order to be reproduced on the page" (Belknap 2016, p. 15). This was an ordinary practice in the second half of the nineteenth century for scientific illustrated text (see Bertelli 2021), which implies what Didi-Huberman has termed "a passage into line [*passage au trait*]" in which

the drawing of an engraving based on a photograph, was still a necessary operation for the pictures to be used and transmitted. [...] In this passage something was always forgotten, something yielded despite [...] alleged passion for exactitude – something about the situation, for instance (Didi-Huberman 2003, p. 39).

Through this case, the aim is to recognize and try to understand the function and potential of such a process of yielding.

From what can be observed, this is one of the many stereotypical ethnographic representations aimed at representing otherness in a condition of primitivity and fixity. If, however, the gaze moves outside the border proposed by the engraving (and in turn by the cultural frame offered by that particular editorial product) and tries to relate this representation to other objects and other images, if, thus returning to the two models, it seeks to step outside the stereoscopic vision and exercise a double vision, it finds itself confronted with another photographic object (fig. 2). In the photographic print – which can be found within the *Società Geografica Italiana*'s photographic archive – from which the engraving was later made, the pencil mark clearly intervenes in the framing, proposing to cut out ("*ritoccare*" as written in the cardboard) a presence that is deemed cumbersome and unnecessary to the dominant colonial narrative. The line separates the two subjects, who are instead inextricably linked, sharing the same space. The scrap excludes the Italian military, in order not to contaminate a certain vision of that space and its inhabitants as isolated, controllable, and distant (see Fabian 1983).

Figure 2 – Carlo Citerni, "Ritoccare / Un Ghelebat (Bass Narok 1.Sett.96)", albumen print mounted on cardboard, inv. 69.4.30, 18853 © Archivio fotografico della Società Geografica Italiana.

By eliminating the presence of the Italian soldier in white uniform, the image was in line with the textual communication of exploration as an enterprise characterised by immersion in the unknown African world, in which interaction, negotiation processes, and the construction of the colonial and ethnographic field were not to be visible. The soldier in the original image was perceived as an "excess of description", as Poole (2005) called it, a disturbing detail that revealed the temporal contingency of the photograph in spite of its fixity. Looking at this case through the two models proposed, within the paradigm of stereoscopic vision the engraving in the illustrated book would have been taken as a reliable and valid representation. The double effect produced by diplopic vision,

meant in this case as the overlapping of the final public image with the photograph from which it stems from, allows a different meaning to emerge. The presence of the soldier places the images in the realm of colonial encounters and also makes visible the system of manipulation embedded in photography, de-framing the image out of the colonial gaze which created it.

4. *From the photograph to the photographic event*

Passing from the first to the second case, I propose to linger on Ariella Azoulay's suggestion to enlarge the attention from the photograph to what she calls the "photographic event". With this notion she does not mean the "event photographed", challenging the very ontology of what a photograph is. Azoulay proposes to move away from the idea of photography as a finished product and out of the authorial perspective, to concentrate instead on what is elusive. Instead of focusing on the statement: "photographer photographs a photograph with a camera" (Azoulay 2012*, p. 18), which puts all the burden, the responsibility and the agency on the photographer – meant as the owner of the means of production and, therefore, the owner of the visual product – there is an enlarged appreciation of the picture that transcends the private view and the contingent moment. Considering the photographic event means taking into account the various participants present at the moment of the shooting, involved in the material making of the picture, implicated in the editing, manipulation and observation of the image, opening interpretation to a multiplicity of standpoints and places. This shift also leads to considering the picture "as merely one possible outcome among others of the event of photography" (*Ivi*, p. 24).

