Photography 2

Digital Image and Culture
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Before you start

Welcome to *Photography 2: Digital Image and Culture*.

In recent decades digital imaging technologies have had a profound impact upon myriad aspects of our daily lives, and also on contemporary art and its institutions. In this course, you'll be introduced to the work of practitioners who exploit the possibilities and potential of digital photography and imaging technologies, and you'll explore the diverse and complex themes that their work addresses. Alongside tracing the genesis and trajectory of digital photographic art, you'll examine the various ways that vernacular digital imagery is consumed and disseminated, and consider the wider social, ethical and philosophical implications of these rapidly evolving platforms and processes.

You'll be encouraged to take exploratory and experimental approaches to making practical work, using both your own photographs and found imagery. This course fosters a conceptual approach to practice, and you'll expand your awareness of contexts and frameworks in which to develop your personal practice and your creative vision. You'll further develop your visual communication skills and work to realise your ideas into compelling visual products. You'll engage in current critical debate and consider relevant social and cultural perspectives in relation to digital imagery, its production and its consumption.

Your OCA Student Handbook should be able to answer most questions about the basics of this course and all other OCA courses so keep this to hand.

**Learning outcomes**

On successful completion of the course you'll be able to:

- demonstrate detailed knowledge of visual and conceptual strategies in digital photographic practice and explore your own critical digital photographic projects
- demonstrate an awareness of the wider social and cultural contexts in which the digital image operates and discuss relevant ethical perspectives in relation to your own practice
- explore and realise a range of ideas and creative starting points, and exercise judgement in the production of visual material
- manage learning resources, conduct self-directed contextual and visual research, and appraise your progress with increasing confidence
- demonstrate increasing autonomy and a developing personal voice, exercise your communication skills confidently and interact effectively within a learning group.

Even if you don't intend to submit your work for assessment, it's useful to take ownership of these outcomes to aid your learning and use as a means of self-assessment. You can check your progress against the learning outcomes in your learning log, when you review your progress against each assignment.
Your tutor
Your tutor is your main point of contact with the OCA. Before you start work, make sure that you’re clear about your tuition arrangements. The OCA system is explained in some detail in your Student Handbook.

If you haven’t already done so, please write a paragraph or two about your experience to date. Add background information about anything that you think may be relevant for your tutor to know about you (your profile) – your experience of photography so far, your reasons for starting this course and what you hope to achieve from it.

Email your profile to your tutor as soon as possible. This will help them to understand how best to support you during the course. Arrange with your tutor how you’ll deal with any queries that arise between assignments. This will usually be by email or phone.

At the end of each part of the course you’ll complete an assignment and send it to your tutor for feedback. Reflect carefully on your tutor feedback and, if appropriate, go back to the assignment and make adjustments to it based on your tutor’s comments. If you submit for assessment, making such adjustments demonstrates responsiveness and learning and will help improve your mark. Note down what you’ve done differently, and why, in your learning log.

Studying with OCA
If you haven’t already done so, now is a good time to work through the free introductory course ‘An Introduction to Studying in HE’ on the OCA student website. Don’t be tempted to skip this introductory course; it contains valuable advice on study skills (e.g. reading, note-taking), research methods and academic conventions which will stand you in good stead throughout your studies.

The OCA website will be a key resource for you during your studies so, if you’re new to OCA, take some time to familiarise yourself with it. Log onto the OCA student website and go Link 1. Watch the video and make notes.
Your learning log
Your learning log is an integral part of this and every other OCA course.

Use your learning log to record your progress through the course. Your learning log should contain:
• your thoughts on the work you produce for each exercise
• your ideas and observations as you work through the course
• your reflections on the reading you do and any research you carry out
• your tutor’s reports on assignments and your reactions to these.

Even if you’ve used a hard-copy learning log in the past, for this course you should set up your learning log as an online blog. This blog will document your work for the exercises and assignments and provide links to research material. Setting up a blog is easy using the OCA Wordpress template which you’ll find in the ‘Resources’ section of the OCA student site. You’ll also find study guides to keeping a learning log and setting up a learning blog.

You may want to keep an optional research folder to store things like material you pick up at exhibitions or galleries, cuttings from newspapers or magazines, etc.

Planning ahead
This Level 2 course represents 600 hours of learning time. The course should take about a year and a half to complete if you spend around 8 hours each week on it.

As with all OCA courses, these course materials are intended to be used flexibly but keep your tutor fully informed about your progress. You’ll need to allow extra time if you decide to have your work formally assessed.