To discuss the implication of the shift of focus to the photographic event, I provide an excerpt of the travel account written by the explorer Luigi Maria D'Albertis, published in Italian and English in 1880 with the telling title *New Guinea: What I did and what I saw*, with a clear reference to the principal values associated to fieldwork: activity, movement, and direct visual access to reality. The report contains some references to his activity as an amateur ethnographic photographer of local inhabitants. As can be read in one of these passages:

I tried five or six times to take a portrait of the daughter of the Corano of Hatam, the fair albino-the beautiful Eve of these forests; but it was impossible to get her stand still. First a fly settled on her face, she raised her hand to brush it away, and the portrait was spoilt; then some other insect came to annoy her, and she

scratched her head; the third time it struck her that she was insufficiently covered, and she strove to arrange the one scanty garment which she wore. I made two more ineffectual attempts, and then gave up all hope of succeeding (D'Albertis 1880, pp. 141-142).

From the description, it seems as if the sitter used a series of tricks to impede having her portrait taken, up to deciding what should be an appropriate garment. As we also know from other cases, traceable between the lines of nineteenth-century travel accounts, attempts by the photographed subjects to sabotage the photographic appropriation, to more or less subtly control the pose or the final outcome, to negotiate their own image, were not uncommon, producing an interruption and undermining the mechanism of representation.[8]

Therefore, there is no single picture that matches this narrative and provides a visible trace of this moment. Nevertheless, this can be considered a photographic event, linked as it is to elements such as the device, the setting, the photographer and the sitter. This event, although unrepresented, can open up an interpretative possibility that is not easy to recover through the analysis of many 'successful' photographic sessions. On the one hand, it brings to the fore the theme of the privilege of vision, whereby the participant in the photographic event as the photographed subject is not necessarily a spectator of the image portraying him/her, acknowledging the existence of different degrees of interaction with the photo-object due to uneven power relationships. On the other hand, this unhinges the idea of the subjects of anthropological photographs as silent and passive performers and instead provides an insight into the relationship existing in the field and the agency of the subject in the manipulation of its representation.

The absence of this photograph, therefore, leads us to consider invisibility as another useful trace (and in a certain way opposed to that of excess) to stimulate a diplopic vision, putting us in front of the possibility of considering – for example, when looking at photographs that were instead taken by Luigi Maria D'Albertis (fig. 3) – what could not be given, what could not become photographically visible, but which we nevertheless have the duty to imagine has been.[9]

[8] Similarly, Jane Lydon (2017, p. 45) describes how Catholic-converted Coranderkk aborigines controlled their representations and refused to be portrayed naked, being well aware of the trajectories that their pictures would have taken in the Western world, and the documentary value that would have been attached to them. Other examples of the resistance of subject to be portrayed by photography could be found in travel accounts such as those written by Mantegazza (1880) or Modigliani (1890).

[9] This challenge the "it has been" formulated by Barthes (1980), as it opens up the interpretation of photographs beyond what was rendered visible photographically, allow-
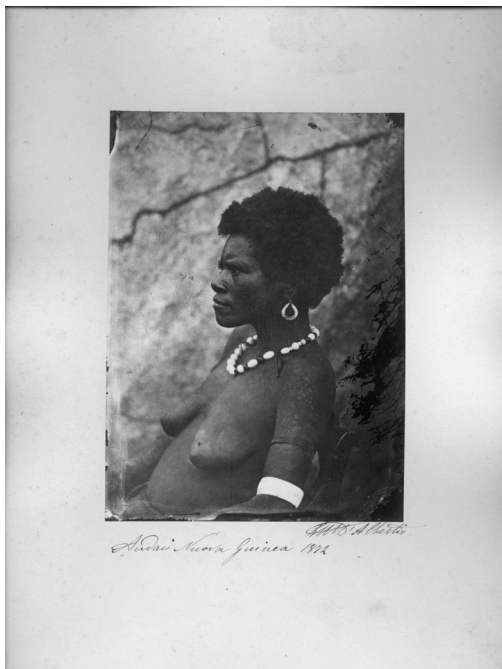
Figure 3 – Luigi Maria D'Albertis, "Andai Nuova Guinea, 1872 / LMD'Albertis", albumen print mounted on cardboard, inv. F65, Collection Luigi Maria D'Albertis, © Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo, Genova.

5. *Conclusion*

Throughout the paper, I have attempted to outline how photographs related to the colonial past can be viewed and analysed as documents and as "sensible objects" (Edwards, Gosden & Phillips 2006). Through the shift from stereoscopia to diplopia, I have proposed an exercise in material theory that seeks to restore an understanding of the visual object that engages with the historical dimension without reproducing it. As mentioned above in the paper, the two models proposed to allow such repositioning clearly engage with the optical system but they are not to be intended as a defence of an ocular-centric approach (associated with positivism

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ing the polarised association between what is represented in a photograph and what has happened to be blocked.

and colonialism).[10] This movement draws the attention from within the picture itself and its context of production towards a relational dimension, to be understood not only as a relationship between photographer and photographed, but as an environmental condition in which the photographic object finds itself. The focus overflows spatially and diachronically outside the boundary of the image, to include also the technical and technological condition, the encounter between numerous subjects, the role of the archive, the gaze of the beholder and his or her position away from that within which the image was originally produced.

The paper engages with the notion of "photographic excess" (Pinney 2003, pp. 1-14; Poole 2005, pp. 159-179; Edwards & Morton 2009, p. 4) as particularly relevant to this investigation. As formulated by Pinney (2003, pp. 3-9), which directly recalls the concepts of trace and clue proposed by Carlo Ginzburg (1979, 1980, 1989), such a concept has to be understood with a sense of surplus, something that remains in the historical object, despite the intention of the actors producing it. The question of the correlation between formal qualities and effects is at stake here, and it became an especially critical point in the analysis of images. Working on photographic excess means acknowledging the unstable relationship between context and visual object, and moving the focus from the elements determined by the ideological structure to what is escaping through the photographic lens. Such a repositioning in the analysis of images works both against the "absolute fit between the image and the ideological forces that appear to motivate the image" (Pinney 2003, p. 8) and the art historical paradigm that tends to read the visual artefact in terms of its aesthetic value and attribute to the author full intentionality over its production.

This aspect is particularly evident in the first case analysed, which deals with the issue of framing, and its connection to the issue of selection and excess. As Pinney puts it:

> however hard the photographer tries to *exclude*, the camera lens always *includes*. The photographer can never fully control the resulting photograph, and it is this lack of control and the resulting *excess* that permits recoding, 'resurfacing', and 'looking past' (*Ivi*, p. 7).

The photograph precisely shows such impossibility of control, which is instead corrected in the final engraving where, recalling

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[10] Many studies recently go in the direction of dismantling a pure optical appreciation of the image, such as (among others) Di Bello (2008); Olin (2012); Brown & Phu (2014); Campt (2017). I thank professor Chiara Cappelletto for the suggestion of exploring the issue of multisensory and synesthetic experiencing of images.

Azoulay, the unerasable traces of the photographic event "are regulated within the schema of the frame, blunting their presence and allowing the photographed event to be foregrounded as one that has already been concluded" (Azoulay 2012, p. 21). Analysing it through diplopia, the photograph, in its relation to other times-places-objects-images (the moment it was taken, the print that was developed, the line that was made on the print, the engraving published in the book, the gaze that looks at it today) is activated by meanings that would have been precluded if the image transposed 'from a photograph' onto the illustrated book had been considered a truthful representation.

In the second case analysed, the traces are to be investigated and recovered through the analysis of the relationship between visibility and invisibility (see Guerra 2020). The inexistence of the photograph becomes in itself a visible trace that questions the mechanism of representation and introduces other subjectivities and agencies, unseen yet present. The topic of power relationship is not denied but considered differently within a diplopic mode of visual analysis, a mode that investigates the absence not only as something that was not selected by the imperial gaze but as something that resisted it. In connection again to Azoulay, who proposes to challenge an understanding of photography as a pure reflection of a given political view and structure:[11]

> The photograph is a platform upon which traces from the encounter between those present in the situation of photography are inscribed, whether the participants are present by choice, through force, knowingly, indifferently, as a result of being overlooked or as a consequence of deceit. Many of these traces are neither planned nor are they the result of an act of will. [...] Even when these traces express cultural and social hierarchies that organize the power relations between photographer, camera, and photographed person, they never simply echo such relations nor do they necessarily reflect the point of view of the most powerful figure present in the arena at the time the photograph was captured (Azoulay 2012, p. 24).