Photography 2: Digital Image and Culture is divided into four parts. There are six course assignments:
• Assignments One and Two are practical assignments.
• Assignment Three asks you to write a 2,500-word critical essay on an aspect of digital photographic culture. You can choose from one of four topics, or decide on your own in consultation with your tutor.
• Assignments Four and Five are devoted to producing a project on ‘digital identities’. You’ll start this in Assignment Four and resolve it in Assignment Five in the light of your tutor’s feedback.
• Assignment Six is your pre-assessment review – preparing your work for assessment.

Each part of the course addresses a different issue or topic and is separated into projects designed to tackle the topic in bite-sized chunks. As well as information and advice, each project offers exercises and research tasks that slowly build up and feed into the assignments that you’ll send to your tutor.

The first assignment has a diagnostic element and is designed to give your tutor a feel for your work at an early stage in the course.
Thinking about assessment

Once you’ve completed and submitted your first assignment, you’ll need to decide whether you want to go for formal accreditation at the end of the course, i.e. assessment. Your tutor is there to help you decide. There’s a study guide to assessment and how to get qualified on the OCA student website, with more detailed information about assessment and accreditation. For assessment you’ll need to submit:

• all six assignments as submitted to your tutor plus any amended versions (i.e. amended in the light of tutor feedback)
• your tutor reports
• your blog url.

Please make your original assignments available to the assessors on your blog, exactly as they were submitted to your tutor.

Except for Assignment Four (work in progress), you should submit final, amended versions of your assignments in hard copy, as appropriate to your individual project.

Only work done during the course should be submitted to your tutor or for formal assessment.
Assessment criteria

These are central to the assessment process for this course, so if you’re going to have your work assessed to gain formal credits, please make sure you take note of these criteria and consider how each of the assignments you complete demonstrates evidence of each criterion. On completion of each assignment, and before you send your assignment to your tutor, test yourself against the criteria – in other words, do a self-assessment and see how you think you would do. Write down your findings for each assignment you’ve completed in your learning log, noting all your perceived strengths and weaknesses, taking into account the criteria every step of the way. This will be helpful for your tutor to see, as well as helping you prepare for assessment.

Assessment criteria points

The assessment criteria for this course are as follows:

- **Demonstration of technical and visual skills** (35%) – materials, techniques, observational skills, visual awareness, design and compositional skills.
- **Quality of outcome** (20%) – content, application of knowledge, presentation of work in a coherent manner, discernment, conceptualisation of thoughts, communication of ideas.
- **Demonstration of creativity** (25%) – imagination, experimentation, invention, development of a personal voice.
- **Context** (20%) – reflection, research, critical thinking (learning logs, critical reviews and essays).

Pre-assessment review

If you decide to have your work formally assessed, you’ll need to spend some time at the end of the course preparing your finished work for submission. How you present your work to the assessors is of critical importance and can make the difference between an average mark and an excellent mark. Because of this your tutor is available to guide you on presenting your work. There’s more about this at the end of this course guide (Assignment Six).
Introduction

Since its invention, photography has impressed itself upon both the art world and society. The resemblance of photographic images to their subjects was initially a cause of anxiety for artists, but it is this quality that continues to touch and influence nearly all spheres of culture and society today. Photography is used by virtually all institutions to catalogue and communicate, and it is no exaggeration to suggest that it has become intrinsic to the fabric of our culture, economy and politics.

Because of its prevalence, and its persuasiveness, the photographic image continues to be a topic of controversy and contest: when and where it is appropriate to take photographs; what and who we can take pictures of; whether or how images should be manipulated; when and where they should be published; what they may or may not mean… These are all questions that students and professional photographers must ask themselves. However, they are also questions that come up frequently in everyday conversation and popular culture and are regularly debated in the media. Like it or not, we are all stakeholders in photography; photography connects all of us.

Until now, you've mostly explored the techniques and processes associated with photography and applied these to particular genres and visual strategies to construct meaning and narrative. You'll have ample opportunity to continue to develop your practice in this way (you may already have found an approach or field of photography you wish to pursue), but Digital Image and Culture differs slightly in that it takes a deeper look at the medium of photography itself, both historically and in its current, rapidly-evolving forms.

Course overview
The first part of the course looks at the notion of the constructed image, from an historical starting point and early combination printing techniques, to the first use of digital processes by artists in the 1980s and 90s. You'll start to look at the impact of the internet and see how artists have employed both rudimentary technologies and more complex digital processes to make work addressing various themes.

Part Two expands upon the use of found imagery. You'll take on board the concept of the artist as curator and explore the creative use of archives of various kinds, including the family album.