The development of analytical and receptive systems that allow the cut-out, invisible, unheard, silenced relations to emerge through images cannot be separated from the current debate about the decolonization of museums, archives and social and artistic practices. The possibility of undoing the colonial gaze by recontextualising

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[11] Azoulay chooses to use the adjective "civil" as a reaction to a too fixed understanding of the justaxposition between political and aesthetic. The disregard of the political in favour of the stress on the "civil imagination" is not just a nominal move, but a mode of reappropriation over photographs through the appreciation of its complex system of interaction. "to make room for the return of the category of the civil, and for the place of the civil imagination within it, it is necessary to redefine the political imagination" (Azoulay, 2012, p. 5).

"difficult heritage"(see Macdonald 2010), such as material and visual collections preserved in anthropological and former colonial museums and archives, has been at the centre of professionals and academic debate for fifty years now, calling for a reassessment of our relationship with traumatic legacies.

The discussion about the preservation and possible valorization of complicated, fraught forms of heritage – such as colonial photographs – in recent years has led to debates about their concrete display and the ethics and practices of researching, re-using, and exhibiting such material. Concerning Italy, an example could come from the *Museo delle Culture* in Milan[12] which recently proposed in a new display the exhibition of colonial postcards depicting bare young African women. The curators, in confrontation with the local diasporic communities involved in the phase of setup and collection reorganisation, opted for placing them in a showcase on the reverse, therefore removing the image from public view as a way to question the possibility of interrupting (rather than reiterating) the gaze that produced them. The possibility of subtracting from view while showing the material object, providing the visitor with the historical trace without allowing him/her to grasp it in a complete visual appreciation, is connected to the issue of creating a "sensible system" within which viewing the "intolerant image" (as analysed by Rancière 2011, p. 100).

The proposal of exercising a double vision in the analysis of these photographs is not only connected to the possibility of reviewing the relationship between the producer, the represented subject, and the observer, but also to move toward a different relationship with images in general. Such an approach could therefore question the way we socially experience the images that surround us, not limiting it to the observer-object binomial, but opening up to the dynamic encounter between beholders. The paper opens up the possibility of generating an active observation oriented towards the collective responsibility of vision (see Rancière 2011) and the search for possible spaces of resistance and action. To do so, it proposes to get out of a stereoscopic mode of vision, which provides the illusion of an immersive relationship with the surrounding images, experienced as present, therefore real and irrefutable. Instead, it calls for the activation of a diplopic perceptivity, through the consideration of the excessive quality of every photograph, the attention to the function of framing

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[12] The museum has reopened its permanent collection in 2021 with a new set-up entitled *Milano Globale. Il mondo visto da qui*. In the last years, others museums have undergone a process of critical revision which involve also photographic collections (see Bigoni *et al.*, 2021).

and de-framing, the appreciation of the complexities and the agencies involved in the photographic event, the consideration of the invisible and the absence (the pictures that were not shot) when looking at photographic collections. To allow diplopia to be an imaginative possibility and not a collective illness, we have to rethink the relation between images, their context of production, their exposition, their political message (or, as Azoulay would say, their civil message) and the effect they generated on the community of viewers.

Captions

Figure 1 – "Un Ghelebà", engravings, in Lamberto Vannutelli & Carlo Citerni, *L'Omo. Viaggio d'esplorazione nell'Africa Orientale*, Hoepli, Milano 1899, p. 345.

Figure 2 – Carlo Citerni, "Ritoccare / Un Ghelebat (Bass Narok 1.Sett.96)", albumen print mounted on cardboard, inv. 69.4.30, 18853 © Archivio fotografico della Società Geografica Italiana.

Figure 3 – Luigi Maria D'Albertis, "Andai Nuova Guinea, 1872 / LMD'Albertis", albumen print mounted on cardboard, inv. F65, Collection Luigi Maria D'Albertis, © Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo, Genova.

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