Part Three examines the prevalence of the digital image, and in particular questions our relationship to images of humiliation and violence. We also explore the impact of digital photography upon photojournalism. At this point in the course you'll write a critical essay on an aspect of digital photography and culture.

The final part explores the relationship between the digital image and our individual identity. We discuss the notion of the ‘gaze’ and explore the increasing complexity of our digital existence alongside our physical one.
‘Post-photography’
Although this course takes into account the broad history of photography, the principal period we shall be exploring here is what W.J.T. Mitchell, in his influential book *The Reconfigured Eye* (1994), describes as the ‘post-photographic era’.

You might assume that the term ‘post-photographic era’ would define a more recent period than the mid-1990s. We tend to think of the ‘digital revolution’ in relation to photography on two fronts:

1. The plasticity of the digital image – which wrongly assumes that the analogue photographic image is neither malleable nor prone to deception.
2. The increased democracy of the digital image, ever more accessible and available in all respects. With the increased availability of the internet (in the UK, from the late 1990s), this second and more recent development continues to evolve apace. A key piece of work in this area is Fred Ritchin’s *After Photography*, which considers, and optimistically proposes, the democratic potential of the digital image, and its associated applications and platforms, to oppose institutions and governments.

There are as many ways to consider the conditions of this ‘post-photographic era’ as there are specialisms and uses of photography within our daily lives. We can choose to see digital photography as simply a technological progression within the medium, much like any other. After all, a photograph of something will usually still communicate the same thing, whether it was shot on film or on a digital camera. However, beneath the visible surface – and beyond it – we can, and in this course we will, examine the myriad implications of these differences.

‘Digital photography’ or ‘digital imaging’?
Significantly, much of Mitchell’s narrative is around the development of the digital image, encompassing its origins in Russell A. Kirsch’s laboratory in the mid-1950s and the range of processes that enable, for instance, astronomical images to be rendered. One of the first distinctions we should explore before we begin is what we mean by ‘photography’ and by ‘digital imaging’. For many people and institutions the term ‘photography’ is redundant or anachronistic. The police service, for example, has retired the term ‘photography’ to describe the activity of their forensic photographers, and replaced it with ‘digital imaging’, to more accurately reflect the diversity of their methods and processes of obtaining visual data, including moving image as well as more specialist processes like infrared and thermal imaging.

Many of the practitioners discussed in this course, and indeed many others, participate within the broad discourse of ‘contemporary photography’ or call themselves ‘photographic artists’ while employing all manner of imaging equipment, software and techniques. Although we anticipate that most students will continue along relatively traditional creative trajectories (i.e. ‘lens-based’ photography), you should consider creative possibilities beyond this and, as always, push your practice forward in terms of processes, techniques and technologies.
While you should always work closely with your tutor, and always be prepared to justify your creative choices, if you find yourself asking ‘does my idea fit within a “photography” course?’, then the answer will be ‘yes’! (Probably. And within reason!) You should aim to explore the boundaries and parameters of the digital image, test your preconceptions and embrace innovation.

**Course structure and expectations**

If this is your first Level 2 course, you may find the expectation that you’ll take ownership of your self-directed assignment briefs challenging to begin with. There is a summary of the assignment task at the beginning of each part of the course. As soon as you start working on a particular part of the course, you should consider yourself as working on that assignment. You’re expected to develop your idea – both practically and conceptually – over the course of the projects in that part of the course; developing these three practical assignment tasks, plus an essay (Assignment Three), should be the main focus of your creative output throughout each part. You should document the evolution of your projects (test shoots, contact sheets and evaluation) within your learning log as you progress. While there are some practical exercises throughout the course, the majority of the tasks are centred on reading set texts or watching certain videos, and writing short reflective pieces within your learning log.

**Separating the wheat from the chaff**

As with your previous courses, we expect you to conduct independent research by reading reviews, blogs and articles in addition to those listed in the course materials. For some of the reasons outlined above, digital photography and digital culture are very popular topics and identifying useful, scholarly critical articles from more journalistic commentary and comment is a key skill. Exercising good judgement in terms of your choice of sources is particularly important when it comes to researching and writing your critical essay in Part Three. A list of ‘reliable’ journals, websites and blogs is supplied in the reading list at the end of this course guide. (Although they’re ‘reliable’, you’re free to disagree with the opinions articulated within them). However, when you’re looking at content published elsewhere, consider these basic criteria to assess the usefulness of an article:

- What are the author’s credentials?
- Does the publication have an editor? Has the article been peer reviewed?
- How sophisticated is the language used?
- Has the author substantiated or illustrated their arguments or ideas?
- How recent is the article? Are the ideas current or relevant?
- What is the relevance of the topic to the publication? How frequently does the author write about the topic?
- Is there any kind of ‘agenda’ to the article? Is it an ‘advertorial’ or some other form of spin or PR?

Be aware, though, that even ‘bad’ sources can have their uses: they might provide you with a vox populi or give you a counterpoint for an argument, for example.
You’ve been provided with two books to accompany the course:


You’ll be directed to read sections of these at relevant points in your studies. You’ll find the rest of the required reading in the Resources section of the student website. Some of these texts will be more challenging than others. Making notes of the points as you read is a good way to ensure a ‘close’ reading of a text. You may need to re-read a text if it is particularly challenging. If you’re stuck on a particular point in an essay, consider posting a question on the *Digital Image and Culture* forum on the student website Link 2. You should also use the forum (as well as your tutor) to ask what articles and sources your fellow students have found if you’re stuck for sources on a particular topic.

### Referencing your reading
Whenever you read something that you might want to refer to in your projects and assignments, get into the habit of taking down the full reference to the book, article or website straight away. You must fully reference any other work you draw on if you plan to go for formal assessment. To do this you should use the Harvard referencing system. You’ll find guides to academic referencing on the OCA student website. Getting down the full reference at the time will save you the frustration of having to hunt for the details of a half-remembered reference long after the event – and ensure that you don’t inadvertently plagiarise someone else’s work.

### Finally… be social!
Some of you may feel jaded by or sceptical of social networks and aspects of digital culture. Others may not yet have even tried using a learning blog. Given the content of this course, you are strongly encouraged to embrace all things socially networked and embedded within digital culture. In order to gain an appreciation for many of the topics discussed in this course, you’ll benefit greatly from first-hand experience with applications and websites such as Twitter, Facebook and Flickr. As with your previous OCA courses, do engage with your peers and continue to build virtual as well as face-to-face networks (where possible) to help support and sustain your studies and your practice.

Please see the guidelines on ‘netiquette’ and on how to network with other OCA students. Link 3
Before you start working on Part One, try this preliminary exercise.

**Exercise**

We all encounter photographs on a daily basis. For a few decades now, commentators have talked about a ‘flood’ or a constant ‘bombardment’ of images, permeating ever deeper into our lives. Depending of course on where you live, the intensity of this will vary a great deal. To try to get a sense of this, dip your toe into the floodwater and re-photograph every photographic image that you encounter on a single day.

The quality of the image doesn’t matter – use a camera phone or compact camera. You should include videos as well as still photographs; just shoot one frame to document a sequence.

- Construct a grid or compile a contact sheet of all your images.
- Write a short reflective piece in your learning log about this exercise. What have you learned from this exercise? Has it alarmed you? Has it confirmed any preconceptions? What do most of the images you encountered show? Does this tell you anything about the environment you live in?
Photography 2

Part One
The constructed image

Stan Dickinson, *Cricket Matches*, 2013
Use the grid below to keep track of your progress throughout Part One.

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Introduction

The sweeping changes brought in by the introduction of digital imaging have revolutionised photography. Rather than signalling an end for the medium, these changes have reinvented it, creating a new generation of artists who use the medium in a provocative, powerful or playful way. In this first part of the course, you’ll begin to develop an understanding of the impact that digital culture has made on photography, and use a variety of techniques to make your own experiments within digital practice. You’ll explore the history and role of constructed images in digital culture and look at some key practitioners who produce images using a wide variety of digital means.

Your assignment will be to produce two series of 4–6 images that incorporate some of the techniques you’ve discovered in the work of the artists explored in Part One. One series should use traditional cut and paste techniques, the other digital montage techniques. Please turn to the end of Part One now and read the assignment instructions carefully. You may find it useful to print it out and pin it up over your work area so that you can refer to it throughout your work on this part of the course.

Photography has always been sensitive to technological change but it is fair to say that we, in our lifetime, have seen one of the most fundamental changes in the medium in its relatively short history. The introduction of the computer into the studio – and the subsequent introduction of the digital camera – has ushered in new and innovative ways of working with photography.

What makes a digital or algorithmic image different from an analogue one? One of the primary differences between the two is that the digital image is endlessly reproducible without any loss of quality. It is infinitely malleable and easily transferable from one carrier to another. As Daniel Rubinstein suggests in his essay ‘Digitally Yours’, the digital or algorithmic image is also one that often exists only as a digital artefact and not, for example, as a print:

Unlike its predecessor, the digital image is a matrix of digits, a mathematical equation, a binary sequence which can be recorded to disk, transmitted electronically as a stream of data and construed as a visual pattern by algorithms which control the way the image will appear on a display device. Following this line of thought, the difference between an analogue and a digital photograph can be expressed as follows: An analogue photograph is both an object and an image.¹

However, all of the artists we look at here are interested in producing printed images from digital and found materials. In doing so, they allowing us to pause and consider the ways in which we consume images today.

Project 1 The origins of photomontage

Photography has been subject to manipulation since its birth and its history has been inextricably linked to science, chemistry and engineering. (Photography’s founding father, Henry Fox Talbot, worked closely with Charles Babbage, whose inventions paved the way for contemporary computing.) Often, early photographs signalled a desire to capture an aspect of the world, such as movement, before it was possible consistently to do so.

In Oscar Gustave Rejlander’s *The Juggler* (1865) a young man is depicted casually juggling a number of balls.

The unnaturally even spacing of the flying balls, their sharp focus without a hint of blurriness, and the relaxed, even blasé expression of the juggler combine to convince the viewer that this is not live action, but a facsimile. This image is probably a composite print, made artificially in the studio by combining a negative of the figure with one or more of the balls printed into the area above him.

As Phillip Prodger notes in *Time Stands Still: Muybridge and the Instantaneous Photography Movement*, the kind of instantaneity suggested in *The Juggler* (i.e. the kind that could freeze rapid action) remained elusive throughout this period and would only come later, with the advancements ushered in by Muybridge. (Hand-held cameras with high shutter speeds would transform the subject matter of photography, with exposure times decreasing from 40 seconds in 1850 to a fraction of a second by the time Harold Edgerton shot the famous milk drop exploding into a corona in 1957.)

Rejlander’s image depicted something that was – at that point – beyond the limits of the camera. However, the Industrial Revolution was creating a need to depict speed and movement and it would not be long before Eadweard Muybridge stepped out of the wings with his experiments with electronic shutter releases.

With its ‘staged’ appearance, *The Juggler* is perhaps more reminiscent of a Victorian painting than a photograph and in many ways this image is emblematic of Pictorialism – a term coined to describe photographs from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century which moved beyond the concept of a photograph as a mere depiction of ‘reality’. One of the most recognisable images from this
movement is Henry Peach Robinson’s *Fading Away* (1858). This made use of five negatives and combination printing techniques to depict a young girl dying of consumption. Today, this image looks obviously doctored, but to a Victorian sensibility the image was controversial; death by consumption was not considered a suitable subject for photography. The allegorical compositions of the Pictorialists relate directly back to the history of painting.

As photography developed, confidence in the medium’s intrinsic value grew and distinctive genres began to emerge within the medium. The often backward-looking approach of the Pictorialists eventually gave way to the Modernist movement of the early 1920s which ushered in an intense period of experimentation for photography. Led by the pioneering Bauhaus School and artist László Moholy-Nagy, this group – with their experimental and playful approach to the photographic image – were to pave the way for a generation of digital practitioners who, instead of scissors, light and glue, began to work with the camera, software and the pixel.

Please go to the student website and read:


You should also read Joan Fontcuberta’s essay ‘I Knew the Spice Girls’ (pp. 56–63) from the collection Fontcuberta, J. (2014) *Pandora’s Camera: Photogr@phy after Photography*, London: MACK, provided with your course materials.
The layered image
The technique of layering – the placing of one or more images over another to make a second image – has been in continuous use by artist-photographers since the end of the nineteenth century. Early photographers such as Rejlander used layering techniques to evoke painterly compositions. Later, these techniques were used to great effect by the Surrealists and the Bauhaus group to convey ideas that could not be expressed within the single frame.

The arrival of digital imaging, with its ability easily to separate an image into its constituent layers, opened up a Pandora’s box for artist-photographers. Now any image could be manipulated and layered on top of another to create a seamless composite. In 1980, US artist Nancy Burson was one of the first to produce an influential series of composite portraits using digital techniques:

_In 1968 she began to consider a project of producing computer generated portraits that could add the development of ageing onto the faces. Her concept was not totally possible until the late 1970s when computer scanning of images was developed. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) was interested in her ideas and in 1978 MIT and Burson were making the first ‘aged’ portraits. This process was labour intensive and slow and it was not until 1982 that the processing speed was increased._

As digital techniques became more sophisticated, many began to experiment with layering. Today, contemporary photographic practice is suffused by artists using this technique, including Esther Teichmann, Corinne Vionnnet, Idris Kahn and Helen Sear.

British-based artist Idris Kahn overlays multiple texts or musical scores to create intriguing single-frame compositions. Working almost exclusively in monochrome, Kahn uses multiple layers to construct highly complex compositions.

Read about Idris Kahn’s work at Link 1.

Welsh artist Helen Sear uses manipulation, layering and colour to create highly aesthetic images where the interplay of subject and ground is constantly in play. Both Kahn and Sear use the digital layer as a fundamental part of their creative process.

Read Jesse Alexander’s blog post on Helen Sear’s work at Link 2.

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2 Nancy Burson, ‘Big Brother’ [www.vam.ac.uk/users/node/2583](http://www.vam.ac.uk/users/node/2583) [accessed 04.06.15]
Exercise 1.1
Using the list of artists given above as inspiration, create a series of six to eight images using layering techniques. To accompany your final images, also produce a 500-word blog post on the work of one contemporary artist-photographer who uses layering techniques. (This can be any of the artists cited in any section of *Digital Image and Culture*.)
Project 2 Through a digital lens

The introduction in the late 1980s of professional digital backs suitable for rendering high-quality images meant that many artists working with photography now turned towards digital methods of production. Canadian artist Jeff Wall was one of the first and most established photographers to experiment with digital imaging in relation to photography. He often produced large-scale photographic works which referred directly to the history of painting. (Wall trained initially as an art historian). Wall’s early images were presented not as paper prints but rather as large-scale transparencies mounted in light boxes. In changing the method of display, Wall was searching – from the late 80s on – for a better way to express developments in the technical world. These were changes that he believed traditional autographic photography was not capable of expressing.

For Wall, applying this technique to photographic material is a process akin to cinematography. In common with film, the image on a light box relies on a hidden space from which light emanates to be seen. Wall believes that this inaccessible space produces an ‘experience of two places, two worlds in one moment’, providing a source of disassociation, alienation and power. 3

Wall often uses digital techniques to make reference to existing compositional structures within painting, as seen in one of his most recognisable (and complex) digital photographs, A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai) (1993).

3 www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/wall-a-sudden-gust-of-wind-after-hokusai-t06951 [accessed 04.06.15]
This image takes its inspiration from an 1832 series of woodcuts, *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* by Japanese painter and printmaker Katsushika Hokusai, and re-stages it for a new millennium. Using local actors, Wall produced tableaux that mimicked its original source. As with many of Wall’s works, the digital interventions are intended to be seamless, allowing the narrative structure of the image itself to remain to the fore. The resulting image is both fantastical and believable. In *After Hokusai* Wall shows us that our belief in photography as a mirror on reality is misplaced. Rather, photography is a highly subjective medium, which can, like painting, bring disparate elements together to create a fictional whole.

The relationship of photography to painting is further explored in the digital practice of Wendy McMurdo. McMurdo’s experimentation with digital practice began in the early 90s with her project *In a Shaded Place – The Digital and the Uncanny* (1995). This project looked at the relationship to authenticity and originality in the face of an emerging digital culture. Using the image of the doppelgänger or double to explore issues of identity in a digital world, McMurdo produced a series of digitally montaged interiors where the figures of children, one ‘real’ and the other not, appeared to meet an alternative self. The children pictured in McMurdo’s photographs represented the first generation of ‘digital natives’ – children who would grow up in a digital world, which would affect almost every aspect of their lives.  


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4 For a definition and discussion of ‘digital natives’ see: https://comminfo.rutgers.edu/~tefko/Courses/e553/Readings/Selwyn%20digit%20natives%20ASlib%20Proceedings%202009.pdf [accessed 0.4.06.15]
Both Wall and McMurdo use digital montage to refer back to the narrative traditions of tableaux painting and also to critique the status of the photographic image as document. Their work often references previous works of art (usually painting); in doing so, their work is emblematic of a post-modern generation that frequently re-presents or alludes to the work of others. This has been an important strategy for artists since the beginning of photography and has been further developed by Japanese artist Hisaji Hara. In his series of expertly-staged tableaux entitled *A Photographic Portrayal of the Paintings of Balthus*, he takes the strange and mannequin-like gestures of the figures in the works of painter Balthus as a starting point and re-uses these gestures to create his own referential photographic tableaux.

Image reproduced by kind permission of the artist.
Wall, McMurdo and Hara use medium- or large-format cameras to produce their highly detailed images which are often displayed as large-scale prints. The work is often carefully lit and then composed. In this sense, their work, like that of the earliest photographic experimenters (Rejlander, Peach Robinson, etc.), refers back to the pictorial traditions of painting. However, rather than mimicking existing tableaux, artists such as Hara extract a gesture or particular pose or action that evokes a memory of that image. They then take this fragment and re-make the image through their own lens. The resulting work could in some ways be described as ‘an image of an image’; but by using radically different techniques, Hara re-works Balthus’ image and in so doing creates something new.


Watch American artist Daniel Gordon discuss his work and his digital montage methods at Link 3.

Exercise 1.2
Discuss a photograph that takes an existing work of art as its starting point. Write a 500-word reflection on your chosen piece in your learning log.

Next, re-make an existing work of art using photography. This can be a simple re-staging – using photography – of an existing painting, drawing or print (see, for example, Sam Taylor-Wood’s Dutch still life-inspired Still Life video portrait at Link 4) or a more elaborate figurative tableau (like that of Hara).
Project 3 The found image in photomontage

Since the arrival in the early twentieth century of readily available printed photographic matter in the form of mass-produced newspaper and magazine reproductions, artists have used and re-used photographic material to make their own work. One of the most important of these was German-born artist Hannah Höch (1889–1978). Höch, along with her fellow Dadaists, used print media and found photography from a variety of sources to produce politically motivated images using collage and montage.

*Whenever we want to force this photo matter to yield new forms we must be prepared for a journey of discovery. We must start without any preoccupations; most of all, we must be open to the beauties of fortuity.*


In her use of found images from contemporary media, Höch’s work both incorporates and critiques the media culture that surrounded her at that time. In her series *From the Ethnographic Museum*, she combined reproductions of tribal statues in museum catalogues with images of eyes and limbs cut from contemporary magazines to produce an unsettling series of cut-up bodies which reflected on the colonial attitudes of the time.

Hannah Höch, *Double Vision*, c.1928 (collage)
Photomontage was embraced by the Dadaists in the Weimar Republic from the post-World War I period onwards, but had existed since the birth of photography itself, and often for political ends. Höch noted:

_For decades photojournalism has used photographs to cut up very modestly but quite consciously, often pasting on parts of photographs whenever it felt a need to do so. For example, when a potentate was welcomed in Trochtelborn, and the journalistic photo taken on the spot was not impressive enough, various groups of people from different photographs were glued to it, and the sheet was photographed again, thus creating an immense crowd when in reality the welcoming crowd was only a male choir._

Photomontage was used to devastating political effect by German artist John Heartfield (1891–1968) whose anti-Fascist photomontages are some of the most influential works ever produced in this medium. Like Höch, Heartfield used found image and text to create a powerful anti-Fascist commentary; these ideas were then disseminated in a variety of forms. The manipulations of both Höch and Heartfield were purposefully crude. Whilst carefully composed, their aim was not to deceive the eye but rather to get their ideas across in as immediate a way as possible.

Photomipulation was of course also used to different ends. The close relationship between photographic manipulation and politics is explored in W.J.T. Mitchell's _The Reconfigured Eye._ Mitchell gives several examples of photographs submitted as evidence at trials but later discovered to be manipulated and therefore worthless as evidence.
Peter Kennard follows in the tradition of Höch and Heartfield and uses both analogue and digital montage to question socio-political structures. In *Haywain with Cruise Missile* (1980) Kennard inserted three nuclear warheads into a reproduction of John Constable’s portrayal of an idyllic East Anglian scene, *The Hay Wain* (1821). The impetus for this work was the proposal to base US cruise missiles in rural East Anglia. Using simple and direct compositional techniques, Kennard effectively conveys his message.

Peter Kennard, *Haywain with Cruise Missile*, 1981, Photomontage, Tate collection

- Read a review of Hannah Höch’s 2014 exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in London at Link 5
- Read Sabine Kreibel’s essay ‘Manufacturing Discontent: John Heartfield’s Mass Medium’ at Link 6
Exercise 1.3

Listen to Peter Kennard talking about *Photo Op*, a piece made in collaboration with Cat Picton-Phillipps, at [Link 7](#).

If you can, look also at British artist Lisa Barnard's recent book *Chateau Despair*. Barnard used found archival news images of ex-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher alongside shots of the then Conservative HQ to construct her narrative. See [Link 8](#).

To complete this exercise, use readily available images to make a short narrative series of four to six collages based on a recent or contemporary news event.
Project 4 Photomontage in the age of the internet

The arrival of affordable digital cameras in the late 1990s, along with the accelerated growth of the internet and the development of mobile devices, had a profound impact on a new generation of artist-photographers keen to reflect on the changing world around them. British artist Eva Stenram uses digital technologies to explore how both photography and the ways in which we use the internet play a large part in the representation of desire and human sexuality. Here, the artist describes her Drape series (2011, ongoing):

Drape uses vintage pin-up photographs as its source material. These photographs, probably mostly from the 1950s and 60s, depict women that are posed in interior (semi-) domestic sets in front of curtains or drapes. After scanning these pin-up photographs, the curtains or drapes were digitally extended in order to partially obscure the women. The background (the drapes or curtains) and foreground (the model’s body) are exchanged and this digital manipulation causes a rupture within the scene. Once the backdrop falls in front of the model, showing just parts of her body, our voyeuristic desire becomes clearer. By deflecting and redirecting the viewer’s gaze, our attention is drawn to the rest of the scene that sets the fantasy, yet often remains overlooked. 5

Stenram is one of a growing number of artists working with found material. Her constructed images are made up of material, often found online, which is then scanned and manipulated on-screen. The resulting images are represented as photographic prints.

Eva Stenram, Drape VII, 2012

5 www.evastenram.co.uk/pages/mumdraped.htm [accessed 04.06.15]
British artist Stephen Gill works in a similar way, scanning and re-photographing images alongside objects found on location. In his *Hackney Flowers* projects, Gill uses fragments of organic material (flowers, etc.) along with photographs to give a poetic and multi-layered picture of life in Hackney Marshes.

Watch Stephen Gill describe his exhibition *Best Before End* at Foam, Amsterdam, at Link 9

Hear Eva Stenram discuss her *Drape* series at Link 10

Gill is a highly experimental photographer who often rips, tears, folds and even burns the photographic image to create the effects he wants. These strategies are present also in the work of another British artist, John Stezaker. Stezaker uses the cut and the tear to uncomfortable effect, forcing connections between previously unconnected images. In *Marriage LXI* he splices together two found photographs, originally intended as publicity shots. In bringing these two images together to create a third meaning, Stezaker suggests that the identities created in these publicity shots are both constructed and infinitely interchangeable.
Look at the image below by student Stan Dickinson and read what he has got to say about his series of work, *Cricket Matches*.

The assignment brief, written with a journalistic ‘leaning,’ was to photograph an event, but this series subverts the idea that photo-journalism is the only way to present visual imagery in response to events. It references collage, still life, and postmodern appropriation; it uses images and graphics from internet research, news publications and second hand books; and it combines physical ‘cut and paste’ construction with digital manipulation. The outcome is a series of large-scale photographic prints that do celebrate a history of cricket between England and Australia, but also pose questions about social and cultural change and, above all, consider how photographic artists might create meaning within the torrent of 21st century images.
Read:

- David Campany’s Deutsche Börse essay on John Stezaker at [Link 11](#)
- ‘Why do we call it Love when we mean Sex?’ in the collection *Pandora’s Camera*, provided with your course materials.
Assignment one

Combined image

Produce either a series of four to six portraits (looking at Stezaker and Stenram) or a series of four to six landscape-based images based on your immediate surroundings (as with Gill’s Hackney Marshes series). Complete Parts 1 and 2 of the assignment and upload the finished images to your learning log together with a short reflection (500–1,000 words) on your motivations, references and methods for both parts of the assignment.

Part 1
Use traditional ‘cut and paste’ techniques (scissors/scalpel and glue) to produce a series of simple photomontages using elements from two to five original or found photographs. These can be found images and/or images that you’ve shot yourself. Re-photograph your finished photomontages and present the work in your learning log as a digital file.

Part 2
Using digital montage techniques (Photoshop or similar image-editing software) produce a digital montage using elements from a minimum of two and a maximum of five digital files. Use components that you have shot yourself rather than found images for this exercise.

Here are some further online resources that you might find useful:
Listen to Daniel Gordon discuss his digital portraiture with MOMA curator Eva Respini: Link 12
Hisaji Hara: Link 13
Hannah Höch: Link 14
Peter Kennard’s Photo Op and censorship: Link 15, Link 16
Eva Stenram: Link 17, Link 18
Jeff Wall: Link 19, Link 20, Link 21
Contemporary photographic collage: Link 22
Reflection
Before you send your work to your tutor, check it against the assessment criteria listed in the introduction to this course guide and make sure that it meets all the criteria.

Your tutor may take a while to get back to you so carry on with the course while you’re waiting.

Reworking your assignment
Following feedback from your tutor, you may wish to rework some of your assignment, especially if you plan to submit your work for formal assessment. If you do this, make sure you reflect on what you’ve done and why in your learning log.